

leap of faith

THE NEW HOPE SANGHA NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2005

Meditation Retreat April 15-17 See page 5

Being Vulnerable

John's Dharma Talk, June 20, 2004, Enrich Retreat

Dear Friends,

Another eventful year has passed. The year 2004 saw the birth of our spiritual community, The New Hope Sangha. Our meetings, which include silent meditation and dharma discussion, have been well attended and many people are finding spiritual friendship and support. We have had visiting teachers from the Theravada Buddhist community meet with us and we plan on having others come from various spiritual traditions to share the Dharma. The plans this year is to form a board of directors and apply for non-profit status. I am a part of a number of different sanghas around the country that I teach at on a regular basis. However, it feels wonderful to be a part of a spiritual community in the area I live. It has added another dimension to my life and I am grateful.

This year has also been a personally challenging one for my family and myself as my wife Glenda and I have separated. The Buddha once said that being apart from what we love and cherish is the source of pain and that certainly is the case in my separation from my family. Glenda has moved to Minneapolis, where many of her family members live, and my two stepsons are away at college. I am alone again after many years of being part of a loving family. This reminds me that everything in life is impermanent and changing. I have been experiencing the sadness, grief and pain of loss and the deep love, which has always been the foundation of our relationship. I want to thank everyone who has been a support for Glenda and myself during this difficult time. Please trust, as we do, that the process we are going through is appropriate for us and that we are both learning a lot about relationship and ourselves.

I wish each of you an abundance of blessings and peace this New Year.

Love, JOHN

The Buddha frequently spoke of the significance of aging, sickness and death. He encouraged those who practiced with him to contemplate impermanence and the loss of that which we cherish and love in our lives. Whether it is loss of health due to the changing nature of the body or the loss of loved ones due to separation or death. Loss is painful and often we feel vulnerable and not fully in control of the circumstances of our lives.

I have been experiencing my share of illness lately and it's made me feel vulnerable. This isn't a feeling that I'm used to having. I have had a strong, healthy body and have felt like I could go anywhere, and do anything. Somewhat like driving an SUV that is supposedly able to function in any conditions. As I get older and experience chronic illness I am more aware of my mortality and feelings of vulnerability. Please don't be concerned, because I don't have an illness that is life threatening. In fact it has been a good teacher as it reveals my relationship with my body and mind. It's not easy to be present with vulnerability. When I'm vulnerable, my heart is open to the present moment and whatever is arising in the moment. There is spaciousness in this awareness and at times acceptance of what is. There can also be an uneasy feeling of fear that I am not fully in control of what is happening in my life right now and this can be unsettling. Along with vulnerability is a sense of not knowing what the future will bring and how this will affect me.

Last March my beloved cat, Angelo, died. Angelo was an old friend and had been with me for many years. He was full of love and offered it freely. The last couple of years of Angelo's life, I savored our relationship and the love we shared. Realizing that he would some day die, I cherished our moments together. When he died suddenly I experienced deep pain, sadness and grief. I felt like I should have been able to protect him from death and

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WINTER 2005 SCHEDULE FOR RETREATS AND WORKSHOPS

RESIDENTIAL AND NONRESIDENTIAL RETREATS

JANUARY 28-30 PHILADELPHIA, PA

RESIDENTIAL RETREAT
Led by John through the Philadelphia Meditation Center. For information call 610-853-8200 or see their web site at www.philadelphiameditation.org

FEBRUARY 26-27 ATHENS, GEORGIA

NON RESIDENTIAL WEEKEND OF MEDITATION
Led by John. Contact David Kurtz 725 Kings Rd. Athens, GA 30606. 706-546-7238 or dkurtz41@yahoo.com

APRIL 15-17, PITTSBORO, NC RESIDENTIAL/NON RESIDENTIAL RETREAT

With Barbara Brodsky and John at Windsong Center. For info. call 919-286-4754 or john@newhopesangha.org

APRIL 23-30, EMERALD ISLE, NC RESIDENTIAL RETREAT

Vipassana at the ocean, with Barbara Brodsky, Aaron and John. For information contact Linda Pendelton at 910-822-6375 or mettagreetings@juno.com.

