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

Number 11    Newsletter of the Regina Insight Meditation Community    Fall/Winter/Spring/Summer/Fall 2008 – 2009

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## Our Wisdom Heart

Sharda Rogell

We often hear the beautiful analogy that the Buddhist path is like two wings of a bird – one wing is wisdom and the other compassion and both are needed to fly. The wing of wisdom refers to the revelation of emptiness in which nothing stands by itself alone and nothing exists independently. This understanding points to the insubstantial or empty nature of all things and gives us a feel for our non-separate interconnection with everyone and everything. When one knows this, true compassion naturally arises in one's heart for the suffering of all beings that act in ways that cause harm to others out of ignorance of their true condition. When we are disconnected from our intrinsic nature everything seems so personal. Not being able to see clearly, we get caught in painful patterns of defending and reacting, often acting out in ways that are destructive to ourselves and others. The energy of compassion can move us into action to alleviate this suffering because we understand how unnecessary and pointless this pain is.

The word compassion is used to describe both the genre of the heart qualities as well one of the *brahma viharas* specifically.

The *brahma viharas* are the beautiful states of mind-and-heart that are expressed from our realization of emptiness. When we are not caught in our view of separation and we sense our loving connection to all things, we naturally and effortlessly feel and express these different qualities of the heart. We might think of them as different flavours of the heart just like different flavours of ice cream. *Metta*, or lovingkindness, is the lightness of love that wishes for all beings to be happy and well. *Karuna*, or compassion, is love turned toward pain and wishes for beings to be free of their pain. *Mudita*, or empathetic joy, is the heartfelt happiness for other people's success and good fortune. *Upekkha*, or equanimity, is the firm balance of mind that grounds and centres us and protects us from our reactivity and grasping.

Each one is a profound expression of deeply knowing what's true. They are expressions of our intrinsic nature itself shining through our humanity. I call this manifestation our wisdom heart as it illuminates our path with clarity and love. In this way, these heart qualities act as inner supports as we walk our own path to freedom. They hold us and give us a ground to stand on as we walk deeper into the unknown territory of our own heart and mind.

Walking a spiritual path is very challenging for most of us. Without the cultivation of the inner support of our wisdom heart it is nearly impossible. When we begin walking the Buddhist path, we are asked to take refuge in the Buddha, the dharma and the sangha. Taking refuge can give us a sense of a ground as we let go of the things of this world as we have known them to be. In the beginning, we believe that external things – people we love, our job, money, things we own, food or sex will bring us lasting happiness and we believe our task is to line up enough of these things and keep them in place as best as we can. In other words, hold on to them for dear life. A lot of

our energy can go into doing this, maybe even all of it. But as we walk the spiritual path, we realize that the happiness we are truly seeking cannot be found in anything external but only within our own heart and mind. Realizing this, we begin to let go and without a place of refuge, we can feel like everything will be taken away. Since this feeling can be unbearable, we can easily reconstruct ourselves back into our old behaviours. Letting go in this way requires a fair amount of trust. Taking refuge gives us somewhere to place our trust. With some sense of safety, it's easier to let go, and when we do, this drops us into our heart and allows our heart to awaken. As it does so, the

expressions of *metta*, *karuna*, *mudita* and *upekkha* become the aftertaste of this awakening.

### The Brahma Viharas – The Four Boundless States of Mind –

#### Lovingkindness (*Metta*):

May all beings be happy and peaceful.  
May all beings be healthy and well.  
May all beings be safe and protected from harm.  
May all beings be at ease.

#### Compassion (*Karuna*):

May all beings be free of suffering.  
May we open to each other's suffering with kindness  
and sensitivity.

#### Selfless Joy (*Mudita*):

May your happiness and joy never leave you.

#### Equanimity (*Upekkha*)

No matter how much I may wish for things to be  
otherwise, things are as they are.  
May I accept things as they are.

Inner and outer support is critical for us as we walk the path. We draw on this support through formal practices, dharma teachings, our teachers and our friends. The *brahma viharas* are an important form of practice that can give us the support we need to keep walking through the difficult territory of our lives. When we undertake this practice, we are both cultivating and strengthening these heart qualities that are aspects of our intrinsic nature, and at the same time, recognizing and becoming familiar with the way they manifest within and through us. As our sense of being a separate and isolated entity starts to

dissolve, we begin to see reality as it actually is and our sense of connection to everything becomes more apparent. We might say that we actually walk into our own heart and therefore the boundless heart of the universe at the same time. We walk into our own love and joy and the boundless love and joy that are everywhere and ever present. At some point, we fall into this ocean of love and joy and we don't come out. For why would we? Then our life becomes an expression of this awakening of our intrinsic nature without any effort at all.

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## From Dana

### The Blessing of a Benefactor

I have chosen to write about the special relationship of the benefactor. In the lovingkindness (*metta*) practice, the benefactor is a being who is very special to us. They have been good to us in some way or have taken us under their wing. They are someone whom we respect and love and for whom we easily feel gratitude. Our relationship with a benefactor is very easy and loving as very little stands in the way of the flow of love. Most of us have one or more benefactors in our lives – a person, or perhaps a pet, or even a special tree, or a rock. What is important is the relationship we have with our benefactor and how it opens our heart to unconditional love.

