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# .....connections.....

Number 10

Newsletter of the Regina Insight Meditation Community

Fall/Winter/Spring/Summer, 2007 – 2008

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## “Who” Is the Artist Here?

*Sharda Rogell*

What do I mean by creativity in a dharma context?

Creativity is often thought of in a limited way, as a way that we express ourselves through some medium. But when we look deeper into what creativity actually is, in a dharma context, we must inquire into the source, or well-spring of our creativity. When we do this, we may touch upon a source of our creative expression that feels selfless, or like something that is spontaneously coming through us, or like Rumi, who was a contemplative mystic who wrote prolifically about his connection to this source, said:

*Do you think I know what I'm doing?  
That for one breath or one half-breath I belong to myself?  
As much as a pen knows what it's writing,  
Or the ball can guess where it's going next?*

Exploring creativity in this way expands the concept to include not only the “things” we create, but also every expression of our lives! When we explore in this way, not only do we inquire together into what true creativity is, but also the exploration itself IS the expression of true creativity. And that expression  
Creative Listening

can take many forms, through many different mediums. Our contribution in this area, then, can be any kind of inspiration -- poetry, drawings, photography, essays about different things we are creatively involved in, or creative writing itself, to name a few.

When I teach, I am often asked about creativity and how it plays out in a dharma context. This is a reoccurring question because a fundamental teaching of the Buddha is *anatta*, or the absence of any self-existence. So people ask, “If there is no-self, how can we be creative?” Before one has a direct experience of *anatta*, people believe that without a self, nothing can get done. But this is only from the point of view of the ego that thinks he or she is the one doing everything.

When we study and practise the teachings of the Buddha, we direct our inquiry into three main areas. We question whether things are permanent. We consider whether things of this world are inherently satisfactory, and we look into our belief in a separate, individual self that is responsible for all the things that happen in our life.

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Mindfulness is directed to investigate our thoughts, feelings and physical sensations in order to understand how we construct this solid sense of self. As we go deeper with our investigation, we start to wonder whether we can actually find a solid entity that we call our “self” (sometimes also called the “doer of action”). We notice that without identifying strongly with our thoughts and feelings, things still happen and get done, perhaps with less effort and stress. This is when we start to feel a creative force flowing through us that feels somewhat mysterious and wondrous. We sense that life happens but there isn't such a strong sense of myself as the “doer” of my actions. At this point I may feel a part of a larger flow, like a stream that flows without an obvious source of power. Again, from Rumi:

*We've given up making a living,  
It's all love poetry now.*

*It's everywhere. Our eyes and feelings  
Focus together, with our words.*

Before I became a dharma teacher, I made a living as an artist, both as a painter and as a graphic artist, having worked for Hallmark Cards right out of college for a few years. My identity was strongly configured around being an artist. In the early 1980s, while living in San Francisco, I began a painting class called, “*The Painting Experience*,” with a woman named Michelle Cassou. In this class, which continued for 5 years, Michelle put up a large blank white piece of paper on the wall for each of us. In the middle of the room were about 10 pots of paint with brushes in each pot. Our task was to pick up a brush with one colour of paint on it, put the brush on the paper and allow the brush to move. We were encouraged not to engage our thinking minds but allow the painting to happen.

As an artist, I had high standards of what I wanted my painting to look like. However, without being able to determine the painting from my ideas or to judge whether I liked it or not, I was not able to control its outcome. I would

often find this wrenching, since my identity was so tied into what my painting looked like – even to the point of whether I was a good or bad person! And I did want to control and judge my paintings – because that's what egos do. As painful as this process was, I kept it up because I knew it was forcing me to let go of some fixed idea about who I took myself to be, and allowed something to come through from a deeper part of my being. My time with Michelle was a significant part of my spiritual journey because each evening I painted I moved into a place of trust, even though I struggled – trusting that I was contacting something vital within myself that was more expansive than my sense of self.

I just want to note here that you might think that the paintings would be abstract. However, for each student, something was touched in the psyche and the painting brought out many different kinds of archetypal images, like in dreams, which cohesively brought out a theme that was continuous with each painting.

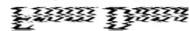
True creativity comes from this deeper source within our being where we let go and allow something to come through that is quite unexpected and often a complete surprise. Then how can we take ownership? The ego self will do everything it can to claim responsibility. Yet, if we are vigilant about our commitment to a deeper truth, then the ego is confronted again and again until the truth of the matter is revealed and the ego is displaced from its power. And ultimately, we begin to laugh, even out loud sometimes, or cry at the loss of any control, and let go into the intelligent flow of life. Here is where we ultimately find the ease, sense of well-being, satisfaction and joy that we have been searching for. The creator and that which is being created dissolve into each other. We let go into true creativity.

*Today, like every day, we wake up empty and frightened.  
Don't open the door to the study and begin reading.  
Take down a musical instrument.*

*Let the beauty we love be what we do.  
There are a hundred ways to kneel and kiss the ground.*

(Rumi)

## From Dana



### Creativity

I have taken a long time to get around to writing this article. In order to write about creativity, it requires that I dabble in creativity, which has been and continues to be an edge for me. I remember as a child how challenging it was for me to explore my own creativity. When I see Manni, my grandson, being encouraged at school to colour “in between the lines”, I am reminded of how scared I was to ever consider doing something that was new or different or that just came naturally to me. I cringe, knowing how much children are still encouraged to follow the lines and use the proper colour, instead of to see where the lines take them and what colour they feel drawn to use. I also remember many “paint by number” kits because, as a child, I was very attracted to making crafts. Now – reflecting back – I realize that creativity calls for a willingness to be with the unknown. Back then, it never really dawned on me that I

could create something that was uniquely my own. I can see how I felt safe just “staying within the lines”, following the directions or pattern. Yet something was missing, and I knew it then but was not able to free myself enough to explore it.

For most of my life, I have considered creativity to be the territory of those who are talented in some way or another. I felt dependant on other people's ideas – on their patterns, for example – so that all I had to do was just follow the directions and finish them off. For sure, I felt satisfaction in seeing what I had completed, but I simply never saw nor learned to value and appreciate my own creativity.