JUNE 17-25, 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 10-16, PHILADELPHIA, PA

Residential Retreat for Young Adults
RESIDENTIAL YOUNG ADULTS RETREAT AGED 13-18
Led by Ed Quinn and John Orr. TeenWork's Inside Out Leadership Program offers motivated teens an in-depth, fun journey into "the essentials" of positive self change and transformational leadership that can have

an impact on you for a lifetime. For young adults aged 13 – 18. The program's "essentials" format explores four domains of leadership and "inside out" self change: Mental Intelligence, Emotional Intelligence, Physical Intelligence, and Inside Out Leadership. One of the program's greatest strengths for aspiring young leaders is its use of mindfulness meditation and hatha yoga as "master tools" for "inside out" self change and growth. Contact Information: Tara @ 610-469-5001 or www.teenwork.net/

AUGUST 19-21 PHILADELPHIA, PA

RESIDENTIAL RETREAT
Led by John through the Philadelphia Meditation Center. For information call 610-853-8200 or see their web site at www.philadelphiameditation.org

PLAN AHEAD FOR THE FOLLOWING RETREATS

SEPTEMBER 23-25 PITTSBORO, NC

RESIDENTIAL/NON RESIDENTIAL RETREAT
With Barbara Brodsky and John at Windsong Center .

OCTOBER 7-14 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

OCTOBER 28-30 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

**DECEMBER 28-JANUARY 4,
NEW YEARS RESIDENTIAL RETREAT**
With John at the Southern Dharma Retreat Center, 1661

West Rd., Hot Springs, NC 28743. Call: 828-622-7112 or www.main.nc.us/SDRC

WEEKLY CLASSES AND WORKSHOPS

JANUARY 24- FEBRUARY 21, RALEIGH, NC

LEARN HOW TO MEDITATE
Five Classes for beginners, Mondays, 7:15-9:00 pm
Fee \$90, Course ID Number (CE 1043), 0.6 CEU available
Instructor: John. Held at Meredith College. Register by requesting a Community Outreach Fall 2004 Catalog available at: Meredith College Graduate and Professional Studies c/o Anne Henderson 3800 Hillsborough St. Raleigh, NC 27607-5298 or register online at www.meredith.edu/academics or call 919-760-8450

FEBRUARY 6, DURHAM, NC

DISCOVERING A SPIRITUAL PATH WITH HEART
Sunday, 9-4:00 pm
Offered by John at The Bishop's House Room 107 (East Campus) through Duke Continuing Education. Fee \$85. Register online at www.learnmore.duke.edu/shortcourse or by phone 919-684-6000. Have the following information ready: Class ID# 8586 and MC/Visa information. To register by mail call 919-684-

6259 during business hours and ask for a copy of the fall short course program which includes a registration form. Advance registration is recommended. Registration is possible at the class site, space permitting.

MARCH 6, 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 919-449-0530 or movingmantrayoga@ncrr.com. Another way to reserve a space is the web site: movingmantrayoga.com.

APRIL 9, RALEIGH, NC

MINDFULNESS MEDITATION: THE ART OF LIVING IN THE PRESENT MOMENT
Saturday, 9 am-4 pm
Fee \$75, Course ID Number (CE 1044), 0.6 CEU available
Instructor: John. Held at Meredith College. Register by requesting a Community Outreach Fall 2004 Catalog available at: Meredith College Graduate and Professional Studies c/o Anne Henderson 3800 Hillsborough St. Raleigh, NC 27607-5298 or register online at www.meredith.edu/academics or call 919-760-8450

NEW YEARS RETREAT

Take Refuge in the Silence

December 28-January 4, 2006

John will again be back at Southern Dharma Retreat Center to lead the New Year's Retreat this year. He led the New Years Retreat for many years and is looking forward to participating in this wonderful retreat again. Mark your calendars and bring in the new year in silence sitting on the mountain! For information contact the Southern Dharma Retreat Center, 1661 West Rd., Hot Springs, NC 28743. Call: 828-622-7112 or www.main.nc.us/SDRC

In This Difficult Moment, Where Is God?

