

# Center Voice

Spring 1993

the newsletter of the Center for Sacred Sciences

## Special Focus: Reality

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### ◆ Enlightenment Day Celebration ◆

Each year we honor the enlightened mystics of all traditions on the anniversary of Joel's awakening in August 1983. This year marks his 10th anniversary. The Center will be hosting this year's party on August 15th, following our regular Sunday program. Join us at 11 a.m. or from 1-4 p. m. for a potluck .

### In this issue . . .

In our last issue we explored the theme of inquiry. In this issue we're taking up the goal of inquiry: reality, or the true nature of whatever exists.

So what is real? If consciousness alone is absolutely real, as CSS's first fundamental states, what does this mean in spiritual terms?

In Mike's article on page 9, "The Mystic's Challenge," the challenge is the discovery of the nature of reality for yourself. This requires a commitment to awareness and discipline in everyday experience. Your practice is a lens through which you begin to view the world and through it you open the gate to radical insight.

A common thread in spiritual traditions around the world is the use of parable and paradox to express the nature of reality. Joel's article, "In the Reality Garden," on page 3, follows this ancient tradition, in which the most direct statement that can be made about reality takes place in a story. . .

In the culture most of us grew up in, with its roots in Western Europe, a peculiar gulf exists between science and spirituality. The providence of truth, real truth, i.e. objective truth, is science. The scope of religious truth has grown narrower and narrower, until it claims only an indefinable territory within the subjectivity of each person. But just when even the terrain of the human spirit was being mapped into psychological drives and complexes (about a hundred years ago), the materialist foundations of science began to turn inside out. It's no longer possible to define a universe in which consciousness is an incidental phenomenon. The statements of physicists suddenly begin to resemble the statements of mystics from many different spiritual traditions. We take a look at statements from both sides in "Reality: Through the Eyes of Scientists and Mystics" on page 8.

— the editor.

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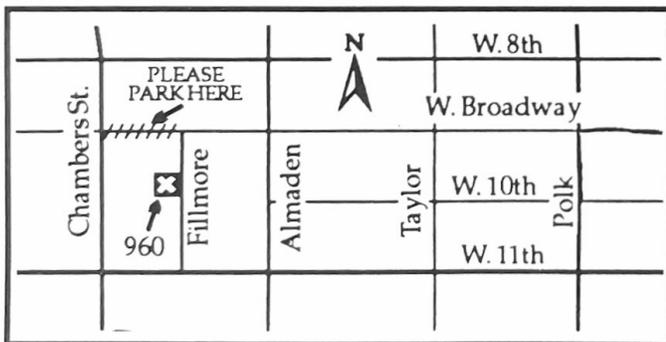
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The Center for Sacred Sciences is a non-profit, tax-exempt organization dedicated to the creation and dissemination of a new Worldview, based on the wisdom of humanity's great spiritual teachers, but presented in forms appropriate to our present scientific 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 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.



**Meeting Address: 960 Fillmore St.**

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## Center News:

**A Wedding.** Center members Mike and Ellen were joined in marriage on December 6, 1992. Joel performed the ceremony, which was designed in close collaboration with the bride and groom to underscore the spiritual nature of the commitment the couple were making to each other. After the ceremony Joel reminded guests of their obligation to enjoy life. Everyone obeyed and ate, drank, danced, and made merry into the night. A special treat was a solo rendition of the song "Pink Cadillac" by Mike's new stepdaughter, Elizabeth. A good time was had by all, and we at the Center wish the new family all the best.



**On Retreat at Cloud Mountain, Fall 1992.** From left, back row: Gene Gibbs, Paul Weintraub, Anne Likes, Bev Forster, John Richardson, Fred Chambers, Anita Runyon. Front row: Mike Taylor, Therese Engelmann, Joel, Katie Geiser, Bonnie Linn.

**CSS On Video.** Last fall, California video producer, George Heaton, and his wife, Sita, came to Eugene to tape more than six hours of Center teachings and activities. George's company, Heaton Video Productions will be distributing this material on three tapes. The tapes will also be available for purchase or borrowing from the Center Library (see the enclosed Tape & Publication Catalog). Although George does try to recoup his costs through rentals and sales, the primary motivation for his work is spiritual: "I want to do whatever I can to help spread the message." Other tapes of his include interviews with Nisagadatta's disciple, Ramesh S. Balsekar and Perry Mafi, author of *Wake Up From Your Dream*.

## IN THE REALITY GARDEN

by Joel

Once there was a young artist named Every Wo-man who had grown bored with her painting. Although her unusual abstracts were highly acclaimed by the critics, she herself had come to view them as fatuous and self-indulgent. She longed to do something substantial with her life but didn't know what that could be. One day, passing a house with a large yard for sale, she got an inspiration. She would buy the house and turn the yard into the world's most perfect garden.

