

DEEP SPRING CENTER NEWSLETTER

Vol. 18, No. 1 Winter 2010



Barbara Brodsky

Letter from Barbara

Dear friends,

As you read this letter, the winter holidays and the New Year will be approaching or past. I hope it has been a joyful time for you. January will find me back in Brazil with a wonderful group of ten students, further exploring healing and growth together and each in our own ways. These trips to see John of God are always transformative for me and the benefits continue to unfold through the year.

A highlight of Aaron's and my work this year has been Venture Fourth, the two-year program. The transcript from Aaron in the newsletter will tell you more about what we have been doing there. It's been an exciting mix of all I have been learning with Aaron for over 20 years, combining intensive vipassana practice, energy work, connecting with spirit guidance, and intentions to liberation, to service and for the highest good. I've been greatly inspired by the dedication of the participants. For those who would like to follow along with the group, all our transcripts from the intensives, and also the weekly assignments and reading lists, are on the DSC web site/archives/Venture Fourth. I encourage you to work along beside us. It's never too late to start.

We've also begun to train a new group of teachers, starting a new three-year training program. Working with these aspiring teachers is an inspiration, as always. For several years I have not had as direct a part in this program and it's been wonderful to come back to it.

Looking around me at Deep Spring Center, I'm also inspired by our many classes, by the depth of the teachers' offerings, and by the excitement for dharma that I see in our students. Together we are creating something very beautiful and special, a sangha with a deep commitment to growth in wisdom and compassion. I love each of you and am in awe of the ways we are growing, individually and together.

So many of you replied with appreciation for Chapter 2 of my new book, which was in the last newsletter, that I have decided to include another chapter, Chapter 15. Work on publishing the book has been on the back burner this fall while I've had a very full teaching schedule, but this winter I'll resume looking for a publisher or consider self-publishing it.

Wishing you a new year of joy and peace.
With love, Barbara

Venture Fourth Program Aaron's Instruction September 16, 2009

Aaron: My blessings and love to all of you.
I am Aaron.

Two years ago, I proposed to Barbara a two-year program that we would call Venture Fourth. I wanted to do a program:

1. with our most senior meditation students around the country, some of whom have worked with us for 15 or 20 years
2. that integrated meditation and what we call spiritual inquiry
3. that would support people with the deep intention to service in the world, to learn how that service can flow from an egoless place rather than from a place of strong self-centeredness.

Barbara was a bit resistant at first, saying that while she had been working with me all these years with some of what I proposed to cover in the program, she had never taught it. She had somewhat of a preference to stay on the safe ground of teaching that which she knew she had taught before and could teach well.

I nudged her a bit and reminded her that she has said to me in the past few years that she felt like she had hit a plateau, and that perhaps she needed to venture off on a new track. Actually, none of what we're teaching in the program is new. It's what I have taught Barbara for the past 20 years. Barbara has created a strong meditation program here at Deep Spring but so much else of what I've taught her about body energy and chakras, about working with your guides, working with negative energy, and so forth, these are all things that she passed on to this or that individual but never in a class. So the intention was to pull these teachings together.

Tonight I want to speak not only to the smaller group of you gathered here but also to a larger number of people around the country who have stated their interest to follow this course on their own, since we were limited in the number of people that we could include in the actual program. Consider this an invitation to work beside us.

I want to outline some of the reasons for the course, list the primary aspects of it, and give you some areas in which you each can practice. I hope that what I say here will help to give a clear plan for practice to those who are not in the class, even those with no meditation experience, as are some of you gathered here this evening.

You are all what I call angels in earthsuits. You have an angel aspect, a divine aspect to your being, and you wear this earthsuit of the physical, mental and emotional bodies, the human experience, which together has a lower vibration than the spirit body. Some of you tend to self-identify with these heavier bodies. Some of you tend to deny the heavier bodies and only want to hold an identity with the pure spirit body. But you are all of these, and you cannot exclude any aspect of yourself.

If you were only going to experience and identify with the spirit body, you would not have come into incarnation. You are here precisely because you chose to live with the catalyst of these heavier bodies, and they do provide catalyst. Is there anybody whose body has not felt some pain in the past week? Is there anybody who has not felt anger, disappointment or fear in the past week? Is there anybody whose mind sometimes has not been agitated in the past week? Your human experience is not meant to control these aspects of your being, in other words, not meant to subdue and stop them, so much as to lead you into compassion for the human experience, one of being so caught up in the identity of the self as just these heavier bodies. You are the angel and the earthsuit.

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We start with meditation practice, specifically Vipassana meditation, derived from the Buddhist tradition. It's a mindfulness meditation practice. One does not need to be a Buddhist to practice it; it's accessible to anybody because there is no special belief required, or any specific religious forms. One begins with a primary object, usually the breath, just watching the breath come in and flow out, come in and flow out. Of course attention shifts away within a few seconds. Maybe there's a loud noise—"hearing, hearing." Or there's a fly walking on your forehead—"tickling, tickling." Or planning mind comes in, figuring out what you're going to do tomorrow.

We don't say, "No, I'm meditating. I will ignore the fly. I will deny the sound. I won't plan." When there's a fly tickling, you simply note, "tickling, tickling." When there's sadness, you note "sadness." When there's a loud sound that startles you, you note, "hearing, hearing." When there is planning, you note, "planning."

Depending on what object has arisen, what comes next will differ. If you note, "hearing, hearing, people working with jackhammers in the street," the sound doesn't stop. As long as the sound is there and you have an organ of hearing, there will be contact of ear and sound object and hearing consciousness will result.

If you don't want that hearing, then you suffer. You note, "This has arisen out of conditions, and in this situation it feels unpleasant because it's a loud jarring noise, and I want quiet." Yes, it might be a very loud noise that jars the body, and there's also the grasping. "I don't want this, I want that. I want quiet." The sound is an object; the unpleasant feelings are a second object. The grasping, wanting it to be different, is a third object. Each comes in turn and each can be experienced directly.

We watch each object. We watch hearing. If it's a sound or experience that seems unpleasant, we note the unpleasant quality of it. If the body tenses up, saying, "No, stop that. Take it away," we note tension or aversion, as is predominant. The fly comes and he tickles. There's nothing really unpleasant about tickling on the forehead but if you're not expecting that then there's a sense of, "I don't want that. Note, "Tension, tension," or perhaps, "Aversion, aversion." When we watch aversion, it is often directly experienced as tension.

So, different physical, emotional, and mental objects will arise. When mind is planning and you note "planning," in the moment you are no longer planning. It's not like the jackhammer; there, hearing continues but, here, the planning has stopped. We come back to the breath. If mind starts planning again, we note "planning."

As you settle into the meditation practice, you note that the impulse to plan precedes the planning. Wanting to plan, ah, that's different than planning. There's a tension that comes up. Tension, tension, contracting, grasping, wanting. "I want to go someplace else."

Basically you begin to see your experience—physical, emotional, and mental—arising and passing away, and you begin to understand your relationship with the experience. When something is unpleasant, can we relate to it with kindness? When you stop giving it energy, whatever has arisen will fade away. Now, the jackhammer sound may not fade away but your involvement with it may fade away. It's just sound. One simply notes it, holds space around it, and holds space for the human that thought he/she was going to have quiet.

This is part of the work for which you took birth. You are not incarnate to stop mind and body experience; you are incarnate to learn how to be loving with what arises in your experience, how not to hate it. But if hatred of it does come up, how to find space with that experience, too. You are incarnate to become more loving and compassionate beings; it's as simple as that. You are incarnate to discover the angel that lives at the core of these earthsuits, and to learn how to honor the angel without disrespect for the human that has these sometimes pleasant or unpleasant physical, mental, or emotional experiences.

As you are present with experience in this direct way, you also begin to discern the nature of all conditioned experience. Whatever has the nature to arise has the nature to cease and is not me or mine. Here is the second aspect of your human work: the deep wisdom of the nature of the conditioned and Unconditioned, which leads to liberation.

