

SATURDAY 21 DECEMBER 2019

2019 END-OF-YEAR NEWSLETTER



End of year greetings to all, and wishes for comfort and ease during this week of long nights. After the yearly flurry of outdoor work, and with Santi's customary return from Thailand in mid-December, we often find ourselves in harmony with the solstice season, cozy and contemplative in the cabin, marking the soft pink and blue hues of sunrises and sunsets, on snow if we're lucky.

Wholeness has been a potent theme for us throughout 2019 as we reflect on the meaning of Kevala - that dimension, aspect and reality of life that leaves nothing out. CG Jung observes that the mandala and the quaternity are symbols of wholeness, and as our yearly cycle renews itself, we reflect on the fourfold nature of reality-truth (*sacca*) expressed in Buddha-Dhamma. Friends and family face serious illnesses – cancers, Parkinson's – and death. We mourn eco-destruction all around and are buffeted by the repercussions of the climate crisis. Politics has been especially nasty and might be getting worse. Underlying these forms of suffering we observe fear for ourselves and loved ones, anger about beloved institutions and ecosystems under extreme duress, shame about behavior on our borders, doubt about responding, greed for comfort and security. We are called to track these corruptions of the spirit in ourselves, more than calling them out in public figures.

Yet ... the prairie plot nurtured on the Kevala hillside is thriving in colors and diversity, and it is spreading with the help of other prairie lovers. Apple trees share their fruits in late summer as we and the deer feast freely. The garden bears a soul-nourishing harvest, along with camaraderie as we tend it. Our new house arises perched on the edge of the valley. Meditators circle round in silence and in conversation at the Guest House. Life stories and insights are exchanged and honored in discussions concerning Buddha-Dhamma, Dante, and Jung. ... Snowflakes fall and stars twinkle.

Not beyond, but between these opposites we track the heart of non-clinging that rests at ease with all things, able and willing to wait or to take action, as appropriate in each moment. It is the work of a lifetime - to track that heart of discernment and wholeness - and we whole-heartedly cheer you on in your own labor between the opposites. The path of awakening arises again and again, and we invite you to pick up its thread again and again. The path of awakening also arises with each one who arrives here to stop, wait, rest, and explore the meditative and contemplative life. You are welcome to the Guest House at Kevala with your inner work, and your seeking of refuge. We invite you to arrive when you are able.

And, once again we send our annual news and thanks for everyone who shares in our aspirations and endeavors.

- ✿ Building energy turned from Kevala buildings to Jo Marie and Santikaro's own small house near the road this year. It has become increasingly clear that the best way for Kevala to continue long term is for the two founders to build a home of their own, that will be more accessible in old age, provide space for solitude and practice, and some measure of security for the future. The Kevala board has worked towards paying each a more living wage during the last two years. This has enabled the purchase of the areas currently in use for the horses and already developed using personal funds, and the building of a small home. As development at Kevala has created a little more complexity, drawing some boundaries between the non-profit and personal property, in the name of transparency, has felt desirable and appropriate as well.
- ✿ We continue to work developing more prairie areas at Kevala and increasing the diversity of species. In the spring a prairie burn was led by Ben Johnston of the Kickapoo Valley Reserve (our own local true EcoSattva!) and attended by a dozen local hardworking prairie enthusiasts and Kevala supporters. The results were phenomenal, with a bursting forth of color and diversity. The boundaries of the prairie were expanded, and next year we will see how successful that was, as the new seeds require a season of freezing before they will sprout in the spring. Jo Marie is spending time at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve learning what she can about local species, both flora and fauna. The Kickapoo Valley Reserve and its incredibly knowledgeable staff is a treasure in this area: <http://kvr.state.wi.us/home/>
- ✿ Santikaro is involved in local groups addressing the climate crisis. Kevala has joined a local activist cooperative which educates and advocates locally for renewable energy and affordable mortgages. Jo Marie and Viroqua friends have begun a local EcoSattva training group for in-person engagement with the emotional and spiritual aspects of the crisis. EcoSattva training is provided by One Earth Sangha and is a wonderful resource for our times: www.oneearthsangha.org
- ✿ Santikaro continues leading workshops and retreats in Chicago, the Midwest, and further afield. He has just returned from a longer than usual visit to Thailand. A highlight was renewing connections with the work of Suan Mokkh through an 8-day retreat with staff of the Buddhāsa Indapañño Archives and a workshop for people running retreats at Dipabhavan on Koh Samui. Serious engagement with Ajahn Buddhāsa's teaching continues to be inspiring and challenging for him. These encounters with old friends and new students rekindles his gratitude for all that Thai Buddhist culture has provided him.
- ✿ Santikaro has been assisting Paco at BIA with revising and re-issuing *Buddha-Dhamma for Inquiring Minds, Natural Cure for Spiritual Disease*, and smaller works. These [ebooks can be found here](#). He has also advised new translations into Russian, Spanish, and English. Of special interest is an important translation of one of Ajahn Buddhadasa's larger works, to be published by Shambala late next year as *Seeing with Eyes of Dhamma*.
- ✿ In January we look forward to welcoming Jennifer Malin "home" for a several week visit. Jen was an early board member and instrumental in the formation of then Liberation Park in its Oak Park incarnation. She has lived in her native England for the past several years.

We look forward to hearing from you and welcoming you to practice opportunities here at Kevala Retreat. If you value Kevala Retreat and wish to support the work that is done here, please consider supporting with a year-end gift. Kevala Retreat, and her founders depend entirely on you for their support and continuance. Follow this link for ways to give: <http://www.liberationpark.org/dana.htm#paypal>

In Dhamma & With Gratitude
Jo Marie Thompson & Santikaro Upasaka