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

Number 3

Newsletter of the Regina Insight Meditation Community

Fall/Winter, 2001-2002

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## Connect—ed

I deeply apologize for the long delay in sending this issue of “.....connections.....” to you. The hold-up has been largely the result of our inability until very recently to finalize the 2002 retreat schedule, so I do not anticipate its being repeated too often. We have a diverse and stimulating program that we hope most of you will find truly beneficial. The relatively easy, low-cost access to short retreats for our sangha is rare and is an aspect of RIMC services worthy of special attention.

An unexpected and important consequence of the delay has been the submission of two accounts focusing on the tragic events of 11<sup>th</sup> September and their aftermath. Most other articles were completed before that day of suffering, otherwise they, too, might well have referred to the impact felt by their writers.

Up until now, publication and distribution costs (generally over \$1 per copy) related to the first few issues of “.....connections.....” have almost totally been borne by RIMC's General Fund. To help make “.....connections.....” more financially self-sustaining, we recently began, at our weekly sitting group, to leave out a bowl for donations

towards covering some newsletter expenses. I invite those of you who cannot sit with us, but who find the newsletter valuable in any way, to consider mailing a donation to our Treasurer, Susan Wiebe, at Regina Insight Meditation Community, #507 – 1610 College Avenue, Regina, SK S4P 1B7, clearly indicating it is for the Newsletter Fund.

The theme for the Spring/Summer issue of “.....connections.....” is “impermanence”. The deadline for receipt of contributions is 15<sup>th</sup> March. I urge readers to send me a paragraph or two describing either some insight you have of this fundamental characteristic in our relative world, or a newsy item that you think will interest others in our community. If you submit anything of this nature (cgilboy@sem.gov.sk.ca or RIMC mailing address), I will include them (or a selection if there is a flood of responses!) in a new section named *The Sangha Speaks*. The theme for the Fall/Winter 2002-2003 issue is “wisdom”, and the deadline is 15<sup>th</sup> September, 2002.

May all in our sangha and beings everywhere experience great peace, happiness and freedom in each moment.

Chris Gilboy

## In My Opinion .....

*“The changes that appear to occur in the empty world we call real only because of our ignorance. Do not search for the truth; only cease to cherish opinions.”*

from “*Verses On The Faith Mind*” Seng-tsan

Most of us move through daily life like one side of a strip of velcro. The experiences of life are the other side.

Does a day go by .... an hour ..... a minute, without clinging? to that moment of quiet between phone calls? to the last hour with a loved one? to the last evening of the weekend? to a flavour? an aroma? an eye-catching sight?

Our emotions and senses hook us to pleasures, no question, and in our reluctance to let them go, we suffer. We also recognize that when we focus on the passing of a pleasurable experience, on the “no more-ness” of it, rather than on the direct experience of the moment, we diminish the richness of that moment and that pleasure. When we awaken to the direct experience of the moment as it unfolds, it's easier for us to recognize when we are clinging and eventually to recognize our particular patterns of clinging. However, it's not quite so easy for us to recognize when we are clinging to views and opinions. Still, we needn't look at world events, as dramatic and terrible as they are, to recognize how suffering is deeply rooted in clinging to beliefs, views and opinions. World events we have little control over, but we can begin by looking into our own lives. When a relationship becomes difficult, a partner not quite so “perfect”, or a friend suddenly not so easy to get along with, could it be that the relationship, the partner, the friend no longer fit our view of what relationship, partner or friend “should” be? When a discussion becomes contentious, could it be that we've moved from an open exchange of opinions into a battle of “who's right”? When we become frustrated by some situation in the workplace, could it be that we're clinging

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to an idea how something “should” be done? When we become discouraged with ourselves, become self critical, lose touch with our Buddha-nature, could it be that we're clinging to some impossible ideal of “self”? Someone much wiser than I once said that holding onto self is the deepest form of suffering: we never have been who we thought we were.

