

Friday, March 30, 2007 Durham, NC Retreat

Aaron: My blessings and love to you all. I am Aaron. John, all of you who have made this weekend happen. I'm delighted to see so many of you come together to share the dhamma. Your radiance is very beautiful.

For those of you who are skeptical about whether I am real, don't worry about it. I look like Barbara. I even have the same voice. Are you real? (pointing to people) Are YOU real? Are YOU real? What is real? If what I say is useful to you, take it into yourself and make it your own. If it's not useful to you, discard it. It's as simple as that. Don't worry about who I am, but listen with your heart and ask, does this dhamma speak to my heart?

We arrived at a subject for this weekend of moving beyond limitations because so many of you live within a belief structure that confines you to limitations. And you are miserable, thusly confined, because you are radiant, vast spirit, not just these small bodies and minds, and feel your imprisonment. Your meditation practice is the means to come to know the truth of your being, to know your true nature, and break out of confinement, to be free.

Look at this hand (holding up a hand). What if I said, this is the end of the hand? It seems to be, yes? Now what's happening? (turning hand slowly) Ah, there's more than you thought! The hand doesn't have an end, does it? It just goes around. It does seem to have an outer edge even though it's turning and that edge changes. But how about the energy field that expresses from it? Each of you has such an energy field. Do you end where your skin ends? How far out do you extend?

John, put up your hand. Where does John end and I begin? John, can you feel my energy?

John: Hot!

Aaron: Yet, while John and I each express energy, where we come together, the energy is no longer mine or his, just energy. All of you, feel the energy in the room. Can you find your energy in it? No, because it is mingled with the total energy. And yet you each believe that you are a separate self, and within that illusion is your suffering and your entrapment.

We talk about the different skandhas or aggregates of

self. The body, the physical form. Is there anybody here who has the same form today that you had 20 years ago? Nobody? Your thoughts—that's the second skandha, mind. Is your thinking today the same as it was 20 years ago?

Feelings of pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral arise. Is there anybody sitting in this room who has not had pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral feelings in the past hour? Maybe there was a sensation of an itch or tingling – unpleasant. Then feeling changes; it constantly changes. Pleasant shifts to unpleasant and back again. The form, the feelings, the mind arise out of conditions and when the conditions change, these things change.

Perception is the fourth skandha. Your perceptions of the world are constantly changing, depending on the conditions. The fifth skandha is consciousness itself, body and mind consciousness. Consciousness is as simple as the process wherein the eye that touches an object and seeing-consciousness arises. The ear touches a sound and hearing consciousness arises. The mind touches an object, a thought or a memory, and mind consciousness arises. It's all arising and passing away, dependent on conditions.

You are not any of these skandhas. They simply arise out of conditions. There's a beautiful old Buddhist teaching about the chariot. The chariot has wheels. It has shafts that hold it to the horse. It has a seat for the driver. It has an axle. What is the chariot? Are the wheels the chariot? The seat? Yet without any one, there is no chariot. How about this chair, is the seat the chair? Are the legs the chair? Is the back the chair? Without a seat, even if there were legs, you couldn't sit on it. Without the legs it would simply be a cushion on the floor.

Everything is made up of non-self parts. The chariot is this mixture of objects. There's nothing you can point to and say, "That's the chariot." There's nothing you can point to and say, "That's the chair." And yet, you all point to yourselves and say, "This is me." What are you? Are you today's body, yesterday's or tomorrow's? Those of you with some kind of illness, are you that illness? Those of you who have struggled with unworthiness feelings, abuse, anger, and fear, are you your anger, are you your fear? Are you your feelings of unworthiness? Is it this upon which you build the self image?

When people come to me and say, "I'm a happy per-

son,” or, “I’m an angry person,” that’s their image of themselves. But all of these arise and pass away, they are not self. They are not what you are. Then what are you?

You are spirit, you are divine. You are radiant light. You are awareness. You are pure being. And yet even here we cannot define it with a single word. There’s nothing in your language to clearly define the nature of being. The English language is poor, in that sense.

