

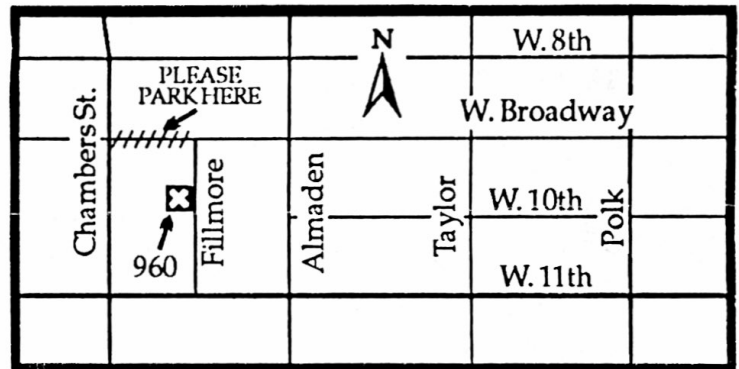
Center for Sacred Sciences

Fall 1991

CSS Moves to 960 Fillmore St.

visit please park on West Broadway. Although this may seem like a slight inconvenience, you can turn it into "a precious opportunity for spiritual practice" by doing walking meditation.

On August 31st, the Center for Sacred Sciences closed its doors at 1486 East 25th, and reopened them the next day at a new location, 960 Fillmore Street. As many of you know, for almost a year we have been looking for a new place to accommodate our growing membership and expanding library. Alas, however, rising rental rates kept one step ahead of our ability to pay. One of our own members came to the rescue and offered to buy a small house which Joel, Jennifer, and the Center could rent at an affordable price. After another month or so of searching we found the new place on Fillmore.



By no means a mansion, it nevertheless suits our needs quite nicely. A larger living room means more space for Sunday programs and practitioners' group meetings. The library is twice the size of the old one, and Joel at last has an office in which to write and see people for private consultations. The one drawback is that Fillmore is a very narrow street with no parking. Fortunately, however, we're only a few houses in from West Broadway (see map), which has ample parking space. When you come to

For those of you who wish to contact us by mail, our mailing address remains the same: 1430 Willamette #164, Eugene, OR 97401. Our phone number remains: (503) 345-0102.

Library Hours: Tuesdays
10:30am to 6:00pm

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CSS 1991-1992 Fall and Winter Video Schedule

Sunday

- October 6 Way of the Tao, a talk by meditation teacher, Joseph Goldstein.
- November 3 Irina Tweedie: a talk by the western-born Sufi teacher and author of Chasm of Fire.
- December 8 The Spirituality of Icons: The history and role of icons in Christian spiritual practice. (Note: Dec 8th is the second Sunday of December. On December 1st we will be closed because of Thanksgiving.)
- January 5 Requiem for a Faith. The classic film on Tibetan Buddhism and culture by the renowned Dr. Huston Smith.
- February 2 India and the Infinite: The heart of Indian spirituality by Dr. Huston Smith.
- March 1 Two videos: Walking Meditation by Thich Nhat Hanh and I Am a Monk, the story of an American-born Buddhist monk living in Thailand.
- April 5 Taoism, a talk on ancient Chinese spirituality by John Blofeld.

The Center for Sacred Sciences is a non-profit, tax exempt organization dedicated to the creation and dissemination of a sacred world view appropriate to our contemporary scientific culture. Our programs draw on the wisdom of the mystics of all traditions as well as the evidence of modern physics. Among the Center's current offerings are Sunday meditations and talks by Spiritual Director Joel Morwood, meditation classes and retreats, study groups, and dream workshops. Joel leads a support group for committed spiritual seekers as well as being available for private consultation. The Center also maintains an extensive lending library of books and tapes covering a broad spectrum of spiritual, psychological, and scientific subjects. Except for a small stipend for the Spiritual Director the Center is run entirely by volunteers and relies on donations and membership dues to meet operating expenses.

CENTER FOR SACRED SCIENCES STAFF

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Joel Morwood

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Publicity And Activities
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1991 Fall Schedule

Sunday:

11:00am. Meditation and Talk.

On the first Sunday of the month includes potluck and video.

Monday:

No public schedule.

Tuesday:

10:30am to 6:00pm. The Library is open to the public.

Call for winter hours in January.

Wednesday:

7:20pm. Practitioner group.*

Thursday:

No public schedule.

Friday and Saturday:

No public schedule.

Special Events:

CSS Open House. 1-4pm Sunday October 20, 1991

Workshop: "True Spiritual Transformation." Saturday November 2, 1991

9:30am to 4:30pm.