Not that the views and opinions are, in themselves, the cause of happiness or suffering. They are simply the products of the mind doing what it does. Suffering arises when we cling to them; when we fail to see each thought as an ephemeral event that arises out of a specific set of conditions, each to be taken with a greater or lesser seriousness. In a society that values thoughts, views and opinions and rewards us for expressing and defending them, it's not easy to see a view or opinion simply as one view or one opinion among many. A question then arises:

### From Dana

In this issue of the newsletter, I want to explore the place of meditation retreats in our dharma practice and how retreats nourish and deepen our spiritual path. The inspiration for this theme comes directly from my observation that, while many people in our community attend retreats regularly, others are not drawn to participate in this form of practice.

In 2001, for the first time in our short history, we offered a wide variety of retreats. Not only have they been either residential or non-residential, but they have been taught by one of four different dharma teachers. To have this availability in the middle of the prairies is really special. For some of us, attending a retreat may have been our first contact with dharma practice and teachings – we dived in headfirst so to speak. For others, our first contact has been through coming to a sitting group or a class. Unless we dived in headfirst, attending a retreat can seem like a huge step. If we regard retreat in this way, I think some of us may feel that we are not ready for such a challenge. Another viewpoint that may keep us away is that it's not really obvious from the outside as to why a retreat would be nourishing. When we hear how a typical meditation retreat has a daily schedule that usually begins at about 6:30 a.m. and ends at about 9:30 p.m., and how most of this time is occupied by sitting and walking in silence, we seem to have to give up a lot of freedom in order to participate. To give up talking, free time, and many activities which we usually enjoy in order to take part in a silent retreat can, for some, feel a bit like going off to prison. Who would choose to do that in preference to having a relaxing weekend? Others amongst us have a very different view – our weekends are filled with activities around Things-To-Do Lists, and going into a retreat and accomplishing seemingly nothing can appear to benefit us less than “getting things done.”

So often in our society, we see giving up what we enjoy and what brings us pleasure as hardship. Unless we engage in renunciation, we may not discover the gift that comes

How are we to know when a thought, view or an opinion has some value? This calls for wisdom, recognizing any view or opinion as just another thought to be held with openness and good will, not necessarily to be defended or attacked. When a view is a popular one, an often repeated one, this doesn't make it any more or less true. When a view or opinion is highly charged with emotion, this doesn't make it any more or less valid. When a view has sprung from our own mind, not someone else's, that doesn't make it any more or less important. The most useful way to relate to views and opinions is to be curious, to investigate with an open mind (not to prove, but rather to find out), to reflect, recognizing and acknowledging our limits and our small place in a vast universe, and to remind ourselves that clinging to them causes almost all of our suffering. More importantly, this clinging kills infinitely more people than do guns.

*Joanne Broatch*

from simplifying our lives for a day, a weekend, a week, or a lifetime. Renunciation goes against the grain of our culture which, instead, is occupied with filling the gaps of inactivity that we all experience in hope of finding happiness and a sense of completion.

On retreat, we can experience firsthand what happens when we stop our habitual activity and give priority to just being with ourselves moment to moment. Of course our tendency is to find all sorts of little distractions which divert our attention away from what we are feeling and experiencing, but in the still, silent atmosphere of retreat, we are often able to see directly that we are distracted from what is happening in our moment-to-moment experience.

When I start a retreat, it often takes a while for me to gear down. As the retreat goes on, however, I discover the deep rest that comes from putting the stories of my life down for a bit in favour of just being. By the end of the retreat, I am often in touch with the pain of moving so quickly in my life, and I vow to try to simplify and bring more presence and being to my everyday life. Sometimes this change carries over and other times I find myself swamped within a short while. These days, I find a growing compassion for myself around this as I see that I am asking myself to swim against the current of the way our world moves. It's not surprising that it's difficult to do. I used to hope that, if I just tried hard enough, I would maintain the same level of mindfulness out of retreat as I experienced within, only to discover that this was impossible. The awareness that we cultivate in retreat is actually very dependent on the conditions of silence and continued practice supported by the guidance of a teacher. Once we leave those conditions, the quality of our awareness naturally changes. When I understood this, I clearly saw how times of retreat are very special because I choose to put myself in supportive conditions and to make awareness and dharma practice the most important aspects of my life during that time.