The Buddha spoke about the conditioned realm and made a distinction between the conditioned and the Unconditioned. While speaking to a group of monks, he said, “Monks, there is an Unborn, Undying, Unchanging, Uncreated. If it were not so, there would be no reason for our lives.” What is this Unconditioned, and how do you get to know it?

You could look forever at the arising and passing away of conditioned objects and still miss the Unconditioned. I’d like you to try something with me. Hold one hand up in front of your face. Stare at the fingers as you wiggle them. Keep them moving, stare at them. Let’s name each as one of the skandhas: the form, the mind, perceptions, feelings, consciousness; (wiggling a finger to each name) there they all are.

Now, shift your gaze and look through. Look at me. Or, look at this body that I’m presently incorporated into. If you can see me, so much the better!

Keep the fingers wiggling, but look through. The fingers don’t cease to exist but there’s a vast space beyond them. Come back and look at the fingers again. And then again, look with the gaze passing right through. Do you see the vast space beyond the objects?

Your meditation practice invites you to watch the arising and passing away of the conditioned realm, of physical sensations, mind and thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and consciousness, all arising and passing away. You watch it and watch it and you watch it, and you ask, “What else is there?” until one day, you wake up looking through. You see how objects arise and pass away. They arose from space and then passed away into space. The space remains.

What do I mean by space? Look in the room. There are a lot of people in the room, yes? There is a floor, and a beautiful ceiling. What is the biggest object in the

room?

Q: Space.

Aaron: Yes, it’s the invisible object, space. This room is filled with space, and the objects exist in the space. When all of you pass out the door, the space remains. If you take a break and then come back in again, the space is not harmed or changed in any way by your entry or leaving the room, the space remains.

It’s hard to find a metaphor that clearly expresses the Unconditioned. The Buddha’s words: unborn, undying, unchanging, uncreated—this is as close as one can come. One must experience it. Your meditation practice gives you the tools with which to experience it.

May I have the bell, John? Thank you.

I’d like you to listen to this sound. The ear organ touches the object, the sound of the bell, and hearing consciousness arises. Then the bell sound fades away and hearing consciousness fades away. Let’s do just that much first.

(Bell)

The bell arises out of the stillness and fades back into the stillness. As the bell fades, go into that space and stillness. Listen.

(Bell)

Physical sensations arise: an itch, heat, or maybe a pleasant feeling of relaxation in the body. They all arise with conditions, they all pass away. Thoughts arise. They arise from conditions. If you grew up with certain conditions, you may have grown up with a belief that you are unworthy or inept, unlovable, or lacking skill or talent or grace. This is an idea and it limits you. You grow into the belief, “This is who and what I am.” And it hardens so that it’s very difficult to release that belief.

Some of you have struggled with addiction of some sort, alcohol, drugs, or even cigarettes. Either you have held the idea, “this is who I am,” or, “this is who I will not be.” But when you say, “I will not be the one who smokes,” or drinks, or whatever, you’re still giving it energy, in a sense. All you’re seeing is that concrete, small piece of what you are, the one who smoked ciga-

rettes and now will not smoke cigarettes any more. The identity remains. There may be the one who used to be careless and now will not be careless any more, one who used to be angry and now will not be angry any more. “I WILL NOT BE ANGRY!” You keep practicing it. You’re trapped within this limited sense of what you are, trapped within your belief systems.

Your practice gives you the opportunity to see how these belief systems, especially your deepest self-identity, have arisen out of conditions, and to reflect, this is only one small piece of what you are. The angry one, or even the good one, the incompetent one or even the one who always needs to be perfect... they are all expressions of being caught by beliefs.

That which is aware of anger is not angry. What is this, “That which is aware”? That which is aware of a belief system, “I am unworthy,” knows it is not unworthy. Your practice asks you to open to the fullness of what you are. The difficulty here is that you are so comfortable in your discomfort. You don’t like it, you say you don’t want to be there, but what else is there? So you keep coming back to it. You’re so used to this self-identity.