Only in the past five years or so have I really allowed myself to begin exploring the creative part of myself. Thanks to my practice, and with the support of friends and family, I have

started to explore my creativity, mostly in the form of photography. What has struck me most about this new phase of my life is how much joy and delight I feel when I allow myself to explore and play. And as I allow and nourish this exploration, I find more and more that what I do is not for others, but rather that I am in love with the creative process, just seeing what will happen if I do this or that. I dare to take risks, to move away from what is pre-defined or known, and to make space for something that is unique and fresh.

Creativity for me is one of those themes that seems rather mysterious, and that I can't exactly put my finger on. So often creativity is associated with producing art in one form or another, but when we look closely, we can begin to see that all of us are creating in our every action, our every word, our every intention, and that these make up our lives and inevitably impact everyone and everything around us. And yet, in the moment, this may not be obvious at all. It's so easy to have a limited view of the way our lives unfold.

One evening a few months ago, I led the Wednesday Night Sitting Group. It was a full night with at least twenty people, probably half of whom are relatively or totally new to RIMC. I began by reminding everyone of our shared agreements that help to create an atmosphere of safety and respect for each other. As I was doing this, I remembered just how long the group has been meeting and how, over these past fourteen years, each of us who has been part of the group has been intrinsic to the weaving of our community fabric. I saw how this weaving continues on as each of us carries on participating in RIMC activities whether it be a group, or a retreat, or a friendship with another sangha member. All is part of a beautiful, creative unfolding. In 1993 when I moved back to Regina and felt the inspiration to find someone else to meditate with, I had no idea that this simple intention – which led to my sitting with Jan Johnson, a friend from university – would lead to anything more than just a way of supporting my own practice.

But look what has happened. Over these past fourteen years, so many of us in larger and smaller ways have created and continue to create our sangha. Without our involvement, our sangha would surely begin to dissolve, as things do when there is not

enough energy or intention to keep them alive. As I explore this, I feel inspired – a sharp contrast to how, over the past many weeks, I have been relating to writing this article. I know that much of my resistance arose because of my sense that I don't have much to share around the theme of creativity. This change of attitude is a great reminder that all I (or anyone else) needs to do is to live in alignment with what is true in any moment, and creativity will be born out of this. RIMC is a wonderful illustration of our interconnectedness as it, like all other things, would never have come into being unless the conditions were there to nurture it.

Creativity cannot be linked to any kind of form, for when forms fall apart, does it mean that creativity has gone? Where is the beginning and the end of creativity? Several weeks ago, I spoke to a person on the Queen Charlotte Islands who has been part of a small sangha that began after my first visit there a few years ago. Several people, including the mainstay of the group, have recently moved away from the QCI. With these moves, the group's make-up has changed dramatically, and it seems unlikely that it will be able to sustain itself. Yet one of the group members still on the QCI tells me that she feels that the practice is alive in her, regardless of whether she has a group to practise with or not. I feel this kind of exploration is important as it's so easy to forget the value of, and meaning in, our daily activities and to see truly that we are creating in every moment.

I have always been inspired by the Rumi poem, "*Do you think the ball knows where it is going?*" that Sharda quotes in her article. For me, creativity really involves a sense of trust in the process. As I write this, I am aware that this is what changed between yesterday, when I was still resisting sitting down and starting this article, and this morning. All of a sudden, a trust arose that whatever words and thoughts came to me would weave into something. It's a real lesson in seeing how easy it is to set myself up to think that what I need to say is somehow more extraordinary or meaningful than simply what comes. I had a conversation with Bernadette, a sangha member, a while ago at our sangha pot luck dinner. I told her that I was having trouble knowing where to start. She said to me "Dana, you don't need to know where to start, just begin writing". She was right!

## Foot Stumbling on Stone

*Nelle Oosterom*

In the dharma field of Wakamow Valley,  
Bumble bees drunk on nectar throw a party on a patch  
of purple vetch. It is said that without bees and their  
powers of pollination, life as we know it would cease.  
"Whatever," say the bee gods.

Their celebration scatters with the approach of a  
bounding jackrabbit. Why, he must be as big as that fox  
that suckles her kits in the side of the hill. It's hard to  
know who to wish well – Good fortune for one deprives  
a family of its meal; Good fortune for the other deprives  
a creature of its life. But this is how it is.

Screaming jets and honking geese share the same blue sky.  
A big mind holds it all.  
A lone gull laughs from its perch on the roof of the  
dharma hall. It's funny we make such a fuss over  
ourselves, Ruminating over what we might like next...

In the rush to make love happen,  
The foot stumbles on a stone sculpted in the heart of  
metta. Slow down, friend, slow down...

See the bones of the lambs gnawed clean among spring  
flowers so beautiful they make you cry. This is how it is.

Big-minded buddha bees are drunk on nectar.  
With dusty feet, they dive into hearts' desire with reckless  
abandon, Holding up the world in a riotous embrace.

## Two Poems

*Bernadette Wagner*

Though my formal practice of Insight Meditation is not strong, I have found it and mindfulness to be extremely useful tools in my life. As Poet, it is essential that I listen closely for the poem,

be fully present to the moment of it and fully occupy the sense of it so that I can move it onto the page. I believe these poems demonstrate this relatively well.

### Meditations on her body

Behind her, a flip-flap, flip-flap of wing,  
another mother at home here.

How easily did that come, that sense? And how  
hard to feel safe enough to carry on,

pick up the threads?

~~~

How easily the slipstitch of time connects  
a child to the world. Two birds crow, a train  
approaches, black beetles goose-bump her arm.  
The crows, further along the tracks perhaps,  
where a ground squirrel meets steel wheel.

~~~

This old piece, a life's work, tales and truths  
of this land, this body.

*(St. Peter's Abbey, 2004)*

### My Heart is Moved

My heart is moved by the meadowlark, by the rumbling  
army of tractors pumping Earth, and by the air  
thick when sunset shifts to charcoal from magenta

by treed coulees, picnics and red  
shoes, pens scratching paper, breath  
and the train tracks they want to remove between Davidson and Regina

by Aurora Borealis, sky-  
scraping grain terminals, and satellites and by the bird that is first  
to chirp at the dawn of a summer's day,  
by the needless deaths of continued colonization, and  
by my children.

My heart is moved by touch, the moon, your cheek  
by our voices, owls' eyes and the energy we raise  
when we circle in song.

