

leap of faith

THE NEW HOPE SANGHA NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2004

Meditation Retreat May 21–23 See page 5.

A Christmas Story

Aaron is a being of light and is channeled by Barbara Brodsky.

Dear Friends,

Another year has past filled with the joys and sorrows of life. I hope that you are well in every way and that the year ahead will bring you peace and happiness.

Our spiritual community, the New Hope Sangha, will begin holding bimonthly meditations and dharma discussions starting in January. Our gatherings are open to everyone. Listed in the newsletter are many meditation retreats to choose from including a new Young Adult Retreat and a Vipassana Retreat at the beach.

We are in the process of converting much of our mailing list to an electronic format. This saves resources and money. We are sending *Leap of Faith* to everyone we have an e-mail address for. We are also happy to continue to send hard copies of the newsletter to who ever wants it. If you are receiving it electronically and want a hard copy let us know or if you are receiving a hard copy and want to get it through e-mail also get in touch with us at office@newhopesangha.org. For those who want to receive it both ways (e-mail and US mail), and presently are not, let us know that too. Lastly, if you wish your address to be removed from our mailing list we fully understand.

I hope you enjoy Aaron's annual Christmas Story. I planned to include a dharma talk I gave on "Non Duality" in this issue of the newsletter. But because of the length of it, I decided to make it available online at our web site: www.newhopesangha.org. If you don't have access to the internet and want a copy of it, do contact us at 919-286-4754.

We hope to see you somewhere, sometime so we can share the experience of dharma and life together. Have a wonderful New Year!

Love and Blessings,

JOHN

I am Aaron. For those few of you who are new to my teaching, each year we offer what you have come to call the Christmas stories. Many years ago I shared with you all that I was alive in the world at the time of the birth of the one that you know as Jesus. I was a poor shepherd, not a wise man in terms of intellectual affairs but perhaps wise in my heart, I grew to have great love for this master.

When I say "I", this is not Aaron, this is the being that I was at that time, a karmic ancestor. I was not privileged to spend my days with him but now and then when his own movements brought him near to where I lived with my sheep, I would take a few days to go and follow his path with him and be with him, one of many who did this. And it was always a great blessing just to be in the presence of this great one.

My Christmas stories have been memories that stood out for me of those different times that I spent with him. I've tried to highlight not so much his divinity but his humanness. The human aspect of his being shined forth: his goodness, his kindness, his patience, his forbearance with pain and difficulties. Some could see through the surface into the deepest inner light and others simply grasped what was given on the surface. But either way, to be in his presence was the greatest gift.

We're all divine, we're all sparks of that divine energy, expressions of that great perfection. For him this expression of his clear light stood out more distinctly than it does for many, and because he shined this light forth in his every expression of being, those who came near to him found him reflecting their own divinity back to them. For some it led to a very powerful opening to that divinity, others were frightened by it because they could not yet see that aspect of themselves. Yet to be in his presence was always to encounter that divine mirror, regardless whether it was a pleasant experience or not.

I told you that the being that I was, was a shepherd. For the first time this man that I was came into the master's presence in

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JANUARY 30-FEBRUARY 1, PHILADELPHIA, PA
RESIDENTIAL RETREAT
 Led by John Orr through The Philadelphia Meditation Center. For information call 610-853-8200 or see their web site at www.philadelphiameditation.org

FEBRUARY 7, DURHAM, NC
YOGA, CHANTING AND MEDITATION WORKSHOP
 Saturday, 2-4:30pm
 With Cynthia Hughey and John. Cost is \$30 in advance, \$35 day of. To be registered, a student must pay in full by 10:00 the Thursday morning prior to the workshop. If spaces remain available, drop-ins will be accepted at the higher fee. You can register by signing your name on the sign-up sheet on the bar at the Yoga Spot or call 919-667-YOGA.

FEBRUARY 22, RALEIGH, NC
YOGA, CHANTING AND MEDITATION WORKSHOP
 Sunday, 10am-12:30
 Led by Cyndi Bulka and John. Held at the Moving Mantra Yoga Studio in Raleigh. Fee is \$35. To register or for more information contact Cyndi Bulka at 919-848-0177 or movingmantrayoga@ncrr.com. Another way to reserve a space is the web site: movingmantrayoga.com.

APRIL 24-30 EMERALD ISLE, NC
RESIDENTIAL RETREAT
 With Barbara Brodsky, Aaron and John
 See ad on this page for registration and information.

MAY 21-23, PITTSBORO, NC
RESIDENTIAL/NON RESIDENTIAL RETREAT
 With Barbara and John at Windsong Center. For info. see flier page 5.

JUNE 18-26, ANN ARBOR, MI
RESIDENTIAL RETREAT
 With Barbara, Aaron, and John. For information call Pat Shalis at 734-996-3743 or visit www.deep-spring.org

JULY 11-15, VALLEY FORGE, PA
RESIDENTIAL YOUNG ADULTS RETREAT AGED 13-18
 Led by John and others in the Teen Leadership Program. For information and registration contact Tara at 610-469-5001 or www.teenwork.net.

