



# UU Sangha

Volume: XX, Number: 1

Journal of the Unitarian Universalist Buddhist Fellowship

Fall 2021

*From the Editor, Florence Caplow: For this edition of the UU Sangha, learn more about our planned Spring 2022 Convocation featuring Buddhist teacher and eco-activist David Loy, postponed from Spring 2021. And read about three UU Buddhist meditation groups and how they adapted to the pandemic.*

*Although vaccines have given us greater freedom from the restrictions of the pandemic, we are still experiencing cases across the country, new virus variants, and large numbers of Americans choosing not to be vaccinated. Many sanghas and UU congregations are beginning, tentatively, to meet in person, but there are many unknowns in our future. We hope these three stories will be inspirational as examples of creative responses and ways of continuing sangha even in an unprecedented time.*

## **Responding to Pandemic Part 1**

### **The Mindful Reflection Community**

**Oak Park, Illinois**

**by Terry Kinsey**

Oak Park's Mindful Reflection Community is part of the Unity Temple UU congregation. It is a community where privilege is the norm for most of our participants. Because of this we are more easily able to look at the pandemic as an opportunity for exploration and deepening our personal practice than many less privileged people

are able to do because of the extreme stresses this pandemic has caused in their lives.

One area of exploration and deepening our practice is to understand and commit to engage in social justice actions to facilitate change in the institutional structures that are causing so much suffering in the world from a center of love and compassion more fully. We recognize that balancing our personal practice with engaged practice is critical to our living a more awakened and skillful life.

Our community is facilitated by six different volunteers who are interested in Buddhism and have a regular practice but are not "trained" teachers in Buddhism. Most members of the sangha are Unitarian Universalist and consider their practice to be a secular Buddhism, although not all. We listen to dharma talks from many different lineages and encourage personal exploration into what specific practices and wisdom teachings resonate within a framework of non-harming and generosity.

During the pandemic, our sangha used the Zoom platform for our two hour Tuesday evening meetings, using breakout rooms to continue to build our personal community connections as we practiced together and listened to the dharma. During the past year attendance has ranged from 37 to 49 participants.

At the request of our sangha members, on April

*(Continued on page 3)*

## Have you renewed your UUBF membership this year?

Subscription to the UU Sangha is based on a calendar year donation of \$25. If you attended last year's convocation, you received a one year membership that has now expired.

Your membership dollars support the printing of *UU Sangha*, which is sent to members who request a paper copy, as well as those who are incarcerated. Printing costs are increasing. We also use membership dollars to help support scholarships to our bi-annual convocations.

Please consider an additional \$25 donation to help us continue to print this journal and share it with those without access via the internet. To donate, go to the [UUBF Donations Page](#) on UUBF.org.



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email: jzimmerman AT uuma.org

### Secretary

Samuel A. Trumbore (Vipassana)  
First Unitarian Universalist Society  
405 Washington Avenue  
Albany, NY 12206  
email: strumbore AT uumin.org

### Editor

Florence Caplow (Zen & Vipassana)  
Unitarian Universalist Church of Urbana Champaign  
309 W. Green St., Urbana, IL 61801  
email: fcaplow AT uuma.org

### Treasurer / Publisher

Richard Swanson (Zen)  
710 24th St. SW  
Vero Beach, FL 32962-8127  
email: rswansonvt AT gmail.com

### Directors (traditions):

Wayne Arnason (Zen)  
Gerald Bennett (Zen)  
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### Web pages:

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8th, 2020 we started offering a 7 day a week, online 20-minute sitting practice every morning at 8:30 a.m. along with a very short dharma reading. Our attendance averages from 35-54 participants. We have had people attend from 9 different states. We will continue this daily Zoom meeting even when we are able to meet face to face again.

We also moved our monthly Sacred Wandering (combination of forest bathing and meditation) to Zoom as well during this past year. This would be normally held in a local forest preserve. Members were asked, if possible, to sit on a porch, deck, yard or using a smart phone, to be in a forest or park. Some chose or needed to sit inside their home, and observe plants/natural landscapes from their windows or watched a YouTube clip of a serene wilderness setting.

Walking, sitting, and guided practice occurred, along with sharing of tea at the end and a sharing circle. Average attendance on Zoom was 23. On April 3, 2021, we moved Sacred Wandering back to in person meeting with physical distancing and masks. Attendance was 25. We anticipate continuing face-face meetings from now on.

For information contact: Terry Kinsey at [mindful@unitytemple.org](mailto:mindful@unitytemple.org)

## **Responding to Pandemic Part 2**

### **Meditation Group in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico**

**by Joan Wolf**

Buddhism is at the center of my spiritual practice since I accepted the Five Mindfulness Trainings from Thich Nhat Hahn. When I moved to Mexico in 2018 I went to my first-ever UU service with the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of San Miguel de Allende (UUFMSA).

