

Published August 19th, 2009

Bodhi Seed Camp, Awakening Young Minds

By Sophie Braccini



Children sitting in the Monastery during story telling Photo Sophie Braccini

nothing," said Uma who will be attending sixth grade at Stanley Middle School this year. "You make sure your body is completely still and after I really enjoy the calm." She plans to continue the practice, especially before tests.

"I like to sit still," said 10-year-old Irene.

The young T.A.s enjoyed the camp as well. Fifteen-year-old Alan Deaton (who will be a junior at Miramonte this fall) had never had any exposure to that culture and its practices. "Once I was able to do it, it was cool, it felt really relaxing and I was truly focused afterward." Deaton was interested by the whole camp, and, even though he does not think he would become a vegetarian, enjoyed the values that were taught.

Meditation is a technique that is central to the Buddhist teaching. "Meditation is a way to raise awareness and reveal one's true nature," said the Abbess. "In our busy lives our minds get scattered. Meditation helps to re-center inward." She was very impressed by the children who came to the camp. "They were very active and present," she said. "They followed guidance and participated eagerly."

Meditation was just a part of the daily activities of the children. They experienced Tai Chi, Dharma instruments, candle making, mosaic, and gymnastics, among other activities. The Monastery did not require any payment for the camp. "This is Dana giving," explains Margaret Goglia, a Moraga resident who has been involved with Buddha Gate for two years. "One gives without expecting anything in return."

Parents can make donations, according to what feels right to them or they can help with the camp. Uma's mother, Lafayette resident Shalini Agrawal expressed her gratitude for the experience. "There is nothing quite comparable in the area," she said. "The Buddhist teachings are not exactly our culture (her family is Hindu), but the values are universal and very centering." She appreciated the opening to a different culture that the camp offered her daughters.

For the Abbess, the purpose of the camp was to plant a seed. "In Taiwan, our Venerable Master Wei Chueh created a children camp many years ago." She remembers the story of a student who had been to the camp as a kid, and who, as a young adult met with challenges that drove him close to deep depression. "He was able to draw from the happy memories he had kept from his youth camp to re-center his life and he wrote a beautiful thank you letter to the Monastery," she remembers, adding, "When a seed is planted you never know when it will mature and flourish."

During the year, the Monastery offers on-going classes for children and adults. For more information, go to www.buddhagate.org.

For the first time, the Buddha Gate Monastery of Lafayette proposed a camp for children ages 5 to 15 where they learned about Buddhist values and Chinese culture, how to meditate, and mingled with more traditional fun activities. Quite an unusual experience in Lamorinda!

The Buddhist Monastery is nestled on a peaceful property at the northern border of Lafayette. The week-long camp was full, with 80 kids attending, and began on August 2. Classes were taught by the Abbess, Master Jian Sheng, herself and many other volunteers. Evan Cushing, a Lafayette native and college student majoring in philosophy and religion, was the head of the T.A.s. "The children were amazing," he said. "Most of them had had no previous experience of meditation and/or Buddhism. Some hated it at first, but they got taken by the Abbess story-telling abilities and through her guidance learned to quiet their bodies and mind. After two or three days they got the knack of it and loved it."

The children confirmed. "It is hard to concentrate on

Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA