

SUMMER - FALL
1998

Center Voice

The Newsletter of the Center for Sacred Sciences

Special Focus: **Breaking Through**

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In This Issue . . .

During our last Fall Retreat something happened that has great significance for this spiritual community—Andrea Pucci attained a Gnostic awakening. A spiritual practitioner and student of Joel and other teachers for fourteen years, Andrea Realized her true Self as Consciousness, Itself—the eternal and infinite Source of all that is. In celebration of her Awakening, we dedicate this issue of the Center Voice to the theme of “Breaking Through” to this ultimate Realization.

The main feature of this issue is an **Interview with Andrea**, conducted over a few days and in various venues during her visit with us in early March. Besides being a delight to be around, she was extremely open and very generous with us in sharing the story of her path to Gnosis and her experience of life since her Awakening. We who were with her for this very first public sharing of her story were tremendously excited and inspired by it. We hope that you, too, may share in that excitement through reading her words.

When we read the testimony of mystics or listen to Joel's teachings, many of us find ourselves moved and inspired. But sometimes there is a small voice of doubt that says, “They're mystics — could I ever hope to attain this Realization, really?” For those of us who knew Andrea before, or who were there on the Fall Retreat with her, she has answered that question most eloquently. In this issue's **Center Voices**, three of our Practitioners reflect on what Andrea's Gnosis has meant to them. Perhaps their sharing will resonate with you or shed additional light on your own feelings after reading Andrea's interview.

Many of us find inspiration, comfort, and instruction in the stories of other seekers' journeys to God. Our **Library Corner**, in keeping with our theme, focuses on accounts of Enlightenment, with reviews of a few selected spiritual autobiographies from the many in our library's collection. We round out this issue with the **Center News**, bringing you up to date on events that include some truly constructive happenings. As always, we hope you will find something of value herein.

In this breaking-through I receive that God and I are one. Then I am what I was, and then I neither diminish nor increase, for I am then an immovable cause that moves all things.

— Meister Eckhart (Christian mystic)

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Sheila Craven

Contributing Editor:

Michael Taylor

Photography:

Michael Taylor

Merry Song

Proofreading:

Merry Song

Dawn Kurzka

Wayne Leeds



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



Meetings: 1571 Buck St., Eugene

Phone: (541) 345-0102

<http://www.integralscience.org/css>

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ANDREA PUCCI VISIT

In response to an invitation from our practitioners, **Andrea Pucci** travelled to Eugene from her home in Bishop, California to give her first public teaching as an Awakened One. During the Wednesday evening meeting with our Practitioners Group, and again at a pizza party the next night, Andrea shared with us the story of her journey to God, and her experience of life since her breakthrough to Gnosis. She also spent many hours being interviewed by your editors for the article that appears in this issue. Her effervescent personality, generosity, and joyful openness made her a delight to be with, and we are all very thankful for the blessing of meeting her and the inspiration of her presence and example.



Joel and Andrea

A VERY MOVING STORY...

Other than Andrea's Gnosis, the big news at the Center this year is our change of residence. The house on Fillmore Street had served us well since August of 1991, but over this last year the Center simply outgrew it. After a few months of trying to squeeze thirty or more people into the Fillmore living room on Sundays, it was clear that we needed a larger space.

In response to this need, Joel and Jennifer have purchased the house at 1571 Buck Street. This will serve as their home, as well as the new lodgings for the Center. The house is located adjacent to an attractive neighborhood park and also has a delightfully wooded backyard of its own. After a few months of interim accommodations for our meetings and library in other parts of the house, it is hoped that by the time you read this the remodeling of our new space will be complete. This will include a large (and cat-free, for those with allergies) meeting room where the garage and carport once stood, a somewhat more spacious library, and individual offices for Joel and Jennifer.

Our deep gratitude goes to Joel and Jennifer for purchasing this house and remodeling it at their own expense to accommodate the needs of our growing spiritual community. Much gratitude is also owed to Therese Englemann, who purchased the Fillmore Street house for use by the Center and Joel and Jennifer, and has been renting it to us at below market value. Thank you, Therese, for providing this community with a home for more than six years!



Our Center's New Home

SPRING RETREAT

From May 29 through June 3, 1998 we held our five-day **Spring Retreat** at Cloud Mountain Retreat Center in Castle Rock, WA. Retreat Coordinator Fred Chambers worked with the Cloud Mountain staff to find extra rooms to accommodate a record twenty-four participants, who came to hear and to practice Joel's teachings on the theme, "**Entering into Silence.**" With a mixture

of traditional meditation, a few innovative experiments, and Joel's personal guidance, many of us tasted for the first time that Silence from which all creation arises. An additional blessing was the presence of Andrea Pucci, who graciously made herself available for private consultation as well as leading the group in a new meditation practice.

Center News continued on page 16



RETREATANTS: (Bottom row from left) Ann Mizera, Merry Song, Gene Gibbs, Karen Fierman, Barbara Dewey, Clivonne Corbett, Andrea Pucci, (middle row) Michael Taylor, Sheila Craven, Jim Zajac, Maggie Free, Joel,

Mora Dewey, Jim Patterson, Miriam Reinhart, Todd Corbett, (top row) Therese Engelmann, Fred Chambers, Carla Wenzlaff, David Cunningham, Mike Craven, Dawn Kurzka, Damien Pierce, and Anita Runyan.



BREAKING THROUGH... A JOURNEY TO AWAKENING

An interview with Andrea Pucci by Joel

Andrea Pucci is a forty-eight year old nurse currently living in Bishop, California, in the shadows of the High Sierras. On October 2, 1997, after a fourteen year journey, Andrea had a Gnostic Awakening during our Fall Retreat at Cloud Mountain. The following is based on a talk she gave to our Practitioners Group on March 4, 1998, as well as several interviews conducted by members of the Center Voice staff during her visit to Eugene.

Joel: I first met Andrea in 1983 when I went to stay with my teacher, Dr. Wolff, in Lone Pine, California. Andrea was his nurse, companion, student, disciple—everything. She lived with him at the main house. I had a little cabin down the road. We got to know each other through that arrangement.

Andrea was my very first unofficial student. By that I mean, when I was living at Dr. Wolff's, I was writing my book and I was not giving any teachings. I never imagined I would ever be a teacher. I thought my obligation would just be to write this account of what happened—sort of bear witness to Gnosis. Then I'd send it out to the universe and go to work at some little hardware store in the mountains and just live in bliss the rest of my life. Things didn't work out that way. One of the reasons they didn't is because of Andrea.

Dr. Wolff was 95 or 96 at the time—elderly. It was hard for him to concentrate for long periods. When students came, it was difficult for him to answer all their questions so I became his unofficial interpreter. We'd sit around, and they would ask questions about his work, and I would answer them, and he would be there to nod “yes,” or “no.” One night, after I'd been living there about three months, Andrea came down to my cabin and she said, “All right, now tell me what's going on. The way you talk, you didn't get all that stuff just from reading Dr. Wolff's books...”

Andrea: I said, “You *know* something.”

J: That's right. So she was the first one I really told about my Gnosis. I told her about it and what I was doing there, writing my book. Then she started coming down to my cabin periodically, asking more questions, and then she started asking me questions when I was up at the main house, and asking me questions all over the place. Then she told Amit and Maggie Goswami about me and the same thing happened.

They started asking me questions. Eventually, Amit and Maggie became my first official students and they were the ones who brought me up here to Eugene to establish the Center for Sacred Sciences. So, that's how I became a teacher. I didn't plan to be a teacher, but this one [Andrea] started asking me questions. So she's the one you should thank or blame—depending on your point of view—for everything that's happened.

Andrea and I have kept in touch over the years. She's had many other teachers besides me—which she'll tell you about in a minute—but she's also come on a number of our retreats at Cloud Mountain. Last year she came on our Fall Retreat and there she had an unmistakable Gnostic Awakening. This is something I've always looked forward to—someday one of my students is going to Wake Up. I never knew when or where. Sometimes I *do* get premonitions, but they're usually about stupid little things—like finding a parking space—never about who's going to Awaken. So, it never occurred to me Andrea would be the first. But I should've known, because this is so karmically perfect. You see, she was my first student, and now she's become my first born.