I was surprised and delighted to find a deep connection between my Buddhist practice and UU

ideals after taking Reverend Tom Roseilla's "Introduction to UU" class. It was wonderful to learn that a Unitarian woman and talented linguist, Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, translated the first Buddhist Sutra from French to English. It was a portion of the Lotus Sutra which was the first Sanskrit text to be translated to a European language by the French scholar Eugene Burnouf. Peabody's translation was published in an 1844 edition of *The Dial*, the Transcendentalist quarterly that was edited by Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Also while taking Tom's class I learned that Buddhist affinity groups are common in many UU fellowships and I was happy to become a member of the UU Sangha soon after.

As the pandemic deepened here in Mexico, with the encouragement of the UUFMSA board, I moved a weekly in-person meditation group to their Zoom account with their tech support. I had been facilitating the group which my Order of Interbeing mentor, Jeanie Seward-Magee, started several years ago. We had been meeting in a yoga studio but that ended in March due to the pandemic. We call our online group Sangha of the Heart. The name resonates not only with our practice but also with our locale, which has the nickname "the heart of Mexico".

We meet online every Friday from 10:00 to 11:30 Central Time and enjoy music, meditation, dharma teachings, and dharma sharing. All are welcome. One of the blessings I find in this time of huge change is the internet. Out of necessity we have all turned to technology to stay connected and it erases borders. Our sangha has participants from Mexico, the US, Canada and occasionally Europe.

If you would like to be added to our email group to receive weekly reminders and a link to our zoom meeting, please contact me at [joanwolf@umich.edu](mailto:joanwolf@umich.edu).

## Responding to Pandemic Part 3

### Outdoor Meditation Group in Urbana, Illinois

by Zenshin Florence Caplow

Prior to the pandemic, I offered regular free meditation classes at the Channing-Murray Foundation on the University of Illinois campus, sponsored by the Channing-Murray Foundation and the congregation where I serve as the lead minister, the UU Church of Urbana-Champaign. The campus community appreciated the classes and I was able to share the dharma in an accessible way. But for 18 months, all buildings on campus were at first closed due to the pandemic, and then only open to students and faculty who could show a negative test. Our church building also closed.

In the summer of 2020, a few months into the pandemic, I was talking with a long-time Zen student and member of our UU congregation, Keri Alice Lynn, and we admitted to each other that we were not enthusiastic about Zoom dharma groups, and we both loved to sit in meditation outside in nature. The university has a beautiful arboretum with mature shade trees, and over the years of walking there I had often fantasized about having an outdoor sitting group, meeting under those trees. Keri Alice and I realized that this was a perfect opportunity to safely sit in sangha together during the pandemic.

In late August last year we let the congregation and others who had attended my classes know that each Saturday we would be in the arboretum at a particular location between 2 and 3 pm, rain or shine. We recommended bringing cushions or lawn chairs and dressing for the weather. Masks and social distancing were required. There was no speaking, just bells to announce the beginning of a sitting or walking period.

At our first gathering, ten people showed up with their lawn chairs and masks on a humid afternoon, and we made a large circle beneath the trees, spangled with light and shade from the canopy above us. We sat for 20 minutes, walked for 10 minutes, and then sat for another 25 minutes. It was deeply peaceful, and felt utterly safe. At the end we picked up our chairs and cushions, waved to each other behind masks, and headed back to our isolated lives again.

The next week there was a torrential rain storm, half way through our time together. One by one people scurried to their cars, until only Keri Alice and I were left, completely drenched but still sitting quietly. At the end we laughed and picked up our chairs, pouring the water out of them.

We kept sitting as summer turned to fall, on warm days and cool days, as the grass dried and the leaves began to turn. I noticed that Keri Alice had not shown up for a couple of weeks, and I called her to see how she was. I knew she had lung cancer, and had chosen not to do the invasive treatments, but she had done well all summer. She said she was feeling very weak, but hoped to come back. Meanwhile, we kept sitting, sometimes just a few people, sometimes more. Soon we were sitting knee deep in fallen leaves, bare branches above us, and then gray skies and cold.

By December, it was bitterly cold. I would “suit up” for our sit in layers of down, but each week a few of us showed up, no matter the weather. I called Keri Alice again. She had decided to practice Voluntary Stopping of Eating and Drinking (VSED). People from her circles—the lesbian community, her UU congregation, and her Zen sangha - formed a circle of care around her, to support her in her dying process, and when we gathered on Saturdays without her, I sent blessings from her beloved trees to her bedside.

## Walking Into Enlightenment by Greg Gaul

Keri Alice died in peace in early January, and in the days after she died word went out that our next Saturday sit would be dedicated to her. Many people showed up, even with snow on the ground, and this time everyone stayed. At the end I spoke for the first time, thanking people for coming, thanking Keri Alice for being our “founder” and dedicating our practice to her.

