

sangha news

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Doorway *The Role of the Breath in* to the *Buddhist Meditation* Sacred

By Eugene Cash

The breath holds a unique position in the world of contemplative culture. Almost all Eastern meditative disciplines—Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism—and the Western esoteric streams of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam utilize some form of breath meditation as a means to enter the spiritual world and touch the sacred.

In Buddhist mindfulness meditation, the breath is the point of entree for exploring one's inner landscape. Mindfulness of breathing initiates the movement from suffering, confusion, and a limited understanding of reality to freedom, clarity, peace, and seeing things as they are.

In the Anapanasati Sutra, which outlines 16 practices for utilizing the breathing as a path to awakening, the Buddha begins with mindfulness of the breath. Mindfulness is not thinking about the breath or conceptualizing or imagining the breathing. It is a felt sense, a direct experience of a breathing body. The training of "mind-fullness" brings



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together body and mind through the sensations created by our life's breath. The breath becomes the medium for introducing the practitioner to mindfulness and

then the vehicle to take one through the various terrains of possibility all the way to awakening.

What is it about the breath that allows for this trajectory? What is it about the breath that makes it a prime subject for meditation?

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The ordinariness of the breath is deceiving. As we begin working with the breath we find it familiar in a habitual way. As we make contact with the breathing and become more intimate with the sensations, the movement, the delicacy, and the exquisite immediacy of each breath, our breathing begins to reveal deeper and more esoteric expressions of itself and reality. The breath ultimately reveals its extraordinary nature. It is a microcosm expressing the extraordinary reality of the macrocosm.

The antiquated word *behold* expresses this movement of the mind in relation to the breathing. To “behold” is to thoroughly hold or embrace something. In its archaic usage it also implies something magical, mysterious, and transformative, as in “Behold the dragon!” The breath asks for an attention that beholds. It calls for an attentiveness that includes interest, wonder, not knowing, contactfulness, and intimacy. Attuning to the breath with a penetrating awareness brings forth the magic of our aliveness.

As a tool for training us in the dharma, breathing offers many rewards. For one thing, the breath is impermanent. Like a human being, each breath is unique, original, only here for a short time, and then gone. The breath can also provide a teaching in nondualism. Attending to the breath begins to dissolve the conventional division between body and mind. Unity, or a sense of oneness, is not something outside of ourselves but accessible through the merging of breath, body, and consciousness.

The birth of human life is characterized by our first breath. Death is characterized by our last breath. When the breath ends we “expire.” The breath itself “inspires” us—it brings spirit to life. The word *spirit* comes from the Latin *spiritus*,

which means “breath, spirit,” from *spirare*, “breathe.” As we learn to devote ourselves to the breath, we find our spirit, that which is numinous in human life. The numinous is described in Buddhism as True Nature or Buddha Nature—that within us which is universal, timeless, pure, or essential.

Suzuki Roshi describes it this way in *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind*:

“When we inhale, the air comes into the inner world. When we exhale the air goes out to the outer world. The inner world is limitless, and the outer world is also limitless. We say ‘inner world’ or ‘outer world’ but actually there is just one whole world. In this limitless world, our throat is like a swinging door. The air comes in and goes out like someone passing through a swinging door. If you think, ‘I breathe,’ the ‘I’ is extra. There is no you to say ‘I.’ What we call ‘I’ is just a swinging door which moves when we inhale and when we exhale. It just moves; that is all. When your mind is pure and calm enough to follow this movement, there is nothing: no ‘I,’ no world, no mind nor body; just a swinging door....

“To be aware of the movement does not mean to be aware of your small sense of self, but rather of your universal nature, or Buddha nature.”

Please enjoy minding the mystery of your breath. May it reveal your universal nature.



sangha news

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Dharma Service Project Update

Sangha Members to Connect with San Francisco's Homeless Community at August Outreach Event

By the Sangha News Staff

Members of IMCSF will join about 2,000 Bay Area volunteers at a different sort of daylong August 10—an outreach event sponsored by San Francisco's Project Homeless Connect. The day of service, to take place at the Bill Graham Civic Auditorium from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., will be the kickoff event for IMCSF's Dharma Service Project (DSP), and all sangha members, as well as their families and friends, are welcome to attend.

