

INSIGHT MEDITATION

COMMUNITY OF

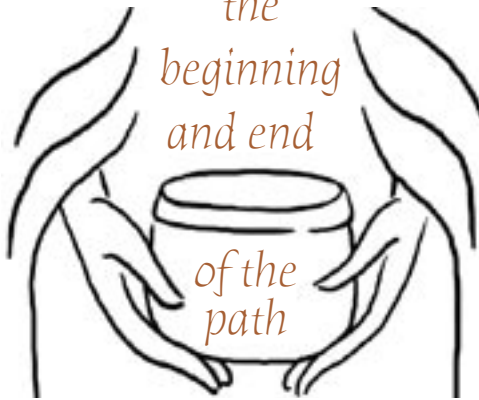
SAN FRANCISCO

sangha news

MAY 2004 VOL 3 NO 1

Generosity

the
beginning
and end



of the
path

By Eugene Cash

When people came to the Buddha and asked what he taught, he would respond to the uninitiated with teachings about generosity. Traditionally it was only after people had come to appreciate this virtue that the Buddha would offer the teachings on awakening.

Generosity, or *dana* in Pali, can be considered both the beginning and the end of the path. It is the beginning because as a virtue or moral power, it becomes one of the building blocks upon which insight and understanding develop. Dharma practice is often difficult. We need to have a sense of generosity toward ourselves as we begin to examine our illusions and confusion. A sense of generosity helps us sit with the habits and tendencies of heart and mind that make it difficult to meditate or be present with our experience.

Recognizing, nourishing, and enacting generosity has a number of useful results. When we recognize generosity, we begin to appreciate our own goodness and the goodness of others. Developing generosity helps us loosen the grip of our self-centered orientation, opening us to the possibility of understanding ourselves and the world in a new way. Our orientation shifts to one of interconnectedness and nonseparation. The enacting of our generosity,

our goodwill, toward other people impacts them in ways known and unknown.

Often we overlook or undervalue our innate generosity. Part of the practice of *dana* is acknowledging the quality of generosity that may already be in our lives. Take a moment to reflect on how and when you give. Do you give of your time, attention, creativity, intelligence,

INSIDE

- Generosity Stories
- Gala Fundraiser Report
- Buddhas on Bikes
- Upcoming Daylongs

continued on next page

continued from previous page

love, care, or compassion? Do you give of your means, supporting causes and actions that are close to your heart? Do you give to the dharma? How does it feel to perceive your generosity?

It can also be helpful to investigate, without judgment, our lack of generosity. How does it feel when you're not generous? Do you have impulses toward giving that you don't act on? Why not? What blocks your sense of dana? What opens it?

It can be equally valuable to recognize when we are the recipients of dana. Reflect on a time when someone was generous with you. Maybe they gave you something you wanted or needed. Perhaps they were generous of their attention or in their action. Remember how you felt and how it impacted you to receive the goodwill of another person. When someone is generous with us we feel grateful. The feeling of gratitude increases our sense of well-being. Our sense of inner abundance encourages us to give more of ourselves. The cycle of giving engenders a sense of connectedness and more giving.

One way to understand dana as the end of the path is through the word *relinquishment*. *Relinquishment* means letting go, not holding on, release. *Dana* is sometimes translated as "relinquishment." It is the understanding that there is nothing we have to—or can—hold on to. When we realize this state of heart and mind there is freedom.

May our practice be a gift to all! May our very lives be for the benefit of all beings!

"Acts of generosity inspired by loving-kindness live long in human memory, generating love and respect among humankind, thus laying foundations for the unity of the whole world."

—Mahasi Sayadaw

The Sangha speaks about generosity

At our weekly sit on Sunday, April 4, the day after our Sister Sangha Gala Fundraiser, Eugene gave a talk on generosity and service. He asked those in attendance to reflect on their own experiences of generosity and share them with the group. These are some of their stories.

SHORTLY AFTER MY MOTHER WAS diagnosed with cancer in July 1998, I told her I regretted not having taken her to see the giant redwoods in Humboldt County. She told me that I should go up there after she was gone and she'd join me in spirit. The illness took her quickly and with much pain. I was with her 24 hours a day for six weeks.

