

Dharma Rag

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Winter Prayer

Joan Sutherland



At about midnight on December 21, at the winter solstice, we cross into the new season. Right now the sun is the weakest and the lowest in the sky it is all year—which is to say, we in the northern hemisphere are as far away from the sun as we ever get. The nights are at their longest. Out my window, only a few yellow leaves still cling to the apple tree, and most of the small birds are gone from the garden. We hunch our shoulders against whatever falls from the sky and, if we have one, keep a fire burning most of the time.

It's interesting that at just this time when the whole world seems ready to pull up the blankets and doze awhile, many of us are caught up in the swirl of the holidays. A series of last hurrahs before things go quiet until spring. A brave show that, again this year, we will be celebrating what the Romans called the Birthday of the Unconquered Sun. We will survive! No, better: We and those we love will thrive.

There's something touching about the things we mark this time of year: the small light that wouldn't go out in the Maccabee's cave, the birth of the shining child, the morning star rising

and igniting the star in Shakyamuni's eye as he sat unmoving under his tree. We mark these things at the beginning of the dark season, as if to affirm our faith in the persistence of the light through the freezes and the storms about to descend.

And then, perhaps, we can turn our attention to what it is like to spend a season in the dark. The word solstice means 'the sun standing still.' Winter is from a Germanic word meaning 'time of water', referring to the rain and snow. So the winter solstice is the sun standing still in the time of water. It's like an image from the I Ching. Even the bright sun must stop in its course when the very air spreads like the sea around it.

The whole earth is stopping, hunkering down, lying fallow. After autumn feasts and end of the year celebrations, we enter a time of fasting. As people move indoors and snow blankets the land or rain drops a curtain around us, things get quieter. It's a time we can really listen, listen for the small voices often drowned out in the wonderful cacophony of sunnier times.

These movements into fasting and concentrated listening are known to us in meditation. The muffled, stripped down world

conspires to help us. Like the sun, we sit still and notice the waters stretching in all directions. The old zen texts use another image to speak of this vast expanse that's always there but often hidden: the bare ground, upon which each thing stands in its vividness. The winter field, a seamless expanse of white, and the dark tree silhouetted against it.

This is the season of moving down and in. Of turning our gaze toward what is usually out of sight. Of listening and noticing and sitting still long enough for the things of the depths to begin to swim toward us. Of settling back into the dark and letting it carry us, as though on an underground river. Of tasting the salt tears and the sweetness like chocolate of which that river is made. Of doing all this with no intention, no plan, no big idea of what it might mean or how it might be useful. Winter is the season of the gloriously worthless. The dead tree. The frozen stream. The eyeless bulbs under the soil. It is the season of what comes alive when all our ideas of usefulness fall away.

And so I wish you nothing bright or shiny, nothing thrilling or important. Just the small things, the oldest things, the long slow movements and the standing absolutely still of winter. Not flowers but their roots. The light--the light will take care of itself. Attend to the darkness, to the quiet. And perhaps you will hear the earth turn, once again, into the new year, and you along with it.

Love Story By Elizabeth King



I truly believe Zen has heart, the deep compassion that tiptoes in during sitting and finally gets you up off the cushion to do what you can to serve others. Yet I've long felt this path lacked one vital thing I needed - a devotional element. How can you feel devotion for *emptiness*? *Love needs a receiver!* This conflict became my Great Doubt and my deepest longing.

So in addition to traditional Zazen, I've started sitting alone with Guan Yin and a small candle, practicing a devotional way of love that leaves me with a softly glowing white-gold flame in my heart. What an unZen-like thing to do! Right?

Yet Joan has told me the ancestors stripped away devotional practices as an antidote for the excesses and superstitions of their day. Then she said, "At some point it's necessary to *liberate oneself from the antidote!* An attitude of warmth and curiosity toward practice allows for its growth and change over a lifetime." Then Joan said she sees three faces of my practice: "the face of inquiry, the face of experience of emptiness, and the face of devotion. "And," she reminded me: "*they are all one!*"

I'm fully aware that Guan Yin is not a deity but a *symbol for the All*. So the love I give and receive in this practice is truly a flame from the heart of the vast

Unnamable. What a lovely candle to carry!

Dharma Punx, by Noah Levine Book Review by Seth Yearout



One of my professors in college said that if you can acquire the ability to only answer one

Noah Levine

question in life reliably, it

should be, "Why?" If you can answer that question you are in good shape. So that is what I wanted to talk about, "Why?"

