

Center for Sacred Sciences

Spring 1992

Center Talk : "Mysticism and Ecology"

On February 9, 1992, Joel gave a talk at CSS on the current ecological crisis and the mystical path. Joel chose to focus on two aspects of this crisis. Drawn very simply on his blackboard were two timeline graphs: back-to-back mirror-images. On the left of the board began a line that measured the elevation of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. On the right edge a line began that measured the rate of population increase on the earth. Both lines escalate sharply toward the vertical as the year 2100 approaches, in a collision course between the human and the natural world.

Joel quoted estimates that place ten billion people on this earth by 2100--in 1900 only about one billion people lived here--while the once stable percentage of carbon dioxide will double. As the atmosphere increasingly fills with carbon dioxide, radical and possibly unforeseen changes will begin in our weather. To hear even conservative scientific estimates of the impact of just these two factors on the future of our world has sobering force.

We are all responding, even subliminally, to this impending ecological crisis. Our civilization is beginning to be defined by the threat of this crisis. As individuals we each assume different positions as a way of responding to a future more unpredictable and uncontrollable than most

of us had once believed possible. Joel identified several of these positions.

There are those who believe in the future of technology, that we will be able to design solutions to the upcoming environmental problems. There are people who are concerned with the wasteful use of resources and the balancing of inequities among the world's people. Their response is to reduce the consumption of material goods in order to redress this balance. A third position is taken by people who believe in militancy, the "eco-warriors," who conclude that the only way to preserve the earth from the evils of a system past healing is destruction of that system. Of course, there is also the response of those who are simply cynics, who believe that the most 'profitable' approach is to gain as much wealth and power as possible in order to have the most leverage for survival.

But all these positions, Joel points out, are ways of mastering the future, of rendering it manageable. These are responses forced out of all of us by the threat of disruption of our lives. We want to be in control, so we are making a bargain. We are bargaining to get the result we want, to save what we value most. But Joel spoke of how the problem is really a deeper issue than simply one of altering the way we use technology or of any action that we might take

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Mysticism and Ecology, cont'd

in order to solve the problem; he said it is really a question of the values of the heart.

What is our relationship to the world and the beings in it? What are our motives? In a world based on materialism there are only physical laws to consider, and moral and ethical questions are matters that have only a subjective basis: there is nothing to uphold them except the conscience of the individual. But in a sacred world view, moral laws are objective. The world is sacred and everything manifest in it is part of a spiritual unity. Respect for all beings is the essential commandment at the heart of all mystical and spiritual traditions.

Joel asks: "Do we treat nature with respect only because we have become afraid?" If we become respectful, then, we hope, catastrophe will be averted. We have become selfish. We've forgotten that we have obligations as part of a larger whole. The moral law that is the basis of the world is sacrifice. Joel said, "Every moment is sacrificed to the next." We, too, are part of the sacrifice, but we want to offer up everything around us in our stead. Joel quoted Francis Bacon, one of the originators of the scientific method in the 17th century: "We must put

nature on the rack to control her to our ends." But to live this way, to bend everything to our use, is to create massive suffering. We cannot avert the cost of selfish action. At the end of the talk Joel quoted from a Seneca Thanksgiving address (in Native North American Spirituality of the Eastern Woodlands):

. . . this is what the sky dwellers did. They told us that we should always have love, we who move about on the earth. And this will always be first when people come together, the people who move about on the earth. . . . And that is the obligation of those of us who are gathered, that we must continue to be grateful.

This obligation continues even when the natural world loses its beneficent character:

But the sky dwellers told us, they said, we believe that your kinsmen will see that in future days it may happen that it will be beyond your control--the wind. It is the most important thing for us to watch. It may become strong in its revolving, and we believe that it will scrape off everything on the earth. The wind it may become strong, we believe, and bring harm to the people moving about. That is what they said. And indeed up to the present time we can attest

cont'd on p. 13

The Center for Sacred Sciences is a non-profit, tax-exempt organization 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 talk by Spiritual Director Joel Morwood, meditation classes and retreats, and workshops and study groups. Joel also leads a weekly Practitioners' 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. Other than a small stipend for Our Spiritual Director, 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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Center Talk: "The Spirituality of Hegel's Dialectic"

On February 23, 1992, Robert Tompkins, Professor of Philosophy at Western Oregon State College, gave a talk at the Center on The Spirituality of Hegel's Dialectic .

[Georg Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) was an extremely influential German philosopher of the 19th century. His most famous work is The Phenomenology of Spirit, 1807].

In this talk Robert spoke of what Hegel means by spirit and how the dialectic and phenomenology enable you to understand spirit. (The word translated as spirit, the German word 'geist', also means mind.) Hegel is an idealist, a philosopher for whom reality is based on consciousness or for whom reality is consciousness. A quote from by the German mystic Meister Eckhart illustrates the importance of consciousness or self-awareness in Hegel's philosophy:

God is God only insofar as he knows himself. In addition, his self-knowledge is the self-knowledge that he has as man. And the knowledge that man has of God is continuous with the knowledge he has of himself in God.

The essence of Hegel's idea of the dialectic is presented in another quote from Eckhart. Here the relationship between man and God or man and universal consciousness are shown as intrinsically unified:

The eye with which God sees me is also the eye with which I see him. My eye and his eye are but one. If God did not exist, I would not exist; if I did not exist, he would not exist.