AUGUST 20-22, PHILADELPHIA, PA
RESIDENTIAL RETREAT
 Led by John through The Philadelphia Meditation Center. See information above.

FUTURE RETREATS

SEPTEMBER 24-26 PITTSBORO, NC
RESIDENTIAL/NON RESIDENTIAL RETREAT
 With Barbara and John at Windsong Center. For info. call 919-286-4754 or bodhi@duke.edu

OCTOBER 8-15, HOT SPRINGS, NC
RESIDENTIAL RETREAT
 With Barbara and John at the Southern Dharma Retreat Center, 1661 West Rd., Hot Springs, NC 28743. Call: 828-622-7112 or www.main.nc.us/SDRC

Vipassana at the Ocean

EMERALD ISLE VIPASSANA RETREAT
 Barbara Brodsky, Aaron and John Orr
April 24-May 1, 2004 Emerald Isle, NC

This retreat will be held in a large house on the beautiful North Carolina coast. Spacious decks overlook dunes and a quiet beach. Weather permitting, some sittings will take place on the beach, especially sunrise. There will be opportunity to walk on the beach and to swim. The retreat will be held in silence, as this is intended to be a traditional Vipassana Retreat. Limited to 20 participants.

We'll probably start late afternoon on Saturday April 24th and end the morning of Sat. May 1. The cost is \$300.

To register, please send a check with full payment or a deposit of \$150 to: Linda Pendleton, 102 Lake Clair Place, apt. L, Fayetteville, NC 28304

Call Linda with questions at: (910) 829-0079 or e-mail her at mettagreetings@juno.com

SPRING RETREAT REGISTRATION FORM

To register for the Weekend Retreat and/or to help us cover costs, please make checks payable to and return this form to Durham Meditation Center, 1214 Broad Street #2, Durham, NC 27705.

Name(s) _____

Address _____

Telephone _____

Email Address _____

May 21-23 Meditation Retreat

if possible pay in full \$100 _____

or deposit \$60 _____

Please indicate where you intent to stay during the retreat.

I will be needing a bed in the center tenting commuting

Leap Of Faith is largely dependent on your donations.

To contribute to the production of the *Leap Of Faith* newsletter please offer what you can. Thank you! . . . \$ _____

TOTAL _____

PAYMENT METHOD Check Visa MasterCard

Credit Card Number _____ Exp. Date _____

Signature _____

Spiritual Counseling Meetings and Meditation Interviews

Available by appointment and held at John Orr's Durham office. Rates for counseling meetings are on a sliding scale. Meditation interviews are available on a dana basis. Telephone counseling sessions also available. Please contact John at 919-286-4754 or john@newhopesanhga.org for more information or to make an appointment.

CHRISTMAS STORY CONTINUED FROM COVER

a smaller group where he could speak with Jesus. I am going to say this in the first person. Please remember it is this karmic ancestor's story. I don't have personal identity with it now.

I came upon the master and some of his disciples gathered in the evening by a fire. They were often offered the hospitality of a home but sometimes preferred to be outdoors on such a beautiful night as this. The sky was clear and the stars brilliant beyond your imagining for we did not have light and atmospheric pollution in those days.

I asked permission to come and sit by the fire and he granted it very happily. I was too shy to talk at first. Shy and afraid because part of what brought me to seek this master was that he talked of forgiveness and I had something in my own life that I did not know how to forgive.

I'd had a beloved brother, very dear to me, who was a craftsman and made very beautiful useful objects fashioned out of wood. He was not quite a carpenter although I'm sure he could have built a structure. But he made wooden vessels without the power tools that you have today, and wooden eating utensils, wooden adornments, and cabinets. His hands were like magic. But this is not why I loved him, I loved him because he was so good, so kind and gentle. And yet brave, and would never let another be hurt without standing up for him.

Some months before, my brother had been at the home of another friend when outlaws came. His friend lived at the far outskirts of a village. He lived a very simple life, had very few possessions. Somehow the outlaws had been given the impression that he was a miser and had gold so they barged into his home and said, "We want your gold." The man just opened his hands and said, "I don't have gold." They said to my brother, who sat there with his friend, "You have nothing to do with this. You go." My brother would not leave. His friend was of a slight build. He stepped in front of him. He said, "He has no gold. You leave." So they beat him. Now he lay in a coma, his body barely alive. The one who he had protected told this story.

It seemed to me that my brother would soon die and I was filled with anger. I did not know who the men were but had some idea where they dwelled. My greatest wish was to find others to go with me and kill them, to make them pay for what they had done to my brother and to others whom they had also maltreated. And yet I loved this great teacher and I heard that he taught, "Turn the other cheek. Forgive. Love one another."

This is what led me to him that first time, Something in his words resonated in my heart, and I felt that I could not simply go and kill these men without first telling Jesus my story and hearing his advice. I said, "This is such a strong case of evil. He's going to tell me, 'Yes, those men do deserve to die.'" I think I really expected that because I had not personally spoken with him before. But when I came into his presence and felt his strength and gentleness, his presence and kindness, I knew that the answer was going to be different than I had expected, and I was afraid of his answer because I didn't feel big enough to do what he would ask of me.

