

INSIGHT MEDITATION

COMMUNITY OF

SAN FRANCISCO

sangha news

JANUARY 2005 VOL 4 NO 1

Right Effort

Traditionally, Right or Wise Effort is understood to be effort that promotes happiness and the release of suffering. As part of the Noble Eightfold Path, Right Effort is part of the Samadhi or Contemplative basket, which also includes Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration. When teaching on Right Effort, the Buddha described the need to become aware of the particular kind of meditative effort needed in each moment.

In the early years of my practice, striving and a willful kind of effort were stressed. We were encouraged to practice intensively, consistently, and ardently. This kind of effort is characterized by the famous Zen injunction: "Practice as if your hair is on fire." There is much to learn from practicing this way. Intense, consistent practice helps us find the inner strength and resolve to stay present and awaken to all of our experience, and reveals the depth of concentration and domains of consciousness available through meditation.

It can be an exciting adventure to practice this way, pushing the edge of our limits and understanding.

But this kind of effort has a shadow side. For many people it brings up the judging, comparing mind, feeding into the cultural emphasis on endless striving, causing us to experience ourselves

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"With sustained effort and sincerity, discipline and self-control, the wise become like islands which no flood can overwhelm."

—The Buddha,
from the Dhammapada

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as “failing” if we don’t meet a desired goal or result. One can always find fault with one’s effort, and we can easily turn meditation into another opportunity to judge and condemn ourselves.

Later in my practice, I discovered the entire quote from the Chinese Zen teacher Daoxin: “When the mind of itself is peaceful and pure, then all that is needed is bold advance, as if to save your head from fire.” In this context, we practice as though our head is on fire only after we learn to cultivate a mind that is peaceful and pure.

I have found that there are different seasons within the contemplative life that call for a variety of different skillful efforts. For beginning practitioners, a more relaxed, patient effort is often helpful. Instead of having a fixed idea about what should happen, we develop an openness that allows our meditative experience to unfold. Rather than reaching for a far-off goal, we weave compassion into our meditation and into how we treat ourselves within the contemplative process. Here we emphasize the cultivation of a sincere effort that includes generosity, patience, and kindness. In response to a student who asked him if he would get enlightened if he practiced Zen, Suzuki Roshi replied: “If your practice is sincere it is almost as good.”

At other times in practice, the kind of effort needed is no effort. We may find that effort itself becomes an obstacle to just being with the truth of the way things are. There may be times in meditation when the body and mind naturally relax and open, Being reveals itself in the thusness of each moment, and we don’t need to do anything. Any effort at this point only gets in the way.

The art of meditation lies in the capacity to be sensitive to the kind of effort that is needed and

the ability to stay attuned and responsive to the changes in effort that may be needed over the course of practice or even in a single sitting.

A sitting may begin with the intention to be mindful of the breath. One may start with a relaxed effort to connect with the body, and as mindfulness of the body is established, allow the breath to move into the center of awareness. As mindfulness of breath stabilizes, one might shift the effort toward being with the various nuances of the breath, deepening one’s contactfulness with the experience. As the concentration builds, a more effortless effort may be most appropriate. Each practitioner needs to explore and experiment in order to see what works and what doesn’t.

Achaan Chah points us to a broader understanding of Right Effort. He encourages us to understand that one’s effort is to be present and awake in each circumstance of our life. He suggests an effort that transcends the artificial split between meditation and the rest of our life: “Proper effort is not the effort to make something particular happen. It is the effort to be aware and awake in each moment...the effort to make each activity of our day meditation.”

Experiment with your effort. Develop a variety of skillful ways to appropriately respond to the fluctuations of meditative experience, and cultivate an effort that allows you to be present for the mystery of your life.

—*Eugene Cash*

sangha
news

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IMCSF Raises Over \$1,100 for Tsunami Relief

The Dec. 26 tsunami disaster in Southeast Asia was a poignant reminder of the truth of impermanence. In response to the catastrophic loss of life and livelihood, IMCSF members contributed \$1,140 to Sarvodaya, a grassroots peace and economic development organization in Sri Lanka. Sarvodaya began relief efforts on the morning of the disaster, and contacted our affiliate, Spirit Rock Meditation Center in Marin County, to request financial assistance.

Sarvodaya, whose name means “universal awakening,” is involved in distributing food and clothing to survivors, organizing medical care for the needy, and managing welfare camps established for those who have lost their homes. The organization has also begun long-range planning to care for the affected population and restore economic activity.