We come back to this energy exercise. What if John insisted that he ends there? (touching John) We keep crashing into each other. One of the reasons that you can walk down a crowded street comfortably is that you feel other people’s energy, even if you’re not conscious of feeling it. And you feel how far your energy field extends out. But it extends so much further than you believe it extends; you are infinite. And that idea is threatening. What if you really are as infinite and powerful as I say you are? Then you’re going to have to be more responsible, aren’t you? If there is negativity, you can’t just say, “Well it’s because of what my parents did when I was 6 years old. I can’t help it.”

Do you want to be comfortable and safe, or do you want to be free? It really is as simple as that. There’s a very beautiful dharma teaching called “clear comprehension.” It begins with clear comprehension of purpose and asks, in this moment, what is my highest purpose? Is it to be safe, for example? Or is it to be free? There’s nothing wrong with being safe, and the two are not mutually exclusive, really, because when you understand that you are free, you understand that you are and always have been safe. But in the illusion, you don’t

feel safe so you revert to the old habits that pull you in. And then there’s no freedom.

What is my highest purpose, and is what I am about to do in this moment suitable to that highest purpose? When John first invited Barbara to teach with him, she said, “How can I do that? I’ve only had formal access to this practice for a short time.” So she asked me, “Can I teach?” And I said, “What is your highest purpose? Is it to share the dharma? Or is it never to make a fool of yourself?” (laughter) So I answered her, “If you teach, you’re probably going to make a fool of yourself sometimes. But if you don’t teach, you cannot share the dharma. What is your highest purpose?”

You become willing to move out of the illusion of limitation into which you’ve held yourself and to start to know the fullness of your being, your power and your wholeness. Those of you with a physical ailment, perhaps something severe such as cancer or perhaps just a cold, you’re not your cold; you are not your cancer. This is one expression of this physical body right now. It’s not who you are. But through repetition, you convince yourself, “I’m the one who always gets colds.” Or, “I’m the one with a tumor growing inside.” Or, “I’m the one with a hangnail.” Whatever it might be, you focus on it.

To the extent that you keep focusing on it, you keep practicing this woundedness and deepening the belief, “This is who I am,” and it becomes increasingly difficult to break free. You are vast awareness. You are light and energy. And you have no limits.

At the same time, clearly this human body does have limits. I’m not recommending anybody climb up on the roof, here, after my talk to say, “Well Aaron says I’m unlimited, therefore I’ll fly home!” Your body does seem to have limits. Yes, there’s nobody here who could not fly if you truly knew you could. But you are not ready yet. We don’t want to pick up broken bodies from the sidewalk! You need to respect that you live within the illusion, and that you have come into the incarnation with a willingness to live within the illusion, but not to take the illusion as ultimate truth.

Let’s use the theater as a metaphor here. We cast all of you, each with a role in a play; each of you learned your lines. Then we opened the stage and asked you to come up and play your lines. The one who said, “Ah, this is

just a play,” and didn’t empathize with the character, didn’t try to feel how that character felt and be that character, their acting would not be very interesting, would it?

Then there are those who come up and thoroughly empathize with their character, thoroughly live out that character on the stage. Through doing that, they learn about the feelings of that character, and the audience also learns. You are both player and audience; you are player to a role, a part in the incarnation, and audience to everybody else’s parts and to your own.

But what happens to the one who deeply empathizes with their character and when the curtain is drawn, is so convinced he’s that character that he continues to play it out when he leaves the stage? On the stage he’s in a brawl with others. The curtain is drawn and the other characters say, “Oh, that was a good show tonight. Let’s go get a beer.” And he says, “With you? I hate you!” because they’ve been brawling on stage. He’s so caught up in the illusion that he can’t see both the illusion that he’s been creating and the deeper reality.

This is really the situation that all of you are in. When we talk about waking up, it’s waking up to realize, “Here I am in the play. I came into the incarnation with an intention to play this part for a reason, to learn certain things from playing the part. And yet if I become so self-involved with the part, deep wisdom can never come.”

You need to have compassion for the human that you are and the part you are playing, and yet be willing to step back into this vast field of awareness that can watch the player and say, “Ah, I see how that habit energy is flowing. Ah, I see how these opinions came. I see how these beliefs came.” And make the decision, “I’m not going to do that any more.” Let it go.