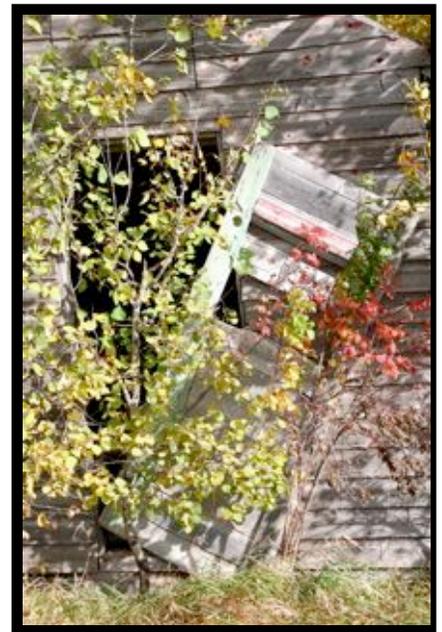
© Bernadette L. Wagner

## Doorways

*Susan Wiebe*

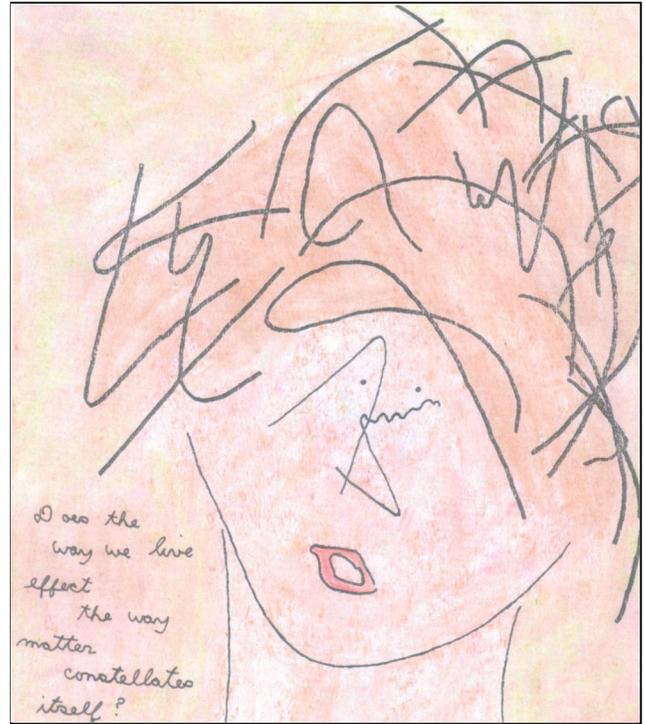
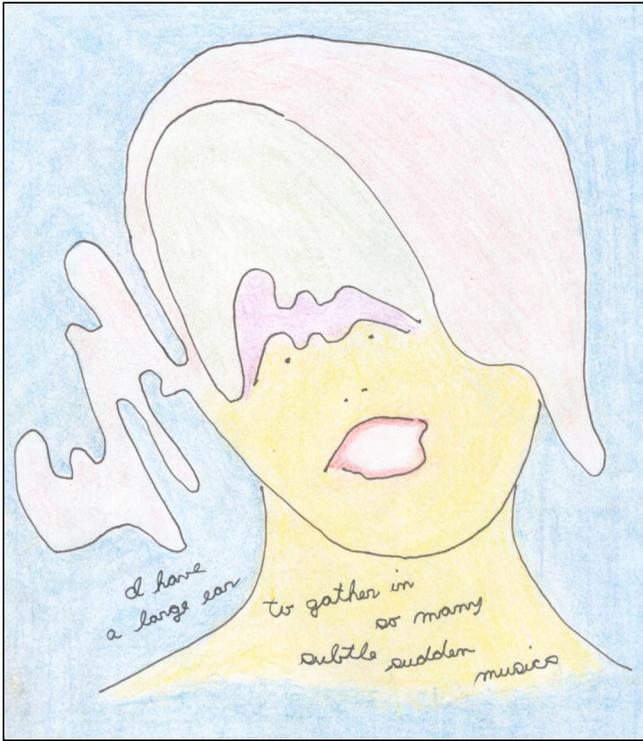
The doors are all entry ways into abandoned structures.  
They beckon the observer to enter and explore.

The life around them has continued to grow and produce beauty.  
A metaphor for personal exploration?



## Artwork

Greg Grace



## The Stump

Bill Owens

This morning I ate, had a shower, read pages from *Being Peace*, meditated, and – yes – without anyone here to poke me, I fell asleep!

When I awoke, I meditated again and then went downstairs to shave. After shaving, I went up the stairs looking out the glass door on the landing, where I had to stop and watch the birds feeding from the log-house bird feeder which I had placed on the stump of a tree that had blown over in a strong wind several years ago. The stump lies amongst some bushes that have overgrown it. These bushes stay green year round and are, to me, very beautiful in nature's blanket of glistening white snow, as is the stump which holds the bird feeder. Even though the tree is long dead, it obviously continues to support life ways that cannot be measured.

I watched for a while from the landing.

There must have been a hundred birds in my yard, some of them waiting patiently in line to go on the feeder. Others were just fluttering around, one or two landing near other birds perhaps to visit with them, much the same as in a lunch room at work with people exchanging the latest gossip. I cannot imagine what that would be in the bird realm, but – who knows? – perhaps it was about the dog which lives in my house.

I continued to watch until I had this feeling that, were the birds to see me, they would fly off in fear. I therefore ascended the

rest of the steps into the kitchen and resumed watching the birds from the window. From this higher position I could see even more birds in the yard. They were on the rails of the back deck eating and talking under two more bird feeders that hung from nature's giant umbrella tree, my name for a large maple tree that honours us with its presence in our yard. These birds appeared to be more dedicated to eating than others that were closer to the house sheltering from the winter wind.

At this point, I looked back at the stump which held the log-house bird feeder. I felt totally connected to the birds that were eating and swooping, and which appeared to be laughing and enjoying the moment, rather like people at a dance laughing gaily in the moment, not worrying about what the future might hold.

