

INSIGHT MEDITATION

COMMUNITY OF

SAN FRANCISCO

# sangha news

MAY 2005 VOL 4 NO 2

## The World of Being

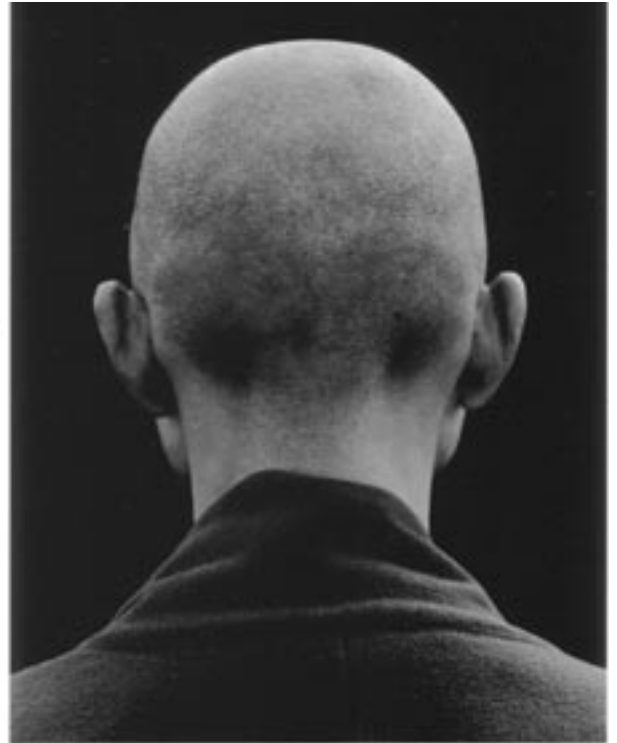
**Eugene  
Cash**  
on Intensive Practice

**T**he Buddha's teaching of mindfulness opens with an invitation—"Come and see for yourself!" We are invited to discover the possibility of becoming centered, mindful, and awake. We are encouraged to explore, through the teachings and practices, the potential to release suffering and realize freedom of heart and peace of mind.

Sometimes people come to dharma practice looking for a simple solution to the vicissitudes of human life. But there is no quick way.

Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche writes:

"The practice of meditation presents itself as an especially powerful discipline for the shrinking world of the twentieth century. The age of technology would like also to produce a spiritual gadgetry—a new, improved spirituality guaranteed to bring quick results. Charlatans manufacture their versions of the Dharma, advertising miraculous, easy ways, rather than the steady and demanding personal journey which has always been essential to genuine spiritual practice."\* *continued on next page*



### INSIDE

Dharma Behind Bars  
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As lay practitioners engaging the dharma in the world, we need to structure our lives around our intention to awaken. To this end we understand that our engagement in the world must be balanced with times of withdrawal and seclusion. One form this takes is the intensive meditation retreat.

Intensive retreat practice has many facets. It is often equated with a journey to a new land. We let go of our usual routines, habits, comforts, securities, responsibilities, and commitments. We enter into a new world, leaving behind the world of Doing, emerging into the world of Being.

The retreat environment is a unique culture, one of silence, simplicity, and presence. We relinquish the everyday world of computers, telephone, media, work, family, conventional relationships, and conversation. The uncluttered atmosphere of retreat provides us with the space and time to contemplate—meaning, “to observe as if in a temple”—the true nature of our body, heart, and mind. This form allows our devotion to the dharma to bear fruit. A few weeks or months of practice reveal to us the inherent qualities of Buddha Nature.

I recently had the blessing of sitting for one month at Spirit Rock Meditation Center, our home temple, in Marin County. The retreat provided me with an opportunity to investigate, experientially, a specific kind of vipassana practice called “whole body breathing.” I learned about how to sustain an awareness of my whole body as I remained mindful of my breath. Especially illuminating was the emergence of the skillful use of pleasure as part of my meditative process. I was also grateful for the silent support and inspiration of the other retreatants.

Within the form of intensive retreat, people’s experience of practice is multifaceted. For some it is an extended period in which to develop and refine the skills of concentration and mindfulness.