CSS Closed

Sunday, Oct. 13 for retreat Dec. 22-Jan 4 (Christmas and New Year's)

Sunday, Dec. 1 (Thanksgiving) March 22-28 (Spring break)

* Interview with Joel required before beginning this group.

About The Wednesday Group

Except for the time when CSS is closed, Joel works with the Wednesday group every week of the year, focusing on the practices of inquiry, meditation, and precepts (virtue). As a part of our practice we read texts from many different spiritual traditions. On this page we try to give you a taste of our Wednesday work.

Focusing On A Meditation Object

A woman who has been a member of the Wednesday group for several years has been meditating on the Bodhisatva of Compassion for the last two. She made the image she uses as the basis of her meditation by coloring a printed line drawing of the goddess. She gave her first image a blue background. But later, after she presented that copy to a friend, she colored another with a red and yellow background.

She meditates twice a day for approximately a half-hour each session. Although she still struggles to keep from drifting off, especially in the morning when her mind wants to plan the day, she finds that doing her meditation has grown easier and more rewarding over the years.

When she first started meditating with her object, she saw its image as a picture and reconstructed its outline, and its various parts in her mind. As she proceeded practicing her meditation, the image came in stronger. And when she started thinking of her Bodhisatva as being flesh and blood, she was able to see it more vividly.

She compares what she sees to a strong dream image. She feels it, experiences it, and then it's not there anymore. It sits in front of its background of red and yellow fire, the unbalanced, high energy, the busy swirl of life. Not distracted by anything, the Bodhisatva is a calmness in front of the action and helps her to realize that one can be serene and totally quiet in the midst of all the world's craziness.

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THE LANKAVATARA SCRIPTURE

A few months ago, the Wednesday group read D. T. Suzuki and Dwight Goddard's translation of The Lankavatara Scripture, from the book A Buddhist Bible. This book is a collection of Buddhist writings representing the history and diversity of Buddhist tradition. The Lankavatara Scripture is dedicated to making clear "the profoundest experience that comes to the human spirit. It everywhere deprecates dependence upon words and doctrines and urges upon all the wisdom of making a determined effort to attain this highest experience." (p.668)

Here are a few of our member's favorite quotes from it:

- ◆ The disciple must get into the habit of looking at things truthfully, recognize the fact that the world has no self-nature, that it is un-born, that it is like a passing cloud, like an imaginary wheel made by a revolving firebrand like the castle of the Gandharvas like the moon reflected in the ocean like a vision, a mirage, a dream.

- ◆ When it is recognized that there is nothing beyond what is seen of the mind itself, The discrimination of being and nonbeing ceases, And, as there is thus no external world as the object of perception, Nothing remains but the solitude of reality.

cont'd on page 10

The Function of Meditation

by Joel

Our FOURTH FUNDAMENTAL reads:

The Way to Gnosis is the way of Selflessness, cultivated on the basis of boundless compassion (Love) and profound insight (Wisdom).

“Profound insight” here means insight which goes beyond or transcends all forms of thought and sees directly into the true nature of situations and things. This differs from intellectual insight which merely substitutes one form of thought for another. For example, as an adult visiting my parents I may have an intellectual insight about their relationship. Perhaps because my father has always been somewhat cold and distant, while growing up I imagined that he was the strongest member of the family. Now, however, I realize that it has been my mother who has actually been calling the shots behind the scenes. Consequently, I come away with a new image of their relationship in which their roles are reversed.

Such insights, of course, can be very valuable, but they still remain within the realm of thought and imagination in which one image (or configuration of images) is replaced by another. Profound insight, on the other hand, occurs when attention by-passes thought altogether and grasps, not a new image of a thing, but the ‘thing’ itself. Making us capable of such insights is the function of meditation.

Having said this, however, we must be quick to correct a common mistake made by beginning meditators, and that is assuming that meditation accomplishes this by suppressing thought. This misconception is unfortunately reinforced by descriptions found even in classical texts on the subject (or, at

least, in their English translations) where meditation is sometimes equated with “mind control” or “thought control.” As a result of reading such phrases beginning meditators are apt to sit down with the idea that they can forcibly clear their minds of all thought. When the attempt to do so fails, they then become extremely frustrated and may even abandon meditation altogether. This approach, however, is completely wrong.

Part of the problem comes from a paucity of precise terms in our language to describe the subtle processes of our minds. In fact ‘mind’ itself is quite vague. What does it mean? Thought? Imagination? Attention? Awareness? Consciousness? The ability to perceive sensory phenomena?