What, after all, could be more substantial than dipping one's hands into the rich earth, digging out solid rocks, and planting living seeds! Here was a project worthy of her energies. In fact, so engrossed did she become in creating her perfect garden that for several years she neglected her painting altogether. During this period Every Wo-man wrote a number of letters bragging about her garden to a philosopher friend who also happened to love gardens but lived too far away to visit hers in person. After a while she received a letter back, complaining that her descriptions of the garden were so subjective it was impossible for him to make an independent evaluation of it. Instead of portraying her garden in words, he suggested she paint a picture of it, depicting everything as "objectively and realistically as possible." That way he could judge for himself whether it was as "perfect" as she claimed.

This proposal delighted Every Wo-man. She hadn't painted anything *realistic* since art school. To do an old-fashioned landscape would be an exhilarating challenge. Happily, she prepared her canvas and paints. But walking around in search of a spot to set up her easel, Every Wo-man started to realize that complying with her friend's request was going to be more difficult than she had first supposed.

To begin with there was this problem of choosing an angle. Each angle presented her with a different view, but which view would represent

the garden as it *really* was? Obviously no single angle could. To represent the garden as it *really* was would require painting it from many different angles. But even if she decided to do this she realized that the number of possible angles was infinite. Moreover, having studied a bit of math, she also realized that any finite number subtracted from an infinite number still leaves an infinite number. This meant that no matter how many perspectives she painted of her garden, an infinite number of equally *real* perspectives would necessarily be left out.

She decided the most rational thing to do would be to adopt a cubist style that could suggest several perspectives at once and, thus, (by implication) the infinite possibilities which lay in between. Moving from one location to another she began to paint her picture, weaving the various angles together as smoothly as she knew how. But after working in this manner for several hours, she noticed another problem just as troublesome as the one of perspective.

She had started her painting in the morning when the garden's colors all had a crisp blue tinge. Now it was noon. The light had changed and everything sparkled with an almost unbearable brilliance. Consequently, what she had painted earlier in the day no longer matched what she was working on at the moment. What's more, the colors would continue to change, so that by evening the garden would again be transformed—this time from its

*cont'd*

*In the Reality Garden, cont'd*

present brilliance into a muted scene suffused with orange hues.

But that wasn't all. Currently it was spring and the tulips were in bloom. By summer, however, the tulips would be gone and the garden would be dominated by roses. And in the fall the roses would die and the chrysanthemums arrive. In other words, not only were the garden's colors constantly changing, but the actual plants themselves would all be transformed with the seasons.

Thus, just as choosing a particular angle falsified the garden's actual or total reality (by excluding an infinite number of possible alternate angles), so choosing to paint it at any particular moment would also leave unrepresented all those other infinite moments which were no less *real*.

Again, the only way she could see out of this dilemma was to paint the different seasons and times of day simultaneously, even if this meant juxtaposing evening hues with morning ones, and superimposing chrysanthemums upon tulips.

By late afternoon the painting was almost finished and Every Wo-man stepped back to survey her work. Although the picture was somewhat disorientating, with its bizarre mixture of angles and hours, still she had promised to depict "everything" and everything seemed to be there—flowers, bushes, gnarled trees, moss-covered rocks, pebbly paths, clumps of ferns, etc. Upon reflection, however, she realized that there was still one thing missing—herself. Was she not in her garden? Obviously, she was. Why, then, was she not in the painting? Obviously, she should be.

The problem was that, although Every Wo-man was quite certain her whole body was in the garden, all she could see of it was her hand holding her brush in front of the canvas. If she were to paint her *whole* body, she would have to use her imagination and that would be a violation of 'objectivity'. In the end, she settled on depicting only what she could see—her hand and brush.

This accomplished, all that remained to be painted was a single blank space, about the size of a postage stamp, right in the middle of the canvas. What this space represented was that portion of the garden which was blocked from view by the painting itself. But as Every Wo-man started to peer over her easel, it suddenly occurred to her that her painting was *also* an object in the garden. If she was going to paint the garden as it *actually* was, with *everything* in it, then

she would certainly have to include her own painting in the picture. And yet that would mean reproducing the whole painting as a miniature within that little blank space, which would be quite impossible. Besides, since the painting would then include within itself a representation of itself, this representation would, in turn, also have to contain within itself a representation of itself. In fact, there was no end to the number of representations within representations which would be required. But even if she had an infinite canvas on which to paint infinite representations—as well as infinite time to do it in—Every Wo-man realized that she would never be able to complete the task. Like an eye, trying to see itself, she would always be one step ahead of her own work.

