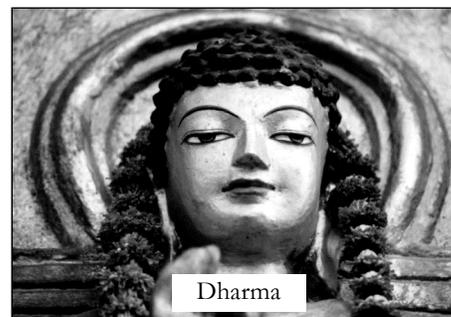
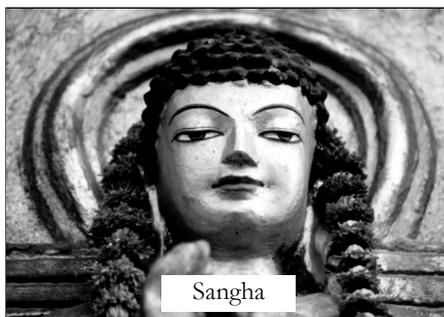
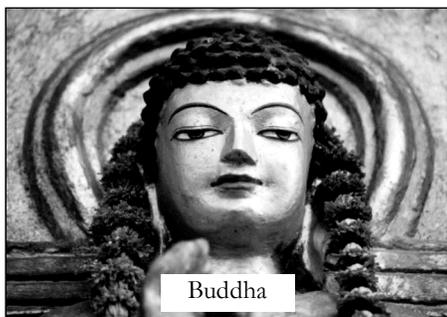


# .....connections.....

Number 6 Tenth Anniversary Newsletter of the Regina Insight Meditation Community Winter/Spring, 2003 - 2004



## Noble Friendship

Then the venerable Ananda approached the Lord Buddha, prostrated himself and sat down to one side. Sitting there, the Venerable Ananda said to the Lord: “Half of this holy life, Lord, is good and noble friends, companionship with the good, association with the good.” “Do not say that, Ananda. Do not say that, Ananda. It is the whole of this holy life, this friendship, companionship, and association with the good.”

### Sangha

*Sharda Rogell*

The Buddha called the sangha a jewel. More accurately, it is one of the three jewels for Buddhist practitioners. The other two are the Buddha, and the dharma. What is sangha and why did the Buddha

include it as one of the jewels in our practice?

Sangha is a Sanskrit word from the early Buddhist texts that literally means, group or congregation. But for Buddhist practitioners it is a term with a very precise meaning. The word refers to either the community of Buddhist monastics (bhikkhu sangha—ordained monks and nuns), or the community of people who have attained the goal of awakening (ariya sangha). When the Buddha called the sangha one of the three jewels for practitioners, he meant that the sangha is a place to which we can go for refuge from the pain of this worldly life. When we go to the sangha for refuge, it takes us deeper into our commitment towards our own awakening. It reminds us that it is possible for each one of us to live a noble and wise life just as those who went before us. It also reminds us that awakening is truly possible for each one of us. The noble sangha serves to remind us of both the goal of the path and how to walk the path of awakening. If this is what we wish for ourselves, then these are the ones that we must look to for inspiration and refuge.

### OFFERINGS

<i>Sangha</i> .....	1
<i>Sangha: the Experience</i> .....	2
<i>Sangha and Diversity</i> .....	3
About Community .....	4
What the Regina <i>Sangha</i> Means to Me .....	5, 8
Vipassana Events:	
The Saskatchewan Scene, 2004 .....	6
The Calgary Scene, 2003 and 2004 .....	7
The Winnipeg Scene, 2003 and 2004 .....	7
Community is .....	7
What Is a Spiritual Community?.....	8
<i>Sangha</i> – in Gratitude.....	9
“Because We Are One, We Act”	
– Socially Engaged Buddhist Practice.....	9
RIMC Financial Summaries, 2002, 2003.....	11
<i>Sangha</i> – the Great Leveller .....	11
Connect–ed .....	12

In the West, we have also begun using the word sangha to mean our own group of like-minded friends. It is important to remember, however, that this is not the group in which we take refuge – yet, our community of friends is very important as we walk the path. In my work with people, I have seen how difficult it is for those who do not have a community, who find themselves alone on the path, to practise. Those who have a meditation group to go to like us here in Regina, who frequently attend retreats, who have a small group of friends with whom they meditate, or even who have just one friend to whom they can talk about their experiences, find it easier to practise the way.