So you are both playing the part and finding liberation from the self-identity with the part, literally becoming free.

(The digital recorder is stopped and a new file started. Aaron comments, “This is just so the transcriber receives small enough folders that she can open. There is a relative reality and we have to obey its rules! Unlimited, we send an hour-long tape to her. But the relative reality is, the technical equipment will not send out a

long folder.”

It’s very much the same. In ultimate reality, you are completely free; in relative reality, there are certain limits that you have to observe, but not with self-identity to them. In the long run, those limits fade away so much that perhaps the only real limit is that the body is an organic object. Yet even that is transcended. I have known beings who literally have lived without food for years, and even with minimal water. I have known beings in whom after death, the karma was so deeply purified that as the body dissolved, it simply dissolved. There was nothing left of it, just a rainbow light emanating from the room. This is what the Tibetans call the rainbow body.

So the body is not necessarily a heavy, course object. The body is energy, and within the cells of the body and the energy field, there is karma. As you purify the karma, there’s nothing left. It dissolves.

Let’s take this one step further. In what ways can your meditation practice help you release limits and beliefs? Let’s use a simple example, the feeling of unworthiness. Because I’m sure that many of you, if not all of you, have at some time or another felt unworthy. For some of you it’s a predominant experience; for others of you, an occasional experience, but a familiar one.

What does it feel like to feel unworthy? Does the body contract? Is there tension? As I recall it, yes. Sometimes there’s heat. The breath may become shallow. There’s a physical experience akin to shame. Because of your practice, you note these physical arisings—heat, change in the breath, tension, tension in the belly, perhaps, or in the throat—and you note the idea, “I am unworthy,” which is a habitual response to certain external stimuli and the physical sensations you’re experiencing. The mind goes into the thought, “I’m unworthy,” and the experience of wanting to shrink, to disappear.

When mind notes this whole experience, it begins to see there is first simply a movement of the arising of physical and mental objects, impermanent and not self, arisen from conditions. They are unpleasant. Following the unpleasantness, there may be a feeling of, “I don’t want this,” Experienced as aversion, and wanting to push the object away. This aversion is a new object, just as the itch and the wanting to scratch the itch are two different objects. So the body sensations and thoughts

that come together with the idea. “I’m unworthy,” is one object, and the anger at being unworthy is a second object. Do you follow me? Two objects; this is vital to see.

This becomes akin to the experience of climbing on a wagon and rolling down a hill. There’s a point where you sit in the wagon on the top of the hill and it’s not moving. You can get off if you want to, but once it starts to roll and picks up speed, you can’t get off. As you get caught with the physical and mental ideas that come together as unworthy, and then the anger, the whole thing picks up speed, and suddenly there’s anger, shame and confusion, and you’re stuck. And each time it happens, the idea, “I am the unworthy one,” gets stronger.

Within your meditation, as you sit there, perhaps the legs hurt and you need to move them. As you move them, you hear the foot dragging on the floor, and shame comes up. “I’m making noise, I’m disturbing others. I’m the one who can’t sit still.” Then when you see, “Ah, thinking, thinking.” Then you’re in the wagon at the top of the hill; you’re not giving it any momentum.

As soon as you go with it, you’re rolling down the hill and it’s harder to stop. Moving, hearing the sound, shame about the noise you’re making, and then anger—“Why do they tell people to sit still anyhow? This is a stupid practice! I don’t think I’m going to do this any more! I’m leaving!” Then you go home and you say, “I can’t do that practice. I’m no good.” Why? Because there is some idea that when the foot moves and there is a little bit of noise, you were bad. Which is just the result of your old conditioning.

Look at this in your lives. See where you give it momentum. Is it with the idea of being the angry one or even the good one, or the one who always has to be good. Is it with the healthy one or the unhealthy one? The bright and clear one or the dull one. Each of you have these self-images, and each time something triggers them, you may give it more momentum rather than just sitting back and watching, knowing this is just a succession of objects arising in space and dissolving again.

You attend to the object with kindness. You can’t deny the object, but you also just rest in the spaciousness.

Here is freedom.