A Channeled Dialogue



AARON, SPEAKING THROUGH BARBARA BRODSKY, AND JESHUA, SPEAKING THROUGH JUDITH COATES

Whistler Advance, July 2004

Aaron You are unlimited and all-powerful. Why create the myth of limit? The younger soul aspires toward power, but with growing maturity, you reach a point of seeing how you may do damage through misuse of power. But negative thought still arises; you don't trust yourselves to hold that unlimitedness and power for fear you will misuse it.

The stories of anger, fear, greed, and so forth will still come, at least for a while. There can be equanimity about them. That means there's a certain wisdom that sees, "This has arisen," and attends to it appropriately but without contraction. When you learn to attend to the difficult arisings in the mind and body with kind attention, ease arises naturally because spaciousness is the essence of your being.

The trick is to stop believing that you must get rid of fear, impatience, jealousy, or whatever, before you can come to that divine center. Instead, know that the divine center is right there with these somewhat heavy density expressions. Don't look elsewhere for love; right there in the anger is love.

Jeshua taught me this deeply. I came to seek him out, just after my beloved wife had died in childbirth. I was heartbroken, angry. On the way to see him, I fell off a cliff and broke my leg. Thus I came to Jeshua. He had the power to heal. I wanted him to magically heal that leg. He saw deeper. He knew me well enough to see the agony I felt from my wife's death, how I blamed myself although I was really blameless.

Each day he came and talked to me. I was angry. "Why don't you heal the leg?" He would put his hands on it and say, "It will be better in time." He knew that what I needed was to find the infinite source of love within myself, right there with my anger and pain, not to go elsewhere, to some place of artificial peace contrived out of denial, to find it. If he had healed the leg, my heart would not have cracked open as it needed to, allowing grief and love to mingle, allowing the profound letting go of how I thought things ought to be, into the present moment of how things were.

While my leg healed, he helped me find space for the anger so that the love underneath could shine through. I became my true self again and released the idea of the one who was broken.

This was a beautiful experience offered with the support of Jeshua. But each of you has that support within yourselves, since the divine is there within you. The deepest knowing of who you are is always available. Look for it especially when you are troubled, angry, or fearful. Stop and ask, "Right now in this moment, where is love? In this very difficult moment, where is God?" And you will find it because where else could it be but right there? You only have to be willing to look.

Jeshua "Where is God?" How often have you said that in moments of despair? "Where is God? God! Where are you? Why don't you come and make everything right for me? I sorrow. I hurt." You cry out to God and you cry out to me to have some greater power to fix things for you. And yet, in the midst of you is God, the Love that heals. And yet, as you are in the midst of whatever is going on, all you can see is so close to you, you do not have the wholly vision, the vision of the w-h-o-l-e.

Where is God? It is in the place of love. And you find God, you find your divinity, as you will step back a moment or so into the place of the beholder. At first it is for a moment or so. Later it becomes a way of living. You step back from the drama that is right in front of you, all around you. You take the deep breath.

In the simplicity of the deep breath there is an opportunity for peace. There is an opportunity to see things differently, to behold with non-attachment, to be in the place of pure love, the place of God. It is as easy and as simple as taking the deep breath, and allowing new vision. The first thing you do as individualized energy of incarnation is to take the breath. The last thing you do as you are releasing the body is to breathe your last breath.

Any time you want to move beyond the attachment to what is going on, allow yourself the deep breath. Come again into that place of peace where there is not distortion, where there is not drama. Yes, you do not deny that there is drama, but you step back from it to observe and to feel the peace of the beholder.

All of you are great lights. All have chosen one more time to bring that light to this plane of reality. All of you wrestle with challenges of human life, as I did in my lifetime, and as Aaron did in that lifetime, to know what it means to have the human experience.

I came as an infant. I grew in wisdom and in stature, as you have it recorded in your Scriptures. I knew the emotions of human expression, as did Aaron; as you do. I and Aaron are not different from you. You are the Christ incarnate in this moment. And what you are doing in this lifetime is to realize—to make real in your experience—the oneness of the Christ, to behold the Christ of each of you, to behold the radiance of the aura, the energy which activates the body, and to see how it intermingles with the next one's aura. It is one. One.

