

MINDFUL HEART BUDDHA SANGHA



OUR MISSION:

The intention of the Mindful Heart Buddha Sangha is to support individual growth to achieve freedom of the mind.

We follow a Theravada tradition, practice primarily Vipassana Insight meditation, and welcome people of all spiritual paths.

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This booklet is intended to provide someone unfamiliar with Buddhism and meditation an initial overview of both. It also provides a history of this Sangha. This information was compiled from several sources listed in the suggested reading list. You are encouraged to read these for a more thorough explanation of Buddhism and meditation. Also, you are encouraged to attend the meditation sittings and Dhamma (teaching) talks to ask questions and gain support.

HISTORY OF MINDFUL HEART BUDDHA SANGHA

The Mindful Heart Buddha Sangha (community) has evolved since its inception in approximately in 1996. This history is meant to give everyone interested an overview of this evolution. Also this history is meant to serve as a guide for future Sangha participants as this Buddhist community changes.

Mary MacGregor, an Evansville resident and psychologist established the Mindful Heart Buddha Sangha after her interest in Buddhism was sparked. In 1994, she read a book by Jack Kornfield, which touched her and encouraged her to attend a retreat at the Insight Meditation Center in Barre, MA. Upon returning from this retreat she began a silent meditation practice. Feeling this was not enough practice, Mary began inviting people with similar interest to meditate weekly at her office. Later, she traveled to France to attend a three-week retreat at Thich Nhat Hanh's center in Plum Village and embarked on an extensive individual study.

In the fall of 1996, Mary began weekly meditation sessions in her home so she could offer more sitting times. The next year, the Sangha was officially named Mindful Heart Buddha Sangha. A board of directors was formed with Mary as the initial President and Teacher. During this year the Sangha also participated in its first outside activity at the Global Ethnicity conference held in New Harmony, Indiana. In November 1999, Mary began individual study with Matthew Flickstein. Matthew is the author of two books and has been a long time student of Bhante Henepola Gunaratana. Bhante Gunaratana is a monk who was born on the island of Sri Lanka and begun his training there as a young boy. Both Matthew Flickstein and Bhante Gunaratana are well-established teachers in the Theravada tradition.

There are many different schools and traditions of Buddhism. They are often divided into three yanas, which means vehicles or paths. These three are Theravada, Mahayana and Tantrayana. Since the Buddha taught for decades, much variation developed over the years due to culture and regional differences. Theravada is called the "Doctrine of Elders." In order to clarify the Mindful Heart Buddha Sangha's teaching direction and due to Mary's study with Matthew Flickstein as well as other Theravada teachers, the board decided to officially adopt Theravada as the Buddhist tradition that the Mindful Heart Buddha Sangha follows. Although this is the Sangha's official tradition, our Dhamma leaders incorporate teachings from other traditions.

Also in 1999, the Mindful Heart Buddha Sangha was invited to help establish a Sangha at Branchville Correctional Facility in Tell City, Indiana. Several Sangha participants traveled to Tell City weekly in order to guide interested prisoners in meditation. The following year, the Sangha began hosting its own events, which included an Extended Sitting and Day of Mindfulness with Jack Lawler, a teacher from Illinois. The Sangha's first overnight retreat was held in April of 2000 at Kordes Enrichment Center in Ferdinand, Indiana. In 2001, the Sangha hosted retreats with Matt Flickstein in the spring and later in the year with Ginny Morgan, a teacher with Mid America Dharma. The tradition of hosting retreats has continued ever since, alternating years with residential and non-residential retreats. These retreats are typically facilitated by visiting Theravada or Vipassana teachers.

In 2005, the decision was made to move the Sangha from Mary's home to a more public location and settled at the Riverhouse complex in downtown Evansville. This space offered participants a chance to have extended sittings and Buddhism & meditation classes were offered for the first time. Due to continued growth, the Sangha needed a larger space and in 2008, the Sangha moved to Suite 960 in the Bradford Park complex on Weinbach Avenue. In 2013 we moved to our current home in the same complex.

The Sangha no longer participates with Branchville Correctional Facility due to changes in their needs as well as the logistical difficulties of continuing such an endeavor.

The Mindful Heart Buddha Sangha achieved tax-exempt status and is recognized as a tax-exempt organization by the State of Indiana. The Sangha has an established set of by-laws, a board of directors, and a council of Dhamma leaders. Board meetings are held as needed. The Dhamma leaders lead meditations, give Dhamma talks, teach classes, and lead retreats.

The Sangha continues to thrive through the support of donations only. The Pali term, Dana, sums up how the Sangha has survived without fundraising or other financial assistance. Dana is translated as generosity but means much more. It also means giving one's time, energy, wisdom, money, and community all from an open heart. This giving is spontaneous and done with a sense of gratitude. The giver has no sense of loss but feels full instead. The Mindful Heart Buddha Sangha does not have membership dues or fees. Financial support is made on a voluntary basis only. Board members and Dhamma leaders receive no financial compensation. The Buddha's teachings are given freely and we honor this tradition as well as the tradition of accepting Dana.