It's often not until we are in a silent retreat environment that we can really give full attention to ourselves and our practice. In silence, we can put our roles and responsibilities down, allowing us to give full attention to being in the moment. Unless we shelve our expectations of ourselves for a while, it's difficult to make our inner life a priority. There's always something that will call our attention in one way or another.

It's only natural that most of us come into a retreat with hope that our experience will be generally one which is peaceful, happy and insightful, though underlying the hope is often some fear that it may not be so pleasant. We never really know until we're in the retreat how it will unfold. What we may have anticipated may be totally absent and what we didn't expect arises. In my experience, it's always a surprise. Over and over again, I have seen how, no matter how difficult challenging and painful a retreat has been, I feel deeply nourished. It is that willingness to really be with myself, no matter how my experience unfolds, which is deeply healing. It is precisely the opposite, not wanting to be with myself, that often results in a feeling of disconnection and distance. Discovering this directly points to the truth that our happiness is not dependent on things going as we wish but rather on how we relate to our experience. If we can embrace our moments with mindfulness and compassion, then this will deeply nourish us in a way that just having pleasant moments cannot. I have also found that the willingness to be with my experience, even when very challenging, strengthens my confidence to face fully whatever situations might unfold for me. As this confidence grows, I feel less fearful of life and all it offers.

Earlier I spoke about the reality that when a retreat ends, the concentration or stillness of mind also disintegrates because the conditions of retreat no longer support it. On first impression, it might seem that if this is true then retreats would not really have much to do with the quality of our daily practice if we can't carry over that stillness. However, in looking more deeply, we find that retreats help us to remember the depth of our commitment to practice. We can once again touch into the joy and contentment of being receptive to our moments just as they are without needing to add a single thing. In our daily lives, it's so easy to get swept down the river of activity and busyness and we lose contact with why cultivating awareness in our lives is so deeply important and meaningful. I have found that it's only by dipping again and again into the silence that we can strengthen the

remembering that it takes to cut through our inherent forgetfulness – forgetfulness which is so fueled by just about everything in our world. Each time I enter a retreat, no matter how short or how long, I feel a great deal of gratitude for the opportunity to go within and to embrace whatever unfolds with understanding, wisdom and compassion. I cannot think of any work that is more important than this as it is the basis from which I am able to share my caring, wisdom and love with our world.

Dana White

### Tool for Reflection

Following the events of September 11, 2001, I found myself searching through my collection of dharma books ..... searching for words of comfort, understanding, context ..... searching for a way to hold this in my mind and heart in such a way that I would not entirely be drawn into my own fear and despair.

In Thich Nhat Hanh's book, *"The Miracle of Mindfulness"*, I found the following passages in a section entitled *"Suffering caused by the lack of wisdom."* (pages 94 to 96). He writes:

*"Choose the situation of a person, family, or society which is suffering the most of any you know. This will be the object of your contemplation .....*

*.....In the case of a society, take the situation of a country suffering war or any other situation of injustice. Try to see that every person involved in the conflict is a victim. See that no person, including all those in warring parties or in what appear to be opposing sides, desires the suffering to continue. See that it is not only one or a few persons who are to blame for the situation. See that the situation is possible because of the clinging to ideologies and to an unjust world economic system which is upheld by every person through ignorance or through lack of resolve to change it. See that two sides in a conflict are not really opposing, but two aspects of the same reality. See that the most essential thing is life and that killing or oppressing one another will not solve anything .....*

*.....Meditate until every reproach and hatred disappears, and compassion and love rise like a well of fresh water within you. Vow to work for awareness and reconciliation by the most silent and unpretentious means possible."*

As I reflect on this passage now, after the months of war in Afghanistan, I can see that it continues to be an important tool for personal reflection and inquiry around the events themselves, and my responses to them.