How do we release hatred? My whole being was wound up in this hatred. He listened to my story. I trembled to tell it because I feared his judgment. Already in that short time I wanted to stay with

him more than anything else, and I feared that he would hear my anger and send me away. He just listened, and when I was finished he said to me simply, "I hear how great your anger is. It must be very painful to carry so much anger." And as he said it, he looked at me with the kindest eyes you can imagine, completely free from judgment.

He did not tell me not to be angry. He offered only compassion for my suffering and the intensity of this anger. "I hear how angry you are. It must be very painful to carry so much anger."

And I said, "Yes."

And he said, "What do you want to do?"

I said, "I want to kill them."

He noted, "You are suffering. Will killing ease that suffering?"

My first response was, "Yes."

He said, "What after you kill them? Will that bring your brother back to life? Will that give you peace?"

And then he looked me in the eyes and spoke again,, "Hatred shrouds the compassionate heart that is able to see the situation free of hatred. But that heart is still here." With those words he gently touched my chest and I could feel within that heart the possibility of forgiveness.

"Who are they?" he asked. I told him they were a band of poor men who lived in the hills, were lazy and did not work but stole for a living. I told how they were widely feared and hated. But they were strong as a band and people were afraid to go after them.

"Do they have children?" he inquired. I didn't know.

"Do you think they enjoy their life?" I didn't know.

"Have they ever been taught to find what they need without hurting others?" I didn't know.

But his questions awakened a realization in me that these were not monsters, they were men, that without the gentle care of my own parents, I might have been one who hurt others to fulfill my own needs.

A certain spark ignited in my heart, a spark that had always been there. His presence and non-judgment brought it to life. It was the seed of compassion.

Three days passed. For 3 days we walked, sat, talked. Of course, I was not with him alone but I had ample opportunity to come to him with discussion when I wished, and he would seek me out and say, "How is the anger today?" For 3 days we walked and talked, and he taught me to take care of my anger, not to hold the anger to use it as a tool to harm others but also not to disrespect it. He led me to see that I did not have to get rid of the anger to find the compassionate heart.

He taught me to find that which was inherently loving and capable of loving in myself and simply to rest there, touching love rather than hatred. At the end of 3 days I had to go back to my sheep, to my work. He asked me as I was ready to depart, "What will you do? Do you still want to kill them?"

I said, "I don't know what I'll do because I can no longer kill them. Yet, they have hurt my brother, who may die soon, and they harm others. I do not know what to do."

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Christmas Story CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

He said to me, "Why don't you just pray that an answer will come, that some solution will come, and see what happens? Hold the desire for healing in your heart and talk with your friends about it too, and see what happens."

I returned to my home. It was harder to keep that light available without his presence, but it was there. I found that as long as I practiced with my anger as he had taught me, I could stay in touch with the light as well. I began to talk to people about what he had told me. Others also began to see their own light, to see how anger and even hatred could be present and love and light could also be present.

Perhaps 4 months later I was on a hillside in the night with my sheep. Noise was coming from the village a mile away and I hurried down to see what was the matter. There were many of us. People came down from the hills all around to investigate this disturbance. We saw that these outlaws had again come into the village. We assumed they were looking for objects of value. Villagers armed with staffs and sticks were chasing them away.

One of them, the leader, had seemed to be carrying something in front of him and placed it on the ground as he fled. I came to it first. To my surprise it was a child, a young boy. Why he carried his child with him we did not understand. Why he left the boy was still more of a riddle. Some people simply turned away but several of us picked up the boy and made the decision to follow these bandits out to the place where they lived in the wilderness to return the boy home and see for ourselves what the situation was. You cannot hate a 3-year-old boy.

The boy was emaciated, dirty, but not afraid of us; it was clear he had been raised with kindness. We came up into the hills carrying the boy. Some of their lookouts shouted to us, "Who are you?"

We said, "We are returning a child." We were permitted to pass.

I leave out some details here, but finally we came into the presence of the man who was the leader of this band of outlaws. I call it a village but the dwellings really were just caves, very rudimentary shelters. I held out the boy to him and said, "Is this your son?" and tears filled his eyes. He said, "All our young children have died, they have starved. He is the last one. I left him on purpose so he would not die."

These were the fierce beings that I had hated. And they had done wrong, they had killed. Nothing justifies such wrong-doing. Yet when we looked up close, we saw some of them were cripples, others of them blind or sickly. It seemed they knew no other way to survive but to steal. And there weren't that many of them, perhaps a dozen men and women. Jesus was right; the spark of love was there in my heart. Seeing these as human beings it was impossible to hate them.

We made the decision to find some ways to help them to grow food, to give them some seeds and also sheep, to teach them the skills that they needed. They could not understand why we would do this. They said, "But we have killed." And I was able to look at one and say, "Yes, you killed my brother." And although Jesus was not there to say it, I know his words would have been, "And now you are my brother. I cannot kill you in return. You are my brother."

