

Center Voice

SPRING 1997

the newsletter of the Center for Sacred Sciences

Special Focus: Retreat

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In This Issue . . .

Periodic retreat from the cares and structures of our worldly life is a practice that has been recommended by spiritual traditions the world over throughout the ages. In this issue of the Center Voice, we will look at the practice of retreat from a number of different perspectives.

In his article **"In Solitude and Suffering,"** Joel discusses the importance of retreat from a mystic's point of view. Drawing on teachings and testimony from mystics of many traditions, he presents an overview of how it is that retreat serves the sincere seeker, and how this practice can further our path towards liberation.

In **"Experiencing the World as The Mandala of Compassion,"** David Cunningham shares from his experiences during our Fall '96 ten day retreat of the same name. Many of us who attended this retreat found that the longer duration allowed for a much deeper level of practice, as well as more profound insight. David's candid account of his retreat provides us with a rare personal glimpse of how powerful a more extended retreat can be.

There is no rule that says that a retreat must be done with a group. Solo retreat can be an equally rich opportunity for spiritual growth and insight. In **"There is No God But God,"** Center practitioner Jennifer Knight shares with interviewer Merry Song the issues that came up for her in preparing herself for a solo retreat, as well as the challenges and insights she faced as she actually implemented the practices and precepts she had taken on.

Many mystics have testified that the spiritual path penetrates much deeper than profound insights and blissful feelings. In the latest installment of **"Postcards from the Path,"** Mike Taylor reflects on his own experience of this darker side of the path, the imperatives of faith, and the redemptive power of God's mercy and grace.

We round out this issue with Center News, our annual Financial Report, and special acknowledgement of some of the people whose generosity, both financial and otherwise, help to make your Center all that it is. We hope you find something of value in these pages.

Don't miss our Enlightenment Day Celebration on Sunday, August 10th, honoring Joel's Enlightenment and all those who have walked the mystic's path. It's a good time to bring someone new to the Center! We'll have a cold plate potluck and a special talk by Joel on what the Center for Sacred Sciences is all about.

CENTER NEWS:

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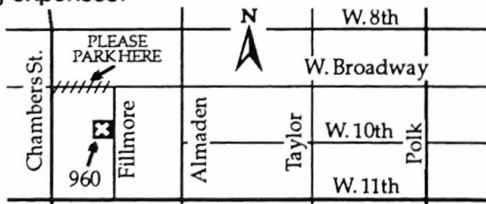
Therese Engelmann,

Gene Gibbs

Fall Retreat:

The fall retreat lasted for ten days, instead of our usual five, and included devotional chanting in the evenings. The theme was "Seeing the World as a Mandala of Compassion", or, in other words, seeing how this very world itself manifests for each one of us as guidance to lead us toward Truth. Joel's teachings were powerful and esoteric, presenting the full cycle of the spiritual path. Each of us drew from the teachings what we could, with the rest planted as seeds for future growth. Many powerful insights and experiences were reported by participants at our final wrap-up session, and the consensus opinion seemed to be that the longer format was most worthwhile.

The Center for Sacred Sciences is a non-profit, tax-exempt church dedicated to the creation and dissemination of a new Worldview based on the wisdom of humanity's great spiritual teachers, but presented in forms appropriate to our present scientific culture. Our programs draw on the teachings of the mystics of all traditions, as well as the evidence of modern physics. Among the Center's current offerings are Sunday Programs with meditation and talks by Joel, meditation classes, retreats, workshops, and study groups. Joel also leads a weekly Practitioners' Group for committed spiritual seekers, as well as being available for individual spiritual consultation. The Center maintains an extensive lending library of books and tapes covering a broad spectrum of spiritual, psychological, and scientific subjects. Other than a small stipend for our bookkeeper, the Center has no paid staff. We rely entirely on volunteer labor to conduct our programs, and on donations and membership dues to meet operating expenses.



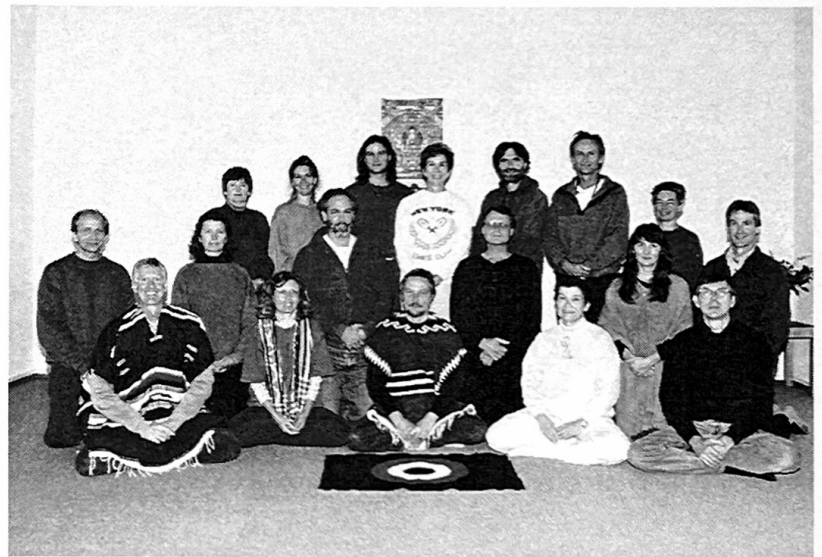
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RETREATANTS: (Bottom row from left) Mike Taylor, Bev Forster, Joel, Therese Engelmann, Thomas Reinhart, (middle row) Jim Zajac, Patricia Burbank, David Cunningham, Mike Craven, Merry Song, (top row) Anita Runyan, Clivonne Corbett, Jeremy Kaplan, Sheila Craven, Todd Corbett, Gene Gibbs, Barbara Dewey, Fred Chambers. Also attending were Jennifer Knight and Sue Orbeton.

Holiday Party:

Our traditional post-holiday bash for the Practitioners' Group and their families was held this year on January 4th. Hosted once again by Barbara Dewey and her husband Mike, it featured an abundance of truly yummy food, good people, and a precious opportunity to connect and enjoy each other's company in an informal setting.

(Center News continued on page 18)

IN SOLITUDE AND SUFFERING

by Joel

From the dawn of time human beings have engaged in a variety of religious disciplines -- fasting, prayer, offering sacrifices, and performing holy rites and rituals. But the quintessential discipline of mystics has always been the *retreat*. This has been true ever since the very first mystics -- the shamans of prehistory -- forsook the comforts of their communities to venture out alone into the vast wildernesses, the rugged mountains, and the barren deserts. But why did they do this? Why did they subject themselves to such hardships and dangers? What were they seeking? Here is the answer Igjugarjuk, an Eskimo shaman, gave to the Norwegian explorer, Rasmussen:

*True wisdom is only to be found far away from people, out in the great solitude, and it is not found in play but only through suffering. Solitude and suffering open the human mind, and therefore a shaman must seek his wisdom there.*¹

And, in one form or another, these words have been echoed by mystics of virtually all the Great Traditions. Listen, for example, to the Tibetan sage, Longchen-pa:

*One should take the examples of holy persons and do practice... Steadfastly tolerate (harsh conditions) alone in remote mountain places. With determination get the real essence... To practice Dharma with efforts from the heart is essential.*²

And the Christian mystic, George Fox:

*I fasted much, and walked abroad in solitary places many days, and often took my Bible and went and sat in hollow trees and lonesome places till night came on; and frequently in the night walked mournfully about by myself, for I was a man of sorrows in the times of the first workings of the Lord in me.*³

For, as the Sufi shaykh, Ibn 'Arabi, wrote:

*Every seeker of the Lord must be alone within himself with his Lord in his inmost consciousness... Otherwise, he will never recognize Him.*⁴

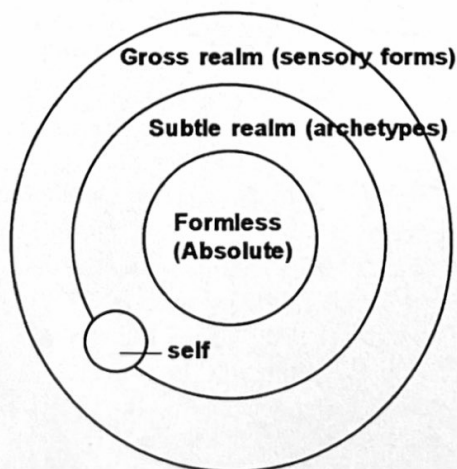
But if all mystics agree that "True Wisdom," Enlightenment, or Gnosis can only be found in "solitude and suffering," we can still ask why this should be so. In order to answer this question however, we must first understand something of the structure of the cosmos from the mystics' perspective.

The simplest way to envision this structure is in the form of a mandala

made up of two rings encircling a center, each representing a primary dimension or realm of being (see diagram). Thus, the outermost ring represents the gross realm of ever-shifting sensory forms. The middle ring represents the subtle realm, composed of those trans-sensory archetypes (both logical and psychological) which govern the transformations of the sensory realm. The center represents the Formless Absolute, that unmanifest realm of Pure Spirit, God, Allah, Brahman, or Buddha-mind out of which the other realms arise. Finally, we can take the paper on which this mandala is printed to represent the Space of Consciousness, Itself, in which the whole mandala appears and which permeates all its realms.

But this mandala not only represents the structure of the cosmos apprehended as an object, it also and simultaneously represents the structure of the apprehending subject -- i.e., our own True Self. For what Gnosis reveals is that these two, Cosmos and Self, are in fact identical. And yet, under the spell of ignorance this identity is just what we fail to Recognize. Instead, we falsely identify our 'self' with a finite pattern of forms -- a body-mind -- appearing like a tiny blip on a radar screen somewhere along the boundary between the gross and subtle realms.

Now, the immediate effect of this mis-identification is to create a radically dualistic and deluded experience of ourselves and the world -- an experience, moreover, in which the seeds of all our future sufferings are already sown. For one thing, believing our-



Cosmic Mandala

“Through investigating the immediate causes of our loneliness and suffering, we can eventually find their root cause...”

selves to be bounded entities existing *within* the cosmos automatically entails a sense of separation and alienation from it. Alone are we born, alone we live, and alone we must die -- or so it seems. Thus, loneliness is inherent in the very experience of being a separate and limited self.

What's more, because we have identified ourselves with the life of a particular body-mind, and because we know that all body-minds are subject to death and decay, we imagine that we, too, must be subject to death and decay. Consequently, from the beginning our whole attitude towards this life is colored by a profound ambivalence. On the one hand, it is the only life we know, so we desperately try to hold onto it; and yet, because this life is ultimately transitory, we are, at the same time, desperately afraid of it. In addition to our primordial sense of loneliness, then, we suffer from an existential anxiety which is also built into the very foundations of our delusion.