How do dialectical relations exist in the world? Everything is relative (although not relativity itself!) and exists only by being in relation to everything else. Relativity is also continual change. This is how we apprehend things, through their movement. Robert illustrated this through examples of pairs of opposites such as high/low. High cannot exist without low: "when you look at something which is very high, you also see low, the not-high." Low is part of the essence of high. High is what it is only through not-being high! The not-being it is an essential part of being it. There is a continual movement between the poles of an opposition. In

active and passive forces such as gravity and matter, gravity is active, but it requires something passive, matter, in order to act. It only acts because the passive first excited it to manifest. Through this contradiction, passive and active turn into their opposites; they each contain the other as a movement within themselves. In this way our own selves or egos are dialectically related in oppositions such as nature or God.

In Robert's words:

Hegel's thinking involves an active relating of basic categories such as material objects, self, time, space, etc., "undoing" their separate meanings and showing their inherent relativity via the dialectic. This produces a change in consciousness as thought is opened to the relativity of its own categories. Conclusions, such as "God exists" are beginnings for thoughts, bringing the meanings of each one alive in/as the thinking consciousness itself. . . . The dialectic relates identity and difference, self and other, and all opposites via their inherent relativity, each passing over in meaning to its opposite, the "movement" between them producing the appearance of states or entities.

Being itself, consciousness, requires its opposite, unconsciousness, in order to be. Thus the world of nature is the unconsciousness of Being, is self diremption into space, time, motion, matter, energy, elements, life and mind. All this is the appearance of an "outside" for consciousness. This produces space, time, etc. dialectically.

Robert concluded his talk with Hegel's ideas about life as the dialectic of desire leading toward universal self-awareness:

All these--life, ego--are levels of development of the self-consciousness of being, or consciousness, tending toward the ultimate realization of the contradiction inherent in being, expressing through this realization the interdependence of all being, God to man, man to God, to nature, to other men, etc.

A tape of Robert's talk is available through the Center, see the catalog insert.

Library Corner

New Books

The theme of this year's book-drive is the Classics of Western Spirituality series from Paulist Press. A few of this year's new titles include: **Divine Flashes**, Fakhruddin 'Iraqi; **The Triads**, Gregory Palamas; **The Complete Works**, Hadewijch; **Safed Spirituality: Rules of Mystical Piety and The Beginning of Wisdom**, Moses ben Jacob Cordovero and Elijah de Vidas; **The Way to Christ**, Jacob Boehme; and **Handbook of Spiritual Counsel**, Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain.

If you haven't visited our new location yet, the new library is much bigger and has a reading chair. Our current collection contains over 1,600 books and 250 audio and video tapes.

Spring hours are Mondays from 10:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Call for summer hours in June.

Librarian's Favorites

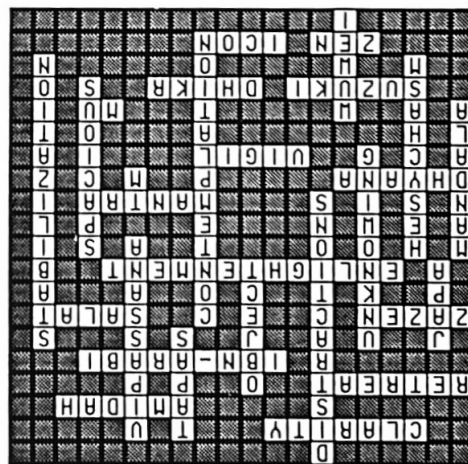
Two of my favorite recent books are **Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge: A Biography** by Arthur Osborne; and **Hsin Hsin Ming**, by Sengtsan. Two illustrations:

That one point where all religions meet is the realization--in no mystical sense, but in the most worldly and everyday sense, and the more wordly and everyday and practical the better--of the fact that God is everything, and everything is God.

Ramana Maharshi, p.104

Emptiness here, Emptiness there,
but the infinite universe stands
always before your eyes.
Infinitely large and infinitely small:
no difference, for definitions have van-
ished
and no boundaries are seen.
So too with Being and non-Being.
Don't waste time in doubts and argu-
ments
that have nothing to do with this.
from the Hsin Hsin Ming

Answers to the crossword puzzle that appears on p.13.



Answers: MEDITATION

The Necessity of Retreat

by Joel

Nowadays, people who periodically withdraw from the bustle of daily life to go on retreat are automatically suspect. Aren't they simply running away from reality? Wouldn't their time be better spent trying to do something constructive about all the worldly woes that beset our harried species?

The answer that the retreatant is only obeying a deep-seated spiritual instinct is of little help because, in a materialistic society such as ours, the very existence of "spiritual" instincts appears to be an impossibility. Even those who acknowledge the legitimacy of such instincts often feel that they should be assimilated to some form of social or political activism rather than be allowed to lead us into an unnatural (perhaps even pathological) solitude. For, if contemplative practices stand condemned as "escapist" in our society, relentless activism is hailed as the panacea for all our ills.

The trouble is, activism (no matter how well-intentioned) which does not spring from wisdom is worse than useless: it is positively destructive. This is amply demonstrated by the disastrous denouement of our own thoroughly activist age. Two centuries of "progress" have brought us not to gates of an earthly paradise, but to the twin precipices of nuclear holocaust and ecological suicide. Faced with such unprecedented crises what we need is not more action, but that saving spiritual wisdom which alone can restore us to harmony with our fellow beings and the universe at large.