Barbara Brodsky is a meditation teacher and channels. She is the guiding teacher for Deep Spring Center in Ann Arbor, Michigan. She can be reached at Barbarabrodsky@deepspring.org.

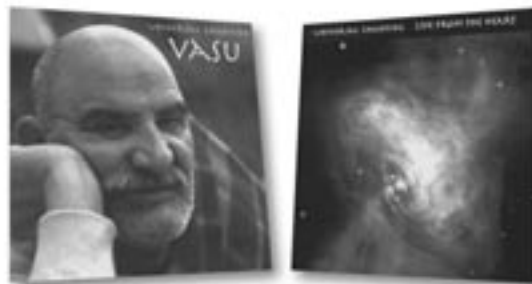
Judith Coates channels and teaches through Oakbridge University in Tacoma, WA. She may be contacted at Judith@oakbridge.org or Oakbridge University, 4007 Harbor Ridge Rd, Tacoma, WA 98422.



SPIRITUAL COUNSELING & MEDITATION INTERVIEWS

Spiritual Counseling addresses both psychological and spiritual issues, honoring the wisdom of many paths. It is helpful for people who are just beginning to explore their psychological and emotional experience. This counseling can also be relevant for those who have been in psychotherapy and now wish a more transpersonal counseling perspective that helps them know more fully their divinity. Sessions may also include instruction in mindfulness meditation. Rates for counseling meetings are on a sliding scale.

Meditation interviews are also offered and are similar to interviews given at retreats. The content of the session is about your meditation and what you are experiencing in your practice. Meditation interviews are available on a dana (generosity) basis. John is welcoming new clients at his Durham office and also does telephone consultations. He can be reached for more information or to make an appointment at 919-286-4754 and at john@newhopesangha.org.



Universal Chanting

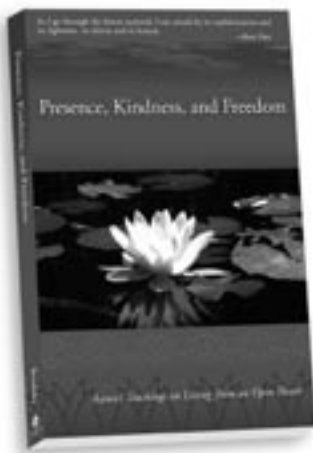
has now moved into the 21st century.

The chanting community in the Triangle area, under the direction of Don Seskevich, has produced two wonderful compact disks. The CDs, "Live from the Heart" and "Vasu" are \$14 each or two for \$25. You can order them by sending a check payable to Don Seskevich to 4017 Iredell St. Durham, NC 27705-4123. You can listen to the chants and even download them by going to <http://UniversalChanting.com>. There are 30 second preview mp3 cuts and the ability to download to your computer individual chant mp3's from both cd's for 99 cents each. Check out a few of the clips of our singing and feel free to pass on this great music and singing to your network.

Thank you very much!

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.

A book by Barbara Brodsky and Aaron

Paperback, 256 Pages, \$15.95

DEEPSRING PRESS

(734) 971-3455

deepspringpress@deepspring.org

NEW HOPE SANGHA

Spring Retreat, April 15-17, 2005

REGISTRATION FORM

To register for the Weekend Retreat return this form to Durham Meditation Center, 1214 Broad Street #2, Durham, NC 27705.

Name(s) _____

Address _____

Telephone _____

Email Address _____

If possible pay in full\$100 _____

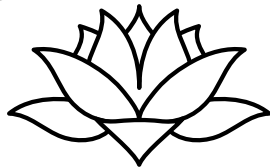
Or deposit\$60 _____

Please indicate where you intent to stay during the retreat.

I will be needing a bed in the center tenting commuting

Please make checks payable to Durham Meditation Center.