It was evening now and Every Wo-man's energy was fading as fast as the light, so she decided to pack it in for the night. Perhaps tomorrow she would be able to think of some way to finish the painting. She brought it into her studio, drank some tea laced with brandy, and fell into restless, dream-tossed sleep.

Surveying the painting in the morning, she was amazed at how differently it had turned out from the one she had originally envisioned. She had wanted to do a *realistic* landscape, but somehow her very effort to be realistic had produced instead this hodge-podge of conflicting perspectives, clashing colors, and contradictory shapes. Moreover, there remained that patch of bare canvas, smack in the center, which she still had no idea how to fill. Nor did she come any nearer to finding a solution in the days that followed. Finally, in disgust she resolved to drop the whole project and get on with her life. This, however, proved easier said than done.

The painting itself was not hard to forget, but the riddles it had raised continued to haunt Every Wo-man whenever she ventured into her garden. Now, as she strolled along its meandering paths, she found she could no longer simply enjoy the plants and flowers for themselves. The sense of a constantly shifting perspective had become a permanent part of her awareness.

And, like a conspicuous camera move, which calls attention to itself and thus reminds the viewer that what she is watching is just a movie, the awareness of this changing perspective made her wonder if what *she* was watching wasn't just some kind of "mental movie." Similarly, she had become acutely consciousness of even the subtlest transformations of color, shape, sound, smell, and textures—transformations that were occurring continually, even within the space of a single

minute. As a result of these heightened sensitivities, what had once appeared to be so substantial, so solid, so *real*—earth, stones, trees, blossoms—seemed increasingly ephemeral, transitory and *unreal*. Was there nothing fixed or permanent to be found anywhere in her garden?

Equally disconcerting was Every Wo-man's growing suspicion that whatever manifested 'out there' depended, in part, on choices she made 'in here.' Not only did the garden's appearance depend on where she chose to view it from, or the time of day, but if she looked to the right, the garden moved to the left. If she look to the left, the garden moved to the right. And if she closed her eyes completely, the garden vanished completely! Like everyone else, she had always believed that things existed even when you weren't looking at them. But now, she realized, there was no way to verify this. Of course, when she did open her eyes, the garden re-appeared once again. But was it the *same* garden, or a *new* one, freshly created?

The more she thought about these things, the more she realized thought itself would never yield a satisfactory answer. Thoughts, like her paintings, were made of images, and, like her paintings, these images could never completely capture reality as she experienced it. Something would always be left out. Therefore, if she was ever going to get to the bottom of reality, she would have to abandon thought and rely on experience alone.

As the weeks passed, Every Wo-man began spending more and more time in her garden, even staying there the whole night through. She also took to sitting very quietly in one position trying to reduce her own movements to a minimum. By doing this, she hoped to be able to observe her garden in as detached a manner as possible, much like a zoologist who, studying animals in the wild, is careful not to interfere with their natural behavior.

At first, sitting like this was difficult. Often her own desires would distract her—hunger, thirst, a longing for friends, a yearning for lovers. But whenever she left her garden to satisfy them, she found that the pleasures

she derived were as impermanent as everything else. This led her to examine her desires more closely, as well as other aspects of what she had always considered her 'self'. But instead of finding any 'self', all she found was an interminable parade of thoughts, feelings, sensations, moods, etc.—all of which arose and passed exactly like the phenomena of her garden. Where did one begin and the other end? It was getting harder and harder to tell.

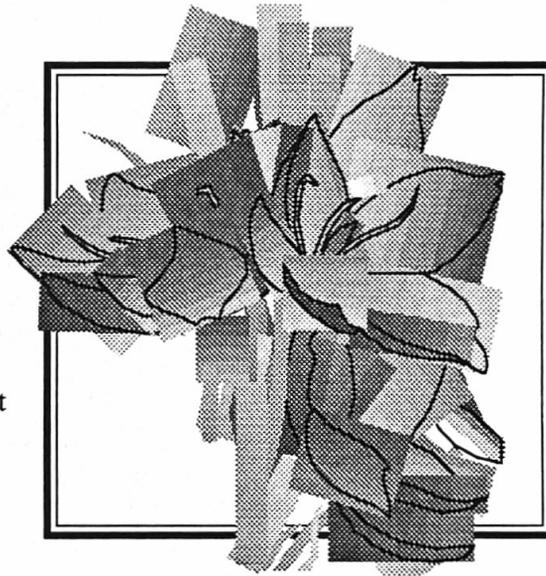
Gradually, as the weeks turned into months, Every Wo-man's mind grew calmer and her desires fewer. When she was hungry, she'd eat. When she was tired, she'd sleep. She paid her bills and took care of business but spent no more time on these activities than was absolutely necessary. And always when her chores were done, she would return to her garden to sit, watching for just one glimpse of something *real* in what had become for her an endless stream of dream-like transformations.

