



## TCVC FALL RETREAT

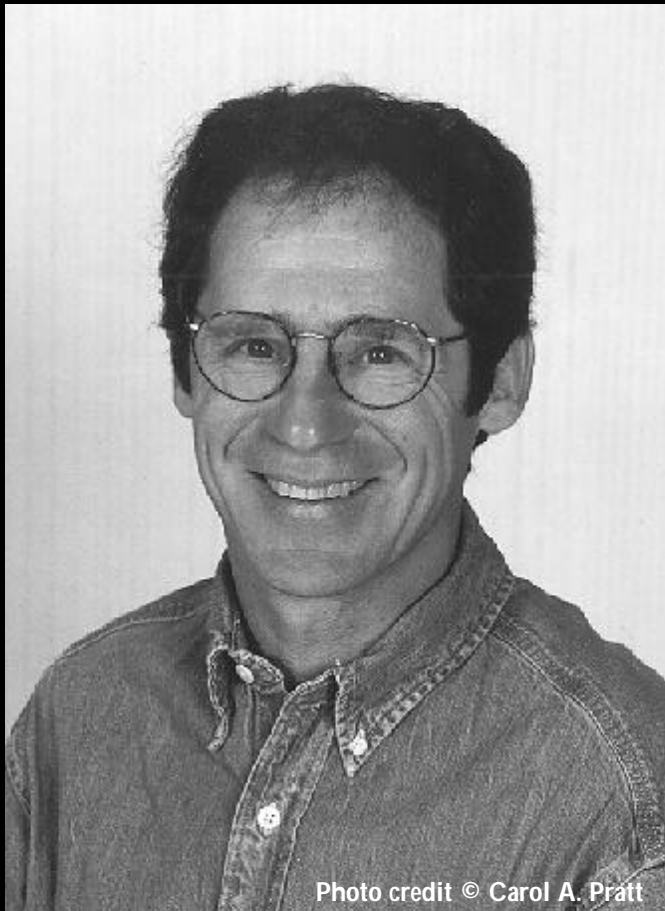


Photo credit © Carol A. Pratt

## WITH EUGENE CASH

See page 6 of this newsletter for retreat details.

Dear Friends,

Our mailing list has once again gotten quit large. Printing and mailing costs continue to be a significant operating expense.

You can help us keep down costs. Contact us by e-mail (p.norr@worldnet.att.net) or PO Box by **January 15** if you wish to remain on the mailing list. If we do not hear from you by this time your name will be removed from the list.

Contributions to support the printings and mailings are gratefully accepted. Thank you for your help.

## REFLECTIONS ON IMPERMANENCE AND DEATH

by Eugene Cash

Great is the matter of Birth and Death  
Time passes swiftly and is quickly lost  
Awaken! Awaken! Do not waste your life

In the Zen tradition this exhortation is written on a block of wood that is repeatedly struck, calling practitioners to meditation. The acknowledgment and contemplation of impermanence is a bedrock of the Buddha's teachings. The Buddha was inspired to seek awakening after confronting old age, sickness and death. As practitioners we can allow the same understanding which inspired the Buddha to motivate us in our practice. The reflection or recollection that sickness, old age and death are inevitable can inspire and inform both one's practice and life.

We don't live forever. We don't know how long we will live. We have no idea when we will get ill or have an accident. Everybody dies. The human body is fragile. The amount of time spent in our life to develop wakefulness is very short. What happens when we bring the truth of impermanence into our awareness?

As we open to the recollection of impermanence we feel inspired to practice. We realize the preciousness of our opportunity to practice given that "time passes swiftly and is quickly lost." It serves as a support for fully engaging in intensive training in the practice of mindfulness. Often this reflection brings fear or aversion. Can we practice with these states, allowing and opening to them as part of our contemplation? All our reactions to the truth of impermanence are to be included.

Impermanence becomes a crucible in which we are purified and illuminated. Allowing ourselves to become intimate with the transitory nature of reality is a fierce practice that awakens us.

Carl Jung said: "The attainment of wholeness requires one to stake one's whole being. Nothing less will do; there can be no easier conditions, no substitutes, no compromises." The contemplation of our mortality and the changing nature of all experience offers us a dharma gate to realize the wholeness to which Jung points us. Another possibility that impermanence offers us is cherishing each moment. When we open to the temporary, transient, changing nature of experience we begin to see the delicacy, the preciousness of each moment and of our lives in general.