As I reflect on this theme, I realize that the benefactor has been a valuable part of my unfolding practice and my life. In my metta practice, especially in the beginning, bringing my benefactor to mind was the only thing that kept me going since I found it hard to discover a place in my heart for myself. Experiencing that simple love for my benefactor, who was my teacher Sharda, I allowed my heart to open enough to find a

measure of caring for myself. Recently I was leading one of my Healing Through Meditation groups and offered a *metta* meditation from *Radical Acceptance* by Tara Brach. In it she suggests that when we cannot find a place of care for ourselves, we can imagine seeing ourselves through the benefactor's eyes. This can be a doorway to discover our love for ourselves through the love that another has for us.

Sharda has been my unquestionable benefactor since the beginning of my practice and now I have the blessing of another such being in my life – Manni, my seven-year-old grandson. How beautiful it is to consider the truth of our connection and how easy it was at first to miss the fullness of his impact on my heart! I certainly know that I love him dearly and that he brings great delight to my heart. Yet, there is so much more. When I am with him, my heart cannot resist being open even at times when I feel momentarily irritated as one often does when with a child. At such times, I see that whatever I am feeling is held in unconditional love and my heart stays open. I also know how

easily my heart constricts in other situations when I feel anger, hurt or resentment. Until recently, I have been assuming that my openness of heart has simply been because Manni is a child, but my sense now is that he awakens in my heart the capacity for unconditional love.

Each week, usually on Fridays, I take Manni out for lunch. It's our "lunch date," as he calls it. It's a hurry to say the least as we have only one hour from the time I pick him up from his school



until I drop him back again. His favourite place is Pasta Prima as they make really great pineapple pizza (ham and pineapple pizza, without the ham!) not to mention the strawberry sundae with whipped cream and chocolate sauce that follows. One day not long ago, Manni climbed into the car and began to tell me about how much he loves his new kitten, Mario. Mario, only 10 weeks old, had just started living with Manni and Fran, Manni's mum, about a

week before. I, along with almost everyone who sees Mario experienced the urge to take him home. He really is adorable! Manni tells me about one of his friends who came over the evening before and wanted to tuck Mario in her coat and take him home with her. Then Manni says to me, "I love Mario so much I want to steal him from myself! I love Mario so much I feel like there are so many hearts coming out of me, I feel like I could burst. And there's the heart inside of me, too". Hearing him say this was truly a very special moment for me. Even as I recall this story, I get tears of happiness in my eyes. Hearing Manni express so beautifully and simply this boundless unconditional love that exists in our hearts was very dear. It's so important to be reminded that the heart can love so much. Manni is teaching me about the capacity of my own heart.

When I am with Manni, I find a wonderful simplicity. I can relax into an unquestionable love that binds us and that opens me to a deeper place of unconditional love. I feel very blessed to have this beautiful little blonde-haired benefactor in my life. Now I see that bringing awareness to the nature of our relationship can only be the cause of further expressions of unconditional love. Manni's presence somehow reminds me of the nature of my own heart and of the possibility that the love in my heart can grow to embrace all living beings. What a blessing!

## On the Way

*Rob Cocarell*

sure as the river rollin'  
me, I'm on the way  
from the path of evolution  
it's impossible to stray.

what fear, pain, sorrow  
apathy, isolation?  
always do I return open hearted  
under star and sun

can't help and curse the folly  
of a world seemingly crazed  
but slow down even a moment  
in the heart pure joy ever blaze.

to encourage skillful vision  
I seek wise company  
and the steady, sublime example

of the sun-basking tree.

how, now, to interpret  
Lila's playful dance?  
me, I'm 'a kick it back and shake a leg  
in a loose but ready stance.

*Writer's Note: These are lyrics to a reggae song I wrote a few months ago as a playful affirmation of the ever-present joy of the heart.*

## A Lesson in Compassion

*Debbie Saal*

I recently visited a Korean War Veteran as part of my volunteer job. This 79-year-old gentleman told me about joining the army as a 17-year-old boy. He joined the army to live, not to kill. Like many young men, he needed work, food and a place to live, so he signed up.

He didn't share any details about the actual fighting in Korea. Rather, he told me about a personal battle that took place in the barracks during army training. I listened in disbelief as he described how at night a group of his army buddies, his so called comrades, would gang up and sexually assault him and other young innocent soldiers.

I was in shock. I could not take in what I was hearing. How could such a thing happen to this man? How could this horror be true? My head was not processing this information but my heart knew it to be true. The look in this man's eyes revealed truth.

He didn't talk too much about the after-effects of his personal battle before going to war except to say that for five years afterwards he could not sleep at night.

Our visiting time was soon over. It was time for me to leave. I barely managed to say goodbye.

I kept busy for the rest of the day so I wouldn't have to think about how this gentle man had been wounded by his pre-war and war experiences.

It wasn't until some hours later as I was getting off the bus to walk home that I remembered our visit. The tears flowed as I uncorked the mix of sadness, anger, frustration and sympathy that swirled inside me. Questions battled in my brain. How can this happen? How does one survive? How can I help this man? What could I say? What could I do? I felt inadequate and helpless.

I did not know how to process this heavy information. I did not know what to think. I did not know what to do. I was having my own inner battle.

At other times when I have been overwhelmed and confused I have reached out to the Tree Spirit. Trees have been my strongest supporters and the best listeners that I know of. As I walked towards a familiar old elm tree I pleaded for help. An answer came instantly in the form of a word. The word was "Compassion".

