

# Center Voice

The Newsletter of the Center for Sacred Sciences

## Special Focus:

# OPENING THE HEART

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## In This Issue . . .

Throughout centuries and across cultures, mystics have reported having an open heart, a broken heart. They have described infinite love and compassion. They have documented personal and universal suffering. We may wonder, perhaps behind held breath or tensed muscles, what this may mean for us. We may sense, somehow, or realize directly, that this is a mysterious and powerful invitation to grace—this broken heart. We may grasp that the compassion of which they speak doesn't come from our greatness, but from our ordinariness, our suffering, our Oneness.

In our current issue, this topic is addressed with grace and beauty by Andrea Pucci, in **“Listen . . . The Broken Heart Is Whispering.”** In her article, Andrea leads us on a journey into the heart, into the suffering, the magical piercing that can take us to our True Home. Follow closely, for you will not want to miss a beat. Exemplifying this, we are fortunate to offer the remarkable story of one Center member's journey through just such a piercing of her heart. In **“The Gate: Opening To The Heart,”** M. describes her personal experience and the background that sustained her throughout. These articles are supplemented historically **“In the Words of the Mystics”** and in contemporary **“Poems from the Center Community”**. Finally, **“Center Voices”** offers discussion by three Center members concerning their own experience of love and compassion and the part suffering plays on their spiritual paths.

Completing this issue, we offer in **“Center News”** some recent events above and beyond business as usual, including the most recent act in the unfolding library drama. And, for you book-lovers, **“Library Corner”** focuses this time on some recommendations of new books acquired through the book drive. We hope this issue will provide food for thought, music for your heart and, as always, nourishment for your soul.

*The heart learns to open deeper and deeper into the center of itself or into the space of its true nature, where there is revealed none other than the great space of pure awareness itself.*

— Andrea Pucci

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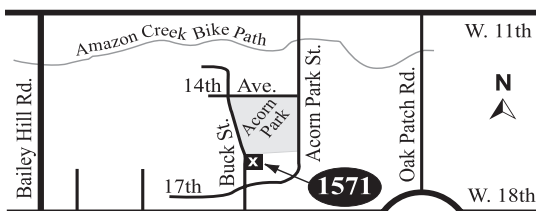
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The Center for Sacred Sciences is a non-profit, tax exempt church dedicated to the creation and dissemination of a new worldview based on the wisdom of humanity's great spiritual teachers, but presented in forms appropriate to our present scientific 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 a weekly Practitioners Group for committed spiritual seekers. The Center also maintains an extensive lending library of books, tapes and periodicals covering a broad spectrum of spiritual, psychological, and scientific subjects. Joel's teachings are offered freely as a labor of love, and he receives no financial support from the Center. We rely chiefly on volunteer labor to conduct our programs, and on donations and membership dues to meet our operating expenses.



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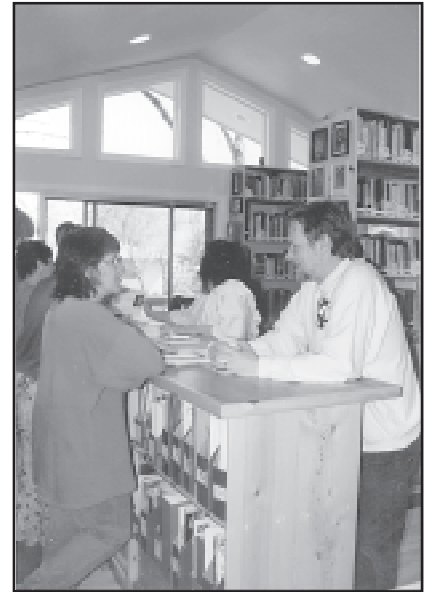
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## CENTER NEWS

### *Thanks to Many Volunteers*

The move out of and back into the library for remodeling was completed over several weeks throughout last fall with the help of many volunteers packing and unpacking books and taking apart and reinstalling bookcases. Much gratitude goes to Niraja Lorenz, Deanna Cordes, Ann Everitt, Steve Zorba Frankel, Maggie Free, Gene Gibbs, Dawn Kurzka, Ellie Hansen-Meservey, Grace Mikesell, Carol (Ann) Mizera, Miriam Reinhart, Vip Short, Jim Zajac, and Jennifer Knight for their devotion and long hours for the cause.



### *Christmas Party*

A lively time was had by all at the delightful home of Center member Grace Mikesell and her husband Ray last December 11. As it was a Saturday night, with a large party across the street at the same time, parking was very limited; so we organized car-ferries so the non-hikers among us could also park way down a winding road while the walkers got in a good climb and view of the Christmas lights all around.