After my mother's passing, a friend asked me if I would like her company when I took the trip to Humboldt County. We reserved a weekend for the upcoming October, but when I called her shortly before we were scheduled to leave, she backed out. I was

continued on next page

sangha
news

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The Sanghaspeaks

about generosity continued

exhausted and knew I couldn't take this trip alone. But I knew that I had to take it. I was depending on it for my own emotional release, surrender, and healing.

Within a day, two other friends offered to accompany me on this weekend journey. Their generosity is indescribable. I went from fearing I'd have to make the journey alone to having to choose between two offers. This was such a powerful lesson about trusting the universe, not knowing from where the gifts will come, being honest about my vulnerabilities, and being assured that I am safe and supported.

Bhavani Kludt

IN 1996, I ACCEPTED A JOB TEACHING HAND-work and art at the Sierra Waldorf School of rural Tuolumne County, in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. A friend of mine knew one of the parents from the school and told her when I would be moving into my new house. On a very hot Sunday that August, my kind nephew drove a U-Haul truck filled with my belongings all the way from San Francisco to Jamestown (two and a half hours away), and when we arrived, there were three families waiting at my doorstep, ready to unload the truck. They cheerfully introduced themselves, carried all my belongings into the various rooms of the house, said "We're glad you'll be teaching at our school," and went home. That was my introduction to what was to become perhaps the most generous community of people I have known in my entire life.

Shoshanah Dubiner

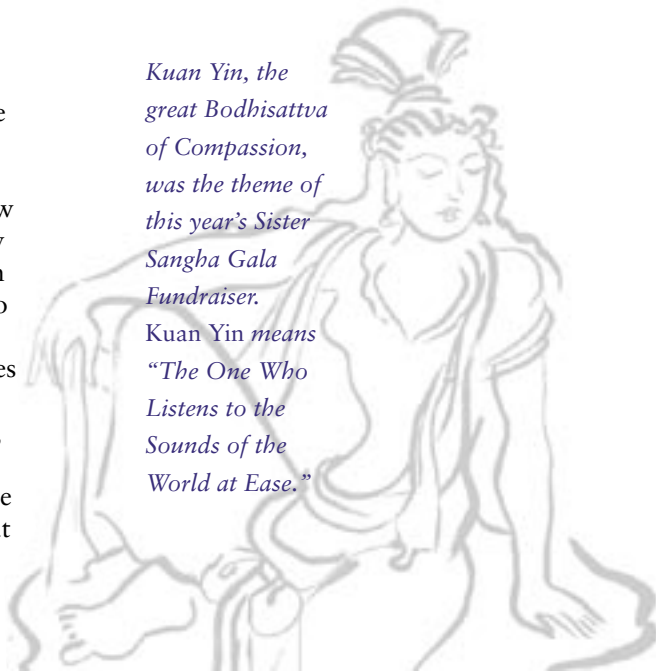
WHEN WE WERE KIDS, MY MOM TOOK US EVERY summer to the mountains where my grandparents and my uncle lived. Surely there were other things that would have been more exciting for my uncle than going every day on the same hikes with us, playing mini golf, and going to public pools. Yet not once do I recall him refusing; he was simply there, as naturally available to us as the mountains.

Going to the pool was our favorite activity. There we made our uncle jump off the five-meter diving board. In spite of his pleas to the contrary, we insisted he jump headfirst; we kids found it to be "cooler" that way.

continued on next page

Kuan Yin, the great Bodhisattva of Compassion, was the theme of this year's Sister Sangha Gala Fundraiser.

Kuan Yin means "The One Who Listens to the Sounds of the World at Ease."



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Today, my uncle is battling his third cancer within two years. He is thin as a stick, and laughter doesn't come to him that easily anymore. Recently, we were sitting together reminiscing and I reminded him of our visits to the pool. He looked at me and said, "Those were difficult visits for me."

For some reason, I understood immediately. "You were afraid of these jumps from the high board, weren't you?" I asked.

He smiled and said, "I was terrified, but it seemed important to you, and I didn't want to disappoint you."

