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# connections

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Number 1

Newsletter of the Regina Insight Meditation Community

Fall/Winter, 2000

## LETTER FROM SHARDA

Dear Friends,

I am delighted to be contributing to the first newsletter for RIMC. This newsletter marks the growth of this meditation community over the last six-and-a-half years. I was first invited to come to Regina to teach a retreat in 1994 by Dana White whom I had met in India some years before. Through her dedication to the teachings of the Buddha, founded on her own personal evidence of transformation, she has brought these precious teachings to women and men in Regina and around Saskatchewan in hopes that they will make a difference in their lives as they have in hers. The program presented in this newsletter indicates that, in fact, people have been touched by these teachings over the years and are interested in making them available to anyone who wants to find out for themselves how to be free of pain and suffering in their lives.

When I was in India, one of my teachers told us a story about an old man and wife who had lived in poverty all their lives. One day, the old man went under the house to tinker with something and discovered a bag of gold. Of course he was overjoyed on discovering this, and they were able to change their ways in the last years of their life. Yet, if the gold was under the house the entire time, were they in fact poor, or had they always been rich and just didn't know it until they discovered the gold that was always there? In the same way, it could be said that we are living in a house that seems in disrepair and rundown. But if we look deeply, we may discover an abundance of riches has been there all along. We just haven't bothered to look! The teachings of the Buddha give us a map to help us find this pot of gold. The Buddha said that if you follow this map, you will be free of this painful existence once and for all. You can be free in this very life. You do not have to wait for the next life (if in fact there is one). That which is truly exquisite can be discovered right here where you already are, without even changing the outer conditions in which you live. In other words, you can stay in the same house.

Dana chose to stay in Regina to do her work and, as the Dharma guide, gives her time and energy to help people in the area practise the Buddhadharma. As the guiding teacher of RIMC, I will give support to her and the community of practitioners in any way that I can. I have recently moved to Seattle, Washington, as a teacher for Seattle Insight Meditation Society. This will allow me to come to Regina more frequently than I have in the past. I am interested in working with Dana and the members of the Council (the group of

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committed people who are responsible for the decisions of RIMC) to find ways to build and strengthen the community. It is through the support of one another that each person finds strength to do this difficult work. Therefore, it is of prime importance that the community itself is strong. The collective strength of the group impacts each of its members, just as the strength of the members impacts the group as a whole. Each is dependent on the other and, in this way, each of us is responsible

for one another's happiness. The more we live with the understanding of the interdependent nature of all things, the more we can help each other live in peace and harmony.

May each of us find the riches within our own hearts. May we also have the strength to help all beings live a life filled with happiness and joy.

With love,

Sharda Rogell \*

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## DANA WHITE: A PRACTICE TAKES ROOT

It seems appropriate for this first Regina sangha newsletter to introduce everyone to Dana White, our Dharma guide, without whose love for the Dharma, and vision of sharing it with others, "connections" might not now be before you.

In 1987, when Dana was working as a counsellor at the Contemporary Women's Program in Regina, she discovered a very strong interest in Eastern philosophy and religion. She applied for a six-month leave of absence from her job and set off on a journey to South East Asia in search of somewhere that she could learn meditation. Thailand was high on her list of places to visit. Soon after arriving there, she traveled north to Chiang Mai where she found a forest monastery on the edge of the city. For a month, she went to the monastery daily, hearing the teachings of the Buddha for the first time from a German monk and several other fellow meditators who were there. She began her meditation practice by using instructions found in a book. To her surprise, she resonated very deeply with the Buddha's teachings (called the Dharma).

Intrigued by this experience and wanting to deepen her understanding and practice, she traveled south to attend a ten-day vipassana (insight meditation) retreat offered to westerners by the monks at the

monastery of Wat Suan Mokh. The retreat schedule was rigorous, 4:00 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. each day. From beginning to end, the retreat was a struggle. Dana was facing herself directly for the first time and had little support to do so. Neither group nor individual interviews were built into the schedule, so retreatants were very much on their own. Dana did not have a strong affinity for the teachers, yet still felt very much connected to the teachings and, by the end of the retreat, resolved to continue the practice on her own.



Sharda (left) and Dana (right) after the May 2000 Retreat, Moose Jaw.

At this time, Dana's fascination with meditation turned her leave of absence into a full-fledged resignation. Dana moved to Indonesia, continued her meditation practice daily, and attempted to integrate the Buddha's teachings into her everyday life. She hoped to find the guidance of a

teacher along the way, but was still very much on her own with her practice. She discovered what the Buddha meant in his teachings about suffering as, for the first time, she could see clearly the suffering in her own life – suffering that manifested as doubt, fear, loneliness, judgement and dissatisfaction. Even though the process was painful, Dana found relief in finally connecting with this truth. She spent October and

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November of that year trekking in Nepal where she learned the power of taking one step, one moment, at a time.