As I continued walking and crying, the word "compassion" started to calm me. Compassion helped me realize that I could not take his pain away, that I could not change his situation, and that I could not make it all better.

"Compassion" helped me understand that I could not carry his pain as I had been doing all day. Compassion is what I could give. Compassion is what I could do. Compassion is how I could help.

For the first time, I really understand what compassion means. Compassion means to care deeply about another's pain and suffering and to wish for it to be lessened.

In the past I have felt compassion for others many times but I have carried their pain inside me, not knowing what to do.

With my lesson in compassion today I now know that I can take on others' pain, hold it in my heart, and send it out as compassion.

I can help by sending compassion to others and to myself.

## Self-Forgiveness and the Brahma Viharas: An Ongoing Practice

*Chris Gilboy*

*Crack!*

The sound of the shot reverberated through the cool clear air of the African morning.

My heart beating fast, I ran to where the dik-dik lay on the ground, warm, its blood still slowly flowing into the soil beneath it, its eyes quickly glazing as its life-force left it. Not far away, its mate stood, startled by what was happening, seemingly less concerned about its own safety than about waiting for its companion

I picked the dik-dik's limp, still-warm body up, already tasting in my mind what would become part of my breakfast and dinner for the next two or three days.

When this meat supply ran out, I would return to the same place, again in the early dawn, and usually find the dik-dik's mate there, seemingly lost in its loneliness. Its meat would end up on my plate for the following few meals.

Years later, I read somewhere that dik-diks are monogamous, essentially mating for life.

Gradually, over time, as the preciousness of life becomes increasingly apparent to me, memories of the killing, the destruction of beauty, the tearing asunder of close connection, bring an underlying fabric of remorse that lies deep within me into my conscious awareness. This remorse is not only for my having killed the dik-diks, but for my having purposefully and cold-heartedly extinguished – at one time or another – the lives of many birds, fish, and insects, and for a multitude of other unwise actions in which I have engaged. Whilst this remorse does not weigh me down so heavily that it becomes debilitating, it is present as an undertone of sadness, shame and guilt for the harm

I have done to beings that were just going about their own business.

Now, when I look back at the unskilful, harmful actions that I have performed – especially when a youth and in my twenties – I realize how all-embracing was my ignorance, how heartless I was in my greed for meat or for beautiful bird wings to add to my collection, how intensely irritated I was by the flies that swarmed around my face, landing to dab up my sweat with their proboscises. Realizing this, my compassion for myself as that ignorant young person stirs within me ..... "May you be free from suffering, and may all beings be free from suffering ....."

The thought arises: "May the beings I have so intentionally harmed through my ignorance and delusion – along with all those beings I have unintentionally harmed – forgive me, and may I forgive myself for the harm I brought upon them and upon myself."

The question then arises: "Has that ignorant young person changed?"

I like to think the answer is "Yes," now that I no longer have the same level of ignorance that I had then, am well aware of greed, hatred and delusion when they are clearly obvious, and am increasingly aware of these three defilements in their more subtle manifestations. I find the Buddha's advice to his son, Rahula, helpful when he urged Rahula to reflect on his bodily, verbal and mental actions before, during and after carrying them out whilst performing them, and after completing them. If, at any stage, they prove to be harmful to oneself or to others, he recommended that Rahula stop doing them right away and not to do them again in the future.

The ethical precepts are wonderful guides leading toward skilful behaviour. For example, I find the precept to refrain from killing any sentient being helpful when I'm tempted to crush a biting mosquito out of existence – a common temptation in Saskatchewan summers! When sentient beings are annoying, like the flies were in those far-off days when I was working in Ethiopian cattle country, I now find loving-kindness (*metta*) practice truly useful and effective – albeit not always easy – in helping to transform my aversion into relatively non-reactive acceptance ..... “May all beings be happy and peaceful .....

As, through meditation, self-forgiveness, compassion, and loving-kindness practice, I grow more at peace with myself and with all around me, I find that my heart sings more frequently, and that my appreciation of beauty, kindness, peace, physical well being and so on surfaces more readily. Experiencing increasing appreciative joy in my heartmind, I wish similar joy to others ..... “May your happiness and joy never leave you .....

My hope is that, as I learn valuable lessons from, and reconcile myself with, my myriad unskilful actions – in particular from clearly seeing the harmful consequences of those actions – I grow a little wiser, gentler, more compassionate, more forgiving, more loving, more joyful, and more balanced in my relationship to all around me. The conditions that, especially in my younger days, affected my decisions, my priorities, my intentions, have changed and continue to transform as I try to align my thoughts, words and actions ever closer to the Buddha's teachings. And I try to stay as alert and watchful as I can to keep greed, hatred and delusion, which I recognize are still my close companions, from exerting too much influence on what I think, say, and do .....” My (*Your*) happiness and my (*your*) sorrow depend upon my (*your*) intentions and actions, not upon your (*my*) wishes for me (*you*).....”