The next thing that happened is the part I want to express. I was standing there in wonderment when I noticed my face felt moist. I realized I was so happy that I was crying! My mind immediately took offence to this, not allowing me to be fully present – but this was okay, for I now know what, for me, true love is: my unconditional connection with another species of sentient beings, and with a dead tree stump which is somehow as alive now as it was when it held its branches high in the air.

I think my mind's rafters are starting to shatter now, and how beautiful it feels.

In death we support life, and in life we support death ....

*butterfly leaves, but quiet heart stays*

“I just don’t take my self loathing personally anymore”

Tonight’s dharma theme

Caught a glance

Of the softer self  
That puts up with me  
The me that hates me  
But softness sits quiet,  
Patient, she will wait for it  
The day when you’re  
Ready to admit  
You don’t need it  
You don’t need to be it  
And not enough  
Can just hang on a minute  
And let me have this  
This minute of freedom

Peace falls so seldom  
In its humble whole  
Lets itself be shown  
And I am one  
Someone I can keep  
With whom I could be satisfied

But the butterfly leaves the flower  
And is off out of sight  
Moments slip past  
As soon as greedy hands  
Try to grab

But a quiet part of my heart stays  
And in its timid voice says  
You are not alone  
But always with you  
And will peak through  
When time is waiting  
Not taking

*Melissa Lichtenwald*

*You are the River...*

Dreams and sunsets  
Spinning of fire and’ earth  
Around distance, gravity pulling space  
Into a sense of place

Brought you  
Has drawn you near  
Under midnight moon  
I watch you shimmer  
My eyes dance as lightly  
As the shades of ever deeper blue  
Across you  
Seeking to sink below surface

To feel the essence of its movement  
What lies within waters wandering  
Winding, meandering, rolling over shoulder  
Rushing through, white water soothes soul  
Feeling its echo reverberate in hollows of my bones

Shall she strip shy feet of shoes

Reflections bring stars,  
Space of unfathomable distance  
into our hands  
Wrap round lips taste sound  
Waves bend time-space into a place that  
does not exist, begin or end

Soles of feet on sand  
Toes feel the cool liquid melt around them  
Swim.....surrender to the current’s spirit flowing in  
Stars dance on shivering skin  
Leaves brush in quiet wind  
She is very near silence  
As he glides across her flesh  
She knows not yet what is this

*Melissa Lichtenwald*

**Just Wondering .....**

*Fran Gilboy*

i had a really beautiful experience this morning.  
my backyard is full of trees and, therefore, full of birds. often  
when i wake up in the morning a chorus of birds is already  
chirping away. my bedroom is the loft on the second story of  
our house and there is a deck right off it.  
i usually keep the window of the door open so that i can  
hear/smell/feel the nights and mornings. manni and i will  
often wake up early ,due to the singing, and head to the deck,  
where we are greeted by lush green treetops and the sun. i  
have a bed set up out there, so we'll spend an hour or so lying  
in the sun, enjoying the heat and the birds.

this morning i woke up, but not to the chorus. it must still  
have been early, maybe 3 or 4 am. i was in complete darkness,  
not a crack of light anywhere. there was sound though, the  
sound of one single solitary bird. it was beautiful to listen to  
just this one song. no other birds woke up and joined in, i sat  
and listened, eyes open. i could have kept them closed...it  
wouldn't have made a real difference, except that i was  
enjoying the magic of it with all senses engaged. it was  
beautiful. the whole experience felt very solitary. i wondered  
what the bird was doing awake, all by itself, what made it sing?  
what stopped the other birds from joining in?.....then i  
wondered why i was awake, all by myself, lying in complete  
darkness, compelled to listen?

# VIPASSANA EVENTS

## THE SASKATCHEWAN SCENE, 2008

<b>January 12 and 13</b>	“Meditating Together” Insight Meditation Retreat, non-residential, with <b>Sharda Rogell</b> at the Sherwood Forest Country Club, near Regina; \$80 plus <i>dana</i> ; to register, please call Maureen McKenzie at 352-1750
<b>February 24</b>	Day of Mindfulness, 9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., at 2672 Robinson Street, Regina
<b>February 29</b>	Pot-Luck Supper, 7 p.m. onward, at 4279 Wascana Ridge, Regina (please confirm interest in attending as early as possible: Carol Sexton at 584-9010)
<b>March 28 to 30</b>	“Living our Deepest Purpose: Bringing the dharma into our everyday lives” Insight Meditation Retreat, non-residential, with <b>Adrienne Ross</b> at Mennonite Central Committee offices, 600 45 <sup>th</sup> St. West, Saskatoon; \$60 plus <i>dana</i> ; to register, please call Doris Larson at 242-5004
<b>March 30</b>	Day of Mindfulness, 9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., at 2672 Robinson Street, Regina
<b>April 10 to 13</b>	“Realizing the Four Noble Truths in Real Time” Residential Insight Meditation Retreat with <b>Howie Cohn</b> , at Wood Acres Retreat Centre, Moose Jaw; \$290 (\$256 before March 15 <sup>th</sup> ) plus <i>dana</i> ; to register, please call Liz Gavin at 949-6195
<b>April 14 to June 2</b>	“Insight Meditation”, a seven-class course on Monday evenings, 7:15 to 9:30 p.m., taught by <b>Dana Anjali</b> , at 2672 Robinson Street; \$35 plus <i>dana</i> ; to register, please call Chris Gilboy at 522-0616
<b>May 25</b>	Work <i>dana</i> day, 9 a.m. to noon, lunch to follow, at 2672 Robinson Street, Regina (please confirm interest in attending as early as possible: Carol Sexton at 584-9010)
<b>June 6 to 8</b>	“The Mind’s Eye and Its Lens” Insight Meditation Retreat, non-residential, with <b>Joanne Broatch</b> at the Seniors’ Education Centre, Regina; \$80 plus <i>dana</i> ; to register, please call Carol Sexton at 584-9010
<b>July 27</b>	Day of Mindfulness, 9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., at 2672 Robinson Street, Regina
<b>August 24</b>	Work <i>dana</i> day, 9 a.m. to noon, lunch to follow, at 2672 Robinson Street, Regina (please confirm interest in attending as early as possible: Carol Sexton at 584-9010)
<b>August 29 to September 1</b>	Insight Meditation Retreat, residential, with <b>Joanne Broatch</b> at St. Peter's Abbey, Muenster; for details, please contact Doris Larson at 306-242-5004 or <a href="mailto:dwlaron@sasktel.net">dwlaron@sasktel.net</a>
<b>September 20 and 21</b>	“Walking a Wise Path” Insight Meditation Retreat, non-residential, with <b>Sharda Rogell</b> at the Seniors’ Education Centre, Regina; <i>dana</i> retreat in honou of the 15 <sup>th</sup> anniversary of our sangha; to register, please call Brian Brunskill at 586-0937
<b>October 3 to 10</b>	“The Art of True Meditation” Residential Insight Meditation Retreat with <b>Sharda Rogell</b> at Wood Acres Retreat Centre, Moose Jaw; \$575 (\$540 before September 13) plus <i>dana</i> ; pre-requisite of one week silent Vipassana retreat experience needed; to register, please call Deb at 306-771-2980
<b>November 30</b>	Day of Mindfulness, 9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., at 2672 Robinson Street, Regina
<b>December 6 and 7</b>	Loving-kindness (Metta) Retreat, non-residential, with <b>Dana Anjali</b> at the Seniors’ Education Centre, Regina (unless otherwise indicated); \$40 plus <i>dana</i> ; registrar to be announced.