But where is such wisdom to be found?

"True wisdom," the Eskimo shaman, Igjugarjuk, tells us, "is only to be found far away from people, out in the great solitude."¹ It is, of course, important to note that Igjugarjuk did not remain in solitude forever (else we would never have heard of him). He returned to share with his people the wisdom he had found. And indeed, this rhythm of withdrawal-and-return constitutes

the archetypal pattern of all genuine spiritual life. What must be stressed in our own times, however, is the absolute necessity of a period of retreat if this kind of wisdom is to be attained. What was true of the first shamans who departed from their villages questing for visions in the vast primeval wilderness, was later repeated by the ancient rishis of India seeking Enlightenment in the forests; by the Buddha forsaking his princely palace for the solitude of the bodhi tree; by Taoist sages retiring to their mountain hermitages; by Lady Tsogyel performing her tapas high in the Himalayas; by Moses on Mount Horeb; Jesus in the desert; Teresa in her convent; Mohammed in his cave; Rabi'a in her hut--as well as by countless other mystics who abandoned their worldly life to discover the Source of Life Itself . . . and, yes, returned to tell about it.

Nor is there anything "unnatural" in this pattern of withdrawal-and-return. On the contrary, the mystic's path simply replicates the fundamental rhythm of the entire cosmos. From the creation and destruction of galaxies to sub-atomic particles popping in and out of existence; from the cycle of days and nights to the alternations of the seasons; from the phases of the moon to the ebb and flow of tides; from waking to sleeping, and birth to death--all phenomena manifest, then vanish into the unmanifest in an endless round of withdrawals and returns.

What is unnatural (even pathological), however, is our own unholy fear of this rhythm, our refusal to participate in the dance between light and dark, something and nothing. Believing ourselves to be isolated beings trapped in a world of terrifying flux, we cling to the visible, while shunning the invisible. We identify with growth but not decay; with thought but not silence; with emotion but not stillness; with self-will, but not self-sacrifice. And it is from this one-sided identification that all our worldly woes flow, because, in truth, this identity is false and the

The Necessity of Retreat, cont'd

effort it produces, futile. No matter how unrelenting our activism, we cannot hold back the night, nor fix the moon in her fullness, nor freeze life at its flood. What's more, whenever we try to do so, we merely distort the tempo of the round, hastening that which we dread the most--the unmanifest conceived as the annihilation of some manifest 'self' in death.

The retreat provides a necessary antidote to this compulsive attachment to the manifest. It affords an opportunity for solitude, and solitude is the laboratory of the soul. Here, you can learn to cooperate with the rhythm of the cosmos and, so, unlock its secrets. By withdrawing from the world and its distractions, by stilling the body, detaching from thoughts, dis-identifying with desires 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.

Such insights tend to free one from the fear of the unmanifest which generates the obsessive selfishness that characterizes so much of ordinary life. Now, you are naturally less inclined to re-arrange the furniture of creation merely to satisfy some ephemeral need. Instead, you begin to feel at home in the world wherever you find yourself, to appreciate the wonder of whatever arises (indeed, that anything at all should arise!) without the compulsion to recast it in the mold of your own self-centered fantasies. But there is more.

By weaving periods of retreat into the ongoing fabric of your life, you can penetrate yet deeper into the mysteries of the unmanifest--even to the point of an Absolute Awakening (or Gnosis) which transcends all dualities whatsoever, including that between the manifest and the unmanifest. For in the complete surrender of identification with any particular manifestation,

you may Suddenly Realize that your withdrawal from the manifest has, in reality, also been a return to the unmanifest; and that your return to the manifest has, in reality, also been a withdrawal from the unmanifest. Thus, the apparent antithesis which arises between withdrawal-and-return is cancelled by a mirror rhythm of return-and-withdrawal so that all the illusory oppositions--life and death, self and world, I and other--to which either rhythm seen alone gives rise, are instantly nullified. In their stead is Revealed a Single Consciousness, engaged in a Single Activity which is this very Cosmos. Thus, you are not an isolated being trapped in this or any world: You are That Consciousness, and all worlds are arising within You!

This is the "true wisdom" of which Igjugarjuk spoke and to which the mystics of all traditions have testified--the wisdom found only in solitude. Action born of such a Wisdom can never be in conflict with the Cosmos for the simple reason that it is identical to it. To know this is to know that the breath on your pillow is indistinguishable from the wind on the mountain, the beating of your heart from the coursing of the seas, the substance of your thoughts from the rainbows of a summer day. All is a Single Circuit of Sacrifice from the manifest to the unmanifest--a Divine Love-offering of Consciousness, by Consciousness, to Consciousness.

More than this cannot be said. May you discover it for yourself.

12/24/91

1. Halifax, Joan. Shamanic Voices. Boston: E. P. Dutton, 1979, p. 69.

On Retreat - One Person's Experience

Editor's Note: The following article reflects the personal experiences of a participant in our April 1991 Meditation Retreat at Cloud Mountain. It is presented here for two main reasons. First, so that people who have never participated in a meditation retreat may have some sense of what such a retreat is like. And second, as a sharing of one person's spiritual experiences during the retreat, for the possible edification and encouragement of the reader. The writer, who prefers to remain nameless, has been a disciple of Joel for about two and a half years, with no previous intentional spiritual practice.