This was the fruit of my first encounter with the one you

know as Jesus. He did not merely preach forgiveness, tolerance and love, but led each being to find that in their own hearts. He opened the way to that discovery by reflecting his own enormous lovingkindness and non-judgment. He was light and drew out that light in all beings.

Each of you have this ability, each of you are learning to touch on your own divinity. This time of year when you give gifts in honor of him, the greatest gift that you can give to each other is to see the true light in others. Do not cast aside the negativity of others. Simply see it for what it is, an expression of fear, and go beyond it. The more you allow your own true nature to shine out into the world, the more you invite that from others. And this is the only way that we will change the hatred in the world. Fear and hatred can only be diminished by love, and each of you has that seed of love within you. Nurture it as your gift to him this season and through this year.

I wish you a blessed holy season as we welcome the return of the light. That is all.

Presence, Kindness, and Freedom

Aaron's Teachings on Living from an Open Heart.



*As I go through
the Aaron material,
I am struck by its
sophistication and its
lightness, its clarity
and its beauty.*

—Ram Dass, spiritual
teacher, author of *Still
Here* and other titles.

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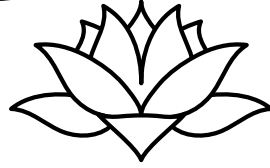
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Take Refuge in the Silence



INSIGHT MEDITATION RETREAT

May 21–23, 2004

A weekend retreat is an opportunity to develop calmness, wisdom, and compassion in a supportive environment. Emphasis is placed upon developing mindfulness in sitting, standing, and walking to help us access our innate understanding, joy, and peace. A weekend retreat such as this can be a wonderful way to learn meditation and to deepen one's practice. Beginners, as well as the more experienced, are welcome to attend. There will be instructions, practice, dharma talks, chanting from various spiritual traditions and silence.

THE RETREAT LEADERS:

Barbara Brodsky is a Quaker and trained “dharma teacher” in the Buddhist tradition. She is the guiding teacher of Deep Spring Center in Ann Arbor Michigan. Barbara has been deaf for 27 years; living with silence has greatly influenced her life and teaching, as have years of active involvement with nonviolent action for social change.

John Orr received Theravada Buddhist ordination and training for a period of eight years while living in Thailand and India. He has been teaching meditation and leading retreats around the country since 1980. John is an Interfaith minister and teaches at Duke University.

THE LOCATION

The retreat will be held at the Windsong Retreat Center, 2540 Seaforth Rd., Pittsboro, NC. This is a lovely Center located on 16 beautiful acres east of Pittsboro, near Jordan Lake in Chatham County. Windsong is within easy driving distance from anywhere in the Triangle and commutable. There is lodging available on a first come first serve basis. Tent sites are available. All retreatants will begin together on Friday evening and the retreat will end at 4:00pm on Sunday. Upon registration you will receive a map, directions and other information.

REGISTRATION

The fee for the weekend is \$100 whether participants choose to sleep at Windsong or not. This fee covers the cost of putting on the retreat which includes teacher transportation, 6 vegetarian meals, and advertising. Barbara and John will offer the retreat on a “dana” donation basis as will the Windsong Center. Participants will have the opportunity to give a donation to the teachers and Windsong Center at the end of the retreat if they wish. A deposit of \$60 will hold a place in the retreat. All but \$10 of your retreat fee is refundable if you cancel before May 7th. For information call Durham Meditation Center (919) 286-4754 or bodhi@duke.edu.

To register for the retreat use the form on page 2.

NEW HOPE SANGHA

Bimonthly Meditations and Dharma Discussion

Our community, the New Hope Sangha, will be holding meditations and dharma discussion the 1st and 3rd Tuesdays of each month, beginning January 6th, at the Eno River Unitarian Universalist Church (ERUUF) on Garrett Rd. in Durham. We will meet from 7-9pm in the Chapel, a lovely place for meditation. This is an ideal location and accessible from anywhere in the Triangle. The format will be alternating sitting and walking meditation which will be followed by a dharma talk and/or discussion.

For the first six months our discussions will be focused on the Six Paramitas or Perfections, also know as, the Six Principles of Enlightened Living. They are Meditation, Effort, Patience, Generosity, Virtue and Wisdom. The 1st Tuesday of the month there will be a dharma talk on one of the Perfections and discussion of our experience of it on the 3rd Tuesday. We will reflect upon one of these principles each month and integrate them into our practice and the context of our daily lives. Of course, we won't be able to do it perfectly! Doing something perfectly isn't the goal. The important points are our intentions and sincerity in our practice.

Please plan on arriving by 6:50 so we can be in our seats by 7:00. We will end promptly at 9:00 so those living at a distance can get home at a reasonably hour. Bring cushions if you plan to sit on the floor. Chairs are provided. This isn't a meditation class. No registration is necessary. Join us at any time.

This is an open group and all are welcome to attend. If you are new to meditation and need meditation instructions please call Jim Jarvis at his office 309-2922 or e-mail jjjarvis@mindspring.com. One of the group leaders will meet you 6:00 at the Chapel to give you instructions and guidance in the practice. Please call as far ahead of Tuesday evening as possible so arrangements can be made. If there are any other questions concerning the group please call Jim at the above numbers.