When Dana was in Thailand, she had heard about an annual retreat in Bodhgaya, India, the place where the Buddha attained enlightenment. Because the retreat was taught by western lay teachers with a western perspective, she felt drawn to participate. She arrived in Bodhgaya in early January and attended the three-week retreat. Here she found her teacher, Sharda Rogell. Sharda was leading the retreat along with Christopher Titmuss and several other teachers. Together they peered into Dana's experience. It wasn't an easy process, but with Sharda's strong support and guidance this became a time of growth and exploration for Dana despite the numerous doubts and fears she had about her capacity to face herself. She recognized the power of the silence and the meditation technique to unravel her pain and point to the truth. No longer was bringing mindfulness practice into the centre of Dana's life questionable, for the Dharma had begun to speak to both her heart and mind.

After the retreat Sharda suggested that Dana leave Asia and go to Totnes (where Sharda was living at the time) in Devon, England, to live at the Barn, a farming retreat community. The Barn provided a wonderful opportunity to residents to integrate practice with working on the land and living in community. There, over a six-month period, Dana was able to assimilate her understandings gained from her Asian experiences and deepen her meditation practice. She continued to meet regularly with Sharda. Upon leaving the Barn, Dana became a manager at Gaia House, a nearby Insight meditation retreat centre, where she stayed for five months. She then settled in Totnes, continuing to enrich her practice through contact with friends in the local community, through retreats, and through her continued contact with Sharda and the other teachers who lived locally. It was now 1991.

That winter, Dana travelled back to Bodhgaya both to attend the retreat and to assist the managers. From there, Sharda and Dana traveled to Lucknow to spend several weeks with Poonjaji, the teacher with whom Sharda had previously spent a few months and who had become very important to her. Dana, too, was profoundly touched by her experience with Papaji (as he was affectionately known), experiencing freedom in a tangible way for the first time. But her

visit was unexpectedly interrupted when she learned her father was terminally ill. Within two days she arrived back in Regina. Her father died a week later. At the same time, Dana discovered that she had hepatitis. The next months were spent in the cold winter recovering from the illness.

After four months, just weeks before she was to return to England, she met Chris Gilboy. At this point, Totnes had become her home base, but this emerging relationship called that into question. Chris was firmly anchored in Regina with his career and his two half-grown daughters. Dana chose to return to England as planned, but before flying to India to manage at the January retreat in Bodhgaya once again, she returned to Regina to be with Chris and his daughters. Now she had two loves, the Dharma and Chris. Feeling confident that she could nourish both these loves, she decided to move back to Regina in the spring of 1993.

Not knowing anyone in Regina who was actively practising vipassana meditation, she missed the connections with her community in England and Asia. Needing to nurture her own practice and eager to share what she had learned, Dana set about building a community in Regina. She found a friend who had some experience with insight meditation and they arranged to sit together once a week. Within a month, five women were sitting weekly. This was the beginning of the Wednesday Night Sitting Group. In 1994, she convinced her teacher, Sharda to come to Saskatchewan to lead a retreat. Twenty-nine people attended the weekend at Camp McKay, a church camp on Round Lake, and fourteen stayed for another three days. Ever since, Dana has seen to it that retreat opportunities have been regularly offered. She has operated out of tents, a Benedictine monastery, schools and private homes. Retreat lengths have ranged from one day to a week and attendance has been as high as 45 people.

Convinced by her own experiences, Dana works hard to facilitate people's integration of retreat activity with their daily lives. She has been instrumental in implementing weekly sitting groups, discussion groups, mindfulness days and introductory classes. She has recently been accepted into the Community Dharma Leader Training Program offered by Spirit Rock Meditation Center. This training program, which will begin in January 2001, will support her in

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## VIPASSANA EVENTS: THE SASKATCHEWAN SCENE

### 2000

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- September 28 to November 2    Introductory Class with *Dana White* in Regina (Thursdays)
- October 29                        Day of Mindfulness with *Dana White* in Regina
- November 7 to December 12    Introductory Class with *Dana White* in Moose Jaw (Tuesdays)
- November 18 and 19            Non-residential partial Weekend with *Dana White* in Saskatoon
- November 25 and 26            Non-residential Weekend with *Dana White* in Regina
- December 4                      Public Talk, *Sharda Rogell*, in Regina
- December 10                     Day of Mindfulness with *Dana White* in Moose Jaw