Defining Terms

We can clear up some of this confusion by creating a few working definitions. Let us call consciousness-awareness the total field of experience at any given moment. Let us define sensory phenomena as anything arising in this field that can normally be correlated with our sensory organs--i.e. sights, sounds, sensations, etc. Let us call thought that running commentary (whether in words or images) that interweaves with sensory phenomena invoking memories, expectations, judgments, etc. And finally let us define attention as the power of awareness to focus on whatever arises in the field of consciousness-awareness, whether it be sensory phenomena, thought, or some mix of these (e.g. feelings and emotions).

What is valuable about these definitions for our purposes is that they make a clear

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The Function of Meditation, cont'd

distinction between attention and the objects of attention--i.e. thought and sensory phenomena. This distinction is something we are not usually aware of because attention is so often dominated by thought and sensory phenomena. Right now, for instance, if you were to hear the sound of a car crash outside your window, your attention would leap from reading these words to that phenomenon. And in the very next instant it would probably be captured by a stream of thoughts identifying what you have just heard: An accident has occurred. How serious was it? Was anybody hurt? Should I call an ambulance? You might even assume that by 'thinking' about this sensory phenomenon (in this case the sound of a car crash) you were giving it your 'attention,' whereas actually your attention would now be focused, not on the sensory phenomenon itself, but on the thoughts this phenomenon aroused. Finally, if at this point one of your children tried to get your 'attention' by tugging at your clothes and

“Thus the real aim of meditation is not to eliminate thought, but simply to liberate attention from its tyranny.”

mumbling some questions about homework, you would probably find it very difficult to tear your 'attention' away from your thoughts about the car crash and direct it towards your child's problem. In such a situation we usually say we are 'distracted', by which we mean our attention has become fixated on one thing to the exclusion of almost everything else.

Such a sequence of events illustrates how habitually our attention is captivated by thought and sensory phenomena with thought usually playing the dominant role, directing our attention to various phenomena, telling us what they are, and how we should think and feel about them.

The Liberation of Attention

Now the problem with this whole process is not that it happens--thought here is merely fulfilling its natural function--but that most of the time we are convinced that what thought tells us is true. Put differently, we believe unquestioningly that thought reflects Reality. It does not.

What thought does is create a metaphorical (i.e. an 'as if') world, made up of imaginary distinctions which thought itself draws on the field of consciousness-awareness. Furthermore, the particular metaphorical world which thought constructs at any given moment is always only one of many possible world variations--variations which, if we could but recognize them, would provide different and often more appropriate opportunities for response.

The reason we fail to notice this metaphorical character of the world (or worlds) is because we have lost sight of that Ultimate Reality which transcends both thought and sensory phenomena--which is to say the true nature of the total field of consciousness-awareness or Consciousness Itself. And the reason we have lost sight of this Ultimate Reality is precisely because attention has become the slave of thought, forced to view all experience through the filter of thought's own self-created distinctions. As long as attention remains in this servile condition it

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The Function of Meditation, cont'd

cannot possibly give us profound insight into the true nature of 'situations' and 'things'. Thus the real aim of meditation is not to eliminate thought, but simply to liberate attention from its tyranny.

The next question, then, is just how does meditation accomplish this? Because the relationship between attention, thought, and sensory phenomena is highly complex and multi-dimensional, a vast array of meditative techniques have been developed by various spiritual traditions to deal with different facets of their interaction. This makes the whole subject of meditation itself vast and complex. Nevertheless, we can try to get some basic idea of how it works by considering the three principle stages in which most meditative practices unfold. These are: concentration, stabilization, and contemplation.

Concentration

Concentration literally means "centering on." Anyone who has tried to meditate even a little knows first hand how domineering thoughts can be. Almost as soon as we begin they catch our attention and carry it off into innumerable fantasy worlds and imaginary landscapes. The first task, then, is simply to train attention to hold still and this is done by concentrating it single-pointedly on one object. Although different objects will produce subtly different effects, at this stage of practice the choice of object is far less important than the principle involved--i.e., the development of concentration.

Sitting motionlessly in a comfortable posture, focus attention on any stable object such as a picture or a statue (icon), a mentally repeated word or phrase (mantra), or the rhythmic sensation of your own breathing. When thoughts or sensory phenomena distract your attention, simply notice that your

attention has been distracted and, without any anxiety or fuss, gently but firmly re-focus it on your chosen object. By constantly repeating this practice of focusing--being distracted--refocusing, your ability to hold attention single-pointedly on the object will grow stronger and stronger.

It is important to remember that this is a gradual process, much like practicing scales in order to train your fingers to play the piano. Although consistency and discipline are essential, any attempt to speed up the process through an artificial effort of will is doomed to frustration. The real trick is, instead of forcibly trying to suppress distractions, to learn to relax and ignore them.

