
connections



Number 2.1 Newsletter of the Regina Insight Meditation Community, **Special Retreat Issue** Summer, 2001

Connect-ed

Saturday evening, 26th May: twenty-five members of our wider community (hailing from as far away as Washington State [Sharda, our teacher] and B.C. in the west to Manitoba in the east), gathered for “The Heart of Wisdom” week-long residential retreat at Wood Acres in Moose Jaw. Amongst the sitters, familiarity with the dharma ranged from much to relatively little.

Saturday morning, 2nd June: twenty-five retreatants had their last sit prior to breaking silence. Later, in the closing circle, many gave voice in different ways to some of their experiences. The idea was born that perhaps some who were present might be open to sharing the essence of what the

retreat had meant for them with all of our community through a special issue of “..... connections”

The offerings that follow come from five of those hearts of wisdom (thank you, dear hearts ...). They were born in the stillness of prolonged silent meditation: walking, sitting, standing, lying, eating

I hope that everyone who reads what is written derives great benefit, for those who sit retreats do so for the welfare and happiness not just of themselves, but of all beings everywhere. I also hope that those of you who have not sat a longer retreat may sense the inner depths that can be penetrated, and the joys and challenges that this journey can arouse.

In closing – a reminder to all who wish to contribute to the Fall/Winter issue the topic is “craving and attachment”, and the deadline for receipt of copy is 15th September. We are hoping to add another section to the Fall/Winter issue entitled “The Sangha Speaks” If you have some brief dharma-related observations (one to three short paragraphs) that you think would be of interest and value to others in our community, this will be the space for them.

That's it from me for now. Read and enjoy

Chris Gilboy ☸

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Transformation

1

Moving thru' the shadows,
my feet upon the path;
Coming to a place where there's
no future, there's no past.
I have journeyed to the centre
of a place that I cannot name;
There has been a transformation
and I will never be the same.

2

I have wakened to a nightmare
that I thought I'd never know,
A space so dark and empty
where everything moves slow,
Where time becomes a mirror
that is staring back at me.
Now the words are slowly forming:
How can this be? How can this be?

3

There's a fervor in the knowing
 of this place so stark and deep,
 There no longer is a refuge
 in the sacred space of sleep,
 For the veils are growing thinner,
 all the walls are coming down
 Now there is no separation
 no ground to stand upon.

4

Ah, but I've come to know a freedom
 that I could not know before,
 I have gazed into the water,
 I have opened up the door,
 And I see the shields are shifting
 with the facing of each fear.
 Now the light's a little brighter
 and the vision's coming clear.

5

Oh, I know I'm not the first one
 to journey down this path.
 There are many gone before me,
 and I will not be the last,
 But I'm so grateful to the Mystery,
 the One that I cannot name,
 For there has been a transformation,
 and I will never be the same,
 and I will never be the same.

Joys Dancer ☉

A Little about Nothing / Patience with the Process

For me, the retreat didn't begin the day I arrived in Moose Jaw. It began in my mind the day I signed up for it. After meditating for two years – every day (I like to tell people that part) – I decided I needed to climb a mountain. Silence and meditation for a whole week in residence seemed like a mountain – an honourable challenge.

But it also felt like I was signing my own death warrant. Why would I do this to myself? Why would I voluntarily put myself in a situation where I would be “forced” by a group setting to meditate. After all, my regular meditation practice of half-an-hour everyday was difficult enough. Mountain to climb or not ... here I was signing up for more meditation – every day for seven days, 45 minutes per session, six times per day including walking meditations! Surely, death loomed.

In my pre-retreat panic, I went over some previous deaths during my two modest years of meditation. I had voluntarily given up many patterns of behaviour because I'd lost my taste for them. My taste for approval-seeking had begun to dissolve like sugar stirred in water. My taste for self-criticism now seemed like too much gooey trouble to indulge in.

My taste for judging myself and others no longer held much appeal either.

Changing tastes in my own behaviour was kind of like loving candy floss when I was a kid and then coming to a point where candy floss seemed too sweet. The question that would always arise after I got sick of a behaviour was, “Well, now that I don't like that any more, what am I going to like next?”

I experienced a sense of loss with every thing that changed. I thought I really liked and needed all that stuff and now, more and more, parts of it just felt yucky. How could that be? It seemed all the things that I thought were “me” were now up for grabs.

I worried that after the retreat I would discover something else wasn't the “me” I thought I was. This “me” whom I had come to know and love and rely on, seemed to be phasing out in little bits and chunks. All this extra meditation at the retreat would surely speed up the process – there would be an avalanche. Fear became the operative feeling. If the retreat was going to get me to discover that even more good-old stuff wasn't “me”, how was “I” going to survive?

“Damm, what now?” I thought, “I’ve signed up for a week-long meditation. I’ve paid my money, and I’m going!” I felt stuck out on a limb and I didn’t want to go back to safety. This spiritual warrior boot camp stuff sucked! It put me between a rock and a hard place. Here I was voluntarily giving away all my valuables – except they were no longer valuable.

All this thinking and questioning, and I hadn’t even packed my bag for the retreat yet!

Okay – so I did the retreat. I smuggled in a jar of coffee and a few cokes just to make sure I maintained something of who I was and what I liked – not to mention a fear of no caffeine. The retreat turned out fine. My body, mind and emotions stopped rebelling after a few days. Life seemed precious and beautiful. Meditation became everything.