*(Continued on page 3)*

# IMPERMANENCE AND THE ART OF THE JAPANESE DEATH POEM

by Peter Hanson

One of the (few) great things about aging is that it makes the Buddhist concept of impermanence much easier to understand. Buddhist scholar Jack Kornfield writes that, "the truth of our being is simply this process of flowing change. Everything is impermanent. Nothing is worth grasping because nothing lasts." (*Seeking the Heart of Wisdom*, p. 56, Shambala, 1987)

I recently had a birthday—a big one, a multiple of ten. That event was wonderfully celebrated, but evidence of impermanence keeps piling up: the need for bifocals and relaxed fit jeans, crow's feet that look more and more like raven's claws, and injuries that necessitate switching from basketball to tennis to hiking. Can shuffleboard and mall walking be too far away?

Buddhist writings are full of tales of people being enlightened by events that are epiphanies for impermanence. One story describes how a woman who was a follower of Gautama Buddha was enlightened as she washed her feet. She watched the water roll down her feet and saw it be absorbed by the earth. As the water changed from liquid to mud, she realized, on a very deep level, the impermanence of all things and the nature of reality.

At a Vipassana meditation retreat in 1997, one of the teachers explained the Buddhist concept of *Asubha Bhavana*, the development of the perception of the unbeautiful aspect of the body. It is this unbeautiful aspect of life—aging, suffering, disease, and death—that impelled the young Gautama Buddha to leave the life of a pampered, protected prince and become a seeker of the truth. One must be careful that a realization of *Asubha*

Bhavana doesn't degenerate into despair or self-hatred, but is, instead, used to skillfully transform one's life in a positive way.

We see the power of *Asubha Bhavana* in the life of Ambapali, another female disciple of Gautama Buddha. As a young woman she was an Indian courtesan so beautiful and skillful that princes and nobility came from great distances to be with her. The riches and retinues they brought made not only Ambapali, but also her village, Vesali, quite wealthy.

Ambapali became a follower of the Buddha in her later years, practicing the five precepts (refraining from killing, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct and inebriation) and creating a park for the benefit of the Buddhist monks.

One day as she was contemplating the effects of aging upon her body, she realized, on a profound level, the transitory nature of all phenomena, the shimmering, shifting web of cause-effect and matter-energy. She became enlightened.

One of the ancient Indian epics, *The Mahabharata*, poses the question, "What is the most wondrous thing in the world?" The reply: that people can see others around them aging and dying and yet think that somehow this will not happen to them!

Woody Allen has said that any middle-aged person who is not obsessed with death is crazy. He would appreciate the Japanese tradition of writing *jisei*.

The *jisei*—or death poem—is a short poem composed by Zen monks, samurai, or poets just before the moment of death.

A haiku poet named Togyu died in 1749 at the age of 44 and left us this death poem:

When autumn winds blow  
not one leaf remains  
the way it was.

Another haiku poet, Seiju, who died in 1776 at age 75, also reminds

us of the constantly changing nature of reality:

Not even for a moment  
do things stand still—witness  
color in the trees.

Some poets hint at death bed revelations. Tokugen, who died in 1647 at the age of 89, wrote,

My life was  
lunacy until  
this moonlit night.

Another poet, Sunao, who died in 1926 at age 39, reports on the beneficial, though gross, aspects of his disease:

Spitting blood  
clears up reality  
and dream alike.

Ikkyu Sojun (1393-1481), a Zen monk, also writes reverently (or irreverently?) about the crude aspects of death: "And now, at the hour of my death, my bowels move—an offering raised to the Lord of Worlds."

Shutei was an entertainer and a painter who lived near Osaka. Just before he died, at age 48 or 49 in 1858, he wrote:

Frost on a summer day;  
All I leave behind is water  
that has washed my brush.

I think of frost as something that will soon disappear (more quickly in Japan than in Minnesota), the water as the water of life, and the brush left behind as the vacated body.

The awareness of one's death burns right through triviality and insincerity. Just before the poet Kisei died in the fall of 1764 at age 77, he wrote:

Ninth-month moon:  
of late, when I've said  
my prayer, I've meant it.

Some poets bring their sense of irony to even their deathbed. Karai was 57 when he died in 1778. He wrote:

Why should I hesitate?  
I have a travel permit  
from Amida Buddha.

