

## Chapter News

### St Louis Center for Pragmatic Buddhism:

Weekly meetings continue on Thursday nights. The Dharma Talks for September are:

- 9/4: Self/ No-Self
- 9/11: Social Self
- 9/18: Intoku (Good Done In Secret)
- 9/25: Healing Breath Meditation

### Kawatha Lakes Centre for Pragmatic Buddhism:

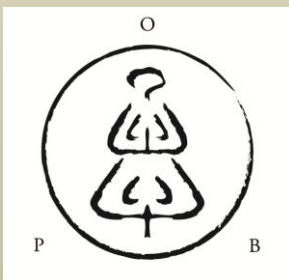
The Kawatha Lakes chapter is now meeting twice a week, here is the schedule for September:

- 9/2: Karma and Ethics
- 9/5: Formal Sitting
- 9/9: The Three Pure Precepts
- 9/12: Formal Sitting
- 9/16: The Four Ennobling Truths
- 9/19: Formal Sitting
- 9/23: Beginner's Mind
- 9/26: Night Candle Walk
- 9/30: The Eightfold Path: Appropriate View

### Central Ohio Center for Pragmatic Buddhism:

We will continue our weekly formal sitting with Dharma Talk on Sunday mornings. The topics for September are:

- 9/7: Karma and Ethics
- 9/14: The Four Ennobling Truths
- 9/21: Buddhism and Meditation Q&A
- 9/28: The Eightfold Path: Appropriate View



**The Sensei's Cushion:** Movement is essential for human beings. Studies continue to demonstrate that regular movement is better for our health and wellbeing. When the body/mind moves with intention, the benefits are remarkable. Yet it comes to pass so often that we are stagnant or that we move mindlessly. Stagnation may reveal itself as a couch potato or as people obstinate in their views. Mindless movement may manifest as living on autopilot and bandwagon thinking. These concerns not only apply to individuals but to the organizations of which they are part. We so often default to stagnation and mindless movement because they are easy, lazy. It takes discipline and rigorous self-honesty to live with intention. Such practice is more than meditation, more than some planned quiet time now and again. It is also more than the adoption of a philosophy inclusive of conditioned causality. Such practice is a moment to moment engagement with life that requires appropriate and ennobling view, thought, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration. Now, where have we heard THAT before?

— Meaghan Godwin, sensei

## Intentionality in Pragmatic Buddhist Ritual

What is the use of words, rituals and symbolism in Pragmatic Buddhism? This is an important enough question that a section of the precept training for new monks is included expressly on this topic.

In the notes for that training, it says: "Buddhism teaches us that every action in which we engage needs intent behind it, if it is to be realized through the kind of awareness we are cultivating in Buddhist practice."

This embodies the pragmatic approach to Buddhism we take - a pragmatic orientation says to use the most appropriate tool to accomplish a particular goal. The goal of Buddhism is to increase human flourishing/decrease human suffering. So, Pragmatic Buddhism is using the most appropriate tools to increase human flourishing and decrease human suffering.

Does calling what we do a religion or a philosophy increase human flourishing? Yes. No. It depends on why and how we're using the tool of language.

Does wearing robes and using a mala increase human flourishing? Yes. No. It depends on why we're using the tool of dress.

Does using an altar increase human flourishing? Yes. No, It depends on why we're using the tool of symbolic communication.

As we move through life, we adjust our presentation of self to fit the context - we wouldn't wear sweatpants to a job interview, but we may happily wear sweatpants as we sit on the couch watching TV. Are we being disingenuous by wearing clothing appropriate to the context of an interview? No. It would be difficult for the hiring manager to take us seriously if we wore sweatpants to an interview. That is, our "message" wouldn't be heard if we didn't present it effectively.

The significance of including intent in the training on ritual is the key for me.