Inside, as usual, we found a festive feast, good company and a hearty sing-along. Musicians included our own Gene Gibbs on guitar and Steve Zorba Frankel on violin, as well as some brave women (who wish to remain anonymous) playing spoons (and sometimes wearing them on their noses—don't ask!). They were accompanied by some very fine voices including those of Therese Engelmann and her husband Gil Campbell, Ellie Hansen-Meservey, and Miriam and Thomas Reinhart (who also informally led the Christmas carols that augmented our usual varied musical fare) in addition to the rest of us. Our deep appreciation goes to Grace and Ray for welcoming us so magnificently once again.



### ***Library Team Has a Changing of the Guard***

We give hearty thanks to Ann Everitt who put in many hours of volunteer time in the fall and winter before returning to the Seattle area. Also a warm thank you is extended to Carol (Ann) Mizera who has logged many hours of library service over the years from assisting with the original card catalog to her most recent stint as a weekly volunteer this last year. In May we welcomed aboard Miriam Reinhart.

### ***Tom McFarland Speaks***

On Sunday, February 20, we were fortunate to have Tom McFarland visit us from Palo Alto, California, to speak about synchronicity from a scientific perspective. Joel had warmed us up the previous Sunday, discussing the spiritual approach to synchronicity, and Tom built on it with a very interesting and convincing presentation. For a more complete introduction to Tom's background, please see his article in the Summer 1999 issue of *Center Voice* on our web site or see his published writings in our library and on his web site: [www.integralscience.org](http://www.integralscience.org)

### ***Spring Retreat***

The new-leafed trees at Cloud Mountain Retreat Center in Castle Rock, Washington, welcomed twenty-eight of us back for our annual spring retreat from April 28 to May 3. With the guidance of our wonderful yin-yang team of Andrea (as lead teacher this time) and Joel, we drew from Pema Chodron's book, *Start Where You Are*, to intensively practice tonglen meditation.

Tonglen practice develops our capacity to fully experience and be able to be with our feelings, however painful or frightening, as they arise, without acting out or repressing them. The method of dealing with these feelings, at its most powerful when used as an ongoing response to daily events, constitutes a reconditioning of our way of being in the world. Our heart opens as its defensive armor drops, and we draw closer to our Real Self as our identification with our ego images melts. And this is what we tasted in the intimate silence of collectively walking our individual paths at this rich retreat.



**RETREATANTS:** (Bottom row from left) Vip Short, Carol Mizera, Niraja Lorenz, Merry Song Caston, Erica Eden, Mike Craven, (middle row) Beth Mackenzie, Clivonne Corbett, Todd Corbett, Robin Retherford, Joel, Andrea Pucci, Jim Patterson, Kate Waterbury, Rich Marlatt, (top row) Gene Gibbs, Tom Kurzka, Maggie Free, Damien Pierce, Tina Wells, David Cunningham, Hanna Offenbacher, Jim Zajac, and Fred Chambers. (Not Shown: Miriam Reinhart, Ellie Hansen-Meservey, Grace Mikesell.)



# ***Listen . . . The Broken Heart is Whispering***

by Andrea Pucci

*On October 2, 1997, after a fourteen-year journey, Andrea Pucci had a Gnostic Awakening during our Fall Retreat at Cloud Mountain. Since that time, she has increasingly sought to share Truth with all who ask her through teaching and writing. She now teaches at the Center and continues to participate in Dharma groups in several locations.*

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At the core of our physical being, in the center left of our chest, is an organ pumping the red life force of nutritious fluid that carries oxygen and nutrients to every cell of our body that it may live and breathe. This organ is the central supply of all activity of our body/mind. If you have ever seen a beating heart, with inner chambers undulating in the perfect synchronization of a single heart beat, and not felt the awesome mystery and miracle of such a display, I invite you to look deeper.

How amazing to see an invisible force in action. How mysteriously beautiful. The entire process is impelled by the need and longing of each cell for oxygen and fuel to sustain being. It is this very longing and need that propels the enactment of the most exquisitely complex and intricate processes of interrelationship of the organism that is known as the human body.

Without need there would be nothing happening. The self-sustaining activities of the body/mind are the basis and support for what may be called our precious human existence. The intricate interrelationship of the basic elements of earth, wind, water, fire and space configure, recycle, and reconfigure in infinite patterns—and we call this our life. Our heart, and every other cell of our physical being, is made up of exactly the same elements that appear ‘outside’ or in the world. In fact, what we call our body/mind is simply the interplay of all the infinitely appearing, reconfiguring elements of matter and energy in playful dance.

What is this mysterious force that moves all of life, ranging from the heliotropic movement of a plant towards the sun, to a living heartbeat, to the interactive dance of countless galactic worlds? A mystic knows this great mystery to be a dance of divine love, an eternal display of countless forms and emptiness in perfect equipoise and ceaseless expression of itself. Or we could say that the entire creation of the universe is a longing of the cosmic

heart to give expression to itself in its self-love.