You learn a deep equanimity, a peacefulness with the world as it is, which does not mean that you cease to work to change the world. Where there is disharmony in the world, injustice, you don't just say with resignation, "Well that's how it is. Aaron said to have equanimity with it." Instead you work to change the world from that place of wisdom, spaciousness and equanimity.

However, many people have not learned this so they're trying to fix and change the world from the ego, and that just creates more friction. The harder you try to fix something, the more waves you create.

Think of it this way. Imagine I had a large bowl like an aquarium filled to the top with water, sitting on the table. Somebody's footsteps across the room shook it a little bit so water began to slosh out over the side. What if I put a hand on the top to try to still the water? It's not going to work; it just creates more waves. But if you just hold that space and breathe, the waves will settle down naturally, as do the inner waves of fear, of agitation, of doubt, of grasping, and so forth. It will all settle.

As you experience this spaciousness and release of tension, you begin to know the innate radiance of the being, the innate beauty and goodness, the clarity, that you are, and to trust it. Some of you have had glances of it but you don't yet fully trust it.

NEWSLETTER

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Dear Reader,

On this page Aaron begins to describe the Venture Fourth Program in more detail and lists the “soul traits” with which we’re working. The class is reading *Everyday Holiness* by Alan Morinis (Trumpeter Books, Boston, 2008). This book describes the practice of Mussar from the Jewish tradition. Many of these traits are explored in the book, as is the importance to balance our selves within each trait. Here is the Buddha’s “Middle Way” expressed clearly within another tradition. I want to acknowledge our debt to Morinis and the Mussar tradition. For the spiritual practitioner, *Everyday Holiness* is a beautiful book, well worth your reading.

~Barbara

At first you have those rare moments of deep clarity, of joy; then you say, “I was imagining that.” So part of the practice is to settle in to what you truly are with no denial of the outer framework that we would call the human. Ultimate reality and relative reality: we begin to know that they are not separate in any way. Here is the angel in the earthsuit!

You are souls evolving into a greater maturity, and yet at another level there’s no place to go, you’re already there. From the relative perspective there is a passage. From the ultimate level, you are all awakened, divine beings. Yet you must invite that awakened nature to express. There’s a favorite quote of mine in a book of pure awareness teachings called **Flight of the Garuda**:

*Butter is made of the essence of milk,
But if the milk isn’t churned, the butter won’t form.
Sentient beings are made of the essence of perfection
But if they don’t practice, they won’t be enlightened.*

Venture Fourth gives us the opportunity to practice within the relative plane where we have weekly assignments with different, let’s call them, character traits, where we can watch patience and impatience, for example, gratitude, humility, or arrogance or low self-esteem. We begin to see how these different qualities are experienced, what nurtures or weakens them. I’m mentioning just a few of the ones we’ve already worked with. We’re taking one quality a week and we begin to see that these wholesome qualities are innate to us. You are truly innately patient, humble, filled with gratitude and lovingkindness, but also when ingratitude arises, when arrogance or low self-esteem arise, when impatience arises, we attend to them.

How does one attend to what we might call the less wholesome side without trying to fix it? Just give it love and at the same time hold the intention not to enact that quality. I’m reminded here of the image of training the puppy. If the puppy has an accident, you don’t smack the puppy, you just say “No” and you take it outside. If you tell the puppy to sit and stay and push his rump down, and

A partial list of the qualities: Awe (*Yirah*), Balance (order), Compassion (*Karuna*), Concentration, Energy and effort, Enthusiasm / determination, Equanimity (*Upekkha*), Faith, Generosity, Gratitude, Honor / Respect, Humility, Integrity, Lovingkindness (*Metta*), Moderation, Morality, Mudita, Order, Patience, Renunciation, Responsibility, Silence / Stillness, Simplicity, Truthfulness, Trust, Wisdom

he sits for five seconds and gets up, you don’t smack him and scream at him, you just say, “No, sit. Stay.” You trust the puppy’s innate capacity to learn to relieve himself outdoors, to sit and stay and follow what he’s asked to do. You treat the puppy with loving respect.

But so many of you do not treat yourself with that kind of loving respect. You order yourself around. You judge and condemn yourself when you don’t meet up to the standards that you have aspired to for the self. We must have standards. We must aspire. We just keep coming back and saying, “Sit, stay,” again, or “breathe, patience, patience,” again. We work with compassion, seeing how quickly judgment arises of the self and of others.

So as part of our work of Venture Fourth, we are working with one character trait a week for 26 weeks. We are trying to find a place of center, the egoless place, in each character trait. For example, the first week we worked with humility. I pointed out to the group that while one might immediately presume that humility is contrasted with arrogance, really humility sits in the center with arrogance on one side and what could be called a false humility or low self-esteem on the other side. Humility is egoless, it sits right in the middle, whereas arrogance says, “Me, I’m important” and low self-esteem says, “I’m nothing.” That’s not humility.

After practicing with humility and finding that center, we can move on to another trait, let’s say patience. On the one hand we see impatience, then we see patience in the middle, and then we see somebody who is stoic, gritting their teeth saying with great tension, “Yes, I’m patient. Yes, I’m patient.” That’s not patience.

So we try to find that place of true egolessness where we start to know our true nature as compassionate, humble, patient, filled with joy and gratitude. As you work with such a practice over weeks and months, it cannot help but shift the way you view yourself and bring you into a more accurate picture which doesn’t get so caught up in the stories of “I’m bad” or “I’m good.” It drops the self out of it and finds the loving heart and mind that can shine forth.

So this work, grounded in our meditation practice, is one major aspect of Venture Fourth and will carry through for the two years. We are working deeply to understand that everything arises out of conditions and passes away, not to build a self around it, to watch the stories that come and not be so self-identified with them, but to begin to ground in innate radiance and divinity.

Now we come to the name Venture Fourth. Many of you have been doing the kind of work I just described through many lifetimes. You've wondered, "Why am I doing this work? Yes, I want to be a more loving person but I also want to be of service in the world. How does this connect?"

There may be a desire to be of service and no understanding of how to do that because you see that when you do act from a place of ego, harm can come out of it. Then one comes back to the habitual pattern and chastises and judges oneself. So you swing from high to low. "Oh, I'm good. I'm so good." "I'm no good at all. Look what came up, anger, greed." You swing back and forth, there's no stability.

And for many of you in this incarnation there is such a strong intention to do no harm that you're afraid to become very active in the world because you're afraid that you will do harm inadvertently. You don't yet trust yourselves.

We come back to the fact you are angels in earthsuits and you are here on Earth at this time for a purpose. For many of you the primary purpose is simply to learn to love more fully, not to get so caught in fear and negativity. But for many of you there is a deeper intention to create this climate of love not only in the self but throughout the world. Your world is maturing, just as you are. Now we move into a phase of this talk that may seem bizarre to some of you. I'm simply sharing my own experience. Feel free to release what I say if it doesn't connect for you.

The Earth is moving into a new, higher vibration. You as human are what we call 3rd density. First density is rock and mineral with a very slow vibration, gas also; 2nd density is animal and vegetable. At the lowest end of 3rd density are your highest vibrational animals, the pets and animals that are beginning to experience a sense of self-awareness. And through the human aspect, you are 3rd density beings.

At the end of 3rd density there is equanimity with what arises in your experiences so there's the ability to watch anger, impatience or fear arise, not self-identify with it, attend to it in a skillful way, and release it with compassion for the human in whom it has arisen. There is simultaneously the ability to watch such movement in others with compassion rather than judgment. The 4th density being is telepathic. If you have thoughts of which you

are ashamed, you don't want others around you to be telepathic. If you are still uncomfortable with others' negativity, you don't want to be telepathic.

