



## Newsletter of the Center for Sacred Sciences

### CREATING TRADITIONS: Center Establishes New Official Holiday, Renames Old



The Center has established a new official holiday— *Light of Love Day*, which will be celebrated each year on December 25th. Although that date is, of course, traditionally a Christian holiday, the Light of Love Day will embrace all religious traditions by celebrating the universal principle of Love and Compassion, expressed in such forms as generosity, joy, charity, loving kindness, and devotion. We anticipate that the celebration of this new holiday will include singing songs drawn from various religious traditions, as well as perhaps some original songs or lyrics from our own community. It may also include sharing of poems and stories related to love and compassion.

In addition, the Center is officially changing the name of the existing Enlightenment Day holiday to *Light of Truth Day*, which will continue to be held each year on a Sunday close to August 13. As with Enlightenment Day, the Light of Truth Day will be a celebration



and acknowledgement of Gnosis, the transcendent realization of the nondual Truth that is the birthright of all humans. These two Center holidays represent the complementary aspects of ultimate Reality, transcendence and immanence, variously called truth and love, wisdom and compassion, knowledge and devotion, jnana and bhakti, mind and heart.

### COMMUNITY NOTES

- A PDF of the Center's financial summary for 2014 is now available for viewing on the CSS website: <http://www.centerforsacredsciences.org/index.php/about/finances.html>  
Previously these have appeared in the newsletter annually, but will now only be available online.
- The full transcript of Annie's account of her awakening is (finally) available on the CSS website: <http://www.centerforsacredsciences.org/index.php/Articles/annies-awakening.html>
- A serious faux pas on this editor's part: The last newsletter listed Deste as being at the 2014 fall retreat, but she was not in attendance. Also, it was not mentioned that Vip, though he was not in the photo, actually *did* attend. But I'm glad to know that our "Stories of I" can withstand such egoic blows.
- The Center now has a web page available for updated Library news and resources. You can view it here: <http://centerforsacredscienceslibrary.blogspot.com>
- Matt has been leading a new online practitioners' group... what some suspect could be the first of many. There may be some practitioner reports coming in future newsletters, but you can at least see what these folks have been up to. (This group is available to all Foundation and Distance Studies graduates.) <http://www.centerforsacredsciences.org/index.php/Practice/practitioners-online.html>

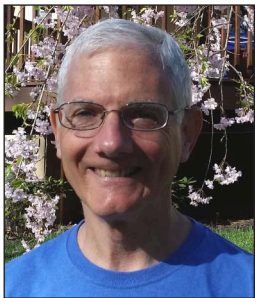
## Editorial Mention

This newsletter edition will be a bit different from those we've become used to. Typically, there are a variety of offerings, reports, summaries of events, pictures, and just general community hubbub. However, little has come in over the last few months, which I think can only mean that people have been spending SO much time in meditation, that there has been barely the impetus to raise hand to pen (or finger to keyboard). One can just feel, in the aggregate, the Stillness. In fact, in our last Community Night (on April 1), an entire roomful of practitioners ran out of things to say, or ask of Joel and other gathered inspired and inspiring teachers. Amazing... how far we've come.



Even so, I was thinking —and not only because of our 9th Precept— there is so much that a mature group like this can share and express from... our lives! To me, this newsletter just seems like such an easy and natural place to contribute to... whether something about a personal experience, insight, poem or some other excellent (short) piece of writing that would fit in with the rest. In fact, what you'll find enclosed in this edition are mostly things I've just collected along the way. I hope you like them, and feel encouraged to maybe send in something that's moved you, as well. I'm guessing the rest of your bretheren would be grateful. I know I would.

*Mark*



## Distance Studies Member Michael Penny: Closer and Closer

As someone who became disillusioned with the world in 1973, then lived in an ashram that ended with a sexual abuse scandal in 1995, I spent over 15 years thereafter reading spiritual books and practicing yoga and meditation, with a commitment to no particular practice.

Smart, educated, and betrayed nuts like me don't trust easily. In order for me to trust, I needed to see sincerity, humility, depth, clarity, *and* consistency. Oh, did I say intelligence and discrimination and compassion? When I stumbled upon Joel's book *The Way of Selflessness*, I was stunned. Who was this guy? Where did he come from? How is it possible that I never heard of him when I thought I had read everything? I needed to know more. I got his autobiography, and the progression from regular guy to sincere seeker to superb teacher made enough linear sense that I wanted to study and practice more. In short, he had earned my trust.