Thoughts about some issues of word, ritual and symbolism:

Why do we bow? Is it based on tradition? Maybe. Should we reject tradition simply because we're Westerners and (mostly) Americans and we need to be John Wayne about everything? This is just as rigid as the Buddhist sects that become so involved with ritual that the ritual becomes the goal instead of a tool to accomplish a goal. Pragmatically, we bow as a formal way to begin practice. It is a symbol of respect for the mutual activity we are about to engage in. Is that religious? Yes. No. It depends on the intent.

In CPB St Louis, we don't use robes. Again, this is a mostly pragmatic response - very few of us leading the meditation could/can afford the expensive robes, so that element of the practice was relaxed. Do robes serve an

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important function in practice? They could, depending on the intent. If the intent is to mark this space as different than the other spaces in our lives, it makes sense that we would dress appropriately. Likewise, the altar. In CPB St Louis, we use a statue of the Buddha to represent one of the three jewels (Buddha, dharma, sangha). Is that religious? It depends on the intent. For us, it's a symbol to focus the purpose of our gathering. We use a mala to count the number of strikes for the bell meditation before moving to zazen. We use incense to create a physiological connection to this space (we use the same scent every time; when we smell that incense, it helps put us in the frame of mind for meditation). The smoke also symbolizes extending our practice to all living beings. Is that religious? I come down with a definitive maybe.

Pragmatic Buddhism is exceptionally strong in providing a way of thinking about intent and appropriate tools to accomplish the particular goal of that intent. What I am most grateful for about PB is not that it gives me the "right answers" but that it cautions me about getting too attached to the "right answers." The answer is not the goal. Thinking through the many possible answers to the question is the goal. Exploring the intent behind the question and possible answers is the goal. It's the process, not the product. The process helps me consider if I've become dogmatic (either by wholesale rejection of some pattern or by wholesale acceptance of some pattern). The process reminds me that I can make mistakes and fix them or do it differently next time (karma/reincarnation).

So, should we use words like philosophy, religion, monk? Should we use symbols like robes, altars, malas? Yes. And also no.

^ Danielle McCartney, OPB, Chapter Leader, Center for Pragmatic Buddhism, St. Louis, Mo.



## On the Zafu: Tips on Meditation

Some primary meditation techniques in the Order of Pragmatic Buddhists:

The following meditation techniques help us make the transition from a state of average, everydayness to a refined awareness that is responsive to the unique circumstances of the present moment.

### 1) Awareness Cultivation/Zazen (Primary Technique)

Zazen, as it is known in the Japanese Zen tradition, is the practice of "just sitting in mindfulness" (shikantaza). It is not a matter of "stopping" the mind, but rather allowing the practitioner to become aware of his or her own thoughts, the overall condition of his or her mind, so that benefit can result from this intimate understanding. The practice of zazen leads to bodymind relaxation and the introduction of deep calmness into one's consciousness. The simple attention that results from "just sitting" allows for a nonjudgmental awareness of one's circumstances, so that fewer negative mental labels are attached to one's experiences "out in the world." Zazen is most beneficial because it is readily employable in stressful situations in one's everyday life. As you sit, simply "watch and be present."

### 2) Flame Meditation (Primary Technique)

The use of a tea candle may be employed to aid with sitting practice (zazen), particularly when one is just starting a practice, or during periods of challenged concentration, such as when one is sick. The flame is dynamic, like the mind, making it particularly suited to aid with concentration.

### 3) Bell Meditation (Primary Technique)

Bell Meditation is a central practice at CPB, second only to zazen, and therefore it is essential that you perfect this technique. This meditation may be performed alone or in a group setting. The leader strikes a ching (Chinese bowl bell) and the audible sound of the bell is the central focus, though the striker is equally focused on expressing a deeply calm and unified bodymind through the motion of the strike itself. Your mind should follow the sound from its initial pronounced strike to its fading away into quietude and near silence. After the the sound is hardly perceivable, the leader strikes the bell again, and this is continued usually for 10-15 minutes prior to zazen. The bell may also struck more rhythmically and more frequently than just described, depending on the audience and purpose of the meditation.