If we consider that this might be true, then it follows that our very longing and our deepest yearning is the very impetus for all of life to appear. Every appearance, every arising of form, however, is followed by its disappearance or its dissolution. If our desire seeks to find fulfillment in something that is thought to be outside of ourselves, in the form of any object that is doomed by impermanence to change—then our heart will continue to break in its unrequited yearning.

Our longing for experience continues to demonstrate a process of desire, a need-propelling activity to satisfy that desire, momentary fulfillment (if object is attained) or disappointment (if object is not attained). None of this activity, however, seems to fulfill our deepest longing. In fact, this very activity—to satiate desire through acquiring countless objects thought to promise fulfillment—seems to create our suffering and disappointment, our feelings of failure and inadequacy for attaining happiness.

If we are mistaking the temporal or relative and impermanent for what the heart is actually seeking (a permanently satisfying happiness), then we are forever doomed to suffer the lack. It is here in this broken heart that the promise of fulfillment actually awaits recognition. A heart that is broken by its unfulfilled longing is suffering from the truth that it will never be satisfied by anything that appears temporarily in the world.

*“If the heart can open to what is beneath the surface of unrequited longing and pain . . . A broken heart is ready to awaken to its deepest fulfillment.”*

A broken heart that can dwell right there in its pain and frustration and feeling of failure is closest to union with its deepest desire. If the heart can open to what is beneath the surface of unrequited longing and pain, it can embrace what is before, during, and beyond any impermanent or worldly seeking for happiness. A broken heart is ready to awaken to its deepest fulfillment.

If we do not cease grasping at new ideas for temporary satisfaction, we will continue to distract our attention away from this most tender and ripe potential place of true self-discovery. If we could learn to be with our most vulnerable feelings without seeking to change our experience, we might discover the hidden depths of our longing. If we could learn gradually, incrementally, to stay wherever we feel pain and longing, we could open to what is the deeper root of those feelings, to what is in fact the very source of all longing.

This suggestion to remain with feelings of loss and vulnerability is not a technique or discipline that we have been taught in our homes or schools for the most part. In fact, our world and our modern world's economy seem to work by repeatedly unsated mad consumer attempts to buy happiness in one form or another. Where and how do we learn to stay in the broken heart and dwell in the creative forces of our lives that seek to awaken us from our sleep? We turn to those who have made the journey through the broken heart and penetrated to its deepest center.

The mystical traditions all speak of the breaking open of the heart as a necessary prerequisite for the divine filling. How we can learn to bear the wound that is there is the big question. Let us consider how this might be possible. First, it seems that to remain with an open heart is to be able to remain with, to endure, to allow whatever our experience seems to be.

If there is disappointment, we must stay with that rather than seek to change that experience. Right there we could cease attempts at changing anything and simply abide in the feelings and direct sensations of the experience. As we allow whatever feelings about the situation to reveal themselves, and maintain an open willingness to allow feelings to emerge without grasping or pushing them away, we can begin to appreciate the changing and open quality of the stream or process of unfolding sensation and feeling. We can begin to sense the impermanent and changing quality of all phenomena and experience.

Allowing feelings to reveal themselves without grasping means that as thoughts about these feelings arise, we do not cling to them, involve our attention in them, or conclude anything. Instead, we just allow whatever

data surfaces to speak equally and not dilute our focus of attention away from the direct bodily and emotional sensations that will continue to be felt. We use the breath to breathe space into sensation, so that we can be there with openness and attentive caring. We acknowledge and let go with our attention that continues to flow with the changing sensations. We allow the flow of the presence of awareness that does not cling to anything felt but continues to remain open to whatever will reveal itself. We let attention flow with the changing feelings and thoughts.

*“We allow the unobstructed revelation of what is seeking to express itself through feelings, bodily sensations, and thoughts that arise and dissolve.”*

Allowing feelings to reveal themselves without pushing them away means becoming very aware of resistance and fear which may be directing attention away. Resistance often appears in the form of thoughts that reflect doubt about what we are doing, or suggestions of inadequacy and failure, or agitation and physical discomfort. Please keep in mind that resistance can take many different forms. We simply allow whatever experience continues to emerge, as our attentive and willing inquiry allows the deepening expression of what is there to acknowledge itself and continue to speak. We allow the unobstructed revelation of what is seeking to express itself through feelings, bodily sensations, and thoughts that arise and dissolve. We must remember not to allow our attention to be directed away with thoughts about what's happening, and continue to redirect our attention into the direct experience of changing sensations.

To open our heart to our deeper experience, we must be willing to bear or sustain what we consider to be the uncomfortable energies of want, need, frustration, expectation, anger, terror, desperation, hope and fear. To open our heart to our experience is to find the presence or the spaciousness of awareness in which we can remain in the midst of whatever discomfort might be arising—simply remaining spaciously aware of it with our breathing and ongoing willingness to abide continually with it—as it reveals itself in its momentary, impermanent, and changing quality.

