

Bhanté and Michael Lerner Vipassana courses at Commonweal

Commonweal (Bolinás, CA) Vipassana mindfulness retreats with Bhante

Avis and William Rapaport started the Commonweal Garden, now the nation's oldest regenerative agriculture design and training center under Penny Livingston. They had studied with Alan Chadwick near Charlottesville, Virginia, at the garden Alan started based on his European training in French Intensive gardening. Alan had been a successful Shakespearean actor who had a second career bringing French intensive 'double dug' gardening to the United States. He was brought by Joseph Chilton Pearce, Bob Monroe and Elizabeth Kubler Ross. They lived in adjoining farms in the Southwest corner of Virginia in the 60s-80s.

Avis and William were also meditation students of Bhanté. They had been at Claymont, the Gurdjieff Fourth Way campus in Charles Town, West Virginia. Bhanté had come from India to John Bennet's College for Continuous Education in the UK. John had selected Bhanté to be the school spiritual guide after John passed on.

Avis and William invited Bhanté to give a two week insight meditation introduction. People stayed in the three cottages on the Commonweal property. About 20 people took each program. There were 3-4 such courses at Commonweal along with a variety of other courses, in such places as Josh Reynold's family estate outside Asheville, North Carolina; Ananda Ashram in Monroe, New York; Chichester and other Buddhist monasteries in the United Kingdom and at Claymont in Charles Town, West Virginia.

The instruction for these courses was simple: For the next two weeks (or period of time), be so completely in the moment that thoughts neither distract nor intrude. Bhanté spoke for about 30-60 minutes each morning and evening. In between, there were hourly different meditations from 5 AM until 8 PM. There were morning and evening sitting meditations under dichromatic lights. Bhanté would place people under green, amber or blue PAR 38, 150 Watt lights depending on his sense of what color therapy they needed. There were hour long walking meditations, eating meditations (two per day), stretching meditations, musing meditations, music and art meditations, meditation on the Buddha within, breathing meditations, ambling meditations, free form meditation and open times where (if desired or needed) people were able to talk with Bhanté. Otherwise, silence was

observed. Almost everyone who took these courses had life changing experiences. Bhan  considered these very short... a six month introduction to insight mindfulness is what he suggested as an introduction or entry course in insight meditation.

My job included getting up a little earlier to make Bhan  ginger tea with a drop of raw honey.

Each course for me was distinctive, evocative and usually something would occur that would rock my world.