But that's not the end of it, for the desire to escape this original solitude and suffering now becomes the overriding motive which shapes and conditions how we lead the rest of our lives. In order to escape solitude, we compulsively cling to the company of other limited beings like ourselves. In order to maintain life, we grasp at wealth, power, and position. In order to forget death, we distract ourselves with an endless parade of worldly pleasures, amusements, and diversions. Thus, like

some psycho-centrifugal force, the desire to escape solitude and suffering keeps us pinned to the periphery of the mandala, chasing after ephemeral forms which, precisely because they *are* ephemeral, can never bring us real relief.

This, then, is the situation in which ignorant beings find themselves and to which Ijugarjuk speaks when he insists that True Wisdom can only be attained in solitude and suffering. For, obviously, the first step in putting an end to this self-perpetuating dynamic is to stop running away. Instead of constantly chasing after sensory forms, we must practice detachment from them and the desires and fears which they arouse within us. Only when we have freed ourselves from our own attachments, desires, and fears, can we begin that inner journey, back through all the other realms of the mandala, to its formless center wherein the secret of our True Identity lies hidden.

But, in order to navigate this inward passage successfully, we must not only stop running away from solitude and suffering, we must actually turn around and take them in hand, for these are the Ariadne's threads by which we can retrace our fall from the center of being to its circumference. Through investigating the immediate causes of our loneliness and suffering, we can eventually find their root cause, which is nothing other than our ignorance of who we truly are. What going on retreat does, then, is to intensify this investigation and accelerate this journey in a

way that no other spiritual discipline can.

But what about the practical aspects of retreat? What sort of preparations do we need to make, and what sort of practices should we employ? To begin with, we can think of retreat as involving two basic but complementary disciplines, one external, the other internal. Here is how Krishna describes them in the Hindu classic, the *Bhagavadgita*:

The man of discipline will train himself, continually in a secret place, alone, restraining himself and his thought completely, without having or wishing for anything⁵

As Krishna indicates, the external discipline is to physically isolate oneself as much as possible from all those exterior distractions that constantly command our attention -- phones, bills, newspapers, television, and the demands of other people. Although it is feasible to make a retreat in your own home, this requires a good deal of self-mastery and is only recommended for advanced practitioners. For most seekers it is better to actually leave your house, family, and friends, and find some secluded place in which to conduct your retreat.

In our society, it is not too difficult to rent a room in an inexpensive motel somewhere out in the country. But even here, if you have not already gained some mastery over yourself, there is a danger you will while away your time in mundane activities like eating, napping, reading, going for walks in woods, or just plain day-dreaming. If you are a beginner, the best thing to do is join an organized group which follows a strict retreat schedule at a facility with a support staff that can take care of your daily needs.

Having reduced exterior distractions to a minimum, you can then start to cultivate the internal discipline of retreat. This involves mentally isolating yourself from interior distraction, such

as restlessness, boredom, and the perpetual fantasies that fill the mind. The most effective way to accomplish this is by engaging in extended periods of meditation. Virtually any kind of meditative practice that builds concentration will do -- whether it be a practice of focusing on the breath, a mantra, or a visualized image. By concentrating single-pointedly on one object, you can train your attention to become stable and still, so that it no longer compulsively pursues the stream of images, feelings, and impulses that are continually arising and passing in consciousness.

Once your attention has been at least partially liberated from both exterior and interior distractions, it can then be put to use in a variety of ways, all of which are designed to chip away that basic ignorance that clouds our perception. For instance, you might make a retreat in order to meditate on a specific sacred text. Meditating on a sacred text is very different from reading it solely for theoretical comprehension or intellectual enhancement. Here is how Theophan the Recluse, a mystic of the Eastern Orthodox tradition, describes this kind of meditative reading:

You have a book? Then read it, reflect on what it says, and apply the words to yourself. To apply the content to oneself is the purpose and the fruit of reading. If you read without applying what is read to yourself, nothing good will come of it, and even harm may result. Theories will accumulate in the head, leading you to criticize others instead of improving your own life.⁶

Another powerful practice you can do on retreat is to spend time contem-

plating the impermanence of whatever phenomena you normally believe yourself to be. For most people this includes such things as bodily sensations, emotions, desires, thoughts, memories, etc. By closely observing how all these phenomena arise and pass away in each moment, you can gain direct insights into the fact that they cannot be you, the "observer," who does not arise and pass away with any of these phenomena. By persisting in this practice you will eventually come to an empirical understanding of what the Buddha meant when he said:

Whatever there be of bodily form, of feeling, perception, mental formations or [self-]consciousness, whether one's own or external, whether gross or subtle, lofty or low, far or near; one should understand according to reality and true wisdom:--This does not belong to me; this am I not.⁷

Having cultivated stability of attention, you can also make a retreat in order to seek guidance from subtle realm archetypes. In Native American traditions this kind of retreat is called a "vision quest." George Sword, a Lakota medicine man, explains how it is done in that tradition:

The usual way to seek a vision is to purify the body in an Initi [sweat] by pouring water on hot stones and then go naked, only wrapped in a robe, to the top of a hill, and stay there without speaking to anyone of mankind or eating, or drinking, and thinking continually about the vision he wishes....he should remain on the place he prepares until he receives either a vision or has a communication.⁸

Again, the crucial point is not to allow attention to be distracted by such things as hunger, thirst, or the longing for human companionship, but to concentrate completely and continually on receiving a vision. Although there is no guarantee that such a vision will come (since authentic visions are not subject to personal volition), the more the mind is released from the grip of worldly distractions the more it "opens" to other dimensions of the cosmic mandala. In doing so, it naturally becomes receptive to archetypal teachers and teachings.

Here, however, a word of caution is necessary. Novices should never undertake a vision quest except under the direction of a qualified human teacher. There are several reasons for this: First, it is often difficult to distinguish a true vision from wishful fantasies that only serve to fortify the ego. Second, not all subtle realm manifestations are benevolent. There is a danger of exposing yourself to wrathful deities and demonic influences which can cause great harm if you are not equipped to handle them. Third, the visions you receive may, like dreams, be highly symbolic, and so require an experienced teacher to help interpret them accurately. For all these reasons, Ibn 'Arabi, warned:

For God's sake, do not enter retreat until you know what your station is, and know your strength in respect to the power of imagination. For if your imagination rules you, then there is no road to retreat except by the hand of a shaykh who is discriminating and aware. If your imagination is under control, then enter the retreat without fear.⁹

But while the stability, insights,

"...when Gnosis dawns, solitude and suffering themselves evaporate like mists in the morning sun."

and guidance gained during the course of a retreat can help liberate your attention and wean you from attachments to gross realm phenomena, such experiences do not constitute the end of the path. As Iqjugarjuk insisted, the ultimate goal is "True Wisdom," and to attain this you must, as we said, eventually transcend even the forms of the subtle realm and penetrate the very Heart of the Mandala. This is why Ibn 'Arabi also wrote about those who seek Allah, and Allah alone:

If everything in the universe should be spread before you, receive it graciously--but do not stop there. Persist in your quest, for He is testing you. If you stay with what is offered, He will escape you. But if you attain Him, nothing will escape you.¹⁰

But how exactly does one do this? What is the method or practice by which you can attain "Him" who is your True Self? Actually, there is no method or practice by which your True Self can be attained because, as the Hindu's say, YOU ARE ALREADY THAT! How, then, can you attain what you already are?

This is why the greatest method and the highest practice of retreat is, paradoxically, the abandonment of all methods and the surrendering of all practices. Here is how Lalleshwari describes it:

*Even though you have knowledge become like a fool.
Even though you have eyes, become blind.
Even though you have ears, become deaf.
Become completely inert, like a rock.¹¹*

In other words, at this stage it is no longer a question of *doing*, but of *being*. For, when all effort ceases, and when all attempts to escape solitude and suffering have been exhausted and come to an end, then attention naturally gravitates back to its Source in the Formless Absolute. And it is here, sim-

ply by abiding in the Stillness of the Absolute, that you may suddenly Recognize the Truth: You are not a particular body-mind, located within any realm of the cosmos, for in the Emptiness of the Absolute no such body-mind arises. Rather, you are that Infinite Consciousness in which the entire mandala, with all its realms, appears and disappears as seamlessly as a reflection flashing in a transparent pane of glass.

Recognizing this Truth is Gnosis -- that "Wisdom" found only in "solitude and suffering." And yet, when Gnosis dawns, solitude and suffering themselves, evaporate like mists in the morning sun. For, since there is nothing outside of You, for whom could you be lonely? And since all forms are Your forms, what need is there to cling to any particular one? And since there is no clinging to a particular form, how can the death of any one form cause suffering?

Of course, you don't have to wait to go on a formal retreat for this Awakening to happen. In principle, it can occur at any time, in any place, and without the least preparation. This is possible because, in a certain sense, the potential for Gnosis is always present as the pure power of awareness, native to Consciousness, Itself. In practice, however, the vast majority of Gnostics that we know of attained their Gnosis during periods of solitude, and only after fully facing suffering. To give but one example, here is how another Eskimo shaman, Aua, described his Awakening :

Then I sought solitude, and here I soon became very melancholy. I would sometimes fall to weeping, and felt unhappy without knowing why. Then, for no reason, all would suddenly be changed, and I felt a great inexplicable joy, a joy so powerful that I could not restrain it, but had to break into song, a mighty song with only room for one word: joy, joy! And I had to use the full strength of my

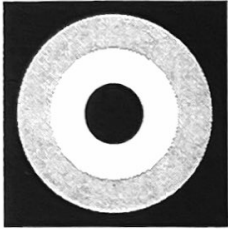
voice. And then in the midst of such a mysterious and overwhelming delight I became a shaman, not knowing myself how it came about. But I was a shaman. I could see and hear in a totally different way. I had gained my quamaneq, my enlightenment...¹²

So, if you are serious about seeking True Wisdom, do not neglect going on retreats. Enter them as often as possible and stay as long as you can, for there is no more powerful way to deepen your practice and hasten your progress through the stages of this path. May all of you find that song of joy Aua spoke of, and gain his *quamaneq* for yourselves. Ho!