### About Regina Insight Meditation Community’s Teachers



**Sharda Rogell** is the guiding teacher for the Regina Insight Meditation Community. She has been practising and teaching Buddhist insight meditation for over 30 years and teaches worldwide. Sharda has been influenced by many Buddhist traditions, as well as by her root teacher, H.W.L. Poonja, during her many trips to India. Sharda is also a student of A.H. Almaas in the Diamond Heart School. She is currently on the teacher Council at Spirit Rock Meditation Center in northern California near her home.



**Howard Cohn** has practised meditation since 1972 and has led retreats since 1985. He leads on-going classes in San Francisco, California, near his home. He has studied and practised with many Asian and western teachers of several Buddhist traditions including Theravada, Zen, Tibetan, and Advaita Vedanta, and incorporates a non-dual perspective in his teaching.



**Joanne** has been practising Vipassana (Insight Meditation) in the Theravadin tradition since 1980, and teaching since 1994. Her primary guide as a practitioner and as a teacher is Jack Kornfield and she has practised extensively with senior teachers at I.M.S. and Spirit Rock. She is influenced by Diamond Heart work, the Painting Experience, and her own years as a teacher, business consultant, writer and editor. She teaches retreats in Canada and the U.S. and has classes and sitting groups in Vancouver.



**Dana Anjali** has been practising Insight Meditation since 1988. In 1993, she founded the Regina Insight Meditation Community where she is the Dharma Guide and is mentored by her teacher, Sharda Rogell. Since 2003, after completing her training at Spirit Rock, Dana has been the Community Dharma Leader. She teaches meditation classes, weekend non-residential retreats and leads the Wednesday Night Sitting Group in Regina as well as supporting people in their ongoing meditation practice. For the past four years, Dana has also been teaching Healing through Meditation classes.

**Retreats:** require pre-registration. If you are on our regular mailing list (please contact us if you wish to be placed on it), details of residential retreats will be mailed two to three months before the event. **Please ask retreat contact persons about scholarships** if your financial situation deters you from attending.

**Days of Mindfulness:** We try to ensure that the opportunity for more extended practice is available to the community by setting aside the fourth Sunday of each month in which there is no scheduled retreat. Half-day (9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and 1:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.) or full-day (9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.) sessions made up of alternating periods of sitting and walking meditation with a taped dharma talk during the afternoon; 2672 Robinson Street. Information is distributed by e-mail, or please contact Maureen (306-352-1750) or Chris (306-522-0616).

**Meditation Evenings and Public Talks:** Please look for posters at traditional locations announcing public talks by visiting teachers when they are in Regina or Saskatoon.

**Weekly Sitting Group: Regina**

Wednesdays throughout the year, 7:30 to 9:15 p.m.; 2672 Robinson Street; led by Dana Anjali or an RIMC seasoned practitioner; 45-minute sitting, about 50 minutes for discussion, and 10 minutes for dedication of merit and closing announcements

**Weekly Sitting Group: Saskatoon**

Sundays throughout the year, 7:30 to 9:00 p.m.; Yoga Central, 211B – 3521 8th Street, Eastwood Centre; 45-minute sitting, 45-minute discussion

**ALL EVENTS are fragrance free – please avoid wearing perfumes, perfumed skin-care products, clothing washed in fragranced detergents, or anything else which can cause distress to those who are chemically sensitive.**

**Contacts for Regina Insight Meditation Community information:** Maureen (306-352-1750) or Chris (306-522-0616).

**Contact for Saskatoon Insight Meditation Group events:** Doris (306-242-5004).

## THE CALGARY/EDMONTON SCENE, 2008

**April 4 to May 2**

Thirty-day residential retreat with **Venerable U Vansarakkita** at Kamp Kiwanis (25 km west of Calgary); \$1200 (or \$175 for weekend, \$400 for ten days, \$550 for fourteen days, all starting April 4); please register at <http://www.bringingawarenesstolife.ca/residential/regrequest.html>

**June 21 to 29**

Nine-day residential retreat with **Venerable Bhikkhu Sona** at Providence Renewal Centre, 3005 - 119 Street; \$775 plus *dana*; to register, please call Sheila Lennox at 780-433-1386

**October 15 to 19**

Five-day residential retreat with **Bhikkhu Pavaro** at Providence Renewal Centre, 3005 - 119 Street; \$395 plus *dana*; to register, please call Sheila Lennox at 780-433-1386

**Sitting Groups:**

**Calgary Vipassana Sangha** meets 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday of every month from September to May to meditate and study the teachings of the Buddha. This is for experienced meditators. Suggested donation \$5. For further information on retreats or meditation classes, call Judy at 403-241-2219 or visit us at [www.yogameditationcentercalgary.ca](http://www.yogameditationcentercalgary.ca)

**Calgary Theravadin Meditation Society**, meets 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of every month, 7:30 to 9:00 p.m.; open to all meditators with experience in Vipassana meditation; contact Anne Mahoney at 403-270-8450

**Calgary Metta Study Group**, meets 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Monday of every month, 7:30 to 9:00 p.m.; contact Anne Mahoney (403-270-8450)