It was autumn when her philosopher friend arrived, pounding on her door and demanding to know why she hadn't returned any of his calls or answered his letters inquiring about the painting. The painting? Oh, yes...of the garden.

She told him it wasn't finished

but he insisted on seeing it anyway. She shrugged and led him into the studio where the painting still sat untouched since that first day. Seeing nothing but a chaos of colors and shapes her friend was shocked. It was obviously the work of a woman gone mad! But he was even more shocked when she showed him the garden itself. Weeds had sprouted everywhere between the flowers. The trees had gone unpruned, and the stone paths were half hidden by a thick carpet of dying leaves. Why, in God's name, had she let it all go like this!

Every Wo-man tried to explain. In an ocean of infinite change, what was the point of trying to make anything perfect? Even if one succeeded for an instant in attaining such a goal, in the very next instant, it would all start to come unraveled. Better to just let things take their course. But her friend was far from convinced. It was *she* who was coming unraveled, he declared. Had she seen herself in a mirror lately?



*cont'd*

*In the Reality Garden, cont'd*

Why, she looked as wild as her garden! This at least was true, Every Wo-man thought, and for some reason it made her smile. But her friend continued to rant and rave until Every Wo-man could no longer make sense of his words. They were just empty sounds coming out of a flapping mouth.

Later, after her friend had gone, as Every Wo-man sat in her garden the word 'empty' drifted back to her mind. Perhaps that was the one thing that you could say about absolutely everything—like her friend's words, it was all *empty*. She began concentrating more intently than she ever had before. Not letting her attention wander even for a moment, she focused it laser-like on whatever arose in consciousness. What arose, of course, were the same ceaseless transformations she had been observing for months, but this time she noticed something new. They had become utterly transparent, and she could see clearly that there was nothing in them at all. They were all perfectly *empty*. The garden was empty! She was empty! Emptiness permeated everything like a palatable *presence* which grew stronger and stronger until she realized it filled the whole universe. That was it! *Emptiness was the reality of all things!*

Now this was a momentous discovery, but curiously it seemed to leave her personally unaffected. She felt neither happy nor sad, joyful nor depressed. She just sat there, sinking deeper and deeper into this emptiness into which all forms were dissolving, including herself. Was she was dying? Yes, she was certainly dying. Funny, all her life she had been afraid of death, but now that it was here, it didn't trouble her in the least. What was life but emptiness? What was death but more emptiness? There was simply no difference between them. Life and death came and went but Emptiness was forever.

Then, suddenly out of nowhere—*exactly* out of nowhere—a bird chirped. And, out of that *same* nowhere, Every Wo-man's voice chirped back. Then again. Chirp, chirp! Only, it wasn't *really* Every Wo-man's voice that was chirping, for you see, Every Wo-man was no more. Nor was it *really* a bird's voice chirping, because no bird had ever been. It was just—Chirp-chirp! Chirp-chirp!—followed by laughter—lots of laughter, and dancing, of course, and whooping and

yelling well into the night.

The next morning Every Wo-man-who-was-no-more went to look at her painting. Suddenly, she knew just what to put in the blank spot. At last it was finished. She called it *The Reality Garden*. But after that, she never touched brush or canvas again. By spring, however, she was back in her yard, pulling up weeds, pruning trees, and planting seeds. When the tulips arrived they entertained her with poems. Roses preferred more serious fare and when summer came she spent many hours with them engaged in subjects too esoteric to tell about here. Chrysanthemums, on the other hand, loved music and countless songs were exchanged, much to everyone's delight. In winter she sat with the seeds enjoying the Silence at the center of the world.

News of her garden began to spread and as the years went by more and more people came to see it. But they always had trouble finding its owner. Her feet had grown so gnarled they blended right in with the old tree roots. Her bony arms had become indistinguishable from the twisted branches, and her stringy hair resembled nothing so much as a hank of Spanish moss. Even when people looked straight into her eyes, all they could see were reflections of whatever flowers happened to be in bloom. Once a visitor even tried to break off her finger, thinking it was a twig. "Ouch!" she exclaimed, but really there was no one there to mind.

When she died, of course, there was a revival of interest in her paintings. Collectors and investors scrambled to buy up all her work, but the one that fetched the highest price was *The Reality Garden*. This was considered her greatest masterpiece precisely because no one had the slightest idea what it was about. It was purchased at auction by an oil executive and his wife, who hung it in their living room but never bothered to glance at it again. Only their five year old daughter took an interest. She loved to climb up on the back of the couch and stare at it for hours. What especially intrigued the little girl was the tiny mirror, about the size of a postage stamp, embedded right in the center of the painting. Looking into it she could see herself in the Garden of Reality and, for reasons which her parents never fathomed, this made her laugh and laugh. ❖

January 1993



## Library Page

### CSS Library Hours:

Sunday afternoons  
2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.