Arrival

As we drove into Cloud Mountain for what was to be my fourth retreat there, it was like coming home to a very special sanctuary. Here, I could completely forget the myriad distractions of my everyday life, and let the turbid waters of my mind settle and clear. The retreat center encompasses a number of attractive but simple buildings set on a wooded hillside property that just exudes peace. After bringing my personal things to one of the spare but functional individual rooms that line the outside of the main meditation hall, I took some time to reacquaint myself with some of the things that I have come to love about Cloud Mountain.

I walked silently on the wooded paths, past mossy little shrines with little Buddha statues lovingly ensconced, stopping to pet one of the resident cats. I sat on the dock on the pond, quiet now as the bullfrogs rested up for their nightly performance. Strolling past the gardens, watching the peacocks strut, I noted to myself that I had no expectations at all of this retreat. I had come because it was an opportunity to "deepen my practice," but today I didn't have any idea what that might mean, and it was a question that didn't seem to concern me somehow. I was there to follow Joel's guidance, and I felt free from caring about the fruits, if any, of my efforts here.

At the dining hall a bit later, we listened to a

brief orientation before the twelve of us sat down to our first supper of the retreat. The three vegetarian meals a day that are prepared by Janice, the Cloud Mountain cook, are a true luxury and temptation on these retreats. I have to remind myself not to overindulge, lest I lose alertness for my meditation! One other luxury is the sauna, which spawned some good-natured jokes about the new "Club Med(itation)" when it was installed. Let me testify that it is a pleasure that does wonders for aching knees and bodies after a day of sitting.

A Typical Day On Retreat

Our wake-up gong sounds at 6:00 a.m., and after attending to our personal needs in silence (silence is maintained throughout the retreat), we meet in the meditation hall for our morning period of sitting and walking meditation, which takes us to breakfast time at 7:30. After breakfast, there is personal time until we meet again at 9:30. People often use this time for contemplation, taking a walk on the paths, or maybe a hot shower. No distractions, such as reading, writing (except for spiritual journals), or music are allowed. This rule alone provides a rare opportunity to just be with oneself, to allow time and space without habitually trying to fill it up.

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On Retreat, cont'd

We start our morning period with a session of yoga stretching exercises, then settle down for the morning teaching from Joel. After his talk, which I always find inspiring and illuminating, we do sitting and walking meditation till lunch time. We usually sit for twenty minute periods, followed by walking meditation for five or ten minutes, then sitting, and so on. Sometimes we do our usual meditation practice (which often differs from person to person), and other times we receive special meditation instructions designed to help us explore different aspects of our being. There is time for questions and answers at the end of the period, during which Joel helps us to evaluate whatever might have come up in our meditation.

When doing the walking meditations, I noted with surprise that this clarity did not leave when moving; there was a peace and bliss here that was deeper and more stable than any I had previously experienced.

After lunch, which is the main meal of the day, there is more personal time before we meet back at the meditation hall for our afternoon session. The afternoon period is similar to the morning one, but without the yoga exercises. Then comes dinner and some more free time before the evening period, which takes us to 9:30 or 10:00. Then one might visit the sauna, or stop at the dining hall for a cup of herb tea before bed.

So goes a typical day on retreat. It is a common experience that during the first few days

of retreat, while the mind slowly relaxes, the body often complains about the sitting. We are encouraged to do what we need to do to be comfortable, with pillows and kneeling benches available, along with folding chairs as a last resort. Often, after a few days, the body and mind relax into the routine, and one feels an opening into a deeper level of experience. This writer has always been sorry to have to leave after only four or five days, often feeling my practices starting to really open up towards the end.

My Personal Experience . . .

The first night of meditation, Joel read us some passages from various traditions to help orient us to the days ahead. The last passage was by Lao Tzu, from the Tao Te Ching, and talked of "emptiness." I felt that the writer was talking directly to me, and Joel's instruction to "hold fast to emptiness, as if I were a stone" resonated deep within me as we started our meditation.

In the first round of sitting meditation, mindful of the instruction, I experienced a state of great clarity that seemed almost effortless to maintain. For the most part, thoughts did not arise, and when they did, I saw them clearly as they arose and passed quickly from consciousness. There was not the least "friction" from attachment or identification with the thoughts as they passed through consciousness, leaving not a trace. This Clarity state was entirely "here and now," spacious and utterly peaceful, my experience clear and unveiled by thought or gross level attachments. When doing the walking meditations, I noted with surprise that this clarity did not leave when moving; there was a peace and bliss here that was deeper and more stable than any I had previously experienced. Reminding myself of the instruction on emptiness when necessary, the Clarity state remained all that night.