Cherie Westmoreland

### I Want .....

How often do we start sentences with "I want .....", either quietly to ourselves or out loud to our companions?

How often do we hear others start sentences in this way?

How early does the arising of want start in our lives? We are exposed to it in all sorts of ways as children, often as part of our training toward becoming useful members of society. One example of this is when our parents, teachers or older siblings tell us things like "I want you to tidy your

room," "I want you to eat up all your food," "I want you to play outside," and so on. These wishes are often disguised as direct commands ("Tidy your room!") or as respectful requests ("Please will you eat up all your food?"). If we challenge the person about the reason for carrying out a particular action, we often witness an angry response, or increased authority, or confusion. Sometimes, however, the wisdom of performing the action is explained to us in

*(Continued on page 5)*

## VIPASSANA EVENTS: THE SASKATCHEWAN SCENE, 2002

January 12 and 13	" <i>The Heart of Mindfulness</i> ", a Non-residential Weekend with <b>Dana White</b> in Regina; contact Maureen McKenzie, (306) 352-1750
March 9 and 10	" <i>The Four Foundations of Mindfulness</i> ", an Insight Meditation Weekend with <b>Sharda Rogell</b> in Regina; contact Susan Neden, (306) 789-3986
April 10	Regina Sitting Group led by <b>Myoshin Kelley</b>
April 11 to 14	Residential Retreat with <b>Myoshin Kelley</b> at Wood Acres (Moose Jaw); contact Cherie Westmoreland, (306) 545-5673
April 16 to May 28	" <i>Introduction to Insight Meditation</i> ", a six-week course with <b>Dana White</b> ; contact Maureen McKenzie, (306) 352-1750
May 26	Day of Mindfulness with <b>Dana White</b> in Regina; contact Maureen McKenzie, (306) 352-1750
June 22 to 24	Non-residential Weekend with <b>Joanne Broatch</b> in Regina
August 16 to 24	Residential Retreat with <b>Sharda Rogell</b> at Wood Acres (Moose Jaw)
September 17 to October 22	" <i>Introduction to Insight Meditation</i> ", a six-week course with <b>Dana White</b>
October 20	Day of Mindfulness with <b>Dana White</b> in Regina
November 14	Public Talk, <b>Sharda Rogell</b> , in Regina
November 16 and 17	Insight Meditation Weekend with <b>Sharda Rogell</b> in Regina

### About Our Teachers

**Sharda Rogell** is the guiding teacher for the Regina Insight Meditation Community. She started practising in the Theravadin Buddhist tradition in 1979 and teaching worldwide in 1985. She brings a strong emphasis to awakening heartfulness. Sharda has also been influenced by the non-dual teachings of Advaita, as well as Dzogchen in the Tibetan tradition. She presently teaches at the Insight Meditation Society in Massachusetts, and Spirit Rock Meditation Center in California.



**Myoshin Kelley** is a Canadian who, in her childhood, lived in Regina for some years. She has been practising meditation since 1975. During this time, she has practised with a number of teachers in various traditions, including Sayadaw U Janaka, Sayadaw U Pandita, Hogen Daido Yamahata, Joseph Goldstein, Sharon Salzberg, and Tsoknyi Rinpoche. Her teaching reflects a strong influence from Burmese meditation masters, with an emphasis on simplicity and loving-kindness. Myoshin lives at the Insight Meditation Society (IMS) in Barre, Massachusetts. She leads retreats at IMS and elsewhere around North America.



**Joanne Broatch** has been practising Vipassana 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 White** has been practising insight meditation since 1988, attending retreats in Canada, United States, England and India. In 2000, she began teacher training under the guidance of Sharda Rogell. For the past eight years, Dana has been the guiding member of the Regina Insight Meditation Community.



