

INSIGHT MEDITATION

COMMUNITY OF

SAN FRANCISCO

sangha news

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Recognizing
NEW YEAR'S
the passing of
REFLECTION

BY EUGENE CASH

*a year can be
an opportunity*

The New Year doesn't exist! What we conventionally regard as the "New Year" is just that: a convention—a widely agreed-upon custom. It is a point in time we have come to invest with meaning, even though in "real time" it is just another day. In our practice, the question is how to use the convention of the New Year to deepen our practice and support awakening.

One of the central teachings in Buddhism is the truth of impermanence. We can contemplate impermanence individually when we sit in meditation, observing how everything changes, and can do this as a culture by acknowledging the cyclical transition from one year to the next. Each passing year means that a year of our life is gone; our life span is now lessened.

*to reconnect
with transience
and change*



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The Buddha said that if we completely understood the truth of impermanence we would awaken. As a culture, we tend to downplay or deny the relentless march of time. We often fail to acknowledge how fleeting our life is. Recognizing the passing of a year can be an opportunity to reconnect with transience and change. Allowing this characteristic of human life to impact us can support our intention to practice and to awaken. The word for this in Buddhism is *samvega*. Samvega refers to the urgency to practice based on seeing the reality of transience and impermanence.

A second, equally important by-product of reflecting on temporality and change is the appreciation of the preciousness of life. When we assume things will last forever we live in a trancelike dullness of habit and reification. When that assumption is in abeyance, we appreciate the freshness, immediacy, and poignancy of each moment. Reality, in its 10,000 forms, comes alive. We recognize the beauty and mystery inherent in every moment of life.

The Zen monk/poet Ryokan described it this way:

*The bamboo grove in front of my hut!
Every day I see it a thousand times
Yet never tire of it*

With the turn of the new year, we can contemplate what is true and skillful, and reflect on how we have used our time in the past year. Did we devote ourselves to fulfilling our goals, living our values, and embodying our deepest understanding? This kind of contemplation is not meant to encourage our judge or inner critic. Rather, it is an opportunity for objective reflection on the way things are (or were) as the basis for renewing our intention and desire to awaken.



The possibility implicit in a “new year” allows us to ask ourselves, What do we really want? What skillful means are needed to support our intention? How can we create the conditions to bring about our realization? It can be helpful to take a period of meditation or an extended length of time to contemplate our intention for the new year. We can use the new year to re-vision our life and then commit to the new vision.

Ultimately, this process is also an opportunity to remember the truth beyond the convention: that each day, each moment, is fresh, mysterious, not bound by any convention. Each moment is a new year.

*May this year be one of awakening
and freedom for all.
May we all know Peace.*

sangha
news

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From the Deep South to South Africa

IMCSF Continues to Serve Communities in Need

By Kitty Costello and Rachel Markowitz

At the conclusion of IMCSF's September Sandwich Retreat, teachers Eugene Cash, Pamela Weiss, and Thanissara, along with retreat participants, were moved to donate half of the dana collected by the retreat to IMCSF development and half to the Hurricane Katrina relief effort. Through Evan Kavanagh at Spirit Rock, IMCSF contacted the Conscious Living Project (CLP), which has been channeling relief funds to families and community activists in some of the hardest-hit, poorest communities in southern Mississippi. On CLP's recommendation, our \$1,500 donation was split among the following three organizations:

- North Gulfport Community Land Trust — The trust purchases properties that have been lost to tax delinquency and leases them out to residents in the form of a 99-year lease. This strategy effectively takes the land out of the reach of speculators and puts it directly in control of the community.
- Turkey Creek Community Initiative — This effort is spearheaded by community activist Derrick Evans, who, when Katrina hit, filled several moving trucks with emergency supplies and maxed out his \$20,000-limit credit card to help those in need. Evans works with youth, engaging them in projects that rebuild and strengthen their community.



Opening day at the Woza Moya Community Centre

- Moore Community House — Serving east Biloxi, half of which was leveled by Katrina, the Moore Community House coordinates a host of community programs, including Head Start and Meals on Wheels, as well as job training and crisis assistance.

In response to IMCSF's donation, CLP project coordinator Luke Lundemo emailed, "My body is still tingling with those wonderful sparks that come from recognizing some goodness in the world. Thank you so much for your generosity to people who will really appreciate it."

Halfway around the world in South Africa, the Woza Moya Community Centre—built largely with funds raised by IMCSF—opened its doors November 9. The much-needed building, located in a region particularly devastated by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, houses Woza Moya's main office for staff, a counseling room, and a supply center.