Others dedicate themselves to opening the heart through the intensive practice of loving-kindness and compassion. The retreat setting offers the safety and kindness in which authentic psychic and somatic healing may take place. For many, the Wisdom factors of the path are revealed: impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self. One may also focus on refined states of consciousness through deep concentration and sustained continuity of practice. In each case we experience a transformation in our understanding of who we are, how we relate to human experience, and the nature of life itself. Intensive practice allows the dharma to reveal an expanded consciousness, a full-heartedness, and the freedom of release.

However, for us householders, the rarefied world of retreat always comes to an end. One Zen understanding of the goal of practice is to “return to the marketplace [our lives] with bliss-bestowing hands.” This image confirms how both aspects of our practice, intensive retreat and daily life, complement and nourish each other. May the wisdom and compassion we cultivate on retreat benefit all beings.

\*Chögyam Trungpa quote from *Living Buddhist Masters* by Jack Kornfield, 1977

For more on  
intensive practice,  
see pages 6 and 7.

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**sangha**  
news



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# My Best Friend Is in Prison

By Allyson Klein

**T**ony and I have been pen pals for over two years through the San Francisco Zen Center's Prison Outreach Program. I've never met him in person, yet we have developed an honesty and simplicity in our friendship that is unmatched in my other relationships. I believe that for the first time in my life, I have established a truly unconditional friendship.

We read books together, send each other drawings, and support each other through difficult periods in our lives. Tony often quotes from Buddhist scripture and has offered frank advice about my own personal attempts to apply Buddhist values to my life situations. Many times when I open an envelope from the Santa Rosa Correctional Institution, I am humbled by his insights. He seems to "get" the dharma in a way that most people I know don't; I believe that it is due to his intimate experience with the cycle of suffering. It is very clear to Tony how his hostility and attachment have caused pain both to others and to himself.

Tony's life is monotonous and filled with fear and confrontation. I have been shocked by the difficulties he faces in trying to meditate and



sustain nonviolent thoughts in an atmosphere of violence and negativity.

The reason I sought out a pen pal in prison is that I feel strongly that spiritual growth is the sole solution to recidivism.

Like many of us, I have few spare hours and cannot commit to extensive service outside of my daily activities. Corresponding with Tony has become less and less of a responsibility and more and more of a simple contemplation of the right words to use in support of him. These letters have become a thought-provoking complement to my sitting practice. Yet there is not one aspect of my practice that has contributed more to my spiritual development than this simple activity. I highly recommend prison correspondence as a way to expand your insight into suffering and compassion.

Tony will probably never leave prison, and I will probably never meet him, but we continue to inspire each other and impact each other's lives in profound ways. And I have learned that his life is much more than the act that landed him in prison.

It is a great hope of mine that one day IMCSF will develop its own prison outreach program. If you would be interested in participating in such an effort, please let me know ([allysonsta@yahoo.com](mailto:allysonsta@yahoo.com)) and perhaps we can put together a proposal for a prison correspondence program.

# TRAVELER ON THE PATH

Jürgen Möllers  
interviews  
Alison Heather

**J:** *You are from Ireland. Did you already have a meditation practice there?*

**A:** Oh no. My life in Ireland was quite different. Where I grew up, everybody drank—my parents, my friends, I did. Alcohol and drugs were so normal, it wasn't until I came to this country that I started realizing that I had a problem. To make matters worse, I got into an abusive relationship. It was very self-destructive.

**J:** *What did you do?*

**A:** Well, I became clean, I sobered up. At the time, I didn't have much support from a group or a program, but somehow I did it. I was seeing a therapist who helped me a lot, and I also had a couple of very supportive friends in the karate school I was attending. But it was hard.

**J:** *How did you get in touch with meditation?*

**A:** I eventually quit karate and started doing yoga. Quite soon the ten-minute meditation became the most enjoyable and important part of the yoga for me. A friend then introduced me to a Vipassana sitting group in the city.