My first encounter with the dharma came about by meeting James Baraz, who was leading a meditation class in San Francisco in 1978. In America, the dharma was then little known. I took his six-week class after which I wanted a group to sit with. He told me to come to his house on a particular night and there would be a group. When I showed up, there were two other people besides James, and even though this would usually be awkward for me, I felt so happy to have these people with whom to meditate. That was my community. I started going to retreats and met more like-minded people. A few years later, I started my own weekly sitting group in San Francisco with Howie Cohn, and the community grew. Now, 24 years later, I teach and travel around the world and have an international community – my

dharma family. It's important to remember that all of us are connected to this international community simply by being dedicated to our practice\*\*.

Our like-minded friends are so important because we establish a sense of safety and trust with them in a way that may not be as possible with others. I believe this trust comes about because those of us who are committed to the Buddha dharma are following the five precepts and the Noble Eightfold Path. It means that we reflect on ways that we cause suffering to ourselves and to other beings and think of ways to act differently, by paying respect to all life, not taking things that don't belong to us, not causing harm through sexual misconduct, not using speech that is hurtful, not using substances to intoxicate the mind, and not engaging in work that is hurtful to people. It means we commit our self to the path of meditation and wise understanding. Following the five precepts and the Noble Eightfold Path means it is more likely that we will take responsibility and be accountable for ways we cause harm or suffering. To me, it is important to have friends whom I can trust in this way.

*\* Sharda is the guiding teacher of the Regina Insight Meditation Community*

*\*\* To connect further with the international community of practitioners, subscription to the INQUIRING MIND (P.O. Box 9999, Berkeley, CA 94709-0999; for more information, visit [www.inquiring.com](http://www.inquiring.com))*

## **Sangha: the Experience**

*Joanne Broatch*

In one of his teachings, the Thai master, Achaan Chaa, speaks of coming back to monastery life from a period of seclusion and long practice during which he had achieved deep levels of concentration and tranquility. He was shocked to find that, within mere minutes of contact with others, he was filled with annoyance, frustration and anger. It was this kind of experience that led him to found monasteries where to this day the primary practice is not to sit alone in silence, but to spend large parts of the day doing mundane chores in what might seem to be a less-than-ideal community of less-than-perfect others ..... in other words, in sangha.

As lay practitioners, we understand the historical sangha to be communities of monks and nuns living

according to a system of monastic discipline known as the vinaya. When we take refuge in the sangha, we touch into that tradition. We also connect to what has grown from it: generations of practitioners all over the world traveling a path of practice that leads to the liberation from suffering, all of us bound together by an invisible bond of that practice and intention.

Our direct experience of sangha is much more concrete. We experience sangha when we come together physically as a community, on retreat, in sitting groups and in social and service activities. Often it doesn't feel like much of a refuge at all.

Ideally this direct experience, this physical coming together, can be a place of acceptance, understanding,

awareness, generosity and support. It is a place where we can practise attitudes and uphold values that are different from values of our popular culture, such as exclusivity, competition and consumerism.

Sangha is inclusive. Anyone can come to practise, and even though there may be conflicts, the movement is toward acceptance rather than banishment. In sangha we try to accept differences so it becomes a safe place to be ourselves.

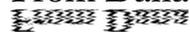
But wait! What about the one who comes late and with lots of noise? The one whose comments are mini-speeches? And are off topic? The one who talks endlessly? The one who never speaks?

“All our past history and all our neuroses are related with others, in some sense,” says Trungpa Rinpoche, “.....without others, we cannot attain enlightenment – in fact, we cannot even tread the path ..... If everything were lovey-dovey and jellyfish-like, there would be nothing to work with. Because of all these textures around us, we are enriched.”

Sangha provides the textures Trungpa speaks of, and these textures provide opportunities and possibilities. Sangha gives us opportunities to examine our own reactions, judgments, expectations, opinions and projections. At the same time, sangha provides an opportunity for us to look at our own behaviour ..... our need to be heard, or defend, or correct, or add to. Sangha can also provide a safe place for us to try something else: to resist voicing every thought, or perhaps to speak up when our habit is to be silent. Sangha is a safe place in which to try a different way of being.

*On the occasion of the 10th anniversary of your sangha, many blessings and many thanks for allowing me to be part of it. The way your sangha has grown and strengthened over this relatively short time speaks to a generous prairie spirit and a deep dedication to the dharma. It also reflects countless hours of hard work. Thank you, Sharda, for introducing me to the sangha. Thank you, Dana, for keeping me connected, and thank you, everyone, for allowing me to share the dharma with you. For me, it always feels like coming home.*

## From Dana



### Sangha and Diversity

To me, this year feels especially rich as last fall we began celebrating the tenth anniversary of our sangha. It's a time of recognizing and appreciating what we have created together, each of us contributing in our own unique ways. Over the months, I am taking in just how much this community and all of its activities

Sangha can provide a safe place in which we can let our heart be open and honest; look at whatever arises; express feelings that we might be afraid to expose in other social or work groups; and admit to our loneliness, anger, or envy, knowing that we'll be heard and that others won't feel they need to “fix it”. Sangha includes living the Noble Eightfold Path and being especially mindful of of Right Speech. It means listening to, paying attention to and caring for one another.