Tuesday evenings  
5:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

### Library News:

Last summer and fall we acquired many new books, and this spring we will acquire a dozen new videos for the library. These new additions bring our collection to approximately 2200 books, 350 audio tapes, and 65 videos. We still need your old books to sell to raise money for new books for the library.

Because of popular demand the library fish will stay, although more space and more bookcases are needed.

A few of you have written to tell us of your favorite new and old books, thanks and keep it up!

JWK.

### Book Reviews:

#### *Dream Yoga and the Practice of Natural Light*

by Namkhai Norbu

Snow Lion Publications, \$12.95

Namkhai Norbu is a Tibetan master of the Dzogchen tradition. In this book he gives instructions for developing clarity within the sleep and dream states. The methods for guiding dreams are part of a broader system for enhancing self-awareness called Dzogchen. In this tradition, the development of lucidity in the dream state is understood in the context of generating greater awareness for the ultimate purpose of attaining liberation.

The editor's introduction provides a helpful background to the understanding and study of dream work. The subjects discussed are science and dream phenomena, dreams and depth psychology, and dream work in traditional cultures.

In his description of the nature and classes of dreams, Norbu Rinpoche groups our dreams into two main categories: the more common types of dreams appearing from karmic traces and other types of dreams appearing from clarity of mind. The karmic dreams are related to an event (in a previous life, in youth, or the recent past) that touched the person deeply and left traces of tension, fear or other strong emotion. When body, energy and mind begin to relax, the individual's clarity may spontaneously appear as dreams of clarity. Clarity dreams of previous karma can occur, as well as dreams that anticipate a future event, though most commonly the dreams relate to recent experiences.

The next chapter details what Norbu Rinpoche calls the practice of natural light. This is the state between falling asleep and the beginning of dreams. There is the presence of the state of awareness, and yet mind has not begun to enter into operations such as thinking. The awareness of this state of natural light between sleep and dreaming allows for lucidity while dreaming, and ultimately mastery of one's dreams. Then the person governs his or her dream. Throughout the book Norbu Rinpoche illustrates these concepts with his own amazing clarity dreams. ❖

Paul Weintraub

#### *The Lover & The Serpent: Dreamwork Within a Sufi Tradition*

by Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee

Element Books, \$13.95

If you're the intuitive type and like to read about other people's dreams and their interpretations, this is an excellent book. In the first chapter, Vaughan-Lee lays out the sufi path according to the Naqshbandi Order and gives examples from the dreams of past and present sufis (including those of his teacher Irina Tweedie). The remaining chapters are arranged according to archetypal dream "stages" and are rich with dream examples from the sufi students of Irina Tweedie. The chapter on "Teaching Dreams" was very interesting, and previously I have only heard Joel talk about this subject.

If you're not the intuitive type and other people's dreams often remain obscure and remote even with interpretations, or if you are just beginning to read about dreamwork you might be better served by another book. Let me suggest two practical, technique-oriented books: *Innerwork* by Robert Johnson or *Dreams & Spiritual Growth* by Louis Savory et al. ❖

Jennifer W. Knight

## Reality: Through the Eyes of Mystics and Scientists

Crazy Horse dreamed and went into the world where there is nothing but the spirits of all things. That is the real world beyond this one, and everything we see here is something like a shadow from that world. —Black Elk (Lakota Shaman)

In physics the mathematical formulae are not an end in themselves...but symbols for some kind of reality which lies beyond the level of everyday experiences. —Max Born (physicist)

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With the realization of the falsity of the imagined characters...the once believed ultimacy of the line of division between the 'self' and the 'not-self', the subjective and the objective, is rejected as untrue. —Nagarjuna (Buddhist)

The subject-object distinction is indeed at the very root of the unease that many people feel in connection with quantum mechanics. Some such distinction is dictated by the postulates of the theory, but exactly where or when to make it is not prescribed. —J.S. Bell (physicist)

◆◆◆

In the consciousness of Brahman the universe is, and into him it returns. —Upanishads (Hindu)

When the province of physical theory was extended to encompass microscopic phenomena, through the creation of quantum mechanics, the concept of consciousness came to the fore again: it was not possible to formulate the laws of quantum mechanics in a fully consistent way without reference to consciousness. —Eugene Wigner (physicist)

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I teach that the multitudinousness of objects have no reality in themselves but are only seen of the mind . . . . —Lankavatara Sutra (Buddhist)

Thus it dawned upon me that fundamentally everything was subjective, everything without exception. That was a shock. —Max Born (physicist)