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.

**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 about retreat scholarships if your financial situation deters you from attending.

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

**Introductory Meditation Courses:** made up of six classes that generally run from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. and a day of mindfulness (participants are expected to attend them all); require pre-registration; dates may change – please contact us for up-to-date information.

**Weekly Sitting Groups: Regina**                      Wednesdays throughout the year, 7:30 to 9:00 p.m.; 2672 Robinson Street; Dana White will lead whenever possible; 45-minute sitting, 45-minute discussion.  
**Saskatoon**    Sundays throughout the year, 7:45 to 9:00 p.m.; Yoga Central, #201 – 804 Central Avenue; 30-minute discussion, 45-minute sitting.

*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:** Jill (306-522-5553) or Maureen (306-352-1750)  
**Contact for Saskatoon events:** Doris (306-242-5004)

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a way that quells all thought of disagreement. As parents or friends delivering wise counsel to our young, we discover that this kind of advice does not arise from personal desire, but from the empty space of wholesome intent in which experience has dissolved to liberate whatever has been learned.

As children, when do we begin echoing our elders and making our wants known to them – “I want the Glamorous Barbie,” “I want another cookie,” “I want Billy to stay over and play with me” .....? If our pleas or demands are granted, how long is it before we begin pestering for some other goodie that attracts our attention? If they are refused, how do we react? With anger, perhaps, or with tears or resentment ..... maybe with calm acceptance ..... Do we eventually get our way, or do we receive some valid explanation as to why our desire is not going to be met?

Moving from the individual to the group, we find desire continuing its rampage: “We want freedom to possess firearms,” “We want possession of firearms to be restricted and tightly controlled,” “We want better health care,” “We want lower taxes,” “We want higher wages,” ..... the list is endless. These wants are regularly deeply felt, and often bring one group into conflict with another with the consequent danger of erupting into violence.

How welcome, then, is the clarity of the Four Noble Truths. Through them, if we have not already realized the sabotaging effect that craving has on our potential for happiness, we start to understand suffering – its nature, its cause, and its cessation – and to follow ways that lead to its cessation.

How welcome are the insights we are given into the basic source of our desires. It lies in our experience of feeling tones – the pleasant, unpleasant or neutral feelings that are almost instantaneous and continuous responses to our sense contacts with our changing environment. We generally develop habitual tendencies to favour the

pleasant, to avoid the unpleasant, and to be bored by the neutral. Once we are truly mindful of the connections between feeling tones and desire, and between desire and attachment, and see how they so easily lead to unwholesome consequences for ourselves and for those around us, we can start to sever or transform them.

How welcome, too, are the pointers toward where to find our strongest attachments (sense pleasures, views and opinions, rites and rituals, and belief in the self) and our deepest fears (loss of livelihood, loss of reputation, unusual states of mind, death, and public speaking). Once our attention is drawn to these truths, we can, if we choose, commence to let go of attachment and fear. Very gradually for some (many lifetimes, perhaps), more suddenly for others, the conditioning and delusion obscuring our closed minds vanishes to reveal the mind's unconditioned, true and open state.

Instead of desire and craving, we find we are imbued with the four limitless qualities of loving kindness, compassion, joy and equanimity. But we need deeply and mindfully to experience, recognize, accept, embrace and understand desire and craving to know what are the limitless qualities and their benefit to our own existence and the existence of everything around us.

Instead of clinging and attachment, we find freedom. But we need deeply and mindfully to experience, recognize, accept, embrace and understand our clinging and our attachment to know what is freedom and its benefit to our own existence and the existence of everything around us.

Instead of “me” and “you”, we find non-separation of self and other. But we need fully to experience, recognize, accept, embrace and understand “me” and “you” to know what is non-separation of self and other and its benefit to our own existence and the existence of everything around us.