## Into

*Cherie Westmoreland*



into the diamond heart of things  
a surprise, really, on this mystery surface  
pretending to be a blue tree with ruffled bark  
or a sky high view of some exotic  
tropical flood plain

into the diamond heart of things  
where we see beyond the appearance  
beyond the false certainty  
into the place where we stand  
images flying in and by  
like filaments of prayer flags  
blessing us in their  
disintegration transformation

## VIPASSANA EVENTS

### THE SASKATCHEWAN SCENE, 2009

- October 25** Day of Mindfulness, 9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., at 2672 Robinson Street, Regina
- November 21 and 22** “Love and Inclusivity” Insight Meditation Retreat, non-residential, with **Sharda Rogell** in the Rotunda, Room 216, Language Institute Building, University of Regina main campus; *dana* retreat; please pre-register by calling Chris Gilboy at 522-0616
- December 31** RIMC’s annual midnight *Metta* Sitting to bring in the New Year; details to be announced

### THE SASKATCHEWAN SCENE, 2010

- January 14 to 28** **Sharda Rogell**, in keeping with her intention to serve RIMC will be in Regina – she will lead the Wednesday Night Sitting Group, have time for some individual meetings and a class for senior students
- January 23 and 24** Insight Meditation and Inquiry, non-residential retreat, with **Sharda Rogell**, in Regina; *dana* event; details to be announced
- April 15 to 18** Insight Meditation Retreat, residential, with **Howard Cohn** at Wood Acres Retreat Centre, Moose Jaw; registration fee plus *dana*; details to be announced
- September 21 through October 7** **Sharda Rogell** (same as for January 14 to 28, 2010)
- September 25 to October 2** Insight Meditation Retreat, residential, with **Sharda Rogell** at Wood Acres Retreat Centre, Moose Jaw; registration fee plus *dana*; details 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.



**Dana Anjali** has been practising Insight Meditation since 1988. She is the Founder and Dharma Guide of the Regina Insight Meditation Community. In 2003, she graduated from the Community Dharma Leader program at Spirit Rock in California. Dana teaches Healing through Meditation classes and supports people in their ongoing meditation practice.

**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. See “The Saskatchewan Scene, 2009” for information which is also distributed by e-mail and posted on our website.

**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 practitioner who has been authorized to facilitate by Sharda and Dana; 45-minute sitting, about 50 minutes for discussion, and 10 minutes for dedication of merit and closing announcements.

**Weekly Sitting Groups (Saskatoon)** Two opportunities for group meditation in the Insight tradition are currently offered in Saskatoon; both offer open invitations to anyone interested in attending them:  
**Sunday Morning Facilitated Group:** Saskatoon resident Community Dharma Leader, Jennifer Keane, leads a 30-minute guided meditation session at 10:00 a.m. Jennifer follows the meditation with a talk and discussion related to integrating Buddhist teachings and meditation practice into our daily life. The formal session ends at 11:00 a.m. after which everyone is invited to stay for

tea. This group meets at The Refinery, 609 Dufferin Avenue.

**Sunday Evening Peer-led Group:** meets at 7:30 p.m. at renew yoga fitness healing, B2 (lower level) 626 Broadway Avenue. It shares leadership with Jeanne Corrigan, a student of the Dedicated Practitioner Program at Spirit Rock. The last Sunday of each month, Jeanne leads a lovingkindness meditation; the rest of the month leadership comes from willing members, using material from a variety of teachers. A 45-minute meditation is followed by a short reading and discussion. The gathering concludes with social time and refreshments; it normally ends at about 9:15 p.m.

**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); alternatively, visit our website at: [www.reginainsight.ca](http://www.reginainsight.ca)

**Contacts for Saskatoon Insight Meditation Community information:** Doris (306-242-5004); Jennifer (306-652-7663); Jeanne:(306-653-2325); alternatively, visit their website at: [www.saskatooninsight.com](http://www.saskatooninsight.com)

## Love and Inclusivity

*(Sharda's non-residential dana retreat, November 21 and 22, 2009)*

The human heart has an immense capacity to love and care deeply about people and things, yet this love gets blocked by our fixed ideas and beliefs about ourselves, others and our world. Through the practice of mindfulness (a directed, focused attention on our experience) and inquiry, it is possible to bring understanding to these obstacles and to free the heart from its constraints.

In this retreat, through sitting and walking meditation as well as talks, discussion and periods of inquiry (with two or three people), we will explore these issues of the heart.

**All are welcome**

*(please pre-register by calling Chris Gilboy at 522-0616)*

## THE CALGARY/EDMONTON SCENE, 2009

**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, 2009

**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.

## Loving Kindness Through a Sea of Suffering

*Lotus (Harriet Vu)*

In Buddhism, loving-kindness is practised with insight meditation. Years ago, as a student, I first learned of the practice of loving-kindness in the simplest and most profound way during a retreat with Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh. In Vietnam, a country which has its share of sufferings, sorrows and pains stemming from the war, healing was much needed, not just among those who directly experienced extreme hardship, but also among the generation born after the war.