❖ Joel, Spring 97

NOTES

1. Joan Halifax, *Shamanic Voices*, (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1979) p. 69.
2. Longchen Rabjam, *The Practice of Dzogchen*, 2nd ed., trans. Tulku Thondup, ed. Harold Talbott (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1996) p. 340.
3. *Quaker Spirituality: Selected Writings*, ed. Douglas V. Steere (New York: Paulist Press, 1984) p. 65.
4. William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1989) pp. 158-159.
5. *The Bhagavadgita*, trans. Kees W. Bolle (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979) p. 73.
6. Igumen Chariton of Valamok, *The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology*, trans. E. Kadloubovsky and E.M. Palmer, ed. Timothy Ware (1985; reprint, London: Faber and Faber, 1966) p. 130.
7. *A Buddhist Bible*, ed. Dwight Goddard, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970) p. 27.
8. James R. Walker, *Lakota Belief and Ritual*, ed. Raymond J. DeMaillie and Elaine A. Jahner (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1991) pp. 58, 86.
9. Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi, *Journey to the Lord of Power: A Sufi Manual on Retreat*, trans. Rabia Terri Harris (New York: Inner Traditions International, 1981) p. 30.
10. Ibid p. 32.
11. Lalleshwari: *Spiritual Poems by a Great Siddha Yogini*, rendered by Swami Muktananda (South Fallsburg, NY: SYDA Foundation, 1981) p. 73.
12. *Shamanic Voices*, p. 118.



EXPERIENCING THE WORLD AS THE MANDALA OF COMPASSION

by David Cunningham

This is a record of my experience of the Fall, 1996 Center retreat, the theme of which was "Experiencing the World as The Mandala of Compassion." I kept a journal throughout the retreat and this record is based largely on that journal. The retreat occurred over a ten day period from Friday, October 18 to Monday, October 28.

On the subject of retreat Joel has written, "The retreat provides a necessary antidote to [our] compulsive attachment to the manifest. It affords an opportunity for solitude. ...By withdrawing from the world and its distractions, by stilling the body, detaching from thoughts, dis-identifying with desire and fears, you can come to understand directly that you are not in essence any of these manifest phenomena; for when they vanish into the unmanifest, you are still there! Thus, what you feared so much to lose was never really yours in the first place."

This retreat provided me an exceptional experience of dealing with just such desires and fears as Joel described in the above quote. It was a psychological and spiritual roller-coaster ride between despair and fear on the one hand, and what seemed a profound spiritual awareness on the other. The up and down, back and forth nature of this ride persisted throughout the entire retreat. My first journal entry, written the evening of the first night, reads in part:

Finally here, after a fair amount of anticipation. For weeks now images of the retreat center have been spontaneously coming to mind... I am starting this retreat with a 'drier,' more 'businesslike' attitude than in past retreats, not looking for any "thing" to happen. Instead, this retreat will be a time of greatly reduced distractions, a time to 'Wait in faith and in darkness' to paraphrase Saint John of the Cross. To practice detachment and emptiness...

Focusing on detachment and emptiness had been characteristic of my spiritual practice for the last several months, but this attitude crumbled quickly at the retreat.

Looking back on those first entries in light of what subsequently occurred, it seems very much as if I was trying to "psych" myself into experiencing the retreat in a certain way, attempting to program an outcome by controlling my outlook, as if to say, "If I'm detached enough something good will happen." By late in the retreat I was to become disgusted with the realization of how thoroughly I approached everything at the retreat with this attitude of a "strategy for attainment" — everything I did being a calculated maneuver, whether subtle or gross, to bring about some spiritual end or goal. The exact opposite of detachment.

Detachment for the sake of a result is not detachment, but manipulation. The shallow nature of this demeanor started to reveal itself in just a few short hours.

DAY 1 - SATURDAY

Saturday, the first full day, the journal records a continuation of the sense of "dryness" which characterized the first evening. But sometime that day the dryness evolved into a sense of:

"desolateness, mixed with moments of near despair - all seems chillingly empty, dry, dead."

Within hours, "withdrawing from the world and its distractions" was having a much more profound effect than I had anticipated. The retreat was revealing a level of attachment I had not honestly recognized. In the months preceding the retreat, I had been, with increasing frequency, experiencing things as spontaneously arising and devoid of any sense of self. This relative sense of emptiness of self was at times disquieting, and always produced at least some of the dryness noted above, but now, in the greater isolation of the retreat, this dryness had become much stronger.

Joel's teachings during this first full day were "refreshers" about meditation; he did not begin discussing the theme of "Experiencing the World as the Mandala of Compassion" until the evening session. This theme was uplifting and would ultimately prove integral to my being able to endure my most difficult moments during the retreat, but at this early point the teaching served more as a comforter from the sense of desolation and thus as a mild distraction from the nature of my own experience.

DAY 2 - SUNDAY

Sunday's teaching was a more in-depth investigation of the main theme of the retreat. One exercise was to go outside and note how the forest is full of teachings. I spend a fair amount of time hiking in the hills and woods, so this exercise was right up my alley. For me, nature is full of teachings about beauty, peace, patience, impermanence, selflessness and the like. At the end of this day I recorded:

Felt better today, stronger. The first day or so is always an adjustment period for me: letting go of home and family, job, anything and everything that can't come here on retreat. Not so melancholy, more focused on the work here in front of me.

I further realized that for me, living about 350 miles from the Center and usually practicing alone, there was a need to adjust to practicing with others. I noted that for the first day or so of the retreat I allowed myself to drift along with the schedule and not be as attentive and present as I would have desired. But by the end of this day I thought I had pretty much adjusted to both the presence of others and the isolation of the retreat.

DAY 3 - MONDAY

Monday dawned well and the sense of increasing strength and focus continued. This day the format of the retreat shifted permanently from an almost equal mix of teaching and practice to a heavier emphasis on practice, there being one teaching session in the morning and the rest of the day being either structured or unstructured practice time. I spent two hours after lunch meditating and inquiring, reaching a familiar state between waking and sleeping, without my frequent problem of falling asleep. I was quite focused during most of this period until towards the end, when I realized that I was pushing way too hard and should probably shift gears and take a walk. I quickly realized on the walk that I was exhausted and felt as if I had been "smashing my head against a brick wall." The exhaustion was also accompanied by some melancholy. The long, slow walk somewhat eased both feelings, as did the evening chanting, but the mood persisted.

That night I tried to do an all night vigil outside under a shelter. However, the wind howled all night and it rained quite hard. About an hour and a half after starting the vigil a large branch came crashing down nearby and I took that as signal to stop battling nature and go inside. I attempted to continue the vigil back in my room but only lasted another half hour or so before sleep overtook me.

DAY 4 - TUESDAY

Tuesday morning I awoke with a powerful, disorienting sense of unreality. My dreams seemed more real than being awake, or perhaps it was just that the waking state seemed so unreal. And whether related or not, it was that afternoon that the shit really hit the fan.

I met with Joel in the early afternoon to review several points concerning my practice. Such meetings are usually a joy for me, since I rarely see him, and this meeting was no different. After the interview I went to the meditation hall and joined the group there for two rounds of sitting and walking meditation, then left the hall and went for a walk.

As the walk started, a sense of anxiety arose which, in the next half hour or so, grew to near panic. The anxiety started with the thought that five more days on retreat seemed like a long time before seeing my wife, Lori, and I wanted to see her and get away from the retreat. The thought, gentle and easily dismissed at first, kept recurring and the emotion accompanying it, which was just the mildest unease at first, grew steadily and swiftly. Though I tried to just watch it, I quickly became "hooked," identifying with both the thought and the feeling, and within a very few minutes I was battling to stay at the retreat, having almost talked myself into a rapid departure and trip home. What had happened? How had a good retreat experience so swiftly turned into such near panic?

In retrospect I have come to regard this episode, and its several recurrences, as a massive ruse, an attempt by mind to escape an encounter with the "death" of selflessness. Joel later said that mind cannot distinguish between physical death and the "death" of selflessness, which seems every bit as real and threatening as physical death. In the retreat setting the emptiness of selflessness can be power-

fully felt, and the "monkey-mind" may go to great lengths to avoid this "death" if at all possible.

A desire to flee in the face of great fear was not a new pattern for me. Nearly 20 years ago I left the association of a very impressive teacher under a similar set of circumstances: I was scared to death. Though I had a wonderful intellectual justification for why I could no longer keep his company (differing beliefs about the approach to God [as if I knew better than him!], different beliefs about God, etc.), that justification was really pure crap — I was just scared to death of how inadequate I felt next to his perceived sublimity. Not being able to tolerate the tension of the difference, I fled. Now, 20 years later at the retreat, the same mechanism of fleeing in the face of fear was again in play.

This was truly the crisis moment of the retreat for me, the moment during which I could easily have fled. The crisis was probably not in the thought of fleeing (if I had been 100 percent in favor of fleeing there would have been no crisis), but in the conflict between this desire to flee and my commitment to an authentic spiritual life. When I ran from the teacher of 20 years ago there was a subsequent drop-off in my spiritual practice to an almost non-existent level, and I became pretty caught up in chasing after relationships and career, all the typical stuff with which we distract ourselves. It had taken years to slowly, gradually revive an active spiritual life, which culminated in deciding to study under Joel's guidance. That decision marked a pivotal change in my life, and the thought of once again abandoning a dedicated practice for...what?... was unbearable. Indeed, the question, "For what?" was at the center of the crisis. Having already chased after both career and relationships and knowing from personal experience that those avenues would never quench the longing of my heart, there seemed nowhere for me to go if I fled the retreat. I thought that if I ran away again I would never again feel that I had an authentic spiritual life, and any thought or dream of Awakening would have died with the decision to run. In retrospect it is easy to see how melodramatic and self-inflicted all this was, but at the time the crisis nature of the event was quite real to me.

As I walked and battled the panic, a



Mist Haven Lodge at Cloud Mountain Retreat Center

drawing by Carla Wenzlaff

combination of things gradually eased the pressure. One of those things may simply have been time, impermanence: the “attack” came, then left, as all things do. Also helpful were some of the retreat teachings, thoughts such as “There is nothing that isn’t God,” and the recognition that all things were contributing to my awakening. If God is everything, here is okay, there is okay. And if everything is contributing to my awakening, then the trees, flowers, hills and valleys, everything, was “on my side,” and I was not alone. If everything is God, then even this panic was God and it was somehow contributing to my awakening. Though I could not see how that could be, especially if I fled, I could trust the teaching and act as if it were true. The pressure did gradually ease and by 9:45p.m., when I recorded the incident in my journal, I wrote that I “felt fine,” but was “alert” (wary) about how powerful the episode had been.

