

Springs Mountain Sangha

# The dharma rag

Volume 9, Issue 1

Jan-March, 2006

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Springs Mountain Sangha's  
Monthly Newsletter  
*The dharma rag*  
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hopefully.

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[Smsdharma@ispwest.com](mailto:Smsdharma@ispwest.com).  
Submission deadline is the third  
Friday of each month mostly.  
Come visit our website @  
[www.smszen.org](http://www.smszen.org)

Dear *dharma rag* Readers,

It is that time of year again - Tax season! Well, yes that too. With the coming of tax season, remember the Springs Mountain Sangha now has tax exempt status and your donations can be cited as charity deductions.

What I actually mean is, we are in our 9<sup>th</sup> consecutive year of publication. I thank you for your support of this newsletter and look forward to your future contributions and feedback. I want to reestablish the annual subscription renewal to make sure our distribution list and snail mail list are up to date.

If you are on our email distribution list, please email me ([smsdharma@ispwest.com](mailto:smsdharma@ispwest.com)) to let me know you wish to continue receiving the *dharma rag*.

If you are on our snail mail list, please complete the back page of the *dharma rag* and mail it back to me. If there is anyway you can convert over to the email distribution or download your own copy of the rag from the website, that would considerably help our copying/ mailing costs.

We do accrue some monthly costs, any financial donations to this cause, though not required, are greatly appreciated. Please direct your support to the **Springs Mountain Sangha** c/o Robert King (see the box to the left or the back page for the mailing address).

Read on ... this issue is full ... enjoy!

With gratitude and appreciation,  
Judith Steed (Editor -  
[SMSdharma@ispwest.com](mailto:SMSdharma@ispwest.com))

## Mid Winter Retreat with David Weinstein

As I've been thinking about our upcoming retreat over the Presidents' Day weekend, there are a couple of things that have caught my attention.

First, there is the joy at the prospect of doing a retreat at Sarah Bender's home. This is a joy on top of my usual happiness about doing a retreat. There is something special about doing a retreat in a home, as we've already experienced a number of times through the generosity of Robert and Elizabeth King. For me, it feels like it connects me to my lineage, from sitting in the Aitkens' home-zendo in Honolulu, to sitting in the Yamadas' home-zendo in Kamakura, to the many retreats we've done in homes, here in California, and there in Colorado, it epitomizes lay practice. We practice in our lives, in our homes. In our lives as they entangle with others' lives, in others' homes. After a while it gets hard to keep track who's the host and who's the guest, whose home is this?

Second, I've found myself thinking about the 'George Washington chopping down the cherry tree' story. That story is about telling the truth, and that's what zen practice is about. Actually, more often than not, practice seems to be more about how we don't tell the truth, and then, being truthful about that. By not telling the truth, I don't mean actively lying. It's more like having ideas, opinions, whatever, that get in the way of seeing things clearly. You know, like, "I shouldn't feel this way or that because I'm practicing Zen and I know ultimately this, whatever it is, isn't that important, so I shouldn't get upset about it." When the truth is, "I'm upset about it!" Which isn't to say we should go around spewing our 'stuff' all over each other. But, we do have to acknowledge what is true about what we're thinking and feeling. Having done that, having given ourselves the space to experience that, then something else is possible.

In the George Washington story, after telling the truth to his father, his father threw his arms open and said something like, 'Come here my darling son, you have paid me back a thousand fold the value of that tree.' Sweet. Funny how we don't hear that part much. But, it's true, if we can 'tell the truth' we are rewarded a thousand fold the value of whatever it is we're protecting by not 'telling the truth'.

Looking forward to 'chopping down some cherry trees' together soon.

David

### Mid Winter Retreat with David Weinstein

Friday, February 17 @ 5:30 to Sunday, February 19, 2006 @ 4:00pm. A weekend retreat with David Weinstein, Sensei at Sarah Bender's house. Cost is \$150.