So I signed up for the distance studies course as soon as I could. I put all the talks on my smart phone, and ordered the books phase by phase. I admit that I listened to the 100+ hours of talks almost exclusively in my car while driving. I knew it wasn't intended that way but, in my defense, I listened to all of them more than once. The critical, untrusting mind had almost no objection to anything Joel said... and I did read the recommended books and practiced the meditations regularly during meditation time.

No one I have read or heard about explains spirituality as broadly and clearly as Joel. Not to diminish any other teacher's awareness or purity, but every teacher crossing my path in any way has been very immersed in his or her own path, but unable to express the breadth of different spiritual paths in a clear way.

Working with Fred helped me put specific teachings into specific practice. Whether I was dealing with lust or anger or fear or jealousy, or just plain, ordinary mind stuff, Fred always knew how to interpret Joel's teachings in a meaningful way. The 2013 fall retreat was also powerful and extremely quieting for me.

Despite having been a sincere practitioner for almost 40 years, the distance studies course and the silent retreat re-energized my quest for God and ultimate truth. It improved my relationship with my wife, helped improve my leadership skills, and brought me a new level of calmness.

I am still happy to be a member of the Center, still listen to Joel's teachings, and have been participating in Matt's new online practitioners group, focusing largely on Anandamayi. What I appreciate most of all, though, is the ever-growing awareness that there is never anything to do, never anything to get, and that nothing happens through my will. The teachings available at the Center for Sacred Sciences are truly special, and I am deeply grateful for them.

## Excerpts from Descartes' *Discourse on Method*



*Editor's Note* — I came upon this (edited) excerpt in the March 2010 edition of Eugene's own Oregon Vagabond. Talk about humble beginnings, and how amazing that philosophical enquiry such as this would find itself alongside the painfully authentic stories of some of our least fortunate local citizens! What struck me most about this, though, was how it changed my view of Descartes. I'd always just accepted a superficial view of him as that evil one who sucked the joy out of so many lives by separating so firmly the body and the mind. With just a slight revision of how I read his language, though, I found I could appreciate the depth of his inquiry a lot more.

Without apparently living differently from those who are concerned only to lead an agreeable, innocent life, who are careful to separate pleasures from vices, and who engage in any honorable pastime in order to enjoy their leisure without getting bored, I continued to follow my plan... to progress in knowledge of the truth, perhaps more than if I had merely read books or spent my time in the company of the learned. ...Nine years passed by before I had made up my mind about the questions usually debated among the educated people... But since I wanted to focus exclusively on the search for truth, I thought it was necessary... to reject as absolutely false everything in which I could imagine the slightest doubt and to see, as a result, if anything remained among my beliefs that was completely indubitable.

Because our senses sometimes deceive us, I decided to assume that nothing was the way the senses make us imagine it. And since there are some people who make mistakes in reasoning and commit logical fallacies, even in the simplest geometrical proofs, and since I thought that I was as subject to mistakes as anyone else, I rejected as false any arguments that I had previously accepted as demonstrations. When I noticed that this truth,

“I THINK, THEREFORE I AM” was so firm and certain that all the most extravagant assumptions of the skeptics were unable to shake it, I judged that I could accept it without scruple as the first principle of the philosophy for which I was searching.

When I was examining what I was, I realized that I could pretend that I had no body, and that there was no world or any place in which I was present... but I could not pretend in the same way that I did not exist. On the contrary, from the very fact that I was thinking of doubting the truth of other things, it followed very evidently and very certainly that I existed; whereas if I merely ceased to think, even if all the rest of what I had ever imagined were true, I would have no reason to believe that I existed. I knew from this that I was a substance, the whole essence or nature of which was to think and which, in order to exist, has no need of any place and does not depend on anything material. Thus this self — that is, the soul by which I am what I am — is completely distinct from the body and is even easier to know than it, and even if the body did not exist the soul would still be everything that it is.

— Commentary by Joel, on back page

### Hafiz Sayeth...

If you think that the Truth can be known  
from words

If you think that the Sun and the Ocean  
Can pass through that tiny opening  
Called the mouth

O, someone should start laughing!  
Someone should start wildly laughing

Now!

### Lao Tzu Sayeth...

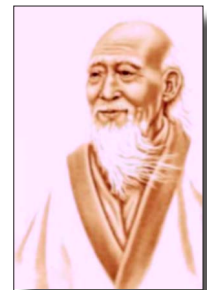
Watch your thoughts;  
they become words.