Take Refuge in the Silence



NEW HOPE SANGHA INSIGHT MEDITATION RETREAT

April 15–17, 2005

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 register first serve basis. There are no private rooms. Tent sites are available. Check in will begin at 5:00 pm on Friday and supper will be served from 6:00-7:00 pm. Course opening is at 7:30 pm. We will end by 9:30 each evening to allow time for commuters to return home. The retreat will end at 4:00 pm on Sunday. Upon registration you will receive directions to Windsong Center 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" generosity basis as will the Windsong Center. Participants will have the opportunity to offer generosity to the teachers and Windsong Center at the end of the retreat. As part of our gift to Windsong Center there will be a hour long work period on Saturday and Sunday morning. Appropriate jobs are assigned and none of the work is too strenuous. A deposit of \$60 will hold a place in the retreat. All but \$10 of your retreat fee is refundable if you cancel before September 10th. Use the registration form on page 4. For information call the Durham Meditation Center (919) 286-4754 or office@newhopesangha.org.

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, at the Eno River Unitarian Universalist Fellowship on Garrett Rd. in Durham. We will meet from 7:00–9:15 pm in the Chapel, which adjoins the main Sanctuary. 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.

The 1st Tuesday of the month there will be a dharma talk on a relevant subject and on the 3rd Tuesday we will discuss our experience of it in relation to our practice. Any questions about your meditation practice or spiritual life are welcomed.

Please plan on arriving by 6:50 so we can be in our seats by 7:00.

This is an open group and all are welcome to attend. If you are new to meditation and need meditation instructions please come to the Chapel by 6:50pm and one of the group leaders will meet with you separately to give you instructions and guidance in the practice. If you have any other questions concerning the group please call Jim Jarvis at his office 309-2922 or e-mail him at jjjarvis@mindspring.com.

There is no fee charged. There will be a dana (generosity) basket available to help pay the cost of the room rental. During the first Tuesday of the month, when there is a dharma talk given, there will also be a dana basket for the teacher offering the talk.

The New Hope Sangha is a resource for anyone who wishes to learn and practice the dharma. This is a nondenominational 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, "Leap Of Faith" is available online and in hard copy for those who request it. Send requests to office@newhopesangha.org.

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.

Heartsong Universal Chanting

FIRST SUNDAYS OF THE MONTH, 7-9 P.M.

Come reconnect with the source of your joy, as we sing from the heart. We sing songs and chants from many traditions – Hindu, Sufi, Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Native American. No prior singing or chanting experience necessary. Newcomers welcome.

Offered on a dana basis.

Held at ERUUF (Eno River Unitarian Universalist Fellowship) 4907 Garrett Road, Durham, in the Straube Chapel (located in the same building as the main sanctuary-the large building with the glassed-in gallery facing the courtyard). The chapel is to your right as you enter the building. Next meeting: January 2, 2005.

For directions to ERUUF, see the Web site, www.eruuf.org, or call the Fellowship at 489-2575. Questions? Contact Page Potter, 490-1551, ppotter@ipass.net.

WEDNESDAY EVENING PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION ON

The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying

by Sogyal Rinpoche.

February 2 – April 20, (no meeting March 16) 6:30-7:30 pm. Held at the Eno River Unitarian Universalist Fellowship 4907 Garrett Rd. Durham. For directions see above. This class is being offered on a dana basis.

This beautiful book is enjoyable to read and filled with wisdom about both living and dying. It offers a wide range of meditation practices and discusses such topics as karma and rebirth. Sogyal Rinpoche continually points us to what survives death and is changeless. It is a spiritual classic and wonderful guide on the path.

John Orr, a former Buddhist monk and meditation teacher will facilitate the evening.

