

sangha news

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The awakening of the heart is outlined in the teachings of the Brahma Viharas. *Brahma Vihara* has many translations. *Brahma* is often translated as sublime, perfect, lofty, excellent, noble, or divine. *Vihara* means abiding and living, abode or home. Those who practice and embody the particular qualities of the heart related to the Brahma Viharas are said to abide or live in a divine or noble way. The Brahma Viharas are abodes because they express our true home, our true nature. When we practice them, our being becomes saturated with their qualities. They are the expression of divinity in Buddhism.

The awakened heart is revealed within four main expressions of the Brahma Viharas:

- (1) *Metta*/Love
- (2) *Karuna*/Compassion
- (3) *Mudita*/Joy
- (4) *Upekkha*/Equanimity

Love or loving-kindness is the foundation. It is a universal sense of friendliness and warmth toward all beings. Confronted with suffering, the

The Awakened Heart

“This holy life, bhikkhus, does not have gain, honor, and renown for its benefit, or the attainment of virtue for its benefit, or the attainment of concentration for its benefit, or knowledge and vision for its benefit. But it is this unshakable deliverance of heart that is the goal of this holy life, its heartwood and its end.”

— The Buddha

awakened heart

responds with compassion. In the light of happiness and good fortune, the heart’s response is one of joy and delight.

Equanimity is the quality of heart that recognizes things as they are and meets the joys and sorrows of life with balance and peace.

The Brahma Viharas are taught as formal practices to both cultivate and reveal their sublime nature. We may also cultivate them informally by inclining the mind and heart toward love, kindness, friendliness, care, joy, delight, balance, and wisdom. The Buddha taught:

“What a person considers and reflects upon for a long time, to that their mind/heart will end and incline.”

This inclination can come through study, reflection, inquiry, prose, poetry, chanting,

continued on next page

music, the arts, and the inspiration of others.

The Brahma Viharas are sometimes called the Four Immeasurables. This translation acknowledges their difference from our conventional understanding of emotions by pointing to their boundless nature. They are boundless (*appamanna*) because they are not limited either in range or exclusivity. They are not bound by preference. In their actualization they radiate in all directions toward all living beings including ourselves, our benefactors, friends, neutral people, difficult people, and others. They also radiate spatially to include our immediate environment, neighborhood, town, state, country, continent, other continents, other worlds, and other universes. Finally, their expansion continues to include all realms of beings—beings in the upper (heavenly) realms, beings in the human realm, and beings in the lower (animal, hell, and hungry ghost) realms.

They are also distinguished from conventional emotions in the sublimity of their presence. For example, *metta* is love without attachment, and compassion doesn't deny suffering nor is it overwhelmed by suffering.

Joy is not intoxication. Equanimity is contactful rather than detached. In each Brahma Vihara there is a sublime quality in contrast to the gross quality of the emotions.

In the teachings of the awakened heart, the four qualities of the Brahma Viharas complement and balance one another. Compassion keeps love from being saccharine by recognizing and responding to the reality of suffering. Joy prevents compassion from becoming morose or depressed. Equanimity balances all the others by seeing clearly the way things are, allowing for a fullness of expression without attachment or clinging. Love, compassion, and joy keep equanimity from becoming dry and distant.

The beauty of the Brahma Viharas is that their radiance is not limited by our small sense of self. In their limitless manifestation they are expressions of Buddha nature. In moments of nonclinging, the Brahma Viharas can reveal themselves naturally. Please consider the cultivation of these qualities of heart by practicing them formally and also by inclining yourself toward the recognition and embodiment of them in daily life. —Eugene Cash

a call for articles

IMCSF's newsletter 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 in your own life?

All articles will be reviewed by the editorial staff and our teacher, Eugene Cash. Please submit articles in hard-copy format to Shoshanah Dubiner or Jürgen Möllers, c/o IMCSF (see address on back page).



This is the first article submitted by a member of the sangha about a personal experience with the dharma.

MEDITATION AND TEA GO WAY BACK.