Kyoriku (1656 – 1715) even brought a sense of humor to the understanding of his own death. He was an excellent painter and a student of the famous poet Basho. He was so taken with his own talents that he commented that other poets were “no better than dogs.” Before his death, he wrote:

Till now I thought  
that death befell  
the untalented alone.  
If those with talent, too, must die  
surely they make a better manure?

Another poet who had a sense of humor concerning death was Moriya Sen’an, who died in 1838.

Bury me when I die  
beneath a wine barrel  
in a tavern.  
With luck  
the cask will leak.

More poignant is the 1843 death poem of author Hanabusa Ikkei:

I thought to live  
two centuries, or three—  
yet here comes death  
to me, a child  
just eighty-five years old.

Equanimity and serene emptiness pervade the death poem of Haiku poet Bokusui, who died in 1914 at age 40. His use of snow as a poetic image reminds us that each snowflake is individual. Yet when the snowflake melts, it becomes one with the water into which it flows.

A parting word?  
The melting snow  
is odorless.

My favorite death poem uses beautiful imagery of still water (the calm mind), the full moon (the heavens, enlightenment), and a barrel of water (the body containing the water of

life). It was written by Mabutso, a haiku poet who died at age 79 on the day of the full autumn moon, 1874.

Moon in a barrel:  
you never know just when  
the bottom will fall out.

All of these poems are in a book entitled *Japanese Death Poems* by Yoel Hoffman (Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1986). I love these poems because they instruct us on the preciousness of life. The value of our lives can be seen from the economic perspective of supply and demand. Value increases as the supply decreases. Death limits the supply of time given to each of us, thereby increasing the value of our remaining time.

Arab friends have told me, “Death is always over your left shoulder.” The famous haiku poet Basho put it another way:

No sign  
in the cicada’s song  
that it will soon be gone.

In some movies, e.g. *It’s a Wonderful Life*, the stars come close to death and the experience transforms them. In other movies, the hero or heroine gets an incurable disease and learns how to live with an attitude of gratitude and with *enthusiasm* (a word from the Greek “en” [in] + “theos” [god]). Of course in Hollywood, the “incurable” disease is usually cured, but the insights remain.

Death informs us of the value of life. What will seem important when death touches us? Each of our “big” birthdays, each of our age-related injuries, and all of our wrinkles inform us of life’s impermanence. The trick is how to live with gratitude and enthusiasm and how to realize, moment to moment, the preciousness of life.

The Zen monk Sengai tells us:

If your time to die has come  
and you die—very well!  
If your time to die has come  
and you don’t—  
all the better!

### (REFLECTIONS ON IMPERMANENCE AND DEATH, *continued from page 1*)

How often we negate or forget how temporary things REALLY are. We go about as if in a trance, mystified and hypnotized. We are entranced by the phenomena of life, the experiences of body, heart and mind. We take them to be real, in the sense of being permanent. We reify or concretize our experience, forgetting the fleeting nature of life.

In our usual, habitual state we deny the transient, dream-like appearance and disappearance of experience. Opening to transience allows us to appreciate, honor and cherish life and the moments of life. This understanding allows us to engage life without holding on to experience or solidifying reality.

The *Mahaparinibbana Sutta: The Great Passing* is the story of the last year of the Buddha’s life and his death. It is a wonderful story of impermanence and death, rich with the teachings of wisdom and compassion. It is also filled with guidance about how to embody our practice and understanding.

The sutta begins with the Buddha visiting his disciples. He offers them guidelines about how to practice, how to live with others, how to live in community, and how to live a life of selflessness and care. It is interesting that the sutta on the Buddha’s death is a teaching on how to live life. Mythologically this points to the inseparability of birth and death. Now death can inform life, helping us make wise and kind choices about how to live honoring all of life’s manifestations.

On the surface, the contemplation of transience and mortality is frightening and upsetting. With mindfulness and the development of equanimity, we discover a willingness to contemplate these truths. As our contemplation deepens, impermanence and death become a motivation for wholehearted practice and an inspiration to fully engage life.

## BUSINESS MEETING

The next TCVC Business Meeting will be held on Sept. 9 at 7:00 P.M. at Common Ground Meditation Center, located at 3400 East 25th Street in Minneapolis. The following meeting is on Nov. 11, also at Common Ground. Everyone is welcome.

## VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

TCVC is made possible by volunteers who appreciate the gift of TCVC-sponsored retreats and wish to support these retreats by giving their time and effort. TCVC needs additional support for administrative and organizational tasks necessary to carry on this tradition. Sharing the work among a larger pool of volunteers results in a more manageable work load for each volunteer, and will help sustain TCVC far into the future.