BEING VULNERABLE CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

saw the tendency to move into blame of the veterinarians or myself. Blaming became a way of moving away from the pain of the loss of my cat. Instead of the pain of loss I experienced anger. Noting there was blame and anger helped me to let go of it and reconnected me with pain, vulnerability and love. Many years ago I realized that my conceptual understanding of Buddhism in itself was not going to lead me to liberation. Buddhism is rich intellectually as a system of psychology and philosophy. It defines precisely various states of mind and maps of consciousness. At a certain point I realized that much of my learning was more conceptual than experiential. This was most apparent regarding the teaching of “anatta,” or no self. No self, doesn’t mean that we don’t have a body and mind. Obviously we do. No self means that the expressions of the body and mind don’t exist separately from the web of life, which connects everything. Even though I was suffering from fear, anger and other states of mind I rationalized the experience by telling myself that none of this was myself. I used my mind as a way of separating myself from my emotions. After some time I realized that this approach wasn’t making me free. I had accumulated many concepts and understood the Buddha’s teachings intellectually, but I was still suffering. I decided to take the Buddha statue which was sitting on my alter and put it in the closet as a reminder to let go of my conceptual understanding of Buddhism and start fresh again in this moment. When my friend and teaching partner, Barbara Brodsky came to visit I gave her the Buddha statue as a gift. Symbolically I was letting go of my attachment to the concepts of Buddhism and simply being in the moment with what is. Ironically at that time, my teacher Aaron, told me “When your path changes, have the courage to follow it.” My path was shifting and I felt vulnerable with how it was changing. I was being guided to live more in my heart than in mind and to know the dharma from this perspective.

Being in relationship with my wife, Glenda, and my two stepsons, Jacob and Ben have taught me a lot about living in my heart. Being an older bachelor and former monk, I had relatively little experience with being intimate with others in a family setting. It had been a long time since I had lived with my family of origin and I took some time to adjust to another level of intimacy and responsibility that comes with family life. One noticeable difference was that I didn’t have as much control over many circumstances, which occurred on a daily basis. This left me feeling more vulnerable emotionally. For example, whenever I became sick before I got married I would deal with it alone. After marriage I had a loving wife who wanted to nurture and take care of me while I was ill. I found it difficult to allow her to be nurturing towards me because I felt more vulnerable when I was sick and her loving me also meant that I would have to love myself. She saw me as loveable and I would have to accept myself as loveable. When I was growing up getting sick was seen as something bad. I think my mother felt torn between staying home to take care of her sick child and needing to go to work. There was caring, but not an immediate sense of love and nurturing. So being nurtured while sick was new territory, which felt uncomfortable. My tendency was to emotionally push my wife aside so I would feel safe and in control. Reacting in this way also created a barrier

between the two of us. I experienced myself as separate from her and I know this was difficult for both of us. I would essentially go cognitive and lose the heart connection, which is so vital in relationship.

There’s a wonderful piece that was written anonymously by someone who attended a three month retreat at the Insight Meditation Society, located in Barre, Massachusetts in 1981. It was written several weeks into the retreat and speaks of the process the yogi goes through in becoming intimate with himself during a long silent retreat. It’s called “Ode To Ms. Mindfulness.”

From the moment I met her I knew that I was lost. When I look at her I see my feminine ideal, my anima, my counterpoint. She’s my own nature turned around. She can be as elegant as a queen and she can rage like a tempest. She can be a playful coquette or a torrid seductress. Anything you want, she says to me. I laugh and she laughs. I weep and she weeps. And the only constant thing about her is her eyes. Soft, large beautiful eyes that look back at me with total acceptance.

We are alone together, my lover and I. Early in the morning and late at night. It is then that I sit naked before her. Revealing myself in all my beauty and ugliness. Sharing my most intimate secrets with her. She simply nods silently. Her heart opens, accepting places in me that I can hardly accept myself. And in these moments she sows me the greatest happiness I have ever known.

But even the deepest love in this worldly realm cannot be perfect. And we do have our problems. She often goes away unexpectedly, to where she never says. Sometimes I don’t see her for days. I grow jealous and agitated. Is she dancing with another man? Is she someone else’s constant companion? But there is no answer. She is gone.

And sometimes I am the one who leaves. Our intimacy begins to rub against me. And I grow sore and weary. I feel I must get away from her or I will lose my mind, my soul. I run away and try to hide out in bars or in the cinema. Or stay late at work or go with other women. But I soon tire of these mere pleasures. Memories of the way that it was with her begin to haunt me. So eventually I return slowly and hesitantly. We embrace and our beautiful dance begins again.

