

September 2002

Greetings From the Editor

Hello one and all! The Dharma is always being born and so too is the Dharma Rag. (Since my computer ate the first draft of this column, it literally is being reborn!) I am very excited about my new role as editor and I wish to thank those responsible for laying the groundwork for this publication—Andrew and Wendy Palmer, and before them, Judith Steed—as well as everyone who have contributed to it since its foundation.

There are some changes as is to be expected any time the torch is passed. First, the Dharma Rag will be published on a quarterly basis while I get the hang of it. Second, being the poetic spirit that I am, I would like to see the Dharma Rag be a vehicle for poetry and creative writing. Since it is published quarterly, there will be more room for articles, essays, poems, and photography. Please send me your stuff!!! Submit! Submit!

Finally, I am very happy to have the opportunity to give back to this community that has given me so much. Thank you all. And now, without further ado, let the Dharma unfold!

Stephen D. of SMS

One Year On

Joan Sutherland

September 2002

So already a year has passed since September 11, 2001. Then we were caught in the rush and the shock of images and emotion. It's different now; for some, there seems to be a kind of sorting going on, thoughtful people considering what continues to matter a year on, what has emerged and persisted over these last months. It's a kind of middle passage, between the roar of the event and the time when we begin to settle into our long views of things. In the middle passage, the narrative is still unstable, but it's no longer just a jumble of sensation. Things begin to differentiate; it's a bit more spacious. We can notice what catches us, what wants to spend some time in our company, without, yet, having entirely to understand why. There's a beauty to such a time, in the beginnings of a collaboration between one's imagination and the little mysteries, the vignettes, the small shards that catch the light now, a year later.

As thoughtful people sort in their different ways, they bring forward their own little mysteries, some of which will leap into us. Here are a few that live now in me, too, at least for awhile, which I pass on to you as I received them, without trying to make meaning of them. Just the things themselves, which is plenty.

A photographer who was there, who saw people jumping from the Twin Towers, says he can't imagine doing that, making that choice for the abyss, and he wonders if things had already changed for those who jumped: perhaps they were already in the next world, so that it seemed to them that they were falling into a garden, a beautiful place they could rest.

A museum curator speaks about why he thinks art matters: because it opens us over and over again to being moved by the ordinary things of this world—sunlight pouring through a window, the pearl in a young girl's ear. He says this is the sacred nature of art, this revelation of the everyday as numinous, and one can't help but notice that, in the face of the awesome, the curator of modern art steps back into, and speaks out of, a tradition that is primordial and entirely unironic.

William Langewiesche reports that all the structural steel from Ground Zero was sold for scrap, shipped overseas and melted down, then used in the manufacture of everything from rebar to cars, the bones of those buildings become new things, spreading now to every corner of the world. In the face of these bright shards, what's been called the kitschification of September 11 really doesn't matter. There's plenty here that's real as real can be and dreamlike as dream can be, all at the same time. What persists, what has fallen away, what catches you for the first time one year on? And what leaps from your imagination to join this great streaming life of ours?

Taking Refuge in the Storm at the July Sesshin

David Cockrell

We walked up the little hill at Benet Pines into the Labyrinth: A classical or seventh circuit labyrinth, beautifully interwoven of stones through the Ponderosa Pines. Robert King was in the lead, Joan and David somewhere in the middle of our little sangha line, all in silence. At the center of our walk into the labyrinth, Joan said nothing. I didn't expect this: I expected some jewels for us to contemplate. After a few minutes of silence, we all began to chant: I vow to save the beings of the world, I vow to set endless heartache to rest. . .

The "seven circuits" refers to the seven paths that lead to the center or goal of the walk. It is an ancient labyrinth design and is found in most cultures. It is sometimes dated back more than 4000 years. Also known as the Cretan Labyrinth, it is associated with the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur. The seven circuits design was actually found on Cretan coins. There are many approaches to walking the labyrinth. One Christian approach is based on the "threefold path" of Purgation, Illumination, and Union. These represent three stages in a labyrinth walk:

1. Releasing (Purgation). From the entrance to the goal is the path of shedding or "letting go." There is a release and an emptying of worries and concerns.
2. Receiving (Illumination). At the center there is illumination, insight, clarity, and focus. It is here that you are in a receptive, prayerful, meditative state.
3. Integrating (Union). Empowerment and taking ownership. The path out is that of becoming grounded and integrating the insight. It is being energized and making what was received manifest in the world.