It is exactly here, in the midst of our discomfort, where we do not distractedly run away and attempt to manipulate our experience, that we may begin to discover the natural dissolution of desire, fear, disappointment, sadness, or whatever feeling or emotion has kept us running in circles. As we commit to remaining present for the deeper expression of our longing or dissatisfaction, we begin to directly experience the self-liberating or dissolving of whatever we held to be our desire or the grief associated with never having attained it.

Longing was held to be a real need that we had to act out—simply because we did not give it our deepest attention. In the light of that attentive inquiry, that ‘being with directly’, the experience dissolves into the next moment where what we thought was there is there no longer. Desire naturally dissolves if we do not seek to satisfy it. Unrequited desire or grief naturally dissolves if we do not seek to distract ourselves from its feeling.

As we gradually develop the capacity to bear the feelings of the broken heart, this very heart that yearns for fulfillment is guided into its deepest source of true happiness. The heart that is encouraged by its commitment and courage is willing and more capable of increasingly abiding in the difficulties or the energetic discomforts of experience. This heart, that is pumping with the healthy vigor of loving commitment and growing strength, may gradually open deeper and deeper into its center or core, where there is revealed again and again—through all kinds of experience—its empty, open, luminous, clear, infinitely spacious center, *where satisfaction is already present*.

The heart learns to open deeper and deeper into the center of itself or into the space of its true nature, where there is revealed none other than the great space of pure awareness itself—empty, luminous, and brilliantly radiant and whole with infinite potential for all arising and dissolving of myriad worlds of infinite form. This heart is radiant and remains the center of all experience, the unchanging core of satisfaction and contentment that requires nothing and is independent of any cause or condition. This radiance is the source of all cause, condition or circumstance. Here the heart is one with its deepest yearning. Here the heart knows Itself. Nothing short of this remembrance or recognition can or will ever satisfy it.

The longing heart is the perfect expression of itself. If we simply allow our heart’s deepest yearning to direct us to its very source, we will discover its secret center where all desire arises. All desire has only one fulfillment. All desire seeks to unite with its source. All desire, relentlessly unfulfilled by temporary resolution, leads us home if we would follow it in. This means that the broken heart is the doorway into our true nature. This means that if we stop trying to ameliorate our pain, if we cease distracting ourselves from our feelings of grief, we can enter our radiant core.

So, let us resolve to face the truth of ourselves, to penetrate to this inner radiant heart wherever we have opportunity to do so. The greatest opportunity for finding our true nature is through the heart that longs for Itself. This heart can never be satisfied by anything less than the truth and, precisely because of this, each of us has an inner wisdom that is ever whispering to us. We must listen very closely to this inner voice that knows when we are fooling ourselves with irrelevant or temporary substitutes, knows when we are walking away from the way in and instead into a detour, knows when we are turning away from our opportunities. This inner voice does not judge or condemn. It simply knows, feels and points to a habitually patterned way of being or reacting, so that you will notice what is obstructing your way in. Let it guide you and encourage you on. Do not take this voice of pure guidance and turn it into an abusive authority, throwing you out into further separation or alienation from your heart’s true center.

*“Let your broken heart  
become a quivering heart  
that is trembling with  
prayer.”*

Listen to your deepest heart voice speak and resolve to go home. Look within and dare to release the habitual tendencies that move us out and away into further experience. Open your heart and hear it whisper to you. Hear it whisper in your dreams . . . listen. Hear it whisper in your sadness . . . listen. Hear it whisper in your discomfort . . . listen. Hear it whisper in the crack of your broken heart. Let your broken heart become a quivering heart that is trembling with prayer. Stay awhile in the inner chambers of your heart and let it reveal its intricate splendor.

You must become quiet in order to feel and hear and know the inner whisperings of your heart. It does not set off firecrackers to get your attention, but instead leads you to look down and notice a budding flower, an insect with a broken leg, the sound of a bird’s wing in the air, the cry of a child, or a disappointment. Turning in, abide in the sacred stillness of your whispering heart and let it speak your way home. Let your heart guide you into your true nature—the heart of all hearts, the center of all creation.