What if somebody in the room is thinking, "Oh, I don't like her shirt" or haircut or whatever it might be. Maybe you don't want to hear that. If I were to ask now, how many of you would be perfectly fine if everybody in this room was fully telepathic. Is that okay with you? Does that idea bring a little discomfort?

As you learn deeper equanimity with the human experience while still taking responsibility for that experience, you become ready to say, "Yes, it's fine. It's fine if people hear my thoughts because they do not come from a central self: they're just the habit energies expressing themselves, and I am not afraid to reveal what's under there. And I am not afraid of that in others."

Your Earth is becoming a 4th density planet. This is why we spell the program's name not "Forth" but "Fourth," a Venture into 4th density. You are all part of this movement, consciously or unconsciously, simply by choosing to be incarnate on the Earth at this time. Your Earth has the potential to become that Eden for which you so yearn, to be a place where nobody is starving, a place free of war, a place of kindness. And it has the potential to be a nightmare. Which are you going to make it? Each of you is co-creating this Earth.

Your work begins with yourself, with taking responsibility for your own negative energies, not to grind them under your heel but to say no to them in a compassionate way while holding with love the human who is experiencing this feeling.

So Venture Fourth is a way of guiding people into taking this kind of responsibility. To take such responsibility, one needs to acknowledge one's fullest power. All of you believe in limits. You're afraid to trust the enormity of yourself. The belief in limits must go. The limits are based on fear; they're based on the old habit of acting out negativity. As you become more comfortable with the fact that you do not need to act out negativity, you begin to drop the sense of limits.

As part of moving beyond limits, we must connect with that with which we are inherently connected—with the earth itself, with your spirit guides, with the elements. This is another part of Venture Fourth, in which we remind you of these connections.

THE WORK

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For example, the earth is an energy system. Actually, the whole universe is such a system. And the body is an energy system. When you get to know the energy system of the body, you see how it corresponds to the whole universe. We may begin to know the body energy and the chakras by toning. Are you familiar with the term chakra? Each chakra has a tone (pointing to chakras, beginning with the base)—C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C. When we experience the chakras as closed—they're never really closed but sometimes we experience them as closed—we can invite reopening by attending to them. Each chakra relates to certain basic issues. So, for example, the 5th chakra relates to speaking one's own truth, and sometimes for people who find it difficult to speak their truth, the throat chakra ceases to spin; it has stagnancy. We call that closed.

You can't just say, "Now I'm going to open the throat chakra." You invite, you co-create. One of the best ways I know to co-create the opening of any chakra is to sing to it. One can sing the tone of that chakra or even better, for the throat one can sing the heart tone and the third-eye tone. When they both are spinning fully, the energy comes down from the third eye and up from the heart into the throat and helps to free the throat. Then in meditation you may find certain issues about expressing your own truth are revealed to you. And as there is that clarity, sometimes psychological or emotional clarity, sometimes just an "Aha, so that's how it is," you realize, "I don't have to close this anymore. I'm free to speak my own truth." So in this way you begin to expand beyond who you believed you were and more fully into who you are. You release limits.

My intention with Venture Fourth is to help each person open into the greatest fullness possible of their being, to move as much as possible beyond limits while taking clear responsibility for the energies that move through them. And to trust their capacity to do that, and to give them the tools to support such intention.

That is by way of background.

Meditation often seems like a linear practice where you practice a choiceless awareness practice, watching what arises, watching how you relate to it, always with the idea that as you watch tension and negativity arise, at some point in the future, something is going to shift so such arising ceases. And it will. But it's so important that you have the direct experience of spaciousness, of joy, of love, right here in this moment and begin to realize that while on the relative level there is tension, the tensionless is also here. On one level you're on a journey, but on the ultimate level there's never been a journey. Where would you go? You are already divine and radiant beings. As the Flight of the Garuda poem says, you need to churn the cream. You needed to realize your divinity.

One simple way to realize it is, as Barbara would phrase it, simply to hang out with a loving energy. In the first Intensive we did some shamanic journeying with drumming and some people had very profound experiences of their guides and power animals and so forth. Some simply saw spinning light or vegetable matter.

Different guides come in different forms. We don't start with an idea, "This is what my guidance should look like," only, "Let me be open," state my highest intention of service to all beings for the highest good, and invite in the guidance that comes in response to that request.

When you begin to connect with that guidance, at first you are still working with what seems like an external guide, but through using the guide as a reflector, so to speak, you begin to see not only the guide's divinity but your own. You begin to connect with what we call the higher self, your own deepest wisdom and love. What we're doing in a sense is shifting the self-identity from that of the limited, impaired being to that of the divine being but still with acknowledgment, there's still a human here.

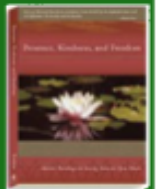
For the divine being, there is no limit to your capacity. We can use the physical healing of the body as an example. It's something I spoke of at the Intensive, that in one lifetime I lived in what would be considered among the aborigines of Australia. You would consider them primitive. But if as we ran through the countryside somebody stepped into a hole and broke their leg, that did not mean six weeks in a cast.

We would pick that person up and carry them to a comfortable place. If the skin was torn or the bone was mal-aligned we'd pull it back in place. Once aligned, we would literally sing to it, using vibration and each member of the circle holding the image of the ever-perfect bone. There was no denying the bone was broken on one level. We didn't say to the person, "Ah, don't be a malingerer, get up." The bone was broken. It only happened ten minutes earlier. But on another level, nothing is broken.

So you hold the image of that ever-perfect and you relate with compassion to the broken bone and whatever body pain or trauma there may be. Through vibration we would sing to it and within half an hour the bone would knit. Within an hour the person could be up and walking on it without pain. Often we would leave the person to rest for the night just because it is a big trauma to the lower vibration physical body to experience the break. The break is real. I'm not saying the break is not real, but if you believe, "If I break my bone, it's going to take this long to heal," then it will.

Presence, Kindness & Freedom

*Aaron's Teachings on
Living from an Open Heart*



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Such healing doesn't happen in your common relative reality, but that's no reason to assume that it's impossible. Most of you know that for over 30 years Barbara was totally deaf, and then she began to challenge the idea that she would never hear again. On the one hand knowing yes, she is deaf, and on the other, she is now knowing the wholeness, knowing she can hear and indeed is beginning to experience hearing.

May I ask you to tell that wonderful story? (someone in the class shares a story of Barbara's hearing her laugh when Barbara's back was turned to her) So there's no denying that the ears are deaf at one level but to say, "Well, I'm deaf. I'll never hear because I'm deaf." As the doctors have said, "You'll never hear," that denies any possibility. There is also that which can hear, just as the whole bone is there right with the break. Just as that which is not angry is there with anger.

When anger arises, one doesn't have to combat that anger but just to ask, "Where is kindness right here in this moment with anger?" The anger will dissolve when it's ready. That which is not angry is present. That which is patient is present right there with impatience. That which is generous is present right there with greed. That which is whole is present right there with whatever feels broken.

In this way we learn to move past the idea that we are limited through direct experience. It's very powerful when there's strong anger and you attend to that anger in a caring way and literally find that which is not angry. "Wow, it's here, it really is here." Then we're more able to just let the anger be a little yapping dog until it's ready to leave. It's just anger. You just say, "Shhh!" and not act it out. It will leave when it's ready.

We focus on the wholeness, the unlimitedness, the beautiful qualities, rather than trying to fix the unwholesome qualities. We attend responsibly to the unwholesome qualities so they do not do damage. But we don't have to be upset about them. They are simply the result of conditions and they'll go when they're ready.

So within Venture Fourth we are working in various ways, the ways I have taught Barbara through all these years. Working with vipassana, working with me and her other guides, working with shamanic journeying and her power animals, working with breathwork, and other means of entering into alternative states of consciousness and finding different realities in those states of consciousness so that one begins to be able to ground in those broader realities but always without denial of relative reality.