I first noticed something had happened when we were sitting in the meditation hall. She seemed a bit disoriented, so I looked at her and it was like suddenly I could see right through her—not that she became visually transparent, but in the Tibetan tradition they say the mind of the student and the teacher merge. I never quite understood what that meant, but when I looked at her, sure enough, there was just no difference. It was quite startling. Here was this woman I've known all these years. Nothing's changed in one sense, except now there's no wall. It's just gone! Anyway, we talked some up at Cloud Mountain, and we've talked on the phone since, and there's no doubt in my mind Andrea has Awakened.

A month or so ago, some of you suggested that we might want to have Andrea come to Eugene to answer questions. You remember at the time I was very insistent that I not be the one to invite her, because in my tradition—such as it is—the way you become a teacher is you don't decide to teach. People just start asking you questions and then you find you have no choice—you can't help but try to answer them. So the invitation had to come from one of you—a student—and eventually Merry Song did call, and now here Andrea is, about to give a teaching. And this, too, is perfect—a kind of karmic revenge—because she was the one who destroyed the dream of living my life out in bliss, and now you're about to do the same thing to her.

So, I'll turn this over to Andrea. [*To Andrea*] Maybe you can tell them a little about your spiritual background—your path and practices.

A: First, I want to say I really feel connected to all of you, in terms of a spiritual sangha. I've been listening to Joel's tapes over the years, and I recognize your voices—Todd's, Merry Song's, Fred's—so, I've felt somewhat a part of this community from the beginning. And then last fall, when Fred called me up from a thousand miles away to say, "Do you want to go on retreat?" I just felt, what a beautiful thing. That's why I went—because you called me up.

Fred: You were on the list [*laughs*].

A: And you do that. You keep the list, and I felt like that was a really wonderful thing to do. That's the beauty of sangha. Out of nowhere, somebody calls up and says, "Do you want to go on retreat?" There was just something going on, that in a sense, has always been going, which is this knowing that everything is right. Everything is beautiful. Everything is okay. Even in the midst of suffering, of confusion, and everything else. I think I've always had this. Especially because it turned out to be a very powerful doorway for me. Through gratitude, or through the sense of feeling blessed, there's a whole kind of calmness and presentness that happens, because you're not worried or concerned about the past, or wanting something in the future. It's just about coming home to right now. I think this is a practice, just pure and simple gratitude for the blessings of whatever it is that is presenting itself—PRESENTing itself. That was a big part of it. I've really enjoyed the search. I've really enjoyed being a suffering being [*laughs*]. I just had to clarify that.

To go back to the beginning, I think I've always known there was such a thing as a spiritual path in this lifetime. I was brought up in New York, Italian Brooklyn style, but I had no early concept of what we call *Enlightenment*, that it's possible for a human being to experience something beyond this world of appearances. I went to Catholic school for 12 years. One of the greatest places for me was to walk into church because it had this profound stillness and these grand rising walls. It was beautiful with its stained glass windows, and its monastic quality that was quite extraordinary. I sensed

that as a child, and I loved to be in church—the Gregorian chants, the incense, the stillness—and I was a very devoted little Catholic.

I think that the greatest gift Catholicism gave me was a sense of compassion, of suffering. I remember going around the house and taking the crucifixes off the wall and taking Jesus off the cross (some of them had removable nails.) I put all the little statues on a pillow on the bed, got them really comfortable, and put some bread and water or grape juice there. But there was a negative aspect to this, too—the emphasis on sin and guilt. It made such an impression on me, that Jesus went through all this suffering because of my sins and the sins of other people. That guilt was way too burdensome to place on an innocent child's heart.

"I was aware of wanting to find a place in the world where I could be of some value. I was always aware of suffering and I wondered if I could do anything to help."

I attended Catholic church regularly until I was around 18 and things basically petered out in the sense of having formal Sunday practice. But my spiritual relationship with life continued. I was aware of wanting to find a place in the world where I could be of some value. I was always aware of suffering and I wondered if I could do anything to help. That's why I chose to become a nurse. I wasn't interested in career or money—it was just that I was naive enough to believe that medicine could end suffering.

I also found the movement of the '60's, and art, and music. I started to read Carlos Castaneda when I was 20 years old. And that opened up an entire dimension—Herman Hesse's *Siddhartha*—all of that. As I read it, I said "yes." I knew that there was more to life than being an Italian Catholic living in Brooklyn. So in a sense, there was the intuiting or the beginning of a taste of an alternative journey in life—a path off the main highway.

1983 was a big year in my life. I was 33 and all these teachers started to appear. In one year I met Joel, Dr. Wolff, Richard Moss, Joseph Goldstein—all these beautiful beings in the same year. The first one was Emmanuel. I was living in New York City, going to nursing school. Emmanuel was a

teacher there. He was from Ghana—so black he was blue—and very mysterious. He had all these books about Theosophy and the Ascended Masters, and he started to impart his spiritual understanding to me. He was such a loving being, such a manifestation of compassion. He was also very intelligent, and he used his intelligence in a very beautiful way, always helping people. And so I thought, this has to be good! That was my first conscious spiritual relationship—a very treasured relationship—based upon the sharing of spiritual sensibilities. Emmanuel was like the prince who bestowed the first kiss on the cheek—the awakening kiss. He kissed me out of sleep.

That same year I heard an interview with Dr. Richard Moss who's a medical doctor and spiritual teacher. He was talking about a new model for working with symptoms of diseases, and how you have to go deeper. That to go deeper, you have to go beyond the physical, that you have to move into the realms of the psychological and the spiritual. What he was saying made a lot of sense to me, so in February I went to California for a ten-day conference he was holding. It was the first time I had been in a group where there was focused energy, and the energy was focused into the immediate present of what we were experiencing. I would walk outside and stare at a tree for two hours. *Tree*—not defining and thinking, “tree,” but just standing there and looking at it. I think that was the first time I ever encountered stepping back from the conceptual experience of the world and recognizing the difference between direct experience versus conceptual experience. That was very powerful. Richard was also a very kind and loving person. He was a healer and had very much a Christ-energy. Afterwards I came away feeling there'd been a big change. Being a nurse was not really so important now. I had a sense that I needed to go deeper into this reality, because that's where real compassion was.

It was at this conference, too, that I met Dr. Franklin Merrell-Wolff who was not a medical doctor, but a doctor of philosophy and a Realized mystic. He was 96 at the time and had been visiting Richard. Dr. Wolff lived on a ranch in Lone Pine and his caretaker was leaving. He was too elderly to be left alone, so Richard put me in touch with him, thinking that he might need a nurse as he was getting older. So, I stayed in the trailer with Dr. Wolff for a week, and I just loved him. This beautiful loving being felt like my grandpa, or rather, the Grandfather of the Universe.

After Richard's conference several people suggested I go to Joseph Goldstein's ten-day silent Vipassana retreat, which I attended a few weeks later. Vipassana is insight meditation from the Buddhist tradition, free of ritual. It's about progressively gaining insight into the nature of awareness—what is actually going on—through developing mindfulness. There was walking meditation, sitting meditation—the stuff we do on Joel's retreats. Joseph Goldstein was my first Buddhist teacher. He opened me up to inquiry into the

nature of moment to moment awareness—seeing, hearing, tasting, touching—just being very grounded in the present moment of awareness. To this day, this remains one of my most important practices, insight into awareness—awareness of awareness.

All this was happening really quickly. I felt such a depth opening up. I wasn't choosing these things. They were just appearing and I was responding. When I got home, there was a letter from Dr. Wolff inviting me to come back to California and become his full-time caretaker, so I accepted and moved out there in July. Joel arrived a few months later just oozing compassion and warmth and caring. I would ask him questions, and he was delighted to share. I always felt when I met a good teacher who really loved what he was doing, you can feel that enthusiasm—it was just flowing out of Joel.

