

Springs Mountain Sangha

The dharma rag

Volume 8, Issue 2

February/March, 2005

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Awakened by Birdsong

Joan Sutherland

<http://www.smszen.org/teachers.htm>

Dharma Rag ~ February/March 2005

In a little over a month my annual residency in Colorado Springs begins. It's a lot of work, and a substantial commitment of time and energy for those who take part. Why do we do it? Why is it important, every once in awhile, to practice even more intensively than usual? Part of the answer, at least, has something to do with joy.

In the old Chinese texts, a synonym for awakening is intimacy. A day-to-day intimacy with our own heart-minds, with the people and things we meet in our lives, and with the original face we all share. Like the original face, this intimacy wasn't born and won't die; it's a stream always flowing that we can step into at any moment. Or maybe it would be truer to say that at any moment we can look down and notice that we're already standing in the stream; our feet have always been wet.

When we experience this intimacy, it's like remembering what we've always known, meeting someone who's always been there. There's a familiarity about it, the familiarity of a beloved face. Women talked about walking hand in hand with the Ancestors; Dahui said it was like going outside and running into an old friend.

The joy that comes with this intimacy has nothing to do with happiness or unhappiness. It's not dependent on the presence of something or the absence of something else. We don't have more of it at one time than another, although—and here's where practice comes in—how much we can feel that joy is dependent on what we do.

As with anything we care about, it can't be bad to turn our attention and love to it. Meditation is a kind of digging down to the aquifer of intimacy, and most people find that occasional concentrated practice really supports the work. Without this attention, our wells begin to silt up; we begin to lose the connection to day-

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Monthly Newsletter

The dharma rag

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at
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UH. Submission deadline is
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month.

Come visit our website @



Monika May

to-day intimacy and the joy that comes with it. Maybe we even begin to doubt the existence of those sweet waters, though it is ourselves who have shrunk away, not the river.

Fortunately this condition is easily reversible—a little meditation, a little inquiry, a little companionship on the way. It might seem strange to think about deliberately cultivating joy, but why should this be different than kindness, or insight, or equanimity? How could it fail to be good for the world if we are more easily intimate, more able to express in our lives this deepest of joys? It's like in retreat, when we offer a bit of every meal and cup of tea to the spirits: we return some of the gift we have been given. One way we repay the gift of a connection to the deep waters is through our joy, our delight in the world that gave us the gift.

Guanyin, the bodhisattva embodiment of compassion, is The One Who Perceives Sounds. That's what her name literally means. She hears all the sounds; she is awakened by birdsong as well as responsive to a cry for help. This is her complete freedom.

Freedom, joy, intimacy—not a shabby list of aspirations. And possible, right here and right now, in the midst of these very lives. Let's do a bit of digging together, a bit of rejoicing, a bit of recognizing the beloved faces all around us, all the time. See you in April.

EVENTS

<http://www.smszen.org/events.htm>

Awakened by Birdsong

Joan Sutherland's Colorado Springs Residency
April 2005

*For whom do you bathe and make yourself beautiful?
The cry of the cuckoo is calling you home.
Hundreds of flowers fall, but its voice isn't stilled;
even deep in the mountains, the call is clear.*

Dongshan

RETREATS

Spring Comes with its Blossoms Retreat

Monday, April 4 — Sunday, April 10

Benet Pines Retreat Center in the Black Forest, Participants may attend full- or part-time. **All are welcome to attend the talks at 7:00 pm Tuesday through Saturday;** Thursday evening is the koan seminar. Contact: Robert King: 684-0130, kingrh53@earthlink.net

Clear Mind, Open Heart: The Way of Zen Meditation

Saturday, April 16 — 9:00 am to 4:00 pm. The Woman's Club at Colorado College

Introductory Retreat. Call Elizabeth King elizking@earthlink.net to register, cost is \$30; call Sarah Bender sbender@corb.com for more info

Make the Mountains Dance: Koans, Freedom, & Love

Friday evening, April 22 to Sunday afternoon, April 24. The Woman's Club at Colorado College

Non-residential Koan Retreat: Frank Actis to register and for info, fee is \$150-200: frank.actis@flukenetworks.com, 282-8511

TALKS

The Thoughtful Heart, Zen in Real Life,

Friday, April 15— 7-8:30 PM. The Courtroom at the Historic Federal Building, 415 N. Main St., Pueblo

Awakening as a Conspiracy of Friends,

Dharma talk

Monday, April 18 — 6:15 to 8:00 pm

Shove Chapel on the Colorado College campus. Buddha Birthday Celebration and community gathering: Families, Friends and Flowers (lots of all) encouraged to attend.