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On Retreat, cont'd

The next morning, Saturday, as we started our meditation I was still experiencing this state of clarity. During the next two days this state continued, and deepened. When the mind is

It was as if for all of my life, all my senses and mind, even awareness itself, had been immersed in cloudy water, and now I had bobbed to the surface and could see clearly for the first time.

unclouded by thought and gross level attachments, one becomes aware of subtler and subtler layers of attachment. As these were noticed, because of their subtle marring of the Clarity of consciousness, I was able to release them effortlessly, like the metaphorical hot coal in the hand that Joel often refers to. Upon noticing and releasing each cloud that came to obscure the clarity I was experiencing, it seemed that the state became deeper and deeper, more clear, more peaceful, more blissful. It was as if for all of my life, all my senses and mind, even awareness itself, had been immersed in cloudy water, and now I had bobbed to the surface and could see clearly for the first time. With each insight into attachment, and its subsequent release, this state became more effortless to maintain. The effort I am referring to, of reminding myself of the instruction to hold fast to emptiness, was an extremely subtle thing at this point, almost imperceptible in the clarity of consciousness.

One of the more concrete aspects of this experience of Clarity was that my ability to concentrate on my meditation object, a visualized

image, was far greater than I had ever experienced before. No distractions arose in my mind, and I had a sense of "resting" on my image, rather than forcing it into being.

I also had the experience, repeated a few times that day, of looking down at the comforter I was sitting on, and seeing it like I never had before. The colors in it are actually pretty muted, but a few times I strayed from my meditation object and looked down at this comforter, and it was just incredibly bright and colorful! The colors were all clearly defined and of a vividness that startled and delighted me. What I observed seemed to go far beyond the intensity of visual experience that is usually perceived by the human mind.

These are just two of the more concrete aspects of the experience of Clarity that I am able to convey in words. But it was the more subtle aspects, the timelessness, the peace, the bliss, that seemed much more important, "deeper" somehow. This seemed to be a very desirable state of consciousness to be in. Pleasant as it was, however, toward the end of the day Sunday there was a very subtle cloud drifting across the clarity of my experience. It gradually started to take increasing effort to maintain this state.

The Clouds Gather

On Monday, at the morning teaching, Joel changed the format for the rest of the day so that each of us was to go off and meditate on our own, with no formal structure being imposed from without. My initial reaction was one of apprehension. Somehow it seemed that the structure of the retreat gave me permission to relax the mind, to not worry or be responsible, to not exercise my will. Now I felt responsible for productively utilizing an entire day, with none of

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On Retreat, cont'd

the established structures I had back in the world, or even the substituted structure of the retreat itself. I did in fact have some difficulty with this, but the Grace of God transmuted trouble to insight, as I shall explain.

[A]s with most spiritual teachings and instructions, I did not really understand what this meant intellectually, but in doing the practice, levels of direct insight opened . . .

I returned to my quarters to establish my own routine for the day. At first, things went okay, but it was becoming harder and harder to maintain the state of clarity and bliss that I had been experiencing. "Abiding in emptiness" was becoming a bit of a chore, and the clarity of consciousness was becoming ever more clouded with a vague dullness that I could not dispel. Restlessness tried to claim me, more and more, as my ego sought to reassert itself. After a few hours of this, I was not such a happy camper anymore. I decided to avail myself of Joel's standing offer of personal consultation.

In Joel's room, I tried to convey what was going on. I knew that I was not being too clear, my thinking seemed dull and recollection of passing states of consciousness was tenuous at best. What happened next still surprises me. Joel stopped me, and proceeded to describe exactly what had been going on in my head for the last few hours, this description being extremely detailed and subtle. Even though I could not have remembered things so precisely or recounted them so well, his description was unerring. It was like there was a tape recorder in my

consciousness, recording everything I thought, felt, and experienced, and Joel was playing back the tape. It was uncanny.

Anyway, after I confirmed that he understood where I was at precisely, Joel gave me some specific instructions and teachings. We talked about attachment to emptiness and bliss, and will and surrender, and about the need to go beyond the teaching of "abiding in emptiness" to the higher level teaching of "abiding in non-abiding." I didn't understand this then, but the meaning was to reveal itself in time. He gave me some specific instructions relating to the total abandonment of my supposed individual will to the Will of God. Again, as with most spiritual teachings and instructions, I did not really understand what this meant intellectually, but in doing the practice, levels of direct insight opened up to me that were startling and profound.

Surrender

Thanking Joel, I returned to my room to follow his instructions. "I" was to do absolutely nothing, I was to accept absolutely everything as the "Will of God," with no judgment or preference whatsoever. If God willed that I spend the rest of the retreat in a dull stupor on my cot, so be it. I sat comfortably on my cot, and in relative clarity, settled down to do nothing but observe.

At first, I noticed a certain restlessness in myself, a will to do something. Not attaching myself to these restless thoughts by acting on them, and not suppressing them, but just letting them pass effortlessly through consciousness, a state of deepening clarity returned entirely of its own accord, requiring zero effort of will on my part. In this deepening state, I observed thoughts arise and pass, totally frictionless, not "me" at

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On Retreat, cont'd

all. Even more surprising, I observed the body acting, totally without "me" willing it to do so. The body adjusted itself on the bed when it became uncomfortable. It got up and went to the privy when it needed to pee. It returned and sat on the zafu. Consciousness observed it all, untouched, unidentified with the body and mind. Consciousness was aware of vast spaciousness and peace, totally effortless, totally free.

I felt . . . as if only the most delicate gossamer thread tied me to the delusion of a separate self.