Our walk captured my journey into refuge over the preceding four months in an astonishing way. The Refuge Vows, Pure Precepts, and Bodhisattva Precepts taken during the refuge ceremony are deceptively simple (of course!). Don't kill. Don't take drugs. Don't defame the three treasures. Just do it. But what shall I not kill—your creativity, your spirit, your ideas? So, I vow to take stands for life positively but tentatively, always ready to see the other side, always ready to acknowledge the change, the illusion. What shall I not steal? Your energy, your opportunity, your limelight. . . In the Refuge Ceremony on the last night of Sesshin, I vowed to practice the pursuit of relentless honesty, and this is a most important one for me. I vow to be faithful to what IS, and not dissipate energy into making it into what I think it should be. But, as Joan says, "taking on the precepts is a reckless act, in which we make impossible promises and express our willingness to have life act upon us".

Taking refuge is, in a fundamental sense, a "letting go", an exploration of our own sense of self, a journey inward. And at the core is the teisho of our actual selves, our harbor and weir, in the sea of

eternity. And finally, we wind our way back out, to practice good, to save all beings. It has indeed been a messy process for me, this labyrinth of refuge, but I walk daily now with the peace that I am taking refuge, not from the storm, but in the storm.

One Vow by Randy Simpson

During a discussion regarding precept study the question was posed: If all of the sixteen precepts could be condensed to just one vow what would it be? Having considered this, I decided to write what the one vow is for me and a few thoughts regarding it. Well here is what my one vow currently is:

Every being, including myself and everything, is fine just the way it is. I vow to be just as I am. When I mentioned this one precept to a friend he mentioned "what about war?" My response was that this precept does not exclude taking action to stop war rather it creates space around it. Fully accepting the universe as it is, is the best place to start from. I know this is still difficult to accept. A recent news article indicates that scientists have for the first time constructed a biological virus from scratch. Thinking of nasty viruses being created as weapons to kill people would make it seem clear that such technology should be banned. But what if this technology is accepted as just a technology as it is and maybe it will lead to a cure for AIDS? Accepting the world with this technology reduces judgment and widens the scope of possible outcomes, including limiting it in ways to avoid military uses while continuing research.

What if those who fight wars fully accepted that things are fine just the way they are, instead of saying they are not fine so I need to kill in order to make things ok? The point is to not exclude, especially do not exclude change. Change is a part of things as they are and so it cannot be said that things were fine the way they were. It also cannot be said that things will be ok in the future. The only thing that can be said is that things are fine just the way they are. I think, because there is change, improvement is inevitable. If you genuinely feel like improving that is fine because that is how you are just as you are.

Anger can arise even while meditating but if it is taken just as it is, it will be seen for what it is. Anger that is seen as a condition of past events is no longer just anger as it is, it is anger with stuff attached to it. Cause and effect is a part of things as they are but it does not have to be blind.

A tape by Daido Looi Roshi has a section in it that seems to address the very root of my thoughts on the confusion that can arise from saying "things are fine just the way they are" so I transcribed part of it. Here it is.

"Isn't that the logic of this and that? You have pain and you move away from the pain, you have fear and you run away from the fear. It's because we think it's something other than ourselves. The pain is not us it's something else, the fear is not us it's "he did it", anger is not us it's "he made me mad". Nuclear holocaust is not us, it's the Russians and Ronald Reagan. So we move away, move away, move away, and we make it bigger, bigger, bigger, we deny it more and more and we are just victims and that is the way it is, that's delusion, first class delusion. So what do you do about it? You turn it around a 180 degrees and go exactly the opposite direction. You don't move away from fear you become it! You don't move away from pain, you become it! You acknowledge it! The moment you acknowledge it, it returns to the self, the ten thousand things return to the self which is where they have always been, only we didn't know it. There is no place to hide from samsara or pain, not even on a remote mountaintop, or a Zen monastery. Samsara is with us, it's not the outside world, it is us, we carry it wherever we go, place to place, relationship to relationship, from birth to death, it's the

same scenario until we put it to rest. Empty out the mind, die the great death, the death of the ego. You can do it right off or you can do it little by little...”