We have continued. We have met every week for more than a year. Once it was so cold that I was afraid we would all get hypothermia, and I led a walk through the arboretum instead. We watched the grass turn green and grow long this spring. We felt the air soften and fill with birdsong. In May, we sat without masks on for the first time, still many feet apart. In June we were soaked again, this time by a thunderstorm on a hot day.

The spirit of Keri Alice continues with us. Even when the worst of this pandemic ends, I suspect a little circle will gather under the trees each Saturday.



*Sitting cushions in the snow, winter 2020*

So many think about changing the whole world,  
few think about changing their very selves.  
Standing on the precipice, peer beyond.  
Pierce your personal, privileged bubble.  
View the vast vision across all beings.

In wonder, count the petals of a flower.  
Be amazed, probe a chambered nautilus.  
Walk backwards out of Fibonacci's Spiral  
into eternal embrace with enlightenment.  
Spin science's vortex, fall into art's abyss.  
Through the dark to the light and back again.  
A looking glass within a looking glass,  
mirroring all nature, realities' rules.

It seems little opens closed minds much  
but when it does, it opens hearts forever.  
Buddha's "mind-heart" path, hoping all will walk.  
Walking through two doors at once can happen.  
Trust that quantum particles jumping  
in and out of existence can be real.

Or gaze deeply into a baby's eyes  
and not picture the expanding universe.  
Rather, see yourself this time, finally looking out.  
Enlightenment finds you, you don't find it.  
As it approaches, make your mind be still  
all you need is loving-kindness and a smile.

## UUBF Convocation 2022

The postponed UUBF semiannual Convocation will be held on Thursday March 17 through 22, 2022 at [The DeKoven Center](#) in Racine, Wisconsin on the shores of Lake Michigan. David Loy will be the keynote speaker. The topic will be centered around the climate catastrophe and EcoDharma.

David Robert Loy is a professor, writer, and Zen teacher in the Sanbo Kyodan tradition of Japanese Zen Buddhism.

He is [a prolific author](#), whose essays and books have been translated into many languages. His articles appear regularly in the pages of major journals such as [Tikkun](#) and Buddhist magazines including [Tricycle](#), [Turning Wheel](#), [Shambhala Sun](#) and [Buddhadharma](#), as well as in a variety of scholarly journals.

David lectures nationally and internationally on various topics, focusing primarily on the encounter between Buddhism and modernity: what each can learn from the other. He is especially concerned about social and ecological issues. A popular recent lecture is "[Healing Ecology: A Buddhist Perspective on the Eco-crisis](#)", which argues that there is an important parallel between what Buddhism says about our personal predicament and our collective predicament today in relation to the rest of the biosphere. He also leads meditation retreats.

Eco-dharma combines the teachings of Buddhism and related spiritual traditions (dharma) with ecology and ecological concerns (eco).

In June 2014, David received an honorary degree from Carleton College, his alma mater, during its 2014 Commencement. In April 2016 David returned his honorary degree to the College, to protest the decision of the Board of Trustees not to

divest from fossil fuel companies.

David Loy is one of the founding members of the new Rocky Mountain Ecodharma Retreat Center, near Boulder, Colorado

## **Quotes from David Loy**

From [A Wild Love for the World](#)

*Today it has become obvious that we cannot separate our own individual awakening from the larger social transformation that is so urgently needed. It is by rising to that challenge that Buddhism can remain most true to its essential message and fulfill its potential.*

From [Becoming an EcoSattva](#)

*Even as the ecological crisis is the greatest challenge that humankind has ever faced, it's also the greatest challenge that Buddhism has ever faced. Buddhism developed, evolved, and spread by interacting with new cultures, and just as Buddhism in China interacted with Taoism to make Chan, it may be that Buddhism in our globalized, secular, consumerist world is going to interact with [Extinction Rebellion](#) (XR) or similar movements to create something new. Will the [bodhisattva](#) become the ecosattva? It's a pretty exciting time to be a Buddhist.*

From [EcoDharma: Buddhist Teachings on the Precipice](#)

*"Sentient beings are numberless. I vow to save them all." Wow. We are vowing to fulfill an unfulfillable vow, is that weird or what? Since it can't be fulfilled, what it's calling for is a reorientation in our lives.*

*Hope and despair are dualities. I don't think it's hope and despair that motivate bodhisattvas. I think it's something deeper.*

*Our ecological efforts are our gift to the earth.*

*Visit his web site here: <https://www.davidloy.org/>*

## Thoughts from our UUBF President

These past two years have been filled with circumstances that have brought us into closer touch with the truth of impermanence. Many of us know of someone who has contracted the coronavirus or perished from it. The pandemic's reach has been uneven, affecting Black, Indigenous, and People of Color more harshly. The promise of vaccination has yet to reach children, who are now our most vulnerable cohort.