Sometimes people who are newer to spiritual work get caught up in some of these techniques, and move into a denial of

relative reality so that they do certain kinds of practices and suppress the actuality that there is anger, that there is fear, that there is pain, that there is the broken leg.

What we're learning is the integration of relative and ultimate reality, always holding the two together so that there is a respect for relative reality but not a belief in the limitations it suggests. Most of you know relative reality quite well but have not entered as deeply into the experience of ultimate reality. Of course, the meditation practice takes you into ultimate reality. That is our primary path. At times during the vipassana practice it's as if one has stepped outside the whole movement of objects arising and passing away. The example I sometimes use is, one sees sunrise and sunset from the Earth and it seems like the sun rises and sets. But if you go off to outer space far enough, you see the Earth is just turning and moving, nothing is rising and setting, it's just the perspective. So we shift to the outer space perspective, seeing further and deeper into the nature of reality.

"What we're learning is the integration of relative and ultimate reality, always holding the two together so that there is a respect for relative reality but not a belief in the limitations it suggests."

One stops believing in that relative perspective as the only perspective, and yet one still needs to live within it. This is the hardest place of balance for people. People get pulled one way or the other way. As you learn to open yourself to this broader consciousness, you ground yourself more in a new perspective, and this broader perspective can help you know your unlimitedness and also help you know that there's nobody there. By that I mean you are not a self in the way you've always conceived yourself to be. Then the fix-it energy dies away and what takes its place is a kind attendance

on yourself and on the world. And it's from that place that you can best be of service in the world and of supporting the whole world's move into 4th density.

Getting to know your guides, working with energy practices, toning, chakras, all of these different powerful tools, can also help introduce you to ultimate reality. Your guides remind you not to get caught in the narrow perspective; work with energy connects you to universal energy and a broader perspective. So we use these tools to remember who we are. Remember that toning, work with chakras and journeying are tools, paths to a broader perspective and knowing, and not ends in themselves. A non-ordinary state of consciousness simply reminds you not to hold to the limited view of ordinary consciousness.

There's much more that I could say here. This is by way of background. I'd like to pause my formal talk here and just open the floor to questions.



Chapter 15

Faith and Equanimity

Barbara Brodsky

Exiting the plane in Detroit after my first visit to the Casa, I felt enthused about both my trip and my prospects for healing. I had learned much, my mind had expanded, and the possibilities were endless. I felt like I had a clear plan of action, a healing practice that I could work with. Yet, there was also a sense of failure. I still could not hear and there was both anger and sadness. I would learn more in the weeks and years ahead, but not in a manner I could have foreseen.

In April, 2004, I led a retreat in North Carolina, on the beach. I'm a strong swimmer, and I love to play in the waves. I find it helpful to hold on to a small surfboard because of my poor balance, and I also love to ride it. I was playing happily in the ocean when an unexpected series of large waves scooped me up and threw me hard to the ocean floor. My face hit the ocean bottom hard, twisting my neck and breaking facial bones. My legs went numb and I lost control of them. My surfboard broke, smashing several ribs, and knocking the breath out of my body.

There were short lapses of consciousness, mixed with moments of lucidity; I was aware of terrible pain, felt that I was drowning, and felt helpless to change the situation. I didn't know which direction was up. I thought my back was broken. Yet, interestingly, there was no panic. The noting mind of meditation came through, "great pain, dizzy, chest burning, no air" It wasn't a conscious thinking process, of which I was incapable, but a deeper level of awareness. Then came that often-described tunnel of Light, an alluring exit in the face of intense pain. In that Light there was such spaciousness, ease, joy and peace. As I wavered between life and death, knowing that to choose the Light meant leaving the body, something within made a conscious decision for life, not out of fear of death, but from a conscious realization that my work here was unfinished.

I had no idea what kind of body I would have when I returned. But the decision arose spontaneously and was stable, the fruit of a long spiritual practice. At that point, I felt spirit support me to move arms and rise to the surface where I called for help. With my face streaming blood, a feeble call for help, and I was seen. Hands grabbed me and that was the last of consciousness until my eyes opened, aware of my body lying on the beach.

Blessed now with the perspective of distance, I can see better how this seemingly horrible accident fits into my journey. Before the first Casa trip, Jeshua had said that what I needed most was courage. I really did not understand, then, how prophetic Jeshua's statement would become on many levels. When He had spoken, I thought He meant the courage to heal my ears, resolve my past karma, and break through the feelings of separation from the world that my deafness preserved, by going to Brazil and inviting healing at all levels. This was true, but much more would be asked of me. Healing would take longer than I had expected, and would require a greater transformation than I had thought possible. Faith became a word and a concept that held my attention.

On the plane I had read a book called *The Desert Pilgrim*.¹ The section on a monk's healing of a deaf child seemed to resonate with my growing understanding of faith. The monk is speaking:

"When you're on the spiritual path, you're on the right road. Listen, there was a mother who brought her young daughter here the other day. The daughter was deaf. The mother had taken her to doctors, but they could do nothing. 'Oh Papa, won't you help my daughter,' the woman begged. 'I can help your daughter and I will,' I said. I sat her down on the bench right where you are. I spit on my two fingers and placed them in the daughter's ears. The girl closed her eyes and I began to chant a prayer of healing in Russian.

"'But what if it doesn't work?' the mother cried. 'What if it doesn't work?'"

¹ *The Desert Pilgrim* by Mary Swander (hardcover, Viking Compass, 2003, pp. 270-271)

“And it’s not going to work with you asking that question,” I said. ‘You of little faith, go on out of the room right now, immediately.’ I kicked her out and returned to the daughter, the girl who had perfect faith. I spit on my fingers again and placed them in her ears. I chanted. I asked that God’s healing powers come down upon her. We joined together in our prayers and after a few minutes the girl said that she could hear my voice. She raced outside and found her mother and told her that her deafness was gone.

“So that’s the kind of faith you have to have, the faith of a little child. You must come to the kingdom of God like an innocent.”

Faith had deepened on the trip, as I saw the miraculous healings taking place around me. However, faith and equanimity are not the same. Equanimity allows us spaciousness, and rests in wisdom, but in part it’s logical or at least has roots in logic. Equanimity grows as we see that everything truly does arise from conditions and then passes away; thus, there is a logic to allowing things to be the way they are. Faith is total surrender to things as they are. In faith there is equanimity but also courage, deep love and joy. Faith brings me home.

Yet when I returned from Brazil, I was angry and disappointed and felt abandoned. I felt as if I had failed somehow because I could not bring forth hearing, despite my rosy concepts of faith, and despite my conceptual understanding of what was needed. I didn’t yet really believe that hearing was possible, despite all I had seen at the Casa and the Entities’ promise to help. It became clear that this faith that I thought I had was

actually based on conditions, and that I had not completely surrendered to things as they were. My faith in healing and in spirit, already troubled by my lack of healing, was further shaken by this accident. I found further wisdom in *The Desert Pilgrim*. The monk is discussing the Dark Night of the Soul with Mary:

Monk: I told you that you want to sink down into the dark night and stay there. You are fighting so hard to get out. You must enter into that void because then you make the great discovery that God is in the void. God is the dark night.

Mary: How could God be the dark night?

Monk: ... You’ll find the Divine in paradox, in contradictions, in moments of surprise. You are not going to find the Divine in some safe, cozy apartment where everything moves along at a predictable pace.

The Monk’s words certainly spoke to my condition, and would prove to be as prophetic as Jeshua’s statement that courage is what I needed most. As long as we cling to some place of safety, we never surrender to the fullness of that void, which holds the intensity of love and fear, of perfect love and perfect peace. In my journal after the accident I asked:

Am I holding back? Having come so far, I feel like I had settled into a safe space, a safe enlightenment, only to be thrown out by this pain and confusion. I know that the enormous suffering that sometimes catalyzes growth is not necessary. We can enter the void and know the safety of the Divine, at the same time. Can I find the Divine in this battered body filled with pain? I don’t know how to start.

