

### Upcoming Fall Classes

#### *Meditation in Everyday Life Class September 30 - November 18, 2009*

Wednesdays 6-8 pm. 8 weeks, \$160.  
Beginners and others. Basic instruction  
in Shamatha (calm-abiding) meditation,  
mindfulness and compassion practices.

#### *Intermediate level Meditation Class October 1 - November 19, 2009*

Thursdays 6-8 pm. 8 weeks, \$160.  
To deepen and expand your current  
Shamatha meditation practice.

Call Ker at 349-0595 for information &  
registration or check the Calendar page at  
[www.ClearHeartCounseling.com](http://www.ClearHeartCounseling.com)


I have a new office! I've moved to  
the Professional Center at 1679  
Willamette Street, above Evergreen  
Nutrition. You may enjoy the quieter  
atmosphere, the free client parking  
and the central heat and a/c - I do!

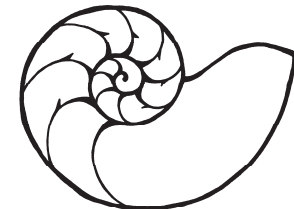
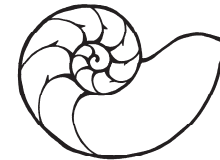
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at my office, by mail, and at:

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Address Correction Requested

  
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## The Doorknob Gazette Summer Solstice 2009

*If we plant peaches, we're always going to get peaches. If we plant pears, we're always going to get pears...If we're using strong negative emotions to get what we want, and what we want is happiness, it's never going to work. ~ Sakyong Mipham*  
Turning the Mind into an Ally

Greetings, Dear Ones ~

When we feel threatened, frightened, angry, or uncomfortable, our natural response is to tighten up. We react like a sea anemone, drawing in swiftly and completely to ensure the safety of our tender parts. This is understandable, even reasonable in some circumstances. If we are being attacked by a wild animal with fangs and claws, it is a good idea to curl into a ball with our vital organs on the inside, protected by our rib cage.

Problems arise when we treat every situation as a wild animal attack. If we never pause to look clearly at what is happening, and never consider other responses, we spend an awful lot of time curled in a ball. The world shapes itself to our expectations. What we think the world is like is what it is like; when we behave as if we are continually threatened, we experience a dangerous world.

This becomes a claustrophobic situation. We come to believe there is not enough room for us in the world. We become rigid, isolated and tired. We experience depression, anxiety and perpetual anger. The protective, lifesaving impulse will actually harm us if acted on repeatedly in non-life-threatening situations. This chronic mental and emotional stress lays the groundwork for much physical illness and disease.

When we get tight around our pain, it increases. This is how we move from "inevitable pain" to "optional suffering". Experiment: next time you have a headache or a hangnail or stub your toe, you could tense up and resist it. Or, you could meet it with an open sense of

curiosity and exploration of your actual experience of the moment. I find migraines less painful if I can pay attention to the precise quality of my experience rather than jumping to conclusions (oh, no, a migraine, how awful!).

Noticing the particular location, intensity, shape, color, and quality of our pain brings us into present moment experience, into direct contact with what we ordinarily resist or try to run from. When we have direct experience - without judgment or trying to make it different - not only do we suffer less, we have the opportunity to experience relief, even joy. I have found migraines to be kind of fascinating since I began practicing with them this way, and the duration and intensity of suffering has lessened considerably. Migraines are not constant pain, as I had supposed. Pain comes and goes. Each migraine is different. Once I even noticed the precise moment a headache disappeared. It was like a soap bubble popping - there was the headache and then, suddenly, there wasn't!

The practice of opening applies to emotional pain as well. In the throes of a strong, scary emotion, we could whisper to ourselves "Open...open...open..." in a loving and encouraging tone of voice. We could choose to breathe and relax, opening our heart to the pain and pop! Like the headache, the fear could vanish.

A regular meditation practice is very helpful for learning to open when our impulse is to close off. In meditation we learn that our thoughts and feelings do not need to rule us, and that our

minds are spacious enough to accommodate everything that passes through us, without needing to act on it. But it is not the only way to practice opening and relaxing our minds. We can simply make space in the present moment with breath, and attention to the here and now. We can just practice noticing, with a kind of friendly curiosity, that we are tightening up, feeling frightened, curling into a habitual ball of suffering.

We never lack opportunities to practice opening - we get them daily, hourly, every moment! We always have the option of holding the awareness of tightening in a gentle, accommodating space. We don't have to give in to it, or scold it, or reject it. We can just open up around it, calling on the sky-like nature of our own minds to expand and make enough space for this weather to pass through. Through this practice we can open to our own pain and the suffering of others without worrying that we will get stuck in it or mortally injured. Practicing open relaxation and resting in the spacious nature of our minds helps us develop our true compassion and joy, and allows our anemone selves to wave easily in the tides that flow around us.



*Ker Cleary, M.A. is a counselor in private practice in Eugene, Oregon. Trained in Contemplative Psychotherapy, she helps people discover friendship with themselves as the path to healing. For more information, call (541)349-0595 or visit [www.ClearHeartCounseling.com](http://www.ClearHeartCounseling.com) May all beings benefit.*