When the dinner gong sounded, the body walked to the dining hall, and had a cup of tea while the preparations were being finished. Sitting there, watching Janice putting out the food, watching my fellow retreatants doing whatever they happened to be doing, I was overcome by such a deep opening and outpouring of love for all of them that I was moved to tears. It didn't seem to be anything particularly personal, this opening and outflowing seemed to include all equally. It was not the possessive type of feeling often taken for love, but an expansiveness that just poured forth from the heart to encompass these beautiful beings. It is hard to describe, but was very powerful and steady during the dinner gathering, either as an undercurrent when attention was elsewhere, or a powerful upwelling when attention was directed to it.

After dinner, back in my room, I settled down for some more meditation. The crystal-clarity and effortlessness of my state continued. It was as if in my two years of meditation practice I had been trying to pry open the doors of consciousness for just a glimpse "inside." Now,

the doors to the "laboratory of consciousness" had been flung wide open, and I could play in the laboratory with ease and abandon! I played "neti-neti" (not this-not that) as objects arose in consciousness, systematically disidentifying with thought, feeling, sound, sight, sensation, etc., until the only identity, the only "me" that remained, was extremely close to nothing. I felt as if I were very close to gnosis, as if only the most delicate gossamer thread tied me to the delusion of a separate self. I tried to see directly what this thread consisted of, but tiny and delicate as it was, I could not discern its nature. My thoughts began to analyze the situation, reviewing the wealth of teachings I have been exposed to in the last few years, trying one experiment in consciousness after another, seeing clearly the results of each experiment in my open laboratory. Interesting as these experiments were, I was not getting any closer to Gnosis, in fact, in a very subtle way I was being drawn back from that razor's edge. After an hour or two of this, I realized that the Grace of Gnosis was not to be mine tonight.

Compassion

Tuesday morning at breakfast I noted that the feelings of love and openness from the night before were still with me, just as strong. The thought arose how beautiful it all is, and then thoughts arose of all those in the world who were suffering, who didn't have love and comfort. I thought of the victims of the Iraqi war, death and disease and starvation, loss of loved ones, and felt the pain of the world wash over me. I heard a bird sing, and thought of a young boy's mindless cruelty with a BB gun. I left the dining hall to be alone with the pain of the world, a pain that was not "mine." Filled with compassion, I cried from the depths of my being for all the pain in this world, this "play of

cont'd

On Retreat, cont'd

God." I felt like all of my protective barriers were gone, and this pain engulfed me for the next few hours. It seemed that because I didn't identify with the pain, I could experience it fully, but at the same time it passed through consciousness without friction, leaving no traces. I don't think I could have endured these depths of sorrow if I had identified with the pain, if it was "my" pain.

[M]y individual will seemed to reassert itself in wanting to see through that last barrier. But . . . that wanting itself was the barrier . . .

This brought me to the end of our retreat. We met as a group to recap our experiences, ask questions, and bring the retreat to an official close. After a hearty lunch, we piled back into our cars for the trip back home, and the challenge of integrating our experiences during the retreat into our everyday lives.

The Experience in Perspective

The experiences and insights gained during this retreat are gradually becoming part of my daily life in the months since the retreat. In looking back on these experiences from this perspective, I can see lessons that were not clear at the time. After I did "neti-neti" that evening, and felt so close to Gnosis, my individual will seemed to reassert itself in wanting to see through that last barrier. But in a sense, that wanting itself was the barrier, the expression of a personal will, an expression of delusion.

With my experience of compassion, I was subtly attached to the power of this experience,

and the emotion it stimulated. By paying attention (being attached) to the thoughts that produced this emotion, I sought to prolong the experience. This was also a manifestation of personal will, the delusion of a separate self asserting itself. Surrender seems to mean total surrender, not just 99.99%. And it can only be the Grace of God that can allow such surrender-willing oneself to surrender all will is a paradox that cannot be solved by the deluded "self."

Only the Grace of the true "Self," God, Brahman, whatever word you want to use, can pierce this paradox. I feel this Grace more and more as it manifests in my life, preparing "me" to know the Truth. I am grateful for these experiences for giving me many deep insights into some areas of "unripeness" in myself. I know that whatever insights or attainment I experience is not "my" doing, they only come when the delusion of "I" is not there to block them. Insight is a pure gift of God, by the same Grace that led me to my Guru, sustained me in practices he assigned that are slowly removing the veils from my sight, and the Grace that ever strengthens the Faith that sustains me on this path.

I am deeply thankful to Joel, for his love, compassion, and guidance, and for that Grace that the teachings assure us is constantly available to all, if we but open ourselves to it, and empty ourselves to make room for it in our hearts and in our lives. In looking forward to our next retreat, I must be careful to have no expectations of similar experiences. Expectations are attachments, and serve only to strengthen the ego and leave no room for God. And experiences are not the ultimate value, they only arise and pass in consciousness, Truth alone is eternal. The next retreat will only be what each one is, a precious opportunity to open more fully to the One, to see who "I" really am.

Ecology and Mysticism, cont'd from p. 2

to it, the way it occurs, it destroys their homes. From time to time it is destructive, for the wind can become strong, but as for us, we are content, for no matter how strong the wind has been, we have been happy.