**J:** *Was that somehow related to your quitting drugs and alcohol?*

**A:** Oh yes! Becoming sober and waking up are both parts of the same process. The practice felt—and feels—like a natural progression to me. It's a progression towards being aware and being truthful.

**J:** *What is it that keeps your practice going?*

**A:** The desire to wake up and the support of like-minded people. I don't believe in a God, and I don't like talking about spirituality. But I do know that the practice helps me open up—to myself, to other people, to everything. It helps me to be more mindful and to become the best person I can be.

**KM** Kalyana mita (“spiritual friends”) groups meet once or twice a month for about two hours. These small sanghas of six to ten people provide an intimate setting for exploring our practice and how it manifests in our lives. The following San Francisco groups currently have openings.

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**Adventurous elders** If you've reached or surpassed the age of 55 and you have time to meet about once a month, join others in investigating the subject of aging in our society and what it means to be elders in a spiritual community. To participate in this brand-new KM group, contact Anita at 824-8395 or [anitakline@comcast.net](mailto:anitakline@comcast.net).

**Book group** This already established group seeks a few new members. Meetings

take place every other Monday evening from 6:30 to 8:00, and include a 30-minute meditation, check-in, and discussion of a reading. Book list has included *Seeking the Heart of Wisdom*, *Buddhism Without Beliefs*, and *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*. Six-month commitment. Contact Alison at 282-4731.

**Women's group** A drop-in meditation and movement class led by Buddhist chaplain Abhaya Kopka. Meetings take place Tuesday evenings from 6:45 to 8:15 in the Outer Richmond. Teaching by *dana* (donation). A second class may begin on Sundays in North Beach. Call 435-7520 or email [abhayasong@juno.com](mailto:abhayasong@juno.com).

Got news? Artwork? A dharma story?  
Contribute to *Sangha News*.  
[rachel@mink.com](mailto:rachel@mink.com)

*Sangha member Bill Karnett has been traveling through India since December. He left Pondicherry, a southeast coastal town that suffered a great loss of life in the tsunami, just days before the disaster hit. At the request of Sangha News, he graciously granted us permission to print these photos and excerpts from his letters home.*

*“The picture of the man and the lake was taken in Bodh Gaya. He tried to get out of the way but I insisted he be in the picture. The fact that I would pay him that interest and respect blew his mind, and after I took the photo, he fell to the ground and kissed my feet.”*

## *Snapshots from India*



*“This little girl is one of about a half-dozen homeless and orphaned children who live under the platform at the train station in Gaya. (Often children like these don’t know how they got there and can recall no other prior lives.) Their joy and generosity was amazing. They could laugh so easily and looked after each other so effortlessly. Our train was delayed seven hours and at first the children were seen as irritants because of their relentless begging. After a while we started feeding them and giving them balloons. An Israeli had a guitar and he sang folk songs for them, which they loved. Then, after a few hours, these children, who had virtually nothing, disappeared and returned with their pathetic and secret stash of old biscuits, and offered them to us.”*

# LONG RETREAT PRACTICE

*Several sangha members, including Eugene, participated in this year's February–March retreat at Spirit Rock. When they returned, we asked them to reflect on their experiences.*

**BRIAN NAAS**, *who did the two-month retreat, writes:*

Because the retreat environment is so bare and unadorned, I quickly became excruciatingly aware of the ridiculousness and insubstantiality of my constant projections and conceptual preoccupations. An afternoon-long obsession about an interaction in the lunch line. A four-day worry about a pain in my knee. A bitter assumption about a fellow retreatant that evaporated the second the retreat ended and I actually heard him speak. It was somewhat disconcerting when I started to realize how adept I had become at fabricating an entire conceptual universe out of nothing. I had become so good at it that I didn't even realize I was doing it. It took an entire disengagement from my habitual activities and methods of stimulation before I could grasp the subtlety of this process.