## Who are Pragmatic Buddhists?

OPB members come to us from across the U.S. and Internationally. In this section, find out what draws our members to Pragmatic Buddhism. This week month, meet Lynndal.

### Q: Tell us a little about yourself

A: I'm a licensed marriage and family therapist in San Francisco. My wife and I met and married after moving to the Bay Area separately almost 20 years ago. I'm originally from Oklahoma and came out to California to work on a graduate degree. My wife is from Thailand and was doing post-doctoral work at Stanford when we met. Have been happily married and consider the Bay Area "home" ever since.

### Q: How did you get interested in Pragmatic Buddhism?

A: It's been an evolving process. As you might imagine, growing up in Oklahoma, there wasn't a lot of exposure to Buddhist teachings. In fact, I'm not sure I had ever heard the term until I took an "Intro to World Religions" course in college. Buddhism appealed to me immediately from an academic, intellectual viewpoint. However, it took that "proverbial rock bottom" experience to shake up my world enough to bring me to the practice. I did a lot of reading, but really committed to Buddhist practice as a formal student in the Rinzai Zen tradition for several years. At some level, I was running both to and from something. I was running from a more fundamentalist religious upbringing and to something that was more inclusive and more about practice and less about unquestioning faith.

At some point, I began to question the rituals and cultural traditions that almost every Buddhist school has, whether it be Theravada, Mahayana, Vajrayana, etc. I was most interested in the core teachings of the 4 Ennobling Truths, including the 8-Fold Path and how they could be applied in my day to day life. I was less interested in the robes and rituals. Stephen Batchelor's writings introduced me to the idea of secular Buddhism and that has resonated with me. While we all have various takes on the practice, the Order of Pragmatic Buddhists has provided me a Sangha of similar-minded dharma-practitioners and access to a formal structure and teachers to help deepen my practice. The concepts of "life is our monastery" and "acceptance, awareness, and action" are meaningful to me as is having Dharma kin to share the practice with.

^ Lynndal

## Sutra of the Month: The Heart Sutra

AVALOKITESVARA, BODHISATTVA OF COMPASSION, OBSERVING DEEPLY THE REFINEMENT OF WISDOM, PRAJNA PARAMITA, CLEARLY SAW THE EMPTINESS OF PERSONALITY, THUS ENDURING ADVERSITY AND PAIN.

O, SARIPUTRA, FORM IS NO OTHER THAN EMPTINESS, EMPTINESS NO OTHER THAN FORM; FORM IS EXACTLY EMPTINESS, EMPTINESS EXACTLY FORM, THE SAME IS TRUE OF FEELING, PERCEPTION, MENTAL FORMATIONS AND CONSCIOUSNESS.

O, SARIPUTRA, ALL DHARMAS ARE FORMS OF EMPTINESS, NOT BORN, NOT DESTROYED; NOT TAINTED, NOT PURE, NOT INCREASING, NOT DECREASING, AND SO IN EMPTINESS THERE IS NO FORM, NO FEELING, NO PERCEPTION, NO MENTAL FORMATIONS, NO CONSCIOUSNESS; NO EYES, NO EARS, NO NOSE, NO TONGUE, NO BODY, NO MIND; NO COLOR, NO SOUND, NO SMELL, NO TASTE, NO TOUCH, NO THOUGHT, NO REALM OF SIGHT AND SO FORTH UNTIL NO REALM OF CONSCIOUSNESS, NO IGNORANCE, NO END TO IGNORANCE AND SO FORTH UNTIL NO OLD AGE AND DEATH, AND NO END TO OLD AGE AND DEATH, NO SUFFERING, NO DESIRE, NO CESSATION, NO PATH, NO WISDOM, NO ATTAINMENT.

AND SO THE BODHISATTVA RELIES ON THE PRAJNA PARAMITA WITH NO HINDRANCE IN THE MIND, NO HINDRANCE, THERE FORE NO FEAR, FAR BEYOND DELUDED THOUGHTS, THIS IS NIRVANA.