There is no fee charged. There will be a donation basket available to help pay the cost of the room rental.

The New Hope Sangha is a resource for anyone who wishes to learn and practice the dharma. This is a non-denominational community that respects the wisdom of various spiritual traditions. Our meditation practices are grounded in three Buddhist practices: Vipassana (Mindfulness) Meditation, Metta (Lovingkindness)

Meditation and Dzogchen (Non Dual Awareness) Meditation. To facilitate this process we have set up a web site (see: www.newhopesangha.org) that will give up to date information about the meditation programs we are offering, as well as, dharma talks by various teachers and other useful information. Our newsletter is also available online.

We hope you will join us for our meditations.

May All Beings Be Happy!!

DIRECTIONS TO ERUUF AT 4907 GARRETT ROAD:

Raleigh/Cary (east), Charlotte/Greensboro(west) via I-40:

Exit 270 (15/501). Go north toward Durham. At Garrett Road, turn right continuing 7/10 mile. Turn left into the entrance.

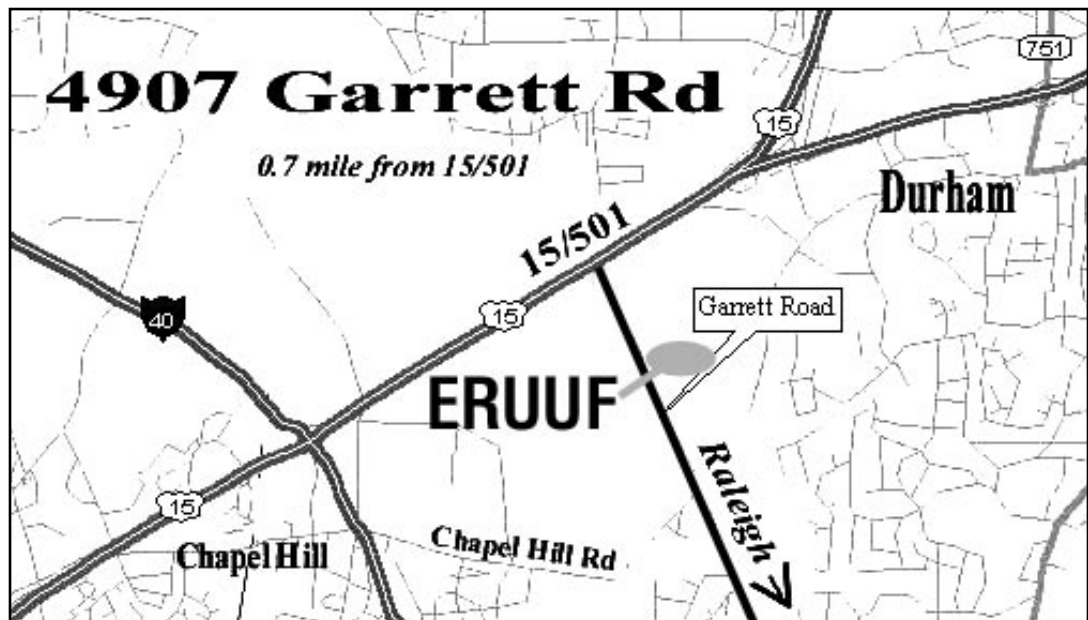
Raleigh/Wake Forest via I-85/70

After Rt.70 merges with I-85, Exit from the left lane onto 15/501 toward Chapel Hill. At Garrett Road (BP Station), turn left and go 7/10 mile to entrance on the left.

Greensboro/Hillsborough via I-85/70

Exit Rt. 147 and Exit onto 15/501 toward Chapel Hill. At Garrett Road (BP Station), turn left and go 7/10 mile to entrance on the left.

As you enter the church grounds, bear to the right, and park in the lot next to the sanctuary. The chapel adjoins the sanctuary. For detailed maps visit www.eruuf.org.



Non-Duality

A dharma talk given by John Orr to the teachers at Deep Spring Center in Ann Arbor, Michigan, November 3, 2003

It's an honor to be here and share this talk with you. Non-duality isn't any easy topic to speak about, but I'll do my best. Most spiritual traditions speak of non-duality or the non-dual mind. Non-duality is essentially a simultaneous awareness of the conditioned and the unconditioned. When I was living in Thailand we would frequently talk of the conditioned and the unconditioned as form and formlessness. What is form? Form is the five aggregates which consist of our body, feelings, perceptions, mind and consciousness. What we perceive through our body and our mind is the world of form. Various bodily sensations—both pleasant and unpleasant, mental feelings, perceptions of sound, sight, taste, odor, and thought—all are experiences of form. Everything in this room is a form, these books, the tape recorder, chairs, and every other physical object. Our whole mental life of memory, images and emotions are considered to be form. Everything that is subject to conditions for its existence whether it is physical or mental is a form. All forms are born and ultimately change and die.