The Taming Power of the Small: Living in Interesting Times: Dharma talk

Monday, April 25 — 6:15 to 8:00 pm

Shove Chapel on the Colorado College campus. A talk and conversation during the regular SMS gathering

Work in the Room

Tuesday, April 19 & Wednesday, April 20 — 7:00 to 10:00 pm

The Woman's Club at Colorado College. Private meetings with Joan Sutherland, open to regular SMS participants and those with an established relationship with the teacher. Liaison is Elizabeth King elizking@earthlink.net:

Community Gathering & Celebration!

Wednesday, April 27

In Celebration of Joan/ her residency and our community. Details to be announced

VOICES*Zen and The Art Of Choking*

Yesterday, a couple of bites into my lunch during my break, a piece of Beef Wellington got stuck in my throat. Thinking I could swallow it down with the help of my water, I took a drink, which was followed by gasping and sputtering, me heading outside and the water making its exit. The morsel remained, and I realized I was choking-but not choking. I couldn't swallow it and I couldn't get it out. It was just below the entrance to my windpipe, so I could still breathe. However, when I tried to cough it up it did block my windpipe, thus I was choking. But then it would settle back into its place and I could breathe again. What made it even more interesting was that no one else was around.

Somewhere between 1 and 2 minutes I contemplated my situation, literally. I am not full blown choking and I may be able to work it out on my own, so should I get somebody? If I do try to work it out on my own and it really gets stuck and no one is around, then what? During this contemplation, the piece of food shifted a few times and blocked my windpipe again, replacing those thoughts with panic and fear.

Sometime during all this it hit me that this was my death. Not a car crash death. Not a heroic death. Not a stoic death. A death, all alone, choking on my lunch outside of my coworker's office. I actually found it humorous and a giggle or two found their way out. I also had thoughts of my wife and son, which stifled the humor. Not any kind of rational, linear thoughts, just them, alone. My comedic tragedy. A smirking, sighing, half-laughing forlorn shake of the head. This is how I die? No, can't! Not like this?

Eventually I figured it would be best to have someone else around, so I made my way down the hall (rather casually considering my situation, I must say), seeking out the coworker in whose office my drama had been unfolding. No, not looking for the first person I could find, but seeking her out specifically (she happened to be among a small group of people, though).

Can I borrow you for a moment? I asked, realizing that I could talk as well as breathe. As we walked back down the hallway, I explained I've got something stuck in my throat, but I'm not choking. But I can't get it out, either. I just need somebody nearby in case something happens and I do start choking?

We return to her office and she stands by while I try to get things worked out, to move beyond this state of limbo. She offers to do the Heimlich. I say not yet because I'm not actually choking and can breathe. Time passes and the Wellington is still in its state of limbo, so I say give the Heimlich a try. It turns out you do have to actually be choking with your windpipe blocked for it to work. Otherwise you

make strange, zombie-like noises and end up with a sore abdomen.

She then decides to call our healthcare provider to see if they have anything to suggest. Getting a busy signal, she remembers that someone down the hall used to be an EMT, so we head that way to see what he has to offer. On the way we come across our supervisor, who asks my coworker to drop by later. Sure, I can do that. By the way, do you have any advanced medical training?

Our supervisor says I should go right to the ER, and offers to drive me. As we walk back down the hall towards her office (which is fairly adjacent to the office where all of this started) I'm thinking we should get a bucket or something so I don't get her car messy, if anything should happen with the Wellington. She then decides to call our medical provider to see if they have a specific emergency treatment place we should use.

I'll be outside, in case anything happens in the meantime.

I need your I.D. number.

I return to her office, give her my card, then go back outside. While she is making her way through the menu option on the phone, I cough and hack. A bit of the Wellington separates from the main piece and, alas, I am able to swallow it down!

I tell my supervisor that all is well, so never mind about the ER. I go inform my coworker as well, and thank her for being there and helping me. Then, without much thought about all that had just happened, I quite matter-of-factly pick up the thread of my day and go back to eating my lunch, very mindfully eating my lunch.

How strange this all was! Strange and wonderful! Writing this, I am once again filled with gratitude for this Zen practice of ours. It's not that I acted the way I did because of this practice, but that I was able to be present and watch the action unfold, yet not get carried away by it. There was room for laughter and fear and rationality and foolishness, all dancing together. When it was all over I wasn't overcome with emotion, nor was I bombarded by thoughts of what could have happened or what I should have done differently. Internally, everything was pretty quiet, and I just went on with my day.