Because this retreat is shorter than our usual retreats, (typically 4-day or 6-day retreats) this one is a good opportunity for someone who has not done a retreat before to try it out. If there is space available, it should also be possible to come for a day or part of a day at a reduced fee. For more information, please contact Robert King

## Upcoming Events!

**Intro to Zen classes** are scheduled regularly throughout the year. If you'd like to be notified of upcoming classes and events, please email [info@smszen.org](mailto:info@smszen.org) to be added to our e-mailing list.

### Chan Buddhism: Its history as our tradition, and its application to our lives today.

Sundays, January 29, Feb. 5, 12 and 26, Mar. 5 @ 4 to 6 PM. Peter Hershock's Chan Buddhism is the text we'll use. We'll meet at the Woman's Club. Our first meeting is Sunday, Jan. 29, 4 to 6 PM. You don't have to make a commitment to attend any number of meetings; you are welcome to come to any of the five sessions. There is no cost for the series, but donations will be gratefully received.

For the first session, I'd like you to read through the introduction and chapter 1, if possible. There's plenty of material in there, but it's not a long section. If you will come with a note or two about what stuck out for you---especially anything you found yourself having a strong response to, either an attraction or a repulsion--- that will make for a juicy discussion. If you have questions, please contact, Sarah Bender.

**Touching the Heart-Mind: Zen Meditation, A Mid-Winter Introductory Retreat, Saturday, February 4, 2006 @ 9:00am to 4:00pm** Cost is \$40. Led by meditation instructor, Sarah Bender 20 Mesa Road west of Cascade Ave., at Monument St. Participants will be given orientation to Zen Buddhism, meditation instruction and practice. There will be discussion and readings, a vegetarian lunch shared in silence and time to enjoy some stillness and quiet. Please contact Sarah Bender (594-0724) [sbender@corb.com](mailto:sbender@corb.com) to register or for more information.

**Mid Winter Retreat with David Weinstein**

Friday, Feb. 17 @ 5:30 to Sunday, Feb.19, 2006  
@ 4:00pm. See Box above

**Spring Retreat with Joan Sutherland**

Monday April 24<sup>th</sup> to Sunday April 30<sup>th</sup> @ Benet Pines. Remember, this year, Joan will be taking **her residency in the Fall** not the Spring. This is your chance to meet with her and sit with your companions. For more information, please contact Robert King

**VOICES****Dear Readers,**

I would like to explore some terms we use on this path. I invite you to send your ideas about these words and what they represent, what words you think work for you and why. Such words or ideas as "Retreat," "Sit," "Bow," "Altar," "Tradition," "Path," "Cushion," "Companions," "Sangha," etc.. Thank you, I look forward to your thoughts.

Judith

\*\*\*\*\*

**Keep Peter**

Keep Peter  
in you thoughts,  
on your mind,  
in your prayers.

We don't want to face the pain  
of losing him.  
He is already lost behind a gun  
on a Hummer  
not using hard earned chemistry or math.

They say this will save lives  
bring freedom  
spread democracy.  
They say WMD's and *It's the right thing to do.*

They say this will help shift ancient peoples  
into a viable future.  
We see only vast deserts blowing lifeless sands into  
Peter's eyes.

Keep sands from his eyes  
from his limbs  
from his heart.

Keep Peter.

Hal G. (C/S December 26, 2005)

**Birthing a Retreat**

## DAY ONE

Out of the not-yet silence  
of this still unborn retreat:  
ragged groans and long slow moans,  
the labor pains of work that's done  
and more that's yet to come.  
Frantic footsteps overhead,  
bangs and clunks and Zendo farts,  
these are the sacred sounds of Day number One.

## DAY TWO

Not yet morning, long cold night  
the moon holds its breath  
awaiting Buddha's star.  
Piercing Densho sounds the cry  
of the now-born baby's birth.  
Welcome, live retreat, exactly as you are.  
Softly now, listen! Listen!  
to the song of the sitting bell  
gently struck by hands well trained in love.  
These are the sacred sounds of Day number Two.