DAY 5 - WEDNESDAY

The next day, Wednesday, was about as opposite a day from Tuesday as could be. That morning Joel made a suggestion

about a further addition to my practice. (He did not know at that point about the previous day’s events, but was getting back to me about something we had discussed in our private interview). This suggestion, put into practice, quickly aroused a powerful sense of bliss and presence, power and profundity. This presence and bliss became the preoccupation of most of that day. This experience was particularly characterized by what I thought of as its “immediacy.” Whatever this “Presence” was, it was so near and so immediate that thoughts of practices, paths, religious or spiritual beliefs, and the like, in order to “reach” something so immediately available, were laughable. Indeed, it was apparent how such things in fact operate to separate us from this presence, not bring us closer. Even the thought of being closer was ridiculous — how could one get closer than this?

There was also a “flip side” to this experience. As the initial blast of ecstasy diminished, what became apparent was my preoccupation with how wonderful it was that I was having this experience. Over and over again I mar-

veled at how wonderful it was that this was happening to me, and this preoccupation undoubtedly hastened the passing of the experience. Eventually it did fade, with me stealthily trying to recreate it without “me” being present. The folly of this finally became apparent, and I surrendered to just seeing how preoccupied I was with myself. It turned into a valuable lesson in what is, for me, one of Joel’s principal teachings: “Relax.” I had grasped so hard at retaining and increasing the experience that I had pushed it away. I ended up enhancing the sense of “I” rather than the awareness of that Presence. It was easy to see, after this experience, how a mystic could get trapped in the experience of bliss and never go beyond bliss to selflessness — bliss is so seductive and so reinforcing to the self experiencing it.

DAY 6 - THURSDAY

The next day I did not feel well physically. Profound psychological ups and downs can be taxing to the system, and bliss particularly so. I felt tired, drained and lethargic much of the day, and was somewhat disgusted about the self-preoc-

cupation of the previous day: "my" bliss, "my" wonderful experience, "my" insight, etc. I wrote in the journal:

After waking up from a long nap in the afternoon, I felt very dry, disinterested. Not in the retreat, but in all the pre-occupations of self. Would just like to wake up to the Real, come Home. The Real, not all these self-gratifying imaginary worlds. The Real, Home...

DAY 7 - FRIDAY

If Tuesday was the crisis moment of the retreat, then Friday was to prove equally powerful in a different way. It started with the morning's teaching on detachment and surrender which, interestingly, had been the topic of much of my thought the last few days, particularly with respect to the self preoccupation of Wednesday's bliss experience. As Joel was speaking this morning I felt something building inside, a sort of pressure accompanied by the thought, "This is impossible. To attain enlightenment is impossible, inherently impossible." I later wrote:

...Early in the morning's teaching what "came home" like a ton of bricks was the realization, "Inherently impossible!" Trying to realize enlightenment is an inherently impossible task, and that's precisely the task I've taken on.

The utter futility of this slammed home with a lot of force... It was a real sinking feeling, and the bottom just sort of dropped out. Of course, I'd heard and said this a thousand times before, but never has it hit home with this kind of force. It continued to sink in through lunch and a long walk afterwards and right through till now (7:00p.m.).

"Inherently impossible." I said these words during the teaching and Joel echoed them back, seeming pleased, saying, "Exactly." He's said it so often, I've heard it so often, but it never felt like this.

What had sunk in was the realization that *enlightenment is strictly a matter of the surrender of that which is seeking enlightenment*, and no amount of doing of any kind, spiritual or otherwise, can cause this recognition. All such doing just reinforces the sense of being a doer with something to do. The path is really more a matter of the complete exhaustion of all one's resources, one's doing, and one's sense of being a doer. I had heard, read, thought about and repeated this many times, but this realization came with a force not encountered before. Perhaps I had reached such a stage of exhaustion. Perhaps the juxtaposition of the previous couple of days — the preoccupation with self and all the subtle and gross attempts to manipulate that self into a "spiritual" state, and the subsequent disgust and exhaustion over this state of affairs — lent additional power to this realization. Regardless, this realization did have a profound impact. It felt like an implosion, a collapse inward. I wrote further in the journal:

The walk after lunch involved some tears and such empty resignation. Much thinking the rest of the day about life, what it's been, and how to live (the spirit to bring to life?). At first, all I could see was making it through the remainder of the retreat, going home and trying to be a good husband and father and somehow find ways to serve others. What else was left? ... live humbly, serve others when the opportunity arises, and worship God, expecting nothing...

There was also much contemplation of the last days of Joel's path. The emptiness, no place to go, no options, and then the flash of light in the darkness. I see the "process" of it all much more clearly, perhaps more personally.

I experienced no such "flash of light in the darkness;" the experience just gradually faded away. During this occurrence the entire path somehow suddenly seemed to possess a sense of coherent wholeness, rightness. There was the sense, "Of course, how else could it be?" Surrender, surrender, surrender, and RELAX!

The importance of service was also profoundly felt during this experience; it

seemed like a direct insight into the reality of service as selflessness in action. I realized that, for me, it would often be better to find something to do to contribute to the welfare of others than to seek something for myself in meditation. (This does NOT mean that I was inclined to stop meditating!) The retreat had emphasized the connectedness and oneness of all reality, and service is a manifestation of that connection which at the same time helps correct the preoccupation with self that so frequently consumes consciousness.

DAY 8 - SATURDAY

Most of Saturday was a beautiful day outside, after many days of rain and gray. I felt well and walked and meditated much of the day, but in the evening, around 5:30, another "panic" attack came on. This one was not nearly so strong or as long in duration as Tuesday's, and it had mostly passed in little more than an hour. However, it served to make clearer the characteristics of these attacks, chief among which was the desire to "get the hell outa' Dodge" and to safety. "Safety" meant escape, anywhere away from the recurrent fear which prompted the attacks. It was becoming clear that if I left the retreat (the perceived "cause" of the fear) I would feel better the instant I drove off the property and onto the road.

The other outstanding characteristic of these attacks was the feeling produced by the continuing confrontation with "inherently impossible." I had meditated about three hours that afternoon, and in retrospect saw that I regarded that time as unsuccessful because "nothing happened." How result-oriented could one get?! How materialistic in the search for spiritual awakening?! As strong as I knew this tendency to be in myself, the retreat seemed to very much highlight my "seeking" mentality. The "failure" of seeking-but-not-finding was difficult to bear and implied an inadequacy at life's most important task. I think the subconscious desire was to flee the scene of such a defeat and return to someplace, anyplace, where I was "okay."

Sometime during the retreat Joel had said that anytime one finds oneself being anxious one should pull back and examine what is going on, because anxiety implies a self deeply involved in the delusion of

being a doer. These panic attacks epitomized such a scenario, with the conflict of feeling I had to flee but that I also needed to struggle valiantly against this feeling. At the time I was so caught up in the struggle that I was unable to adopt the attitude of staying with the feelings, neither fighting nor fleeing.

This episode passed quickly, and by the evening's teaching I felt substantially better. That teaching was wonderful, much too good to attempt to recreate here, a masterful summation of the course and purpose of the retreat. Whatever feelings had persisted from the earlier panic were entirely wiped away in my appreciation for Joel's presentation. I felt great gratitude for the company of such a marvelous teacher; in my estimation this is one of life's greatest gifts. He was for me truly excellent at that moment, and I only wished that I could somehow have shared that teaching with those I love.

DAY 9 - SUNDAY

This was the free day of the retreat, without any required activity except one's retreat chore. I again spent the day walking and meditating. Again, almost predictably, I experienced another panic. This occurrence was weaker than the previous two, but it still required vigilance to avoid becoming hooked. I also had a final meeting with Joel and reviewed my experience at the retreat. We shared a good laugh at how the retreat seemed quite successful if judged by the "ego-smashing" rendered not just to me, but apparently to others, too, judging by some forlorn faces seen at different times during the retreat.

DAY 10 - MONDAY

Monday was departure day, involving only an early morning meditation, sharing our retreat experiences with each other, then lunch, clean up, and departure. When going to bed the night before, the thought had occurred that the retreat was basically over and that whatever of significance was going to happen had happened, but I was wrong again.

That morning I awoke at 3:40 a.m. needing to go to the bathroom. I awoke in a peculiar state I have experienced before, a state of being aware without, as it were,

anyone being there. In this difficult to describe state, what I call the "Dave Show" — all the familiar states of mind, emotion, reaction, and so forth — have not yet arisen. It could perhaps be described as a "witness" state in which there is little or no sense of "I" in its usual significance, there is just awareness. There is nothing spectacular, awesome, or exciting about it in any way.

In this awareness there seemed to be two objects: something that can only be described as a "black" presence, and mind (the "Dave Show" which at this moment was witnessed as though it was at a very considerable distance). In seconds this mind seemed to come from the distance to the immediate here and now, and when it reached the "here" it enveloped awareness and assumed the form of selfhood, with all the usual connotations. This coming from the distance to "here" was witnessed as a sort of spiraling motion. In the enveloping of the witness consciousness by "mind," the witness assumed identity with that which it witnessed. I am aware that this is an awkward description, but I can do no better. The enveloping of the witness consciousness by normal mind was immediate as soon as normal mind came to the fore, and after that "I" was "myself" in all the usual senses.

I lay in bed some ten minutes or more considering the experience. There was no excitement initially, just a practical analysis and rehashing of what had occurred. As similar experiences had occurred in the past it did not seem that there was any particular significance to this episode, and I probably would not have considered it again had it not been for the memory of the black presence. The thought arose that the black presence may well have been what the Tibetans call the "Mind of Black Near Attainment," classically discussed as part of the dying process, but which also arises every time we fall asleep or awaken from sleep. This state is considered a prime opportunity for awakening to Gnosis. I became more excited thinking about this and resolved to check it with Joel. If this had indeed been the Mind of Black Near Attainment it had been a moment of classic opportunity; the fact that it had slipped by was only mildly disappointing because there had been absolutely no sense of being a doer who could have caused something different to have happened. Eventu-

ally I fell asleep again, to reawaken later for the morning meditation.

In the morning meditation I suddenly became aware of a lamp on the wall of the meditation hall. At one instant there was no awareness of the lamp then suddenly, in another instant, awareness of the lamp arose. *The arising in consciousness of the awareness of the lamp was exactly identical to the arising of the awareness of mind in the early morning awakening.* In the instant of recognizing the arising I remembered the morning experience, and suddenly realized that this must be how all arising in consciousness occurs: it is identical in process, only the content varies.

As had been true of the early morning experience, this recognition of an arising in consciousness had been spontaneous, there being no sense of an "I" involved; there had only been witnessing. This again reflects the teaching that the path is mostly about surrender. Practice may cause, through habituation, increased attentiveness to the always present Consciousness, but other than seeming to agree to a life of practice, "I" can in no way affect such a recognition. The realization of the selfless nature of both these events was forcibly impressed and has proved a deep lesson.