❖ Andrea, Spring 2000

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*Note: Andrea has recorded a guided meditation audio tape titled Basic Awareness Meditation which is now available for purchase. See enclosed Audio Tape Catalog sheet in this issue.*

# *In the Words of the Mystics*

## **Islam**

*The heart of him who receives the casting must have the preparedness for what is cast into it. Without it there would be no reception.*

—Ibn 'Arabi

*Every one sees the Unseen in proportion to the clarity of his heart, and that depends on how much he has polished it.*

—Rumi

*When the foundations of your existence become topsy-turvy, have nothing in your heart, for you will also become topsy-turvy.*

—Hafiz

## **Buddhism**

*The purpose of the Holy Life does not consist in acquiring alms, honour, or fame, nor gaining morality, concentration, or the eye of knowledge. That unshakable deliverance of the heart; that, verily, is the object of the Holy Life, that is the essence, that is its goal.*

—Buddha

## **Judaism**

*The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.*

—Psalms 51:17

*A person must perform a spiritual circumcision, alongside the physical one; for the foreskin of the heart must be removed in order to reveal the holy life that dwells within.*

—Menahem Nahum

## **Christianity**

*Your heart must be empty of all other things because God desires to possess it exclusively, and he cannot possess it exclusively without first emptying it of everything other than himself; neither can he act within it nor do there what he pleases.*

—Brother Lawrence

*The spirit of wisdom and revelation, and the heart that is cleansed are two different matters...The heart alone, despite all purification...will not give us wisdom; but the spirit of wisdom will not come to us unless we have prepared a pure heart to be its dwelling place.*

—Theophan the Recluse

## **Shamanism**

*I had not been lying there long before I heard the bear coming. It attacked me and crunched me up, limb by limb, joint by joint, but strangely enough it did not hurt at all; it was only when it bit me in the heart that it did hurt frightfully...this was necessary if I wished to attain any good.*

—Autdaruta's shamanic initiation (Eskimo)

## **Hinduism**

*From this absolute stand-point, the Heart, Self, or Consciousness can have no particular place assigned to it in the physical body. What is the reason? The body is itself a mere projection of the mind, and the mind is but a poor reflection of the Radiant Heart. How can That, in which everything is contained, be itself confined as a tiny part within the physical body which is but an infinitesimal, phenomenal manifestation of the one Reality?...All that you can say of the Heart is that it is the very Core of your being.*

—Ramana Maharshi

*When all the ties that bind the heart are unloosened, then a mortal becomes immortal. This is the sacred teaching.*

—Upanishads

# The Gate: Opening to the Heart

by M.

*M.'s main interests are seeking the True Nature of her being and using writing, photography, and video to document the process. She has been a member of the Center for over five years, and has practiced Vipassana for ten years.*

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When my partner of eight and a half years came home one day, sat down on the couch, and said, “I want out,” I had a moment of delight. I don’t mean that I wanted her to leave. This tiny instant of delight was my recognition of the possible piercing of my heart. Talk about good stuff for spiritual practice—this was it!

After at least ten years of Buddhist teachings, including Vipassana and Tibetan practices, without really knowing how, I had gotten to the point of just sitting in the presence of the Truth, not trying to figure anything out. I had come to trust the effortless process of unfoldment. So I watched.

What followed were two weeks of my pain and suffering, all the typical reactions to being left: “How can you do this to me?” “I thought this relationship meant more to you than that!” “So this is all that eight and a half years means!”

But no matter what I said, C. was determined to go. As I cried, swore, and begged, a very big part of me was watching the drama unfold and rather *enjoyed* it. This eye that was watching seemed to be *me* and *not me* at the same time.

One particularly painful day I suddenly thought, ***Oh—this is the pain of rejection that so many people in the world feel right now. It’s not my pain. It’s not personal at all! Nothing about this situation is personal.*** And somehow I felt lifted out of my “self” and opened up to the universal pain.

When my partner announced that she was going to spend the weekend with her new lover, I said, “I don’t want you to go.” But after she left, I noticed I felt fine. As I looked more closely, I saw that I had no jealousy in the heart toward the other person she had gone to. I also noticed a feeling of compassion toward C.—I wanted her to be happy and youthful and alive—maybe this was what she needed.

When C. returned from her weekend rendezvous, I saw that I had a new appreciation for her. If she was going to leave me, then every moment of her still being here was precious.

I could clearly see that any sense of my having had security with her in the first place was false. We will die someday—we can’t control that. And I can’t control her staying with me or going. I suddenly realized that, in fact, it

made no difference if she stayed or went. I would give her my open heart.

I began to express this open heart every day by sitting and talking with her when she was here, giving her little treats I knew she liked, and touching her gently on the cheek. Sometimes I’d think: This might be the last time—better hurry and take the moment to give my tender love.

I started to feel happy for seeing life as this opportunity to feel and be open to it all without pushing anything away. I didn’t know how to envision the future without her, so I didn’t try. I just let this feeling come to me that the next thing would be the next thing, and God, I’m glad I have such good teachers and fellow seekers and an insight that continues to reveal more and more to me.

I did worry about the cat. We couldn’t cut Bodhicat in half. “She stays with me!” I announced, and C. agreed. I also had some melancholy moments thinking this would be the last of this and the last of that, but the moments washed through me, sometimes with a tear and sometimes with a smile.