Inspired by the work of dharma friends Kittisaro and Thanissara, founders of the Woza Moya HIV/AIDS project, IMCSF raised over \$40,000 for the organization through various fund-raising activities beginning in 2001.



This plaque is displayed near the entrance of the building

"The Woza Moya Community Centre will be officially opened on Wednesday, 9 November, starting at 10 a.m. We hope that you will be able to join us in celebrating this wonderful gift from the San Francisco sangha in the U.S., c/o Kittisaro & Thanissara." — from the invitation to the opening

GROWING INTO MY LIFE

*I'm filling out my existence
like a dress I've been longing to wear
I'm starting to live as if I'm allowed to be here
as if I'm entitled to each precious breath
as if I have the right to be what I want
to do what my heart desires
to eat what my body craves*

*Like a slick of slow-moving lava
I am moving into every crevice of this being
I plan to embody every inch of me
to move as a whole organism
as a dancer aware of each limb's movement
the angle of each extremity
the flutter of every digit*

*I'm all grown up
but I'm finally growing out
Having been continually pleached*
my limbs at last
make their way to the sky
turning into hefty branches
flowering and offering fruit*

*This lava is flowing
this tree grows
the habit of hesitation fades
natural rhythm comes in its place
a calm simplicity of being
not questioning or wondering
just being, breathing in and out*

*Freedom rolls down into my legs and arms
weighting my steps and actions
Liberation ripens on my branches*

*Bent and woven as to form a hedge

PALMORE HOYT



BEING IN MY BODY

*Being in my body
feeling it for the first time
I begin to notice*

*It is tense
my stomach aches
I quiver with fear*

*Openings and closings
relaxing over and over
patiently and impatiently*

*Just being is enough
in the endless now
in moments of awareness*

*The body is confused
with past and present
feeling unsafe*

*Finally facing the fear
my body learns how
to allow joy*

*Who is the one
who knows
and is aware
of body and breath?*

LYNN STANTON

MORE POETRY ON LAST PAGE

Traveler on the Path

Jürgen Möllers speaks with sangha member Rebecca Katz

JM: You started practicing a couple of years ago. What brought you to meditation?

RK: I think it all started with an event that shook me to the core. I was a first-year medical student when I saw a young man dying in the emergency room. I understood that this could happen to anybody at any time, and it made me wonder what this is all about, what it means to have unfinished business, and how I would deal with death and dying as a doctor—without falling apart each time and without hardening.

JM: How did you start your practice?

RK: Trying to process that experience in the ER, I came across the Zen Hospice Project, where I was introduced to the concepts of mindfulness and meditation. I had friends who were meditating, and soon after I started sitting I did my first retreat at Spirit Rock. There was so much sadness and grief in me. But it also felt very cathartic. From then on I knew I needed a place where I could let go and find grounding.

JM: What sustains your practice these days?

RK: I often think of that man in the ER with gratitude as the one who brought me to the path. But it is my understanding that freedom is possible in every moment, and that keeps me walking the path.

In November, Rebecca completed a six-week retreat at the Insight Meditation Society in Barre, Massachusetts.



The chilly air was no match for the warmth of sangha at IMCSF's picnic in Golden Gate Park on Saturday, October 22. About 40 people—and two pooches—attended. Special thanks go to Paul Irving, Bill Weber, and Kim Hsieh for organizing the event, and to Dave Matthews for the photos.



Daylong Retreat

Saturday, February 18

Teachers: Kris Bailey and Bill Weber

(see bios below)

9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

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

Teaching by dana. To register, 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.

5-Week Beginning Vipassana Meditation Class

January 26; February 2, 9, 16, and 22

Four Thursdays and one Wednesday

7:00 to 9:00 p.m.

Teachers: Kris Bailey and Bill Weber

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 February 18 daylong retreat.

Teaching by dana. To register, send a \$35 check payable to UU Church to First Unitarian Universalist Church, Attn: Adult Education, 1187 Franklin Street, San Francisco, CA 94109. (Or bring a check with you to the first class.)

Kris Bailey is a senior Vipassana practitioner and member of the Dedicated Practitioners Program at Spirit Rock. **Bill Weber** is a senior Vipassana practitioner and a graduate from Spirit Rock's Community Dharma Leader Program.

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

Eugene's Absences and Visiting Teachers

February 5: Bill Weber (see below left)

February 12: Jacques Verduin from the Insight Prison Project

February 19: Diana Winston on activism and engaged Buddhism

February 26: Kris Bailey (see below left)

Beginning Orientation

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

A brief introduction to Vipassana meditation practice, led by a senior student.

Vegetarian Potluck

First Sunday of the month, 5:30 p.m.

Chi Gung

All Sundays except first, 6:15 to 6:45 p.m.