Sangha gives us the opportunity to be responsible. It is a relationship ..... to the dharma, to our practice, to our teachers, to our companions on the path and to ourselves. Like any relationship, it needs tending. Sangha asks us to remember that, while we use the collective energy of the group to support us in our practice, we are also part of providing that energy for others. Sangha is a palpable reminder that we are not alone. In this aspect, sangha asks us for commitment: to ourselves, to the dharma, to the practice and to the community itself. And we can do this among others who are moving in the same direction, who understand the joys and the challenges of the journey.

Our responsibility to sangha also means that, while we are being held in this long tradition, we are also co-creators of the tradition. It means that, in creating it and to be authentic, we must give up the idea of perfection – the idea of a perfect sitting, perfect teachers and, especially, a perfect sangha. The sangha we have is perfect for us because it is a mirror that is constantly reflecting back to us what we are putting into it, who we are and who we are becoming. Our sangha, our spiritual community, is – like ourselves – always a richly textured work in progress.

and connections mean to so many of us, providing a safe, respectful and supportive sanctuary in which we can explore ourselves and the true nature of this life. Being the Community Dharma Leader, I have the privilege of seeing the numerous ways in which members of our sangha collectively and individually

respond to life and cultivate ways of being that are based on increasing compassion and wisdom. This journey with our dharma community is showing me the true value of sangha in our practice.

It is tempting to stay in this place of comfort, safety and ease that has grown in our community. However, if we wish, we can use our strength, trust and connection through our respect and love of the dharma and the path of awakening to explore community on a deeper level. In any group, there is usually a strong tendency for the sake of its survival to suppress individual differences and diversity of views. In other words, we may be unwilling to express our differences for fear of rocking the boat by creating conflict or shaking up our own sense of belonging. This suppression often happens unconsciously, without our even noticing that we are censoring our contributions or our way of being. We are used to fitting in or to feeling excluded, and we accept either condition as normal. Numerous opportunities are lost in this process, not least amongst them being the richness of all that each of us has to offer to our shared understanding and practice. Many of us shy away from expressing our differences as we try to find shared commonality. We do this because we believe that it's the differences that keep us apart. We don't see that this lack of acknowledgement of difference is what actually keeps us apart. In my experience, over and over again, I see how constructive it is to work through differences and conflict together, how in this way the very fabric of relationship is strengthened.

In my Community Dharma Leader training experience, I directly saw how blindness to differences operated. By not acknowledging our differences and by holding on to our ways of being, we prevented ourselves from fully functioning as a community. It is only in retrospect that this became clear to me – when a community does not allow for diversity, all its members are not fully seen. Luckily, yet disturbingly, conflict within our group erupted, and we were given the opportunity to explore how we as a community could make enough space for each one of us to speak our truth and be respected, even if we didn't agree with each others' points of view. There were numerous times when our group process was interrupted, changed or abandoned in order to create a new way of being together in truth. Unexpectedly, through this process, I and many others began to experience true metta (*loving-kindness*) for each and every individual at the training, including

all who did not agree with the way that the process was unfolding. There was room ..... no one was excluded. We began to trust our wholesome intention to be completely honest with each other. Not only that, but the very environment allowed us to continue to explore together more and more issues that inevitably arose just by our being ourselves. It was in this process that I began to understand directly the incredible richness of experience that we miss by being in groups where we are not fully open to the amazing mix of cultures, ethnicity, abilities, socio-economic groups, gender and so on. In a community of diversity, all voices are heard and respected, yet the fact remains that decisions need to be made and not all perspectives can be acted upon. Within a mutually respectful environment, however, these decisions are not based on power held by the dominant group in that setting, but are inclusive of all participants. With the advent of this kind of community, doors are opened for others to participate in the richness of our shared journey.