Buddhist teachings may urge contemplation of the precariousness of life yet when confronted with this reality in our daily lives, and for a prolonged period as has been the case with pandemic, we are challenged. The end point of the pandemic is ambiguous, though we might wish for a closing bell. Under such conditions our UU values act like an anchor in the midst of confusion and uncertainty.

The UUBF is a resource that can help us remain steadfast in our practice and in bringing our UU faith to the world. The UUBF Facebook group continues to grow, providing an avenue that encourages connection and sharing. We strive to publish the UU Sangha at least twice a year, but due to our editor's health challenges, we have missed more than a year of publication. Our apologies, and thank you to all who have contributed to this issue and made its release possible.

Additional opportunities to practice flexibility happened once again, when we learned that the retreat center which was to host the 2022 convocation was forced to close. The 2022 Convocation will take place in March, 2022, and David Loy will be our speaker. He is the author of *Ecodharma: Buddhist Teachings for the Ecological Crisis* and a teacher in the Sanbo Zen tradition of Japanese Zen Buddhism. The convocation will follow a hybrid model, with both in-person and virtual means of participation. Registration information will be found at <https://uubf.org>.

April 25 brought the first-ever virtual all UUBF sangha meeting. We need not wait for convocation to bring us together as one! We are planning another Zoom gathering November 14th. More information again on our web site. Zoom conferencing made it possible. Having a regular virtual meditation time and more frequent, shorter newsletters surfaced as some of the things participants wished UUBF to give priority. The UUBF Facebook group has a meeting summary available in the Files area. I hope you'll take a look at that document and stay tuned for ways to volunteer to bring these proposals to life.

As we press on through the second year of pandemic, may we extend empathy and compassion to one another as well as ourselves. From this place of self-stewardship may we come into greater awareness of who we really are at our core. May we help build a post-pandemic future that alleviates suffering and brings all living things closer to flourishing.

Yours in the UU dharma,

*Rev. Judy Zimmerman*  
UUBF Board President

## **Special Request from the Church of the Larger Fellowship**

The Church of the Larger Fellowship (CLF) is an online and by mail UU congregation, serving thousands of UUs world-wide.

Did you know that the CLF has a Prison Ministry? The CLF is now serving over 1,200 CLF members currently incarcerated through its Prison Ministry. Most CLF members in prison are new to Unitarian Universalism and learned about the CLF from friends or cellmates. With no access to the web or UU Sunday services, people who are incarcerated can only learn about Unitarian Universalism from the mailings we send them and the letters they exchange with our staff and other Unitarian Universalists like you!

The CLF's **Worthy Now Prison Network** provides an opportunity to live out our Unitarian Universalist values by connecting you with a pen pal. In turn, your heart may be renewed by witnessing the power of Unitarian Universalism present even in the most difficult of places.

Please consider becoming a part of our prison ministry team by becoming a pen pal. Offer a message of hope and make a profound impact on someone's life. Click [here](#) for more information, including access to the pen pal application form.



# Convocation 2022 UU Buddhist Fellowship

## Ecodharma: Buddhist Perspectives on the Ecological Crisis with David Loy

Dr. David Robert Loy is a professor of Buddhist and comparative philosophy and Zen teacher in the Sanbo Zen tradition of Japanese Zen Buddhism. Loy is one of the founding members of the new Rocky Mountain Ecodharma Retreat Center, near Boulder, Colorado

Traditional Buddhist teachings help us wake up individually and realize our interdependence with others. Today we need to wake up collectively in another way. We need to wake up to what is one of the greatest dangers that humanity has ever encountered. Buddhism can help us understand and respond appropriately to the climate emergency driven ecological crisis.

Neither the Buddha nor Asian Buddhist traditions have faced the complex set of challenges of the twenty-first century. Yet Buddhism includes many teachings that are relevant to our situation. There are profound parallels between our individual human struggles which Buddhism addressed and our ecological predicament today. The parallels suggest that the eco-crisis is as much a spiritual challenge as a technological and economic one. In both cases, at the root of the problem is our illusion of separation: that “I” am separate from others, and that we are separate from the natural world.

Perhaps the most important thing that Buddhism has to offer today is a new version of the bodhisattva — or *ecosattva* — path, which can respond to collective and institutionalized versions of greed, ill will and delusion (the three poisons). All this suggests, the ecological challenge is also a challenge to the ways we understand and practice Buddhism.

## March 17-22, 2022

### The DeKoven Center

600 Caron Butler Drive  
Racine, Wisconsin 53403

Registration: <https://uubf.org>  
(early registration discounts!)







# UU Sangha

c/o Richard Swanson  
710 24th St SW  
Vero Beach, FL 32962-8127  
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