**Community of Mindful Living, Bow Valley Sangha, Canmore**, meets every Tuesday, 8:00 to 9:30 p.m.; occasional days of mindfulness and non-residential retreats; visitors and beginners welcome; contact Mary Dumka at [ma48an49@telus.net](mailto:ma48an49@telus.net) or 403-678-2034

**Light of the Dhamma Society, Edmonton**, meets every Wednesday, 7:00 to 9:00 p.m., in the Edmonton Shambala Centre, #1B, 10110 124th Street NW (visit <http://www.lightofthedhamma.org/> for more information)

## THE WINNIPEG SCENE, 2008

**Sitting Groups:**

**Winnipeg Vipassana Meditation Group**, meets Sundays at 9:30 a.m. at Yoga North, 109 Pulford Street (basement of Augustine Church) for sitting (about 30 minutes) and discussion (30 to 45 minutes); contact Nelle Oosterom (204) 453-3637

### The Practice of *Dana*

In the spirit of the 2500 year-old tradition of the Buddha's teachings being priceless and freely offered to everyone who wishes to hear them, our programs are open to all, regardless of their ability to pay. Registration fees for retreats and classes cover administrative costs only.

*Dana* is the Pali term for “*spontaneous generosity of the heart.*” Everyone wishing to express appreciation for hearing the teachings can voluntarily offer donations for the support of the teachers at retreats, public talks, sittings or any other occasion.

## Creativity and the Dharma

Cherie Westmoreland

You know, photography was my first meditation practice. In the late 1960s, I was drawn to the work of U.S. photographer, Minor White, and two small quotes of his have stayed with and informed me all these years:

*No matter how slow the film  
Spirit always stands still  
long enough for the photographer  
it has chosen.*

and

*Be still with yourself  
Until the object of or attention  
Affirms your Presence.*

Something in the world invites me to respond and engage....the slant of light on a leaf; the texture of grasses; the dramatic prairie sky cloud formations....and as I stand behind my camera, bring my eye to the camera's eyepiece, and then look through the lens, I'm brought into the aliveness of the present moment, and into an investigation of spirit that has invited me to engage.

As my dear mentor and friend photographer, Freeman Patterson, says, "Our sole purpose in life is to be creative." So, as creative beings in the world, we express this movement of the heart in endless and beautiful ways...the way we set a table, the quality of listening we offer our children, the welcome we offer our colleagues, the way we turn our heads to catch the warmth of spring sunshine on our faces. Often we think of creativity narrowly...as if it is the domain of "artists" and that it can only show up as a painting, or a sculpture or a novel. Freeman encourages us to see all that is in our lives and in our responses to it as creative.

Freeman is also someone who introduced me to "inquiry" before I had met this practice through the dharma. He often speaks of that initial impulse to make a photograph; that time when you are tempted to snap the shutter and move on. But he sees this impulse, this connection, as an invitation to begin to explore the

subject matter; to set aside your ideas of what it is and to begin to be curious. An invitation is the beginning point, not the end point. And he encourages us to step out of our habitual point of view. Get down on the ground and point the lens up toward the sky; bury the lens in the leaves and throw it out of focus; over-expose, underexpose, create camera movement...be alive to the ever-changing moment.

Freeman also spoke of the mystery of what we are drawn to, and invites a beginner's mind approach to seeing our work. In his experience, he has discovered that it often takes years before the meaning in the work begins to emerge. So, for photographers, he strongly suggests that we don't edit our images too severely or too soon and that we let their conversations and meanings emerge over time.

I have been and am consistently drawn to photograph trees; this is a lifetime relationship of curiosity, inquiry, mystery, deep respect, wonderful presence. Below are a few of my favorite quotations about trees, along with a few images.

*"Think of a tree. When you think of a tree, you tend to think of a distinctly defined object; and on a certain level, it is. But when you look more closely at the tree, you will see that ultimately it has no independent existence. When you contemplate it, you will find that it dissolves into an extremely subtle net of relationships that stretches across the universe. The rain that falls on its leaves, the wind that sways it, the soil that nourishes and sustains it, all the seasons and the weather, moonlight and starlight and sunlight - all form part of this tree. As you begin to think about the tree more and more, you will discover that everything in the universe helps to make the tree what it is, that it cannot at any moment be isolated from anything else, and that at every moment its nature is subtly changing."*

Sogyal Rinpoche, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*



*"When her doctor took her bandages off and led her into the garden, the girl who was no longer blind saw 'the tree with the lights in it'. It was for this tree I searched through the peach orchards of summer, in the forests of fall and down winter and spring for years. Then one day I was walking along Tinker*



*Creek thinking of nothing at all and I saw the tree with the lights in it. I saw the backyard cedar where the mourning doves roost charged and transfigured, each cell buzzing with flame. I stood on the grass with the lights in it, grass that was wholly fire, utterly focused and utterly dreamed. It was less like seeing*

than like being for the first time seen, knocked breathless by a powerful glance. The flood of fire abated, but I'm still spending the power. Gradually the lights went out in the cedar, the colours died, the cells unflamed and disappeared. I was still ringing. I had been my whole life a bell, and never knew it

until at that moment I was lifted and struck. I have since only very rarely seen the tree with the lights in it. The vision comes and goes, mostly goes, but I live for it, for the moment when the mountains open and a new light roars in spate through the crack, and the mountains slam."

Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*



### **LOST**

Stand still. The trees ahead and bushes beside you  
Are not lost. Wherever you are is called Here,  
And you must treat it as a powerful stranger,  
Must ask permission to know it and be known.  
The forest breathes. Listen. It answers,  
I have made this place around you,  
If you leave it you may come back again, saying  
Here.  
No two trees are the same to Raven.  
No two branches are the same to Wren.  
If what a tree or a bush does is lost on you,  
You are surely lost. Stand still. The forest knows  
Where you are. You must let it find you.

David Wagoner



## Our Will to Create

*Pauline Duncan -Bonneau*

In order to live creatively, it is perhaps an advantage to be able to face death with equanimity, for if we are afraid to die, we are likely afraid to live fully. Little stifles creativity more than fear of living fully in the moment!