So that was the year that everything took root. Many seeds were planted that year, 1983, and they were nurtured by the kindness and the beauty and the goodness and generosity of Dr. Wolff and Joel, and Richard Moss, Joseph Goldstein, and Emmanuel—all these beautiful teachers and others that I met later, like Karthar Khenpo, Alan Wallace, Stephen Levine, Gen Lamrimpa, Chagdud Tulku, and Lama Gocha. From the moment they started to appear I loved and I appreciated them, and I felt really blessed that they were in my life. I still do. It's just incredible. We're all really blessed to have each other....I probably forgot a lot about myself [*laughs*]. All these little reminders keep popping up....Maybe we could just talk.



Question (from member of the audience): What was it like living with Dr. Wolff and Joel at the same time?

A: It was a golden time. Very intense. Dr. Wolff was the Big Daddy of the Transcendent. He had this certainty of presence which had to do with being his true Self. He just emitted this certainty of the real Self. He was known as a Great Vedantist, but he also studied Buddhism, Hinduism, Sufism—all the great traditions, like Joel. He made me feel like you can find certainty. So there was this understanding of

the value of being in the presence of an Enlightened Being. He would say, “Whoever finds their way to this door, finds it open.” I always thought that was the most beautiful thing. That was his whole energy. I have never felt so deeply loved in my entire life—loved in the truest sense of the word. He looked through you, your concept of who you were, and looked right into your heart. And when somebody looks into your heart and soul, you’re never the same after that.

Joel was a teacher from the first moment I met him. People would come up to see Dr. Wolff, and Joel would listen to them. He was an excellent listener. He seemed to cut right through to what the problem was and he would address that. Within just weeks after his Gnosis, he was reading the scriptures, beginning to comprehend how all the traditions address suffering. Dr. Wolff kind of coached him. Joel would come up for dinner a couple of times of week and he and Dr. Wolff and I really got into it. Then we formed a study group and Joel started teaching Dr. Wolff’s *Philosophy of Consciousness without an Object*. Dr. Wolff was right there, giving him his full sanction and Joel totally understood it because he had Realized it.

I remember Joel talking about the self—that the false sense of self is the cause of suffering. If you want to awaken, that’s what you have to address. I would love to argue with him. I’d say, “But there *is* a self! Who’s talking? Who’s asking questions?” And he’d say, “Go find it. What is the self? Is there anything really there?” So, that’s what he was doing. He was kindling the fire of self-inquiry. He started it and I was his great student.

All this happened in the Eastern Sierra where I live. It’s this immensely spacious landscape. There’s just sky everywhere. There’re these big, dramatic mountains. They’re not gently sloping green mountains. They’re mountains that jut up. They’re the Eastern Sierra. They’re always there. They’re just there. It’s very much like the feeling I began to intuit or touch into when I met Joel and Dr. Wolff, and the “guys,” which was this sense simultaneously of the infinity of sky, and this immensity of presence that was always there. The mountains are always there. There was this feeling of these two things that was beginning to take root—the ground of being, or awareness, or consciousness, symbolized by the mountains, and the infinity of that spacious sky that births them. That was a very powerful time for me.

Q: In hindsight, was having Enlightened teachers important to your realization?

A: Yes, because when I was with these teachers, I was so happy to be in their presence. I didn’t want anything from them. I was just happy to be with them. It was like a miracle. In fact, that’s what cured me of my narcissistic mood—feeling inadequate and all this stuff. I would say, “Andrea, you must have done something great to be with these beautiful beings.” They helped cure me of my sense of unworthiness just by the fact that they were in my life. That’s something to

remember when you’re really being hard on yourself. Just remember all the teachers who love you.

Q: Was there ever a time when you had difficulties on your path?

A: Yes, there was a phase that, looking back now, I would call a dark night of the soul. It began when I started to consider, “Why do I do this? Why do I do that?” Then I’d see I had all these hidden agendas. “Oh Andrea, you think you’re such a kind person, but really, when your motives start to be exposed, there’s selfishness everywhere you look.” When I first began to turn on the light of awareness, all these self-centered agendas began to reveal themselves. The pink glasses start to come off, and you look in the mirror and go from being a fairy tale princess to a beast. I saw everybody else like that too. I was living among beasts—one of many beasts living among beasts. So, there was this identification for a long time of “I am not worthy. I am such a jerk. All my motives are so selfish.”

Looking at your behavior with unedited awareness can be very painful. But what happens is, the more wisdom grows, the more there’s a commitment. You stay with it and you go through that difficult time, and wisdom starts to grow, and you’re not as stickily connected to the ‘I’. You’re more connected to the clarification of everything and you begin to sense that that very selfishness is the fuel for this fire of clarification. Initially, you feel like you’re the fuel that’s being burned up, but then your identity starts to shift to the fire. You begin to identify less with being the fuel and more with being the fire. And the more you move into those states, the more you discover the joy of awareness, where you’re exposing your selfishness. You start to see how much freer you’re becoming. And so, the further along in this direction I went, the easier it became.

Q: Could you tell us more about the kinds of meditation practices you did on your path before Awakening.

A: In the beginning it was just the Vipassana I had learned from Joseph Goldstein. Then Alan Wallace showed up. Joel had already gone and Dr. Wolff passed on in October of ’85. The following May, Alan drove up the hill on his BMW motorcycle. He was a Buddhist monk with a shaved head who had just graduated from Amherst College with a degree in Physics. He’d been driving through these mountains, and he found out about Dr. Wolff, and his heart just drove him right up there. We started to talk and I found out he loved Buddhism so much that he’d gone to India, and learned the Tibetan language, and had been a translator for the Dalai Lama, so I said, “Oh my, you’re a Buddhist monk, you know Vipassana, you lived in India and practiced for 10 years, and you’re brilliant.” The guy was another one of those—whoever appeared at Dr. Wolff’s door, they were like that.

Later, Alan came back and went into solitary retreat. I got him his food and supplies so he could stay there undis-

turbed. Out of that he wrote a book, *Passage to Solitude*, and he's since gone on to publish several more and become a highly respected teacher in his own right. As a Buddhist monk, Alan was a continuation of strengthening the Vipassana seeds that had been sown by Joseph. As a physicist, he was a continuation of Dr. Wolff's work. What Dr. Wolff did for philosophy in the West, and Joel was doing with the great traditions, Alan was doing with science and Buddhism. He also began to lead small Vipassana retreats for some of us at Dr. Wolff's ranch, which has become a yearly tradition. We started with insight meditation and then he brought in Tibetan practices which evolved into Dzogchen meditation.

Meditation—the crux of it—really didn't start to flower for me until about 3 years ago. Joel came down to Lone Pine and presented a meditation on space, and around the same time Alan also introduced the Dzogchen meditation. Doing that meditation really seemed to open up a very deep dimension of stillness, alertness, and lucidity. It was really very effective for me. In the last few years, there seemed to be a lot of deepening in that meditation, so it's been very helpful.

Q: Can you tell us a little about your personal life? I understand you were married and had a house.

A: I still have a house, I'm still married—although last August, a month or so before the retreat, my husband and I separated. His name is Dean and we'd been together about 11 years. We built the house, and we worked pretty hard on it, but he wasn't very happy living in the Sierras. One thing about where I live, it's a very beautiful place, but there isn't much going on culturally, and there isn't much opportunity. He'd tried to get work going, and it wasn't happening. He was needing to break away and go somewhere else. We decided that we would separate.

It was a little difficult to hear that because Dean in many ways had been my spiritual path. My marriage was a great opportunity to put my 'self' aside, in spite of all my desires to defend it down to the last minute. It turned out to be a great opportunity to think about someone else. I was very open to his pain. He is a very beautiful and sensitive man, and I really cared for and loved him deeply. So a lot of times, when the stuff of our confusion, of our samsara, our cause and effect conditioning would come up, I would see it and just get out of the way, and give up the self...up to a point of course [*laughs*]. That had been very much a practice for me. Then, after all this caring, he was leaving. That was a surprise. For a few days I was a little upset. Then I totally saw that it was absolutely the right thing to do, because he really did need to take his space.