Something deeper that I reaped from this ordeal came via a memory of a story that David Weinstein told regarding one of his Tibetan teachers, as I remember it. It's the one about the lama who is drinking tea and says that he could die right here and now, drinking this tea, then he laughs so hard that he nearly falls off his cushions (or maybe he did fall off). This tale stuck with me because it was so powerful and so true, and it has been with me ever since, even more so now that I am a father. However, it wasn't until yesterday that I

actually lived it for myself and realized just how true it is. Any moment, any place, any activity?" death is there.

This realization had a soft presence during the choking-but-not-choking episode-I think that is how humor and laughter made its way there-but it didn't fully sink in until a little later. At that time I noticed that I felt lighter. Looking around, the people and objects around me seemed brighter, and even had a slight golden hue. And I understood the lama's laughter, even laughed again myself (although not hard enough to fall out of my chair). I had a larger sense of freedom and a more vivid sense of being, which has remained with me since then.

How strange, wonderful and ridiculous it all is!

Andrew P.

RANDOM REVIEWS

Bones of the Master by George Crane

I enjoy reading tales that are told just for the sake of being told, letting readers take from it what they will rather than trying to reach a specific conclusion, so this book was right up my alley. It is the story of a Ch'an monk, Tsung Tsai, returning to Mongolia to find where his master's bones are buried so he can give his master a proper Buddhist funeral. He is aided by an American writer and self-proclaimed ne'er do well, George Crane. Along with the main story of their adventure together, there are snippets of poetry sprinkled among the pages. It also offers the archetypal serene-eastern-master/reluctant-western-disciple relationship, with all its quirks, depths and delights. Another aspect of this book that I found especially powerful was Tsung Tsai's account of the astonishing, and sometimes horrific details of his escape from communist China. Each facet of this book could stand alone and still offer a lot, but combined they create a richness that reaches much further. If this review speaks to you, why not give *Bones of the Master* a read?
Andrew P.

Book Review of A Western Approach to Zen by Christmas Humphreys -

I gave myself a present this Christmas season; one that no one else could ever have the insight or ability to offer. I see in the Zen tradition an encouragement to create moments, if possible, extended moments of tranquil mindfulness. For several days I had no obligations that required me to leave my home. For those days my wife and mother-in-law who lives with us were out of town. Let us say, I gave myself a personal sesshin.

Just prior to these days of solitude, I read a book written by an Englishman who in the 1930's founded the Zen Society in London. A contemporary of D. T. Suzuki and Alan Watts, he possessed a profound commitment to bringing the Zen

experience and practice to the West. The Society drew heavily from the former influence and enjoyed personal visits by him throughout the remainder of Dr. Suzuki's life. Let us say it is an amusing coincidence that this author's name is Christmas Humphreys.

His book is entitled *A Western Approach to Zen* and offers his approach to bridging the cultural, psychological, and experiential differences between East and West that make the assimilation of Zen uniquely challenging for those of us on this side of the Pacific.

In his work with the Buddhist Society, he pioneered a method employing a strength of the Western Mind, rational analysis, to the unutterably irrational and intuitive task of seeking the mind that abides nowhere. What resulted was a practical "course" of study to systematically cut our Western philosophical and cultural roots and so facilitate the leap from the 100-foot pole. This "course" was conducted in London in 1969-1970 and again in 1970-1971

In the five sections presented, he assumes—rightfully so for the time of his writing—that the reader has only the most cursory, and likely inaccurate, understanding of Buddhism. The first, "Basic Buddhism" introduces the rudiments, Buddha, the Four Noble Truths and the teachings on Rebirth. In this section I found it quite illuminating to be presented with details of the evolution of Buddhism from India to China to Japan and the various schools and influences that resulted from that migration. It is here he surveys the lineage of the Rinzai school upon which his course is based.

A section entitled "Approach to Zen Buddhism" opens his attempt to kindle the fire within our Western minds that might be later be fueled and fanned to the all-consuming heat consistent with a sincere, committed practice. Here he places the Insidious, pervasive and empirical notions sacred to the analytical mind in juxtaposition with the Eastern concepts of Oneness and the ultimate goal of going beyond thought.

With this preparation, the author presents his "course" in the third section. There are four "phases" here: "Un-think", "Stop Thinking", "Re-think" and "Beyond

Thought" in which he seeks to refine the vision of the student and to clarify the goal so foreign to the Western mind. Each phase is concluded with a series of questions designed to lead the student to a direct, personal experience with its concepts.