### 2001

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- February 1                        Public Talk, *Sharda Rogell*, in Regina
- February 2 - 4                    Non-residential Weekend with *Sharda Rogell* in Regina
- February 6 to March 13        Introductory Class with *Dana White* in Regina (Tuesdays)
- March 11                         Day of Mindfulness with *Dana White* in Regina
- March 23 - 25                    Residential Weekend with *Joanne Broatch* (from Vancouver) at St. Peter's Abbey (Muenster)
- April 19 to May 24              Introductory Class with *Dana White* in Regina (Thursdays)
- May 20                            Day of Mindfulness with *Dana White* in Regina
- May 26 to June 2                Residential Retreat, "*The Heart of Wisdom*", with *Sharda Rogell* at Wood Acres (Moose Jaw); maximum of 30 participants
- June 22 - 24                     Non-residential Weekend with *Joanne Broatch* (from Vancouver) in Regina
- July 16                            Public Talk, *Sharda Rogell*, in Regina
- August                            Summer Break
- September 13                    Public Talk, *Sharda Rogell*, in Regina
- September 14 - 16              Non-residential Weekend with *Sharda Rogell* in Regina
- October 2 to November 6        Introductory Class with *Dana White* in Regina (Tuesdays)
- October 28                        Day of Mindfulness with *Dana White* in Regina
- November 9 - 12                Residential Retreat with *Rodney Smith* (from Seattle) at Wood Acres (Moose Jaw)

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**Retreats:** require pre-registration; if you are on our regular mailing list, details of residential retreats will be mailed two to three months before the event. Please contact us if you want more details of mindfulness days or non-residential weekends, or wish to be placed on the mailing list.

**Introductory meditation classes:** require pre-registration; dates may be changed and extra classes added (Regina and Moose Jaw) if necessary; please contact us for up-to-date information.



## VIPASSANA EVENTS: THE SASKATCHEWAN SCENE (continued)

**Weekly Sitting Group, Regina:** Wednesdays throughout the year, 7:30 to 9:00 p.m.; 2672 Robinson Street; Dana White will lead whenever possible.

**Mindfulness Practice Days:** Held in Regina, one Sunday each month, starting October 22; open to those who have insight meditation experience; self-led; include sitting and walking meditation periods; please contact Josephine (565-2883) or Jill (522-5333) for details.

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

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## VIPASSANA EVENTS: THE CALGARY SCENE

2001

February 9 - 13 Women's Vipassana Retreat with *Joanne Broatch* (from Vancouver)  
June 24 - 29 Residential retreat with *Bhikku Sona* (from Birken Forest Monastery, B.C.)  
October 26 to November 4 Residential Retreat with *Venerable Bhante Gunaratana*

**Sitting Group:** Second and fourth Sundays of each month.

**Contact for all information:** Barbara (403-243-9697)

### Introducing:

Members of the Sangha Council, which guides the Regina Insight Meditation Community.

Barb Bell	Jill Forrester
Kelly Bourassa	Chris Gilboy
Laura Bourassa	Veronica Marner
Jo Browne	Shauna McFadden
Pat Cavanaugh	Dana White
Patrick Close	Susan Wiebe

The Council is deeply grateful to Linda Harcourt and Cherie Westmoreland who are leaving after sharing our first year together.

### What is 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.

## COMMUNITY: THE BEGINNING IS THE END

Where does community start and finish?

For all of us, in our earliest experiences of our lives, community starts with family. A few days, weeks, months or years after our birth, it extends to friends and then, perhaps, to fellow students and teachers at school. Still later, it may include colleagues in the workplace and members of societies and clubs which attract our interest. We gradually become aware of an expanding world – strangers who pass us by in the street of our home town; politicians who are nothing more to us than names in a newspaper or a picture on a TV screen but whose decisions affect our lives for better or worse; myriads of faceless, nameless people who suffer from drought, famine, ethnic violence, oppression, flood, geological hazard or other disaster; past generations of heroes, heroines, villains, and ordinary folk; future generations for whose welfare we are responsible; and a great many other categories of human society. We become aware, too, of an expanding universe as astronauts take their first perilous, costly journeys into space and as some of us reflect on the possibility of the existence of life – intelligent life, even – on other planets.

We realize, too, often from an early age, that community involves more than other humans, for animals, birds and fish are accepted deep into our hearts. We play with and care for some of these creatures in our homes. Others of them are geographically more removed, but strongly present in our consciousness as they are threatened by extinction – plants as well as animals. Plants! We ultimately depend upon them for our own existence. They, too, are an intrinsic part of our wider community.

In general, the strength of our connections with each of these various categories of community

differs for each of us. For some, family bonds are beautiful, unbreakable. For others, friendships are the most important. For yet others, disillusioned with the vagaries of humankind, animals bring comfort and peace-of-mind. Broadly speaking, for most of us, the strength of our connections weakens as the remoteness of the various categories from our moment-to-moment experience increases.

When we contemplate our connections with our widest community, it is sometimes rewarding to try to equalize their strength, reinforcing those that we recognize to be weaker than those that we have,

say, with our nearest and dearest. In this process, it is probably helpful for us to

investigate the degrees to which any of these bonds develop into attachments that firmly anchor us. We might see that if this happens, the fluidity, flow, flexibility and freedom of non-attached communal bonding can be replaced by a solidity and rigidity which may be readily fractured or may in some other way become difficult to maintain.