The coordinating committee is confident that we can provide all the training and support necessary for you to contribute. Please call Patrice Koelsch at 612-722-3813 if you would like to help.

## *Grass Roots Dhamma*

is published by the Twin Cities Vipassana Cooperative with help from volunteers including Joanne Skarjune, Paul Norr and Sylvester Fernandez.

We welcome material relating to your Vipassana practice at home, in retreat and in daily life. Newcomers and old timers are equally encouraged to contribute. We are happy to include your practice-related announcements as well. Please send copy to TCVCcoop@hotmail.com or the PO Box.

If you would like to add your name to the mailing list, send your name and address to TCVC, PO Box 14683, Minneapolis, MN 55414.

## DHARMONIC CONVERGENCE

### Thinking Habit

"Blah, blah, blah, me, blah, blah, my, blah, blah, blah, I....."

### Mindfulness Habit

".....in.....out.....in.....out....."

### Habit Habit



by Deah Cain

## BEING WITH DYING

Deah Cain is looking for others to share the audio learning course, *Being With Dying*, for the winter months. This course, presented by Joan Halifax, PhD., Buddhist, teacher and writer, has consolidated nine hours (in cassettes by Sounds True Recordings) to explore the meaning of death. The audio course combines Eastern and Western psychology, philosophy and contemplative practices from many spiritual traditions. For more information please call Deah at 651-649-1605. Dates TBA.

## OUTREACH PROJECT

The Beverly White Community Outreach Project is a combined effort of many Twin Cities Buddhist groups to bring meditation and mindfulness to people in prisons, nursing homes, and chemical dependency treatment centers. Training and support is provided.

An information meeting will take place Sun., Sept. 19, at 2-4 P.M. at Dharma Field Zen Center (49th and York in south Minneapolis). FF1 call volunteer coordinator Martha Boesing at 612-825-2820.

## PRACTICE OPPORTUNITIES

### Common Ground Meditation Center

Common Ground is a community meditation center that provides practice opportunities for people interested in Buddhist mindfulness meditation.

Wendy Morris will lead a four week program, *Off the Cushion: Mindfulness Practice in Everyday Life*, Thursdays, Oct. 14–Nov. 4.

Please join us for the 7<sup>th</sup> annual Holiday Retreat, Dec. 26–31. All programs are offered free of charge; donations are welcome. Please call for a current flyer.

Sun.	8–12 A.M.	Meditation
Tues.	8–10 A.M.	Meditation
Wed.	7:30–9 P.M.	Sitting Group

3400 East 26th Street  
Mpls, MN 55406

612-722-8260 (Mark and Wynn)

### Rivers'Way Meditation

Individual practice guidance and instruction available by appointment. Monthly retreats. All offerings are on a dana (donation) basis. Call to register and for confirmation of retreats.

Mindfulness meditation retreats:

Sun., Oct. 17, 1–4 P.M., St. Paul Yoga Center

Sun., Nov. 15, 1–5 P.M. (location TBA)

Sat., Dec. 11 day long (times and location TBA)

612-376-9069 (Merra Young)

### St. Paul Sitting Group

Anyone interested in meeting every two weeks to sit together and perhaps discuss how our practice is going? Deah Cain is looking for others who would meet in the St. Paul midway area. (Her house or office is available.) Times flexible and TBA. Please call Deah at 651-649-1605.

### Phat An Temple/Vietnamese Buddhist Association of Minnesota

Vipassana practice.

475 Minnesota Avenue  
Roseville, MN 55113 612-927-7231

Sat. 6–9 A.M. Meditation

### Winona Sitting Group

Rosemary Lyons and James Lenarz lead a sit every Sunday 8:30–9:15 A.M.

524 East King Street  
Winona, MN 55987 507-454-7875

### Center for Mindful Living

Thich Nhat Hanh and Soto Zen style.

3206 Holmes Avenue  
Mpls., MN 55408 612-825-7658  
(Michael O'Neal and Joen Snyder)

### Clouds in Water Zen Center

308 Prince Street  
St. Paul, MN 55101 651-222-6968  
(Mike Port, guiding teacher)

### Dharma Field Zen Center

3118 West 49th Street  
Mpls., MN 55410 612-928-4868  
(Steve Hagen, head teacher)

### Minnesota Zen Meditation Center.

3343 East Calhoun Parkway  
Mpls., MN 55408 612-822-5313

### Shambala Center

Tibetan Practice.