Once we clearly see the true nature of craving and attachment, we have the capacity fully to release them into emptiness. Also, and importantly, we are able clearly to distinguish “wants” from “needs”, for in this conditioned world, we need food, clothing, shelter and, at times,

### **Hatred Never Ceases By Hatred, But By Love Alone is Healed**

After the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> and the American declaration of war on terrorism which resulted in the bombing of Afghanistan, we both experienced shock, confusion, fear, despair and anger. We felt as if we were caught in a pervasive fearful silence that would not allow expression of opinions opposing the decision to bomb Afghanistan. It became evident that courage would be required to express the need for a resolution to this conflict by peaceful means rather than by use of violence. Through our support of one another, and in the spirit of providing another perspective, we decided to organize a silent action for peace as a way to express our truth and to share the wisdom of the Buddha regarding the futility of violence as a way to end violence. We created a banner with the Buddha’s well known saying “Hatred never ceases by hatred, but by love alone is healed”. On a number of early mornings in October and November, we and several others gathered on the corner of Albert Street and College Avenue in Regina. We meditated for half an hour with the intention of bringing loving-kindness and compassion to all who are involved in this conflict and with the wish for a peaceful resolution to the war and an end to the bombing in Afghanistan. Anyone was welcome to join us.

On the first morning, five women gathered to meditate and stand with our banner. We were surprised by the power we experienced in this silent action – we felt as if there were five hundred of us instead of five. The sense of community and shared intention was very beautiful. We both experienced our despair dissolving during the meditation. We became aware of our sense of power-within, which gives us the strength to express our truth in a loving and

medication – physically to sustain our bodies, mentally to sustain our consciousness, and spiritually to sustain our diligence and faith as we travel the path of liberation.

*Chris Gilboy*

compassionate way. During the silence, we also noticed how our hearts opened in compassion and love for all beings experiencing the fear and pain of this conflict. This contact with love and connectedness was very steady as we continued in our daily lives which included watching the news, discussing this situation and so on.

Feelings of fear and hopelessness which we experience in times like this can lead to a numbing out and denial which relegates us to the role of victim and leads to a sense of separation and apathy. This public peace-meditation became our practice-in-action in that it connected us with our hearts, and the words of the Buddha inspired and empowered us.

As we express our truth, we also honour the tradition of engaged buddhism inspired by Thich Nhat Hanh and others. A strong voice for engaged practice is that of Joanna Macy. In her book *Coming Back to Life – Practices to Reconnect Our Lives, Our World*, she says “as our pain for the world arises from our systemic interexistence, so does our power”. She offers insight into the roots of our despair and points to a way out of apathy to “the work that reconnects” and empowers us towards healing ourselves and our planet.

As we engage with the pain of those that suffer through this war, we begin to live our practice and grow in our awareness of our interconnectedness and our capacity for a peaceful heart.

*“Something inside me has reached to the place where the world is breathing.”* Kabir

*Pat Cavanaugh and Dana White ❄❄*

### **Retreat with Tenzin Palmo, a Western Yogini**

Well you just have to be impressed with her, don't you? She meditated in a cave for twelve years! Having read her biography, *“Cave in the Snow”*, yes, I was impressed. Now I am going to meet her in retreat for two days in Edmonton. What will she be like? Will I see anything different about her?

Travelling to Edmonton, I take the long way: through Waterton National Park, Radium Hot Springs, Jasper and the Columbia Ice Fields. I see mountains everywhere, and tons and tons – billions of tons – of rock ..... solid landscapes made of multi-shaped grey masses.

On the curving highway, amongst the massive rock, I ponder the word “rinpoche”, which means “very precious”. Although Tenzin Palmo officially has no such a title, I ask myself what kind of person does? As I look at the mountains, I think how absolutely special a gemstone would look in all that rock. I think perhaps seeing tons and tons of grey rock day after day, or life after life, is a

necessary condition to notice and appreciate a precious stone should you happen upon one. Will the contrast of a shining gem against grey flat rock blast mundane senses into experiencing a sense of preciousness? Are rinpoches equally noticeable in contrast to the rest of us?