I settled. And I went home.

At some point after the retreat I asked myself, “So what else in me has died?” I had expected a death of some part of myself and now I wondered what it was. But I could not think of a thing. Weeks went by with the question in the back of my mind. I waited for something to come to light. Then realization finally crept up to me in animated slow motion: *this time, nothing had died.*

What had developed instead was a cool, settled feeling of being comfortable in the period between when something dies and when something new is born – that period of apparent nothingness.

It reminded me of my golf game after I took golf lessons. I played fairly well before the lessons but knew I could be a better player and enjoy the game more if I learned some new techniques. After the lessons my game actually got worse because I was in a period where the old stuff didn’t work and the new stuff needed practice. I hated that phase – I wanted to play better NOW. I was tempted to go back to my good-old golf swing because at least it worked – to a point. But I practised the new techniques anyway, with some degree of patience, because I trusted that eventually it would work. And it did.

My experience with the golf lesson experience seemed to me what I felt like going into the retreat. I feared the death, the falling away, of old behaviours because I understood that new ones took time, practice and patience to come about. I feared how I would handle that time in-between when nothing worked – for sure.

As I continue to practise now, my understanding is that what I really need to do with the void-in-between-feeling is NOTHING. It is totally cool to sit doing nothing with the void, in full trust that something eventually arises out of calm nothingness. I think I am starting to understand that it is the heat of frustration and impatience with the process that throws me off balance ... and really wrecks a good golf swing too!

With much gratitude to the Universe for meditation and golf ...

Gail Tiefenbach ☉

Prairie Sandwich

I’m nestled down
 into the soft spring-green leaves
 of my prairie sandwich.
I like being the filling ...
 ... here ... between earth and blue sky.
Aah ... but we’re a gourmet sandwich ...
This gold prairie greening with spring,
The clouds scudding low ... all at the same height
 ... with bottoms sliced straight and clear ...
 ... as if with the sharpest of bread knives.
Saucy sprigs of flowering wolf willow,
 tender shoots of new sage,
and the sweet joys of Saskatoon
 and chokecherry blossoms ...
 ... spice this delight.

And, oh, did you know?
This sandwich has voices, too ...
A veritable talking sandwich
 ... in the cadences of geese,
 nesting meadow larks, orioles and sparrows,
 not to mention the raucous brown thrasher.
And the wind whispering the precious truth
 of constant change.
And, oh ... yes ... the playful beating
 of the hearts of everything.
It’s the no(t)-self prairie sandwich
at the Heart of Wisdom sidewalk café!

Cherie Westmoreland ☉

My Loneliness, the Land

In preparing to go to the May retreat in Moose Jaw, I knew I was carrying with me a loneliness. Not a specific loneliness for someone or something, but a broader, deeper, free floating loneliness that I had no words for, but a long-term familiarity with. My intent was simply to walk with the loneliness, to feel it, observe it, to allow ... without my usual move to understand (and solve/fix) or to push it away with the counter-argument of how many reasons I have to not feel lonely.

And so I walked (both figuratively and literally) supported by the land. The land, first with the stark loneliness of the wind-swept hills and then the emerging beauty I became aware of as the fear inside me began to settle. By the end of the week, the land was no longer a metaphor for the longing inside to recognize, to honour those parts in me that

are difficult to look at as well as those parts that make my heart sing, but rather I had somehow dissolved into the land. The separation between what I was drawn to, nurtured by ... the trees, shelter from the wind, the river's edge ... and what I felt assaulted, repulsed by ... the barren hills, incessant wind, scrub brush, began to disappear. As my judgments about the land eased, so did my judgments about myself. As my separation from the land dissolved so did the separation from myself.

Six weeks later, I am aware something has shifted inside me. The terrain of my soul has been altered. Coming home to the land was also a coming home to who I am – a work in progress. It is with a lighter step I can now walk with the loneliness that arises.

Susan Neden ☉

The Wind

The wind – rushing, swirling,
Regardless of my presence.
I face into it and close my eyes,
Try to sense its every nuance
The gusts, now so strong,
Now dropping away to momentary stillness;
The sounds,
Now a loud swishing through the grass under my feet,
Now dropping away to a murmur;
The ice-cold raindrops
Sting my bare skin.
I stand in silent awe,
Witness to the wind's supremacy,
Witness to its infinite variety,
Which I dare not start to try to memorize
Lest my mind become clogged with dead junk.

Life – rushing, swirling,
Regardless of humanity's concerns.
I, who am a part of Life,
Can force my way headlong into it,
Opposed by its great strength,
Or can flow swiftly with it,
Floating on its current,
Or, in its midst,
I can stand in silent awe,
Witness to its supremacy,
Witness to its infinite variety,
Which I dare not start to memorize
Lest my mind become clogged with dead junk.

Why the wind?
Why Life?
Why the multitude of shapes, sounds,
Smells, tastes, textures and thoughts?
Are they all momentary manifestations of that Emptiness
In which exists everything:
The great and the small,
The wise and the ignorant,
The cruel and the kind,
The bound and the free,
The possible and the impossible,
The known and the unknown?

So it is that now I play,
Joyful in my inability to answer my questions.

So it is that now I stand in awe,
My back to the rushing, swirling wind,
..... gusting
..... still
..... gusting
..... still
..... gusting

So it is that now I fly with the wind

So it is that now I am the wind

So it is that now all is as it should be

Chris Gilboy ☉