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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...All duality is falsely imagined. —Lankavatara Sutra (Buddhist)



Bohr advocated the use of both pictures, which he called "complementary" to each other. The two pictures are, of course, mutually exclusive, because a certain thing cannot at the same time be a particle (i.e., substance confined to a very small volume) and a wave (i.e., a field spread out over a large space), but the two complement each other. —Werner Heisenberg (physicist)

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As to that false appearance which appears to the reasoner,  
As of a Globe rolling through Voidness, it is a delusion . . .  
The Microscope knows not of this nor the Telescope. they alter  
The ratio of the Spectators Organs, but leave Objects untouched  
For every space larger than a red Globule of Man's blood.  
Is visionary; . . .  
and every space smaller than a Globule of Man's blood.  
opens  
Into Eternity of which this vegetable Earth is but a shadow:  
—William Blake, English mystic

However, all the opponents of the Copenhagen interpretation do agree on one point. It would . . . be desirable to return to the reality concept of classical physics . . . materialism. They would prefer to come back to the idea of an objective real world whose smallest parts exist objectively in the same sense as stones or trees exist, independently of whether or not we observe them. This, however, is impossible . . . —Werner Heisenberg (physicist)

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# THE MYSTIC'S CHALLENGE

by Mike

Due to snow, the schools were closed the other morning and my family was sleeping in late. My wife was sleeping in my arms as I lay awake enjoying the tranquility. Suddenly she said that she would talk to our daughter Elizabeth about keeping the TV turned down in the morning when we were still in bed, that she really had it blaring this morning. I said that as far as I knew Elizabeth was still sleeping, and there had been no noise from the TV. Somewhat amused, Ellen realized that she must have been dreaming, and soon returned to sleep.

A little while later she awoke, asking me if Elizabeth was up yet. Giving in to a mischievous whim to play with her mind, I said, "Of course she's up, didn't you hear the TV blasting?" I felt her body jerk in shock and could just imagine her suddenly disoriented mind searching in panic for 'reality'. Was she dreaming earlier when I told her the TV wasn't on? But that had seemed so real. Or was she dreaming now— this seemed so real, here and now! How could she tell?!

Sensing immediately that my little joke had much more powerful effects than I had intended, I admitted right away that I was just messing with her mind. Her relief was quickly followed by friendly accusations of my having a "sick sense of humor" and admonitions that I could drive someone crazy doing that.

I relate this story because many of us have probably experienced, from any number of causes, the transitory disorientation and panic of our sense of reality suddenly becoming questionable. If it is questioned by someone else, we will often fight quite viciously to assert our 'rightness'. Threatening as such challenges from outside are, that threat pales against the fear that results when we lose our orientation internally. The fear is deep and visceral. We may wonder, "Am I going crazy?" The mind races, all its resources devoted to regaining its bearings, to determine again what is 'real'.

In circumstances like these, we have an opportunity to see clearly how tightly we cling to what we call 'reality'. In a relative sense, a conventionally agreed upon reality is very necessary for us to be able to live as human beings in a society. When challenged, individuals and societies will defend this shared sense

of reality as if it were a necessity of life, such as food, water, or shelter. But what, exactly, is this reality?

If we read the mystics, from many different cultures, from ancient times and modern, they universally tell us that what we think is real isn't Real! They say that this reality is just an illusion, a projection of mind, with no existence in and of itself. Jesus, in *The Gospel of Thomas*, says "the Kingdom of the Father is spread upon the earth, and men do not see it." A Hindu saint of our own century, Anandamayi Ma, says, "God alone is Truth, Happiness, Bliss. Do not set your hopes on anything except Supreme Beatitude, the Bliss of the Self. Naught else exists. What seems to exist outside of It is merely illusion." The Buddha, in *The Lankavatara Scripture*, says, "the world is only something seen of the mind itself . . . it is like a wheel of fire made by a revolving firebrand which is no wheel but which is imagined to be one by the ignorant." Not only do mystics say that we don't know what is real, they claim that all of our suffering is due to this delusion, and to our deep seated attachment to this illusory reality.

Throughout history, we human beings have perceived the objects of our senses and taken them to be Real. Desiring the sensations, experiences and ownership of these sense objects, we have suffered from want, dissatisfaction, and innumerable varieties of the pain of incompleteness. Believing our selves to be real, we suffer from fear of loss, fear of death.