DONATIONS TO BARBARA

Barbara Brodsky is not paid a salary nor does she receive money from your donations to Deep Spring Center. Your support permits her to do full-time teaching, channeling and work on Aaron’s books. You may offer your donations directly to Barbara.

Donations for Barbara may also be offered into the Roth Retirement Account started for her by sangha members. Make checks payable to: Oppenheimer custodian for Barbara Brodsky Roth IRA. Contributions can be sent to: Oppenheimer & Co. Inc. / Attn: Gary Austin, 301 E. Liberty Street, Ann Arbor, MI 48104 800-423-7491 or 734-747-8040

It was out of that “don’t know” that a more complete surrender finally came, both with the continuing deafness, and now with these new injuries. The body was devastated, with broken ribs, severe back and neck injuries and bruised and broken facial bones including the nose and orbital bone around one eye. There was constant pain. I could not even lie down as ribs were broken in front and back. For weeks I slept sitting in a chair, head cushioned on arms resting on a table. I had nothing left with which to fight, I could only let go and be with this body as it was.

I found myself ready and willing to work on gradual healing, with a deepened faith in the possibility to heal. There was an awareness of the need to look at any doubt and to not be caught in the story of doubt. If healing was not immediate, it was because that was the deepest, though unconscious, intention for the highest good. I needed courage to find and demonstrate healing gradually, the courage to persevere through bodily pain and loss of function. I needed patience to learn the skills that can be passed on to others, for that transmission is my higher intention, not just ease and comfort.

In order to survive that day in the surf, I needed to make an instant choice for the highest good. It seemed like an initiation of sorts into a long period of unexpected twists in my health and seeming detours in my progress toward healing.

Four months of rehabilitation followed. My picture was brought to the Entities, requesting their help and they responded in many ways. Broken bones healed more quickly than expected. When pain was severe, I felt them near me, helping to release the physical agony. I would feel their presence and a warmth and softness wrapped around me, allowing me to sleep.

My back and face were feeling better, I was able to walk and swim again, although walking was painful. My left knee, on which I had had traditional surgery years earlier to correct torn cartilage, was very painful and swollen. It had been reinjured in the accident. Hip and lower back pain also made walking a struggle.

It no longer hurt to breathe or to open my mouth and talk or chew, although on my lower lip there was a

spot that continued to bleed profusely several times a week, when I talked and ate. The medical doctor said that an artery must have been punctured. Since surgery would leave a scar, we left it alone, hoping it would soon heal on its own.

Now that I wasn’t feeling overwhelmed by the physical experience, I could begin to gain insight into what had happened to me. Before the trip to Brazil, I had explored the simultaneity of relative and Ultimate reality. On the Ultimate level there was nothing left to heal, while on the relative level there was deafness. I began to understand how to hold the truth of wholeness, and to still be with the body as it was. There can be no denial of either reality. I also see now that I needed to learn how to invite the healing of the body, of broken bones and torn tissues, before I could do the work on the ears.

Through the late summer, Aaron spoke more to me of healing the body and spirit with harmonics and vibration, and how the healing that I was seeking was part of the core of my work here on earth, and truly, of all of our work. That work is to carry a high, love-based vibration, regardless of our mundane experiences. A lesson came when a horsefly followed me on my kayak on the lake. I became agitated. Aaron spoke to me and seemed to suggest that disharmony of the physical body limits the ability to face negativity with love. It was an unpleasant outing and I returned to my cabin filled with tension and began to meditate. My agitation followed me. Finally I began to speak with Aaron.

First let us address the rage at the horsefly. You were enjoying the boat, enjoying the lake, but did not want to be bitten and he kept returning, attacking as you felt it. You understood that he was merely being a horsefly. There was mindfulness about the anger he brought up. Yet you would have killed him if you could, so you could enjoy your lake in peace. How can there be peace at the cost of killing a bit of the divine?

You are about to say, “Do I just sit there and let myself be eaten?” No, nor do you need to kill. Here we get to vibration and sound. The angry cells literally give off a vibration that says “prey” and invites the fly to bite. The high, centered vibration gives a very different message of saying no to negativity, but with

no fear or hate.

To say no in this way, it is not necessary that there be no fear, but that there be no self identity with fear. In the same way, it is not necessary that there be no cellular distortion, but no self identity with that distortion. When you hold the mirror of the Ever-Perfect as truth, even while the cells still express some distortion, and embrace both the distorted and the Ever-Perfect, it is that openness that gives the highest vibration. The cells will heal as they are able. On the relative plane, the distortion still may exist, but it is embraced, it is transmuted. What expresses out is the highest level of being.

I asked him if he meant that distorted cellular tissue gives a lower vibration, but it doesn't give a lower vibration if I don't believe in it as self.

Not quite. It still emits the lower vibration if it is diseased or distorted, but that vibration is not broadcast. Rather, the lower vibration is held in a container of highest, loving vibration and that is what is broadcast. There will always be distortion in the body, just as there will always be some emotional distortion. Just as that emotional distortion actually strengthens positive polarity when love is given to it, so does physical distortion do so. You embrace the human, know the Ever-Perfect in all the bodies as true self, and also work on the relative plane to balance the distorted, without taking it as self. That which presents as "distorted" on the physical, such as an unhealthy cell with low vibration, has an Ever-Perfect component. Even when the cell broadcasts at a lower frequency, there is no difficulty if there is recognition of the simultaneous Ever-Perfect, a loving embracing of both, and intention to help invite that of low frequency into higher vibration in gentle and loving ways.

So what makes it difficult to greet the negative with love is the untended low vibration in body or emotion?

Precisely. Please return to your meditation.

As I looked at the horsefly experience. I saw there could be both the low vibration of discordance and the higher vibration of the loving container. The lower

2 Eight weighted tuning forks of good quality, from lower C 64HZ to the next octave C 128HZ.

vibration still exists and I had thought it would be broadcast. Yet when I look at the emotional experience rather than the physical one, I see the lower vibration of negative emotions exists on the relative plane but is almost irrelevant, like waves on the surface of the lake. There is anger, for example, and the compassion that holds space for anger. The compassion absorbs the anger just as the large body of water absorbs the waves. I asked Aaron if this was what he meant about the physical body discordance? He replied, "Yes. The waves do not affect the quality of the water."

The Entities offer several ways to raise the vibrational frequency of the body, including prayer and meditation and drinking the blessed water. After the accident, the Entities asked me to purchase tuning forks² and use them in specific ways.

Through their use, I was also learning to hear in a new way. The exercises included hearing with the body, feeling the vibration, and chanting specific syllables that are harmonious to each chakra and supportive to the health of body tissue. They didn't instruct me what to chant. I used a sacred syllable, "Om," beginning at C and working up to the higher C. Sometimes I would chant just the CDE repeatedly while working with the lower chakras. Sometimes I repeated the F of the heart center for a long time, chanting Om. I worked intuitively with the body and chakras, singing to whatever was closed. I found that as I brought together intention to open for the highest good of all beings, willingness to see what held it closed and attend to it, and the physical tools of tuning forks and crystals often placed on the chakras as I chanted, the chakras responded. I held the fork near first the right ear, then the left, as instructed, and chanted the note I heard or sensed through the body and vibration. Next I placed the stem of that fork on the appropriate chakra point, and chanted more.

As I sang to the body, I visualized it as perfect, while still holding the injuries with compassion. I stopped seeing distortion as something wrongful, and instead began to know it in the way I knew the movement of my kayak in strong current, just a slight swerve that needed attention. This listening and vocal toning became a daily practice. Aaron told me:

The pure harmonic vibration serves as a template for the discordant vibration and invites transformation, just as holding the visual image of the Ever-Perfect offers a template for the material distortion. The Ever-Perfect is one "bias"; the distortion is another. Just as two currents push at each other to establish a third flow of movement, so these two currents of the distorted or lower vibrational frequency and the perfectly harmonious energy both dissolve into a third movement that both contains and is different from the first two. Think of your sailboat; the wind pushes the sail one way and the water pushes against the centerboard the opposite way. The boat doesn't move as pushed by wind or water but moves ahead, merging the two forces. This is the emergent expression. This is the process of healing. At the Ultimate level the Ever-Perfect always exists. At the relative level it is always becoming, never here. Everything is in flux; everything is decaying. Yet ultimate equilibrium always exists. Everything falls apart and decays in the relative, yet it decays into the One, into harmony. Chaos slowly shifts into divine order.