When I later asked Joel about these experiences he confirmed my suspicions, namely:

1. The early morning experience had been the Mind of Black Near Attainment.
2. If the thought had arisen at the time of the experience to ask, "Who's watching this?" it could well have been a propitious moment for recognition.
3. Watching mind come into being or the lamp come into consciousness — it's all the same. *Everything arises in consciousness in exactly the same way.*
4. If it was possible to cultivate the awareness underlying these experiences, it could prove advantageous to the prospects of Realization.

This, then, was the end of my retreat. It was a full and challenging experience which I still reflect upon, trying to apply its lessons as I continue on my path. May we all recognize that Immediate Presence we are seeking. Peace.

❖ David, Spring 97

POSTCARDS FROM THE PATH

by Mike Taylor

Dear Friends,

In my last dispatch I spoke of the spiritual challenges of my four month pilgrimage to India. But painful as that time was for me, it was a mere foretaste of a terrible and prolonged trial of darkness that was to engulf me after my return. As I write to you now in February, the inner storms have cleared and a bright new day seems to have dawned. But my path to renewal took me through a winter of the soul so dark and bitter that I feared for my very survival. Join me as I share some reflections on the midlife transition, suffering, and the way of my deliverance.

The dilemma that confounded me in India continued to deepen upon my return. I felt abandoned by God, and ruined forever for worldly life too. A profound crisis of meaning had emptied me of everything. I could find no path, no purpose, no will — and no escape. As Ramana Maharshi said, I had reached a point where my practices and even my Guru couldn't help me. I was truly on my own, lost in a trackless wilderness with no hope of rescue.

As I mentioned in my last article, my faith was soon restored with a deep experience of Ultimate Reality, or Union with God. As in previous experiences, I was shown the complete and ultimate satisfaction of every possible desire. If it appeared at times that my life was a total loss, the promise of this Truth was the carrot that was always drawing me on. I was shown beyond doubt that this Divine Reality was my true Being.

I was most grateful for this and many subsequent affirmations of my faith, but the rest of my crisis continued unabated. How long could I bear to live in pain among the ashes of this samsaric world? How could I not yearn for the infinite love and beauty of God, of my true Self? Yet in that terrible mystical paradox, as long as "I" aspired to the final grace of gnosis, it would be denied me. Faith was indeed guiding me, but I had much to learn about surrender.

This crisis of meaning felt much like a depression, except that my ability to enjoy myself wasn't particularly diminished. But even the best times just didn't matter. My joyful experiences were fleeting and impermanent, and profound dissatisfaction seemed to be my abiding state. Sitting in my quiet house that summer and fall, I often felt terribly lonely and isolated. Yet when I did get together with friends, welcome relief that it was, it really didn't touch what was hurting in me. Even if they were

sympathetic, there seemed nothing they could do to help. And frankly, some just didn't want to know about it. I understood where they were coming from — I was a mess, and whatever I had, they didn't want it. Eventually it became just too painful to maintain some "friendships" with people who could not accept me as I was, feelings and all. Isolation and loneliness were becoming a self-perpetuating vicious circle.

I also found that my habitual escapist pursuits like reading, television, snacking and other pleasure-seeking had become undeniably compulsive. Yet I could no longer find even a bit of solace or satisfaction in them. Nothing could fill my void, and no matter how I twisted or turned, I couldn't escape this dark tide that was flooding my life. Never a heavy drinker, I started drinking too much, trying to anesthetize my pain. Becoming an alcoholic was once unthinkable, but now the possibility really scared me. Yet the more I resisted the urge, the more compulsive it became. Only when I knew I was out of control, and had to prayerfully surrender my fate to God, was that particular trial lifted from me. I was starting to get the drift of things, that I was being called upon to surrender my deepest fears.

I eventually discovered that my experience had many characteristics of a classic midlife crisis, a normal developmental stage that most adults go through to some degree. Even the most secular psychological studies I researched spoke of a crisis that included "meaninglessness, depression, isolation, and exhaustion of egoic satisfactions." Maybe there was more going on here, I thought, than the tragic failure of a spiritual path. While it was reassuring to think that something deeper was involved than my own personal failing, the archetypal forces at work in me were not affected by mere intellectual understandings. All attempts to save myself continued to be futile and deeply unsatisfactory. And

finally, after a week long visit with my father in September that stimulated painful memories of my childhood, I became profoundly depressed, no quibbling about definitions now.

Toward the end of these months of despair I was shaken by a dreadful realization. I knew that without some saving grace I could well follow the path of an old friend who took his own life after years of depression and increasing isolation. I wasn't suicidal yet, but I was in one hell of a nosedive, and there seemed nothing I could do to pull out of it. I had long ago given my life to my spiritual path, but now it seemed it was time to "pay up", and that my idealistic intent might turn all too literal. I had imagined surrender to Truth as something noble and good. But *this*? This was nothing noble. This was total failure. How could I surrender to this? Even so, something deep inside me knew that not to surrender would be an even greater failure.

How could I find the courage to stay the course? How could I surrender my desire for human love and companionship? How could I go on without my livelihood - would I eventually become homeless in the gutter? And how long could I bear the pain of pining for that Perfect Being that could never be grasped by this deluded self? I would have done anything if someone could have just shown me the way, if some absolute teaching dealt with where I found myself. But the teachings of the mystics were all equivocal, and to choose one teaching over the other would be like tossing a coin. No one could save me from my struggle. I was on my own, *mano-a-mano* with the very Mystery of life, and it was clearly no contest. But no one could tell me the secret of surrender.

I had been consciously waving the white flag for years, but I came to see that my deepest resistance to surrender was unconscious, operating completely outside the realm of my awareness. When I have seen the source of my suffering it usually takes no effort at all to release it, like the proverbial hot coal in the hand. But since my resistance was unconscious, I needed to find some way to bring it into awareness. Early on in this process, I realized that if suffering was to be my teacher rather than just so much pointless pain, I would need a guide to the uncon-

scious realms of the psyche. I was blessed to find a gifted and compassionate counselor, Isbel Ingham, who became my trusted guide to this unknown realm, and a valuable ally on my path.

Where psychology often fails the spiritual seeker is in the goal of self-improvement or curing of symptoms (trying to "fix" this delusion of self). But I have seen that self-improvement is a seductive trap that can actually sustain the ego-self indefinitely. It was important to keep my motives clear. I wanted to know the truth about what was really going on in this psycho-spiritual realm, what the unconscious was demanding of me, and what prevented my surrender to God. If insight brought healing, then well and good, but that could not be my motivation. The Humanist and Feminist schools of counseling that Isbel practices do not believe that the therapist "fixes" the client, and her approach was well in harmony with my spiritual intent. I had my own tendency to fall into the "fix-it trap", but by keeping my intention clear, I embarked on an amazing journey that did in fact bring deep healing.

Like an Eskimo who didn't believe in palm trees, I was skeptical at first about theories of unconscious mechanisms that I had never found in all my years of meditation and self-inquiry. But I trusted Isbel enough to put my doubt aside until I could judge from my own experience. Early on, she suspected much of my adult suffering could be traced back to childhood psychological abuse by my father. I knew my Dad had caused me a lot of pain, but I was inclined to shrug it off. After all, I had heard of much worse childhoods — mine was no big deal, I thought. But whenever we probed that area, strong emotion would start to arise and then

who are unprepared for what lies within. And that fear itself was completely unconscious, making for an hermetically-sealed process that was totally invisible to my own unaided inquiries. This process of repression was quite slick, and seemingly impenetrable, but Isbel always seemed to have the right keys to pick the locks of my psyche.

As we persisted over months of inquiry, I started picking up a trail of pain and deadness that seemed to lead primarily to my father. Maybe there was something to Isbel's intuition after all. I could remember only a few demonstrations of love or affection over my entire childhood, but a great many hurtful incidents. I wasn't inclined to make much of them, but Isbel suggested that I was in denial of my own pain. This denial, she felt, stood between me and my healing. She was right, but it took me quite a while to stop dismissing my own hurt and discover the truth of what she said.

It turned out that a deep compassion for my own suffering was a prerequisite for my healing. Over the course of my spiritual path I have had many deep insights into compassion, and felt myself to be a fairly compassionate person. But until now I hadn't realized how hard I was on myself, that my compassion didn't extend to my own being. That icy hard inner critic that held myself to higher standards than others, that harshly judged everything I did said or thought, could only be thawed by my own mercy, forgiveness and compassion. And this could not happen until denial ceased.

I needed to fully know, not deny, my own pain and brokenness. I had spent a lifetime building walls to protect my heart. In my brief but traumatic marriage and the destruction that ensued, it seemed that the

*"For me, surrender had to come through
the cruel grace of defeat."*

immediately shut down without a trace, as if there was nothing there at all.

This was how my ego was able to keep me completely ignorant of my own mechanisms. There was a deep reflexive fear that functioned like fierce dragons guarding the temple gates to scare away those

Divine Wrecking Service did just what was necessary to crumble those walls. Only when I could fully feel my own woundedness with deep compassion could I begin to become whole again. And only then could I discover that the walls that held back this pain were the same walls

that separated me from others. In fact, it was this very same mechanism that unconsciously resisted the love of God.

Healing would come, and my depression would lift only when I could truly surrender. As long as I denied and struggled and sought to escape from my pain, as I had my whole life, I was reinforcing that very "self" that was my suffering. But willful attempts at surrender didn't work. For me, surrender had to come through the cruel grace of defeat. It seems that the culminating event of this defeat came shortly before Thanksgiving when I knew in my heart that suicide was where this path was likely to lead me, and that there was nothing I could do to change that. Short of denying Truth, which was never an option, I had tried to save myself every way I could and had reached a dead end — Cosmic checkmate.

Only when I knew and accepted total defeat did my experience miraculously change. Only in being fully broken could I taste the waters of life bubbling up through my heart. My depression quickly and dramatically lifted, replaced with a deepening peace and uncaused bliss that has continued to grow over the months. Even Christmas brought not a trace of depression, for the first time in over two decades. The midlife crisis that started as a battle in my soul feels like it has become a cooperative project toward wholeness. This psychospiritual exploration has become an incredible adventure, and the mysteries of my lifetime are being revealed to me as something deep inside (God?) is healing and reintegrating my psyche.

The following example might help to illustrate this process. One evening I was pondering the implications of insights that came during our last retreat, "Experiencing the World as The Mandala of Compassion." If this waking life was indeed God manifesting for me to guide me to Truth, what was the meaning of my ex-wife and my devastating marriage? I had gotten the teaching about humility, but there must be more. Why would I be treated the way I was treated? It just didn't seem to make sense.