The mystics claim that we have it all wrong, that our suffering is caused by delusion and attachment to things that don't truly exist, impermanent things that can never give lasting satisfaction. Reality (God, Brahman, The One), they say, was never born, will never die, is unchanging, eternal, and infinite. They claim that there is nothing *but* this Reality, and that includes this paper, these very words passing through your mind, and whatever you think of as 'yourself'. You don't exist, they say, as a separate entity, but are just a delusion arising in infinite Consciousness. They urge us to awaken from our delusion, to Know our identity with God. In the Upanishads, it is said,

When a man knows God he is free: his sorrows have an end and birth and death are no more. When

*cont'd*

### The Mystic's Challenge, cont'd

in inner union he is beyond the world of the body, then the third world, the world of the spirit is found, where the power of the All is, and man has all: for he is one with the ONE.

These teachings are very threatening to what we think of as our 'selves'. Our first reaction to hearing them might be to just dismiss them as being so much craziness. But if we look at these holy men and women, they seem to be totally, and unreasonable, happy. And if we look at the world, it seems to be mired in endless suffering. We cannot dismiss their testimony quite so easily.

But we are not asked to simply believe. Mere belief in what they teach will never be sufficient, they say. We must investigate for ourselves, test the teachings against our own experience. As quoted in *The Buddhist Bible*, "... Each one has to struggle for himself, the Perfect Ones have only pointed the way."

But how are we to find the courage to begin our investigation when we cling so tightly to our delusion? Faith is important. The great mystics of the past such as Jesus, the Buddha, Lao Tzu and The Prophet Mohammed serve as beacons through the ages. Their lives embodied such Truth and moral power that they shaped entire civilizations. Their teachings have held such value for humanity that they have been treasured and passed from generation to generation for thousands of years. These teachings, and the personal example of more contemporary mystics, show us a being so joyous and free, so loving and compassionate, and so divinely intelligent that we cannot help but be moved by their example, and this leads us to examine their teachings in our own lives, to try some of the practices that they suggest.

As we begin our personal investigation, our faith is augmented by insight and knowledge, but also a certain unease. We start to have glimpses through this reality we have constructed, and if we investigate the teachings assiduously enough, we see how replacing our now shaky reality with any other version of reality is ultimately going to prove unsatisfactory. Jesus said, "Let him who seeks, not cease seeking until he finds, and when he finds, he will be troubled, and when he has been troubled, he will marvel and he will reign over the All."

Mystics challenge their disciples in countless ways. Take any one of these challenges seriously and put it to the test. Joel has said that if we could see this pillow or this gong, or anything at all, for what it Truly is, we would know everything for what it is, and we would have attained Gnosis. Accept the Challenge!

The challenge serves as a prod to our practice. What is this no-thing, that mystics claim is the only Reality? What is this Nothing that mystics claim is who we really are? And what is this all about us, this floor we sit upon, the walls around us, the air we breathe, the light in our eyes, the warmth on our skin, what is all this if it is not Real? How do we find out?

A disciplined meditation practice, to train our concentration and mindfulness, is of inestimable value. With the seviceable mind this practice develops we can slow the whirling of the firebrand, calming and steady-ing the mind so it can disengage from the objects of the senses and loosen our attention from the snare of the discursive mind itself. Our everyday reality becomes a little more transparent as time goes by.

The challenge: to look at this pillow and see it for what it Truly is. We look at it, and at first we see a pillow. As we go deeper into a meditative state, we might be able to let go of the *concept* PILLOW and our experience of it becomes one of 'dark object against a mottled background'. Which is real, 'PILLOW' as a 'thing', or 'dark object against a mottled background'? But the question doesn't go deep enough. The mystics would all claim that no object is ultimately Real. The challenge acts as a prod. Look deeper . . .

. . . after much meditation, something in our mental awareness may relax further, something that was *creating* this black object, and now we may have an awareness of this visual sense object as being exactly what it is, and nothing more or less than the visual sensation that it appears to be. We can examine that sensation closely, and see the effort of mind that was required to make an object, and eventually a pillow, out of this bare sensation. How can these objects in consciousness be real if we can observe the process of mind that creates them? What *is* Real? The challenge prods us on . . .

. . . This bare sensation *itself* is a subtle object in consciousness. The teachings say that what we mistakenly perceive as an object *is* nothing other than Consciousness Itself, that the 'I' that wants to know doesn't exist . . .

. . . Teachings come to mind at various points to guide us. Joel says, "Gnosis is *effortless*." We realize that this struggle to *see* has been anything *but* effortless. Trusting our Guru, and after years of practice and exhaustion, we may finally see that there *is* nothing to be done. DO NOTHING!