For me, the most valuable aspect of long retreat practice is that it has allowed me to open my attention to levels of physical and emotional pain which I had shut out for many years. Through sustained meditation and stillness, the self becomes unglued, and enough space is allowed around the heart for grief and anguish to emerge. Neurotic quirks rise out of the shadow and be-

come more intense and specific. As they enter awareness, they reveal themselves as deep-held emotional patterns, well-traveled grooves in the mind, painful memories, and physical tension. Complexes of compulsion and fear are clearly seen under their surface manifestation, and they are dismantled by surrender and acceptance.

During this last retreat, I frequently reflected on a line from the Pablo Neruda poem *Keep-*



Photo courtesy Spirit Rock Meditation Center

might interrupt this sadness / of never understanding ourselves.” The silence of intensive retreat practice offers this opportunity for understanding, a much-needed refuge in a culture driven insane by constant activity and stimulation.

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**STEFANO MASSEI**, *who sat for one month, recounts the following:*

A couple of weeks into my retreat, the silence got really deep and the stillness was almost palpable, and I realized I had gotten really good about identifying the various states of mind I found myself in. The observations came from a safe distance. If I was feeling sad, for example, the “I” wasn’t as predominant as it usually is; it really wasn’t about “my” sadness but about realizing, “Oh, sadness is here right now.” The nonidentification with my states of mind was so profound and easy, and the knowing of the impermanence of all things made it possible to bear even the strongest and most unpleasant emotions. It wasn’t about me any longer...I was everybody and everybody was me, the joy and the sorrow were the joy and the sorrow of the world...a world that I definitely and finally belonged in.

One day, though, things changed. My practice was still very deep, and my commitment to it incredibly strong. But I remember waking up and feeling a sense of uneasiness, almost like feeling depressed for no apparent reason, and even though I practiced noticing it and trying to not identify with it, slowly it took hold of me. The unpleasant sensation grew, and I really couldn’t put my finger on the cause of it.

This went on for a couple of days until one night after the last sitting meditation I decided to take a walk before retiring for the night. The moon was almost full, and the light in the clear sky was so brilliant and beautiful. Everything was enveloped in a cold and pale bluish tint; it seemed magical. I could walk everywhere as if it were daylight. But I was still sensing this heavy feeling inside, and not knowing the reason for the way I felt made it even more difficult.

Then suddenly, from nowhere, I saw an image of myself holding a photographic filter (I am a photographer professionally). The filter was lightly tinted. I was holding the glass in front of my eye and everything in front of me was affected by it, but this time I was able to actually see my hand holding the filter. I felt an enormous jolt, goose bumps rushing up and down my spine, as I realized that the feeling I couldn’t give a name to wasn’t really a feeling, it was a mood, something I had woken up with and carried with me for a while, very difficult to detect while I was in it. I had been seeing life in a certain coloration but was not able to see the reason of the coloration because the filter had been too close to my eye to be visible. It was just a mood, and the seeing it and naming it gave me the necessary distance from it not to be completely and fully at the mercy of it. I was still feeling it but it was so pleasantly different at this point.

All of this happened in a fraction of a second. I felt my body expanding...gently exploding, and I felt like I was breathing at the same pace as the hills, the sky, the moon, the night, the birds of prey. It was blissful.

On Saturday, March 5, I spent 14 hours in San Francisco County Jail #7. Fortunately, I was able to leave at the end of the day. Most of the people with whom I practiced went back to their dorm bunks for the night. This was the second 12-hour practice day facilitated by yoga and meditation practitioners for men in custody at this “program” jail.

Twenty-one men who regularly attend a Tuesday night meditation/yoga class had asked to participate in the daylong. All of them are violent offenders who never meditated before setting foot in jail. And all of them completed the 12 hours of practice. Mindfulness, lovingkindness, forgiveness, walking and eating meditation, as well as hatha yoga, quieted them and opened their hearts. Tears were shed. Poems were written. Insight was gained. Everyone learned and grew. As we broke silence at the end of the day, the inmates’ shares moved all of us deeply. One of them said, “This wasn’t only my best day in jail. This was the best day of my life!” I am truly honored to support their journey.