## THE BRAIDING TIME

So now begins the braiding time  
as strands of silence twist and turn  
over, around, under and through  
the mystic hum of chords becoming form  
till sound and silence fuse.  
These are the sacred sounds  
of a fully formed retreat . . .  
waning now.  
Waning.

Elizabeth K. (Poem from the Winter Ancestor Retreat)

\*\*\*\*\*

**What Works Now.**

I drive along, catching myself scowling. A black cloud hangs over me, like that cartoon character from years ago. Often I have no idea why I am immersed in this negative mind-state. It sticks to me like dust on wet varnish.

Sometimes I feel that this is what the practice is doing to me: sanding me down, grinding out the motes and irregularities of the smooth, pure surface. Much of the time this past year, I have felt like a block of wood submitted to an unskilled hand. The shaping has been violent, performed with a rasp, a chisel, a sledgehammer. But as I turn with my grain toward the tool, align myself to receive the direction, the process becomes more welcome. Steel wool and oil now gently

reveal the character of the wood. What I perceive as flaws may become interesting burls. I can imagine the action as mysterious, poetic, even sensuous.

Yet old habits die hard. I hang on to the cynicism and pessimism. I have real difficulty accepting "what is", undesirable or not. I actively resist optimism.

What HAS helped has been an unrelenting aspiration for gratitude. I can readily embrace that there are many things to be thankful for. I practice thanking everything--the mundane ("Thank you that the humidifier works.") to the glorious ("Thank you for that beautiful, amber tree."), the desirable ("Thank you for allowing me to find my passport.") and the unwelcome ("Thank you that only 5 of 7 glasses broke when I dropped them.").

As a tool in the practice, I see it shift my focus. The simple act of openly thanking the universe lubricates the transformation, cools the blade. It moves me away from an inert, dark, safe place to a life-holding, open space. A space for enlightenment, if you will. And this opening is not particular; all manner of other emotions seep in through the crack. Like forgiveness and hope. My practice then extends outward into one of blessing. Blessing the squirrel that makes it safely across the road. Blessing the homeless man in the wheelchair. That jerk (er—fellow soul) who cuts me off—blessings to all he encounters, that they remain safe, that peace comes to his heart.

Holding thankfulness in my heart and expressing it openly is one discipline I can consistently practice. As I continue to observe how it changes me, how the pain it allows in expands my heart, I develop faith and courage. Faith that other disciplines will heal more than hurt. Courage to accept the pain and expand, not constrict. To go further and experiment with other attitudes, such as forgiveness and generosity.

Thank you to all in the sangha for your part in shaping and finishing my sometimes-wooden self. Thank you to the universal energy that connects us all.

Judith L

## Lunch Together with Friends

(following the Ancestors' Retreat)

In front  
(or is it behind?) the  
picture window.

A great place for lunch.  
She fills the feeders  
regularly, and so  
they come-  
three kinds of jays,  
the downy and hairy  
woodpeckers, and a family  
of speckle breasted flickers,  
the occasional black  
squirrel, countless  
sparrows and towhees

and  
a friend from  
out of town has  
attracted another from  
the other side of  
town and a good  
reason to get out  
the good dishes, the silver,  
some wine, and an  
espresso to finish.  
We speak of now  
and then and  
what if's and why.

And,  
as if just added to  
our collection, a  
long stationary kestrel  
solitary, motionless,  
large in its black  
and brown tail stripes.  
Never do we notice,  
a lone sparrow,  
equally motionless  
on a thin limb  
of a winter's bared bush.

Suddenly,  
across the snowy-white page,  
a brown and black  
curving calligrapher's stroke  
carved of kestrel decisiveness:

this Now, just this Now.

for David W and Judith S

Hal G.