As I was pondering the metaphorical significance of this episode in my life, suddenly an autonomous image arose in my mind of a huge cobra viciously striking, striking, striking at me (snakes had been a frightening and inscrutable dream symbol of mine for years). Strangely, I

noted a feeling of attraction in my heart towards this attacking serpent. Borrowing from the active imagination techniques we used in counseling, I 'asked' what this snake was all about as I reentered the image. The cobra transformed for a flash into a vivid image of my former wife verbally attacking me. The image surprised me but made sense. What really disturbed me though, was that I felt the pull towards the snake even stronger this time, and try as I might I couldn't flee the attack.

I really didn't want to see this — it felt really sick. Could I really be one of those people who unconsciously sought hurtful relationships? I certainly didn't see that in myself, and the possibility made me ex-

"More and more the ashes of samsara are bringing forth the living flowers of God's love and compassion."

tremely uncomfortable. I reentered the vision to find out more — why couldn't I run? Using a gestalt technique, I became the cobra, and instantly knew it was my father! Now I was myself in the image, as a little boy of four or five. This little boy had a powerful love for his Daddy, like little kids do, even though his Daddy was constantly hurting him. He was helpless to make it stop, just needing to be loved by him. This was the powerful yearning I was feeling in my heart. Eventually the snake image faded away, and I was left with an incredibly strong yearning in my heart, this yearning now clearly for God.

I cried and cried as so much became clear to me. Before this vision I couldn't remember loving my father as a small boy, couldn't even imagine it when asked to in counseling. That little boy who loved his Daddy so much couldn't stand the hurting anymore, and had to stuff away both his heart and his pain behind a protective wall. Did love and pain get hopelessly confused in his little mind? A lifetime of loneliness and disappointing love relationships suddenly started making sense to me. How deeply sad I felt for that little boy and the burden of grief he would struggle through life with.

It felt clear to me that this experience was in response to my prayers to love God ever more strongly. I was being shown one of the deepest sources of my resistance to that love. The result was a deepening compassion for myself and others, and a heart that was becoming less afraid to love both God and Her creatures. Subsequent visionary experiences over the next few weeks showed me the pure, unafflicted nature of this snake energy, a vital part of myself that I had repressed in fear as a child. Coming full circle, that long lost part of my psyche has been restored to me by this mysterious healing process.

This is but one example of this process of reintegration. I am frequently amazed at what is happening in me, and feel truly blessed with joy and appreciation. The inner work is still hard as I continue to travel fearward, but a steady current of grace seems to be carrying me along. My unconscious resistance to the ultimate surrender appears to be fading, and I have found myself blessed with an ever deeper and more subtle connection to the Divine. More and more the ashes of samsara are bringing forth the living flowers of God's love and compassion. I sometimes find myself crying tears of joy, just for the sheer beauty of it all.

Although this is not the end of my path, I no longer feel that I am walking it. It is God who walks my path — I can only get in the way. Where I am going, what I shall do, what shall happen to me, all these are truly none of my concern. It may be that some (or all) of the things I feared will actually come to pass. It may be that I am never graced with gnosis. I haven't been given any guarantees. But it doesn't seem like an issue anymore. It feels like something deep inside me has changed, and for some reason I am not afraid of falling back. If I do find myself involved with worldly values and fears, insecurity may still sweep through consciousness, but now it is more like a breeze than a hurricane that could carry me away. My task now seems to be to surrender ever more to pure being, to divine love, and I pray for the courage that allows this.

Well, that's all for now. Until next time, may we all be granted the grace to see that what we're given (even the "bad" stuff) is what we need. Peace to you, my friends.

❖ Mike, Spring 97

There Is No God But God

An interview with Jennifer Knight

Last summer, Jennifer Knight, Center practitioner and librarian, decided to set off on a spiritual retreat of her own in order to deepen her meditation practice. Even the journey to her retreat center of choice, The New Camaldoli Hermitage, served as grist for the mill as she strove to adhere to a number of precepts that interrupted her usual behavior (for example, not listening to the radio while driving in the car). By the time she reached her hermitage which overlooked the Pacific Ocean on the Big Sur coast in California, she was ready to face the quiet of her solitude. However, as she told her interviewer, Center practitioner Merry Song, she encountered a lot more than quiet once her formal retreat began.

CSS: Most of us at the Center have gone on different kinds of retreats from time to time. They are usually group retreats where we have a schedule all planned out for us ahead of time, and all we have to do is show up and follow that schedule. But I understand that in your case, you had something else in mind. What was your original idea?

Jennifer: I wanted to connect with a Sufi meditation practice, and I'd read a book called *Forty Days* by a German woman who had been raised in Turkey and then married a Turkish man. Later when she was splitting up with her husband, she went back to Turkey to do a 40-day retreat. That was really inspiring to me because I'd been wanting to do the

same kind of practice that she did-- a Zikr, which is a repetition of a sacred phrase from the Islamic Sufi tradition. Her retreat was really unstructured. She had very little instruction at all. She was allowed a couple of tapes of the Zikrs that she was doing, and she was allowed the Koran, a book of Rumi, a book of Ibn 'Arabi, a handful of dates, and an apple a day, and a cup of soup once a week, and some water now and again.

CSS: And that inspired you?

Jennifer: Yes, that inspired me. She pretty much had to figure out what to do with her time. I thought that was inspiring because sometimes I get into a thing where the more discipline I try to force on myself, the less disciplined I become. I knew I had a natural desire to meditate. But whenever I tried to force that structure on myself, it never worked. So I was wanting to awaken my desire to do the practice and awaken my sense of discipline. However, Joel thought I might run into trouble since the solitary part of my retreat was only five days, and the rest of the time was traveling. I was still trying to be in a retreat mode when driving to the retreat center, but the real focused part was only five days. So he thought that would be too short to really try to develop my own schedule and that I should write up a schedule for myself in advance.

CSS: So in order to prepare for this retreat you had to sit down and think about what you were going to do each day and

the requirements you would put on yourself. What did your schedule look like?

Jennifer: I came up with the practices I would do when I was traveling including a morning meditation and two in the evening, and then every time I got out of the car I would say a short Islamic prayer from the Koran to remind myself that even though I was stopping to get gas, or even though I was going into the store, I was still on a retreat and this was still retreat time. And then during the five days itself I structured it pretty much like our group retreat schedule.

CSS: Did you prepare in any other way?

Jennifer: Yes, I had the idea that I wanted to take some precepts to guide me while I was traveling and while I was in retreat, and I wanted Joel to give them to me. Well, he wanted me to do it in front of everyone at the Center after the Sunday talk. And I thought people would think that was boring, and I thought I might be intimidated, but people seemed to take it seriously. And doing that in front of everyone almost felt like taking marriage vows.

CSS: What exactly were the vows you took?

Jennifer: I vow to strictly adhere to our ten selfless precepts*, which we always do when we go on retreat as a group, and then I added: First, I vow to abandon luxuries, especially expensive meals and

*These Ten Selfless Precepts are practiced by the members of the Center's Practitioners' Group:

1. **Responsibility:** To take responsibility for my life. Not to blame others for my own unhappiness, nor make excuses for my own mistakes.

2. **Self-Discipline:** To regard each moment as a precious opportunity for spiritual practice. Not to waste time in frivolous pursuits, nor overindulge in drugs, alcohol or escapist entertainments.

3. **Harmlessness:** Not to injure or kill any being heedlessly or needlessly.

4. **Stewardship:** Not to waste the resources upon which other beings depend.

5. **Honesty:** Not to deceive myself or others by word or deed.

6. **Integrity:** Not to take what does not belong to me.

7. **Honor:** To regard my word as sacred; not to give it lightly but, once given, strive to honor it under all circumstances.

8. **Sexual Restraint:** To make of sex a sacrament; not to profane it in the pursuit of selfish ends.

9. **Charity:** Not to be possessive of people or things, but to give unsparingly of my assets, both material and spiritual, for the alleviation of suffering.

10. **Remembrance:** To recite these precepts once a day, renewing my vows and remembering this path which I have freely chosen.

accommodations. Second, I vow to abandon worldly distractions, especially worldly media -- newspapers, radio, and TV. Third, I vow to abandon judgments, especially of people, food, conditions, and spiritual states,— practicing inner silence and outward humility. Fourth, I vow to abandon selfish thoughts of worldly gain and loss. And finally, I undertake this retreat for the benefit of all beings.

CSS: Beautiful! Did you write those yourself?

Jennifer: With some help, yes.

CSS: So once you were at the retreat center, there was a certain time when you had to get up, a certain amount of time to get ready to start your Zikr, and then time to have meals and meditation. Were you able to stick to that schedule pretty closely without having a teacher or a group joining you?

Jennifer: I did refine it as I went. Since I was at a Catholic monastery down in California, the vigils and the vespers were part of their program. I chose two that I wanted to go to -- morning and evening. I wasn't exactly sure how long those would be. So I would pencil in things as I learned them to refine my schedule. And then I would block an hour of time and I would think, *OK, I'm going to read, I'm going to take a walk, I'm going to do the dishes*, and I found that I didn't have enough time to accomplish anything. So I would start— *ok, during this hour that's when I do the dishes*. I'd have the dishes very tidily stacked and I'd try to economize. I'd do the dishes once a day. The next time I had a break I'd do my journal, and then another time I'd take a walk.

CSS: What kind of schedule did you have for your daily spiritual practice?

Jennifer: The first spiritual practice I would do in the morning was a practice called Sending and Taking—a Buddhist practice that the Practitioners' Group had been doing. Basically, you start with your own mother and think about all the good things she's done for you. You generate compassion for her and then send it out. And then when you think about the suffering she may be facing now, you take that back on yourself. I did that with my mother, and then eventually the practice leads you to doing the same thing with

Traveling Schedule:

Morning: Base Zikr meditation

Stops: Prayer-- 7 lines from the Fatihah

Evening: Sending and Taking-- especially for people met during the day, short Zikr before sleep

Whenever possible: readings from Rumi (first), Koran (second).

