

The Pragmatic Buddhist



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Volume 1, Issue 1

Order of Pragmatic Buddhists, www.pragmaticbuddhism.org

Chapter News St. Louis, MO:

This is the schedule of
Dharma Talks for August:
8/3 – Zazen
8/10 – 3 Characteristics of
Existence
8/17 – Karma and Ethics
8/24 – The Three Pure
Precepts
8/31 – The Four Ennobling
Truths

Kawartha Lakes, ON:

With the heat and the end of
the mosquitoes and blackflies,
we are back at the Kawartha
Lakes Hospice attending to the
public labyrinth; weeding,
raking gravel into place,
planting new flowers. Later this
month we will use the labyrinth
to do some walking meditation.

Central Ohio:

The COCPB is moving from
monthly meetings to weekly
starting on July 27th. This should
allow much easier scheduling
and increased participation.
We're still meeting at 9:30 am
on Sundays at the Stonewall
Center on High – 1160 N. High
St., Columbus, OH

*The Centers for Pragmatic Buddhism
offer services such as: Weddings,
Blessings, Purifications of home and
business, Memorial Services,
Educational services, Speakers for
events and Chaplain services. Please
contact the Center near you for more
information. Center contact
information is on the bottom of
Page 3.*

The Abbot's Cushion: Since 2007, the Center for Pragmatic Buddhism (CPB) has participated in an energetic, ongoing conversation about the relevance and value of Buddhism for the 21st century. From mindfulness meditation to concepts of *selflessness*, a virtue of our increasingly pluralistic society is the opportunity to adapt the good ideas we acquire from our neighbors for our own needs, so that we may benefit in a fundamentally new way. At CPB, we focus on the most useful and salient elements of Buddhism to meet the unique manner in which we live today; in doing so, we express the core of another tradition that is of foundational importance to us: philosophical Pragmatism. In adhering to the "spirit of the law," it is this synthesis between traditional Buddhist values and contemporary pragmatism that yields *Pragmatic Buddhism*. Having spent the past four years focusing on leadership development within our organization, we are excited to turn our attention outward, to offer something of value to others. I anticipate the new interest and engagement that *The Pragmatic Buddhist* newsletter will inspire.

— Jim Eubanks *sensei*

Welcome

Welcome to the first issue of *The Pragmatic Buddhist*, a newsletter published by the Order of Pragmatic Buddhists (OPB) for people interested in a Western expression of Buddhism. Since this is the first issue I wanted to spend a little space speaking to "What is Pragmatic Buddhism".

Pragmatic Buddhism grew out of both the Chinese Chan Buddhism and Japanese Zen Buddhism and is principally an effort to take the teachings of those schools as well as the original teachings of Siddhartha Gautama Buddha and bring to them a Western philosophy and practice. This is the same thing that has been done in each country and region as Buddhism has spread out of India into the world at large. As Peter Hershock says in his book "Chan Buddhism": "Buddhism not only changes the indigenous culture when it is assimilated but is also changed by that culture."¹ This has been the case in most cultures, but not in the West. This is mainly because the first appearances of Buddhism in the West were among immigrants from various Eastern countries and each of these groups brought their own school of

Buddhism with its own – culturally bound – practices and philosophy. When Westerners began to become interested in Buddhism they mainly found one of these Eastern schools that appealed to them and began practicing in that manner. There are some exceptions to this, but principally the Western practice of Buddhism is a mirror of the cultural practice of Japan, or Tibet, or Thailand, or some other Eastern country rather than being a Buddhism that has been changed by – and changes – the West.

The OPB seeks to change this by looking at Buddhism through the lens of Western Pragmatic philosophy and to build a Western school of Buddhism than neither clings blindly to Eastern practices nor rejects them whole scale but rather keeps what speaks to the Western mind and spirit as we grow our own cultural expressions of Buddhist practice and philosophy.

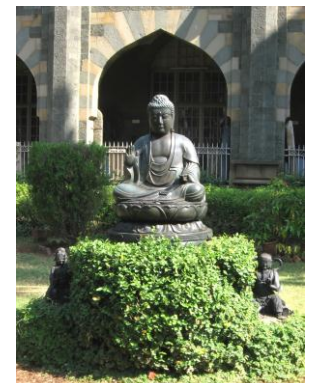
This newsletter will give you a view each month of what's going on at our Centers as well as offering advice on meditation practice and a chance for you to

ask questions that will be answered by one of our monks. If you have questions you can contact me at glenn.gustafson@pragmaticbuddhism.org. You can also find out more information about Pragmatic Buddhism at our website, www.pragmaticbuddhism.org.