In view of my experience at Spirit Rock and knowing the strength of our sangha, I feel strongly committed to begin exploring these issues within our community. I've had the good fortune to directly take part in the creation of a community that is held together by a fabric stronger than just our individual commonality and that includes, and is much enriched by, all that is shared. To this end, a Diversity Committee has recently been formed by our Sangha Council to explore how we can begin to build a community which is completely open to diversity and difference. This move takes courage, commitment, honesty and respect as it has many challenges. The very nature of this work may cause us to touch areas within ourselves that are vulnerable. It calls us to question ourselves deeply, to look clearly at our beliefs, and to take responsibility for the ways in which we might exclude ourselves or others who are different in some way. This path is one that needs to be travelled slowly and respectfully, not hurrying the process. The process itself is far richer than we might imagine. Because we have the strength of our commitment to the dharma and our sangha, we really do have the capacity to do this work that is so sorely needed not only within our own community but all over the world. This is the work of being able to relate to all beings kindly and respectfully, and of cultivating metta to everyone without distinction. In our community, we have the opportunity to make a real difference.

## About community...

*Maureen McKenzie*

This life, this body I inhabit in this place, this time, these feelings, these views and opinions ..... to all, I have fiercely clung with tunneled vision. It is a conditioned response, fear-based and self-perpetuating (pardon the pun).

Through the practice of mindfulness, harnessing my innate curiosity to the process of investigating my experience on a moment-by-moment basis, a loosening of that identification has occurred. Behold the truth devoid of opinions, imaginings and wishful thinking! It is by no means always accessible especially when what is evident is unpleasant or unpalatable. It is not a practice I would have endured

were it not for friends near and far; the community of those who offer support, guidance and wisdom on the road to freedom from the bondage of self-delusion; the family that holds us while we mature. This is the sangha, the third of the three jewels, so intertwined with the Buddha and the dharma as to be one. This unfolding and this deep appreciation for the three jewels are about building and sustaining my love for, and trust in, others and Self. Sangha gives me courage when doubt and distrust start to overwhelm me. Sangha is the framework and the witness to my awakening.

May all beings know the gift of community.



*Tenth Anniversary: RIMC's Wednesday Night Sitting Group, 10<sup>th</sup> September, 2003.*

## What the Regina Sangha Means to Me

*Brenda Evans*

*(Long Distance Sangha Member, Birtle, Manitoba)*

While scanning my first issue of the Inquiring Mind newspaper one day in January 1998, feeling isolated both geographically and spiritually (I live in a tiny town on the Manitoba-Saskatchewan border), and in great need of a Vipassana retreat, I happened upon a tiny notice under upcoming retreats. The headline immediately caught my eye ..... Regina, Saskatchewan.

Regina?

I had never thought to look to Saskatchewan for any links to a Vipassana community. Regina was accessible, only three hours away, and actually closer to me than Winnipeg! I vividly recall my feelings ..... elation, joy, gratitude and curiosity.

The retreat listed was with Sharda Rogell, and the contact person was – Dana White. I had never heard of either Sharda Rogell or Dana White. I called Dana

*continued on page 8*

## VIPASSANA EVENTS

### THE SASKATCHEWAN SCENE, 2004

<b>May 4 to June 15</b>	<i>"Insight Meditation Two,"</i> a Six-Week Course for those who have completed <i>"Insight Meditation One,"</i> with <b>Dana White</b> ; Tuesdays (7:15 to 9:15 p.m.) at 2672 Robinson Street, Regina; \$25.00 class fee and <i>dana</i>
<b>May 15 to 23</b>	<i>"Awakening Presence and Authenticity,"</i> a Residential Retreat with <b>Sharda Rogell</b> at Wood Acres Retreat Centre, Moose Jaw; \$495 retreat fee and <i>dana</i> ; contact Pat Cavanaugh (306) 525-4048
<b>September 10</b>	RIMC Supper and Open Meeting – <i>"Community and Service,"</i> times and venue to be announced
<b>September 18 and 19</b>	Non-Residential Meditation Weekend with <b>Sharda Rogell</b> at Seniors' Education Centre, Regina
<b>September to October (dates to be announced)</b>	<i>"Insight Meditation One,"</i> a Six-Week Course with <b>Dana White</b> ; 7:15 to 9:15 p.m.; at 2672 Robinson Street, Regina; \$25.00 class fee and <i>dana</i>
<b>October (date to be announced)</b>	Day of Mindfulness with <b>Dana White</b> at Seniors' Education Centre, Regina; \$10.00 registration fee for anyone not on the September to October six-week course
<b>November 10 to 14</b>	Residential Retreat with <b>Howard Cohn</b> at Wood Acres Retreat Centre, Moose Jaw

### 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 Vedanta, 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.