Several days later I meet Tenzin Palmo. I am impressed with her presence, her simplicity, her humility and her egolessness. But she says early in the retreat, “Don't look at me, look at the teachings.” I try to get over my awe of her, and listen.

She teaches that pure consciousness of mind is like a clear mirror that reflects everything accurately, without distortion. But thoughts and thinking coat the mirror with dust, so we can't really see clearly anymore. Then we meditate, and meditate, and meditate, and finally become silent. A speck of dust is removed from the mirror. We see a little, ever so little, clear light under our dusty mirror. And so we go on, in our lives, cleaning the dust off our mirror,

creating more and more gaps of clarity between our thoughts.

I like this teaching. It strikes me. Tenzin Palmo, herself, isn't so important at this point.

Two days later, sitting on a beach in a brilliantly colourful sunset, I recall the life in Tenzin Palmo's face as she taught us. Even though she had said not to look at her, I had. I had looked lots. I recall the stark, wide-eyed horror in her face as she talked about environmental destruction. I recall her face as it mirrored all the concern of a worried mother with a sick child as she asked us, "What can be more important in your lives than being on the path?" And I

recall the brightness of her face when she smiled.

Recalling the wholeness of her being, I feel stunned, as if I have happened upon a gem, made precious by tons of grey rock. And experiencing this sense of preciousness, I now understand the preciousness of a fleeting speck of light on my dusty mirror.

Please note that Tenzin Palmo was in Edmonton on a fund-raising tour for the Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery (meaning "Celestial Garden of the Authentic Lineage"). For more information about, or to donate to, the nunnery project, see: [www.tenzinpalmo.com](http://www.tenzinpalmo.com)

*Gail Tiefenbach*

## **Community Dharma Leaders' Program: Session 2**

My second session of Community Dharma Leader training took place last September. Sharda and I were to begin our journey from Regina to Seattle early on September 11<sup>th</sup>, only to be turned back minutes before the flight was due to leave. On several occasions during the hours that followed, I questioned the wisdom of traveling to the United States. The events of September 11<sup>th</sup> were so very close and disturbing. Yet I also knew that this was an important opportunity to help me learn to hold these events with more equanimity and compassion and a little less confusion. After waiting two days, we flew to Vancouver, where we rented a car and drove to Seattle. There, we transferred to Sharda's car and continued our journey to San Francisco.

When the CDL program began, only 65 of the 80 expected participants were present. The fall in numbers was due mostly to the September 11<sup>th</sup> events, which became an underlay to the whole training session. The events brought home to me the utmost importance of our dharma work particularly in times of conflict such as these. I realized that I had entered the training feeling very negative and hopeless about our world. By the time I left, I felt I had a broader understanding of the situation and had recognized the possibility that something beautiful can come of something so awful.

The part of the session that stands out most for me was the morning which Joanna Macy spent with us. She is both a Buddhist practitioner and a longtime leader in the field of deep ecology, the work of healing our planet. She led us in a process called The Truth Mandala in which participants were invited to speak about their pain in whatever way they wished to express themselves. Our job, as a group, was simply to acknowledge their pain. The process provided a rare opportunity to be in an environment that could embrace and hold the pain. The healing and connection were palpable.

As some of you may remember from my CDL write-up in the last edition of "*..... connections .....*", racial diversity issues were a strong theme in our first session. They continued to be front and centre in the second session. It was challenging to be directly involved in this situation where the potential for misunderstanding and more division was a real possibility given the complexity of racial issues. At the beginning of the week, I feared that our CDL community, being so newly formed, did not have the capacity to move through these issues in a way that would bring healing rather than division. However, input around diversity issues from various teachers and members of the Diversity Committee, who led us in a whole afternoon of exploration of racial suffering and how it impacts each of us, enabled us to end the week in what I believe to be a very heartfelt place. It is very clear that there are no easy answers as there is so much history and pain of division. Yet I see that our willingness to communicate, stay with the process, and open our hearts is what is really most important.