When we meditate or engage in other kinds of spiritual practices we are essentially looking into the nature of form and seeing our relationship with it. For example, in the Thai tradition there are many different forms of Vipassana Meditation. I wouldn't be able to list them all. It's not uncommon that practitioners of these meditation techniques get attached to their particular form of practice and cling to it as being an absolute truth. A meditation technique or method may bring peace, insight or a profound opening of our hearts but it is only a raft that helps us to navigate to the other shore. At times we become attached to the forms that we are using. What would be your experience if you had to move away from Ann Arbor and Deep Spring Center? Would there be any clinging to this center where there is such a spirit of love and community? Of course if you had to leave there would be loss and sadness, but if there is clinging to sangha members and the activities of the center then there would be attachment that leads to suffering. The key is to use form without getting attached to form.

Another example is the Vinaya (the Monks Discipline) which is an important practice for an ordained monk. The Vinaya consists of ten primary vows and 227 rules of conduct. The Vinaya

encourages a monk to be aware of his actions and the intentions behind those actions so he lives free from suffering and in harmony with his surroundings. It's an effective tool to use in one's practice especially in the environment of Thai monastic living. One of my teachers, Ajahn Chah, said that even if you don't do any other meditation practice, if you fully use the Vinaya you will become a Stream Enterer or realize the first stage of enlightenment in this lifetime. I remember senior monks commenting that it is good to be fully immersed in the Vinaya, even to the point that you become attached to it. Of course, at some point, you have to see that you are attached to it and how it's causing suffering. We begin to see the fear behind the attachment and can skillfully work with the fear. This is an example of working with a form and taking it to an extreme so that we fully embrace it. Then we see how we are caught in the form, and can let go of attachment to it.

I saw this clearly while living in India for a year as a penniless monk dependent on alms food for my survival. I was keeping the Vinaya very strictly. One rule prohibits having possession of food overnight. If people gave me food for the day and offered additional food for the next day, I couldn't keep it overnight. Sometimes I received little to eat the next day. My body became emaciated, I became sick and ended up in the hospital. I was not seeing the larger picture of what was actually happening. My thinking was that these are the precepts and I have to keep them because this is my discipline. I wasn't listening to the needs of my body. Clinging to the form and letter of the law was creating suffering.

I remember Ram Dass once saying that this dynamic almost has to happen as part of spiritual practice - that is, using form and then getting trapped or caught by the form, seeing our relationship to the form, seeing its limitations and then truly seeing it for what it is. Form is a vehicle that is going to lead us into insight and greater awareness of the formless. The finger is not the moon; it's just pointing to the moon. This is form pointing us in the direction of the formless. When we mistake the form for the formless and cling to the form, we suffer. Whenever there is clinging and grasping, there is going to be suffering because of how we are relating to the world of form - not just in the context of spiritual practice but in every aspect of our lives. We get a new car and don't want to park it too close to other cars in the parking lot. Someone might open their door and put a scratch on it. Anxiety and fear arise as we cling to form.

In the beginning of my practice, I think the attachment to form was an attempt to find a secure and safe place within myself. I was in a lot of emotional turmoil. India was a tumultuous place and Asian culture in general seemed chaotic. India was not a quiet place to meditate. I was young, confused and looking for stable ground in my life. My attachment to different forms came from a desire for stability and safety in a world that seemed uncontrollable.

While in India I practiced with a teacher named S.N. Goenka. He taught a meditation technique called sweeping meditation. It was so helpful and wonderful that I became totally attached to it. I became attached to the pleasant sensations that I experienced while moving my attention through my body and the deep peace, which was a result of a focused attention. I thought this is going to take me to liberation. However, when I became sick much of the calm and rapture faded and I experienced depression and hopelessness. It became obvious that what I had been experiencing wasn't liberation. Nor was there much insight. It was concentration, peace and rapture. It was not liberation. When I returned to Thailand, I realized that I needed to let go of it all. I needed to let go of all form, of everything that I had been doing so I could look at my relationship with it. For three years I lived in an isolated hut in the forest. The first year I let go of all the meditation techniques I had been using. I sat on the porch and just looked into the woods. Every time my mind would go to the breath, I would think, "No, you don't need that." Every time I wanted to sweep the body, I'd think, "No, you don't need to sweep the body. Just sit here. Don't do anything." Essentially, I had been doing Dzogchen Meditation. I had never heard of Dzogchen Meditation up to that point. Dzogchen is a non-dual awareness that enables us to realize our Innate Perfection or Pure Mind. I had to let go of the meditation forms that I had been using and open to the formless. To rest in the formless. I was aware of the animals in the forest and the large trees in front of me. When thoughts or images arose in my mind I was aware of them, but primarily I continued to rest in the spaciousness of the formless realm.