\* \* \*

I began volunteering to teach yoga and meditation to men in the San Francisco County jails in 1999. These practices have been incredibly transformative for me physically, mentally, and emotionally. I witnessed how my brother suffered when he spent 12 years in prison. Although he’d had no interest in these practices, I was determined to provide them to others in similar circumstances who would be willing to try them.

I began by co-teaching yoga with a Buddhist practitioner in a weekly yoga/meditation class. It consisted of 45 minutes of hatha yoga, 25 minutes of meditation, and 20 minutes of discussion.

Practicing  
in  
Prison

By Bhavani Kludt

The classes were secular, but a fellow teacher cleverly called the discussion sessions our opportunity for “stealth” dharma.

I’ve learned never to underestimate the power of the practices and people’s capacity to change. I’ll never forget this story from an inmate during his second class: “I was involved in an ‘incident’ yesterday. I was just about to react in my typical way when I stopped myself at the last minute. I decided to go away and meditate on it. I came up with something completely different. I went back, did the other thing, and everyone was completely shocked!”

Since those early classes, I’ve gotten more involved at the jail and am now on staff for a violence prevention program. I also continue to teach yoga and meditation on a volunteer basis, including the two-hour class every Tuesday night. Each class is co-taught by a yoga teacher and a Buddhist practitioner. Many of the teachers are from IMCSF, including Bill Scheinman, Stefano Massei, Jürgen Möllers, and Alistair Shanks. All of us, as well as people from other sanghas, came together to offer the 12 hours of practice on March 5.

\* \* \*

The day began at 9:00 a.m. with an orientation. Yoga sessions, sitting and walking meditation, and one-on-one interviews followed, along with group check-ins, a teacher-led talk and discussion, and a silent lunch and dinner with us teachers. When the daylong ended at 9:00 p.m., the participants received a copy of *Finding Freedom*, a book by San Quentin death row inmate and practitioner Jarvis Masters.

**T**his is one of several poems I have written about my work as a social worker with cancer patients at San Francisco General Hospital. For the almost 20 years I have done this work, I have wanted to take the time to write about my patients. Most of them suffer greatly from poverty, homelessness, drug and alcohol addiction, psychiatric illness, or the many difficulties encountered by recent immigrants. All of them have something to teach me, and sometimes I have a few minutes to stop and think about what that is. I find that writing poetry and practicing meditation work well together. Each involves looking deeply for the truth of the moment. Each helps me see it.

—Anita Kline



## Regret

*He showed up late.  
Something about waiting  
somewhere  
all afternoon  
to let his pants dry off.  
I did not tell him  
that wet or dry the stink still stung my nose.  
Nor that years ago  
chemotherapy  
had made me pee in my pants too.  
Better to thank the fates  
that I was still in my office at 5:20  
and congratulate him on getting there  
at all.*

*We conducted our business.  
I filled out vouchers  
for cabs to the clinic  
for his daily dose of methadone.  
He rifled through his brain,  
his pockets,  
assuring us both  
before staggering out  
that he had it all written down,  
knew where he had to be and when  
if not exactly why.*

*If only I had walked him to the ER.  
If only I had called his brother.*

*If only he had not been homeless.  
If only he had never shot heroin.*

*If only there were no suffering.  
If only we could love life  
As it is.*

*If only, three days later,  
He had not died.*

August 2004

***Upcoming Daylong Retreat***

“Freedom and Compassion,  
Moment to Moment”

Saturday, May 21

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

Teachers: Kris Bailey and Bill Weber  
(see bios on page 11)

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

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

***Beginning Mindfulness***

***Meditation Class***

May 5, 12, 19, 26, and June 2

Five Thursday evenings, 7:00–9:00 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 May 21 daylong retreat.

Teaching by *dana*. To register, bring a \$35 check (made out to First Unitarian Universalist Church) to the first class May 5.

***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 8: Noah Levine, Vipassana teacher and  
author of *Dharma Punx*

May 15: Larry Yang, Community Dharma  
Leader and teacher of LGBT sangha

June 5: Pamela Weiss, Zen teacher

June 12: James Baraz, Spirit Rock teacher

July 3: 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.

