

A Fresh Breeze to Part the Clouds

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Within the Buddhist tradition, the cycle of Dana is the breath of vitality and the root of growth. This Sanskrit word translates simply to donation, but the essence of the practice goes deeper.

An orange robed monk slowly steps on the cool morning soil; his bare toes softly part the earth. His nostrils pull in the sweet air to fill his lungs. His silent, sparkling eyes collect the swirl of colors as he drifts into the village. He kneels at the feet of a woman and child, not saying a word. She extends a small wooden spoon, steam rising as she scoops the nourishment of fresh rice. The young boy places a yellow banana beside it. The monk's pureness of heart allows him to feel the gratitude so deeply it brings a tear to his eye.

If I could do exactly what my heart and mind deeply wish, I would use the fellowship donation to live in a community of people devoted to finding inner peace. It is my vision that the practice of meditation can survive and thrive outside of monasteries, and even make its way onto a college campus. My dream is to travel to Thailand and study meditation for four months. Devoting a long period of time to study one's self could be seen as selfish, but as one comes to understand the patterns and relationship to the self, that person begins to see the self in all things. Relationships become full, sights and sounds turn into extraordinary happenings. It

awakens our mind, and every interaction bears a fruit of beauty. I am grateful to have the opportunity to apply for the Stuart Givens Fellowship, and if I am chosen, I plan to take what I have learned on my adventure and use it to nourish our campus community.

The first retreat I attended was only 4 days long, but those 4 days of silence blew a layer from my clouded head. The freshness of that breeze was like the whisper of the best secret the universe holds. I came to taste the beauty of life in a whole new way. I understood for the first time that to actually experience what is going on... to actually allow my senses to perceive what is present, while being free from the mind's monotonous chatter could take me to a new world.

For the past 2 summers I have traveled across the country to San Francisco. It is a new annual tradition. It feels like entering a new world; like coming home. Into silence I go with other young adults, at a retreat center stitched and woven with the threads of compassion and wise living. Lead by many great teachers (including Marvin Belzer, who lead me through my first retreat, and started the BGSU Mindfulness Club) this weeklong retreat is absolutely life changing. The possibility of truly healing and living well is seen, and it is a wonderful thing. The process of facing deep emotional wounds, and unhealthy patterns happens here in our sacred silence.

Deep in the providence of Ubon Ratchathani, Thailand, lies Wat Pan Nanachat, a beautiful monastery welcoming students to stay for free. Many great teachers reside here and it was founded by one of the most renowned teachers

of modern times: Ajahn Chah. I am in contact with a monk who recommended this place to me. He has lived and studied at Wat Pan Nanachat. All the teachings are in English, while staying true to the culture and tradition. Into solitude I would go, with the support of wise elders to take care of me.

Thailand is one of the easiest countries to travel to, regulation wise. Flying into Bangkok is relatively simple, and many trails run daily, leading directly to Ubon Ratchathani. Preparations to stay must be made three months in advance, by writing a letter to the monk in residence stating the arrival time. I plan to go during Spring Semester of 2013. Health insurance and vaccinations must be planned and gotten before departing. Once at the monastery, nothing is needed except for clothing, basic toiletries and a small allowance for food.

Last summer I strengthened my practice while living at a monastery in Canada for six weeks. The head monk of this monastery was ordained at Wat Pan Nanachat. Some could imagine solitude as boring, but this was the most exciting time of my life. I embarked on the journey 18 hours north, just past Thunder Bay, Ontario. With no electricity and no running water, my days fell into a wholesome routine. Chopping wood, building fires, boiling tea water and long walks along the rivers helped me to silence my internal dialogue and judgmental mind. Such exhilaration I would feel at the simplest of moments. I see it is possible to live in this beautiful way, and I will never cease to offer my hand in teaching what I have been taught.

It has been apparent to me that college students are seeking a new way to live and be happy. Just as children learn languages very easily at a young age, college students are in a very unique position to learn meditation. It is noticeable that meditation has not been particularly “hip”, or “cool” in the past. We will soon see that those who we hold dear to our history, the free thinkers, the revolutionaries, and the wise ones have always sought the truth meditation can teach us all. We are ready for a fresh take, and I commit my sweat, blood, and tears of joy to this vision. For the most part, this time in student’s lives is long-term commitment free. Our paths are open to create whatever future we wish to manifest. Once a portion of students start to learn and practice meditation, more and more minds would start to break free from the social traps that hold us inside our own nervous habits. All it takes is a simple example of how to live well. To create a space dedicated to love and healing will act as a lighthouse, and attract those who wish to explore what it has to offer.

I am currently a part of the **SEARCH** Learning Community (**S**tudents **E**ngaged in **A**ctive, **R**eflective, **C**aring, and **H**olistic learning). So far, this has been a wonderful place to teach and learn. I have gathered my friends and started a weekly meditation and yoga class in our common space, as well as a daily meditation at the BGSU Student Union. Through our experiences, a strong community has formed. I have decided to run for the presidential position of the Mindfulness Club to begin practicing with a wider range of people. The mindfulness club meets weekly at a house on the edge of campus called The

Common Good. I have been asked to move into this house next year and begin my own projects of living well. With my experience in Thailand, I wish to return home and begin sharing the teachings and the experiences I had with my friends and all who wish to practice and learn with me.

Most of all, I seek the time to really explore my passions and creativity. Having a safe time and place allows them the safety to 'crystalize'. When they are solid, they can hold strong in all types of difficult situations. It is difficult to carry compassion to those who need it the most, but I believe this is how we will change the world. It has excited me greatly to write and think about all the possibilities of the future, and I thank all involved, past and present, for this opportunity.



Trip Budget – 4 months

Travel – Airfare & Train & Taxi Airfare projected to be around 2,600 (round trip) Train and taxi projected to be around 400 (round trip) 500.00 reserved for trips into nearby towns, rising fuel costs, etc.	3,500.00
Vaccinations & Medicine First Aid kit, Malaria pills Diphtheria Tetanus Measles Polio Typhoid Hepatitis A or Immune Globulin IG Hepatitis B Japanese encephalitis Rabies Yellow Fever	400.00
Travel Health Insurance (calculated through WorldNomads.com)	300.00
Gear and Supplies (including toiletries) Lamp oil, mosquito net and repellent, sunscreen, rain gear, hiking shoes, soap, toilet paper, shampoo, razors, etc.	500.00
Food & Water	700.00
Buffer Funds (Emergency, unexpected costs, possible donation to monastery if unused)	600.00

Trip Total = \$6,000.00 USD