Jürgen Möllers

MY MUSIC MENTOR AND LIFELONG FRIEND

Toby Tate was the first Buddhist practitioner I ever knew. He taught me, among other things, the value of disciplined practice. After I moved to San Francisco in the late '70s, my dad started taking piano lessons with Toby. It had been my father's dream to perform in little piano bars after retirement. When Toby surprised him by drawing him into improvisation and composition, it opened a world of deep new connection and sharing between my dad and me as we began "talking shop" about music.

Then my dad discovered he had cancer, which soon metastasized to his brain. He had to let go of his dream of performing, but he wanted to continue his music practice as long as possible. When he could no longer travel to Toby's studio, Toby, who had serious medical problems of his own, spent more than a year making weekly house calls to teach my dad. He improvised a series of rehab-

oriented piano exercises, accommodating my dad's ever-changing abilities and disabilities, keeping kind company with him through the slow loss of one of his most treasured gifts. I never knew how deep, rich, and multilayered life's connections could be before witnessing this extraordinarily kind gesture.

Kitty Costello

LCAN STILL CLEARLY VISUALIZE THE BLUE-and-white cooler on the landing at the top of the stairs to my house. It remained there for many weeks during a time my younger daughter was critically ill. Each evening after visiting her in the hospital, I climbed those stairs. I opened the blue lid of the cooler and pulled out two or three carefully wrapped packages that had been tucked inside earlier that day as though by fairies. Once inside my kitchen, I popped the contents of the packages into the microwave and sank gratefully into a chair. Within minutes I was enjoying a delicious dinner that had been lovingly prepared by one of my colleagues. Each day's cook seemed to have prepared his or her specialty, be it a southern gumbo, a vegetable lasagna, or an Irish stew. Sometimes I knew who it was through an enclosed note sending me kind thoughts and prayers; sometimes the creator of my day's meal remained anonymous.

I will never, however, forget those dinners that nourished my body and soul at a time when both were in greatest need.

Irisa Tekerian



We Are Family

Sister Sangha event raises funds and spirits

by
Gayle
Markow



Kittisaro and Thanissara

On April 3, IMCSF hosted its second annual Gala Fundraiser for our Sister Sangha in South Africa. Like last year's event, this one was successful on many levels. Not only did approximately 300 people enjoy an evening of excellent food, entertainment, and dancing, as well as raffle prizes and an incredible silent auction, but the event raised \$17,892 (after expenses) to send to the Woza Moya project in South Africa. This money has been earmarked for the completion of a community center for the people of the region (see the letter from Kittisaro and Thanissara on our website for more info).

The story of our developing relationship with our Sister Sangha and our support for its AIDS outreach project, Woza Moya, is a story of two distant sanghas that have touched each other in profound and wonderful ways. It's a story of inspiration and generosity, hard work, and struggle. It's a story of both sanghas moving off their cushions to help alleviate suffering, building bonds of connection that have brought out the best in many of us.

It started in the fall of 2000, when Kittisaro and Thanissara, guiding teachers of the

Buddhist Retreat Centre in Kwa-Zulu-Natal, South Africa, visited our Sunday night sit. Their teachings and stories filled the room and our hearts with inspiration, compassion, and joy. We asked them if we could help—if we could be “Sister Sanghas.” The caring that began flowing in both directions that evening continues today.

Doing fund-raising work for the benefit of Woza Moya has provided IMCSF with an opportunity to be in relationship with a people and a community half a world away. It enables us to have an understanding of the suffering that is taking place there and the work that is being done to relieve that suffering. Doing this work has also provided us with an ongoing personal relationship with Kittisaro and Thanissara, including enjoying their visits to our sangha and going on retreat at Spirit Rock with them and Eugene as our teachers (their next Spirit Rock retreat is scheduled for September 14–19).