***We’re Moving!***

But not too far. Starting in May, we’ll be meeting in the Starr King Room, located near the restrooms. It’s larger than our current space and has a better sound system.

**save the date!**

IMCSF’s 10th anniversary party is scheduled for  
Saturday, August 6, from 6:00 to 10:00 p.m.

## *Retreat Schedule for Eugene Cash*

### **May 6–14**

Insight Meditation Retreat  
“Awakening the Heart”

Eugene Cash, Yanai Postelnik, and Sharda Rogell  
Insight Meditation Society, Barre, Massachusetts  
[www.dharma.org/ims](http://www.dharma.org/ims)

### **June 3–6**

Insight Meditation Retreat  
“Illuminating the Awakened Heart”

Eugene Cash  
Gaia House, United Kingdom  
[www.gaiahouse.co.uk](http://www.gaiahouse.co.uk)

### **July 9, July 23**

Two Daylong Retreats, Parts I and II  
“Invoking the Brahma Viharas (the Divine Abodes)”

Eugene Cash  
Spirit Rock Meditation Center  
[www.spiritrock.org](http://www.spiritrock.org)

### **August 7–14**

Meditation and Study Retreat  
“Living Dharma”

Eugene Cash, Sally Clough, Sharda Rogell, and  
Mark Coleman  
Spirit Rock Meditation Center  
[www.spiritrock.org](http://www.spiritrock.org)

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**Kris Bailey** is a senior Vipassana practitioner and member of the Dedicated Practitioners Program at Spirit Rock. She is also a student of the Diamond Approach.

**Bill Weber** is a senior Vipassana practitioner and a recent graduate of Spirit Rock’s Community Dharma Leader program. He is also a documentary filmmaker and video editor.

## Yahoo How-To

*Join our online sangha in 3 easy steps*

Stay in touch with other sangha members by joining our Yahoo Group. It’s an easy way to post activities, arrange carpools, request referrals, make recommendations, share inspirational quotes, pose dharma questions, and more. Here’s how to plug in:

- 1.** Go to the IMCSF website ([www.sfinsight.org](http://www.sfinsight.org)) and click on [IMCSF Yahoo email group](#), in the middle of the right-hand column.
- 2.** On the Home Page, click on “Join This Group.” At this point, you’ll be asked to log on to Yahoo. If you’re already a member, sign in. If not, sign up—it’s a simple one-time process of creating an ID and a password.
- 3.** Once logged in, you’ll be asked to complete a brief form that includes choosing your preferred mode of accessing group postings. Choices range from receiving individual emails as they are posted to receiving no email and instead going to our Yahoo Groups site to check for postings.

The photos on the cover and on page 9, as well as the one shown right, were taken by Stefano Massei at Deer Park Monastery in 2003–2004. Thich Nhat Hanh is the guiding teacher at the mountain sanctuary outside San Diego.



## 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

[www.sfinsight.org](http://www.sfinsight.org)

## 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, a school of spiritual investigation and self-realization developed by 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 giving. Generally, a basket or bowl is provided in which to place dana offerings for the teacher.

## **a call for articles** THE DHARMA AND RELATIONSHIP

*Chances are you know a little something about practicing within relationship—and we'd love to hear from you. Perhaps you've experienced gratitude or anger or confusion in the company of a loved one or a colleague...or felt great joy or loneliness or discomfort among family or friends. What were you aware of in the situation? Were you able to relax with what was happening or did you react out of habit? How did bringing mindfulness, wisdom, and compassion—or not—to the situation lead to resolution—or not? Basically, how has your meditation practice permeated your relationships?*

*Add your story to our next issue of Sangha News, where we'll feature a special section on the dharma and relationship. Essays (up to 200 words) will be reviewed by the editorial staff and our teacher, Eugene Cash. Submit work to Rachel Markowitz, editor, at [rachel@rmink.com](mailto:rachel@rmink.com).*

*Personal essays on other topics are also welcome.*

***Submission deadline for the next issue: July 1, 2005***