In the same way, diseased and damaged tissue gives a vibration that has a harmonic element. The perfectly pitched tuning forks carry the Ever-Perfect pitch, reminding the distorted tissue with discordant vibration of its own Ever-Perfect level. As you chant, the cells come into greater balance. On the ultimate plane, there is the realization of the Ever-Perfect and the cessation of identification with the distortion, This whole then becomes the new relative and is played again into balance with the Ever-Perfect. The vibration continues to increase.

While meditating and chanting I saw the meaning of Aaron's words in my body. Cells constantly die away and new cells come, always with some distortion. As the body holds a higher frequency, the new cells are born into the higher frequency, the tissue becomes healthier, and the whole vibration becomes progressively purer. When there's focus on "fixing" the distorted, with contracted feelings and energy,

that contraction lowers the vibration. While the idea is there to raise the vibration, it can't happen because one is practicing the contraction. When there is the open-hearted intention to invite the higher vibration and to rest in the ultimate truth of that Ever-Perfect, the body on a cellular level follows naturally.

The body wants to express its wholeness. The mind with fear shies away and holds the body back. Chanting and work with harmonics is a kind of affirmation of the body's ultimate perfection and high vibration and this invites the gradual move to that vibration.

Fear, expressed as contraction, is the limiting condition. Love, expressed as the uncontracted, is the release. More recently I had an opportunity to practice further with harmonics. In the summer of 2008, several months after my return from the Casa, I had the opportunity to explore the release from belief in limitation in everyday life and to watch the transfer from the mental to the physical bodies and the power of harmonics. I was leading a horse who bolted and pulled me over. In the hard fall, I broke my big toe. My family doctor estimated it would take six weeks for the bone to mend, and longer for it to recover fully. It was painful, swollen and very discolored. A Casa Entity, Dr. Cruz, said to me in meditation, "It is all molecules; nothing solid there. Sing to it and visualize the bone whole." He asked me to hold the foot tenderly and ask it what tones it needed to support healing, and to soak it with the Casa water. For three days I sang to it, just a repetition of the syllable "Om" in different tones. I held the image of the healed toe in my mind, not as a linear process, but envisioning that ever-perfect toe that was already there under the swelling. Through the three days, the colors changed, and finally faded. The pain diminished. By the fourth day, there was no longer any discoloration or pain at all. Dr Cruz assured me, "The bone is mended. Be gentle to it for a time as it is still a little fragile." Although it remained swollen for many weeks, there was no further pain at all. The x-rays after that healing showed no sign of a break.

Some time later in the summer, after experiencing the horsefly in my kayak, a different fly gave me another opportunity to explore and practice. This time I had a very different response. Irritation arose from a pesky

fly. I could feel myself tensing, pulled out of awareness. There was wisdom about the experience, and equanimity with the fly at first, with being uncentered, with the tension—all of it. Without trying to fix anything, awareness watched an ancient desire to control and the feeling of helplessness. Meanwhile, the fly kept buzzing me, and occasionally landing, and there was aversion to being bitten.

I slipped into the water to avoid the fly, and floated there. Aaron often says, “That which is aware of anger is not angry.” I have learned to rest in that state of Awareness and watch. Awareness could compassionately see the small self grasping and preferring, acting according to very old karmic conditioning. But it was clear I could not choose to escape into awareness to avoid this experience, which would tighten another karmic knot.

As I continued to float, the tension released, and my experience merged with light and space. I felt very open, and nothing was solid. I doubt if this would have happened so easily if I had stayed on the boat with the fly attacking. It was as if I could see the knot and ten thousand events that had created it, all floating in space, no self, just conditions pouring forth, and there was no need to hold it any more. It was a very powerful shift. I floated there about ten minutes, just resting in Awareness, feeling all tension released.

Once I climbed back into the boat, the fly was back and persistent in its effort to bite. It was unpleasant, but the experience no longer pulled me hard into aversion or into a personal self. Instead, there was spaciousness with the unpleasant feeling, and a strong compassion for this hungry fly, though not strong enough to let him eat. Finally, I got back into the water, tied the boat rope to my waist, and swam back to the dock.

Looking back on my experiences after the accident and through the summer of 2004, I am amazed and humbled at the healing I underwent and the teachings I was given. Even biting insects became a blessing. Inwardly, this ongoing dialog and exploration led to a deepened faith. The faith I had during my first trip to Brazil I now realized was similar to the simple faith

of the child in The Desert Pilgrim. My belief had been wounded by my lack of healing in the same way the child’s faith would have been shattered by the mother’s disbelief. Out of that wound, and with Aaron’s words and my experiences, I found a faith based on the more solid foundation of knowledge and wisdom. But even as I relaxed into this new understanding, new trials would lead to new learning. My healing would continue to happen gradually, with almost constant setbacks and unexpected difficulties. I needed the strengthened ability to surrender to the reality of my experiences so that this new faith could more easily survive intact and grow.



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Letter from Board President

December 2009

Deep Spring Sangha Members,

Fall is the time when changes occur on the Deep Spring board. This fall we welcomed three new members to the Deep Spring board of directors—Tom Slank, Sandra Villafuerte and Lisa Zucker. Tom, Sandra and Lisa bring a great deal of Deep Spring experience and even more enthusiasm to the board. We're very happy to have them join us.

Three members have also left the board: Anne Teare left earlier in the year; Linda Longo and Peg Tappe left the board this fall. Linda served as Treasurer for over two years, and spent much time and effort managing Deep Spring's finances. Many thanks, Linda, for your efforts.

Peg Tappe served as Vice President for two years, and has done so very much for Deep Spring while serving on the board. Whenever something needed doing, Peg would get it done. Whether it was working with the teachers to gather and disseminate information, getting a new ramp built for the center, taking over many office duties after our office manager left, or any of a host of other things, Peg always pitched in and got things done. We'll really miss her dedication, can-do attitude, and most of all, her warm and open heart. Of course, Peg is still very active with the center, and continues to help out and make things run smoothly.

New and old members were in attendance at the annual board intensive held September 12. We reviewed and discussed our mission statement, formed our definition of consensus, and got to know each other a little better. We also reviewed the goals from the last board intensive, and discussed progress and some potential new goals. Because long-range planning at this board intensive was limited, goal-setting will be done at upcoming board meetings. The minutes of the board intensive are posted on the web site in the Board of Directors section.

At our September board meeting, we came to a consensus on officers and liaison positions. Following is the 2009–2010 board:

- President: Curt Fish
- Vice President: Tom Slank (also Social Committee liaison and Asst. Treasurer)
- Secretary: Lisa Zucker (also Teacher group liaison)
- Treasurer: Sherry Hansen
- Member-at-large: Simon Ha
- Member-at-large: Sandra Villafuerte (also Retreat Committee liaison)

The Who Does What doc has been updated on the Deep Spring site. Click the Board of Directors link on the left, then look for Who Does What at DSC. Copies are also available at Deep Spring Center.

And, finally, just one more thing to bring into awareness again this year. We are right in the middle of the giving season. If you have not yet received a letter asking for your contribution to Deep Spring, you will soon. Please give the letter your attention, and act with an open heart.