Learn more about Sarvodaya, which was founded by the distinguished peacemaker Dr. A. T. Ariyaratne in the late 1950s, at www.sarvodaya.org. Spirit Rock Executive Director Evan Kavanagh explains how you can help with the relief effort at www.spiritrock.org. And for a list of humanitarian organizations in the U.S. and abroad, visit the Buddhist Peace Fellowship’s website at www.bpf.org.

—Kim Hsieh

Thanks, Kim, for leading the fund-raising effort!

Gayle Markow reflects on the uncertain future of our sister sangha relationship

It’s been four and a half years since we first met Kittisaro and Thanissara, and began the “sister sangha” relationship with them and their community outreach program, Woza Moya, in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa. During the last four years our sangha has raised approximately \$40,000 for Woza Moya. In the face of the AIDS pandemic in South Africa, as well as all the issues connected with severe poverty, our contributions were needed and appreciated.

In addition to Woza Moya’s benefiting from our work on their behalf, it must be noted that our sangha also benefited greatly—as often happens to those who give. Besides having a sense of connection and satisfaction, we also enjoyed our ongoing connection with Kittisaro and Thanissara, two teachers whom many of us have grown to deeply love and respect, and with whom we hope to have a greater relationship in the future. Perhaps most important, we’ve had the opportunity to work together—engaging with one another, contributing our individual skills

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Many years ago B.E. (before Eugene), my wife, Flora, and I were attending classes with Howard Cohn. We were immersed in the Buddhist doctrine of *anatta*, often translated as no-self, egolessness, or impersonality. Like many students, I found the teachings to be challenging, illuminating, and liberating. Little did I know that I would have an opportunity to practice being nobody on the streets of San Francisco.

Flora and I were meeting friends for dinner south of Market, and had parked at the newly constructed Moscone Center. My Toyota hatchback had no trunk, so we put some valuables behind the seat.

Several hours later upon returning to my car, we noticed that it had been broken into. There were four of us and we split in various directions to see if we could recover any of the items. I thought to myself, "If I were a crook, where would I be now?" The answer immediately came to me: Sixth Street. So off I walked into an area not exactly on the tourist map.

At a phone booth at Sixth and Minna, I saw a woman making a call with her friends gathered around. As I approached them, I noticed Flora's appointment book because adjacent to her credit cards were two photos of our cats, Ebi and Uni. I interrupted the woman's conversation and said, "Excuse me, but I don't think this belongs to you." Startled, she immediately dropped the appointment book to the sidewalk. After picking it up, I then had to negotiate with some of her tough friends for other missing items. They told me they had not stolen our possessions but instead had "found" them, and they demanded a "finder's fee." I reached in my wallet and gave them \$20. Other items were similarly negotiated. I thought I had recovered all that I could and was just about to leave, when I noticed that

Being Nobody

*When crime hits,
David Haase meets
the moment*



one of the stocky men I had been talking to for quite some time was wearing Flora's new prescription glasses. I was somewhat unnerved because they looked so natural on him. I demanded that he relinquish the designer frames.

At this point the thief became very agitated and said to me, "You know what? You're nobody. You're a nobody, punk!" I didn't tell him that I had just finished reading Ayya Khema's excellent book *Being Nobody, Going Nowhere*, nor did I mention the subject of *anatta*. Instead I said he might be right and could I please have the glasses. For another \$20 they were in my possession.

What was supposed to throw me off didn't because of my practicing "spiritual jujitsu." It never occurred to me that I could have been robbed or stabbed. I think in this circumstance, I was able to be effective because I treated my adversaries with respect and without judgment. We were all characters in a play. The dharma wheel could have changed due to different conditions. I felt these could have been my brothers and sisters, because I was fearless, I wasn't a threat to them. I walked back to my car a happy man.

When he's not chasing thieves, David enjoys composing music on his keyboards.

Letter from Shoshanah

Sangha member and artist Shoshanah Dubiner recently sent this update from her new home in Ashland, Oregon.

I've been here for almost a month now and have enjoyed every day up here. Aside from being a small but very culturally sophisticated town, Ashland is wonderfully quiet and surrounded by beautiful mountains often covered in ever-shifting mist.

I've attended two Zen sittings. There is no Vipassana meditation group in Ashland as far as I can determine, but if there are a few people interested, I may, as Eugene suggested, start a meditation group myself. I do miss the San Francisco sangha.