When the war ended, millions of refugees fled Communist Vietnam in the late seventies and early eighties to find freedom. Using small boats, and, therefore, known as the Vietnamese Boat People, many of them experienced the horrors of pirates plundering, killing and raping in addition to the other dangers involved in crossing the South China Sea. More than a million Boat People died in their attempt to escape. Most of those who survived – my father was one of them – had witnessed the deaths of family members, of friends, and of fellow countrymen in the war and then the violent abuse of fellow voyagers from pirate attacks. Survivors who reached refugee camps and, if fortunate, safe new homelands in Europe or North America faced long separations from their families while they adapted to surroundings that were completely foreign to them. As if that wasn't enough, the pains of long-term separation, of adjusting to new ways of life and culture caused many families to break up after they were reunited. Instances of domestic violence, divorce and separation were high among Vietnamese immigrant communities. With little counselling and support for post-traumatic stress, many Vietnamese Immigrants carried into their new homelands pain, anger, hatred for the Communist Government, and fear of losing their culture and way of life in their new homeland. A generation gap grew between children educated in North America and their parents from a war-torn country carrying traumatic memories of atrocities committed during and after the war. Healing was desperately needed within the Vietnamese community because of the presence of so much pain, anger and psychological shock.

Both my parents survived the war and experienced many of these pains. Five years after the war, my father fled Vietnam with two of my brothers and a hundred others on a small boat. When they finally landed in a refugee camp in Pulau Bidong (a Malaysian island), they stayed for a year in cramped and crowded conditions, subsistence living, until eventually arriving in Canada as immigrants. I did not see my father until five years after he reached Canada. As if this pain was not enough, my parents divorced shortly after my family was re-united – a result of my father's alcoholism and infidelity during the five years he had been separated from my mother.

Growing up, I constantly felt my mother's anger toward the Communist Government, the war, the resulting separation from my father which led to his infidelity, and my father himself. I

did not experience the war, but the separation and subsequent divorce of my parents stemming from their experience during and after the war was an ever-constant reason for unhappiness within our home. The pain, displaced anger, sadness and despair were never thoroughly examined. This situation propelled me to seek healing in the Buddhist practice of loving kindness through insight meditation. The teacher from whom I first learned this practice from was Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Zen monk now living in France, who was himself a refugee of the war.

In 1991, I attended a week-long retreat outside Montreal led by Thich Nhat Hanh. We practised awareness of the present moment, and how to be mindful of all the experiences we go through during the retreat. Most importantly for me, I learned to look deeply into the nature of things, and to find compassion even for the evil pirates who had raped, murdered and robbed the Vietnamese Boat People during their flight from Vietnam to find freedom. Thich Nhat Hanh taught us that each of us receives seeds of pains and of ignorance from others around us. We unconsciously accept these seeds and they blossom within us. I am sure that no one as an innocent young child wants to grow up to become pirates, rapists and murderers. But those who do have themselves been abused and victimized until the pain and anger are so strong in them that they act out their suffering as a way of life, perpetuating their pain in others.

The practice of insight meditation is to look deeply within ourselves to discover internally the root of suffering and pain that we carry, and to find that our experiences are not unique and are shared by other people. We see that we, too, have suffered and have unconsciously passed on the seeds of our suffering to others just as the pirates did. The suffering and pains of my people, the Vietnamese Boat People, are not so different from those presently experienced by other people around the world. Wars in Iraq, Palestine and other parts of the world at any given time bring suffering to many inhabitants of our planet. But even those who began the wars had themselves suffered at the hands of others who were also unconscious and who had themselves suffered at the hands of other unconscious people. No one starts a war or conflict because they were happy or contented with what they had. War and conflict always have their roots in people's lack of awareness and understanding of their own anger and suffering.

At the retreat with Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh, I learned of "hugging meditation". I was taught to give and receive a hug while being totally present and aware of myself and the other person without any mental filter, noise or distraction. The participants of the retreat breathed and hugged each other that day, giving love and receiving love for no reason at all. Suddenly the walls between each person fell away. Everyone cried and reached out for each other. There wasn't a dry eye in the room.



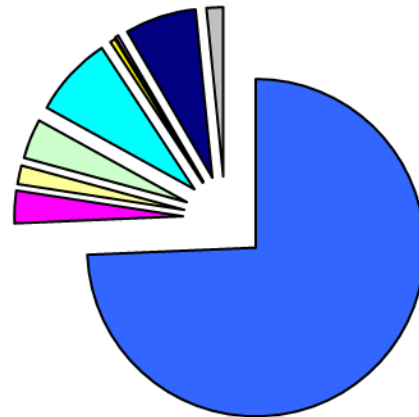
I saw people my mother's age, my grandparent's age, all becoming like young children crying in the arms of others. The acknowledgement and unconditional acceptance of each other as human beings with our pains, regrets, anger, and sadness came flooding out in that moment. We were all victims: victims of the war, of circumstances, of each other, and of ourselves; victims of ignorance and of the lack of awareness to see that love is always present and accessible to each of us.

In being loving and compassionate to others, we first have to learn to give ourselves and others the gift of clarity. The practice of meditation provides us with opportunities in each moment of our lives to give this gift to ourselves and others, because each moment that we are aware, suffering is not present, and without awareness, there is only suffering.