With metta,
Curt



Top row: Simon Ha, Curt Fish, Lisa Zucker, Tom Slank
Front: Sandra Villafuerte, Barbara Brodsky, Sherry Hansen

Fragrance Free Center



*Because we care about one another
Please refrain from using fragrances
When coming to Deep Spring Center.*



Retreat Committee News

Karen Mori

The experienced meditators retreat at the Howell Nature Center took place October 23-25. The intimate atmosphere was supportive and very open-hearted. There were ten retreatants plus our teachers Barbara Brodsky, John Orr, and Aaron. We heard teachings on objects and spaciousness, emptiness and pure awareness. The retreat center is in a lovely setting surrounded by woods and some wildlife that tried to wander inside. We put up a sign, "Keep door closed—turkeys." Sandy Norton and Ingrid Weisz managed the retreat. We are also pleased to have had Janet Bourgon join the retreat committee.

The self-retreat for experienced meditators will take place March 6-12. This is a favorite retreat for those who like to meditate on their own throughout the day and have an option for a group sitting at night. In addition, each meditator will have daily meetings with Barbara Brodsky. It is being held at the Weber Retreat Center in Adrian, Michigan, which has lovely grounds for walking meditation and a chapel for additional sittings.

The Spring Vipassana Basics Retreat led by DSC teachers is being held March 19-21 at the Steiner House in Ann Arbor. Residential and commuter options are available.

The No-Frills Vipassana Retreat is taking place at the Howell Nature Center, April 23-25. There will be no teacher and retreatants are required to have a stable practice and have attended at least three teacher-led residential retreats. We are now looking for a coordinator for this retreat, as George SanFacon, who has been in charge of this retreat since its inception, is now stepping down. Thank you, George, for your many years of dedication to this retreat. (See George's article on the No-Frills Retreat on the next page.) For more information on coordinating this retreat, contact Karen at 734-747-8179.

The summer retreat led by Barbara Brodsky, John Orr, and Aaron is being held June 18-25. The retreat will likely be held at Emrich, but we will not receive confirmation that the center will be in operation next year until their board makes the final decision in late January. The retreat committee is holding the intention that there will be a loving and spirit-filled June retreat.

We hope that members of the Sangha can find a retreat that is appropriate for their needs and come share with us this loving opportunity to deepen practice.



Social Committee News

Tom Slank

A successful "plant exchange" took place at Erica Dutton's home on May 31. Everything brought was taken by other

sangha members, and donations by those who left with new plants for their gardens went to Deep Spring.

The annual picnic at Friends Lake was once again a fun time for all who attended. About 30 sangha members, friends, and family stopped by sometime during the afternoon and evening of August 15. New friends were made and old friends reacquainted.

The summer kayak/canoe trip on the Huron River took place on August 22. Eleven members with their family enjoyed a fun day on the river.

Five hardy Deep Springers (and friends) enjoyed a beautiful fall color kayak trip on the Huron on October 17—a beautiful and peaceful day.

November 1st was the kick-off for the Deep Spring Media Exchange, offering people the opportunity to donate gently used books, CDs, DVDs, and tapes, which are then made available to others for a suggested donation. Funds raised help with general Deep Spring operating costs.

The Social Committee is always looking for new ideas ... and volunteers. If you have any ideas—or would like to assist with these or any other Deep Spring events—or be a member of the Social Committee, please contact Tom Slank at 734-660-6415 or email Tom at thomasslank@yahoo.com.



Newsletter Committee News

Rori Stienstra

The newsletter committee would like to welcome Huilai Shi, who has volunteered to provide layout for the DSC Newsletter. A designer working in Charlotte, North Carolina, Huilai says she has been reading books from the DSC website for some time. She had an interest in becoming more involved in the DSC group and felt that her background could be helpful with newsletter layout. Her work requires her to use graphics and publishing software such as Adobe Photoshop, Indesign, Acrobat and Illustrator. We are grateful to have her on board.

Maria Edelen is working with Huilai to update her on the basics of layout that have been used over the past few years. Once through this issue, Maria will be leaving the committee. I would like to thank her for her efforts and support of the whole process. Her keen eye and generous spirit has been a blessing these past few years.

No one has yet volunteered to take on the role of Content Manager/Editor of the newsletter. If this is a way that you can offer your time and talent to DSC, please consider volunteering. In the meantime, I will continue in the role.

Please let us know what you think of the changes we've made to the newsletter. Comments and inquiries are welcome at rori.dsc.nl@gmail.com or call the DSC office.



The No-Frills Retreat

A Journey into Simplicity

George SanFacon

Several years ago, I realized how vital retreats were to my meditation practice and well-being. Almost without exception, I would return home from Deep Spring silent retreats with a sense of peace and grace; clarity regarding my life priorities and relationships; a sense of easy access to the wisdom and compassion needed for engaging modern life; and renewed ability to sustain my daily sitting practice. As time went by during the ensuing months, however, these energies and capacities would inevitably slowly erode until I attended my next retreat. At that time, I was doing at least two and sometimes three retreats yearly.

After seeing the pattern, I decided to investigate the possibility of doing retreats more often. But some issues needed to be addressed. First was the issue of cost. With a family to support and limited income, I wanted more but less expensive opportunities for doing retreats. At the time, weekend retreats offered through our Sangha typically cost around \$200 plus dana offerings for the teacher. My goal was to lower this amount to a total of \$100. Second was the issue of administration. After being on the Sangha's retreat committee for a decade, I knew a lot of work was typically involved in planning and producing a retreat. Another goal, therefore, was to create a retreat format that minimized such. Third was the issue of programming. It was important that any new venues complement and synergize with the other retreats offered through the Sangha, rather than compete with them, or worse, undermine the work and practice being taught.

Out of these concerns and dilemmas was born what we called "The No Frills Retreat." It is a simple format in which the retreatants themselves co-create the entire experience. There are no teachers, cooks, or staff other than the yogis themselves. They bring the food and prepare the meals. And there are no other teachers, nor Dharma talks. All that is needed are: (1) some meditators (from just a few to a couple of dozen) with a modest amount of retreat experience and a stable sitting practice, and (2) a reasonably quiet and private location where they can come together in silent retreat. This can be at someone's home or at a retreat and conference center.

We have been doing No-Frills Retreats for several years now, and have developed the following guidelines, format and schedule.

Guidelines

Eligibility Requirements. Retreatants need to have some previous meditation instruction as well as some experience attending silent retreats. While beginning meditators therefore do not qualify, we have found that intermediate or experienced students do just fine. In cases where judgment needs to be exercised to determine whether or not someone

is stable enough and their practice mature enough for this format, we defer to their meditation teacher for a determination.

Meals. Meals are provided by the retreatants themselves. They are divided into subgroups beforehand and each group assigned a separate, single meal. This information is disseminated several days before the retreat to the retreatants via email, along with a participant roster with contact information (email addresses and phone numbers). This gives them a count for food quantity and enables them to connect in their subgroups to work out details. They are asked to prepare dishes that are vegetarian, modest, and simple to prepare or heat up on site. They are also told to plan on taking any leftovers home. Because of food allergies and other concerns, people are encouraged to post recipes or ingredient lists alongside the dishes they serve. If retreatants wish to re-negotiate their meal assignment, they are asked to contact other participants on the roster to do so.

BYO. Retreatants are required to bring their own meditation cushions and bedding (including blankets, sheets and pillows).

Meditation Center. A small table, or devotional center, is usually set up in the meditation space. Retreatants can bring flowers and/or personal artifacts for such. A clock and chime are also provided in the space to end the meditation sessions. Yogis are asked to rotate responsibilities for monitoring the time and ringing the end bell.

Weekend Format and Schedule

The following weekend schedule is provided to retreatants and posted at various places on site. It can easily be revised for a longer retreat or a shorter one, such as for a Sabbath. The schedule is reviewed as part of the logistics and housekeeping during retreat opening.