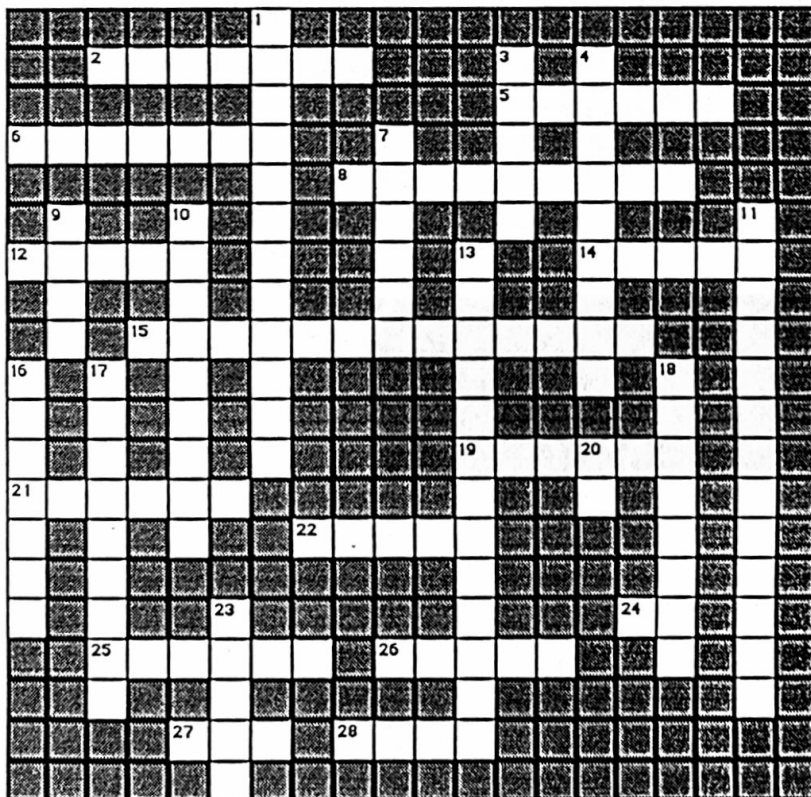
There are many actions we can take to meet the future and its possibilities, but it is well to listen to the Seneca story. Gratitude is different from the attitude of wanting to protect or preserve ourselves. To practice respect because it is our way of life, to regain our spiritual center, is ultimately the most important action we can

take. There is no course of action that is a prescription for saving either ourselves or the world, but we need to remember, as Joel says, "that every single moment is precarious, if we're not willing to live with that, we'll never hear the spirit talk in the mountains and streams."

A tape of Joel's talk is available through the Center, see the tape catalog insert in this issue.

We have all heard of multi-cultural literacy, but what about multi-religious literacy? The terms of this crossword puzzle, relating to meditation, are drawn from a variety of traditions. The answers are on page 4.

MEDITATION



Across

- 2. a lucid state
- 5. part of a Hasidic prayer service uttered three times
- 6. a temporary withdrawal from the world
- 8. famous Sufi author of a retreat manual
- 12. sitting
- 14. one of the five Pillars of Islam
- 15. the end of the spiritual path
- 19. a sacred phrase
- 21. sanskrit for concentration
- 22. a period of wakefulness
- 24. Does a dog have Buddha nature?
- 25. author of ZEN MIND, BEGINNERS MIND
- 26. the remembrance of Allah
- 27. a tradition of Buddhism founded by Bodhidharma
- 28. image

Down

- 1. obstacles encountered in meditation
- 3. ascetic heat (sanskrit)
- 4. insight meditation
- 7. a focal point for meditation
- 9. repetition of mantra
- 10. THE CLOUD OF _____ (book title)
- 11. an intermediate stage of meditation
- 13. an advanced stage of meditation
- 16. a spiritual map
- 17. unceasing prayer
- 18. a quality of mind
- 20. a popular form of meditation
- 23. two words meaning "inaction"

Center Activities

Workshop

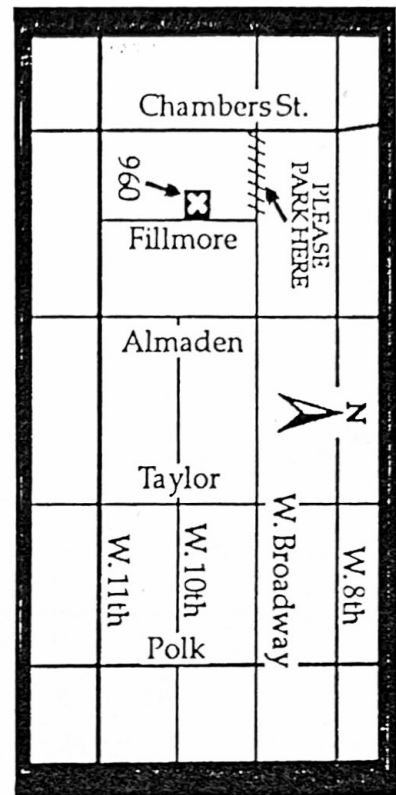
Joel is leading a workshop "The Way of Selflessness" on **May 16, 1992**. For more information see the poster on the back of the calendar insert.

Enlightenment Day Celebration

Every year in mid-August CSS commemorates Enlightenment Day with a party. This year we are celebrating on **Sunday, August 16**.

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 calendar insert for titles and dates.



CSS Visitors: Please park on W. Broadway.