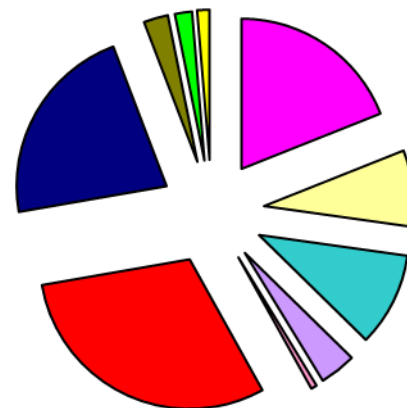
### RIMC Finances and Retreats, 2008

Chris Gilboy

FILL	2008 REVENUE	AMOUNT
	Retreat Surplus	8,758
	Scholarship Fund	366
	Library - Membership Fees	210
	Library - CD Sales	446
	Classes	910
	Community Donations	62
	Inquiring Mind - Donations	37
	Sharda's Fund - Donations	805
	Bank Interest	188
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>11,782</b>



FILL	2008 EXPENDITURE	AMOUNT
	Scholarships	1,500
	Library	652
	Dana's Development	800
	Inquiring Mind Donation	312
	Buddhist Website Donation	50
	Sharda's Living Expenses	2,400
	Sharda's Retirement Fund	1,733
	Dharma Seed Donations	208
	Website	147
	Other Running Costs*	105
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>7,907</b>



**Table 1: Pie diagrams showing RIMC revenues and expenditures for 2008.**

The revenue figures for 2008 show the retreat surplus to be the major source of RIMC income. It was followed by income from registration for Dana's classes, donations to Sharda's retirement fund, sales of CDs of dharma talks delivered at the year's retreats, and donations to the scholarship fund. Our highest expenditure was our contribution toward covering some of Sharda's ongoing California living expenses incurred during the four weeks that she spent here in Saskatchewan 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).

Retreat (2008)	Revenue	Expenses	Net	# Retreatants	Scholarships	# Scholarships
1. Sharda Rogell (January 12 and 13) [NR] <i>Meditating Together</i>	3,640.00	1,658.73	1,981.27	49	0	0
2. Howard Cohn (April 10 to 13) [R] <i>Realizing the Four Noble Truths in Real Time</i>	8,880.00	6,760.91	2,119.09	36	140.00	1
3. Joanne Broatch (June 6 to 8) [NR] <i>The Mind's Eye and Its Lens</i>	2,285.00	1,738.05	546.95	30	100.00	2
4. Sharda Rogell (September 20 and 21) [NR] <i>Walking a Wise Path</i>	2,435.00	1,145.29	1,289.71	72	0	0
5. Sharda Rogell (October 3 to 10) [R] <i>The Art of True Meditation</i>	13,570.00	10,748.84	2,821.16	26	1,260.00	5
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>30,810.00</b>	<b>22,051.82</b>	<b>8,758.18</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>1,500.00</b>	<b>8</b>

As in the past few years, our retreats are our predominant financial (and logistical) activities. In 2008, we held five retreats – two residential [R], Howard Cohn's in April and Sharda's week-long in October, and three non-residential [NR], Sharda's in January and September, and Joanne Broatch's in June. They had a total financial turnover of almost \$31,000, and were attended by a total of 213 retreatants. Eight scholarships totaling \$1,500 were awarded.

Age-dependent reductions for retreat registration fees were, upon request, implemented. Retreatants who are older than 65 or younger than 32 years of age qualify for this consideration.

In another exciting experiment, we offered our first *dana* retreat. Attendees were given the opportunity to make separate donations to Sharda and to the RIMC to help cover our running costs. To our great delight and relief, the totals received were generous enough to support Sharda well and to let us meet all our outlays. In addition, the number of retreatants, 72, set a new high for attendance, meaning more people get to hear and practise the Dharma. This certainly proved itself to be a worthwhile new venture, and the result is that our future non-residential retreats will be offered on a purely *dana* basis for as long as they are sufficiently well supported.

### Farewell to Maureen from the RIMC Working Group

*Gail Tiefenbach*

On Saturday, February 21<sup>st</sup>, 2009, the current Working Group, which consists of Susan Wiebe, Brian Brunskill, Chris Gilboy, Gail Tiefenbach, Sandra Brandt and Carol Sexton, along with our Community Dharma Leader, Dana Anjali, met for brunch as we bid Maureen McKenzie a happy retirement from the Working Group.

Maureen has generously contributed many hours of time, energy and kind-hearted wisdom to help develop and maintain the

various activities that RIMC offers to us, not to mention the excellent ginger cookies she often makes for our residential retreats in Moose Jaw.

We send a very big thank you to Maureen, whose humour and deepening wisdom continue to inspire us at Wednesday Night Sittings.

Maureen graciously continues to be a contact on our website for new people interested in information about RIMC.

### Some Insight Meditation Activities in Saskatchewan – the First Nine Months of 2009

*Chris Gilboy*

The calendar of activities for the first nine months of 2009 included:

**February 6 to 8**

“Waking Up in the Midst of It All” Insight Meditation Retreat, non-residential, with **Howard Cohn** at the Seniors' Education Centre, Regina; *dana*; to register, please call Chris Gilboy at 522-0616

**March 29**

Day of Mindfulness, 9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., at 2672 Robinson Street, Regina

**April 19**

Day of Mindfulness, 9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., at 2672 Robinson Street, Regina

**May 9 to 16**

“Our Wisdom Heart” Residential Insight Meditation Retreat with **Sharda Rogell**, at Wood Acres Retreat Centre, Moose Jaw; \$540 (\$500 before April 25<sup>th</sup>) plus *dana*; to register, please call Carol Sexton at 584-9497