Actually, it turned out to be a very valuable occurrence. In those years, so much of how I was responding and being aware of this environment had to do with being identified with Dean. I didn't exist just as an Andrea entity. I was an Andrea-Dean entity. It made life a little more complicated. When I came back to just being an Andrea entity, I became more

responsible for my own perceptions. There was nobody to project upon. It was just all there. I think that was somewhat pivotal after 11 years of being together—that being in solitude. There was a stillness in the house, and there was a stillness in me, that had to do with being focused just on the here and now, and not on another person. In fact, I think that too may have been a component of what happened on the retreat. Maybe if Dean was still there when Fred called up, I would have said, "No," because I wouldn't have wanted to leave Dean for 12 days. Who knows?

Q: What *did* happen on the retreat. Can you tell it in a step by step way, how it unfolded for you?

A: One of the things about being at Cloud Mountain, which I came to see later, was that when I arrived, I was so happy to be there. I didn't want anything. I really appreciated the sense of connection and loving warmth I felt with everybody. I really felt like we were in it together. It felt like we were One Being, awakening. I'd watch us doing walking meditation, walking slowly around the room, and think, How cool! I was really enjoying it. That's what you get for living in the desert for 12 years!

Joel talks about the kenosis he experienced just before his Enlightenment as having to do with despair and exhaustion of the will—especially the will that's been so frustrated, that can't get what it's after. Well, there was another kind of kenosis for me. It was a perverse contentment [*laughs*]. It was such a beautiful place, and I was so appreciative of everything. That was very important, because I wasn't resisting anything, so it was easier to open up to where I was. Joel and I have known each other about 13 years and he wasn't saying anything new that he hadn't said 13 years ago. But when I think back I observe this progression of how I understood it, because the mind's understanding is ever evolving. And 13 years ago when I heard it, my reaction was, "But what about dah-dah-dah-dah"...there was this whole BUT thing going on. And through the years, that continued to go on and on. But this time it was like, Yeah, I hear what he's saying, and then there was just stillness. For whatever reason, I was going with it, not putting a BUT on it.

At one point Joel said something, and I did raise my hand, and say "BUT, BUT, BUT..." And he responded to my question, and I said, "Oh, there's this symphony going on here and I should just listen. I think I'm going to just listen now." And so I was aware of that. That was a little different. As soon as Joel said something, I completely understood it. It's like the speaker and the listener were just [*claps*] shewwwww—coming together. You know in a strange way it's almost as though in that place and in that time and in that moment, 'I' was more a field of awareness, just hearing it...Yeah, that's it.

Q: Was the particular teaching important, or could it have been any teaching from Joel—the fact that you were just ready, ripe to hear it?

A: That would be a hard one for me to know for sure, because everything that was happening seemed to be perfectly occurring and aligned—absolutely perfect for that unfoldment. So I don't know. It all seemed perfect. The teaching was perfect—everything he was saying. But maybe it could have happened differently in a parallel universe and it would be perfect anyway. However, the teaching was very specific—the practice, the meditation, the instructions were all very clear. I just did them. No embellishing, no questions, no resistance. How did that come about? From years of resistance, I'm sure.

I'll also share with you the instructions, which were to hold your object of meditation—whatever you've been working with—and just continue doing that. But if bliss and energy began to arise, you were to drop your meditation object and follow the bliss. That was the theme of the retreat, "Cultivating Bliss," and it was a very different instruction than I had received before. I'm sure many of us have had the experience that when we become quiet, and centered, and present, we get these little tastes of bliss. But usually the instruction is just to ignore that. Nobody had ever said, "Okay, so when bliss arises, feel that and make *that* the object of your meditation." So that was quite a lovely suggestion, to do that.

It was also very timely, I think, because in the morning I woke up and I felt, "Wow, I'm sinless!" I already told you about being brought up Catholic and how there was this great burden of feeling guilty and hiding your guilt, causing all kinds of secondary reactions and psychological stuff. And now I just had the feeling, I'm sinless, because we're all here, and just by virtue of being born and coming into form, you're absolved. I had the sense that absolutely every moment of awareness that had occurred previously all led up to this moment, and this moment was fully perfect. I just *knew* that! So there was a redemption, or a deliverance—like all of life was perfect. It's all perfect, right now. And I felt that, and it was a very beautiful feeling.

“Anything that arose in consciousness... you just don't grab onto it, and you don't push it away.”

In terms of the meditation practice, itself, one of the first deepenings of concentration was based on what Joel was saying and also the kind of meditation that I was doing. Anything that arose in consciousness—be it a visual object, a sound, a tactile sensation, a thought, a feeling, whatever arose—you just don't grab onto it, and you don't push it away.

There was a commitment to being right there in this field of spacious awareness, to just be in that field. So there was neither grasping nor aversion with things. There was a deepening of concentration and a kind of equilibrium being established.

As the days went on, that's what was happening. There was a growing intensity that continued to radiate and with it a sense of calm and contentment. Nothing to do, nowhere to go. Occasionally I would feel a wave-like movement through the body and I would place attention there for a moment and watch the movement wind down from—this is the only way I can describe it—a broad horizontal figure eight to an increasingly narrow one until it became a point of stillness, and then attention was back in that space where everything arises and falls of its own accord, even thoughts. So there wasn't all this motion going on in the mind—just a building equilibrium. This is what's so valuable about a retreat. There's a momentum that's getting built up, which is not what happens in our everyday existence. It's a unique, precious opportunity.

So this momentum was building. There were things that Joel was saying at various points, keeping it right in tow—it was like *steady on*, was the feeling. Then he gave us the image of ice with water flowing underneath it. At a certain point in meditation the mind becomes solid and transparent, like ice. And even though things continue to appear, they don't affect that—like water running under the ice doesn't affect the ice. So, there's the ice—the solid stillness of the ice—and there's just the water. That happens. It's very possible, and you begin to feel the freedom and the joy of that—that there's a stillness and a presence of mind that is so solid and transparent. All these other little things are going on underneath—sensations, thoughts, reactions, desires, aversion. But there's this growing sense of presence of mind, presence of awareness. It started feeling like I was on a highway. I'm looking out the window and things are passing real quick, but it didn't matter. It was all collapsing in on itself. Things were just dissolving and what was *real* seemed to be emerging. Nothing exists or subsists or endures in that reality. Everything just dissolves. It arises and dissolves, but that equilibrium just gets stronger and stronger.

It might have been the 3rd or 4th day—the sense of equilibrium was really growing until it was just there all the time. Then it seemed like it kind of locked into an equilibrium that was already present in everything. It's almost like the equilibrium in the meditation merged into this Grand Equilibrium that was everywhere. That was somewhat shocking! We work so hard in meditation trying to find this equilibrium and, "Oh my God, the equilibrium is already there!" What a joke [*laughs*]. So many of us, we're trying so hard. Sometimes we have to just tiptoe—like the baby's asleep. Don't make any noise...gently, gently....

It was the next day, in the afternoon, that the breakthrough occurred. Todd and I were in the room, sitting

together. I was very aware of him. There was a deepening of the stillness, the concentrated equipoise. That morning Joel had asked, “Is anybody having problems with excitation or laxity?” Until he asked that question—which was perfect—I wouldn’t even have known I was having a problem. But when he said it, I realized, yes, I was aware of the experience of kind of being on the forward edge of everything and like trying to pounce on it. So, there was a little bit of grasping, there was a little bit of desire. The concentration here is so subtle and awareness so present, you become aware of these very subtle tendencies in the mind.

So I told him there was this subtle grasping going on and his response was, “Well, there’re two things you can do. You can look directly at that, or you can just let it dissolve into the present. But whatever you do, use the exact amount of effort that is needed to do that—no more, no less.” Now, it’s very tricky at this point, because there’s a part of awareness that’s like a spy—the introspective aspect of awareness that once in awhile checks in and says, “How’s everything going? Are we really on target here? Are we doing what we’re supposed to? We aren’t thinking of recipes, are we?” So that spy comes in and looks at things. But when there’s a momentum building up, the spy doesn’t really need to be there. You don’t need to check all the time. However, when the spy does come in occasionally, it needs to become a smaller, and smaller and smaller voice, because you really do feel like it’s a little bit of an intruder at that level of quietude. So when you do look, you have to come from the space where you need this much energy, but not this much—just the right amount. So, that’s what I did and it worked perfectly.