**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.



**Howard Cohn** has practised meditation since 1972. He has lead Vipassana retreats since 1985 and leads ongoing classes in San Francisco and Sausalito. He has studied with many Asian and western teachers of several traditions, including Theravada, Zen, Dzogchen and Advaita Vedanta. He has been strongly influenced by contact with the Indian master H.W.L. Poonja. He has done postgraduate work in East/West Psychology and has a private counseling practice.



**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 ten years, Dana has been the guiding member of the Regina Insight Meditation Community.

**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.

**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.

**Introductory Meditation Courses:** made up of six classes that generally run from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. and a day of mindfulness; require pre-registration; dates may change – please contact us for up-to-date information.

- Weekly Sitting Group: 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.
- Weekly Sitting Group: Saskatoon** Sundays throughout the year, 7:45 to 9:00 p.m.; Yoga Central, 211B – 3521 8th Street, Eastwood Centre; 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:** Maureen (306-352-1750) or Chris (306-522-0616).  
**Contact for Saskatoon events:** Doris (306-242-5004).

## THE CALGARY SCENE, 2003 AND 2004

- Sitting Groups:** *Calgary Vipassana Meditation and Study Group*, meets 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Sundays to sit and to study Buddhism; also, three or more different meditation classes taught each week at the Yoga and Meditation Community Centre; contact Barbara Ross (403) 243-9697 or Judy (403) 241-2219; further information also at: [www.yogameditationcentercalgary.ca](http://www.yogameditationcentercalgary.ca)
- Calgary Theravadin Meditation Society*, meets 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesdays, 7:00 to 9:00 p.m.; open to all meditators with experience in Vipassana meditation; contact Anne Mahoney (403) 270-8450
- Metta Study Group*, meets 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Mondays, 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 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.; occasional days of mindfulness and non-residential retreats; visitors and beginners welcome; contact Mary Dumka (403) 678-2034

### Retreats and other events:

- June 19** Public Talk, *Bhante Sona*
- June 20 and 21** Non-Residential Meditation Retreat with *Bhante Sona*; \$40.00 retreat fee and *dana*; contact Barbara Ross (403) 243-9697
- October 15 to 17** Non-Residential Meditation Retreat with *Bhante Sona*; contact Barbara Ross (403) 243-9697

## THE WINNIPEG SCENE, 2003 AND 2004

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

### The Practice of *Dana*

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

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

### Community is .....

Community is ..... people caring and sharing, speaking and listening, acting and reacting, living, learning, and loving.

Community is ..... Regina Insight Meditation.

Lorraine Weidner

immediately to get more information and to make inquiries about how to register although the retreat was still months away. As I recall, we had a fairly lengthy conversation. Dana was empathetic when I described my situation since she, too, had felt isolated when first moving back to Regina. She gave me a brief history of the Regina spiritual community and promised to send me information about Sharda and the upcoming retreat in April. So that is how I came to the Regina sangha.

Now, six years later, I continue to feel elation, joy and gratitude. The word “lifeline” comes to mind when I think of the Regina sangha. You are my lifeline to the dharma and the spiritual practice I hold so dear. It is because of the hard work and dedication of the Regina sangha that I have benefited from the many retreats offered over the past six years. You have introduced me to many wonderful dharma teachers and have changed my life by doing so. For this, I thank you.

I have always been made to feel welcome and supported and, although I may not always be physically able to attend sittings and retreats on a regular basis, just knowing that the Regina community is there is both a support and an inspiration to my practice. Dana White and Jill Forrester hold special places in my heart. Dana is always kind, understanding, encouraging and coming up with creative ways to include me in the sangha. Jill generously offers me a place to stay during many non-residential retreats and makes me feel welcome by an occasional phone call. I also thank Chris Gilboy and Cherie Westmoreland for the effort they took to set up a speaker phone during the Thursday night discussion group sessions and the group members for allowing me to participate by phone. Finally I thank the individuals who make and send out tapes of dharma talks after retreats and the many others who contribute to the sangha in their own way.

May the Regina sangha continue to flourish in the years to come.

### **What Is a Spiritual Community?**

*Hilary Craig*

I belong to two spiritual communities: the Regina Insight Meditation Community and the Regina Unitarian Fellowship. From each I derive different benefits. I appreciate the first for what I learn about spiritual practice, for the peace and connection of our Wednesday evening meetings, for the fellowship over tea, and for what I learn on retreats. I appreciate the Unitarians for what I learn about different faiths, for opportunities to sing inspiring songs, for a community that includes young children and very old people, for the connections I have made with people across the country, and for animated discussions and children's stories.