Perhaps just as important, doing this work has given us a chance to be in more interesting, creative, productive, and social relationships with each other. For this event alone, well over 50 volunteers worked in all kinds of ways to bring their most creative,


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hardworking, cooperative selves to the table. The food committee did an extraordinary job of obtaining donations, collecting them, preparing and serving food, and even arranging for all uneaten food to be picked up at evening's end to be taken to a homeless shelter. The silent auction committee did an amazing job coping with an abundance of generosity from those who donated items for the auction. Shoshanah Dubiner organized and hosted the making of the travel altars at her home, where sangha members gathered to create the popular auction items. Irisa Tekerian jumped in at the last minute (and after only her first time at the sit) to do the decorations. Paul Kagawa organized a jazz band to play as people arrived for the evening as well as later on. IMCSF's first singing group, Heavy Metta, made its debut at the event. Rachel Markowitz also debuted in a vocal performance. Danny Bernstein and Sally Northcutt played a piano/violin duet, and David Haase played his own piano composition. And Pamela Edelstein, Shoshanah, Andrew Chaikin, and I returned to the stage for the second year.

All kinds of people donated so much of their time and energy and talents, and in doing so contributed in myriad ways to the success of the event. For those of you who have worked in community before, you know that this is not always easy. As in any relationship, there are benefits and challenges—things get complicated and difficult at times. The same thing happens in South Africa...and everywhere. But what is the alternative? To sit silently on our cushions and not engage each other's energies? Coming into meaningful community with ourselves, we develop the possibility of coming into meaningful community with other communities, such as that of our Sister Sangha.

I bow to the willingness and generosity of both sanghas to engage in the practice of mindful community building, identifying what needs to be done and doing what we can do...sharing our struggles, our joys, and the dharma.

Gayle Markow was coordinator of this year's Sister Sangha Gala Fundraiser.

 See photos from the event and quotes from volunteers on pages 8–9.

a call for articles

Sangha News has added a column featuring articles by IMCSF sangha members. Add your voice to the ongoing discussion about buddha, dharma, and sangha. Articles should be up to 400 words and based on personal experience. For example, how has a particular aspect of Buddhist practice—service, concentration, generosity—become particularly significant, challenging, or helpful to you in your life?

All articles will be reviewed by the editorial staff and our teacher, Eugene Cash. Please submit articles in hard-copy format to Rachel Markowitz, editor, c/o IMCSF (see address on back cover).

Buddhas on Bikes

Sangha cyclists
enjoy great weather
and spectacular
views on
third group ride



Byatra participants soak up the sun in Sausalito

Eighteen sangha members, including Eugene, traded their cushions for their bicycles Sunday, May 23, to participate in what was the largest “byatra” yet. A two-wheeled version of a *yatra*, or meditative walk, the byatra gives IMCSF meditators a chance to mingle with each other and their amazing natural surroundings.

Participants pedaled from Golden Gate Park to the Presidio, where they rode under a canopy of eucalyptus and Monterey cypress. They crossed the Golden Gate Bridge, looped around Fort Baker, then stopped at a scenic lookout to sit silently amidst the sounds of birds singing, leaves rustling, and planes flying overhead. Paraphrasing Zen Master Dogen, Eugene closed the 15-minute sit with the following:

*Mountains and rivers,
Earth and sea,
Helicopters and cars,
Are not separate from your own mind.*

The group then continued on to Sausalito, where they stopped for lunch at Sartaj India Café. After a scenic albeit challenging climb out of Sausalito, they rode back over the bridge to the city. Total time: about 5 hours. Total distance: about 20 miles.

“It was really fun,” said rider Alison Heather. “I was definitely one of the slower people, but it didn’t feel like I was getting left behind.”

“We seem to be getting into a rhythm...as far as where to ride and how to accommodate the different levels of riders,” said Sarah Newman, who thought up the byatra with Eugene, a fellow avid cyclist, last fall.

The first byatra back in December, also to Sausalito, numbered a dozen or so riders. About eight people went on the second ride, around Lake Merced, in February. The date of the next ride has not yet been determined.

—Rachel Markowitz

To Be of Service

2004 Gala Fundraiser volunteers reflect on their experiences

“I painted posters, shopped for the best prices on supplies, wandered through the brilliant colors of the Flower Mart choosing flowers, gathered armfuls of greenery from Gayle’s garden and mine, cut paper birds late into the night, stressed about running out of time the day of, but actually finished in time.”

Irisa Tekerian, room decorator

“The coolest thing was how well the event came off considering how laid-back everyone was. We just wandered into the kitchen and were given something to do. Everything was flexible and yet it was all getting done. My mind had told me it couldn’t possibly come off as well as it did. The word for it is *organic*. Everything came together the way it was supposed to come together.”