In an exercise based upon our personal experience of how racial suffering had touched our lives, I discovered that, although I cannot know what the experience of belonging to a different racial group is truly like, in fact I can relate because we are not so very different. We all in some way have experienced the pain of domination, exclusion and discrimination. This was an important learning for me. At my heart level, I understand. Knowing this helps me to overcome the fear that I will not be able to relate in a healing, meaningful way.

These issues are imperative to explore as they are at the root of so much of the conflict, war and oppression in our world.

Ajahn Amaro joined us once again for most of the training. I deeply appreciate the steady presence and wisdom that he brings. Sylvia Boorstein offered a session on metta practice

### **Supporting Dana to attend the Community Dharma Leader Program**

Dana has now completed two of the five sessions in the current CDL Training Program at Spirit Rock near San Francisco. Our community's financial support in helping to cover her travel and accommodation expenses has been and will continue to be of great value to her and also to all of us as the benefits of her participation are already becoming clearly apparent in our sangha. If you wish to assist Dana in this way, please send your donation to: Regina Insight Meditation Community, #507 – 1610 College Avenue, Regina, SK S4P 1B7, clearly indicating it is for the CDL Program

which I also found helpful. The entire five-day session felt more experiential than informational this time. I walked away with few notes but felt very enriched. My sense is that, no matter what the actual program is, I am deeply enriched by being with such a wide variety of other dharma leaders.

I left the CDL training session feeling nourished and very

grateful to be involved in the program and in the CDL community. As the weeks go by, I see how these five days have had a strong influence on my own practice and what I am sharing with our community.

I feel deep appreciation for the financial support I have received from you, the sangha, to attend this program.

*Dana White*

### **Welcome Savannah**

On November 25<sup>th</sup>, 2001, a blessing ceremony was held for Savannah Rose, daughter of Shauna McFadden and Ross Larden. Savannah entered this world on December 21<sup>st</sup>, 2001. The ceremony was held at Jill Forrester's apartment. A group of sangha members was there to share blessings and good wishes for Savannah and to welcome her into our community. It was a very special afternoon.

### **Sangha Update**

The Regina Insight Meditation Community's guiding teacher is Sharda Rogell. The community's day-to-day affairs are managed by the Sangha Council, currently made up of: Laura Bourassa, Jo Brown, Pat Cavanaugh, Jill Forrester, Chris Gilboy, Shauna McFadden and Dana White.

We are most grateful to Barb Bell, Kelly Bourassa and Veronica Marner for their diligent service over the past two years. Although they recently retired from Council, they, along with some other former councillors and sangha members, continue to support our community with their time and energy, thus nurturing the tradition of *dana*, and helping to make dharma teachings freely available to those who wish to hear them. Laura Bourassa and Susan Neden are in charge of Volunteer Co-ordination and Greeting for the Wednesday Sitting Group; Lorraine Weidner of the Tape and Book Library; Susan Wiebe of Financial Records; Kelly Bourassa of the RIMC Mailing List; Chris Gilboy, Maureen McKenzie, Brian Brunskill and others of Postering; Gerald Marchildon of Tape Copying and Labeling; Shauna McFadden of the Phone Tree and E-mail Distribution; Barb Bell of Co-ordinating RIMC Social Events; Susan Neden of Recording Sangha Council Minutes; and Maureen McKenzie of Registration for Meditation Classes. Jill Forrester and Maureen McKenzie are the RIMC Contact Persons. The hard work so generously given in these ways is deeply appreciated. Anyone wishing to offer knowledge and skills in these or other equally useful forms of service should please contact Laura Bourassa (584-5147).

### **Regina Insight Meditation Community**

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