In a sense, community can thus be considered to extend from each of our heartminds to the farthest reaches of the universe, known and unknown. It is also timeless.

We may see with increasing clarity our interconnectedness with everything else in existence through both inter-dependency (subtly implying our need for and acceptance of connection) and inter-supportiveness (subtly implying our ability to give, to nurture, by means of connection). With all our bonds equally well developed, we may also experience a deep sense of balance. This is particularly true if we appreciate that, just as we are interconnected with all other elements of existence, all these other elements are likewise interconnected, each with all else. Thus, there is no centre, no edge. The beginning of such a community is the end, and the community is limitless. \*



*Chris Gilboy*

## WITNESS

I'm taking the scissors  
snipping a seam here  
a button-hole there  
Unravelling the rows  
But slowly  
and carefully  
No tugging with impatience

Resting

Remembering how  
this sweater used to keep me warm  
during those terrible dark days  
of crying for the cold  
that I couldn't keep out

So

In the unravelling  
I am gently and quietly  
Turning and winding the crimped, bent  
strand of wool  
Making a solid, round ball of yarn  
With which to knit  
my new jacket

And even though it's winter  
And my skin stands bare against the ice-wind  
I feel warmer  
Than I have  
in years



Although the poem relates a personal story/experience, the title of the poem reflects, for me, the context within which this kind of growing and moving takes place; the context that actually helps us to see/accept/recognize ourselves. \*

*Cherie Westmoreland*

## ABOUT \*\*\*\*\*connections\*\*\*\*\*

Welcome to "*connections*" and ... thank you all – there are many – who have helped transform it from mere concept into reality.

The prime intention for sending you a copy of this newsletter is to remind you that you are as firmly or loosely linked to the Saskatchewan vipassana meditation community as you choose. Also important is keeping you informed of what vipassana activities are planned in Saskatchewan and the wider prairie region, and of what developments have recently taken place or are in process. In addition, we hope to provide information that might in some way prove generally useful to you in your meditation practice.

What appears in the pages contained within this and future issues depends completely upon what is offered by those of you who submit contributions. I encourage you to share the products of your wisdom and compassion to help enlighten us, your community. We plan to issue two newsletters in 2001. The deadlines for receipt of your offerings are mid-March (let's say the 15<sup>th</sup>) and mid-September. Just as the theme for this issue is "community", that for the spring/summer 2001 issue is "communication" and, provisionally, for next year's fall/winter issue, "attachment". I regret that I cannot guarantee that what you send in will appear in print as we have space constraints – but I will do my best to find room. Your writings will be received with deep gratitude. Please send them as attachments to: [cgilboy@sem.gov.sk.ca](mailto:cgilboy@sem.gov.sk.ca) if you have access to email (the way in which I prefer to get them), or to the return address shown on the back cover of this newsletter.

I am keen that everything that appears in "*connections*", apart from referenced quotations, is original and not text excerpted from existing vipassana or other literature.

Enough said!

May you all find at least a few, and perhaps many, items in these pages that are of interest and value in your explorations of the world within you. \*

*Chris Gilboy*

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continuing to be the Dharma guide in the community. At the same time, Dana has begun teacher training under Sharda's mentorship.

Retreats are a major tool in Dana's exploration of the Buddhadharma. Initially in her practice, she attended shorter retreats lasting from seven to ten days, mostly at Gaia House. Since 1994, she has found it important to practise for longer periods of time, so has attended retreats ranging in length from a month to three months at Gaia House and at the Insight Meditation Society in Massachusetts. Her retreats have included both insight (vipassana) and intensive loving-

kindness (metta) practices which have been invaluable in deepening her understanding and in her healing journey.

Dana believes individual practice is inextricably linked to community life. She puts as least as much weight on Dharma-based friendships and community-building as on formal sitting. This means she has had limited time during the last decade to pursue financially gainful employment, but she remains willing to accept material insecurity in exchange for the freedom to place Dharma service at the very centre of her life. \*

### **Supporting Dana to attend the Community Dharma Leader Program, Spirit Rock Meditation Center, San Francisco, California**

At Sharda's suggestion and with her sponsorship, Dana successfully applied for a place in the upcoming CDL Training Program, a two-and-a-half-year commitment involving five four- to six-daylong sessions at Spirit Rock. The benefits of her participation will be felt throughout our community in times to come. Our financial support in helping to cover her travel and accommodation expenses will be of great value to her. If you wish to assist Dana in this way, please send your donation to: Regina Insight Meditation Community, Apt. G, 2210 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Regina, SK S4P 3P7, clearly indicating it is for the CDL Program fund.

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