So we sit, detached from acting, from wanting, from any thought no matter how profound or holy, we sit and let go. Undisturbed by doing, we just sit, with a still-

ness so deep that expectation can find no home in the growing clarity of awareness. By Grace, doing nothing, we may suddenly realize 'we' haven't ever been doing anything! Our thoughts, feelings, sights, sounds, sensations, all crystal clear now, have no nucleus, no 'I'. They are all just objects arising in consciousness, one thing as much 'I' as another. There is no 'I'— 'I' am infinite, perfect, Consciousness Itself! The veils have parted and the infinite universe (seamlessly including what we used to think of as 'I') is seen to be formed of the only true substance, Consciousness Itself! The ecstasy may fade, and the veils of ignorance generated by habitual patterns may temporarily cloud the Truth, but having seen, we rest assured in the knowledge that Consciousness Itself, our true Self, is unerringly guiding us to Perfect Wisdom.

At some point on the spiritual path, we will probably find that we have become disengaged from the values and goals, the consensual reality of our society, to some extent or another. Even basic functions of the mind seem to change and mature through spiritual practice. All this requires a letting go of agreement with the social world around us. These preliminary steps help prepare us for the totality of surrender and release required to pierce the subtlest veils. To let go every last vestige of attachment to the endless stream of objects arising in consciousness, this requires the sacrifice of ALL. Letting go ABSOLUTELY, at the deepest level, any concern with self, this body, this mind, this world. To let it all go completely, fundamentally, to the point where there is nobody letting it go. But be assured, this release does not lead to oblivion, insanity, or death. As stated in *The Buddhist Bible*:

... the old body continues to function and the old mind serves the old body, but now it is free from the control of the mortal mind. There has been an inconceivable transformation-death by which the false imagination of his particularized individual personality has been transcended by a realization of his oneness with the universalized mind of Tathagatahood, from which realization there will be no recession.

The testimony of the mystics helps us to begin to let go with less fear. As our practice progresses and our understanding deepens, we come to know the truth of what the mystics say from our own experience. Knowledge replaces faith progressively, with the Teachers of the ages lighting the path before us. Their challenge, "What is Real?", prods us on, but it is we who must take up the challenge and walk the path. No one can do it for us. ❖

January 1993

## A Reading List: The Question of Reality

The Center Library has many books from different traditions. This book list is designed as a starting place for people wanting to know more about this issue's theme of reality. The reading list includes books that explore the question of reality from different spiritual standpoints and also from that of Western science. Books are rated on a scale of "1" (most accessible) to "3" (most challenging).

### Science:

*Quantum Questions*, Ken Wilber, Shambhala 1985. (1)

*In Search of Schrodinger's Cat*, John Gribbin, Bantam Books, 1984. (1)

*The Social Construction of Reality*, Peter L. Berger & Thomas Luckmann, Doubleday, 1966. (2)

*The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Thomas S. Kuhn, Second Edition, University of Chicago Press, 1970. (3)

### Mysticism:

*The Upanishads*, Translated by Juan Mascaro, Penguin Books, 1985. (1)

*Hsin Hsin Ming*, Sengtsan, White Pine Press, 1984. (1)

*The Myth of the Eternal Return*, Mircea Eliade, Princeton University Press, 1971. (2)

*The Vision of God*, Nicholas of Cusa, Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1978. (2)

*Nagarjuna's Philosophy*, K. Venkata Ramanan, Samuel Weiser Inc, 1978. (3)

*The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, William C. Chittick, SUNY Press, 1989. (3)

On Contemplating Longchempa's Mandala  
Of The Five Elements  
At Cloud Mountain Retreat Center

On the kitchen deck with a cup of steaming tea,  
rain-blown leaves reel through luminous space.  
A garbage fire's orange flames blaze beyond  
the garden, where Jonathan digs a ditch,  
throwing shovelfuls of thick chocolate-colored  
earth in the smoke-stained autumn air.

Thus do the five elements arise all at once—  
earth, fire, wind, water and space—and,  
all at once, even this work-a-day world is  
revealed to be a pure self-transparent mandala,  
exactly as the old Forest Dweller\* said.

But don't think this signifies anything,  
or you'll fall deeper into delusion.  
Now is the time to abandon all teachings:  
When thoughts come to mind, just let them be  
and behold!—they, too, taste of perfect symmetry.

Joel

\*Longchempa

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By Robert Tompkins. 90 min, 2/92

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60 min, 7/92

Q&A #8: BOUNDARIES &  
COMPASSION  
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90 min, 8/92

THE USES AND ABUSES OF GOD  
90 min, 12/92



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A spiritual autobiography by Joel, \$11.95

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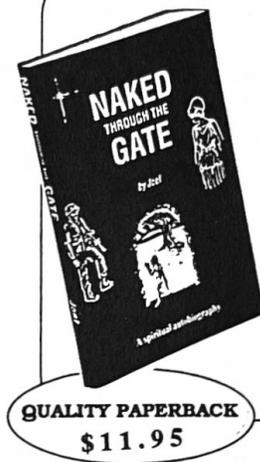
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