Most interesting of all, I found to be his "Experiments" which followed the course of study in which he had his students respond to an additional set of questions which he compiled and summarized. The questions are direct and personal of the following flavor: "What do you mean by the Zen you are seeking and how fiercely are you seeking it?" The responses are as refreshing and human as the are insightful and thought-provoking.

Whether or not I adopt any of the detailed steps so methodically conceived and presented, I was greatly encouraged and inspired by the sincerity and conviction of Mr. Humphreys and the many participants who shared with him this remarkable endeavor. Eric O.

Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter. . . and Spring! by Kim Ki-Duk

This is a beautiful movie. I am considering watching it without subtitles and muting the sound next time. But even with sound and subtitles it has much to offer. The movie presents the lives of two Buddhist monks, master and disciple, living in a small temple that floats on a lake. Sometimes a particular point is overtly illustrated, but most of the film presents moments just as they are, without explanation. Just this! Just this! What I found to be one of the most contrived moments leads to what I found to be one of the powerful moments in the movie (I'll just say the Heart Sutra thingy rather than give anything away). Visually, emotionally, cerebrally and beyond, I found this film to be fascinating and highly recommend it (watch with your ears, listen with your eyes, read the subtitles with your bellybutton). Andrew P.



Sophie's impression of the orange Kara or Spider-man (depending on how you focus your eyes). Please send pictures of your own special ones

Green Tea Incense by Morning Star.

This weekend we went to the store to get more jasmine tea and decided to get a different flavor of incense as well. It's always difficult to pick a new flavor because we have to go by what it smells like in the box and hope that the same scent comes forth more or less when we burn it. We were wonderfully surprised by our pick of Green Tea Incense. Compared with most incense I've experienced, Green Tea is very mellow and subtle. The scent gently makes its way around the room as if it had been there all along waiting for you rather than suddenly appearing and boldly saying "I'm here, smell me now!" Our home zendo shares the space of our living room, dining room, den, computer workroom (truth be told, it's all the same room), so the scent of incense burning in the zendo carries everywhere else in a matter of minutes, and I found our standard sandalwood type to be a bit overpowering at times. Green Tea is a refreshing alternative, and I am very excited and delighted to have encountered it (it doesn't take much to please me). While I still enjoy incense with a "traditional" flavor and will keep burning it from time to time, I am finding Green Tea to be a more practical flavor for use at home on a day-to-day basis. Andrew P.

John Tarrant's Talk at Naropa.

On the 18th, several members of SMS took advantage of John Tarrant's visit to Naropa to listen to a talk and say hello. John Tarrant and Joan Sutherland, our holding teacher, are colleagues in our lineage back through Robert Aitken to Japanese Zen. John is also the author of the new book we've been playing with, *Bring Me the Rhinoceros, and other Zen Koans to bring you joy.*

It was a delightful evening. John talked for a couple of hours, reading some from the book and filling out some stories. Seems to me that his teaching has become elegant lately. He used the analogy of a moth flying into a hot light: the moth's map says that light is about mating possibilities, and this inaccurate map leads him to suffer. Humans are lucky to be able to question and change maps, but it isn't even about finding the best map, but rather throwing the maps overboard and living directly.

He led a meditation centered on the Rhinoceros koan, which was surprising and rich. It was interesting and joyous to see the rather disciplined and serious Boulder crowd relax and laugh a bit; one young woman commented that his presentation had changed her idea of Zen, that she could feel it as intuitive and friendly. The crowd felt receptive and happier as the evening went on. With any luck at all, we'll actually have a tape of the evening to share.

William J.

Community Call<http://www.smszen.org/index.htm>

Help Wanted: ask not what your Sangha can do for you but what you can do for your Sangha.

The Steering committee would like some help with several tasks. Joan's upcoming residency requires **someone to coordinate public relations and advertising** for the various events. This consists primarily of getting the word out in a timely manner. Anyone with a feel for this sort of work would be most appreciated.

And having done the groundwork for a **Community Concerns Committee**, we'd now like to staff it. This concept was ratified by the full Sangha a few months ago: that is a committee to deal with intra-sangha relationship difficulties which defy simple solution. We seek a pool of mature members who would be willing to do some conflict resolution occasionally. It is our intention that training be provided as needed. If you would be willing to serve the Sangha in this way, please contact any member of the Steering Committee.