At the end of each year, all Western monks have to go to Bangkok to renew their visas. The King and Queen of Thailand sponsor the Western monks and nuns. They give you a year's renewed visa if you are in robes. I had been in the forest having little interaction with other monks and now it was time to go to Bangkok—a really crazy place. Bangkok is filled with outdoor markets and cafes featuring delicious food, and lovely Thai women walking about with colorful umbrellas. It was a sense circus. The challenge began on the train ride up to Bangkok. Initially I was feeling very peaceful and open. My mind was not grasping at anything. That afternoon, a vendor walked through the train selling food. I saw my mind beginning to reach out—Oh that would be good! Someone else was selling another treat and my mind went in that direction. Then I'd see a lovely woman and that would capture my attention. Before long I was totally overwhelmed—on sensory overload. This happened with various degrees of intensity throughout my stay in Bangkok. I obtained my visa as fast as possible and returned to Southern Thailand. It was a relief to be sitting on the porch of my hut. I said, "Something's wrong here, What's happening?" I realized that I wasn't paying enough attention to form in my meditation. I was not integrating awareness of form along with the formless. Actually form and formless are non-dual, but not experienced as such when there is attachment to either realm.

Another teaching on non-duality, which I think highly of, is that of J. Krishnamurti. According to his teachings, if you want to be free, you have to let go of all religious forms. I saw Krishnamurti on a couple of occasions. One of these times, he was giving a talk in southern India in Madras. He was speaking on the futility of organized religion and being a monk. As I sat there, the only Buddhist monk amongst all of these people, a part of me wanted to disappear.

The other part of me wanted to get up and rant and rave and argue my case. I started to see my attachment to the form. I was a Buddhist monk in an organized religion with a certain discipline, and I saw how identified I was with all of it. Yet Krishnamurti's teachings really spoke to me, because it was a blend of the form and the formless. He honored form, especially as it relates to nature-like the sunlight on the leaves or the mist beginning to lift, this really appealed to me. Another aspect of his teaching that I found valuable relates to right effort in meditation. There is no goal or anything to attain. In right effort there is no grasping energy. The following passage speaks to this:

Mediation is to find out whether the brain, with all its activities, with all its experiences, can be absolutely quiet, not forced. The moment you force there is duality. The entity that says, "I would like to have marvelous experiences, therefore I must force my brain to be quiet" will never do it. But if you begin to inquire, observe, listen to all the movements of thought, its conditioning, its pursuits, its fears, its pleasures, watch how the brain operates, then you will see the brain become extraordinarily quiet. That quietness is not sleep but is tremendously active and therefore quiet. A big dynamo that is working perfectly hardly makes a sound. It is only when there is friction that there is noise.

When our effort is based on striving and gaining we usually experience tension and contraction in our energy field. Using Krishnamurti's perspective

I began to see how this was occurring in my practice. I became aware of when my body and mind were contracting and how this was related to effort.

Another significant teacher in my life is Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj. I had heard about him from some people that had visited him in Bombay, India where he lived. I was deeply touched by his book "I Am That." Except for the Buddha's teaching, I'd never read any dharma teaching that had such a profound effect on my mind and practice. Nisargadatta Maharaj was an Advaita Vedanta practitioner and a student of Ramana Maharshi. He lived in Bombay with his wife and two children making cheap cigarettes for his income. In the evening he would meet with people who were interested in spiritual inquiry in a loft above the cigarette shop. They would meditate and dialogue together. His book is a compilation of these dialogues with both Westerners and Indians and is delightful dharma reading. It had such a strong impact on me because he was always pointing to the non-dual. Advaita Vedanta is the non-dual school of Hinduism. In Advaita God isn't personified in a form such as Vishnu, Shiva or Krishna. Instead God is spoken of as the absolute self, or ultimate reality. In some ways it's very similar to the Buddhist perspective on reality which is the form and the formless, the conditioned and the unconditioned. Nisargadatta had a remarkable way of pointing you to the unconditioned, to ultimate reality because that is where he was. Sri Nisargadatta wrote:

The real does not die, the unreal never lived. Imagine a big building collapsing, some rooms are in ruins, some intact. But can you speak of the space as ruined, or intact? It is only the

structure that suffered and the people who happened to live in it. Nothing happened to space itself. Similarly, nothing happens to life when forms break down and names are wiped out. The goldsmith melts down old jewelry to make new. Once you know that death happens to the body and not to you, you just watch your body falling off, like a discarded garment. The real you is timeless and beyond birth and death. The body will survive as long as it is needed. It is not important that it should live long.

In reading this quote we might think that Sri Nisargadatta is much more focused on the formless realm than the world of form. But he then goes on to say: "Wisdom tells me I am nothing. Love tells me I am everything. Between the two my life flows." This speaks of a beautiful balance of wisdom and love, of being nothing and everything at the same time. This is a wonderful example of non-duality.