Richard Taylor, kitchen helper

Heavy Metta performs dharmic ditties

“When I first started coming to Sunday evenings, I enjoyed the silence and always sat quietly during the break. I began to notice that some of the people seemed to know each other and were happily talking away. It took me a while—at least a year or two—to begin to meet people and talk to them. When Kittisaro and Thanissara came to visit and the Sister Sangha was born, I was inspired to get together with the group who wanted to help them. It has been so amazing to work together with so many new friends who are now my dharma buddies.”

Jennifer Scaff King, travel altar maker, Heavy Metta singer, and food runner



“I must thank Pam [Edelstein] and Allyson [Klein] for their great organization and contagious enthusiasm. Being part of this committee gave me a deeper sense of sangha, of generosity, and of joy at the event itself.”

Ellen Sakoloff, silent auction committee

Richard Taylor readies the feast





The travel altars dazzle

“Asking restaurants to contribute food to the event became a practice for me: asking for alms. When I found a restaurant willing to donate, it really brought joy and satisfaction to the effort. I loved working with the people on my committee as well. Each of us brought talents to the table that helped create the feast we enjoyed the night of the event.”

*Mindy Zlotnick,
food committee*

“I really valued the sense of being part of something larger than myself and of forging closer ties and bonds of friendship within the sangha, a community that I cherish.”

*Sabrina Weyeneth, silent auction
table monitor*

“In both the practical work of coordinating the cashiers and the creative work of singing in the choir, it was a great joy to deepen my connection with other sangha members...and an outrageous amount of fun! I think I’m starting to get what this ‘jewel of sangha’ thing is all about.”

Kitty Costello, head cashier and Heavy Metta singer



The silent auction swings

“I enjoyed being in the role of fulfilling people’s basic need to drink...to give them water, juice, whatever they wanted. They paid what they could, which was interesting to watch. We ran out of water. That was interesting, too.”

Bill Pattengill, bartender



Shoshanah Dubiner
paints “live”

“There was a strong sense of reverberation; that my actions would be felt on the other side of the planet and that these actions would be the seed for further work and benefit. It was a great opportunity to feel our practice in action.”

Bill Weber, videographer



Rachel Markowitz sings

—Compiled by Jürgen Möllers
and Rachel Markowitz

Upcoming Daylong Retreats

Date to be determined

“Contemplative Inquiry”

Teacher: Eugene Cash

9:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Have you ever wondered how to use thought to deepen your dharma practice? Ever tried to stay “awake” in dialogue and relationship? Ever considered the place of intelligence, curiosity, and investigation in contemplative practice? In our day of Contemplative Inquiry (CI), we will look at how to use means other than silent meditation to awaken. A practitioner of inquiry for the past 15 years, Eugene finds this form invaluable for illuminating the dharma of freedom. Because CI is often done interactively, it has two additional benefits: it teaches us how to relate to each other and be mindful at the same time, and it creates a strong sense of community. Bring your curiosity, openness, and spirit of adventure to this daylong, which will include meditation, interactive inquiry, and group discussion.

Saturday, August 7, 2004

“Beginner’s Mind”

Teachers: Bill Weber and Kris Bailey

9:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Suitable for beginning and experienced practitioners, this daylong includes meditation instructions; sitting, walking, and standing meditation; loving-kindness practice; and a dharma talk.

Teaching by *dana* (donation). To register for a daylong, send a \$10 check payable to IMCSF to IMCSF, P.O. Box 475536, San Francisco, CA 94147-5536. No one will be turned away for lack of funds.

Beginning Mindfulness Meditation Class

July 15, 22 & 29; August 5 & 12

Five Thursday evenings, 7:00–9:00 p.m.

Teachers: Bill Weber and Kris Bailey

This class will offer basic Buddhist meditation instructions as well as Buddhist teachings and practical ways to apply these teachings to our daily lives. Includes August 7 daylong retreat.

To register, send a \$35 check payable to the Unitarian Church to First Unitarian Universalist Church, 1187 Franklin, San Francisco, CA 94109-6813.