Pre-sit gentle movement practice. No experience required.

IMCSF's Donation Policy

To allow us to pay the rent to the UU Church, compensate the teacher, and handle other expenses, we ask Sunday night attendees for a suggested donation of \$10. If you are unable to give \$10, give what you can. If writing a check, make it out to IMCSF.

Retreat Schedule for Eugene Cash

The following retreats will take place at Spirit Rock Meditation Center unless otherwise indicated. For more info, visit www.spiritrock.org.

December 27–January 5

NEW YEAR’S INSIGHT MEDITATION RETREAT
Eugene Cash, Sharda Rogell,
Gil Fronsdal, John Travis

January 24–29

VIPASSANA RETREAT
Eugene Cash, Howard Cohn,
Diana Winston

March 18

DAYLONG: WHOLE BODY BREATHING
Eugene Cash

April 23–30

DEDICATED PRACTITIONERS PROGRAM (DPP)
Invitation Only
Yucca Valley
Eugene Cash, Sally Clough, Jack Kornfield,
Mary Orr, Thanissaro Bhikkhu,
Andrew Olendzki

May 10–17

THE JOY OF SAMADHI
Eugene Cash, Phillip Moffitt, Sally Clough

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Got a dharma story? Contribute to
Sangha News. Email rachel@rmink.com.

Questions about IMCSF? Visit us on the web
at www.sfinsight.org or call us at 994-5951.

Also of Interest

Sean Feit, who has led our pre-Sunday sit *kirtan* (chanting) sessions since June, bids the sangha farewell as he and his partner embark on a trip to India of indefinite duration. “Thank you for your enthusiasm and support of my teaching this year,” Sean emailed dharma friends. “I have learned so much, and enjoyed sharing these beautiful practices with you.”

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Two new *kalyana mitta* (“spiritual friends”) groups are forming in San Francisco. The Richmond group will meet every other Wednesday from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m.; contact Genevieve Buehler at 668-1709 or geneviva@sbcglobal.net. The Castro group will meet either Monday or Friday evening; contact Scott Fogle-song at 621-8358 or scottlf@mindspring.com.

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Spirit Rock teacher Mark Coleman leads wilderness retreats combining meditation, nature, community, and silence. For more info, email markcji@aol.com.

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Spirit Rock teacher James Baraz will teach a course called “Awakening Joy” starting in late January. For more info, email awakeningjoy@mindspring.com.



ABOUT THE ARTISTS Ed Ritger, whose photos appear on the cover, page 5, and at left, is inspired by “the commonality and normalcy of life that binds humanity together yet manifests itself in unique cultural distinctions.” Says Susan Lauritzen, whose photo appears on page 4, “I feel most directly connected to myself, this world, and our mysteries through visions both seen and felt.” Patricia Diart made the drawing on page 2 while blindfolded and participating in Continuum, a breathing and movement practice.

IMCSF

The Insight Meditation Community of San Francisco is dedicated to offering the teachings of the Buddha as they develop in the West. Our specific orientation is toward intensive householder (lay) 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

WELL-WISHING

May you be well

May you delve into your shadows

And stay there a while

May you cry, may you shout

May you shudder with fright

*May you live under your bed where
the monsters reside*

May you look death in the eye

*And then, my dear, may you see love
and eternal light*

*When you awaken whole from this
long lonesome night*

JEANNE FOSS

DANA PRACTICE

Dana means generosity. The Buddha's teachings are considered priceless but traditionally 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 giving. All IMCSF retreats and classes are taught by *dana*.



ABOUT OUR TEACHER

Eugene Cash is the founding teacher of IMCSF. He teaches 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, a school of spiritual investigation and self-realization developed by A. H. Almaas.

dharma datebook

what IMCSF members are up to...
off the cushion

KITTY COSTELLO, who leads our pre-Sunday sit chi gung sessions, will be teaching a 10-week chi gung class at UCSF Mission Bay on Wednesdays from noon to 1 p.m. beginning January 11. For more info, call 695-2911 or email kittycostello@earthlink.net.

PAMELA EDELSTEIN and her quartet will be playing jazz standards—with Pam on vocals—at Emerald Garden Restaurant in Alameda from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. on Saturday, January 14; Saturday, February 4; and Tuesday, February 14. The Vietnamese restaurant is located at 1518 Park Street, just a few blocks south of the 29th Avenue Bridge.

FLORA DAVIS will have new artwork exhibited January 15 to March 31 at CIIS, 1453 Mission between 10th and 11th. Titled *The Way*, Flora's new series of metal sculptures expresses the joy of being in the moment with all its unpredictability. The opening reception is January 27 from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m.