But I have a niggling concern about both communities. I worry that if something happened to prevent me from attending the meetings, I would be forgotten. I would simply cease to exist. I worry even more that we are tenuously connected to our most vulnerable members – those who have difficult lives, who are socially isolated, and who deal with the challenges of depression and other similar conditions.

Let me talk a little about my summer, and how I came to explore this issue at a personal level.

In August, I had a mastectomy. For reasons I won't go into, this was not really a big deal – nothing like my first mastectomy 11 years ago, when I also had to go through six months of chemotherapy. However, I was surprised to find the experience was more traumatic than I thought it would be. The trauma was not, however, the kind that I would have anticipated. It was not with the physical aspects of the experience, but with the social side of my life. Unlike my experience 11 years ago, I was not now part of a workplace community, so I found myself recovering from surgery at home with little support.

Now I am a reasonable person and I know that I cannot reasonably expect that people will just “know” about something when they have not been told ..... and since few people knew what had happened to me, there were very few inquiries or expressions of concern from anywhere.

I had not realized how important it was to me to process what I had been through. I needed to talk about my new state. I needed to have people ask me how I was and to say that they hoped I would be better soon. I felt incredibly vulnerable.

I have lots of friends. I know a lot about illness and healing. I have a degree in social work and have counseled many people and led many groups over the years. And STILL I felt alone and isolated.

I thought about the many people in my two spiritual communities who have just disappeared over the years. What happened to them? Did they disagree with something? Did they simply find they didn't fit? Did other aspects of their lives take precedence? Did they feel that nobody cared about them?

I am profoundly uncomfortable with the proselytizing practices of many Christian churches. But I also know that some of them provide their members with excellent social support, especially in times of need. So I ask myself: Do we have any responsibility to those who belong to our communities? What do we mean when we say somebody “belongs”? And what are the implications for both the member and the community?

I think it is safe to say that all major spiritual traditions began at a time when people lived in geographical communities – villages, neighbourhoods

– in which they knew the people who lived nearby, and were known by them. Daily life was lived very visibly. People went to the same market or shops. They walked, talked and were seen in the common areas. They knew their neighbours. Whilst I don't idealize this situation nor do I believe that everyone was happy or that everything was good in “olden days,” I recognize that our lives today are very different. It is possible to live completely anonymously in a building or a neighbourhood. The Safeway clerk might use our name – but that is all she or he knows about us. We travel from place to place in the metal isolation chambers we call cars. Our networks often depend very much upon our employment connections and our interests. Family often lives far away.

So I ask my readers to consider the following questions. What, in urban Canada, in this 21<sup>st</sup> Century, should a meaningful community based on a spiritual tradition look like? What are its responsibilities to its members? Who, for that matter, are its “members”? What are the responsibilities of the “members” to the community? And what can the community and “members” expect of each other?

### **Sangha – in Gratitude**

*Shannon Corkery*

Recently I was picking classes for my winter semester at university. Also, I was feeling considerable confusion mixed with fear about the future and the present state of our society. Since it was Wednesday, I went to the sitting that night. During the discussion, I looked around and saw a group of people coming together with beautiful intentions to live with gentleness and wisdom. This filled me with great warmth and comfort, reminding me that if you feed the spirit, it will be a loving home.

Before this past winter, I did not understand how fortunate I am to have a dharma community. When I

was sitting a retreat in northern India, I realized how blessed I was. After the retreat, many people were talking about losing their meditation practice when they went home, for their friends and family would not understand. I was one of the very few who had a sangha to go home to. I felt a rush of gratitude to Dana, Chris, everyone in our community, for I know I wouldn't be able to continue this practice without support. Without the practice, I know my patterns of self doubt would have made my head explode, making life a constant struggle instead of a beautiful gift.

### **“Because We Are One, We Act” – Socially Engaged Buddhist Practice**

*Pat Cavanaugh and Dana White*

The origin of the term “engaged Buddhism” can be traced to Vietnam in the 1960s. As the Vietnamese war escalated, many of the Buddhist nuns and monks did not know what to do. “Should we continue to practise in our monasteries,” they asked themselves, “or should we leave the meditation halls in order to

help the people who are suffering under the bombs?” One of the monks, Thich Nhat Hanh, tells what happened: “We decided to do both – to go out and help people, and to do so in mindfulness. We called it engaged Buddhism” (in *Peace is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life*).

Today, engaged Buddhism is practised in many parts of the world. Rather than shun mundane existence (samsara), engaged Buddhists seek to bring the teachings and practices of traditional Buddhism to bear upon the problems of this world. They believe that it is possible to advance along the spiritual path – and to help others advance – in the midst of the conditions and travails of this life. True liberation must include the social and political dimensions of freedom as well as the spiritual. True awakening cannot be for oneself alone.