ALL PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE BUDDHAS RELY ON THE REFINEMENT OF WISDOM AND THUS ATTAIN THE CULTIVATED ENLIGHTENMENT.

THEREFORE, KNOW THAT THE PRAJNA PARAMITA IS THE INTERDEPENDENT MANTRA, THE INTERCONNECTED MANTRA, THE MANTRA OF WORLD MAKING, THE MANTRA WHICH RELIEVES ALL SUFFERING,

SO PROCLAIM THE PRAJNA PARAMITA MANTRA, PROCLAIM THE MANTRA AND SAY: GATE! GATE! PARAGATE! PARASAMGATE! BODHI, SVAHA!

*This sutra is the heart of Mahayana Buddhist practice. It proclaims not that things, thoughts and feelings don't exist but that our view of them as permanent and unchanging is in error; and that we need to see them – and ourselves – as impermanent and changeable. The phrase "no suffering, no desire, no cessation, no path" refers to the original teaching of the Buddha that we call the 4 Ennobling Truths; teaching us that even the teachings of the Buddha – the Dharma – is not unchanging and may grow and change throughout time. If we view all things through this lens of impermanence and change we reduce our tendency to cling to things – after all why cling to something that will change and pass away – and that reduction in selfish clinging will in turn reduce unsatisfactoriness. Things, feelings, people, ourselves are neither good nor bad since those concepts themselves represent dualism which is also empty. Our selfish clinging to things as they are is what most needs to be recognized as empty and allowed to pass away.*

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## Ask a Monk:

**Q: Why do we bow – both during practice and to other Buddhist when we meet or part?**

**A:** Bowing serves many functions in Pragmatic Buddhism. When two Buddhists meet or part they may bow to each other to say, "I respect our mutual interdependence and acknowledge that we are each due respect as equal expressions of the Universe." Here it's like the Hindu Namaste – "I honor the divine in you". Certainly more respectful than a handshake, right?

Within a formal practice it's also used to express several different things. When the group bows to each other or the leader it's an expression that we practice as a group and that we acknowledge the actions of the leader are done on our behalf and with our permission. We also bow at the end of meditation and the recitation of sutras and gathas as a sign of gratitude for the opportunity to meditate together and for the gift of the Dharma teachings.

## Book Review:

**Hardcore Zen written by Brad Warner (2003)**  
**Wisdom Publications**  
**ISBN 0-86171-380-X**

Realization came for Brad Warner in the toilet stall of a seedy, basement bar in the middle of Ohio in the middle of the winter. The dirt, grime, loud pounding music and over-flowing toilets are not a place a person would think of for an enlightenment experience.

Brad Warner is a Soto Zen priest who lives in the United States, but used to live and work in Japan for a company that produced a weekly kids' series for television and monster movies (like Godzilla). Warner, in his youth, was the bassist of a punk-rock group called Zero-Defects. He brings the punk philosophy to his Zen; he does away with much of the ritual and ceremony, and he writes in a very frank, open way – often bluntly rude! Warner's first book, *Hardcore Zen*, tells the story of his youth in the punk culture, college days, his move to Japan and his meeting with Gudo Wafu Nishijimi – who later ordained him as a priest in Soto Zen.

He writes with humour of the Heart Sutra, the Four Noble Truths and wanting to be reborn as Lucy Liu's panties! The book is peppered with wisdom from Zen thought and he finishes with a detailed instruction for seated meditation (zazen).

If you're looking to read something about Buddhism that is NOT from the traditional point of view of old, bald men wearing robes, then check out this book - Zen wisdom for a North American audience.

/\ Jim Kearse, OPB, Chapter Leader, Kawatha Lakes, Ont.

**OPB Rule of the Month:** *Each month we'll present one of the Rules of the Order of Pragmatic Buddhists*

**1) Gautama's Law:**

The suffering of sickness, old age, death and rebirth are unavoidable; all other suffering is optional.

**Contacting Us:** Visit our website at [www.pragmaticbuddhism.org](http://www.pragmaticbuddhism.org) or one of our Centers:

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