This was the most important part of the practice—not grasping nor pushing away. In a sense, that’s analogous to remaining in the present, because in the present everything collapses, and you really can’t hold onto anything. The moment you grasp onto something, or you push something away, in a sense you’re not in the present, because you’re attached or identified with something that’s passing away. So *not* doing that—not grasping or pushing anything away—really brings you into the present, and that’s what was happening in this meditation. It was very obvious—this receding landscape in which everything was dissolving into this ever-present eternal moment, unencumbered by any kind of willing, or grasping, or pushing away. It felt like I could start

to taste the eternal.

Up until that point, there were slight little adjustments being made, but if you move too much it all breaks. It gets really, really subtle. In a sense, you disappear, because you don’t need to be there anymore. So I got to that point, and then my body moved, just a little to the right—I think it was my neck. I had a cervical neck injury, and when I moved a particular way, the body just got comfortable. Then there was this moment of—it seemed as though, there was nobody left anymore, no one doing anything—a realization that when you see there is only the seeing, when you hear there is only the hearing, when you feel there is only the feeling. And nobody is doing it! The do-er had disappeared! And when the doer disappeared, there was a moment where I remember going, “OH! OH!” [laughs] I had no idea what happened, because then there was this break. But I knew I had found the

Beloved. There was a discontinuity, a blacking out of consciousness in which I was extinguished, and then it was like the gates of heaven opened and all I can say is [gasp] the Beloved—that’s what it was. You think you are, and you’re not. You think God is, and God isn’t. And all of a sudden you’re just God. There’s only God.

Dr. Wolff called it, “Knowledge through Identity.” What that says is, “How do you know you are? Because you *are!*” You can’t know this through thinking about it. All the thinking mind can ever know is that it *can’t* know, because the

thinking mind is dualistic. There’s a subject trying to grasp some object. So that has to come to a stop. And when it does, there’s no subject and there’s no object. There’s just Being, and the Being is infinite space. The Being is in everything. Everything is arising from this infinite space. The space is birthing everything and dissolving everything simultaneously. And everything is just this empty infinite space. This emptiness *knows* everything, because it’s empty—just like the eye sees every color because it has no color of its own. So this “knowing” knows everything because it’s nothing.

So there was nothing, and out of nothing, out of complete emptiness, there was a big bang. It’s like my head exploded. There was no more head. There was the universe. And the universe was the head. The head was the universe. Everything is everything. What happened was, there was this sense of infinite space. The infinite space was not the space outside. It was the space that ran through things. Like this explosion



of the big bang could have happened in a grain of sand. It could have *all* been in a grain of sand, in fact. Or it could have been every grain of sand in the universe of a bazillion kalpas. It was infinitely small and infinitely large. It was the space of all being. It was the space that makes everything appear. And that's what was so interesting—the grandness of the universe that goes out, is the same grandness of the universe that comes in. Space is space.

Then, from the spaciousness, there was this luminosity. Everything was light, and everything was made manifest. And there was *energy*. So much energy. That's actually when I remembered that I had a body. Then I said, "Oh my God!" It felt like my body was just going to burn into a puff of smoke. If I kept expanding—that's just an image—but it felt like if I kept expanding, I was just going to become the infinite universe and then there would be no more body. That was the sense of it. So, I remembered the body, and then I came back into the room. And Todd was there, and there was all this energy. So I started doing Tong-Lin, the Tibetan practice of taking and sending. It felt like there was so much energy, so the first thing—being an opportunist—I said, "WOW! Do it now! Do it now, Andrea!"

Joel: I have to interject something here because this is very important. Notice, the first thing she thinks of is not anything about herself—"How wonderful, I'm Enlightened!" No, the first thing she thinks of is doing this practice of compassion for all beings.

A: That's because I've been programmed by you and everyone else. What was the first thing Dr. Wolff did when you met him, when I met him? He handed us a card with the Bodhisattva vow on it. So, of course! What do you think!

And now I completely understood it—how Tong-Lin works. Whatever you imagine to be the problems and the pains and the sufferings of everyone is what your mind imagines suffering to be. It's just the relative world of experience. So when you take it upon yourself, the Self that's taking it is this empty Infinity of Present Spaciousness. So you can take on everything! Take it *all* in! The suffering just burns up. It's consumed in emptiness. Then you do that, and you let out all the joy and all the things your mind can imagine about what might make everybody happy, including yourself. You just send it out, and it just goes to the far ends of the universe. It's a lot of fun [*laughs*].

Anyway, that's what happened. I didn't talk to anybody about it that day. We're on retreat. You're supposed to be in silence. That night, I didn't sleep. There was just this immense energy. It was really interesting. We were supposed to be doing the Ahhhhh at the heart practice. Being a good Catholic girl of course I was still following instructions, trying to focus on the Ahhhhh sound as I fell asleep. It must have been 8:30 or 9 o'clock, and it was like AHHHHH. The next time I remember, I looked and it's like 12:30, and I'm still going

AHHHHH. So, I say to myself, "You need to stop doing stuff now. Just stop." Then everything is like a meditation from now on, because this Awareness has always been there. It's in every moment. And now it is who I am. I AM THIS AWARENESS. It can't go anywhere. It never went anywhere. It has always been there.

*“And now it is who I am.
I am this Awareness.”*

So, the thought arose, The body has to rest, and I stopped doing the Ahhhhh and closed my eyes, and this Awareness just relaxed and merged with this dark, infinite Awareness. And there was nothing. There was just Awareness of the Void. Nothing. Black...I guess it was dreamless sleep, and THAT'S WHAT I WAS.

Then the morning came, and Awareness started to come back out of the Void. It was like the dawn of creation. The first thing coming out of that Void was sound. Then comes a sense of energy, and you begin to see motions and lights. Then you're awake again, your body is moving. And this is where it started to get a little disorienting, because how could I know who I am? There is no 'I'. Andrea is gone. But I *am*. Pure Awareness *is*. Emptiness *is*. Yes, now I'm back in the world again, and I think I'm over here looking at you over there. How can this possibly be? Then awareness is saying, "But it isn't. That's not true. You *are*. Being *is*. Emptiness *is*!"

All morning I was having this sensation that maybe I was disappearing—"I" being the reality of Consciousness—because the everyday awareness was re-entering the field of activity. That's when I said to Joel, "I feel like I'm disappearing." We were all sitting in the meditation hall, and he just looked at me and saw something. So, he said "Let's go back to the teacher's cabin and talk," and that's when I told him what had happened...

Todd: You looked really distraught. I was worried. I've seen people in psychotic kind of states before and it just seemed you had that kind of right-on-the-edge-look in your eyes. I thought something's really wrong.

A: I told Joel what was going on and he said, "You're describing fear. Look at fear." So I looked at fear, and I go, "Oh! There's nothing there, it's empty." Basically he shoved me back into Emptiness. I was reoriented. If he hadn't been there maybe I could have gone into a psychotic state. I don't know what would have happened...But he just shoved me back into Reality.

Joel: Notice what she's saying here is very important. What was so distressing was not that she had Awakened, but that she might go crazy again—she might return to a so-called

“normal” state, to delusion. So what I did is exactly the opposite of what a therapist might do. When she said, “I shoved her back into reality,” she’s talking about Ultimate Reality. I didn’t try to “ground her,” or bring her back to this ‘reality’. I said stay there. Don’t come back. *Never* come back!