Watch your words;  
they become actions.

Watch your actions;  
they become habits.

Watch your habits;  
they become character.

Watch your character;  
it becomes your destiny.



## Another Relative Truth to Ponder...

“There is something you do not know, but we Kpaxians have been around long enough to discover. The universe will expand, then it will collapse back on itself; then it will expand again. It will repeat this process forever. What you don’t know is that when the universe expands again, everything will be the same as it is now. Whatever mistakes you make this time around, you will live through in your next pass. EVERY mistake you make, you will live through, again and again... forever. So my advice to you is to get it right this time around, because... this time is all you have.”

Pröt, from the movie: *(The Man From) KPAX*

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# Once upon a time...

The *Baal Shem Tov* (revered 18<sup>th</sup>-century Jewish Hassidic master) sent a group of his students on an important mission to help a needy couple in another town. When they returned, he was not so interested in hearing about their mission as about the minutiae of their trip... what they ate, where they slept, how they traveled, etc.

They didn't understand the relevance of these details, but he insisted on hearing everything. When they related that one morning they sat down near a brook and drank some water there, his face lit up and he said, "That water was waiting from the beginning of time for someone to come and make a blessing over it and drink it."

In Jewish mystical thought, space, time, and matter are understood to be forces of Divine energy — sparks which fell down to earth at the time of creation, and which became embedded in all aspects of existence; these sparks must be elevated in holiness for the world to achieve

perfection as per the Divine plan. This is why the little things you do in life are sometimes more important than the big things — the journey is sometimes as or more important than the final destination.

When you go to work tomorrow, take a moment to appreciate how you got there. Every second of your trip matters —the people you meet on the way, the cup of coffee you drink while waiting for the bus, the piece of paper you throw in the trash— all are changed by your actions. Quite often the things that are seemingly beyond your control are really opportunities to elevate sparks of Divine energy trapped in the mundane. By doing so, we spiritualize the material, bringing the infinite to the finite.

It's a deeper way of looking at the world. And when you begin looking at life this way, a whole new world will be revealed to you — a Godly world, an immortal world, the real world.

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## Precept #1

Evolution is a term to define only one organism, and that's the Self. The Self is the universe, the Self is the Alpha and Omega, God and infinity. And that's the only thing evolution involves, because we are all part of the Self. Nothing goes through an evolutionary process alone or without direct benefit to the whole.

So when you begin to think that there's this controlling elite, a controlling hand behind the curtains, leading the planet to destruction... when you think the end is near, the apocalypse, Armageddon —and when you think that we as a species are doomed— it is not "they" but you that brought this about.

And for very good reason: You are evolving! Stop blaming everybody and everything else. Quit panicking about global tyranny and natural disaster, and Pay Attention... because the world is telling you something: it is telling you exactly what is wrong with you, and how to fix it.

Excerpt from Ben Stewart's film: *Kymatica*

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## Precept #9

There is a story in India's spiritual tradition about a student who receives a mantram —prayer word— from his teacher. The teacher gives it to him with the caveat, "Keep this for yourself so that you may receive its benefits."

"What will happen if I tell it to others?" the student asked.

The teacher responded, probably trying to hide his smile, "Well, then you might lose its benefits."

The student immediately found a high place where his voice would echo across the village, and shouted his mantram for all to hear.

Joy seized everyone, and the student found himself immersed in joy as well. For the good of everyone, he was willing to take a risk to his own pursuit of happiness and discovered instead that his good was included in that of the whole.

# A Treasure we came upon in a London Museum

Distance and nearness are attributes of bodies, the journeyings of spirits are after another sort.  
You journeyed from the embryo state to rationality without footsteps or stages or change of place.  
The journey of the soul involves not time and place. And my body learnt from the soul  
its mode of journeying. Now my body has renounced the bodily mode of journeying.  
It journeys secretly and without form, though under a form.

Jalladludin Rumi (1207-73), *The Maqnavi* — from “Reasons for Knocking at an Empty House”

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## Go to the Master, Declares Kabir

On obtaining this beautiful human body,  
Worship the Supreme Lord before doing  
anything else.