The Buddha also needed to find the middle way. Living a life of indulgence as a prince in his father's kingdom revealed to him the limitations of form. However as a monk, he also denied the world of form through austerity practices and inflicting bodily pain. It was after falling unconscious due to malnutrition that he realized how out of balance his practice had become. He understood that the body and the mind form one reality which cannot be separated. To abuse the body was to abuse the mind. He then reflected upon a time when he was a young boy. Sitting in meditation beneath a tree during the plowing festival, he had felt such ease and joy. Previously in his attempt to realize the formless jhanas or absorption states his goal was to escape the world of bodily sensations, thoughts, feelings, and sense perceptions. In other words, to escape the world of form in preference to the formless absorption states. Now he saw clearly how he was attached to the formless absorption states, which was a popular practice at that time. He decided to pursue a different angle on his practice that embraced form and formless as non-dual. He went from one extreme to the other before he discovered a path which was right for himself. Similarly, each of us needs to find our own middle path. Sometimes we find ourselves attached to form and at other times the formless. Ultimately as we experience both realms: form and formless, we see they are not separate from one another and are non-dual.

Eckhart Tolle's book "The Power of Now" was extremely helpful for me. His words as expression of dharma touched me deeply. Tolle describes the inner body as a portal to the unmanifest or the formless. He says that getting in touch with the chi energy creates a bridge between the outer body and the inner body or the manifest and the unmanifest or the form and the formless. The following passages from the book describe this in more detail:

The question is, is the unmanifest what in the East is called chi a kind of universal life energy? No it isn't. The unmanifested is the source of chi. Chi is the inner energy field of the body. It is the bridge between the outer you and the source. It lies half way between the manifested, the world of form, and the unmanifested. Chi could be likened to a river or an energy stream. If you take the focus of your consciousness deeply into the inner body, you are tracing the course of this river back to its source. Chi is movement. The unmanifested is stillness. When you reach a point of absolute stillness, which is nevertheless vibrant with light, you've gone beyond the inner body and

beyond chi to the source itself, the unmanifested. Chi is the link between the unmanifested and the physical universe.

So if you take your attention deeply into the inner body, you may reach this point this singularity, where the world dissolves into the unmanifested and the unmanifested takes on form as the energy stream of chi which becomes the world. This is the point of birth and death. When your consciousness is directed outward, mind and world arise. When it is directed inward, it realizes its own Source and returns home into the unmanifested. Then when your consciousness comes back to the manifested world, you reassume the form identity that you temporarily relinquished. You have a name, a past, a life situation, a future. But in one essential respect, you are not the same person you were before: you will have glimpsed a reality within yourself that is not "of this world" although it isn't separate from it, just as it isn't separate from you.

Although Eckhart Tolle doesn't claim to be from any spiritual lineage, his words reminded me of other Advaita teachers that I have mentioned previously. I used his book as a guide while on a ten day retreat at my rural home in North Carolina. It was late afternoon and I was huddled in some blankets and a heavy coat. As I sat on the deck in Dzogchen meditation watching the sun set, suddenly I became the sun. I was in the sun. I was the sun. I was not looking at the sun. I was in the sun looking back at myself. Only there was no me - body and mind had dissolved. There was no self -identity at all. I was in the middle of the unmanifested', in the middle of the formless. I had an awareness that I was in the formless, but not a sense of being self-aware. There was no self. I stayed in the unmanifested for quite a long period of time and then gradually came back into my body, back into form, back into the manifested with an understanding of the relationship between the unmanifested and the manifested. We always exist in both realms. Sometimes we feel like we are existing much more in the world of form in our bodies, in our personalities or in our minds or emotions. Other times, we find ourselves much more in the awareness of the formless. But they are both there. They are a part of each other. They are non-dual.

In my experience chi is the connecting point between form and the formless. It's the river that takes me further into the formless. Some of you have heard my colleague Barbara Brodsky talk about Nada, which is an inner sound. Nada is another example of the inner energy field which manifests from the formless. It's the same thing as chi energy. It is another bridge to the unmanifested, which enables us to experience the connection and non-duality of form and formlessness.

My teacher, Aaron, describes this process as having one foot in the form realm and the other in the formless. There is a shifting of weight that takes place. Sometimes we are more focused in the world of form as it relates to such issues as relationships and livelihood. At other times, we are more focused in the formless with a deepening of insight into the unconditioned. One is no better than the other. They are a part of one another. We are always in this balancing act of having a foot in both realms. We can't stand on one leg alone or we would lose our balance. Equanimity arises when we see the conditioned as an expression of the unconditioned and as non-dual.

The experience I described earlier, while on retreat at my home cut through a portion of the conditioned mind, especially as it relates to unworthiness. Unworthiness is an issue that I have been working with throughout this lifetime. At times vague feelings of unworthiness still arise, but there is no belief in, or identity as being an unworthy person. It is an illusion that has been dispelled. There is still much work to do with the ego and conditioned mind. Most recently this is where my practiced is focussed, or where my weight has shifted. Another of my teachers, Ajahn Buddhadasa said, "In samsara exits nirvana." This means that right in the middle of our suffering lies extinction of suffering. Within the conditioned lies the unconditioned.

I see non-duality as a learning of a lifetime, an exploration that happens from moment-to-moment experientially. It is a process of deepening one's understanding of the dharma of the relative and absolute as they merge within oneself and are expressed in one's life. My path is to understand non-duality in terms of who I am and how I live in the world. That's really what matters. "Wisdom tells me I am nothing. Love tells me I am everything. Between the two my life flows." This is my wish for this lifetime.

Thank you!