**1st Rohatsu Carol**

(sung to the tune of "Rudolph")

You know Hakuin and Dogen and Ol'  
Bodhidharma,  
Black Tara, Manjushri and Samantabhadra...  
But do you recall the bodhisattva that lives in us  
all?

Avalokiteshvara  
Also known as Kanzeon  
And sometimes even Kuan Yin –  
Compassion's where she makes her home.  
See how she deftly uses  
Her thousand arms of love and light  
Like someone sleeping deeply reaches  
For a pillow in the middle of the night.

Long ago at Vulture Peak  
Shariputra's request:  
"Avalo with your prajna deep  
Tell me 'bout form and emptiness!"

Out came the Great Heart Sutra  
Directly pointing through the haze.  
Avalokiteshvara  
To you we give the highest praise!

Andrew the bodhisattva elf  
(We hope to get a podcast of this on the website  
soon)

\*\*\*\*\*

The desert is a good place to go for solitude. There are few distractions in the desert, few song birds, few flowering plants, few plants. There is lots of sky and lots of ground. The sky is open and blue. The ground is full of sand and rock. In December the desert is warm in the daytime. When the sun goes down you can watch the sun drop behind the horizon and feel the temperature drop with it.

I went to the Chihuahua desert because it is close. I went to the Chihuahua desert because it was time to get away and to think. Going to the desert to fast and think was popularized by a guy who did it some 2000 years ago. Going to the desert for visions and to find there way has been a right of passage of southwestern people for generations. I went to the desert after reading *Soul Craft, Crossing into the Mysteries of Nature and Psyche*, by Bill Plotkin.

Bill Plotkin is a depth psychologist, ecotherapist, and wilderness guide. He is the founding director of

Colorado's Animas Valley Institute, which has been leading nature based soul-initiation programs since 1980. His book talks about the adventure and the path to soul.

It is interesting that many of the points made by Bill Plotkin to get in touch with the soul and the core of human existence seems to be Buddhist Practice. Bill gives credit to Buddhist Traditions and to Native American Traditions for aspects of the programs that he has developed. The two primary issues that he stresses and explores are to go back to nature and spend time noticing and observing and being a part of the environment. The second part is taking time and meditating to notice and explore who you are. One wonderful quote:

The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you.  
Don't go back to sleep.  
You must ask for what you really want.  
Don't go back to sleep.  
People are going back and forth across the doorsill  
Where the two worlds touch.  
The door is round and open.  
Don't go back to sleep.

Jelaluddin Rumi

The book and my adventure was a way to connect or reconnect to life and to what my purpose in life is. I was a wander of the world, sometimes moving in grace and beauty. At other times I traveled adrift and lost. Both are good and both teach lessons and life is full of lessons. Most of the lessons I have learned are ones I did not choose but were given to me. I often did not accept them with grace but there were no return and no redemption policy on life lessons. I was shouldered with the taking and the weight of the lesson. In these times I often think of the 4 boundless vows and realize the depth of what they mean.

A person's life purpose is nothing more than to rediscover, through the detours of art, or love, or passionate work, those one or two images in the presence of which his heart first opened.

Albert Camus

Everyone has his own specific vocation or mission in life; everyone must carry out a concrete assignment that demands fulfillment.

Therein he cannot be replaced, nor can his life be repeated, thus, everyone's task is unique as his specific opportunity to implement it.