Why dost thou remain unconcerned with this fact?  
When wilt thou again get such a lucky chance?  
Remember, thou wilt not get such a body again  
for ages;

And then thou wilt repent most bitterly.  
Incomparable is the human life,  
In the wheel of eighty-four lakhs of births.  
Whether thou art a king or a beggar  
Wake up to this one duty;

Remain not unconcerned, I warn thee.  
When you were in the hell-fire of the womb,  
You promised to remember the Lord,  
And recite His Name day and night,  
If only you were rescued from  
the agony of the womb.  
You promised to attach all your attention  
to His Feet,  
And fix your mind on His Name.

You promised that whether happy or miserable,  
Whether you lived or died,  
Not for a moment would you forget Him.

After you had made that vow,  
The Master brought you out.  
But you forgot the promise,  
And became a captive-prisoner of Maya.  
You forgot the promise given in the womb,  
The moment you became conscious  
of the world outside.

Twelve years thus passed away,  
In childish playfulness and ignorance.  
Then came youth,  
And hardened by ambition,  
And intoxicated with vanity,  
You walked the walk of the arrogant,  
And talked the language of the proud;

You applied scents and sandal-paste to your body,  
And, putting on bright-colored garments,  
You loafed in the by-lanes of ill-repute,  
Casting glad eyes at cheap beauties,  
And beckoning them with smiles.

Thus passed away the prime of youth,  
And then arrived doddering old age.  
For lack of strength thy hand began trembling;  
And walking soon tired thy feet.  
Thy eyes became watery,  
And thy mouth gave out foul smell.  
Thy throat was choked with phlegm and bile,  
And at last all hope of the world was gone.

Beware my friend. Mother, father, son or wife;  
None will accompany thee on the journey beyond.  
Thou wilt have to abandon everything;  
This body, wealth, home, worldly work  
and worldly hope,  
And in the end Death will pounce on you,  
And then you will fall into the trap of  
the Eagle of Death.

Oh you dull-head, just know this;  
That without the help of the Master,  
You will not be saved from this tragedy.

If only you would make friends with the Master,  
Learn from Him the Path of Salvation,  
And attach your mind to the Master's feet,  
And catch hold to the Name of the Lord,  
You would be fearless,  
And would not undergo the least suffering.

THIS IS THE PATH.....

Go to the Master, get the Word,  
And worship the Lord. This alone leads to salvation,  
Declares Kabir most emphatically,  
Most emphatically,  
Most emphatically.

# CSS Calendar: May – September 2015

Please check the website for the most updated schedule information:

<http://centerforsacredsciences.org/calendar.htm>

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Public Talk 11 am-1 pm  Video on 1 <sup>st</sup> Sundays  Library open 1-3:30 pm 2 <sup>nd</sup> & 4 <sup>th</sup> Sundays  1-2:00 pm 3 <sup>rd</sup> Sundays	Practitioner's Group (Matt) 7-8:30 pm at his home	Practitioner's Group (Todd) 7-8:30 pm  Library open 7:00-9:00 pm	Practitioner's Group (Todd) 3-4:30 pm  Foundation Studies (Fred & Annie) 7-8:30 pm  Community Nights May 27 & July 29	Hunyuan Taiji & Chan Si Qigong, with Luke 6:00-8:00 pm, <i>Alternating with Fridays</i>  Drop-in class for all experience levels. Great for meditators.  Book Club 1 <sup>st</sup> Thursdays 2:30-3:30 pm	Hunyuan Taiji & Chan Si Qigong, with Luke 6:00-8:00 pm, <i>Alternating with Thursdays</i>  (If in doubt, please check online calendar)	Full-day Meditation 10 am-4 pm  May 9 (Matt) June 6 (Fred) August 1 (Annie)  Light of Truth Celebration August 8, 5-9 pm

## Schedule Notes

- All classes and meetings to be held at the Saratoga address unless otherwise specified.
- There are no regular classes on the weeks of Community nights: May 27 and July 29.
- All CSS activities will be suspended during the July 4 weekend, and while closed for summer, August 10-September 21.
- Library closed Tuesday, September 22 for cleaning party.
- Library closed (tentatively) Tuesday, September 29 for staff training.

## Sunday Videos planned for this calendar period:

### May 3 — *Zen Journey: A Visit with Susan Postal*

In this documentary, ordained Zen priest Susan Postal tells of her 35-year journey studying and practicing Buddhism. Her highly personal account is intercut with scenes of various forms of Zen practice — meditation, chanting, and a tea ceremony. [dvd-0047, 57 min.]