One story of tea's origin is linked to Bodhidharma, who took his sitting very seriously. One day Bodhidharma fell asleep while meditating and was so mad at himself that he cut off his eyelids and threw them to the ground. Legend states that where his eyelids landed, the first tea plant grew, thus providing meditators with an aid for alertness.

I reflect on Bodhidharma's gift to meditators as I settle in to a table at dynasTEA, a tea-house in Russian Hill. DynasTEA serves high-quality loose-leaf teas in traditional Chinese serving cups and tiny teapots. May Hung and her husband, Eddie Lau, opened the café and shop last March with hopes of promoting tea culture. They offer a selection of over 30 white, green, oolong, black, and flower teas imported from the Fujian Province of China.

Drinking tea at dynasTEA is like a practice, and May has become my teacher. She brings over a canister of the tea I have chosen—Orchid Oolong—so I can see and smell it before it's brewed. *Oolong* means "black dragon," and the dark shriveled leaves look like miniature renderings of the mythical beast. The aroma conjures a deep, distant forest.

Watching May prepare tea is like watching a yoga instructor demonstrate a posture: it's calming, centering. Her hands move nimbly through the various actions—bathing cups and pots in hot water to preheat them, measuring out tea with a wooden scoop, "rinsing" the tea before brewing it. She pays close attention to the temperature of the water and the steeping time.

May places a small, lidded porcelain cup, or *gai wan*, on my table and sets an electric kettle nearby. I take a sip from the *gai wan*, tilting the lid with my index finger to hold back the leaves. The *gai wan* is key to this practice

because if you don't pay attention while drinking from it, you'll dribble. The tea tastes toasty, earthy, evocative. I add more hot water for a second cup, then a third. I munch on a fresh-baked ginger shortbread cookie—buttery-rich, sweet-hot.

In its methodical, mindful approach, dynasTEA offers a refuge from the frantic, all-too-common habit of gulping down your food and drink, absently or on the run. And who knows where that could lead? As Paul Repts wrote, "Drinking / a bowl of green tea / I stopped the war."

TEA
HERE
NOW
BY RACHEL MARKOWITZ

TRAVELER

An ongoing series of interviews with sangha members on how they came to practice the dharma.

JM:

Being a native of Italy, Buddhist meditation practice probably wasn't what you grew up with—how did you get interested in it?

SM: When I was a teenager I read a lot about Eastern religions and philosophies, particularly Buddhism. I was all the more fascinated with it, as Catholicism couldn't give me what I was looking for.

JM: *And what was that?*

SM: You see, my childhood and teenage years were very difficult. My sister had an undiagnosed brain tumor and suffered nearly daily from seizures. My parents focused all their love and attention on her, barely noticing me and occasionally reprimanding me for not being supportive enough. I felt lonely, unwanted. I grew more desperate and at some point started stuttering. I later took up drugs and became addicted. I guess I was looking for some shelter, home, something I could turn to. Even when I started doing drugs, there was this longing for a spiritual experience that would take me out of the physical realm, the realm of pain.

JM: *Did meditation work?*

SM: (Laughs) To a certain extent, I guess. Though it now seems to me that you rather have to learn how to live within that world of pain.

ON

Interview with Stefano Massei conducted by Jürgen Möllers.

THE

JM:

When did you start your meditation practice?

SM: I was introduced to a small sangha in my late teens, but stopped attending during my years of addiction. However, all those years, I kept reading and trying to build up a regular practice of my own. About a year ago, I was introduced to our sangha, and it is since then that I have a steady practice.

JM: *What drew you to this sangha?*

SM: Eugene's teachings really speak to me, his wisdom seems to be rooted in experience rather than books. But it's also the sangha. I am happy to be of service here, it makes me feel part of something bigger than I am—and I also have met some wonderful people here.