Viktor Frankl

And so it was time to shuffle the deck, to look at the cards that had been dealt to me. This was a big card game- some say the dealer wear long white robes and has white hair and a long beard. That does not fit my view but might as well have as I did not choose the game or have any say in whether I wanted to be dealt this hand or even if I wanted to be in the game. My choice was to accept the hand and play, draw or fold. So this was a review of the cards and where they had taken me to this point. And the review was like most of you, many joys, some laughter, many sad times, some sorrows. This was a roller coaster of ups and downs. I kept repeating the same mantra I had repeated as a child, "I want all ups and no downs." But the voice echoed empty and that is not what I got. But I have fought what I got and what I have. I suddenly realize what was sticking to me and holding me back was that I would not accept what was - what is. Change, I am not the controller of the universe. I have to be flexible, I have to bear the burdens, I have to endure the pain, I have to jump with joy. These are all a part of life. I have to dance the dance in rhythm to the tune of the drummer and the flute player. The drummer and the flute player sometimes play with me and I must respond. That is life, yes there has been many sour notes but there have been many sweet notes also.

The dance can be like a Jazz jam set where there are no written notes but an interaction and a passing off of the lead back and forth. The lead passes from the drummer, to the keyboard, to the base and back. All have to be in tune and sensitive and respond to each other to produce a sound which can be very exiting and transforming for all. The focus is what makes the difference. Do I want to flavor my perspective, to tell my story with the sweetness of honey? Or do I choose to hold the sour lemon to my heart. This is what I have control over.

We pick and choose to be like carrots, eggs or coffee. Carrots in boiling water become limp, soft, and dissolve to a tasteless mass of nothing. Eggs in boiling water become like a rock, hard and enclosed behind their shell. The coffee in boiling water transforms itself and like the phoenix rising transforms the water into something new and different. I have decided to try to be stimulating and be coffee. To be - to be present.

Any so, this is the task at hand, and I am sure you want to ask -did I accomplish my task? Well yes and no. I went to the desert and I wandered. I fasted and felt the euphoria of fasting, which I rather enjoyed. I went without sleep and wandered and looked at the stars and the full moon and then no moon. There is nothing like being in a place far from the city, far from light and no humidity and looking at the night sky. The sky of diamonds, the clear light, the awe of the ancients, this is the wonder of life. There is a wonderful reconnection to the universe.

I have thought that this would be the place to have a retreat - the Chihuahua desert. No walls, no roof, no limits, no boundaries. The soul, the spirit can float, can soar where it wishes and connect with the beauty of nature - the wonder of nature. Albert Einstein said to the effect that there are two ways to live, either as if there are no miracles in life or as if everything in life is a miracle. I have decided to live as if everything in life is a miracle.

And so you ask, do I now have the secrets to life? The secrets of the desert? Do I know where I am and where I am going? Well yes and know. I know where I am now, at this moment. I know where I would like to go - right now. But there is that impermanent thing. That cause of suffering. I have learned a lot and know that is something that I can accept, I can live with that. I also know at least for me that I have a destination. The corporal part of me will return and be a part of and nourish Mother. The material part of me will reunite with the material part of the world. But there is another part of me that will go on, but that is a new journey, and another story.

By Nard C.

## WISH LIST AND OTHER SMS ITEMS

### AUDIO LIBRARY

To order copies of Joan's or David's talks or a recording of our sutra service, please contact Andrew (ask Andrew how he wants to be contacted). These will be available as CD or tape. Cost is \$10, paid to SMS.

## STEERING COMMITTEE MINUTES

December 16, 2005

he following members were present: Andrew, Sarah, William, Robert, Elizabeth.

Treasurer's Report: Robert reported that we broke even on our December retreat and accommodated more people than ever before for this retreat.

William commented that walking was a problem because of the large number of participants and the unseasonably cold weather. He suggested that in the future we might put up a "screen" of some kind to protect walkers from the wind.

We discussed the proposed plan to hold a weekend retreat in February with David Weinstein as teacher. It would be held at Sarah's house the 17th - 19th and the fee would be likely to be \$150. per person. Though some felt that December is a special time and preferred that to February, a consensus was reached to go ahead with the weekend in February. Robert will contact David about it.

There will be a half-day meditation retreat on January 1 from 2:00 - 5:00 at the Woman's Club, followed by dinner at a local

restaurant. Participants will bring short readings to share; there will be outdoor walks; and the traditional 108 bells will be rung. William and Andrew will set up at noon and Robert will be timekeeper. Elizabeth will call nearby restaurants to see what is open. All were in agreement. Robert will notify the Sangha.