Begun by Mayor Gavin Newsom in October 2004, Project Homeless Connect offers a full day of resources to homeless San Franciscans every other month. Volunteers work directly with attendees by helping to link them with vital social services including medical treatment, substance abuse and mental health counseling, legal services, food stamps, housing options, and more. Attendees can obtain medical care on-site, as well as a free meal and giveaways such as food, books, and clothing. The day of service offers a range of volunteer opportunities, from street outreach to client support to food prep to pet sitting.

“Project Homeless Connect is breaking the myth that people do not seek assistance and services and would simply prefer to be on the street,” according

to the project's home page. “The data proves that when people are approached in a respectful and kind manner, and with available resources, they are eager to accept help towards self-sufficiency.”

To date, more than 18,000 volunteers have participated in Project Homeless Connect and more than 12,000 homeless people have been served. The program has been copied in over 30 municipalities nationwide.

IMCSF's Gayle Markow and Geoff McNally participated in the June outreach event to determine whether Project Homeless Connect would be a good fit for DSP. Gayle, a former nurse, worked in the on-site medical clinic, while Geoff helped distribute food to people as they left. Both came away with thumbs up. “The volunteer spirit was very strong,” Gayle says. “I felt moved by being in close contact with the suffering of the homeless people there, as well as positive about our experience as volunteers.”

To sign up to volunteer at the August event, go to www.projecthomelessconnect.com. If you have further questions, email Gayle at gayle49@aol.com.

Initiated in March, DSP is a co-creative, cooperative project adopted by IMCSF to provide opportunities for sangha members to practice mindfulness in service. Practitioners are invited to submit proposals for practice opportunities, to join in the planning of events, and to participate in such events. For more information, email Kris Bailey at dharmaservice@yahoo.com or visit the IMCSF website at www.sfinsight.org.

James Baraz to Teach Course on “Awakening Joy” Starting July 25

* * *

Spirit Rock teacher James Baraz explores themes such as choosing happiness, learning to be with the hard stuff, gratitude, generosity, and simplifying during this six-month course, which can be done in person in Berkeley or online. For more info or to register, email Shoshana at awakeningjoy@pacbell.net.



It has been a little over a year since I started meditating. Why did I begin? In short, I was suffering. I was experiencing stress, impatience, fear, and confusion. I attended the series of beginning meditation classes taught by sangha members Kris Bailey and Bill Weber. Their love of the dharma was uplifting and energizing and provided me with a foundation for further exploration and insight. The simplicity and heart of vipassana practice began to fill my heart and soul. Naturally I continued practicing and became a regular member of the Sunday night sangha led by Eugene, whose insightful and practical dharma talks enabled me to expand my practice. I also started participating in daylong retreats at Spirit Rock.

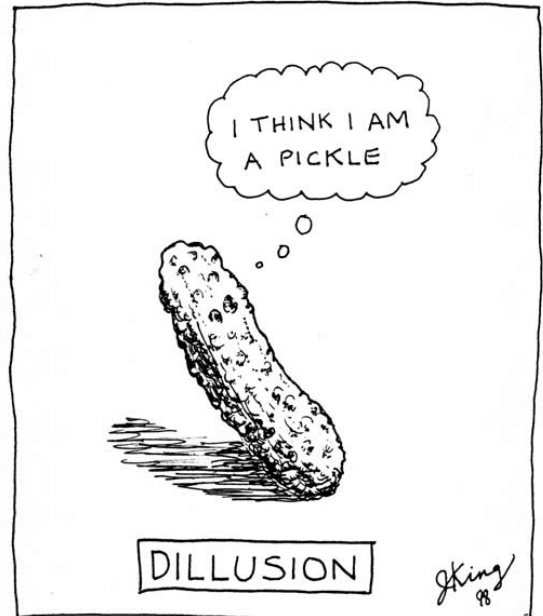
I have come to realize and appreciate how much both the dharma and our sangha have helped me become more aware of myself and the world on so many different levels. The practice has helped me take on in mind, body, and spirit a number of difficult life events: the death of my mom in December, a new job with a start-up company, and my sister-in-law's battle with breast cancer.

Reflections on My First Year of Practice

By Jon Frankel

I still suffer today (no kidding!—because it's not going away!) but I am much more present and awake with my pain. I'm better able to accept difficulties with love and compassion instead of fear and rejection. My next step on the path: attending a five- or seven-day retreat. I can't wait. Peace and metta to all.

When he's not on the cushion, Jon Frankel is either traveling on business or keeping fit by swimming, biking, and hiking.



Jennifer Scarff King

415.