Request for transportation support:

Priya who lives in the Skyway Blvd area of Colorado Springs needs to connect with someone willing to drive her to and from the Monday night sits. Please contact her at **635 4618** -thank you.

Chronic Conditions Meditation Group

A meditation group is starting for people with chronic conditions, including pain, illness, and disability. We will use meditations from many traditions, and this group is open to everyone who is interested.

We will explore our relationship to illness, pain, and disability through meditation. With practice we can develop insight into our own conditions and compassion for ourselves and others. In addition, we can learn to live more fully within the physical constraints of challenging lives.

The teacher will be Clay Taylor, who is a long-term meditator living with chronic, disabling back pain. He

has lead meditation groups for people with chronic medical conditions in Berkeley, CA.

We will likely meet once or twice per month. Purpose of initial meeting: To discuss issues related to chronic health conditions and meditation practice and to discuss a curriculum to use in this group and to set a schedule for group meetings.

Cost: Donations will be accepted on a dana basis.

For more information: contact Clay at 477-1808, or claytaylor5@hotmail.com

Location will be wheelchair accessible. You can make yourself comfortable! Clay meditates while lying down. Bring pads or cushions for lying down if you need them.

Sangha Weekly Calendar<http://www.smszen.org/calendar.htm>**Weekly Sitting Schedule**

- ❖ **Monday** evenings starting at 6:10 p.m. at Shove Chapel located at 1010 North Nevada on the campus of Colorado College.
 - ✓ First Monday of the month: 30-minute sutra Service, brief walking meditation, two 25-minute periods of sitting
 - ✓ Second Monday: two 25-minute sitting periods, including walking meditation, followed by a social gathering
 - ✓ Third Monday: two 25-minute sitting periods, including walking meditation, followed by a talk or reading
 - ✓ Fourth Monday: One 25-minute sitting period and community member shares personal Zen Practice experience: "Way Seeking Mind." If you'd like to/ be willing to take a turn, please call Sarah Bender at 594-0724, or email sbender@corb.com.
- ❖ **Wednesday** Mornings from 6:00 a.m. to 7:00 a.m. at Shove Chapel.
- ❖ **Saturday** Mornings from 6:30 a.m. to 8:30 a.m. also at Shove Chapel. After the sitting many of us usually walk to a nearby coffee shop for breakfast.
- ❖ **Sunday** we often have steering committee meetings or discussion groups or workshops.

March, 2005

Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat
		1	2	3	4	5 6:30-8:30 am Zazen
6	7 6:15 pm Sutra Service	8	9 6:00-7:00 am Zazen	10	11	12 6:30-8:30 am Zazen
13 4:00-7:00 pm Steering Committee Mtg,	14 6:15 pm Community Night	15	16 6:00-7:00 am Zazen	17	18	19 6:30-Noon am Half day sit Zazen
20 1 -	21 6:15 pm Talk Night	22	23 6:00-7:00 am Zazen	24	25	26 6:30-8:30 am Zazen
27	28 6:15 pm Zazen Zen Practice	29	30 6:00-7:00 am Zazen	31		

April, 2005

Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ RETREAT 4-10 at Benet Pines - come for evening talks Tue-Sat ❖ No half day sit </div>					1	2 6:30-8:30 am Zazen
3	4 6:15 pm Simple Service	5 RETREAT ----	6 6:00-7:00 am Zazen - cancelled	7 April 10 th P	8 at Benet Pines	9 6:30-8:30 Zazen - cancelled
10	11 6:15 pm Community Night	12	13 6:00-7:00 am Zazen	14	15 The Thoughtful Heart, 7-8:30 the courtroom 415 N. Main, Pueblo	16 6:30-8:30 am Zazen, 9-4 Intro to Zen, Women's club
17	18 6:15 pm Buddha's Birthday!	19	20 6:00-7:00 am Zazen	21	22 Make the mountains dance retreat,begins evening, WC	23 6:30-8:30 am Zazen; 9-5, Koan retreat continues
24 Koan retreat till mid afternoon	25 6:15 pm Zazen Joan's Talk	26	27 6:00-7:00 am Zazen TBA Special Evening Social	28	29	30

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: _____ (required for e-distribution)

Contribution Amount Enclosed: \$ _____

Checks should be made out to Robert King, Treasurer.

Springs Mountain Sangha is a member of the Open Source Project, in both the Soto & Rinzai traditions.

To learn more, visit our website, HTU <http://www.smszen.org/TUH> or contact us at

HTU Dharmarag@smszen.org .

- Please check if you prefer to receive the newsletter by email, saving resources & expenses.

The dharma rag

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