It has been my experience that those who seek to understand the true nature of things ask the question why. If you are one of those people and seek to gain understanding of the spiritual awakening of a generation called "X" then a book called Dharma Punx by Noah Levine is where I suggest you start.

This book does a great job at looking at the connection of two subjects close to my heart, Punk Rock and Spiritual Awakening. To most the two subjects seem at odds with one another, and if you have a tendency to think so...read the book. This is what it's about:

"This is the story of a young man and a generation of angry youths who rebelled against their parents and the unfulfilled promise of the sixties.

As with many self-destructive kids, Noah Levine's search for meaning led him first to punk rock, drugs, drinking, and dissatisfaction. But the search didn't end there. Having clearly seen the uselessness of drugs and violence, Noah looked for positive ways to channel his rebellion against what he saw as the lies of society.

Fueled by his anger and so much injustice and suffering, Levine now uses that energy and the practice of Buddhism to awaken his natural wisdom and compassion.

Noah is now a Buddhist teacher in training with Jack Kornfield and the teaching collective at Spirit Rock Meditation Center in Woodacre, CA. He teaches meditation retreats nationally as well as leading groups in juvenile halls and prisons around the San Francisco Bay Area.

Noah is also the director and co-founder of the *Mind Body Awareness Project*, a non-profit organization that serves incarcerated youths. He has studied with such well-known and respected teachers as His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh, Ram Dass, Jack Kornfield, Joseph Goldstein, Sharon Salzberg, Norman Fischer, and Sylvia Boorstein, to name a few." -- Back Cover of *Dharma Punx*

Levine does for generation "X" what Kerouac did for the beat generation. I identified with this book immediately and have since recommended it to many of my friends.

So then I leave you with these questions. Why would those who have awakened to spiritual path

actively choose not to leave the punk scene? Should they have to? The answer or at least part of the answer awaits you in the pages of *Dharma Punx*.

What Sangha Means to Me

William Jeavons

Wide, deep, and ultimately unknowable, Sangha remains an ever-changing puzzle to me. Certainly it includes a group of unlikely suspects who've become my closest friends: To have such a wide circle of friends is a treat I've never experienced before.

There is also a sense of coming home, so profoundly discovered at my first amazing sesshin with SMS. I saw this happen to several participants at September's sesshin, and remembered that feeling all over again. This finding and giving refuge among an ever-changing cast of characters would have to be a big part of what Sangha is to me as well. But there is something about society in any endeavor, and perhaps especially in this spiritual search. I think it's widely agreed that Shakyamuni's return to his ascetic companions to begin his teaching career was a turning point.

I've been fascinated by tribal dynamics for as long as I can remember. It's especially vivid now that Bush is playing these wired-in human characteristics to achieve and maintain power, the stalwart Commander in Chief! Why are we all so reluctant to criticize the most

brazen abuses of power, How does he get away with his banal and often absurd explanations? It's clear that we are simply wired as social animals; in crisis we instinctively grant any forceful leader great latitude! Certainly our dominance of the planet is a direct result of our compulsion to work together. Look at the ancient wonders: all monumental communal efforts. So it's no surprise that sitting together, holding retreats together, is so much more powerful than hermit practice. It must engage an entire section of brain that would otherwise go dormant.

So finally, finding enough folks who are willing to get together and play the amazing sesshin game, that's the heart of it for me. This critical mass of seekers who will risk their comfortable lives, risk confronting all those assumptions that we lean on, because they long for clarity, this is treasure! That we enable each other to fathom the depths of this existence; this is too cool. What a gift: to ourselves and to the world.



Current Affairs

New Year's Celebration

This year, instead of a New Year's Eve party, we will be holding a New Year's Day Sitting, Jan. 1, 8:00 am - 4:00 pm at Shove Chapel. It is possible to participate for part of the day only. Please just follow our usual policy of coming and going during walking meditation. Lunch will be potluck in the basement of the Chapel. The schedule:

8:00 - 9:00 am zazen
9:00 - 9:30 breakfast
9:30 - 10 Sutra Service
10 - 12 zazen
12 - 1:00 pm Potluck lunch
1 - 3:30 zazen, taped talk
3:30 - 4 Precepts, sharing



Extended Spring Sesshin

Note that the 2004 Spring Sesshin will be an extended seven-day retreat April 12-18, 2004 at Benet Pines, beginning the day after Joan Sutherland's arrival in Colorado Springs for her month-long residency. To cover the costs of this extended retreat, the cost will be \$450. Scholarships will be available for those who need financial assistance in order to participate.