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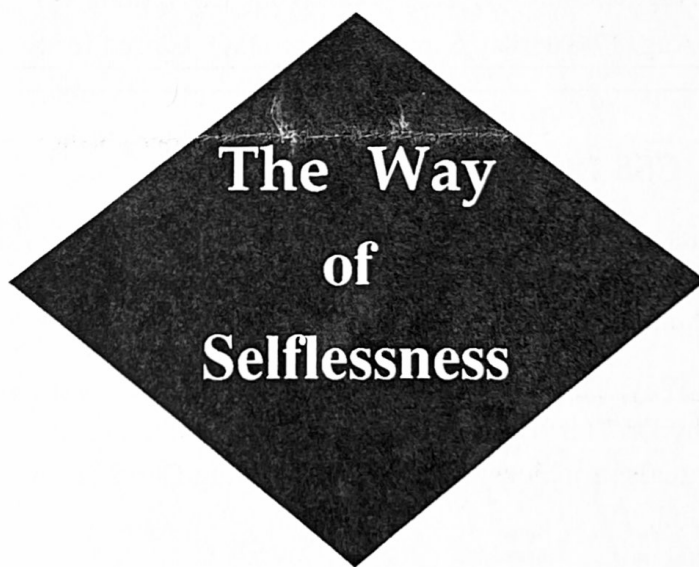
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THE CENTER FOR SACRED SCIENCES
1430 WILLAMETTE #164
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Tired of New Age Nonsense?
Turned off by Fundamentalist Dogma?
but
Still longing to know God?

Then Perhaps



is for you.

A one-day workshop introducing the essence of traditional mystical teachings and practices, presented in contemporary language by JOEL MORWOOD, spiritual director of the CENTER FOR SACRED SCIENCES.

Saturday, May 16, 1992 Place: EWEB, North Building

Time: 9:30am to 4:30pm Donation: \$30 pre-registration, or \$35 at the door

For more info call (503) 345-0102

Center for Sacred Sciences

1992 Spring Schedule

Day Calendar

- Sunday: 11:00am. Meditation and Talk.
The first Sunday of the month includes a cold-plate potluck and video.
- Monday: 10:30am to 6:00pm. The Library is open to the public.
Call for summer hours in June.
- Wednesday: 8:00pm. Practitioner group. (Interview with Joel required before beginning this group.)

Special Events:

Saturday, May 16: Workshop: "The Way of Selflessness"

Sunday, August 16: Enlightenment Day Celebration

CSS Closed

- Sunday, May 8: Spring Meditation Retreat
Sunday, Aug. 9 -Tuesday, Aug. 11: Wolff Convention
Monday Aug. 17-Tuesday Sept. 7 (Labor Day): Closed for Summer Break

CSS 1992 Sunday Video Schedule

- May 4 **The Masks of Rangda:** This film portrays the elaborate and dramatic rituals the people of Bali developed to exorcise violence and preserve the "Spirit of Cooperation" between humankind and God.
- June 5 **The Sufi Way:** This award winning film, 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.
- July 6 **In Search of A Holy Man:** Shot on location in Tibet and India, this film follows a day in the life of an American-born Buddhist nun living in India.
- August 3 **Thoughtless State:** Interview with Perry Mafi, author of "Wake Up From Your Dream," exploring his experience of no-mind and how thought ceaselessly records experience and plays it back to color the present and destroy the freshness of the moment.
- September CSS is closed.
- October 5 **Merton: A Film Biography:** A comprehensive look at Thomas Merton, the twentieth century Christian mystic who wrote over sixty books on some of the most pressing social issues of our time.

Videos are presented on the first Sunday of the month at 11:00 a.m. Call 345-0102 for more info.

Center for Sacred Sciences

Tape and Publication Catalog Spring 1991

TAPE TITLES: All tapes are \$6.50 unless noted

LOOKING FOR THE "I"

60 min, 10/88

SPIRITUAL PHILOSOPHY

90 min, 11/88

ARCHETYPAL GUIDES

60 min, 7/89

MEANING OF MANTRA

60 min, 9/89

SOLITUDE: LABORATORY OF THE SOUL

60 min, 10/89

WHAT IS LOVE?

60 min, 11/89

WHAT IS SPIRITUAL LOVE?

60 min, 11/89

GRATITUDE

60 min, 11/89

IGNORANCE: THE ROOT OF SUFFERING

90 min, 12/89

THE MEANING OF SACRED SCIENCES

60 min, 1/90

INTRO TO QUANTUM MECHANICS I & II

By Tom McFarlane, A 2-tape set. \$12.50

MORAL LAW

90 min, 3/90

SPIRITUAL DEATH

90 min, 4/90

THE FIVE FUNDAMENTALS

4/90 - 7/90 A 6-tape set, \$37.50

CONSCIOUSNESS IN FORM

90 min, 5/90

BEGINNING OF WISDOM

90 min, 6/90

RELIGION: ESOTERIC & EXOTERIC

90 min, 9/90

THE GURU QUESTION

90 min, 10/90

ETHICS: SPIRITUAL & SECULAR

90 min, 11/90

THE SPIRITUALIZATION OF EVERYDAY LIFE

90 min, 12/90

TRUE RELIGION

90 min, 3/91

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS #1: SPONTANEITY AND WILL

60 min, 4/91

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS #2: IMAGES AND ACTION

60 min, 6/91

INTIMACY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

90 min, 6/91