If I could use this image again, we’ve got a hundred wagons here on top of the hill. You’ve been watching people rolling down the hill in their wagons and crashing into trees, bodies scattered, unconscious and bleeding, down there. You’re sitting in your wagon. Above you is a vast, beautiful sky. Why roll down the hill? (laughter)

You have a choice. That’s what your practice is about, remembering you have a choice.

I chuckled a bit to myself as we came up with this theme for the weekend, because there’s another way you’re moving beyond limits this weekend. That’s the limit we’ve imposed on the retreats here, that they not be attended by a spirit. Your culture is beyond much of its prejudice about skin color, religion, and cultural background, but you have to have a body. Because I don’t have a body, there’s quite a bit of prejudice against me! People think, “Oh no! A spirit!”

So I also want to invite you to look at any beliefs you have about what spirit is, because it’s not just me that is spirit; you are spirit. I speak about the fingers and the space beyond, about the forms, the thoughts, the perceptions, feelings, consciousness, all arising and passing away in that space. Beyond all of these things, you are spirit. You are energy, you are light. And this is what you must discover about yourselves, to truly be free.

I spoke about the nature of the chariot or the chair, which are conditioned objects arising and passing away. There is a conditioned body and a conditioned mind, yes, but you are also of the nature of the Unconditioned. I cannot explain that to you. This is where your practice must take you, to that point in the practice where you meditate and the whole body seems to dissolve, the ego dissolves, thoughts stop. There, you don’t cease to exist. There is what we call awareness, or supramundane consciousness.

When you are in that space, you are not just you. This body and mind, these are expressions of that ground or core of being. It’s like taking drops of water out of the ocean—each one is a separate drop. It has intactness to it. And yet if I dropped them back into the ocean again, you can’t say this is this drop and that is that drop. They’ve merged together.

Resting in that space of pure awareness, resting in the Unconditioned, you do not cease to exist in the ultimate sense, and yet you are no longer believe you are the body, the mind, the feelings, the consciousness. It becomes clear those are just outer expressions of you. The self is known as radiant, clear and eternal, the unborn, undying. This Ground cannot be stained by thoughts; the thoughts simply arise and pass away. The beliefs arise and pass away. The body sensations and ailments and all arise and pass away.

If we took a lot of mud and threw it on these windows, would we harm the windows, the glass? Does the glass lose its inherent clarity? When you do attend to the mud, wash it off, the glass itself is not disfigured in any way. And just in the same way, the essence of you is never disfigured in any way by the conditioned arisings. So it's up to you whether you choose to believe that you are really those conditioned aspects of the self, or whether you are this ever-perfect, clear radiance that cannot be stained or distorted, that is infinite, unlimited.

This would seem to be a good place to pause and invite your questions.

Q: In Christianity, there's a supreme being. In Buddhism, there isn't. What's true?

Aaron: Both are true. (laughter) This, what we call supreme-being, this is not a puppet-master God up there deciding which basketball team is going to win this game. (laughter) This is what the Buddha called the Unborn, Undying, Unchanging, Uncreated, simply That Which Is. The important thing is that it's not something out there. You participate in that, you are expression of that. The word, "God" is a difficult word because there is often a puppet-master connotation that accompanies the word "God," but we may simply call it That Which Is, the Unborn, Undying. The Unconditioned. There is something. He said, "If it were not so, there would be no reason for our lives." It would be a very nihilistic teaching to say there is nothing.

When you enter this space in your meditation, Q, it's not empty, it's full. There's an enormous energy to it. We can't label it; the conceptual mind cannot go there. It's only pure awareness that goes there, supramundane consciousness. So the lokuttara citta, the conscious-

ness level that's able to perceive unconditioned objects, touches the Unconditioned, but it's not able to talk about it because we're only able to talk from the conditioned realm. Vocabulary doesn't exist in the unconditioned realm.