Friday

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| 6:00 to 8:00 pm | arrival and settle in |
| 8:00 to 8:30 | retreat opening: review logistics, schedule and housekeeping |
| 8:30 | silence begins |
| 8:30 to 9:15 | sitting meditation |

Saturday

| | |
|------------------|--------------------|
| 6:15 am | rising bell |
| 6:45 to 7:30 | sitting meditation |
| 7:30 to 8:30 | breakfast |
| 8:30 to 9:30 | active meditation |
| 9:30 to 10:15 | sitting meditation |
| 10:15 to 11:15 | active meditation |
| 11:15 to 12:00 | sitting meditation |
| 12:00 to 2:30 pm | lunch and rest |

| | |
|--------------|--------------------|
| 2:30 to 3:15 | sitting meditation |
| 3:15 to 4:15 | active meditation |
| 4:15 to 5:00 | sitting meditation |
| 5:00 to 7:00 | dinner and rest |
| 7:00 to 7:45 | sitting meditation |
| 7:45 to 8:45 | active meditation |
| 5:00 to 7:00 | dinner and rest |
| 7:00 to 7:45 | sitting meditation |
| 7:45 to 8:45 | active meditation |
| 8:45 to 9:30 | sitting meditation |

Sunday

| | |
|------------------|--------------------|
| 6:15 am | rising bell |
| 6:45 to 7:30 | sitting meditation |
| 7:30 to 8:30 | breakfast |
| 8:30 to 9:15 | sitting meditation |
| 9:15 to 10:15 | active meditation |
| 10:15 to 11:00 | sitting meditation |
| 11:00 to 11:30 | break silence |
| 11:30 to 1:00 pm | lunch and closing |

Notes for Schedule

1. Yogis are free to vary their personal schedule as long as they do not disturb the community schedule or others. If leaving the premises and area, they are expected to leave notes checking out and back in.
2. "Sitting meditation" designates group meditation practice scheduled in meditation hall or designated space. Yogis are requested not to join a scheduled group sitting any later than five minutes after the session commences.
"Active meditation" designates private mind/body practice,
3. such as walking meditation, yoga, hiking, mindful exercise or simply resting.
4. Yogis prepare and provide the food for assigned meals. They ring the bell to call yogis when the meal is ready. Clean up is done by those providing the meal.

Retreat Organizing and Administration

The No-Frills Retreat requires: (1) one or more people for organizing, (2) a retreat site, and (3) some retreatants. Within the context of a spiritual community, it also needs to be pre-approved by the appropriate party (e.g., Board, retreat committee, and/or founding teacher). Once that is done, organizers can proceed with securing a site, getting the word out, and tracking registration (name and contact information). A week or so before the retreat, the yogis are sent the participant roster with contact info and meal assignments. During the retreat, a message board/space and Post-it notes can be used for communication purposes. The retreat schedule and bell ringing schedule can also be posted there.

Retreat fees can be handled on either a dana or fee basis. For the former, we include offering baskets for both the host facility and our spiritual community. For the latter, the organizer collects

the fees and submits them to the Sangha.

During the retreat closing, we sit in dialogue to review what went well and what we want to do differently for future retreats. We also discuss who would be interested in doing another retreat and, if so, when. Lastly, we review any housekeeping and clean-up requirements so that the yogis can pitch in and help with such before leaving.

Advantages

Advantages and benefits to the "No Frills" approach include:

- relatively little administrative work
- low cost and affordability
- secure food/meal arrangements, as responsibilities for such are distributed across the participants rather than depending on a single cook or chef
- a level playing field in which there are no classes of people separating retreatants from non-retreatants or students from teachers.

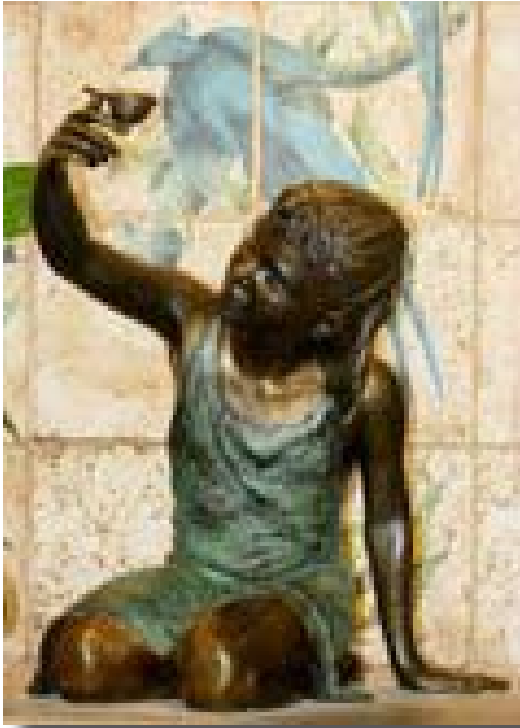
In the No-Frills Retreat, everybody is a retreatant, a staff member, a student, a teacher, and a healer. And the more experienced the yogi, the more they resonate with the No-Frills experience. It seems that as our spiritual practice matures, we are increasingly able to access and trust the teacher and healer within. As one of our handouts put it: The No-Frills Retreat ... no staff ... no cooks ... no teachers ... no healers ... except ourselves.

George SanFacon
December 2009

**No-Frills
Retreat Coordinator
Needed**

Deep Spring has reserved Knoll Lodge at Howell Nature and Conference Center for a No-Frills weekend, April 23-25, 2010, but a volunteer is needed to coordinate the retreat. The coordinator will be responsible for: (1) registration, (2) meal planning/coordination, (3) retreat management, and (4) collection of registration fees (at the retreat).

If you are interested in supporting and giving back to the Sangha in this way, please contact Karen Mori (email: kst734@sbcglobal.net). Note: No-Frills veterans will be available to orient and support you in the endeavor.



Photograph by Phyllis Perry

It seems that Families come in all forms and circumstances: biological, spiritual, work, common interests groups, classmates, neighbors, sangha, four-legged friends; but the most important aspect is some kind of loving connection with another Being, or Beings. Sent with Love.
- Lalita Doke

Family!

You don't have to think about it,
Or,
Wonder about it,
You simply realize that you love them.

Each one,
Unconditionally!

Not because of anything they do,
Or,
Anything they may have accomplished.

But,
Simply because
They are,
That Magical Word . . .
Fam--i--ly!

Lalita, December 5, 2004

DEEP SPRING CENTER'S mission and goals are to:

- offer non-denominational spiritual teachings on non-duality
- teach and support the deepening of awareness on non-duality and related topics through the practice of meditation
- sponsor discussion groups, classes, retreats and workshops designed to provide support for spiritual growth and to further the teachings
- publish and distribute materials concerning these teachings
- foster a community of individuals interested in and practicing these teachings
- expand and redefine our specific teachings always with spiritual focus, into directions the teachings themselves lead.

Deep Spring Center - a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization - is guided by a Board of Directors.

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The newsletter is published three times each year and is offered freely. Your donations allow us to continue to publish the newsletter. Our cost to print and mail the newsletter is \$10/year for U.S. addresses, \$12 for Canada and Mexico, and \$15 for other locations (e.g., Asia, Australia, Europe, India, South America).

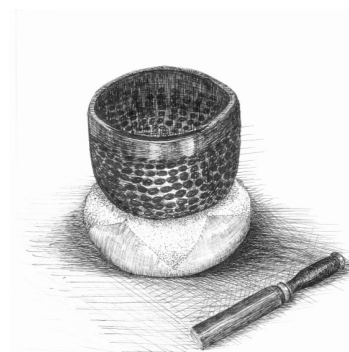
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| ___ | <i>The Path of Natural Light, Part 1</i> | \$ 15 |
| ___ | <i>The Path of Natural Light, Part 2</i> | \$ 15 |
| | TOTAL Publications | \$ _____ |

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Aaron's Closing Thought

"You are souls evolving into a greater maturity, and yet at another level there's no place to go; you're already there.

From the relative perspective there is a passage.

From the ultimate level, you are all awakened, divine beings."

~ Aaron