Moving to Ashland meant not only leaving many friends and family members, but also moving in with my wonderful partner, Craig, whom I met last spring. While we are very compatible in many ways and have similar values and spiritual practices, there is still plenty of opportunity for practicing lovingkindness, right intention, right speech, and self-discipline. Just the practical issues, like establishing new psychological and physical boundaries, finding space for all of our (all too numerous) belongings, sharing responsibilities, and paying bills can bring up a fine little round of grasping, aversion, and delusion. Away from the familiar patterns and people of my life in San Francisco, I sometimes feel uncomfortably disoriented; it is a good reminder of how much our identity depends on the conditions around us.

One big challenge for me was my expectation that I would move into Craig's house and immediately plunge into a daily routine of meditation and serious painting and writing. It was

quite an unrealistic expectation. The relatively few hours between late sunrise and early sunset vaporized away day after day as I unpacked, prepared for the Oregon driver's license exam, and searched for a vet for my cat and for a doctor for me. Evenings were a time to rest, enjoy Craig's company, and meet new friends. I began to feel anxious that I wasn't "getting enough creative work done," but then chose to accept the reality of the situation and be grateful that I have time to savor my new relationship and "take care of business" in a nonfrenetic way.

After eight years of living alone and now living with a partner, I keep thinking of Kittissaro's answer to Eugene's question about how it was to be married to Thanissara after both of them left the monastery: "Like two people under one robe."



SHOSHANAH DUBINER

Have you noticed

how many great people show up on Sunday nights? Do you wish you had more than a few stolen moments at the tea table to get to know them?

Apparently many of your fellow sitters share that sentiment—over 40 of them have joined mini sanghas within IMCSF. Called kalyana mitta groups after the Pali for “spiritual friends,” these smaller sanghas provide a more intimate setting for exploring our practice and how it manifests in our lives.

IMCSF is currently home to six KM groups, with more on the way. The groups average six to ten members and meet once or twice a month for about two hours. Meetings generally begin with a short period of meditation followed by a check-in; some groups share a meal together. Next is the “study” portion of the meeting, where attendees discuss a piece of literature or a pre-agreed-upon topic and relate the subject to their practice and/or their lives.

—Rachel Markowitz

Sally Northcutt says her **book study** group is doing “exciting, meaningful work together.” They meet once a month in a room of the church and discuss a chapter of a dharma book. Since reading Greg Kramer’s *Insight Dialogue* and meeting personally with the author, members have honed their interpersonal communication skills, Sally says. “When we talk about the book, it’s incredibly supportive, there’s a lot of exchange of ideas. The process is very rich.” The group is open; contact Sally at sallysfo@aol.com or 681-3149.

Alison Heather leads the other **book study** group, which meets at her house every two weeks. The group is currently reading *Seeking the Heart of Wisdom* by Jack Kornfield and Joseph Goldstein. “It’s a really nice support for practice,” Alison says. “We’re getting into a nice groove.” The group is open; contact Alison at 350-6244.

“Inspired and moved” by a seven-day metta retreat at Spirit Rock last January, Ann Salisbury started the **metta** KM group. They meet once a month at Ann’s, sit for 45 minutes, have a potluck brunch, then discuss “what’s up for people,” whether it’s personal issues or social engagement. “There aren’t a lot of trappings, there’s no preparation. I want it to be very accessible,” Ann says. To join the group, contact Ann at annsalsbury@sbcglobal.net or 863-4456.

KalyanaMittaGroups

Jürgen Möllers and Armando Singer co-lead the **sutra study** group, which meets about once a month to discuss portions of the Majjhima Nikaya, or Middle-Length Discourses of the Buddha, as well as commentaries on the text by teachers such as Thich Nhat Hanh. Discussions use the text as a starting point, then branch off into “where people are in their practice,” Jürgen says. The group is open and requires a six-month commitment; contact Jürgen at 637-7662.

Spurred on by a feeling that “women were not adequately represented in this practice,” Jessica Herbold started the **women’s** KM group. After four years, it’s still going strong. “It’s a significant part of each woman’s life. We all count on it,” Jessica says. The group, which meets once a month to eat, sit, and talk, has even done retreats together at Mount Madonna, near Santa Cruz. “It’s social and fun but also feels meditative and reflective and quiet. It’s an interesting combination,” Jessica says. The group is not currently accepting new members.