Retreat Schedule:

5:30 a.m.	Warning bell
	Get up, wash face, dress
5:45	Vigils
6:30	Eat breakfast
7:00	Shower, dress
7:30-8	Sending and Taking
8-9	1 hour of reading Rumi
9-12	Zikr
12:30 p.m.	Main meal (pick up and return to hermitage), wash dishes
1:30	walk
2-3	reading Rumi
3:00	Zikr
5:00	Journal writing
6:00-7	Vespers and meditation with monks
7-8	Dinner
8-9	long walk
9-9:30	1/2 hour reading Koran
9:45-10:15	1/2 hour Zikr
10:15	sleep

Prime Directive:

Abandoning everything other than Allah/God

Opening and Closing Retreat Ritual:

Walk clockwise around the trailer three times while politely asking all negative influences, evil spirits, and what-not to vacate premises for the duration of the retreat. At the end of the retreat-walk counter clockwise around the trailer three times while thanking them for leaving and inviting them back in.

friends, and then enemies.

CSS: I understand you also had a daily reading practice as well.

Jennifer: Yes. I did my Rumi readings each day. Rumi was a famous Sufi mystic, well known today for his poetry. Here's an example of something I read on the first day:

Behold the world apparently non-existent but existent in essence; and this other world, apparently existent, but without permanence! God has made nonexistence appear existent and respectable; He has made Existence appear in the guise of non-existence. He has hidden the Sea and made the foam visible, He has concealed the Wind and shown you the dust.

I felt that fit in a lot with my question: "Now am I ready to die? Am I ready to go or not?" I'm wanting to cling to this world but he's saying this world doesn't even exist. This isn't even the real world. It's the foam...it's the dust. It's not the Sea or the Wind. I found that reading helpful while eating my breakfast with the fox or the quail and maybe wanting to sit on my porch and think about the sea that I'm seeing out there and the animals ...those are the foam and the dust. I'm here to figure out the real sea and the real wind and to go inside and find where those things are.

CSS: Was it the Zikr you were saving the main energy for?

Jennifer: Right.

CSS: How do you describe that to someone who has never heard of Zikr?

Jennifer: It's like a mantra, or like the Jesus prayer. It's a sacred word or sacred phrase, and you repeat it over and over again. It's can be hard to do it out loud, especially when you're beginning. So that's what I went down there to do and that's why I wanted a place really private so I could do it out loud and not be embarrassed.

CSS: So the Catholic monks weren't tuned into what you were doing? They weren't disturbed by it?

Jennifer: Right. It was a hermitage that I stayed in. The order, The

Camaldolese from Italy, have a strong hermit tradition. So, I had a little cabin away from the monastery and separate from the other cabins.

CSS: What particular Zikr or sacred phrase did you concentrate on?

Jennifer: The one that I did was La ilaha, illa'llah hu, which means, "There is no God But God, Thou."

CSS: Did you repeat that phrase for like an hour at a time?

Jennifer's seven line prayer from the Fatihah to be said on each occasion of getting out of the car on the way there or upon leaving her room once the retreat started:

*All praise be to Allah, Lord of all the worlds,
Most Compassionate, All-Merciful,
Owner of the Day of Judgement.
You alone guide us in the straight path,
The path of those You have blessed,
Not of those who have earned Your wrath,
nor those who have gone astray.*

Jennifer: Three! Two to three hours at a time. That was the biggest challenge I had. I've been on Center retreats before, so that I knew that the first day while doing the practice, I might start falling asleep. And I'd made sure that I'd slept enough when I'd started...but I did find it at various points difficult. The first day I found myself not being able to move my lips anymore, and I kept thinking: *This is only supposed to happen when you're very advanced. I haven't been saying it nearly long enough to have that be happening!* And then I found myself laying on the bed not being able to say it—and I thought, *Wait a minute, Jennifer—you're falling asleep! What are you doing?* So I did find the length of time a problem. I had to scale it back from three hours to about two and a half hours, and I decided to schedule myself a formal nap. Then I noticed that in the afternoon it would get warm and I'd want to go outside or I'd want to be doing something else....

CSS: So you would notice the mind thinking about things it would rather do

other than practicing the Zikr.

Jennifer: Yes! I wanted to be outside with the quail. I wanted to be taking a walk. I wanted to be down at the picnic table. I wanted it to be dinner time. But then when it was dinner time, I wanted to do Zikr!

CSS: How did you deal with that?

Jennifer: For one thing, I tried to do some walking to keep myself focused while I was doing the Zikr.

CSS: A walking Zikr?

Jennifer: Yes. I'd try to stay on the beat and on the word but get up and walk around or stand. I abandoned the sitting position fairly early on — why struggle with the position? I had a little Icon in my room of Saint George slaying the dragon and sometimes I'd do my Zikr standing in front of that.

CSS: And what does the icon mean to you?

Jennifer: Well, I was reading a lot of Rumi about being annihilated, and it was the ego or the resistance being annihilated or the dragon being slain, so I would try to work up a lot of vigor standing in front of the icon of Saint George. And I'd think, *"Annihilateme—there's nothing but God!"* Or as Rumi said, *"No God but God."*

CSS: Well, did you ever feel like—oh, the heck with it. I'm getting out of here? I'm going to a motel and watch TV?

Jennifer: No, not so much. I thought that I would! But the main thing that helped me was taking my precepts in front of everyone at the Center before I left home.

CSS: And what do you think? Were you successful in adhering to those precepts?

Jennifer: I flunked them all! (laughing) But I tried!

CSS: They did remind you...

Jennifer: Yes, they reminded me and they kept me from going way too far off at any particular time. And the fact that I took these vows in front of people and that they took them so seriously... If I thought, *"Oh I should just drive off this hill... what am I doing here?"* it didn't weigh against the weight of: *"You know, everybody heard me say these vows. Do you mean this or*

not? What are you doing here?"

CSS: That's an important point. I've often thought of that for myself—the idea of making a vow in front of people can really define it for you, or make it more vivid.

Jennifer: Right! Because if you make a vow in front of God, it *seems* like you should take it seriously, but then we forget God, and we think we just made that to ourselves. Somehow that extra form of people listening to me take the vows really helped a lot.

CSS: What advice do you have for people who might be inspired to do this kind of retreat themselves?

Jennifer: It's good to read about other people's experiences. And decide exactly what kind of retreat you want to go on and find the best place for what you have in mind.

CSS: Do you think it's better to start with a group retreat and then go on to a solo retreat, or does it really just depend on the person?

Jennifer: I think it's easier to start with a group retreat. You don't have to battle yourself about the structure. It's right there for you.

CSS: Did your solo retreat experience change your idea of what RETREAT means to you?

Jennifer: No, but it did deepen the practice for me, and that's what I was after.

Anyone wishing to do a personal retreat at the monastery Jennifer went to may make reservations by contacting:

New Camaldoli Hermitage
Big Sur, CA 93920
(408) 667-2456 or
(408) 667-2341

Also, the Center for Sacred Sciences library contains many books, newsletters and other resources on retreat centers and spiritual communities throughout the country.

Library Bookcase Project:

One consequence of the Center's unique and ever-growing library is that all of these books (well over 3,000 at last count) take up space, lots of it. Toward the end of 1996, Librarian Jennifer put out a cry for help — there was no more room for new books! The response from our members was truly gratifying as they contributed funds to construct new bookcases that have more efficient shelf spacing and reach to the ceiling. The project is now complete, and the new bookcases, constructed by Mike Taylor, have added well over 30% to the capacity of our library room. Jennifer says that user response to the attractive, contoured bookcases has been very positive, and she looks forward to our valuable collection of books continuing to grow.

IGEEC:

IGEEC stands for the Interfaith Global Ethic Education Committee, a local group formed in the wake of the Parliament of World Religions in 1993. One of the accomplishments of the Parliament was the creation of a document called "Toward a Global Ethic," outlining four ethical principles (don't kill, don't steal, don't lie, don't commit sexual immorality) found in all religious traditions, that was signed by nearly 90% of the Parliament's participating spiritual leaders and representatives. IGEEC, of which the Center is a participant, has created an educational program to present these ethical principles to young people. We have participated in a number of presentations to youths incarcerated at Skipworth Juvenile Detention Facility, and the reception from them has been very gratifying. There is a real thirst for guidance and connection among these young people, and the moral and religious void many of them have grown up in is astounding. In the face of deep social trends such as this our efforts may seem small, but by grace perhaps some seeds we plant will bear good fruit in individual lives.

THANK YOU THANK YOU THANK YOU

The Center for Sacred Sciences has always depended on the generosity of its members and friends to keep it going. For instance, other than a small stipend for our bookkeeper, we have no paid staff and all our programs and services are produced as a labor of love by those involved. We would like to take this opportunity to thank some of our friends for their special contributions above and beyond their membership pledges.

If you have been to the Center recently you have probably noticed the beautiful new masonry-bordered gravel path leading to the back entrance. This path, which has stayed remarkably dry even in the face of some big winter storms, is the work and donation of Center friend and professional mason **Mikiel** (Michael Mooney Masonry). Thank you Mikiel, for this much needed improvement!

As **Fred Chambers** takes over the important job of retreat coordinator, we would like to send out a big THANK YOU! to **Katie Geiser** who performed this job with dedication and skill over the last few years -- her efforts have been very appreciated!

The new bookcase project to increase our library's capacity was made possible by generous designated-use donations from **Mike and Sheila Craven, Gene Gibbs, Niraja Lorenz and Anita Runyan**, as well as substantial special gifts from **David Cunningham**

and **Jim Zajac**. Your generosity benefits all your friends who walk this path with you!

We would also like to thank **Mora Dewey** for her generous gift establishing a CSS Retreat Scholarship Fund. This is an example where financial generosity has the potential to provide something truly priceless — an in-depth opportunity to practice the teachings! Others interested in helping their fellow seekers in this way should designate their check "CSS Retreat Scholarship Fund". Thank you Mora, for your generosity and thoughtfulness.

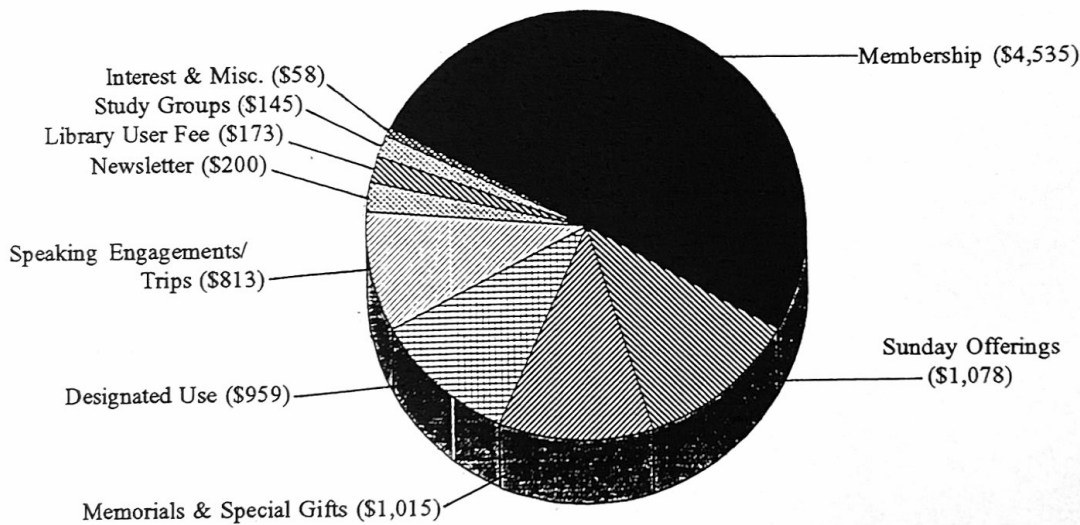
Publication of Joel's book "Through Death's Gate", which has already been of great value to some individuals facing imminent death, was made possible in part by a generous designated-use donation by **Tom McFarlane**. Thank you Tom for your charity, which will bring inestimable benefit to many over the years.