BILL WEBER is a senior Vipassana student and a recent graduate from Spirit Rock’s Community Dharma Leader program. He is also a documentary filmmaker and video editor.

KRIS BAILEY is a senior student and participant in the Dedicated Practitioners program at Spirit Rock. She has traveled extensively and practiced meditation in various traditions throughout India, Southeast Asia, and the West. She is also a student of the Diamond Approach with A. H. Almaas.



For more information about IMCSF’s activities at the Unitarian Church, call Roxanne Worthington at 661-3036.

RETREAT SCHEDULE FOR EUGENE CASH

Every Sunday Evening

Meditation and Dharma Talk

- 6:30–7:00 Social time
7:00–7:45 Silent meditation
7:45–7:55 Break
7:55–8:55 Announcements, dharma talk,
and discussion

Teacher: Eugene Cash
(unless otherwise announced; see below)

Eugene's Absences and Visiting Teachers
May 30: Pamela Weiss, ZC
June 6: Frank Ostaseski, Zen Hospice Project
June 13: Kevin Griffin, CDL
June 20: Andrea Fella, CDL
July 18: Diana Winston, SRMC
August 1: Wes "Scoop" Nisker, SRMC
August 8: Sharda Rogell, SRMC
August 15: Marlene Jones, CDL

ZC: Zen Center
SRMC: Spirit Rock Meditation Center
CDL: Community Dharma Leader

Beginning Orientation

Second Sunday of the month, 6:00 p.m.

A brief introduction for people who are new to Vipassana meditation practice and/or new to our sangha, led by a senior student.

Potluck

First Sunday of the month, 5:00 p.m.

A time to socialize informally with your dharma friends. Vegetarian dishes, please.

June 16–18, 2004

"Contemplative Inquiry: Joy in Practice, Life, and Awakening." With Pamela Weiss. Durango, Colorado. For information, contact Valeta Bruce at 970-375-6393.

August 20–27, 2004

Spirit Rock Residential Retreat: "Dharma Intensive." With Sally Clough, Sharda Rogell, and Mark Coleman.

This retreat is for students who have sat at least two retreats and are beginning to deepen their dharma practice. It will feature both silent practice and interactive teaching sessions, which will include periods of guided meditation, presentations, and small-group and two-person interactions. Readings and reflections will be sent to participants a month in advance to allow them to prepare for the retreat.

September 14–19, 2004

Spirit Rock Residential Retreat: "Illuminating the Awakened Heart." With Kittisaro and Thanissara (from our Sister Sangha in South Africa).

We often overlook the wealth of our own great inheritance, the treasure of our buddha nature. Dharma practice offers the possibility of realizing the awakened heart, that which is already free, luminous, timeless, and vast. In this retreat we will emphasize the illumination of the *brahma viharas*, the radiant qualities of the awakened heart that manifest in the world through love, compassion, joy, and serenity. Together we will invoke and explore these qualities through meditation, chanting, reflection, investigation, and ceremony.

For more information on Spirit Rock events, call 488-0164 or visit www.spiritrock.org.

IMCSF

The Insight Meditation Community of San Francisco (IMCSF) is dedicated to offering the teachings of the Buddha as they develop in the West. Our specific orientation is toward intensive lay (householder) practice. We offer a weekly meditation and dharma talk, classes, meditation retreats, and other events as a community of spirit devoted to the embodiment of awakening in our lives.

Meeting at the First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Francisco, 1187 Franklin at Geary

ABOUT OUR TEACHER

Eugene Cash is the founding teacher of the Insight Meditation Community of San Francisco. He is a teacher at Spirit Rock Meditation Center and leads intensive meditation retreats internationally. His teaching is influenced by both Burmese and Thai streams of the Theravada tradition as well as Zen and Tibetan Buddhist practice. He is also a teacher of the Diamond Approach with A. H. Almaas.



DANA PRACTICE

Dana means generosity. The Buddha's teachings are considered priceless but are given freely in a spirit of generosity. Offering dana (a donation) gives students an opportunity to express their gratitude for the teachings and to cultivate the joy of sharing. Generally, a basket or bowl is provided in which to place dana offerings for the teacher.

INSIGHT MEDITATION COMMUNITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

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