The most widely represented engaged Buddhist organization in North America is the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, founded in 1978 by Zen teacher Robert Aitken and others. All like-minded individuals and organizations, Buddhist and non-Buddhist, are welcome to join.

The Buddhist Peace Fellowship's statement of purpose, which follows, can also be considered a declaration of the key tenets of engaged Buddhism:

- Recognize the interdependence of all beings
- Meet suffering directly and with compassion
- Appreciate the importance of not clinging to views and opinions
- Work with Buddhists from all traditions
- Connect individual and social transformation
- Practise non-violence
- Use participatory decision-making techniques

- Protect and extend human rights
- Support gender and racial equality
- Challenge all forms of unjust discrimination
- Work for economic justice and the end of poverty
- Work for a sustainable environment.

A group of Regina Insight Meditation Community members in Regina who embrace socially engaged Buddhist practice has been meeting for one-and-a-half years to explore our personal relationship to the suffering in the world. We realize that our response to this is an expression of our interconnectedness with all beings. The words of Bernie Glassman reflect our motivation: “Because we are one, we act.”

If you are interested in finding out more about our group, you can call Pat Cavanaugh at 525-4048.

(Material for this article was largely copied from “*Buddhism–Engaged*” by Kenneth Kraft in the “*Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*,” Bron Taylor (Editor in Chief). You can find this article at:

<http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/bron/ern/Kraft--Buddhism-Engaged.pdf>

If you search under “*Socially Engaged Buddhist Practice*,” on the web, you can find many more relevant articles.)



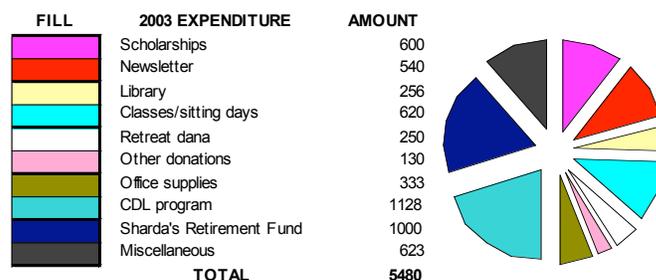
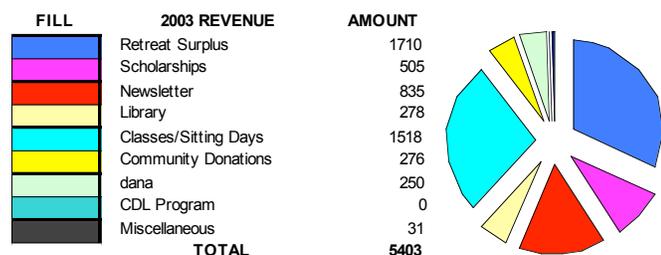
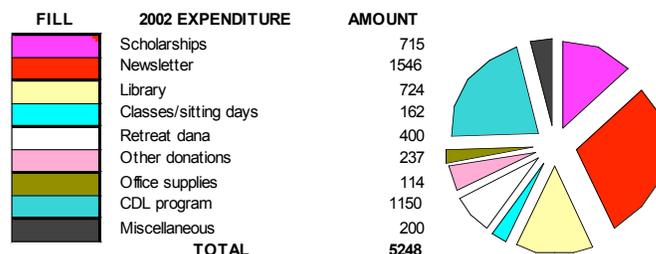
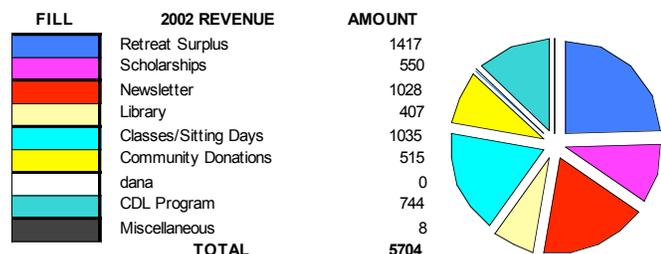
*Tenth Anniversary: RIMC's Wednesday Night Sitting Group, 10<sup>th</sup> September, 2003, co-led by Sharda and Dana..*

## RIMC Financial Summaries, 2002, 2003

Chris Gilboy

RIMC members may be interested to see broadly how funds are raised and spent by the community. The following figures are not rigorous as, for simplification, I have broken them into different categories than are

used in our Treasurer's year-end financial statements. The tables showing retreat revenues and expenditures show how substantial the cash flow is in providing this form of support for dharma practice.