A: You told me to think, “I am Enlightened,” and then let that thought dissolve, and see if Awareness changes. So I did that and nothing changed. Then you said, now think, “I am *not* Enlightened,” and let *that* thought go, and see if anything’s changed. So, I thought that, too, and the Awareness didn’t change. So you very skillfully showed me that the contents of consciousness were irrelevant—that the ‘I’ was just a content arising and passing away—just an old tendency, nothing substantial. It can’t really affect the Awareness that is the groundness of Being.

Q: Has that fear ever arisen again, of getting trapped back in this illusion?

A: No, because what was Realized was that I’m nothing. We always want some sense of identity. Even when we think of Enlightenment, we have an image of what Enlightenment might be—this unchangeable eternal state—because we want ourselves to be *something*. But it isn’t like that. It’s to find out you’re nothing—that’s the jewel. So, who is there to be deluded? No, the disorientation hasn’t arisen.

Q: Has that state you were in then persisted since the retreat?

A: There’s no state that persists, because there never was a state. What persists is, whatever arises in consciousness arises with the knowing of it. It’s the *knowing* that persists.

Q: From your current view, how do you feel about the importance of spiritual practices, precepts, and teachings? Do you feel they were connected to your breakthrough?

A: Absolutely. Beyond question. Every single one’s utterly and irrevocably important. Because when I look back it seems so clear to me that all the years of training, of reading books, and doing meditation, and falling asleep, and not understanding it, and sitting for 20 minutes thinking the whole time—all of that allowed or created, *that* moment, at *that* time, on *that* particular retreat that had all this acuity of perception going on. Because *that* moment was born of everything that had come before it. It was just its time. Like Gene was telling us about the apples in his orchard, how they grow. You put fertilizer on them, and water them, and do all these things, but they come to fruition when they’re ready, in their own time. So I look back on it now and I see the cause and effect of years of being taught with great patience and love by my teachers who just repeated the instruction over again and again in 3 and 4 and 5 and 6 and 7 and 8 different ways so that we might get it. It was just by trying and not

giving up and persevering with all these things that the meditation on retreat started to take on a life of its own and took me where it took me.

Q: You have no need to practice now, is that correct?

A: The Awareness is there. You just keep resting into the bliss, because to rest into bliss is to rest into pure Awareness. Awareness is looking and being looked at. It’s this very beautiful presence. That’s the practice. Just staying present with whatever’s arising. Thoughts arise, preferences arise, and with them mindfulness. It seems to happen on its own, and you begin to see that mind has unbelievable capacities. Mind can be doing five things at one time, and you’re aware of doing five things at one time! Awareness sees the magic of the body picking its arm up and doing things, things we take for granted. It’s amazing what goes on in a split second! So the practice in a sense is that all these things are being revealed.

One of the things you see is that when you pick something up, how precious it is to bring all your attentiveness and the movements of your mind to just that act of picking something up. It’s almost as though everything you do is so precious, that you want to fully be there. You don’t want to be doing five different things at one time. So Awareness also recognizes what distraction is. In a sense, the practice is a growing aesthetic—that it’s really quite wonderful to give each thing that happens its deserved attention.

Q: Has your day to day life changed at all.

A: Outwardly? Yes. Mostly I’ve spent hundreds of dollars on books. I want to find out how everybody got to God. It’s such a wonderful thing to know how everybody got to God. It’s so beautiful. You pick up a book, and you start to read, and within a few seconds you either feel God knowing God, or you don’t—I think it’s an old attachment [*laughs*]. You just want to feel God, hear about God, know about God. It’s like a little kid going to the comic book store and buying all the comic books, and reading all the different little vignettes...

Q: In what ways have other activities of your life changed in terms of what and how you do things?

A: I used to be a very emotional person, but now it’s very rare that many emotions arise. It took weeks before I had an emotional feeling, and when it occurred, I was so amazed. I felt this thing in my body. The body is not local. The body is everywhere—it’s here, it’s there, it’s the body of *being*. And then all of a sudden, I had an emotional feeling. It was at the hospital where I work. One of the other department heads and I were having a discussion. She was telling me how she thought something should happen, and I didn’t think that’s how it should happen. I was having my opinion, and she was having hers, and it was like grrrrrr! It was amazing because it was so clear—how the ‘I’ thought comes in. It was really interesting. I said, “Look at that, look at that!”

Q: A lot of people might think, “Oh, she hasn’t had emotions for months. This is horrible, pathological. She’s lost something tremendously valuable. Poor woman.”

A: Emotions still arise, but I no longer identify with them. There seems to be knowing that’s always there, and a very full feeling, but it’s not emotional. Sometimes I’m listening to somebody, and I feel this immense compassion, like I have a feeling of love like I’ve never had before. It’s not romantic, or emotive. It’s just—there’s a feeling here in the heart—a heart feeling—and it breaks open. I feel that. That’s a little different from having emotions. It’s a feeling, but it’s not an emotion. It’s almost like emotions only exist in relationship to a sense of ‘I’. But you can have a feeling when there is no I-thought present. It’s a different quality.

I have started to see that things like jealousy, desire, anger are really just energies that pop up out of the primordial ooze. What’s usually going on is that you identify with the jealousy. Then the jealousy will cause you to act or think in a particular way and that sets up a whole other chain of cause-and-effect reactions. There really is a mechanical structure to the relative world. Joel has talked about how this mechanism creates a false sense of ‘self’. Everything runs together and it seems like there’s an ‘I’ there, but there isn’t. That’s also the Buddhist approach. In fact, part of the whole technique of Vipassana is trying to look more closely at what’s actually going on. What is really there? You start to see it’s just a mechanistic thing going on—that every thought you think causes another thought. You start to see that’s not something happening to ‘you’ as much as it is a process dependent on previous actions, and the ripening of those actions, and all those things coming together. So when you just stop buying into the jealousy, then you see it’s just a feeling coming up. It appears out of nowhere and it goes into nowhere.

So when you’re Awake and that feeling comes up, you say, “Oh, an appearance!” Then you can act on it, or not act on it. You can just watch it and say, “Oh wow, I see!” You think a certain way, and jealousy happens because you thought that way. Maybe you remembered something from the past. But *who* is remembering? *Who* is acting? Sometimes I ask those question and it just dissolves. There’s nothing there. So, emotions arise. They’re just something to watch and you see it’s just feeling, just energy. They come out of nowhere and they go into nowhere. So, you get to feel all these different things and it’s so interesting, so wonderful! I’m constantly amazed.

Q: Speaking of feelings, do you now feel called to serve this truth in some way like teaching, or does it feel okay to live life just as it comes?

A: They’re not separate. What I find is happening is somebody will call me and I’ll say, “Let’s go for a walk.” And the most incredible moments of sharing with people are

happening. And they just arise spontaneously. There’s nobody doing anything, and there’s no intention to do anything. It just happens. It feels so good to see that because it’s thoroughly, totally reassuring that the compassionate life and the unattached life are the same thing. Just let it be. It’s fine. When you feel asked, you respond. I’m no longer pushing myself on others.

Q: So, do you now consider yourself to be Enlightened?

A: Enlightened?... Why do I hesitate to use that word, *Enlightened*? Because to have the Realization is one thing, to live the Realization is another. To be a Buddhist is one thing, to be a Buddha is another. To know Reality is one thing, to *be* Reality is another. There is an embodiment process that goes on. There’s a birthing, and a maturing, just like a child is born and grows. Literally, I feel I have plopped out of the womb of the Divine Mother. I am just an infant, not yet an adult—which is how I would define an Enlightened being, as someone who fully embodies the Realization.

Q: Then how *would* you label your experience, if anything...?