And last, but not least, a special thank you to **Joel** for his generous contribution for the purchase of new video tapes for the library and for showing on Video Sundays. And for his tireless and selfless efforts on behalf of all of us — the Sunday teachings, the Practitioners' Group, retreats, the writings, individual consultations and all the other things he does without pay as our Spiritual Director, it seems that no thanks can ever be adequate. But nonetheless, thank you, Joel, from all of us!

FINANCIAL REPORT: Fiscal Year ending 8/31/96

The Center's Board of Directors feels strongly that in these times of eroding worldly values, it is especially important that a spiritual organization's financial accounting be open and above board. In the past we have imparted this information at our annual membership meeting each August. However, due to limited attendance at these meetings, we have decided instead to publish our annual financial report in the spring issue of the Center Voice. The pie charts alongside detail our income and expenses for the Fiscal Year ending August 31, 1996. We hope that this format is self-explanatory, but if you have any questions, please feel free to ask Jennifer Knight, our Treasurer.

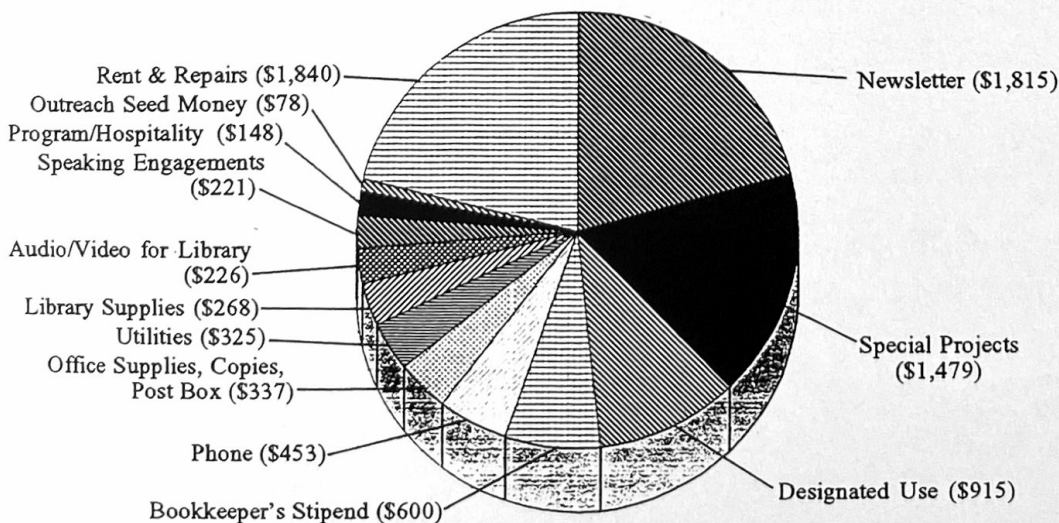
INCOME



Note:

1) Designated Use: This category includes donations for publishing "Through Death's Gate", purchase of new videos, couch repair, and publishing of Joel's next book.

EXPENSES



Notes:

1) Special Projects: This category includes expenses for publishing "Through Death's Gate", and reprinting of "Challenge and Response".

2) Designated Use: This category includes donations for publishing "Through Death's Gate", purchase of new videos, couch repair, and publishing of Joel's next book.

“Beyond all thought and feeling and imagination, there is an inner sanctuary into which we scarcely ever enter. It is the ground or substance of the soul, where all the faculties have their roots, and which is the very center of our Being.”

Father Bede Griffiths

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CENTER FOR SACRED SCIENCES

June 1997

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Video 11 a.m. Library 2-4 p.m.	2	3	Practitioner A 7:30 B 8:00	5	6	7
Talk 11 a.m. Library 2-4 p.m.	9	10	Practitioner B 7:30 A 8:00	12	13	14
Talk 11 a.m. Library 2-4 p.m.	16	17	TBA	19	20	21
Talk 11 a.m. Library 2-4 p.m.	23	24	Practitioner A 7:30 B 8:00	26	27	28
Talk 11 a.m. Library 2-4 p.m.	30					

August 1997

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Video 11 a.m. Library 2-4 p.m.	4	5	Practitioner B 7:30 A 8:00	7	8	9
Enlightenment Day Talk 11 a.m.	11	12	CLOSED	14	16	16
CLOSED	18	19	CLOSED	21	22	23
CLOSED	25	26	CLOSED	28	29	30
CLOSED	31					

October 1997

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
CLOSED	6	7	CLOSED	9	10	11
Video 11 a.m. Library 2-4 p.m.	13	14	Practitioner B 7:30 A 8:00	16	17	18
Talk 11 a.m. Library 2-4 p.m.	20	21	Practitioner A 7:30 B 8:00	23	24	25
Talk 11 a.m. Library 2-4 p.m.	27	28	Practitioner B 7:30 A 8:00	30	31	

July 1997

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Video 11 a.m. Library 2-4 p.m.	7	8	Practitioner A 7:30 B 8:00	10	11	12
Talk 11 a.m. Library 2-4 p.m.	14	15	TBA	17	18	19
Talk 11 a.m. Library 2-4 p.m.	21	22	Practitioner B 7:30 A 8:00	24	25	26
Talk 11 a.m. Library 2-4 p.m.	28	29	Practitioner A 7:30 B 8:00	31		

September 1997

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Talk 11 a.m. Library 2-4 p.m.	8	9	Practitioner A 7:30 B 8:00	11	12	13
Talk 11 a.m. Library 2-4 p.m.	15	16	Practitioner B 7:30 A 8:00	18	19	20
Talk 11 a.m. Library 2-4 p.m.	22	23	Practitioner A 7:30 B 8:00	25	26	27
CLOSED	29	30				

November 1997

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Video 11 a.m. Library 2-4 p.m.	3	4	Practitioner A 7:30 B 8:00	6	7	8
Talk 11 a.m. Library 2-4 p.m.	10	11	Practitioner B 7:30 A 8:00	13	14	15
Talk 11 a.m. Library 2-4 p.m.	17	18	Practitioner A 7:30 B 8:00	20	21	22
Talk 11 a.m. Library 2-4 p.m.	24	25	CLOSED	27	28	29
CLOSED	30					

**MEETING ADDRESS: 960 FILLMORE ST. EUGENE, OR.
PLEASE PARK ON W. BROADWAY PHONE (541)345-0102**

December 1997

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		Library 5:30-8:30	Practitioner B 7:30 A 8:00			
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Video 11 a.m. Library 2-4 p.m.	7	8	9	10	11	12
Talk 11 a.m. Library 2-4 p.m.	14	15	16	17	18	19
		Library 5:30-8:30	Practitioner B 7:30 A 8:00			
CLOSED	21	22	23	24	Christmas Day Talk 11 a.m.	27
CLOSED	28	29	30	31		

January 1998

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1	2	3
CLOSED	4	5	6	7	8	9
Video 11 a.m. Library 2-4 p.m.	11	12	13	14	15	16
Talk 11 a.m. Library 2-4 p.m.	18	19	20	21	22	23
		Library 5:30-8:30	TBA			
Talk 11 a.m. Library 2-4 p.m.	25	26	27	28	29	30
		Library 5:30-8:30	Practitioner A 7:30 B 8:00			
				31		

SUNDAY VIDEO SCHEDULE

June 1 -- Huston Smith: *Jesus and the World's Religions*

Recorded at the 1996 *Jesus At 2000 Conference* in Corvallis, OR. In this video Huston Smith, the famous author of "The World's Religions", talks about Jesus in a multi-religious context which stresses the underlying unity of humanity's scared worldviews.

July 6 -- *The Sufi Way*

This award winning video, shot on location from India to Morocco and narrated by Dr. Huston Smith, examines Islam and its mystical core, Sufism. Features Muslim rituals, teachings of the Koran, whirling Dervishes of Turkey and the Sufi Way to God.

August 3 -- *Taoism*

This video takes us on location to China where John Blofeld, author of many books on Taoism, shows us how this ancient mystical philosophy has deeply influenced the development of Chinese art, history and culture.

September -- No Video

October 12 -- Joseph Goldstein: *Karma and Restraint*

Contemporary meditation teacher, Joseph Goldstein, talks about the spiritual law of karma and it's effects on our lives. Drawing on the insights of Buddhist psychology, he shows how practicing restraint can free us from conditioned behavior and allow us to experience more wisdom and compassion in our everyday lives.

November 2 -- *Peace Like a River*

In 1993, the Second Parliament of World Religions was held in Chicago. Representatives of all the world's religions came together to address the urgent problems facing humanity today--the environment, peace, social justice, and the search for common spiritual and moral ground. This video captures the excitement of many discussions, dialogues, debates, and ceremonies that marked this important historical event.

December 7 -- *Thomas Merton: A Biography*

A comprehensive look at this Twentieth Century Christian mystic.

CENTER FOR SACRED SCIENCES

Publication and Supply Catalog: Summer/Fall 1997

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A spiritual autobiography by Joel, \$11.95

Center Voice

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By Joel

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CENTER FOR SACRED SCIENCES

Audio Tape Catalog Spring/Fall

All tapes are by Joel unless noted

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60 min. 1/90

True Religion

90 min. 3/90

Towards a Sacred Worldview

90 min. 10/91

Two Truths: The Relative, The Absolute

90 min. 6/30

Koan of Selflessness

90 min. 8/93

The Purpose of Precepts

90 min. 11/93

Dualistic Mind

90 min. 3/94

Beauty

90 min. 4/94

Go As Nothing

90 min. 5/94

For the Love of God

90 min. 7/94

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90 min. 7/94

The Heart of Yearning

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