### June 7 – *Coming Home: An Introduction to Christian Meditation*

Benedictine monk, Laurence Freeman, gives a summary of the tradition of Christian meditation and describes the kinds of spiritual experiences it can lead to. The video also includes interviews with meditators of different ages and backgrounds from all around the world who share how this simple practice has enriched their lives. [dvd-0419 33 min.]

### July 12 — *Peace Like a River: The 1993 Parliament of World Religions*

This exciting video highlights the 1993 historic gathering of spiritual leaders from around the globe, exploring how the world's religious traditions can help solve the great problems facing humanity. (This video will be of special interest to those interested in attending the 2015 Parliament of World Religions in Salt Lake City this October.) [dvd 0401, 60 min.]

### August 2 – *The Heart of Islam: Suft Shaykh Ahmed Sidi Kostas*

Bokara Legendre interviews, over lunch, Shaykh Kostas, discussing Sufism, the mystical branch of Islam little known in the West. Unlike the extreme jihadists, who dominate today's headlines, Sufis insist that the core of Islam is Divine Love, and love, peace and acceptance for all people, rather than violence and intolerance. [dvd-0551, 38 min.]

## Commentary on Descartes, by Joel — from page 3

There is no question that Descartes was one of the most influential of Western philosophers, and there is much to admire about him. His method of radical doubt swept away centuries of scholastic dogmatism and helped clear the way to modernity. What's more, his method is still useful for bringing to light our unexamined assumptions about the nature of reality, which we take for granted simply because everyone else around us does. This is a particularly valuable practice for jnanis, walking a mystical path.

From the point of view of Enlightenment, however, the trouble is that Descartes stopped too soon. He realized that doubt was, itself, a form of thought: *As long as doubt was occurring, it was impossible to doubt that thought was occurring.* But then he jumped to an empirically unwarranted conclusion: *Because thought is occurring, there must be a "thinker" of thoughts.* It's too bad he didn't have a qualified meditation master to advise him to look further. How different his philosophy (and Western philosophy as a whole) might have turned out if he had been able to follow instructions like these given by [Buddhist scholar and teacher, John Myrdhin Reynolds](#), commenting on an ancient Tibetan text:

*Looking again and again into our mind, we find that there is no place from which thoughts arise, no place where they remain, and no place to which they go. Moreover, there cannot be found anyone who causes them to arise, to remain, or to pass away. The mind has no locatable source for the arising of thoughts, yet, nonetheless, its nature is luminous clarity. Not finding any source from whence thoughts arise, our own subtle mind, which lies below the usual hubbub of thoughts, becomes lucidly clear without any projections of thoughts occurring. And since this luminous clarity, this natural Clear Light of our own intrinsic awareness, is empty, it is the Dharmakaya (Ultimate Truth). It is like the sun rising in a cloudless sky. Even though this mind does not possess any particular shape of form, such as is possessed by a concrete object, nevertheless, it can be fully known.*  
(*Self-Liberation Through Seeing With Naked Awareness*, p. 52-53)

What's particularly beautiful about this kind of inquiry is that you don't have to have a brilliant mind like Descartes' in order to undertake it. Even ordinary people like us can do it!

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### MISSIONS AND PROGRAMS

The CENTER FOR SACRED SCIENCES is dedicated to the study, practice, and dissemination of the spiritual teachings of the mystics, saints, and sages of the major religious traditions. The Center endeavors to present these teachings in forms appropriate to our contemporary scientific culture. The Center also works to create and disseminate a sacred worldview which expresses the compatibility between universal mystical truths and the evidence of modern science.

Among the Center's ongoing events are Sunday public services, with meditations and talks given by the Center's spiritual teachers; monthly Sunday video presentations; and —for committed spiritual seekers— weekly practitioner's groups, and monthly and semi-annual meditation retreats.

The Center also maintains an extensive lending library of

books, audios, videos, and periodicals covering spiritual, psychological, philosophical, and scientific subjects. In addition, the Center provides a website containing a great deal of information and resources related to the teachings of the world's mystics, the universality of mystical truth, and the relationship between science and mysticism. The Center publishes this newsletter providing community news, upcoming programs, book reviews, and other contributions and resources related to the Center's mission.

The CENTER FOR SACRED SCIENCES is a non-profit, tax-exempt church based in Eugene, Oregon, USA. We rely chiefly on volunteer labor to support our programs, and on public donations and membership pledges to meet our operating expenses. Our spiritual teachers give their teachings freely as a labor of love, and receive no financial compensation from the Center.

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