We’ve been together now for several weeks dancing closely with one another. Like the wind with the leaves. Like the clouds on a clear lake. But now I must go on a journey. I have asked her to go with me and she says she will. But I must remember not to demand too much. Nor hold onto her too tightly or it will not work.

So as I go out the door I take a deep breath. Try to feel my own completeness deep inside. Then lightly I take her fingertips, smile, and head on down the road with my lover together. From moment to moment to moment.

PS: Remember always the great Buddhist teachings: Life is hard and will put you through the changes. But don’t take it personally.

Dedicated to the staff at IMS and signed “Metta,” which means loving kindness.

In doing a long retreat or any form of sincere practice we will experience both vulnerability and intimacy. Life is hard and will put us through changes but don’t take it personally – that’s the key.

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BEING VUNERABLE CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

We so easily take our pain personally. Why is this happening to me? The answer is that it's happening for me so I can learn and become freer from suffering. As many years as I have been meditating - and it's been more than thirty years of very focused, very intentional spiritual practice and meditation, I continue to be revisited by suffering. I'm beginning to see very clearly what the Buddha was talking about when he was talking about the cycle of "samsara." "The cycle of "samsara" is the process of how suffering revisits us time and again. In the past I've had a linear model of suffering and liberation. If I am suffering and I do my practice like a good yogi and follow the path it will lead me to the end of suffering. However, I'm realizing that the path is more of a spiral than linear. It is a spiral in the sense that as habitual patterns of mind arise such as the fear of not having my needs met, I can be aware of the pattern and not get snagged into old stories. Insight arises and there is learning. However, this doesn't mean that the habitual pattern is gone forever, never to arise again. Given the right conditions the pattern will arise again and if I'm not present and skillfully working with it, I will get caught and suffer.

For example, here at the retreat there are two windows in my room, but only one has a screen. I've been finding myself fearful that that the room will get too hot if there isn't a cross breeze between the two windows. However, I can only open one of them because the other window doesn't have a screen and I'm afraid that insects will fly in. Basically this is a fear that my needs will not be met and I'll be too hot. It is a mental projection, because so far the room hasn't gotten too warm. However, the fear is that it will. I looked into my co-teacher Barbara's room and noticed she has three screens. Two of them are just the right size for one of my windows. She could have two screens and I can have two screens. Everybody will be cool and happy. However, it was difficult to get these screens out of the windows. I then saw my mind grasping after the screen and experiencing some fear that I wouldn't get it. I also experienced guilt and shame that I should even be having these desires, no less pursuing their fulfillment. Condition mind suggests that I shouldn't

even bother asking because I won't get it anyway - or - If I do get it I'll feel bad about myself because the procurement of the screen was being driven by my fear. It's amazing that my mind goes through all of these mental gymnastics around something as mundane as a screen. The point here is that it's not just the screen. It could be anything that I desire driven by fear. I was feeling vulnerable and didn't want to experience discomfort. This led to mental grasping and further fear that my needs wouldn't be met. It's wonderful to see the conditioned mind at play. As it turned out I did my best to try and fix a situation that didn't need to be fixed. I had only one screen the whole week and the temperature in the room was fine.

During this retreat we have been talking about applying specific antidotes to various habitual patterns of mind. In this example, one antidote can be awareness of the impermanent nature of the sensations in the body, the thoughts and unpleasant feelings arising, and the mental states of fear, vulnerability and grasping. Seeing and knowing these manifestations of body and mind as impermanent gives me a different perspective in the moment. But sometimes I'm so caught in reaction to what is arising that reflecting on impermanence doesn't help much. Using compassion as an antidote can be a useful means of keeping my heart open to the discomfort and pain of the situation. I have compassion for the fear that I'm not safe and for the feelings of vulnerability that are more fear based than love based. Vulnerability born of love has a different texture than vulnerability based on fear. Love based vulnerability is connected to my heart and the wish to rest in a non-contracted and open awareness. As we practice we can sense increasingly clearly the difference between the fear and love based intentions behind our thoughts and actions. Awareness and compassion guides us on our path of vulnerability, love and liberation.

Thank you!

leap of faith
WINTER 2005

Meditation Retreat
April 15-17
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1214 Broad Street, #2
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