Name of Retreat	Teacher	Dates (2002)	Income	Expenses	Balance
1. Heart of Mindfulness	Dana	12, 13 January	690	556.05	133.95
2. Four Foundations of Mindfulness	Sharda	9, 10 March	2825	1908.99	916.01
3. Uncovering Our Natural Wisdom	Myoshin	11 to 14 April	5555	5655.05	-100.05
4. Loving Kindness	Joanne	21 to 23 June	1200	1378.28	-178.28
5. Uncovering Obstacles to Awakening	Sharda	16 to 24 August	8330	8691.29	-361.29
6. Wise View: Understanding Connection and Disconnection	Sharda	16, 17 November	3290	2283.29	1006.71
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>21,890</b>	<b>20,472.95</b>	<b>1417.05</b>

Name of Retreat	Teacher	Dates (2003)	Income	Expenses	Balance
1. The Judging Mind	Sharda	8, 9 February	2865	1959.05	905.95
2. Expressions of the Heart	Joanne	21 to 23 March	1200	1151.04	48.96
3. Awakening Presence	Sharda	24 to 31 May	7275	7472.76	-197.76
4. Celebrating Joy	Sharda	13, 14 September	2690	1392.9	1297.1
5. Happiness	Howie	7 to 11 November	6470	6814.19	-344.19
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>20,500</b>	<b>18,789.94</b>	<b>1710.06</b>

## Sangha – the Great Leveller

Gail Tiefenbach

Well, I don't know if anyone else has noticed this about sangha ..... it seems to be a great leveller.

I noticed this levelling at the YMCA, too, when people gather at lunchtime to work out. They arrive in their work clothing, looking business-like, or casual, or straight from a household after taking care of cooking, cleaning, and caring for kids all morning. But once they're at the Y, workout gear – shorts, t-shirt and the ubiquitous runners – becomes the norm.

The magical levelling act takes off even more as the various workouts begin. Whether it is lifting weights, peddling a stationary bike, doing aerobics, pacing on a treadmill, or running outside, the effort exerted to pump up the physical body from its complacency is a known experience to a great many of us. In such exercising, we know the self-discipline it takes for us

to come day after day, week after week. We see the sweat and the exertion, and we see the results in the form of trimmer bodies and happier attitudes. A friendly feeling of commonality pervades.

My experience of sangha is much the same. A great levelling magic occurs here, too. We all show up on Wednesdays with our day's or week's events stashed to varying degrees within our minds. We all take to the cushions, benches or chairs. Our eyes close. We look serene – at least on the outside. And like at the Y, I feel a common bond in the effort exerted – though in this case it's to sit still and let the mind be present rather than to get the body going.

I see in each person the sameness of effort, all personalities and body types aside. I experience a common bond of restlessness or discomfort as I hear

people shifting (muffled shuffles or squeaking chairs), and I experience deep silence when we settle into sitting solidly and still. I've known both situations – we've all known both. I could be you, you could be me – no difference.

As we discuss our meditation practice in relation to life experiences, although expressed in endless ways, I understand the essence of suffering or happiness coming through. I feel that it is not just the speaker's happiness or suffering that I'm hearing described –

rather, it is ours, it is part of us all, for perhaps each of us has been in that very place of suffering or happiness at one time or another.

I get pumped about the magic of levelling for purely selfish reasons. As I come into contact with commonality of experience, my sense of self, ego, of “me” diminishes. In that, there is nothing left but joy.

Thank you to our sangha for showing up on Wednesdays to set the conditions for my sense of self to lessen.

### Connect—ed

This sunny, warm, early-spring day brings special joy to my heart as I sit at my computer and format the beautiful contributions about sangha that many of you have chosen to share with all of us who receive this newsletter. As I reflect on how I am choosing to spend this time, I feel closely connected with you, who will soon be reading words with which I am now intimately familiar, and with all things, in particular the untidiness of my office!

I hope that you find this 10th anniversary issue a special reminder of the benefits of community and

practice, and that, with a sense of increasing ease, you understand your place in this wondrous experience we call life.

Our next issue will have generosity, the gift of freely letting go of things both material and immaterial for the welfare of others, dana in Pali, as its theme. I invite anyone who is willing to share their experiences of this quality to write them down and send them to me by 1<sup>st</sup> October, 2004, at [cgilboy@ir.gov.sk.ca](mailto:cgilboy@ir.gov.sk.ca)

I look forward to hearing from you .....

*Chris Gilboy*

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