A: I like the word “Gnosis” because to me it has kind of the sense of I met God. I got to God, so to speak. I got into the depth of what’s Real. But then what’s *that*? What is *God*? Oh, the mystery of God! The mystery of Self! It’s greater than ever! Now there’s this infinite expression of God, or the Divine, or the Self. It’s like Joel has said, “The journey *to* God has an end, but the journey *in* God has no end,” because how could there be an end to God? Dr. Wolff talked about that, too. He talked about greater and greater depths of Space—that Consciousness is this infinitely revelatory expression of the Self, and *that* never ends. So what happened to me was, I woke up. I woke from the dream. And now, when I’m dreaming—which still goes on—I’m lucidly dreaming. Now, I know that I’m dreaming. And I want to share all this because I feel it’s very important. Everything that everybody has shared with me has been extremely useful. And this is happening to all of us. Our meditations are deepening, and this is going to be happening. That’s why I want to share everything I can. Because it’s happening to us together. But, if I say, “I’m Enlightened,” there’re all these connotations—“Are you saying you’re Buddha? Are you saying you’re omniscient?” No I’m not saying any of that. So, I’m afraid to say anything—but at the same time I can’t lie. I crossed a line. I woke up. And because of that I can’t be separated from the Beloved anymore. I can’t.

Q: What is your advice for other seekers?

A: To just carry on and know that you’re perfectly in accord with your destiny.

WHAT DOES ANDREA'S AWAKENING MEAN TO YOU ?

*We asked three members of the Center for Sacred Sciences about what Enlightenment means to them and how they were influenced by a breakthrough close to home. How do their experiences and views relate to the meaning of Enlightenment in **your** life?*



***Dawn Kurzka** is a fifty-four year-old married mother of a teenaged daughter and lives in Eugene, Oregon. A spiritual seeker since her thirties, she has been a member of the Center for one year.*

My first experience of an Enlightened teacher was Paramahansa Yogananda in 1982. I followed him for about twelve years. He didn't use the word *Enlightenment*, but referred to it as *samadhi* (a state of experiencing the unity of all in God.)

Yogananda's disciples were pursuing *samadhi*, and I always thought the really advanced ones might have a chance—not me. Maybe after decades of intense consistent daily meditation it might be achievable, but knowing myself, I didn't think I was going to be able to do what was needed.

I now perceive Enlightenment to be more attainable. I'm encountering people I consider to be more normal who are awakening. Joel being who Joel is, made it seem more possible for me—Andrea made it even more so.

I first heard about Andrea's awakening the week after the retreat. I was pretty excited. It was about someone within this larger community, who had worked extensively with our teacher, among others, who had broken through and awakened. It was very exciting to me because it was closer to home.

Having an opportunity to hear Andrea in depth affected me very much—very powerfully. That night, I was very moved by the way that she expressed herself. My experience is that she expresses herself differently from Joel, although she's saying the same things. A lot of what she said surprised me. It came through in a different way. I was very moved by her laughter, her radiance, her liveliness, and her compassion. She just took me right in.

The next morning when I woke up, I was in a very expanded state. I was in a state where I can't say for sure that there was no concept of self, but if there was a self, it was irrelevant. If there was an "I," it was irrelevant. It wasn't worth trying to find out if there was an "I" or not because I was just beyond it. There was definitely a witness function going on watching this. There was an awareness in the witness that "I" didn't know anything. I remember Andrea saying, "I don't know anything," and was aware there was a *not knowing* part of this going on. The part that was aware was noticing, there's a very heightened awareness here. To what degree there's a self is irrelevant. And there's this expanded state. For awhile, there was nothing I could do but meditate—it was a very blissful experience. I stayed in a heightened mood for days.

Weeks later, I now handle and experience things differently than before I met Andrea. I see her as another teacher—another version. That's very exciting. If "I" can get out of the way and allow the process to happen, I could experience that I'm no one, too. But to some degree, even this holding has dissolved.



Wayne Leeds, a musician and sound engineer, lives in Eugene, Oregon. He is a forty-four year-old spiritual seeker, father, and computer enthusiast, and has been attending the Center for two years.

I have a lot of Christian influences in my background regarding the notion of Enlightenment—those created a very different perception of the end of the spiritual path than how I currently see it. When I was a Baptist at 25, Enlightenment went by the name *salvation*, the instantaneous relief of concern by belief in Jesus Christ as the son of God—simply accepting that fact relieved concern about any future events. My understanding of it was that it was supposed to be a permanent experience, but for me it was temporary.

I've been on a conscious spiritual quest for about five years in a consistent fashion. My first exposure to my current view on Enlightenment came when I met Joel about two years ago. I'm sure my mind toyed with the idea of Enlightenment before then. This newer version of salvation is *Gnosis*. That's the concept that I can make a direct connection with God, essentially become God. That's very different from the notion that all will be provided for me by a god.

I'm pretty convinced that the possibility is there for me to recognize Enlightenment in this lifetime. That's faith operating from a conceptual basis—just from hearing the testimony of the mystics through reading, being near Joel, and hearing other speakers.

I have had what I'd call dim Gnostic flashes. They're not very deep, not what I'd expect of a full Gnostic awakening. From the testimony, I expect that to be somewhat of an overwhelming experience. My sense of the flashes I've had are that they're not very deep, but they are what I consider to be permanent or long lasting.

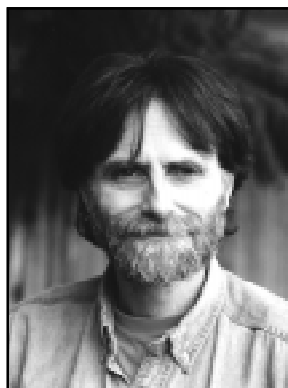
I heard about Andrea's Enlightenment from Joel when he returned from the Fall Retreat—that someone had had a very deep experience. Although I didn't know Andrea at all, my reaction was one of mild excitement in two regards: a feeling of excitement for her personally, and a feeling of excitement for the general possibility being revealed once again.

When Andrea met with our Practitioners Group and described what had happened to her, my level of excitement skyrocketed. Being in her presence and getting the story and words directly really energized that excitement and increased my understanding of what she experienced. Being in Andrea's presence was a very similar feeling to what I get being in

Joel's presence—the words that flow out of each of them resonate with my thoughts and hopes.

I'm often inspired by the writing of mystics—yet, here's one in the flesh who says, *this* happened to me—This I Am. That's inspirational, because in my level of experience I don't have that, but here's someone similar to me who does.

In terms of this world that I experience in my physical form, I hope—even expect—to recognize Enlightenment very soon.



Todd Corbett, forty-nine, is a nurse living in Umpqua, Oregon. He enjoys hiking and camping, and has been attending the Center for six years.

Originally, my idea of Enlightenment was an inner peace. I didn't really have definite ideas about it. It's been clarifying to me to hang out with Joel. Talking to him, I realized that a lot of earlier ideas I had about what Enlightenment could be were silly—it's silly to conjecture. Now, from being around him and seeing Andrea, I have a much better sense about what it is, or rather what it isn't. It's more a sense of integration, or of not being separate from myself or things through habituated identification with ideas.

I've felt that Enlightenment was possible for me from Enlightened moments that we all have—glimpses, just the realization that we are Enlightened. But the problem seems to be the struggling and bantering—all those habits that don't allow us to recognize those moments. It's our nature. What we really are is what our experience is when we stop bantering. When we stop trying to find it and stop trying to understand it, it just is.

I think the question about whether Enlightenment will likely happen to me is misleading. It starts a current going which seems to move automatically away from truth. If I am thinking in terms of accomplishing something, reaching something, wanting something, then I can almost guarantee that's not going to be of any benefit to me, and what I would find through that activity would be some kind of hoax. I'd be leading myself into a cul-de-sac. On the other hand, we do need to recognize our Enlightened nature. It seems to make itself known all the time, but we just have to be in a space where we recognize that.

I first met Andrea on Joel's retreat in the fall of 1994. She seemed to have a lot of energy and warmth. The next time I saw her was on this last retreat in October, 1997. When I talked with her before the retreat officially started, there was nothing unusual—she seemed really sweet and warm.

In a question-and-answer period on the third or fourth day, when Andrea expressed anxiety about losing herself, I became overly concerned that she was dissolving. I guess I was worried that she might unravel psychologically based on psychotic situations I've witnessed as a nurse. My concern continued until the next day when I ran into her by the small fish pond. I thought that she looked disoriented and lost, but after hugging her, I knew she was just fine—although there was still the puzzled sense that *something* was going on with her.