PATH

SAVE
THE
DATE!
APRIL 3, 2004



IMCSF will host its second annual fund-raiser to benefit Woza Moya's ongoing compassionate and practical response to the AIDS epidemic, poverty, and violence in South Africa. Mark your calendar now! Dinner. Silent auction. Entertainment. Raffle. Dancing. Plan to join us April 3, and if you can, please join us sooner by volunteering to participate in making this fabulous event happen. How can you help? Donate an item. Donate a service. Donate your time. Talk with one of the Sister Sangha Committee members who are at the table in the hallway every Sunday evening, or contact Gayle at gayle49@aol.com.

schedule of

events

at the first unitarian universalist church

Daylong Retreat

Saturday, February 7, 2004

Teacher: Bill Weber (*see bio on page 7*)

9:30 am to 5:00 pm

Teaching by *dana* (donation).

Suitable for beginning and experienced practitioners, the day includes meditation instructions; sitting, walking, and standing meditation; loving-kindness practice; and a dharma talk on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness.

To register for the daylong, send a \$10 check payable to IMCSF to IMCSF, PO Box 475536, San Francisco, CA 94147-5536. No one will be turned away for lack of funds.

Beginning Mindfulness

Meditation Class

January 22 & 29; February 5, 12 & 19

Thursday evenings 7:00-9:00 pm

Teacher: 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 7 daylong retreat.

To register, send a check for \$35 to the Unitarian Church (see address on back page).

Beginning Orientation

2nd Sunday of the month, 6:00 pm

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

ONGOING ACTIVITIES

Every Sunday Evening

Meditation and Dharma Talk

6:30-7:00 pm Social Time

7:00-7:45 Silent Meditation

7:45 Break

7:55-8:55 Announcements, Dharma Talk, and Discussion

Teacher: Eugene Cash

(unless otherwise announced; see below)

December Dharma Talks

Eugene will be doing a series of dharma talks on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness.

Eugene's Absences and Visiting Teachers

December 28: Eugene or Noah Levine

February 1: TBD

February 8: Pamela Weiss

February 29: Diana Winston

Potluck

1st Sunday of the month, 5:00 pm

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

For more information about IMCSF's activities at the Unitarian Church, call Roxanne Worthington at 415.661.3030.

schedule

of events

at other locations

SPIRIT ROCK MEDITATION CENTER

Dec. 26 - Jan. 4, 2004

New Year's Retreat (Lottery) – Eugene Cash, Gil Fronsdal, John Travis, and Sharda Rogell.

Jan. 13 - 18, 2004

Vipassana Retreat – Eugene Cash, Howard Cohn, and Diana Winston.


Feb. 21 - 22, 2004 9:30 am – 5:00 pm

Brahma Viharas: An experiential weekend devoted to the Awakened Heart, in the Spirit Rock Community Hall – Eugene Cash.

Feb. 29 - March 27, 2004

Second Monthlong Vipassana Retreat – Eugene Cash, Jack Kornfield, Anna Douglas, Julie Wester, Gil Fronsdal, and Sharda Rogell.

For more information on Spirit Rock events, call 415.488.0164 or visit www.spiritrock.org.



Bill Weber is a senior vipassana student and a recent graduate from Spirit Rock's Community Dharma Leader program. He has studied for the past ten years with Gil Fronsdal and Eugene Cash among others and has extensive retreat practice.

Kalyana Mitta Groups

Kalyana mitta, which means spiritual friends, is at the heart of every sangha. Kalyana mitta (KM) groups of six to twelve people serve as sub-sanghas within IMCSF. These KM groups provide sangha members with a sense of intimacy and the opportunity to personally share issues they are working on in their daily life.

Some KMs are peer groups with evolving themes often based on readings from Buddhist literature. Other groups remain focused on a selected subject. All KM members must be attendees of IMCSF, meditators within the Vipassana (Insight) Buddhist tradition, and have had the beginning meditation instructions. Traditionally a newly formed KM meets for an initial period of six months, after which time members can decide whether or not to keep it going. If any member chooses to leave, the group may offer that slot to a new member.

New KM groups are now forming within our sangha and will start meeting soon after the new year. If you are interested in joining a KM, contact Andrea Dindinger, the KM Coordinator, at dindingera@yahoo.com or 415. 255.4686 starting January 11, 2004.

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 Blvd.

ABOUT THE 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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