Preparing for the moment of our death offers us the opportunity to be creative about a very important legal document – our Last Will and Testament which, for ease of reference, I will simply call “your Will” in this article.

A Will is a written document which is either typewritten, written in someone else’s handwriting or is in your own handwriting. If your Will is typewritten or in someone else’s handwriting it is referred to as a “legal Will”. If your Will is entirely in your own handwriting, it is referred to as a “holograph Will”. Both Wills are legal. The only difference is that a legal Will must have two witnesses to your signature. A holograph Will does not require any witnesses – your signature must simply be included at the end of your Will.

Your Will is the last formal statement that you will make about your values, commitment to others and the manner in which you want your assets conveyed to the people or organizations you deem worthy. When drafting your Will, one of the considerations you might want to make is what, if anything, to leave to our Insight Meditation Community.

The Sangha Working Group of the Regina Insight Meditation Community (“RIMC”) has determined that at this time the cost of having RIMC formally recognized as a “registered charity” under the Income Tax Act is not in our best interest. Therefore the only way you can make provision for RIMC in your Will is to leave the bequest directly to one of the members of RIMC or to the Sangha Working Group. You can specify what you want to see happen with your bequest and entrust the person you have designated or Sangha Working Group to carry out your intention.

For example, you might want to give some money to Dana Anjali, our Community Dharma Leader, or Sharda Rogell, our Guiding Teacher. To do this, you would simply state in your Will the amount of the gift you want her to have. There would be no income tax implications with respect to this gift. Your estate would not get a tax deduction, nor would Dana or Sharda have to declare the gift as income. In Saskatchewan, gifts made in a person’s Will are tax neutral. If you wanted Dana or Sharda to use

the money for something specific, for example to place in her retirement fund, you could express that wish. Your Executor could ask Dana or Sharda to verify that she had utilized your gift in this fashion after Dana or Sharda receives the gift.

You might prefer to leave a bequest to RIMC, in which case you should direct your Executor to give a designated sum to the Sangha Working Group. This gift would also have a tax neutral effect – it would not be taxable in the Sangha Working Group’s hands, nor would it be deductible by your estate. You could specify the manner in which you want the gift to be utilized or simply leave it to Working Group’s discretion. For example, you might want to see your gift utilized to provide scholarships to worthy individuals who want to attend Retreats and cannot afford to pay for them with their own resources.

As your Will is a document that is filed with the Queen’s Bench Court, you probably want to ensure that it is dignified and contains bequests and sentiments that you do not mind sharing with the general public.

In the 30 years that I have practised law and assisted my clients in drafting their Wills, there have been many occasions where people have stated very personal sentiments in their Wills. Some of my clients have included tenderly worded statements acknowledging the importance of their spouse and children. Others have acknowledged their spiritual advisors. Some have stated their hopes and wishes for the betterment of our community. Some have set out the personal vision that they tried to achieve by living their lives in awareness.

A Will is an opportunity to express your creativity and to get in touch with your feelings concerning the death of your physical body. Just think how amazing it would be to inspire your loved ones by taking the time to draft a Will that reflects your spiritual beliefs!

Something I think about often is the kind of energy I want to feel at the moment of my death. Given that none of us knows when we are going to die, I try to be ready to face my death with equanimity at all times. Knowing that my Will reflects the manner in which I want to care for my loved ones and my spiritual community gives me tremendous peace of mind about how I will feel when I take my last breath. This, to me, represents the greatest level of creativity that I can achieve in this lifetime.

## Creative Listening

*Gail Tiefenbach*

Besides meditation and retreats, I don’t think there has been anything more useful to my understanding and practice of the Dharma than listening to audio CDs of Dharma talks – usually purchased or borrowed from the RIMC library.

All those dark, cold winter mornings as I drove to work; all those warm, sunny days of light as I drove to work . . . sipping go-cup coffee, listening . . . Guy Armstrong, Joseph Goldstien, Sally Clough, Sharda Rogell . . . riches beyond measure. Listening to titles like: “Dukkha and Its End”; “Metta: Freeing

the Heart from Clinging”; “Coming out of the Fog of Delusion”.

I would wonder jokingly as I drove and listened: “Will I be liberated by the time I get to work at 8:00, or am I just going to be late, since I’m driving so ... slow ... trying ... to ... prolong ... the ... magic ... of ... the ... talks?”

In any case, things have just greatly improved for all of us! We can now go on line to [Dharma Seed, Freely Offering Western Buddhist Vipassana Teachings](http://www.dharmaseed.org/) and download talks given by Teachers at Spirit Rock and the Insight Meditation Society. Just go to <http://www.dharmaseed.org/> The titles mentioned above are there, and much, much more.

Our Sangha recently made a *dana* offering of \$200 to Dharma Seed in support of this awesome out-reach project.

Considering the immeasurable benefit we derive from Dharma Seed, why not consider offering your own personal *dana* via the website when you download. This would be an excellent show of appreciation and help ensure the website continues to operate.

The only drawback for me now is that I used to listening to every CD over and over again until I feel I have really “got it”, at least conceptually. Now I have so much to choose from that I get sort of confused as to what to listen to and then tend to skip through them in order to get on to the next one.

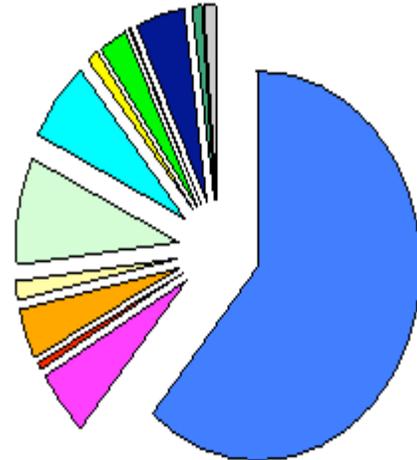
But, isn’t that how *samsara* works? Could it be a greedy mind state kicking in? Hmmm ... isn’t awareness a great tool?