Another group that is closed for the moment is Tim Wicks’s **12-step** group—but he plans to start up another one soon. “The dharma and recovery go so hand in hand,” Tim says. “The first noble truth is that in life there is suffering, and the first step in recovery is to admit we are powerless before our addictions.” Tim’s group meets every two weeks and discusses a reading; they recently read Thich Nhat Hanh’s *Heart of the Buddha’s Teaching*. There’s a check-in about every six weeks, in part to offer support for depression, which is so common in recovery, Tim says. To join the new recovery group, contact Tim at timothywicks@earthlink.net or 821-2569.

And Anita Kline puts out the call to **“adventurous elders”**—those who are “long past the age of young and foolish, yet still wondering when the wisdom of experience will kick in.” For Anita, “developing a spiritual practice has been central to my vision of adventurous eldering. I want to age like those beautiful older teachers with their lively eyes and serene faces. I want to learn to let go—of physical strength, of mental acuity, of beloved friends and family, and most inevitably of this body itself—with as little fear and suffering as possible.” If you have reached or surpassed the age of 55, and if you have time to meet about once a month in San Francisco, join Anita in investigating the subject of aging in our society and what it means to be elders in a spiritual community. Contact Anita at anitakline@comcast.net or 824-8395.

For more info on KM groups, or to propose a new group, contact Tim Wicks at timothywicks@earthlink.net or 821-2569.

Spiritual friendships flourishing within IMCSF

and talents for the greater good, and developing friendships along the way.

However, instead of doing a third annual benefit for Woza Moya this year, we will hold a celebration of our sangha, which has just passed its tenth year (party tentatively scheduled for April 30). Since our two previous spring benefits were so successful, one might wonder why we have decided not to hold one this year. Simply stated, people lead very busy lives and have limited time for volunteering. The two spring benefits, which were successful on so many levels, also involved huge amounts of volunteer labor. And while everyone did a magnificent job, people also got tired out (or burned out), and we were not able to generate the energy to put on another benefit this year, even a smaller one.

Kittisaro and Thanissara have been enormously gracious, thanking us again and again for all of our contributions over the last four years, and explaining that Woza Moya is now doing very well and receiving funding and donations from many sources. They tell us that perhaps now is the time for us to turn our attention inward to see what our sangha needs, and perhaps to pursue another worthwhile project closer to home.

It remains to be seen to where we will turn our attention and energy. I agree with Kittisaro and Thanissara that we can feel very good about the work and contributions we made during the last four years. We all know the Buddha taught about impermanence, that everything changes. At this point it is unclear whether the Sister Sangha Committee will continue to function. Things are changing in South Africa and here as well. I am curious to see how we will come to understand these changes, and where they will take us as individuals and as a community.

Gayle has chaired the Sister Sangha Committee for the last four years.

Food for(No)Thought

The first Sunday of every month, IMCSF members trade their zafus for dining chairs and focus on the area below the nose and above the chin—and we don't mean the nostrils.

Mindfulness of the taste of delicious vegetarian food becomes dominant during our monthly potlucks in the Fireside Room of the church. The informal, nonsilent gatherings attract anywhere from 10 to 15 people, with numbers falling off a bit in the last few months, according to potluck devotee Jennifer Scaff King.

The edibles range from starters, salads, and casseroles to the most sinful of desserts, and, true to the dharma, the menus are unpredictable: one time there were no desserts, and another time the meal was an all-salad affair, Jennifer recalls.

However, despite good intentions, the potluck has not been able to avoid the truth of impermanence. In addition to the slip in attendance, the meal has recently seen its longtime maitre d' Kelly Leber step down from his position, and Kelly's unofficial assistant, Bill Silver, leave town to pursue the moveable feast that is Paris, France.

But the potluck will prevail, as Jon-Paul Kelly has agreed to assume the post of host. The relatively simple task consists of transporting one bag of supplies from the downstairs closet to the Fireside Room and doing minimal setup and cleanup. If you're interested in being a backup for Jon-Paul, talk to Tim Wicks on Sunday nights.

The dinners begin at 5:30 and end just prior to the 7:00 sit. Both homemade and store-bought items are welcome.

—Rachel Markowitz

a call for articles

Submission
deadline
for next issue:
April 1, 2005

The mountain storm starts quietly

with a light whisper

“Quick, get the almost-dry laundry”

The pace quickens as thunder

rumbles, rolls

bounces across the valley,

a child in the village echoing its cry.

Now the deep bass of rain drums on the

tin roof.

Enclosed in a cloud, unable to see across

the valley,

I sit in my monastic chamber

dry

As the storm rages around me

through me

and passes away.

This poem, offered anonymously by a sangha member, was written during a visit to the Namoo Buddha Monastery in Nepal in September 2000.