Currently, the Sangha offers several meditation sittings weekly. Dhamma talks are offered twice a week. Beginning and Intermediate classes are offered several times a year. The Sangha hosts other events including an annual picnic, Buddhist celebrations and retreats.

Every February, the Sangha holds its annual meeting where outgoing board members are recognized and incoming board members are introduced. The board president provides information about the organization such as our financial status and any changes in structure or operation. During this meeting Dhamma leaders offer a Dhamma talk and participants may formalize their Buddhist commitment and practice by electing to take the Five Precepts (explained later in this booklet).

CURRENT SITTING TIMES

Sunday: 6:00 P.M. Sitting Meditation & Dharma Talk

Sitting times are subject to change.

Please check the website, <http://mhbsangha.com> for updated information on meditation times and all other events.

Contact us via email at mindfulheart@gmail.com



Retreat participants following a 2006 residential retreat

THE LIFE OF THE BUDDHA

Buddhism is based on traditions of thought and practice taught by an Indian prince named Siddhattha Gautama who lived from 563 BCE – 483 BCE. Prince Siddhattha Gautama, the son of a powerful king, was brought up surrounded by all the luxuries of the world. Isolated in a palace so that he would never experience sorrow, the prince grew up married and had a child. One day, while riding through the city outside the palace, the prince witnessed suffering for the first time when he saw an old man, a diseased man, a corpse and an ascetic (a person who had dedicated his life to extreme self-denial and self-mortification for religious reasons). The first three observations filled Gautama with dread and despair, while the last observation filled him with sympathy. He became troubled and filled with doubt about questions regarding the changing nature of life.

Gautama enjoyed the greatest possible happiness and privilege known in his day yet he recognized the suffering inherent in conscious existence. He realized that no matter how much humans indulge in pleasure of the senses, eventually the realities of old age, sickness, and death must be faced. Understanding this and encouraged by this fourth observation of the ascetic, he decided to renounce his life of luxury and seek the ultimate truth to benefit all living beings.

He slipped out of his palace in the middle of the night, leaving behind his wife, son and his riches to become an ascetic determined to find the cause of suffering. At first, he studied under the wisest religious teachers and philosophers of his time. He learned all they had to teach but they could not provide the answer he was seeking. He then began to practice self-mortification, abstaining from the normal pleasures of life and intentionally enduring hard and painful conditions. He did long periods of fasting and going without sleep. He practiced life like this for six years, finally reaching a point of collapse due to hunger and exhaustion. After he nourished himself and his health returned, he rejected this approach. One night he sat in intensive meditation under a bodhi tree. In the morning, upon seeing the morning star, he experienced the great Enlightenment.

Siddhattha Gautama attained understanding of suffering, realizing that everything changes in the world, yet desire makes people crave for endless material pleasures. When the pleasures wither away, we become unhappy and suffer. True happiness arises with the comprehension that change is the ultimate reality of the material world and that nothing lasts forever. He taught that this understanding leads to enlightenment and that enlightenment leads to breaking free from the cycle of birth and death. This breaking free is called Nibbana. After Gautama's enlightenment he became known as the Buddha, which is an honorific title meaning "Enlightened One" or "Awakened One."



THE BUDDHIST CANON

Before the Buddha passed into total Nibbana, he told his followers that thereafter the Dhamma would be their leader. In this context, Dhamma means the Buddha's teachings. The early arahants (Buddha's disciples) considered Gautama's words the primary source of the Dhamma and Vinaya (the rules of discipline and community living). Although the Buddha left no written record of his teachings, his disciples preserved them by committing them to memory and transmitting them orally from generation to generation. The version of the canon or accepted scripture preserved in the Pali language took shape during three centuries of oral transmission. Pali is the language of Theravada Buddhism, which is based on a dialect of Middle Indo-Aryan that was spoken in central India during the Buddha's time.

Three months after the passing of the Buddha around 483 BCE, five hundred pre-eminent arahants held a convention to memorize the teachings. This First Council compiled the Pali Tipitaka (Three Baskets) of Buddha's teachings. About 83 BCE, another council was held and the Tipitaka was committed to writing. The word Tipitaka is used for the Buddhist canon because the Buddha's teachings were divided into three baskets when they were written down. The voluminous Tipitaka is estimated to be about eleven times the size of the Bible. Each basket represents a certain aspect of the Buddha's teachings. They are the Basket of Discipline called the Vinaya Pitaka, the Basket of Discourses or Sutta Pitaka and the Basket of Higher Learning called the Abhidhamma Pitaka.