At the end of the retreat when we broke silence and shared our experiences, Andrea's words resonated with me. In that moment there was a tremendous sense of space—of patience and non-grasping. Beneath word and thought, I was with her completely. The conceptual world became clearly imaginary. My mind just grabbed at it as habit—it would grab at states of perfect composure and hold them as memory, only to be left with a sense of need and striving. I recognized the non-conceptual nature of Awareness and the resulting patience that was not threatened by ongoing conceptualizations. I've had similar experiences with Joel repeatedly over the years, but this situation was especially powerful as it was direct recognition of the immediacy of how the mind's dreaming and conceptuality obstruct our Truth in each moment.

When Andrea came and spoke to us five months after the retreat, the same thing happened—the same resonance. Ever since that retreat, when things are happening, and I'm not contriving or doing some technique or being mindful, there is periodically a spontaneous merging of situation, feelings, thoughts, emotions, visual images/perception, the whole story—in Awareness—all on an equal level. When this happens, the sense of me being present is just another part of that story—that unified process just unfolding.

I'm now suffering less. Since the retreat, I've been more able to see thoughts as thoughts and emotions as emotions. Before, they *were* me—they weren't something I could *see*—I was coming from them. I still come from thoughts and emotions, but not nearly as blindly. I recognize their fluidity, they're not my identity.

Andrea's incident was pretty powerful. The fact that there's something we recognize that we know. But somehow the retreat and having that kind of event take place shifted it from an intellectual knowing to a deeper space, deeper knowing—recognition. Her experience clarifies Joel for me. I better recognize what Joel is—what I am.

Andrea was a pinnacle for me. Seeing her go through what she went through awakened in me a faith that's deeper than before. I've turned that faith within. It's like having been given permission to see things as they really are. Her experience is a relief, a recognition—it isn't that it's more possible for me, it's that it is true!

❖ All interviews conducted Spring, 1998

Center News (continued from page 3)

THE FACE OF A BUDDHIST NUN

Former retreatants at Cloud Mountain may remember being asked to avoid a walled compound northeast of the dining hall. A Buddhist nun in silent retreat occupied a tiny trailer inside that compound for three years from May 1992 through June 1995.



Ani Tsering Chodron

Those of us who attended the Center's recent Spring '98 retreat had the opportunity of meeting her. She is Ani Tsering Chodron, born Martha Hamilton, now on Cloud Mountain's staff. She translates Tibetan texts and leads retreats. Although still a Buddhist nun, she wears western dress and follows all of a nun's usual precepts in spirit.

Visit Our Web Site!

<http://www.integralscience.org/css>

The Center's web site includes:

- General information about the purpose, activities, and philosophy of the Center.
- Details about Joel's books and other Center publications.
- Some of the previous newsletters.



CSS Library Hours:

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

Our library continues to grow at a steady pace. We now have well over 3,000 books, 550 audio tapes, and 150 videos. The library has also grown in terms of physical space—increasing an additional 70% at our new facility.

In this issue, we present reviews of two of the many books in our library dealing with *breaking through*.

**Surprised by Grace — A Journey Beyond
Personal Enlightenment**

by Amber Terrell

Published by True Light Publishing, 1997

Reviewed by Mike Taylor

After a twenty-five year spiritual quest, Amber Terrell met her Teacher in the form of Gangaji, an American woman in the Hindu lineage of the late Ramana Maharshi of India. Through Gangaji, Amber was introduced to her true Self, and her search (and the searcher) came to an end in an “explosion of love.” *Surprised by Grace* is the personal story of the end of her search, told with great clarity, candor, and an emotional honesty that really touched this reviewer’s heart. Amber weaves her own story around quotes from Gangaji, with the result that we not

only share her process of awakening, but have an opportunity to ponder the teachings that guided her way. I found this book to be a very inspiring testament, as well as a lucid exposition of spiritual Truth from One who knows firsthand. It happens that Amber is also an accomplished musician, and she has created a beautiful recording of her original spiritual songs called “Awakened From a Dream.” Both this book and her cassette tape are available to borrow from the Center library.

**Pathways Through to Space — A Personal
Report of Transformation in Consciousness**

by Franklin Merrell-Wolff

Published by Warner Books, 1973

Reviewed by Fred Chambers

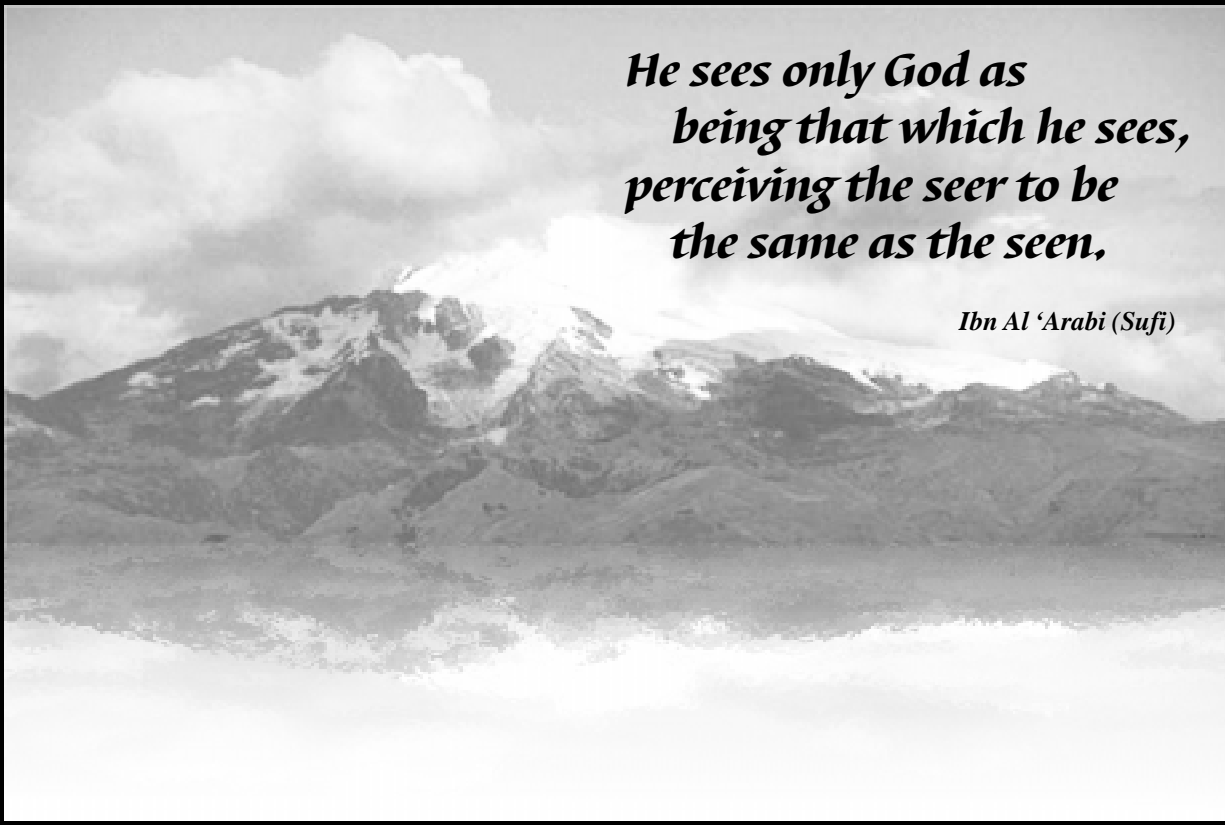
In *Pathways Through to Space*, Franklin Merrell-Wolff gives a personal account of the first 100 days following his breakthrough to ‘higher’ consciousness. Franklin’s main spiritual path was an inquiry into Truth, and this book provides an intriguing glimpse into the workings of a Western, scientific mind. This mystic/philosopher had his Recognition in 1936 and like all true mystical literature, his timeless message is still relevant to seekers today.

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

— Theophan the Recluse (Christian mystic)

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*He sees only God as
being that which he sees,
perceiving the seer to be
the same as the seen,*

Ibn Al 'Arabi (Sufi)

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