Stabilization

Stabilization literally means "to stand firmly." Once you learn to concentrate attention on a single object in a relaxed

"At this stage [stabilization] attention becomes like a mirror. It neither focuses on, nor is distracted by any of the objects appearing in it. It simply holds still, reflecting everything just as it is."

manner for an extended period of time, you can begin to practice observing multiple objects as they arise and pass away in the total field of consciousness-awareness. For instance, you might start by observing various sensory phenomena--sights, sounds, sensations, etc. as they occur moment-to-moment. Next, you can begin observing more

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The Function of Meditation, cont'd

subtle objects: emotions, feelings, desires, impulses, and even thoughts themselves. At this stage attention becomes like a mirror. It neither focuses on, nor is distracted by any of the objects appearing in it. It simply holds still, reflecting everything just as it is.

Finally, after formally practicing in this manner you will be able to bring your meditation to bear on situations encountered in everyday life through what is called 'mindfulness' or 'witnessing'. You may simply observe activities you are engaged in, or conversations you are having from this space of relaxed but stable attention. Again, this does not mean forcibly suppressing any emotions, no matter how agitated they may be. For instance, if you are experiencing anger, you do not try to get rid of it. You just observe it steadily and clearly, realizing

“Contemplation is the stage in which profound insights usually begin to occur in a consistent fashion.”

vividly what it is, how it arises, how it passes away. It is only when you have developed at least some degree of stability and mindfulness that you are ready for the next stage of practice.

Contemplation

Contemplation literally means “to view extensively from a temple”—i.e. a “sacred place.” Contemplation is the stage in which profound insights usually begin to occur in a consistent fashion. This is because, although insights themselves happen spontaneously,

they can be fostered through application of spiritual teachings to one's own immediate experience. For example, all traditions teach that suffering comes from attachment to 'worldly' things because 'worldly' things are by nature impermanent. The meditator who has attained stability and mindfulness can now begin to observe directly and in every moment of experience that this is, indeed, true. In other words, you can see for yourself that all phenomena arise and pass, arise and pass, without cessation, and their apparent continuity is only the construct of thought, which itself comes and goes. Thus 'situations' and 'things' have no permanent or substantial self-existence: their true nature is selflessness.

More importantly, you can now use your stabilized attention to contemplate the seemingly central fact of your experience—your 'self'. Who or what are you, really? In trying to isolate and identify exactly what this 'self' is you observe all sorts of secondary phenomena—bodily sensations, emotions, desires, memories, impulses, etc. But by carefully and steadily contemplating them you discover that they, too, are all impermanent. They come and go, and yet you still seem to be here. Therefore, whatever you really are, you cannot be any of these purely transitory phenomena which are constantly arising and passing away. They do not constitute your true self.

The Last Barrier

It is in this stage that a meditator is apt to get gnostic flashes, or glimpses of that Ultimate Reality that lies beyond all thought. As the sense of self weakens, attention becomes freer and more spacious—open to rivers of a Divine Bliss and Beauty which periodically flood the whole field of con-

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The Function of Meditation, cont'd

consciousness-awareness, transforming its contents into symbols and signs of a Reality that both informs and transcends them. Now, it becomes abundantly clear that it is not only attachments to transitory 'things' which produce suffering, but more fundamentally the sense of self itself; for it is this very sense of 'self' which separates you from that Divinity which has been so tantalizingly glimpsed.

“...[T]he purpose of meditation is never to maintain any particular experience or state for its own sake.”

At this point, a meditator may choose simply to contemplate that Divinity, turning increasingly away from self and towards Its Radiant Light. Alternately, spurred on by the realization that this bare sense of self is the last barrier to be overcome, the meditator may undertake even more refined practices. Through utilizing advanced meditative techniques, one can learn to experience and manipulate 'subtle energies', maintain mindfulness during dreams and sleep, and enter states of awareness in which all but the subtlest forms of self and world are ignored

and transcended. However, the purpose of meditation is never to maintain any particular experience or state for its own sake. Rather, it is always to isolate and identify that basic sense of self, because whatever can be identified as 'self' within any state or experience can also be recognized as not-self by virtue of the fact that it will always prove to be composed of transitory and impermanent phenomena.

And this is precisely the point. Somewhere along the line it must dawn on you that there really is no 'self', no 'I', no 'observer', no 'witness'--that selflessness is not only the true nature of all thought and phenomena but of your 'self' as well! But if all 'situations' and 'things' including your 'self' are selfless, what is there? Since time immemorial Gnostics have tried to express this. We could call it Brahman, or Buddha-nature, the Tao, or God, Abba, or Allah; we could say there is only the total field of consciousness-awareness, or Consciousness Itself, but in the end words must fail. All that can be truly communicated are sets of instruction, such as those given by meditation teachers or found in the sacred texts, along with the advice to follow them and see for yourself. Then, you will have no need of words, for you will have something much better: your own Realization of what they mean.