Thank you,

Glenn Gustafson, editor

¹ Peter Hershock, "Chan Buddhism", University of Hawaii Press, 2005, p 27



On the Zafu – tips for meditation practice

Sitting practice in Pragmatic Buddhism

Sitting in Pragmatic Buddhism is the same sitting (*zuochan* in Chinese; *zazen* in Japanese) of the Chinese Chan and Japanese Zen Buddhist traditions. We sit with no goal other than to cultivate awareness of self and world, and to begin seeing that the two are, in actuality, one and the same. We sit to understand that the causal world "out there" is also the causal world "in here." We sit to see there is no distinction between mind and body. We sit to realize that dualism is the illusion--the belief that the world is separated into two realities: "mind and body," "self and world," "us and them," "self and not-self." Instead, we realize and see our world is characterized by holism. In this way, if we are true to our unified condition, we must not seek special experiences that ultimately serve to confuse and conceal our holistic experience. Turning "inward" into the self at the exclusion of the world "outside" is propagating the problematic belief that the world is two. The Buddha taught that we must practice with intent to unite oneself with his or her world, not in a magical way that only occurs during ritual and transcendental meditation, but by living our everyday lives with the understanding that our world is not two. Self is seen in our minds and the sensations that enter it. While sitting, we pay attention to our own mind as well as the worldly sensations that enter our consciousness, and in this way we embrace our holistic condition for "what it is."

Fundamentals of sitting

Remaining mindful of both the location and timing of your meditation is essential regular practice. You should choose a regular location that is quiet and peaceful – such as a corner of a bedroom that can be closed off from the rest of the house. In comfortable weather sitting outside is a great idea. Remember *zazen* is not about cutting yourself off from the world but about realizing your connection to it.

When just starting your practice it can be helpful to schedule your sitting at the same time each day to facilitate getting your body accustomed to a cyclical rhythm. As you progress in your practice new research is actually showing that changing the time of your sitting deeper cognitive changes.

Sitting supplies can be very simple depending on your choice of posture. For most postures you will need a base cushion and a higher cushion or bench on which to sit. Most Buddhist practitioners use a *zabuton* and *zafu* or *zabuton* and *seiza* bench.

Posture

The Order of Pragmatic Buddhists focuses on four principal postures: 1) Half Lotus, 2) Burmese, 3) Seiza and 4) Chair. Each of these will be described in detail below. No matter which posture you choose bring yourself upward and forward so that most of your weight is transferred onto your legs, then relax back mindfully into an upright posture and slowly exhale letting muscular tension fall away.

Half Lotus

The half lotus is like the full lotus except that only the non-dominant foot is tucked into the dominant thigh. Thus, if you are right-handed, your right foot and leg will be flush against the ground, and the left foot will be tucked into the right thigh at the knee; the left knee will go as close as possible to the ground for proper balancing.

Burmese Posture

The Burmese style posture is like the half lotus, except the non-dominant foot is not tucked, and instead is placed along the ground in front of the dominant leg, allowing for a more centered posture in those who are less flexible than the half lotus requires. *[NOTE: if you are right-handed, the left foot should be in front of the right--the opposite of what is pictured below]*

Seiza Posture

With the *seiza* posture, place the legs parallel to one another and flush to the ground, with toes pointed behind you. It is especially important to have a soft mat or *zabuton* to prevent discomfort while sitting in *seiza*.

Chair Posture

For those who are unable to sit in a traditional posture, sitting in a chair, while retaining the principles of proper centering and balance, will work just fine.

Altar

If you are practicing as a Buddhist it can assist your practice to sit in the presence of a simple altar. Since we come from a Chan/Zen tradition our altars in Pragmatic Buddhism are generally simple consisting of just an image of the Buddha, a vase of flowers, a candle, a small bowl of water and an incense burner. These elements are associated with the elements of earth (flowers), air (incense), fire (candle) and water symbolically bringing in the whole of creation into your sitting practice.



Question: Do you have to be vegetarian to be a Buddhist?

Answer: No. The Buddha and his immediate followers weren't vegetarian. They begged for their food and were admonished by the Buddha to accept and eat whatever they were given. Indeed the Buddha's last meal was "soft pork" according to the sutras. The rules for monks and nuns only forbade them

killing animals themselves or having other kill animals specifically for them. This is still the custom in Theravadan countries. Choosing to be a vegetarian is a personal choice that may be made for ethical reasons but is not a requirement in Buddhism, although many Buddhists will enforce periods of abstaining from meat as a personal discipline – for example during Vesak and other festivals.



Book Review

Essential Chan Buddhism by Chan Master Guo Jun; Monkfish Book Publishing Company, 2013:

Master Guo has written an excellent introduction to Chan Buddhism as it is currently practiced in Singapore, where he lives. Written in short, easy to read chapters it can be used almost as a guide to meditation – using one chapter per day for example.

It is important to remember that this book presents one aspect of Chan practice; but taking that into account Master Guo has produced a book that answers many questions about the centrality of sitting practice in Chan and how we can build outward from our practice into all aspects of our lives.

Glenn Gustafson /\

Contacting us...

The main web presence for Pragmatic Buddhism is www.pragmaticbuddhism.org. There you can find out more about or history and lineage as well as how to begin formal studies with us.

The contact for our St. Louis Center for Pragmatic Buddhism is Danielle McCarthy at Danielle.mccarthy@pragmaticbuddhism.org

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