Spring Events

As usual, SMS has much planned over the next few months. After the full-day sitting on Jan. 1, 2004, the Sangha Steering Committee will meet at 6:00 on Jan. 9 at the CC Art Shop. There will be a Leaders' Retreat on either the 10th or 17th, and a Steering Committee Retreat on Jan. 24.

In February, mark your calendar for a half-day sitting on February 21. Meditation leader Sarah Bender will lead a follow-up workshop to her *Introduction to Zen* series in the fall on February 28. In March, an overnight meditation retreat is planned for March 12-13, hopefully at the Colorado College Cabin near Florissant.

Joan Sutherland's residency will begin Monday, April 12 with the Spring Sesshin, and continue until May 10. There will be a range of public talks, seminars, and opportunities to get to know her, ending with a weekend integrative retreat, May 7-9, 2004. More details for the residency will be available in next month's newsletter.

UCCS class on Buddhism

Professor Fred Bender will be offering a course on Buddhism at UCCS during the coming Spring semester. The class meets 4:30 - 7:05 pm on Tuesdays. Learn more at http://www.uccs.edu/%7Ecourse/courses/las_sprg04.html#PHIL or call Prof. Bender at UCCS.

Leaders' Workshop

There will be a workshop for current service leaders to review and discuss practices at our sittings and services on either Saturday, Jan. 10 or Jan. 17. More from Sarah Bender on this soon.

The SMS Library

The Sangha "library" is currently located in the basement storage room in Shove Chapel. The library includes a variety of books, and a complete collection of *Tricycle* magazines. In an effort to reduce the collection until we are able to secure a more stable "home base", many of the books are now available for the taking. If you would like to browse and take a few for your own collection, just go on down to the basement on a Monday night and look through them!



Anger and tenderness
my selves.

And now I can believe they
breathe in me as angels
and not polarities.
Anger and tenderness, the
spiders genius
to spin and weave in one
movement, anywhere,
Even from a broken web.

--Adrian Rich

December, 2003

Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat
	1 6:15 Sutra Service	2	3	4	5	6 6:30-8:30 Zazen 10-12 Precept Study
7	8 6:15 Social Night	9	10 6:00-7:00 Zazen	11	12 6:00 Steering Committee (Art Shop)	13 6:30-8:30 Zazen 10-12 Precept Study
14	15 6:15 Teisho Night	16	17 6:00-7:00 Zazen	18	19	20 6:30-8:30 Zazen 10-12 Precept Study
21	22 6:15 Two Periods Zazen	23	24 6:00-7:00 Zazen	25	26	27 6:30-8:30 Zazen 10-12 Precept Study
28	29 6:15 Two Periods Zazen	30	31 6:00-7:00 Zazen	Feb. 21 Half-day Sit	Feb. 28 Workshop with Sarah	Mar. 12-13 Overnight Retreat

January, 2004

Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat
April 12-May 10 Joan Sutherland's Residency	Apr 12-18 Spring Sesshin	May 7-9 Integrative Retreat		1 8:00-4:00 Full-day Sitting: Shove Chapel	2	3 6:30-8:30 Zazen 10-12 Precept Study
4	5 6:15 Sutra Service	6	7 6:00-7:00 Zazen	8	9 6:00 pm Steering Committee (Art Shop)	10 6:30-8:30 Zazen 10-12 Precept Study
11	12 6:15 Social Night	13	14 6:00-7:00 Zazen	15	16	17 6:30-8:30 Zazen 10-12 Precept Study
18	19 6:15 Teisho Night	20	21 6:00-7:00 Zazen	22	23	24 6:30-8:30 Zazen 10-4 Steering Committee Retreat
25	26 6:15 Two Periods Zazen	27	28	29	30	31

Dana for Springs Mountain Sangha

Springs Mountain Sangha engages in three weekly sittings, study groups, retreats, residencies for our holding teachers, the Dharma Rag, website, and other communication media. Contributions from members and friends are the Sangha's sole financial resource. Let's share the dharma assets!

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: (h) _____ (other) _____

Email: _____

Contribution Amount Enclosed: \$ _____

Checks should be made out to Robert King, Treasurer.

Springs Mountain Sangha is an affiliate of Pacific Zen Institute, in both the Soto & Rinzai traditions. To learn more, visit our website, <http://www.zencorner.org> or contact us at Dharmarag@comcast.net.

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Dharma Rag

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