**May 23 and 24**

“Joy, Happiness and Celebration” Insight Meditation Retreat, non-residential, with **Joanne Broatch** at Ancient Spirals Retreat Centre, Saskatoon; \$60 plus *dana*; to register, please call Doris Larson at 242-5004 or [dwl Larson@sasktel.net](mailto:dwl Larson@sasktel.net)

**June 7**

RIMC Pot-luck Social Evening starting at 5 p.m. (for 6 p.m.) at 2672 Robinson Street, Regina

**June 19 to 21**

“Head and Heart Together: Bringing Wisdom to the Brahmaviharas” Insight Meditation Retreat, non-residential, with **Venerable Thanissaro Bhikkhu** at the Albert Community Centre, 610 Clarence Avenue South, Saskatoon; free of charge; to register, please contact Xiaoquan at [saskatchewan.kammattana@gmail.com](mailto:saskatchewan.kammattana@gmail.com)

**June 28**

Day of Mindfulness, 9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., at 2672 Robinson Street, Regina

July 17 to 19

“In the Footsteps of the Buddha” Insight Meditation Retreat, non-residential, with **Howard Cohn** at Queen’s House of Retreats, 601 Taylor Street West, Saskatoon; \$135 (\$110 before July 3<sup>rd</sup>) plus *dana*; to register, please call Doris Larson at 242-5004 or [dwl Larson@sasktel.net](mailto:dwl Larson@sasktel.net)

July 26

Day of Mindfulness, 9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., at 2672 Robinson Street, Regina

August 30

Day of Mindfulness, 9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., at 2672 Robinson Street, Regina

September 24 to 27

Insight Meditation Retreat, residential, with **Howard Cohn** at Wood Acres Retreat Centre, Moose Jaw; registration fee plus *dana*; details to be announced

You can see that Saskatchewan has had the good fortune of having had at least six Vipassana retreats in the first nine months of the year. I feel I have been personally fortunate because I was able to go to all of them.

The first was Howard Cohn’s non-residential *dana* retreat at the Seniors’ Education Centre, Regina, in early February. This was the second time RIMC had offered a *dana* retreat, the first having been taught by Sharda in September, 2008, and, like its predecessor, proved very popular, attracting 78 attendees. Two *dana* bowls were put out at these retreats, one for the teacher, the other to help cover retreat expenses. On each occasion, both bowls received generous donations, easily sufficient to ensure RIMC’s continuing to offer non-residential retreats on a *dana* basis.

The second retreat, held in May, was Sharda’s week-long residential at Wood Acres in Moose Jaw. There, 29 retreatants, under Sharda’s gentle and profound guidance, began to awaken to their wisdom heart through developing mindfulness of what’s happening in the present moment and opening to feeling, sensing, knowing themselves and the nature of this existence in ways that are both wise and heartfelt.

The next three retreats, all non-residential, took place in Saskatoon – two organized by the Saskatoon Insight Meditation Community (SIMC), the other by Saskatchewan Kammatthana (a group that practises in the Thai forest tradition of Theravadin Buddhism).

Joanne Broatch, SIMC’s guiding teacher, led the first of them at the Ancient Spirals Retreat Centre in late May with some 30 retreatants present. The retreat was a particularly heart-warming occasion as it marked both the SIMC’s tenth anniversary and Joanne’s commitment to the community.

A month later, Venerable Thanissaro Bhikkhu taught a retreat that focused on wisdom and the brahmaviharas at the Albert Community Centre. It began with a Friday-evening public talk which was attended by about 60 people, the majority of whom attended the rest of the retreat to hear Thanissaro’s teachings, which were recorded and can be heard by accessing the Saskatchewan Kammatthana website at [www.dhammatalks.org/ThanissaroBhikkhuRetreat2009Audio.html](http://www.dhammatalks.org/ThanissaroBhikkhuRetreat2009Audio.html) I was totally delighted to be able to sit Thanissaro’s retreat as I was familiar with many of his writings which I find most helpful in deepening my understanding of the Buddhadharma. Imagine, therefore, my joy at finding many of his books being given freely to anyone who wanted them. I’ve been slowly absorbing them over

the months since the retreat, and am probably about half way through. What an amazing gift Thanissaro has given me and others who benefit from his wisdom and compassion.

Another month later, and it was time to drive to Saskatoon yet again, this time for Howard Cohn’s first retreat in the Bridge City (a popular name for Saskatoon for readers who are not familiar with Saskatchewan). It was held at Queen’s House, which has beautiful, serene areas for walking meditation – with 30 or more people in attendance. Howie’s dharma talks focused on the Buddha’s path of ethics, concentration, mindfulness and love, and on how each of us can move from grasping and attachment to freedom, from confusion to clarity, and from tension to ease.

Howie’s wisdom, ease of being, and keen sense of humour evidently resonated with many in SIMC, for the Saskatoon community was well represented at Howie’s three-day residential retreat, *Loving the House that Ego Built*, in late September at Wood Acres, which was attended by 31 participants. Howie seemed indefatigable, making time to see many attendees for individual interviews, to check in with everyone through group interviews, to give guiding instructions at most sittings, and to deliver inspired and inspiring dharma talks.

RIMC has hosted five Days of Mindfulness in most months when it has not been responsible for organizing a retreat. None has drawn many participants (the range is 2 to about 6 or 7), but I think those who are able to be there find meditating for an extended period with like-minded practitioners in our community a beneficial way of spending three or more hours on an occasional Sunday.