994.5951

BEYOND THE CALL OF DHARMA AN ONGOING LOOK AT SANGHA VOLUNTEERS
BY RACHEL MARKOWITZ

PRISCILLA JOHNSON
TELEPHONE CONTACT
PERSON



Sometimes when you sit with something for a while, the perfect opportunity falls into your lap, so to speak.

Priscilla Johnson was looking to get more involved in IMCSF when, at a Sunday sit last fall, someone announced there was a need for a telephone contact person. To Priscilla, the position seemed ideal. It would give her a way to serve the sangha despite living in Berkeley. The one-on-one nature of the job appealed to her. And, well, she likes the phone. She stepped up and took on the task.

Once or twice a week someone calls and leaves a voice mail. Inquiries range from “What is vipassana?” to “What should I wear to the sit?” Priscilla’s reply to the latter: “Anything from leather to lace. Whatever you’re comfortable in.”

Callers want to know about the lineage of our practice and where exactly we’re located. Once someone asked if we had a 12-step kalyana mitta group (we do).

Others are curious about what’s offered at Spirit Rock. And some people just want to check in before showing up at the sit. “They feel more comfortable talking to a live person before coming to the group as opposed to just getting information off the Internet,” Priscilla says.

A member of IMCSF since 2002, Priscilla enjoys her role as unofficial spokesperson for the group and for the practice. “I love to guide people toward this very heartening way of being in the world,” she says. “I feel so privileged and honored and lucky to be able to do this.”

my haiku practice

30

On soft bananas
The fruit flies continue
Their quiet celebration

12

Barking dog
my sympathy fades
as the night deepens

15

Mind filled with thoughts
The cat arches up to pet
my empty hand

22

Tricky winter sun
all day the pond
stiffens and relaxes

17

Spring is this branch
of cherry blossoms
cost me ten bucks



Last year I had a practice of writing one haiku a day. I didn't always get around to it, but on most days I was able to come up with at least one three-line poem that followed the traditional instruction of capturing a moment with clarity, referencing the time of year, and including my response to what was being observed. These guidelines are discussed in a great little book called The Haiku Year, from which my project took its inspiration. The numbers preceding each of the poems reference the day of the month they were written.

—Tracy Grubbs

8

First rain of the season
Suddenly my heart opens,
an old umbrella

11

Those trees rolling with the wind
always laughing
at the same joke

13

Down this row of laps
seven different ways
to rest a pair of hands

Daylong Retreat

Saturday, September 30

Teachers: Eugene Cash and
Pamela Weiss

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

4-Week Beginning Mindfulness Meditation Class

Four Thursday Evenings

September 7, 14, 28; October 5

7:00 to 9:00 p.m.

Teachers: Eugene Cash and Pamela Weiss

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 September 30 daylong retreat.

Teaching by dana. To register, send a \$50 check payable to UU Church to First Unitarian Universalist Church, Attn: Adult Education, 1187 Franklin Street, SE, CA 94109. (Or bring a check with you to the first class.)

PAMELA WEISS is a Zen teacher and teacher-in-training with Jack Kornfield.

Every Sunday Evening

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

Aug. 20: Wes Nisker, Spirit Rock

Sept. 10: Andrea Fella, Insight Meditation
Center of the Mid-Peninsula

Oct. 8: Kris Bailey, Spirit Rock's Commu-
nity Dharma Leader Program

Oct. 15: Donald Rothberg, Spirit Rock

Oct. 22: Jacques Verduin, Insight Prison
Project

Dec. 17: Frank Ostaseski, Alaya Institute

Beginning Orientation

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

A brief introduction to vipassana meditation
and our sangha, led by a senior student.

Vegetarian Potluck

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

Socialize informally with your dharma friends.

Homemade and store-bought dishes welcome.

Chi Gung

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

Pre-sit gentle movement practice to stimulate
energy flow. No experience required.

“Body of Awakening” Course to Continue Through September

The Buddha emphasized the body as the basis of mindfulness and the medium through which we discover freedom. In the third and final four-week segment of his course on mindfulness of body, Eugene Cash will continue to examine in-depth the Buddhist teachings on the body. The course, held at the Unitarian Church, explores and supports embodiment in all aspects of our life and practice.

Each class combines didactic material, experiential meditation, contemplative inquiry, and group discussion. There are reading and homework assignments between classes. In addition, daylong retreats are optional, but recommended, with the course.