1304 University Ave NE (2<sup>nd</sup> floor)  
Mpls., MN 55458 612-331-7737

### Buddhist Peace Fellowship

The Buddhist Peace Fellowship is committed to open hearted, engaged Buddhism and is a member of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. The local chapter meets monthly. Contact Lee Lewis at 651-699-1330.

### Madison Insight Meditation Group

The Madison Insight Meditation Group began in September of 1995. Comprised of people with varying levels of training and experience in Vipassana, or Insight Meditation, we focus on the essence of the Buddha's teachings that underlie 2500 years of cultural traditions. We are sponsoring the following retreats in Madison, Wisconsin:

Nov. 4–7 Eugene Cash. Contact Janice Sheppard at 603-233-3844.

Mar. 31–Apr. 9, 2000 Matthew Flickstein.

### Mid America Dharma Group

Mid America Dharma Group is a non-profit organization dedicated to making the practice of vipassana or Insight Meditation available to others in the central region of the United States.

Call 573-874-0881 or email Phil@midamericadharma.org for more information.

Sept. 17–20 or 17–26 Stephen Armstrong and Kamala Masters at Conception Abbey, Missouri. Contact Tonda March at 573-443-0214.

Nov. 11–14 Wes Nisker at Atchison, Kansas. Contact Adam Asare at 573-499-0024.

Dec. 30–Jan. 2, 2000 Santikaro Bhikku at Conception, Missouri.

Feb. 11–20 Teacher Training with Matthew Flickstein at Bay St. Louis, Mississippi.

Mar. 3–12 Old Yogi Retreat with Matthew Flickstein at Excelsior Springs, Missouri.

May 26–June 4 Eugene Cash, Joseph Goldstein and Myoshin Kelley at Conception Abbey, Missouri.



# TCVC Residential Retreat with Eugene Cash



Thursday, October 7 8:00 P.M. through Sunday noon, October 10, 1999

Registration 6:30 – 7:30 P.M. Please do not arrive before 3:00 P.M.

## Meditation Retreat with Eugene Cash

Vipassana meditation is a simple and direct practice: the moment to moment investigation of the mind/body process through calm and focused awareness. This practice originates in the Theravada tradition of the teachings of the Buddha. Learning to observe experience from a place of stillness enables one to relate to life with less fear and clinging. Seeing life as a constantly changing process, one begins to accept pleasure and pain, fear and joy, and all aspects of life with increasing equanimity and balance. As insight deepens, wisdom and compassion arise. Vipassana, or insight meditation, is a way of seeing clearly the totality of one's being and experience. This clarity leads to penetrating insight into the nature of who we are and brings peace to our daily lives.

On this silent retreat, suitable for both beginning and experienced meditators, the primary activity is paying attention to the moment by moment experience of the mind/body process. Clear and simple instructions, presented gradually along with daily discourses, will provide direction and understanding throughout the alternating periods of sitting and walking meditation. Regularly scheduled time for questions, in addition to individual or group sessions, will afford personal guidance as practice develops and deepens. Some daily practice of the supplementary meditation on lovingkindness (metta) will cultivate stillness, fearlessness and loving community in which to open our hearts in safety.

## About the Teacher

Eugene Cash has practiced meditation since 1981. He is the Staff teacher at Spirit Rock where he trained with Jack Kornfield. Eugene leads weekly sitting groups in San Francisco and meditation retreats nationwide. His teaching is influenced by many streams of the vipassana tradition as well as the Zen school of Buddhism. He is also a teacher in training in the Ridhwan School with A.H. Almaas. As a psychotherapist he has worked extensively with those who are ill, the dying, and the bereaved.

## Dana

The teachers that TCVC asks to lead our retreats charge no fees for their teachings. They rely on *dana*, a form of voluntary giving by their students, for their support. Dana enables the teachers to continue to devote themselves to teaching. Equally important, dana provides students an opportunity to practice generosity and open-heartedness. There is no expected contribution; give what feels right and is within your means.

## Scholarships

Scholarships are available for up to 50% of room and board only. There is no scholarship for the registration fee. To apply for a scholarship, attach a letter with your registration giving the background of your need and the amount of your request. Those with financial resources may wish to help others by donating to the scholarship fund.