I had found a gate. I went through that gate. The sign on the gate said LET GO—DETACH—NO SUFFERING. There might be a little pain in the “pierced heart,” but beyond that gate, there was no suffering. There was no *me*.

I thought about calling my root teacher, Ruth Denison, or my big oak tree teacher, Joel, or his blooming accomplice, Andrea. But I didn’t. Why bother them and take up all their time? They had all been tirelessly giving me the teachings of detachment and impermanence for years. Now was a moment to cultivate my understanding and let go.

When my partner of eight and a half years said, “I’m sorry I did this—I don’t really want to go,” I neither laughed nor cried. I listened to how she felt that she had just awakened from a dream and truly saw herself. I welcomed her to stay. I hadn’t wanted her to leave. Why not stay?

“Can you ever forgive me?” she asked.

“I never held it against you,” I said.

I was reminded of a story I heard once about a monk who



was wrongly accused of fathering a child with a young woman in the village. When the woman's angry father dropped the newborn at the monk's door, the monk fed the baby and took care of it. When the woman confessed that the baby did not belong to the monk, her father came back after the small child. The monk simply let go of the child.

My teachers have guided me in understanding this story. I give them my most genuine appreciation.

An old friend of mine asked me if C. had promised that she wouldn't hurt me this way again. "I hope not," I said. "That kind of promise is as substantial as my old sense of security. Thank God that's gone."

❖ M., Spring 2000

## 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.
- Previous newsletters.

## Poems from the Center Community

### This Longing

*It sounds sweet in the language of poets like Rumi and Lalla.  
I've called you and promised to listen.  
You came on softly so I could ride you into my heart.*

*But how shall I say what it is when you come like a storm?  
It's like a dog in heat, and the only relief is to escape the house.  
It's like being on fire, a full body rage.*

*Into this hole I throw all the same old things...a new magazine, a  
movie, books, shopping, dreams of a different life or a new love.*

*Even so I see you now.  
I see that consuming the whole of the world would not begin to fill the  
black hole in my heart that is longing for wholeness.*

*I see you now, and I'm on your trail.  
One day when you come as a storm I'll be ready.  
Sweet or storm I'll follow you into the core.  
Until then I pray "teach me to open my heart."*

—Anonymous



### Love

*Tiny dots of rain  
Softly fall  
Piercing my heart with love.*

—Dawn Kurzka

### Untitled

*The story of your own true heart  
Reminds me of what was long forgotten  
Deep in my own  
Tears of bittersweet sorrow stream down my face  
Sobs from the bottom of my soul  
Cast into the open heart of emptiness*

—Tom McFarlane

# What do Love and Compassion Mean to You?

*We talked to three members of our Practitioners Group about the meaning of love and compassion in their lives. Their responses, as told to the Center Voice, include what each term means to them, how the meaning has changed over the years, and the importance of these concepts in their lives. How do their thoughts relate to your own experience?*

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*LouAnne Lachman lives in Eugene, Oregon and is the mother of two children, ages nine and thirteen. She works for her husband's remodeling company and recently started studying chemical dependency counseling at Lane Community College. She has been attending the Center for two years.*

Love generally means that my heart feels open toward a person. But it also means operating in a way that is for the other's best interest. So if I behave in a loving way toward everyone in my world, then I don't behave in a way that I know would be harmful. It's about being aware of my internal world enough not to be lashing out at other people.

Compassion and love are linked, but compassion means seeing suffering and behaving in a way that would alleviate it if I can—when someone is hurt, my heart goes out to them. Sometimes compassion means just noticing that there is suffering—noticing another person in their suffering, noticing myself in my suffering—there's not always something to be done. The difference in this culture in how we use the words is that love is often much more self-centered, and compassion allows that to be gone.

I think love and compassion are the alpha and omega—they're *it*. Other principles are like flowers in the garden, whereas love and compassion are the garden itself—the foundation upon which everything rests. In order for a

meditation practice to work, there has to be love and compassion—you have to be compassionate with yourself. In order for your life to work—to have a good marriage, to have good relations with people—you need love and compassion for the other person and for yourself.

In my life, I can see the amount of trauma and crap that I've cleared out to make enough space for love and compassion. Years ago, I was so busy self-seeking that I couldn't find it—I didn't know what it was. From my background, when I think about love and compassion, it's not just *charity*. I was raised around people who *thought* they were doing the right thing, but weren't paying attention to their hearts. I have this sense that people can get overtaken by following dogma or a set of rules that doesn't connect with their heart—it's just a head thing. Some people can't be loving and compassionate because they don't know what it really is.

I practice love and compassion with people that I meet, never belittling people. It's almost a way of *being*—compassionate being. People pick up on it right away. I've been kind of sheltered in my little remodeling firm and haven't dealt with very many people. Now I'm in school, and I notice that people are drawn to me because they sense that I don't judge them—that I'm interested and want to see all of them, not just one part.