But when you experience it, it's full. I can't tell you what it is. To me it feels like infinite love and intelligence. It is all-intelligent. When I say it's intelligent, intelligent not in the sense of the conceptual everyday mind, but aware of dhamma, if I could put it that way. Aware of the truth of how things are and consistent with that truth. And love. And it's hard to define love. For me, this simply means uncontracted. The loving heart is open and spacious and uncontracted. When there's fear energy, you contract. When you contract, it brings unwholesome karma. When you release karma, you're back into this uncontracted. So love, for me, is consistent with uncontracted. It exists in service to all beings, not self-centered, and yet at that point there is no self or other. So how could we say it is not self-centered because everything is just that self? There is nothing else. It is the highest principle of love.

Please remember that the Buddha was teaching in Hindu India where people believed there were many gods and people avoided responsibility for their choices by blaming the gods. They went off and prayed to this god and that god. They believed the gods influenced how life would be. The Buddha understood that this was not wholesome, and he was trying to help people break through that pattern and take responsibility. So he did not say there is nothing, he simply said, these various gods, they are not what determine things. There is no god of this and god of that. There is no one supreme being, separate and above all else. But that doesn't mean there is nothing.

Q: Are there really soul mates and do we come back with them over and over again?

Aaron: Of course there are. Yes. Let me explain this just a little. You have a number of bodies: physical body, mental body, emotional, and spirit body. The physical body dissolves, a new physical body comes in the next incarnation. The mental body, it moves off into the astral realm with you and it comes back in the next incarnation, not in terms of conscious thought, but in terms of habit energies, karma. The emotional body, similar.

The spirit body is very pure. When you come back in a new incarnation, depending where you are in your evolution. If you've done this kind of practice, when anger comes up, you learn to note, "anger, anger," feel the heat of it, the tension of it, without creating a self-identity, not to act it out, but to watch it dissolve. You've released the self-identity with anger and released the karma around it. In the next incarnation there's not so much work with the emotional body, there may not even need to be a new incarnation.

The mental body is not as heavy as the emotional body, the thoughts and beliefs and so forth. When a belief can come up and you can note it as opinion and not self-identify with it, it goes. But the mental body itself does not dissolve. There's simply no longer belief in the mental body as self.

When you work with your soul mates, guides, and other spirits on the astral plane, it's from a level of this pure mental body and the spirit body, so there's able to be communication on that level. Working out what needs to be done, looking together at the karma of each being and how you can best assist each other to resolve that karma, and then you're drawn by that karma into the new incarnation, often together to work out that issue together. So yes, you keep coming back with your soul mates, your friends, and your worst enemies. They're sometimes your best friends! Do you understand what I mean by that? Our worst enemies are often our deepest teachers.

... I'm happy to take another few questions if there's time...

Q: Aaron, could you speak a little about forgiveness?

Aaron: There are several important things to know about forgiveness... Forgiveness dissolves karma. Therefore it's a very important thing to learn and practice, and yet you can never force forgiveness. I find it's better to work on the level of compassion, karuna. When you deeply look into another being's feelings, needs, motivations, and understand what led them to act in the way they did, you do not condone their action but you understand it. At that point there's nothing left to forgive. You let go of it much more easily. So it's important not to approach forgiveness as a "I should forgive," but rather a willingness to come

together deeply with the other person to hear them and understand them. Thich Nhat Hanh speaks of this compassion beautifully in his poem, "Please Call Me By My True Names". He talks about a pirate who rapes a young girl, who throws herself into the sea to drown. He notes that if he were born in the town and conditions of this pirate, he might have become a sea pirate, and he cannot so easily condemn himself. As we open our hearts in compassion in that way, we understand and cease to condemn. Then you act in the world not to kill all the sea pirates but to change the conditions in poverty-stricken towns so that there are no longer the conditions that create new sea pirates. You act in a skillful and loving way, and this is the outer expression of forgiveness. Is that sufficient answer?

Q: You mentioned twice, "If it were not born,"—I apologize, I'm probably going to get this wrong, but I think you were talking about being unborn and clear, there would be no purpose for our lives. And I'm just having trouble understanding how that connects, how that translates into a purpose. (She is referring to the Buddha's statement, in a sutra, "Oh monks, there is an Unborn, Undying, Unchanging, Uncreated. If it were not so, there would be no meaning to our lives.")

