

Heart not the Valley Mindfulness Practice Center
Annual Board Report 2023

From the “Refuge Chant:”

...I take refuge in the Sangha, the community that lives in harmony and awareness.

...Dwelling in the refuge of Sangha, shining light that supports me, keeping my practice free of obstruction.

...Taking refuge in the Sangha in myself, I aspire to help all people build fourfold communities, to embrace all beings and support their transformation.

From “The Four Recollections:”

Practicing the teachings, the Noble Community in which I take refuge is the community that goes in the direction of goodness, in the direction of truth, in the direction of beauty, in the direction of righteousness; is the community that is composed of four pairs and eight kinds of holy people; is the community that is worthy of offerings, worthy of great respect, worthy of admiration, worthy of salutation; is the community standing upon the highest fields of merit in all the world.

We members of The Heart of the Valley Mindfulness Practice Center (MPC) aspire to live in harmony and awareness, and to be a refuge for ourselves and all beings. We accept all who come our way, and practice to love and understand ourselves and each other.

For the Heart of the Valley Mindfulness Practice Center, the year 2023 was a year of easy harmony and awareness, of building community, and supporting the transformation of suffering in sangha members and all beings. The year moved along with

gentle changes and growth, established routines, and special events.

The Heart of the Valley Mindfulness Practice Center includes two weekly meetings, in-person on Tuesday mornings, and on zoom, Wednesday evenings. Both gatherings grew in number and in depth of practice. The year also saw some fond good-byes: Kathy Andrews now remains in Brattleboro all week and could no longer attend and facilitate Tuesday mornings. Sean Hanly was caring for her mother as she transitioned, and had also started an in-person sangha in Brownsville. Both attend MPC as their schedules permit. With those good-byes also came some hellos. Linda Clark and Jamie Gregory joined the Tuesday morning facilitators and Mary Mullaney became a regular Wednesday evening zoom facilitator. The long standing facilitators and the sangha heartily welcomed Linda, Jamie and Mary.

The Wednesday evening group also enjoyed some guest facilitators: former members Ginger Wallis and Pete Owens, and dharma teacher Marty Soule each facilitated a session. Ginger showed us how to enjoy a “lazy day, “ Pete offered thoughts on dealing with electronics and media, and Marty explored some happiness practices, including taking more time to hold and appreciate the positive little events in our lives that we often let slide by as we focus on our challenges.

With new members at both sits, we are more intergenerational than in past years. The evening session has several members who could be part of the Wake-Up movement (18 to 35 years old). We are also more geographically diverse, with zoom members from Colombia and Chile in South America, and the US states of MA, NY, OR, NH, and VT. The sangha as a whole includes many practitioners from the Upper Valley and nearby locations.

The two gatherings which constitute our full sangha had the opportunity to come together on several occasions, at least the members who live in the vicinity of the Upper Valley. In February, many of us viewed an amazing exhibition of ink paintings by contemporary Korean artist Park Dae Sung, all with Buddhist themes. Suzanne Hinman organized the tour at the Hood Museum and we were once again lead by Vivian Tomasi, the educational specialist at the Hood. The tour ended with a brief meditation in front of a very large meditative ink painting. In August, we held a picnic at Jeff Nielsen's home, enjoying Jeff's house, yard and pond. This is quickly becoming an annual gathering. Both events welcomed members of the Tuesday and Wednesday sits.

The sangha moved through 2023 following many of our weekly and annual routines. The annual Board meeting was held in February as a hybrid so as to include Board members who could not attend in person. An open invitation was extended to all sangha members.

Both groups met regularly, practicing sitting and walking meditation, or another mindful movement. Both sits read Thay's book The Art of Living for most of 2023, completing the book in January, 2024. Both gatherings also recited and studied the Five Mindfulness Trainings, and enjoyed one session per month of "open sharing" followed by a metta circle. The Tuesday sit practiced with one gatha per month throughout the year. The Wednesday gathering began their gatha practice in December of 2023. The gathas are the same. Each card contains the gatha and an appropriate photo; all were created by our sangha sister Coni Richards, from Putney, VT.

The sangha and its members also participated in celebrations and many special events.

Our sangha celebrated the life of Mieke Oort, Bineke and Bram's granddaughter who was tragically killed in 2022, by planting a Sakomi Dogwood tree, at Blue Cliff Monastery. At the end of October, eight sangha members spent the weekend at Blue Cliff and attended a Ceremony of Remembrance for Mieke, led by Brother Phap Khoi. The young tree we planted will bloom every spring.

One of our members, Lisa Burke, spent the winter in Lima, Peru, living with a local family and learning about and practicing veganism. Lisa and several other sangha members are offering talks about plant-based eating and the environment, in the Upper Valley.

In April, Dartmouth hosted a week-long visit from Deer Park Monastery monks and nuns. Many sangha members as well as people from the community attended events during that week. During the same week, a small group of Order of Interbeing (OI) members from the sangha attended the annual OI retreat held at Blue Cliff Monastery.

Several sangha members attended a large gathering, in Boston, entitled "The Way Out Is In, a Musical Meditation based on the Teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh." A most notable part of the evening was a performance by Born I (a Buddhist hip-hop artist) and the Plum Village Band, featuring Phap Huu, who also raps. This April event was a fund raiser for Plum Village and attracted practitioners from all over the northeast, and from further afield,

In May, the sangha held a Vesak Ceremony for the Buddha's birthday. During the Tuesday morning celebration, practitioners offered flowers and placed them on the universal altar. Later, we

enjoyed a birthday cake. The “MPC band” offered lovely music during the ceremony

Both sittings offered various activities from time to time. They included Earth Touchings, and watching dharma talks by Thay.

With this report goes deep gratitude to all the practitioners who join us in person and/or on line. During this divisive and violent time in our world, it is ever more crucial that we come together to practice and to offer our mindfulness, understanding and love to the world. Being together, we strengthen our capacity to live with and offer the energy of interbeing, the energy of non-discrimination and understanding to all beings.

Thanks to everyone for your presence and for your continued support of the Heart of the Valley Mindfulness Practice Center.