Seems like my practice goes in phases. Luckily the bad phases aren't as long as they used to be. Lately, it seems kind of effortless. I'm aware of love and compassion. I'm very aware of the other, and also aware of myself.



*Clivonne Corbett is a registered nurse living in the mountains outside of Roseburg, Oregon. She is fifty years old, enjoys bicycling and hiking, and has been attending the Center for six years.*

Love is just a word that can encompass a lot. In our lives, our deepest yearning is for love. Sometimes I think it's like we are always looking outside ourselves for most of our lives until we recognize that love is a part of what we are—that we can't get away from it—that it's a part of our being that's being expressed. By our very existence, we are love—the very fact that we *are*. Recognizing what we are is the same as recognizing what love is. We think that we are going to get something, or that love is something outside of us, but it isn't—it's everywhere. Love is all around us—the old Beatles thing. It's a manifestation of the divine, whatever it is—how could it not be?

Compassion means caring for someone in spite of what kind of manifestation they have, without judgment of whether it's right or wrong. Like if someone is yelling in your face, angered and really being ugly, you still feel compassion for where that person is at because you recognize in that manifestation of the anger, or whatever afflicted emotion it is, that they're suffering. We have all experienced these emotions and the suffering they cause.

If you feel love, you feel compassion. They kind of go together. Just because you have compassion, it's sort of an expression of love—it's like an understanding of suffering. I've noticed how compassion is working in my life whenever I get into a mood, a heavy thing, and something will just come to me that just wakes me up to the fact that I'm perpetuating this suffering within myself. If you can understand your own suffering, you can understand others' suffering, and you can have compassion and love. If you can love yourself, you also have love for other people. It just works that way since the separation between self and others is part of the big delusion of appearances. The truth is that you can't hurt anyone without hurting yourself, so you begin to develop a bit of mindfulness. Pain becomes a useful tool for waking up. May your suffering be great!

My understanding of love and compassion has changed over the years—you grow. You have these experiences that

just open your heart to suffering—your own and others. Just seeing the things that you've seen and experiencing the things you've experienced, you can't help but start picking up on how we hurt each other and ourselves. The hope is, of course, to become more compassionate—as you wake up you would recognize in certain situations the compassionate thing or the compassionate action. Even still, it's like you can only act from where you are in that place at that time—how open you are or how closed you are at that point in your development.

Love and compassion are connected with the Precepts that we take\*. The Precepts are your guidelines, so you can watch yourself and how your behaviors lead to more or less compassionate or loving actions. The energy of love and compassion is interwoven in everything—it's all connected.

\* See the Practitioners Group's Ten Selfless Precepts on page 12.



*Grace Mikesell lives in Eugene, Oregon and has been attending the Center for ten years. She is a former grade school teacher and, at 71, now spends her time gardening and expressing herself creatively in a variety of crafts.*

Love means an opening of my heart and a union with everything around me. Compassion comes from knowing that I've been there—I've suffered what I see another suffering. My heart opens to them and I want to help, to show support—not solving another's problems, but allowing the other to realize they're not alone.

Love used to mean what would enhance me, my life, and bring me pleasure. For example, I love you because you complete me, because you have qualities I don't have, I aspire to. I used to love what I didn't have. Now I've got everything. I've got the good and the bad. I've got what I love and what I don't love. I don't love in order to complete myself. When love swells up, I can't put it down. When I feel this love, it's God—it just expands me so that I'm everything that is there. One doesn't *think* love—one *is* love—and it's a quality, not just an emotion. Love is being God, being expanded, not having boundaries. That's what it is! If I'm not protecting some imaginary self inside, then the boundary disappears. Love is the glue that keeps us all together.

Compassion is *self-less*. When love and compassion well up and come through me, I become that love and compassion—then I don't exist as a separate self and I am united with whatever triggered the love and compassion. It is a breaking down of all barriers and the realization of oneness—Self.

In terms of the relationship between *love* and *compassion*, I don't think there can be any love without compassion, and I don't think compassion exists without love—I believe compassion automatically flows from self-love. Love doesn't have likes and dislikes, it embraces all.

Compared to other principles on my path, there's nothing else but love and compassion. If you can *be* that, then you don't have to think about other precepts\*. You don't have to worry about having them in your head, or doing some ritual—you've arrived. If you have to *practice* love, then you haven't learned it yet. You don't know love in your head, it just bubbles up. Whenever I find that I am down on myself, and I get grumpy and short-tempered, I show compassion for myself. When I remember to show compassion for myself and realize love of self, then it flows outward.