Please enjoy Dharma Seed

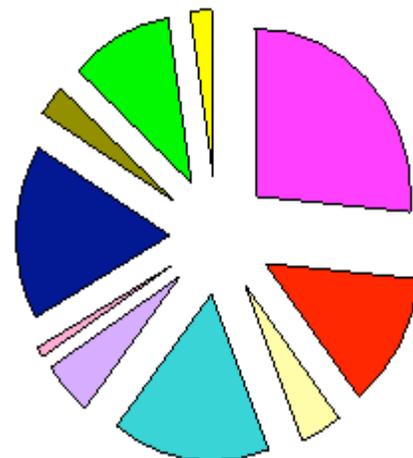
### RIMC Finances and Retreats, 2007

Chris Gilboy

FILL	2007 REVENUE	AMOUNT
	Retreat Surplus	7,441
	Scholarship Fund	685
	Newsletter - Donations	60
	Newsletter - Retreats	500
	Library - Membership Fees	196
	Library - CD Sales	1,113
	Classes	831
	Community Donations	132
	Garage Sale	332
	Inquiring Mind - Donations	33
	Sharda's Fund - Donations	590
	Dharma Seed - Donations	130
	Bank Interest	136
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>12,179</b>



FILL	2007 EXPENDITURE	AMOUNT
	Scholarships	2,575
	Newsletter	1,220
	Library	436
	Dana's Development	1,578
	Inquiring Mind Donation	493
	Buddhist Website Donation	100
	Sharda's Retirement Fund	1,632
	Dharma Seed Donations	297
	Website	1,071
	Other Running Costs	214
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>9,616</b>



The revenue figures for 2007 once again showed that the retreat surplus formed the major source of RIMC income. It was followed by income from sales of CDs of dharma talks delivered at the year's retreats, registration for Dana's classes, and donations to the scholarship fund. Scholarships were our highest expenditure, succeeded by a donation to Sharda's retirement fund (our delayed 2006 contribution), costs relating to Dana's development as our Community Dharma Leader, and the printing and mailing of our newsletter. We paid slightly over a thousand dollars on getting our website up and running – this will probably pay for itself rapidly through future savings on our

newsletter as, starting with this issue, it will be available only on our website unless paper copies have been requested (only two such requests have been received to date).

About \$1,000 of the overall surplus for 2007, which amounts to \$2,563, went toward our 2007 donation to Sharda's retirement fund (the balance came from individual donations), sent to her in July, 2008. RIMC funds will also be spent on helping support Sharda when she is in Regina from mid-September to mid-October, 2008. Also starting in 2008, the cost of retreat registration for those older than 65 or younger than 32 (years!) has been lowered for those who ask for this reduction.

Retreat	Revenue	Expenses	Net	# Retreatants	Scholarships	# Scholarships
1. Sharda Rogell (January 13 and 14) <i>Out with the Old, In with the New</i>	3,040.00	2,082.33	957.67	38	185.00	3
2. Sharda Rogell assisted by Dana Anjali (May 11 to 18) <i>Lovingkindness (Metta)</i>	13,220.00	10,752.74	2,467.26	24	1,980.00	6
3. Howard Cohn (July 27 to 29) <i>Time and Timelessness</i>	3,170.00	2,349.83	820.17	38	200.00	4
4. Sharda Rogell (September 15 and 16) <i>Opening Our Heart with Equanimity</i>	2,475.00	1,574.32	900.68	37	75.00	1
5. Howard Cohn (November 9 to 12) <i>Cultivating Equanimity and Wise View</i>	8,350.00	6,055.25	2,294.75	32	135.00	1
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>30,255.00</b>	<b>22,814.47</b>	<b>7,440.53</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>2,575.00</b>	<b>15</b>

Our main financial (and logistical) activity continues to be the retreats that we organize. We held five retreats – two residential (Sharda's in May, Howie's in November) and three non-residential (Sharda's in January and September, Howie's in July). They had a total financial turnover of just over \$30,000, and were attended by a total of 169 retreatants. Fifteen scholarships totaling \$2,575 were awarded.

When we run retreats, the manager bases the registration fee on a break-even attendance of 22 or 23 full-paying retreatants for residential, 28 for non-residential, though these numbers may

vary depending on how many people the manager thinks might participate. Our ability to hold retreats depends to no small extent on volunteers who manage, register, help with mail-outs, hang posters, transport necessities, set up venues, and carry out a variety of other support activities – thank you to all who have served the community in any of these capacities. Also, thank you everyone who attended – without you, RIMC would not be able to run these retreats for very long. Deepest appreciation also goes to the teachers and to Dana who is the prime contact between the teachers and our sangha.

## Pot-luck Supper, February 29, 2008

*Carol Sexton and Chris Gilboy*





In part to celebrate a day that comes around only once every four years, in part to share friendly company and fine food, some 16 or so RIMC members gathered at Carol and Jim's house from about 7:30 p.m. on Friday, 29 February. There was a wide selection of delicious vegetarian dishes, so the eating (mindful, of course!), took up a good portion of the evening, and conversation also abounded. What joy – comfortable surroundings and wonderful friends! May our next pot-luck supper take place soon.

### Connect–ed

Better late than never!

I'm referring, of course, to the lateness of posting this issue of .....*connections*..... on our website. Many of the contributions came in well past the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2007 deadline that was published in Issue #9 (I don't know that anything had come in by then!), but what has been offered is, to my mind, really amazing – superb photography, beautiful poetry, absorbing articles, intriguing drawings – from a substantial number of sangha members. Thank you, everyone.

As for our next issue, the theme will be around the four brahmaviharas. Most of you are familiar with them, I am sure, but for those who aren't, we'll be exploring *metta* (loving-

kindness), *karuna* (compassion), *mudita* (empathetic joy) and *upekkha* (equanimity). I hardly dare suggest a deadline for submissions – but I'm thinking January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2009. My “crazy” season, when my ability to work extensively on our newsletter becomes very limited, starts at the end of February and goes through to the end of June. If there's a wealth of submissions by the end of next January, I should be able to get Issue #11 posted on our website before my attention is diverted.

May all who read this issue of .....*connections*..... be inspired to delve ever deeper into dharma practice.

*Chris Gilboy*

“Every subatomic interaction consists of the annihilation of the original particles and the creation of new subatomic particles. The subatomic world is a continual dance of creation and annihilation, of mass changing into energy and energy changing into mass. Transient forms sparkle in and out of existence, creating a never-ending, forever newly created reality.”

*Gary Zukav (The Dancing Wu Li Masters: An Overview of the New Physics)*