## Meals and Facilities

The retreat includes meals beginning with Friday breakfast through lunch on Sunday. All meals are vegetarian and high in carbohydrates. You may elect to eat none of the food provided by the center if you have special dietary needs. A kitchenette is available for those who must prepare their own food because of health reasons.

Accommodations at the Tau Center include private rooms with towels and bedding supplied. Showers and bathrooms are shared. Please bring comfortable, loose-fitting clothes and a blanket if you tend to get chilly sitting. Bring a cushion and soft floor pad for meditation, or you may sit on a chair if you prefer.

The Tau Center's phone number is 507-454-2993. **Please use for emergencies only. Do not direct questions to the Tau Center.**

## Retreat Fees and Registration

Retreatants are expected to arrive in time for the opening of the retreat on Thursday night and to stay for the duration of the retreat. Any exceptions must be approved by the retreat manager. Early departures are not eligible for a reduced rate or refund.

All registrants pay room and board fees plus a non-refundable registration fee covering retreat center fees and TCVC expenses associated with the retreat. Applications, accompanied by a check for the full cost of the retreat, must be received by Friday, September 17. You will not receive a confirmation of your registration. Refunds for room and board fees cannot be guaranteed after September 17.

Correspondence about this retreat should be addressed to the registrar, Steve Burt at 612-721-1021, or TCVC, PO Box 14683, Minneapolis, MN 55414.

**Please bring unscented or lightly scented personal products, such as shampoo, lotions and deodorant. Do not use essential oils, perfumes or hairspray at the retreat. Scented products are distracting and may trigger allergies.**

## DIRECTIONS TO TAU CENTER

511 Hilbert Street, Winona Minnesota 55987

The Tau Center is about 2½ hours by car southeast of Minneapolis/St. Paul near Highway 61.



----- Please mail this form with your payment to: TCVC, PO Box 14683, Minneapolis, MN 55414 -----

## OCTOBER 7-10, 1999 TCVC RETREAT REGISTRATION FORM

Registration must be received and paid in full by September 17, 1999. Retreatants are expected to arrive in time for the opening of the retreat on Thursday night (but not before 3:00 P.M.) and stay for the duration of the retreat. Any exceptions must be approved by the retreat manager. Early departures are not eligible for a reduced rate or refund.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ M F (Circle One)

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City, State, ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

\$60 Registration fee. Not refundable after September 17, 1999.

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ Late fee for registrations postmarked after September 17: \$25

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ Room and board (with meals): \$115

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ Room (without meals): \$69

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ Kitchenette use: \$20

The kitchenette is available to those who can't eat provided meals because of health issues.

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ Commuters (meals only): \$52

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ Optional contribution to TCVC funds (please specify)

Scholarship Fund     Operating Fund

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ TOTAL (payable to TCVC) Enclosed


### Please check all that apply

- This is my first TCVC Retreat.
- I would like someone to contact me prior to the retreat so that I can ask questions about the practice and/or retreat.
- I need a ride.     I can give a ride.
- I volunteer to host a post-retreat party. (The retreat manager will contact you to confirm.)
- I volunteer to help the retreat manager. Tasks vary but may include arranging for gifts and flowers, helping set up at the retreat center, and registering retreatants. (The retreat manager will contact you.)
- I would like to volunteer to manage or serve as registrar for a future TCVC retreat.
- This is a new address or phone number.

## RESIDENTIAL RETREAT CALENDAR

The Twin Cities Vipassana Cooperative (TCVC) offers retreats to anyone interested in Vipassana and Metta Meditation practice.

Date	Teacher(s)	Location	Contact
Oct. 7-10	Eugene Cash	Tau Center, Winona	Steve Burt 612-721-1021
Jan. 14-23, 2000	Mathew Flickstein	Tau Center, Winona	TBD
April 7-9 or April 7-11, 2000	Marcia Rose	Tau Center, Winona	TBD
June 9-11 or June 9-18, 2000	Kamala Masters & Steve Armstrong	Tau Center, Winona	TBD
Sept. 22-24 or Sept 22-26, 2000	Wes Nisker	Tau Center, Winona	TBD

 **TCVC INFOLINE 651-229-3139** for information on business meetings and retreats

 **TCVC WORLDWIDEWEB SITE** <http://www.wordimage.com/tcvc.htm>

Twin Cities Vipassana Cooperative  
P.O. Box 14683  
Minneapolis, MN 55414



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