ALSO OF INTEREST

Have you checked out our website lately?

It's much friendlier now, thanks to a redesign by one of our own. Visit www.sfinsight.org for dharma-talk downloads, details on classes and retreats, Vipassana basics, and more.

We're moving! But not too far away. Beginning sometime in the spring, join us for our regular Sunday meetings in the Starr King Room, located to the left of the restrooms. It's a larger room with a better sound system, and our moving spares the church the cost of heating and lighting a large portion of the building. Stay tuned for specifics on the move.

“Adventurous elders” sought for new kalyana mitta group. See p. 7 for details.

It's that time of year again: As we head to our Sunday sit, homeless men will line up outside the church in anticipation of a free dinner, a place to sleep for the night, and breakfast the next morning. For the 17th year, the Unitarian Church will shelter 90 men in the King Rooms for five weeks, Jan. 31 through March 6.

Bill Silver, a sangha member who recently moved to Paris, writes: “My practice at the moment consists of an hour or so of meditation each day in one of the wonderful Paris churches, most often Notre Dame des Champs, which is very near where I live.”



FELIX MACNEE

*Got some
dharma dish?
Contact
rachel@rmink.com.*

schedule of

events

at the first unitarian universalist church

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
*Eugene will be sitting a monthlong retreat at
Spirit Rock Feb. 27–March 25.*

Feb. 27: To be announced
March 6: Bill Weber, Community Dharma Leader
March 13: Diana Winston, Spirit Rock teacher and
founder of the Buddhist Alliance for Social
Engagement (BASE)
March 20: Andrew Getz, Vipassana teacher and
Director of Youth Horizons, an organization
dedicated to introducing awareness practices
to young people
April 17: Frank Ostaseski, founder of Zen
Hospice Project and current director of the
Alaya Institute
May 8: Pamela Weiss, Zen teacher

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, 5:30 p.m.

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

Beginning Mindfulness

Meditation Class

May 5, 12, 19, 26; June 2

Five Thursday evenings, 7:00–9:00 p.m.
Teachers: Bill Weber and Kris Bailey
Basic meditation instructions and Buddhist
teachings. Includes May 21 daylong retreat.
For more info, visit www.sfinsight.org.

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

a call for articles

Add your voice to the ongoing discussion about Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Essays should be up to 400 words and based on personal experience. For example, how has an aspect of Buddhist practice—service, concentration, generosity—become particularly significant, challenging, or helpful in your own life?

Essays will be reviewed by the editorial staff and our teacher, Eugene Cash. Submit work to Rachel Markowitz, editor, at rachel@rmink.com.

Submission deadline for next issue: April 1, 2005

RETREAT SCHEDULE FOR EUGENE CASH

February 12, 2005

Daylong Retreat: “The Enneagram for Buddhists.” With Sandra Maitri. Spirit Rock Meditation Center, Marin County. 415.488.0164; www.spiritrock.org.

The ancient spiritual system of the enneagram describes nine ego types that arise as a result of loss of contact with our true nature. It also depicts how reality looks beyond the egoic self, giving us useful guidance in opening to a more fundamental dimension of ourselves. In this daylong retreat, we will explore how working with the enneagram can clarify our understanding of self and not-self, cut through our obscurations, and deepen our practice. The material will be taught through lectures and experiential exercises so that participants can personally connect with the wisdom of the enneagram. Sandra Maitri, author of *The Spiritual Dimension of the Enneagram*, has studied and taught the enneagram for 35 years.

April 16–23, 2005

Dedicated Practitioners Program. By invitation only. Yucca Valley. For information about the DPP, visit www.spiritrock.org.

May 6–14, 2005

Insight Meditation Retreat. With Yanai Postelnik, Sharda Rogell, and Myoshin Kelly. Insight Meditation Society, Barre, Massachusetts. www.dharma.org.

If your New Year’s resolution was to get more involved with the sangha, here are some ideas for you:

- Arrive early or stay a bit later on Sunday evenings to help with room setup and breakdown.
- Join a kalyana mitta group—or propose a new one (see p. 6).
- Attend the monthly potluck (see p. 8).
- Participate in the next daylong retreat at the church May 21.
- Plug in to our online network by joining our Yahoo Group at groups.yahoo.com/group/IMCSF.
- Contribute to *Sangha News*. Send dharma-oriented news, essays, poetry, and art to rachel@rmink.com.

**Don't
Just
Sit
There**



SHOSHANAH DUBINER