An RIMC Social Gathering took place one evening in early June, and proved to be popular with more than 20 of us sharing food, conversation, and time with each other.

So ..... Saskatchewan has a lot to offer anyone interested in Insight Meditation including, but not limited to, residential and non-residential retreats led by highly experienced and wonderful teachers, opportunities for groups to meet weekly for formal sittings and dharma discussions, meditation classes, and caring communities. The Regina and Saskatoon Insight Meditation Communities are strongly supportive of one another, one manifestation of this being that some of their members are finding established friendships strengthen and new friendships develop.

All this began growing in our province about 16 years ago. I’m fascinated to see what the next 16 years will bring!

## Homage

*(read at the closing circle, Howard Cohn’s September 2009 Retreat in Moose Jaw)*

*Gail Tiefenbach*

Essence of the Buddhas in the three fold times, kind guru, thank you for appearing here in this time and place. Thank you for turning the wheel of the dharma to our understanding. Thank

you for teaching us how to accept and love our egos, for helping us to recognize our inherent buddha nature. May you have a long life and continue to churn samara from its depths.

To Dana and Chris who unfailingly here at home also turn the precious wheel of the dharma according to our varied inclinations, thank you.

I pay homage to all us dharma practitioners who so diligently and joyously learn to "love the house that ego built" so that we can be of benefit in this world.

## RIMC Comings and Goings

*Dana Anjali and Chris Gilboy*

We are delighted to welcome Eliza Bella Howland who was born on the 16<sup>th</sup> April, 2009, to Kinda Kealy and David Howland. Her birth is somehow particularly special as Kinda and David met each other at an RIMC potluck meal some six years ago! We look forward to getting to know Eliza.

The worldly wind that brings us joy is balanced by the wind that brings us sadness as three long-time members of our community head east (Laura and Kelly Bourassa, who have left for Ethiopia) and west (Susan Neden, who now lives in Victoria). We want to take this opportunity to note some of the ways that Susan, Laura and Kelly have supported, and participated in, our sangha. All three served the community by being members of the Sangha Council, which helped Dana guide our community over its years of existence. In addition, both Laura and Susan – as Wednesday Night Sitting Group facilitators – were generous in sharing with many of us what they have learned through their years of dedicated practice.

Laura was, for several years, responsible for finding willing volunteers to undertake whatever community activities needed

people's help. This takes a special kind of person ..... one who is not shy, yet is patiently and good-naturedly persistent so she (or he) neither becomes overly frustrated nor makes her(him)self unpopular. Laura maintained that balance beautifully, as does her successor (Carol Sexton).

Susan was integrally involved with preparing to launch the RIMC website and organized several Community gatherings when, as a group, we were searching for directions in which to focus our energies. She was also a member of the Thursday evening dharma discussion group which has been meeting for many years.

Kelly initially set up our e-tree and our mailing list, and kept them up-to-date for distributing RIMC information either electronically or by snail-mail.

We deeply thank Susan, Laura and Kelly for all the wisdom and energy that they have given to RIMC over the past twelve years or so. The community would not be as it is without their contributions and we wish them happiness and fulfillment wherever their travels take them.

## Our Deep Gratitude to Joanne Broatch

Joanne's June retreat in Saskatoon may be the last time that she teaches in Saskatchewan. As many readers know, Joanne has, since about 1997, been coming to our province – which she obviously loves dearly having lived here many years ago – once or twice a year to lead residential and non-residential retreats. She has,

therefore, been a highly formative and most profound influence on a large number of us who have had the good fortune to hear her teachings. Thank you, Joanne, for nurturing our practice over so many years. We bow deeply to you, and wish you good health and great happiness as you continue to walk your dharma path.

## Connect-ed

Better late than never is becoming one of my mantras – not one that I feel very good about, I have to say – especially after .....*connections*..... contributors had everything in to me by – dare I say it? – the end of April, and many were submitted in February. I offer no excuses, preferring simply to beg for your compassion, and I wish all who look through the pages of this newsletter lots of joy and much benefit from what you find.

Two exciting RIMC innovations that have happened since our last newsletter was posted on our website spring to my mind as I wonder where to focus some attention.

The first is Sharda's month-long stay in Regina last September-October during which she offered two retreats and some individual interviews, led our Wednesday Night Sitting Group for three weeks, and met with a group of her senior students. Her growing commitment to the welfare of the RIMC is truly an amazing benefit that ripples through the entire community. Sharda plans to be here twice in 2010 for about two weeks each (see "*The Saskatchewan Scene, 2010*" on page 6).

The second is the community's offering of its first two *dana* retreats, both non-residential. The first of these retreats was Sharda's in September, 2008 (during her extended stay that I briefly described in the last paragraph), and the second was Howie's last February. Both attracted high attendance (72 and 78, respectively), and both were very generously supported, meaning that we have no hesitation in continuing to offer future non-residential retreats on a *dana* basis for as long as the support remains strong.

I usually suggest a theme and a contribution-deadline for the next newsletter, but am going to refrain from doing that on this occasion. If a theme becomes evident at some point, it will be announced through our e-tree and at Wednesday Night Sitzings.

May your *brahma vihara* practice somehow benefit from what you read in this issue of .....*connections*....., and may all beings be happy, peaceful, and liberated from their suffering.

*Chris Gilboy*