❖ All interviews conducted Spring, 2000

*\*The members of the Practitioners Group at the Center for Sacred Sciences study and practice the following precepts.*

## I Vow to Practice These Ten Selfless Precepts

- 1. RESPONSIBILITY.** To take responsibility for my life. Not to blame others for my own unhappiness, nor make excuses for my own mistakes.
- 2. SELF-DISCIPLINE.** To regard each moment as a precious opportunity for spiritual practice. Not to waste time in frivolous pursuits, nor overindulge in drugs, alcohol or escapist entertainments.
- 3. HARMLESSNESS.** Not to injure or kill any being heedlessly or needlessly.
- 4. STEWARDSHIP.** Not to waste the resources upon which other beings depend.
- 5. HONESTY.** Not to deceive myself or others by word or deed.
- 6. INTEGRITY.** Not to take what does not belong to me.
- 7. HONOR.** To regard my word as sacred; not to give it lightly but, once given, strive to honor it under all circumstances.
- 8. SEXUAL RESTRAINT.** To make of sex a sacrament; not to profane it in the pursuit of selfish ends.
- 9. CHARITY.** Not to be possessive of people or things, but to give unsparingly of my assets, both material and spiritual, for the alleviation of suffering.
- 10. REMEMBRANCE.** To recite these precepts once a day, renewing my vows and remembering this path which I have freely chosen.



**CSS Library Hours:**

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

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The Center Library has grown from a mere shelf of books a decade or so ago to a vast array of ever-expanding titles in several formats. This has happened through grit and determination combined with luck, synchronicity and the offerings of many Center members and friends. One consistent source of funds for the library is the book drive. Here, donations of books not appropriate to the library itself are taken to local used bookstores and, by being exchanged for cash, provide the resources for acquiring spiritual treasures. Following are some short reviews of books purchased through the book drive and added to the library in the last year. The theme is focused on personal stories: autobiography, retreat, pilgrimage and travel.

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**Cave in the Snow: Tenzim Palmo's  
Quest for Enlightenment**

by Vickie MacKenzie. Bloomsbury, 1998.

Imagine moving into a cave in India at age 33 and spending every night sitting up in your meditation box while wolves are howling outside and snowstorms threaten to bury you. Now imagine continuing this solitary retreat until you are 45 years old! That's the story of Tibetan Buddhist nun, Tenzim Palmo, an Englishwoman whose quest for Enlightenment in the female form led her to extreme measures. After her legendary retreat, Tenzim Palmo went all over the world speaking out for the equality of women on the spiritual path. *Cave in the Snow* is intimate, empowering, and revealing. As a bonus, it gives the reader a picture of how Buddhism is being transformed in the West. Highly recommended!

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**Soul Sword: The Way and Mind of a Warrior**

by Vernon Kitabu Turner. Hampton Roads  
Publishing Company, 1996.

As an African-American growing up in a hostile environment, Vernon Turner decided to learn martial arts as a means of self-defense. What makes his story unique, however (and of special interest to spiritual seekers), is that Mr. Turner is largely self-taught, or rather *Spirit*-taught. At an early age, he learned to tap into that Universal Inner Wisdom that is beyond thought, and trusted it to guide both his martial arts and his life in general. Although later he did study formal martial arts techniques with various teachers, and began practicing zazen under the tutelage of Zen Master, Nomura-Roshi, *Soul Sword* is not a book about methods and means. It's about living moment-to-moment from the spontaneous and transcended Depths of One's Being. A real gem!

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**The Face Before I Was Born: A Spiritual  
Autobiography**

by Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee. The Golden  
Sufi Center Publishing, 1998.

Teacher of dreamwork, Sufism, and Jungian psychology, Vaughan-Lee writes of his spiritual path and his training with Sufi master Irina Tweedie. Displaying the tension between intellect and the heart in his experience, and containing a lot of Jungian references, this narrative complements Mrs. Tweedie's own riveting story, *Daughter of Fire*, which was reviewed in the "Library Corner" of the *Center Voice*, Winter 1999.

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**Nothing Ever Happened** (Volumes 1-3)

by David Godman. Avadhuta Foundation, 1998.

This three-volume work is a comprehensive biography of W.H.L. Poonja (called Papaji), including—unsurprisingly—some remarkable stories. It covers his early life and first meeting with his teacher, Sri Ramana Maharshi, through the beginning of his teaching career.

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**El Camino: Walking to Santiago de Compostela.**

Hoinacki, Lee. Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996.

The pilgrim's road from Europe across the Pyrenees and through northern Spain leads to Santiago de Compostela, the burial place of Saint James, and was one of the most important Christian pilgrimages for thousands of years. In 1993, contemporary pilgrim Lee Hoinacki walked the traditional 500-mile route and this is his record of that pilgrimage.



*By "heart" I do not mean the piece of flesh situated in the left of our bodies, but that which uses all the other faculties as its instruments and servants. In truth it does not belong to the visible world, but to the invisible...It is the knowledge of this entity and its attributes which is the key to the knowledge of God.*

—Al-Ghazzali (Islam)



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