Meditation Object, cont'd from p. 4

Since she began her efforts at meditating, she finds it easier to surrender her ego, to be more detached and aware, and to be less caught up in everyday life and suffering. Yet sometimes when her heart opens, the suffering of the world comes in so poignantly that she seeks comfort in her image, asks it for help and finds the reassurance

she needs.

One day a powerful realization dawned on her. If her mind can make the Bodhisatva appear, with imagination it could make an endless universe and put whatever it chooses in the core of her quiet space. It left her with no doubt that there is more to the world than its material stuff.

Lankavatara, cont'd from p.4

◆ False-imagination teaches that such things as light and shade, long and short, black and white are different and are to be discriminated; but they are not independent of each other; they are only different aspects of the same thing, they are terms of relation not of reality.

◆ By attaining an inner perception of the true nature of the Universal Mind they are steadily purifying their habit energy.

CUTTING THROUGH SPIRITUAL MATERIALISM

The Wednesday Group studied Chogyam Trungpa's Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism. Trungpa is a Tibetan Buddhist monk. Here are some of our favorite quotes from it:

◆ . . . The ultimate implication of the words "peace on earth" is to remove altogether the ideas of peace and war and to open yourself equally and completely to the positive and negative aspects of the world. It is like seeing the world from an aerial point of view: there is light, there is dark; both are accepted. You are not trying to defend the light against the dark.

◆ . . . You do not have to feel compassion. That is the distinction between emotional compassion and compassion compassion: you do not necessarily feel it; you are it. Usually, if you are open, compassion happens because you are not preoccupied with some kind of

self-indulgence.

◆ . . . Fear comes from uncertainty. If you know exactly how you are going to handle [a] frightful situation, then you have no fear. Fear comes from panic, the bewilderment of uncertainty. Uncertainty is related to distrust in yourself, feeling that you are inadequate to deal with that mysterious problem which is threatening you. There is no fear if you really have a compassionate relationship with yourself, because then you know what you are doing

◆ . . . The seduction of spiritual materialism . . . is extremely powerful because it is the seduction of thinking that "I" have achieved something.

◆ . . . The enlightened person realized that thoughts and emotions on the one hand, and the so-called external world on the other, are both the "play of the mind."

◆ . . . Sudden enlightenment comes only with exhaustion. Its suddenness does not necessarily mean that there is a shortcut. In some cases, people might experience a sudden flash of enlightenment, but if they do not work their way through, their habitual thought patterns will resume and their minds will become overcrowded again

◆ . . . The now has the potential of the future in it, as well as that of the past. Enlightened people have completely mastered the restless and paranoid activities of the mind. They are completely, fully in the moment; therefore they are free from sowing further seeds of karma. . . .

Center for Sacred Sciences

presents:

“TRUE SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION”

Have you experienced spiritual highs with New-Age practices or workshops, only to have the experience fade away? What is spiritual transformation and how does it happen? Does it stay? Are there spiritual principles that are common to all teachings from all traditions? What is a true mystical teaching, and how can you tell a genuine spiritual teacher?

Explore the answers to these questions, in terms of your own personal experiences, in this all day, in-depth workshop. We will draw upon the teachings and practices of the mystics of all ages and traditions, presented in a form appropriate to our contemporary culture. Learn how using these practices can transform your everyday life into a rich opportunity for spiritual growth! Led by **Joel Morwood**, Spiritual Director of the **Center for Sacred Sciences**, and author of Naked Through the Gate, a spiritual autobiography.

When: Saturday, November 2nd, 9:30a.m. to 4:30p.m.

Where: EWEB Building

Cost: \$35.00 (scholarship possible)

Enrollment is limited, so please preregister by calling the Center at 345-0102.

Center Activities

CSS Open House

This fall ushers in a number of changes here at CSS: we've moved into our new larger space and to celebrate our new location, we're having an open house on Sunday, October 20, 1991 from 1-4 p.m. There will be cookies to munch on and an opportunity to visit with Joel and old friends. Visit the new library; we now have room for five or six people at once!

Workshop

Joel is leading a workshop on spiritual transformation on November 2, 1991. For more information see page 11 of the newsletter.

Video Sunday

The first Sunday of every month (unless there is a holiday) CSS holds a cold plate potluck and shows a video on different spiritual traditions or aspects of meditative practice. See the video calendar on page 2 for titles and dates.

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