On Saturday January 7, Sarah will offer a half-day introductory class from 9:00 a.m. until noon. The fee will be \$20.00. On February 4, she will teach an all-day introductory class from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. The fee will be \$40.00 (\$30.00 for CC students).

Sarah is planning to teach a study group on Sunday afternoons from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m., starting January 29 and ending March 5. She is also considering a four-part introductory class March 12, 19, and April 2 and 9.

After Joan's residency, Sarah will offer a precepts group. As SMS's Meditation Instructor, she will also be meeting with cadets at the Air Force Academy every Thursday beginning second semester.

We plan to prepare a new hand-out packet for newcomers and a greeters' crib sheet.

Andrew will be reproducing tapes of Joan's and David's talks for a cost of \$10.00 each.

The next steering committee meeting will be January 15, 2006.

### January 15, 2006

In attendance: Nard Claar, Elizabeth King, Robert King, Judith Lee, Kathryn McWilliams, William Jeavons. Sarah Bender "attended" via telephone for part of the meeting. Robert served as acting chair. Meeting held at the Women's Club House.

#### New Business

Treasurer's report: current balance is \$4545.00, an increase due to end-of-year donations.

The bulk of the meeting revolved around the upcoming retreat with David Weinstein, February 17th through 19th:

- ✓ Robert will act as registrar: commuters and residents will pay the same fees. Part-timers will pay \$75/day, and no adjustments will be made for partial days. All were in agreement.
- ✓ Robert recommended raising David's earnings for the weekend from \$800 to \$1000. Discussion ensued.
- ✓ No cap on the number of participants has been set.
- ✓ The sign-up deadline is February 6
- ✓ Because of space limitations, all meals will be taken at the cushion.

- ✓ Kathryn and Sarah will plan the meals. Elizabeth will help make calls to coordinate food contributions from participants.
- ✓ William, Nard, and Judith will help with furniture moving and set-up.
- ✓ A walking path outside may need clearing. Robert volunteered to help.
- ✓ A kitchen coordinator is needed.

#### Other business:

- ✓ Sarah wants help constructing newcomers' packets.
- ✓ No decision was made on the content of the introductory class tentatively set for March 12, 19, April 2 and 9. Robert will check with Peter to reserve the Women's Club House for those dates.
- ✓ The next steering committee meeting is set for February 12.
- ✓ Sarah feels the need for the steering committee to have a "check-in" soon. Possible times for an informal dinner include the first or second Saturday of March.
- ✓ Nard discussed the 1023 tax-forms.
- ✓ The leaders' schedule for upcoming sittings was passed around and completed.

Submitted by Judith Lee

## WEEKLY SCHEDULE

- ❖ **Monday** evenings starting at 6:10 p.m. at Shove Chapel: 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*: one 25-minute sitting period, including walking meditation, followed by a social gathering
  - ✓ *Third Monday*: one 25-minute sitting period, 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 Speaking Mind." If you'd like/willing to take a turn, please call Sarah Bender
  - ✓ *Fifth Monday*: Two 25-minute sitting periods with walking meditation between.
- ❖ **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

PLEASE REMEMBER TO CHECK THE WEBSITE  
IN CASE OF CHANGES AND ADDITIONS!!

**Dana for Springs Mountain Sangha**

Springs Mountain Sangha (now with tax exempt status) 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: \_\_\_\_\_

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Checks should be made out to Springs Mountain Sangha c/o 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, <http://www.smszen.org/> or contact us at [SMSdharma@ispwest.com](mailto:SMSdharma@ispwest.com) or [Judith@ispwest.com](mailto:Judith@ispwest.com) (editor).  Please check if you prefer to receive the newsletter by email, saving resources & expenses.

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