For full details on the content of the course, visit www.sfinsight.org.

Tuesday Evening Sessions
September 5, 12, 19, 26
7:00 to 9:30 p.m.
“Selfless Embodiment”

Saturday Daylongs
Sept. 2 (at Spirit Rock), Sept. 30
9:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

The fee for the last four-week segment is \$125. There is an additional registration fee, plus teacher dana, for each daylong. Make checks payable to Eugene Cash. To register, send a check to Bill Weber, 130 Danvers St., San Francisco, CA 94114. For more info, email Bill at weber2000@earthlink.net.



Have a dharma story to tell?
Poetry? Artwork? Announcement?
Contribute to *Sangha News*.
Email rachel@rmink.com.

Retreat Schedule for Eugene Cash

All of the following retreats will take place at Spirit Rock Meditation Center. For details, visit www.spiritrock.org.

Body of Awakening: Mindfulness and Yoga
September 2 (daylong)
Eugene Cash, Ada Shedlock (yoga)

Body of Awakening: Sexuality and the Dharma
November 4 (daylong)
Eugene Cash

Body of Awakening: Mindfulness and Yoga
December 5–10
Eugene Cash, Anna Douglas,
Ada Shedlock (yoga)



ARTISTS' STATEMENTS

FLORA DAVIS FRONT PAGE, PAGE 2 I work with metal, manipulating the surface color, patterns, and texture. I never get the same surface treatment

twice, and I love how the end result looks organic, random, and spontaneous. Upcoming exhibitions of my work: The Atrium Gallery, 600 Townsend Street, July 27–September 7, and ArtPeople Gallery, Crocker Galleria, August 1–31.

Flora is the designer of Sangha News.

JENNIFER SCAFF KING PAGE 4 Several years ago, I was inspired to do some cartoons and enter the *SF Bay Guardian* Cartoon Contest. I won some prizes and it was really fun, but then I got a computer, and now it often seems there's no time to do anything.



IMCSF AT A GLANCE

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

OUR SUNDAY MEETINGS

Our sangha meets every Sunday from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. at the First Unitarian Universalist Church, 1187 Franklin (at Geary). We begin with a silent meditation, which is followed by a dharma talk and discussion. To allow us to pay the rent to the UU Church, compensate the teacher, and cover other expenses, we ask Sunday night attendees for a suggested donation of \$10. If you can't give \$10, give what you can. If writing a check, make it out to IMCSF.

MEDITATION

We practice a style of meditation known as *vipassana*, or insight meditation. Often translated as “mindfulness,” *vipassana* implies seeing deeply or clearly, penetrating and illuminating reality. The practice of *vipassana* or mindfulness offers a way to radically transform our vision, understanding, and engagement of and with our human life.

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. Nearly all IMCSF retreats and classes are taught by *dana*.

KALYANA MITTA GROUPS

Kalyana mitta means “spiritual friends.” These small groups (typically 6 to 12 people) meet regularly to study and share experiences in support of each other's practice. Meetings usually include a short meditation and discussion. For more info, contact Rebecca Katz at rebeccakatz1@gmail.com.



Flora Davis

OTHER WAYS TO GET INVOLVED

Sangha members often engage in outside activities and service projects. Past activities have included fundraising projects for an AIDS-related community outreach program founded by Buddhist friends in South Africa; the compilation and sale of a sangha cookbook to fund retreat scholarships; a picnic in Golden Gate Park; and group bike rides. To stay abreast of current activities, visit our website or our Yahoo group site.

ABOUT OUR TEACHER

Eugene Cash is the founding teacher of IMCSF. He teaches at Spirit Rock Meditation Center in Marin County 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.

DEFINING BUDDHA, DHARMA, AND SANGHA

Considered precious, these are the Three Jewels, or Three Refuges, of Buddhism. *Buddha* refers both to the historical Buddha and to the wise and compassionate buddha nature within each of us. *Dharma* refers both to the teachings of the Buddha and to the universal truths of human life. *Sangha* means “community” and can refer to any group of Buddhist practitioners: monks, nuns, or householders (laypeople). The Buddha placed great importance on the company of like-minded companions.

CONTACT US

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“JUST AS ALL THE OCEANS HAVE BUT ONE TASTE, THE TASTE OF SALT, SO THE TEACHINGS OF THE DHARMA HAVE BUT ONE TASTE, THE TASTE OF FREEDOM.” —THE BUDDHA