Aaron: My sister, if there were only the conditioned realm into which you took birth and eventually died, life would simply be about material living. There would be nothing but the conditioned. Some might say yes, there's a purpose to that. I've seen a bumper sticker that says, "He who dies with the most toys, wins." Well, that's a certain philosophy of life, but to me there's not much purpose there. It's self-defeating. As soon as that self dies, the purpose is gone.

In order for there to be a, what the Buddhists call Buddha-nature and the Christians call Christ-consciousness, in order for there to be that deeper essence of being, there needs to be the Unconditioned. But we do not create an Unconditioned philosophically to give us a purpose. Rather, as we move deeply into meditation and have some of these profound experiences where the body and ego disintegrate, and thoughts stop arising, there's absolute stillness, when you move into that space, there is light, there is energy. When you know, "I am that," then the deeper purpose comes up, to try to live this outer expression as consistently with what you find in that stillness as you can. That is, with as much love and compassion, generosity and grace, as is pos-

sible.

When you do this, we're not doing it simply to end the karmic stream; that is not an end in itself. Because once the karma is dissolved and there's no need to take further incarnation, this unborn, undying essence of you continues.

Please consider a huge container of somewhat impure water. It's got a lot of dirt in it. You begin to filter it. You drain cups out and filter them and then you pour them back. You do it thousands of times, draining cups from this vast container, filtering them and pouring them back. The water will become increasingly pure, yes?

In just the same way, as each of you does this work with yourselves, That Which Is, which is infinite and perfect, already, becomes more infinitely perfect. How can perfection become more perfect? How can light become lighter? How can love become more loving? And yet, because it is unborn, undying, because it is infinite and constantly capable of expanding, this expansion of love is possible. There are no boundaries.

For me, it comes down to the question of, would you rather live in a loving universe or one based on hatred and fear? As each of you does this work on yourselves, it's like purifying the water and feeding back more love, so that the universe becomes more and more filled with that love. This is hard to talk about because we're talking about some balance between the relative and the ultimate. On the ultimate level, it's unchanging. The Unborn, Undying, Unchanging. It already is, it's perfect. And on the relative level, it's constantly changing and expanding. You keep contributing to it. Does somebody have a clean white piece of paper? (he is given one)

Here is an unwrinkled sheet of paper, can you see it? No wrinkles. (crumples paper and unfolds) You can see the wrinkles. We are not in any way denying the existence of the wrinkles. Can you see that the unwrinkled sheet of paper is still there? Where would it go? The wrinkles exist and the unwrinkled sheet of paper exists.

On the relative level there are wrinkles and on the ultimate level there are no wrinkles. What you are doing, in effect, is integrating the ultimate and the relative so that the relative increasingly reflects the perfection of

the ultimate. And the reason that there would be no purpose in life without this is that one would have to resign oneself to living in a world where the wrinkles were the ultimate reality.

(crumples it up; tosses it out) Play with it! (laughter)

Q: What I'm wondering is, why is the relative necessary?

Aaron: It is your learning place. Let's go back to that theater stage. You come out on the stage and read lines that may be involved with anger and pain and fear, and often there's a learning process and catharsis for the actors and the audience, yes?

Life in relative reality is very much the same thing. From the ultimate perspective, dwelling on the astral plane in between incarnations, there is no fear. You incarnate and accept the illusion of the separate self. You accept willingly to forget your true nature so that you can come here and practice loving. If you remember your true nature and that this is just a play, there is no anger, so nothing to serve as catalyst for compassion. In the same way, it would be very hard for the actor on the stage to really bring up anger, unless he's willing to put aside the idea that he's an actor and really feel the part.

When you feel the part, then you can learn compassion. Without these negative emotions, how can you learn compassion? If you understood it's all an illusion, and something brought up anger, then all you would say is, "It's all an illusion anyhow so there's no anger." Your heart doesn't open, then. You're not really learning lovingkindness and compassion, you're just using the brain. But this is not about the brain, this is about the love.

It's 10 minutes to 10, Barbara's body is tiring; her energy is dwindling. We'll end the session at this point...

Thank you for your attention and for permitting me to share my thoughts. It has been a joy to share our energy and radiance. My love to you.