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Center Voice

The Newsletter of the Center for Sacred Sciences

Special Focus:

Practice

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In this issue, we begin with a special message from Joel, “**Seven Things to Do when Samsara Gets You Down,**” in which he addresses unfolding world events. Next, in “**To Practice or Not to Practice,**” Joel explores the very timely debate about practice, borrowing from the testimony of mystics to support his points. He describes the creation of delusion, the central role played by self-involvement, and the rocky road to liberation from attachment and identity, illustrating that doing both something and nothing each has its own time. Following this, in “**Center Voices,**” six Center members share their own experiences of practice, including both the pitfalls and benefits they’ve found and their current attitudes. (More “voices” than usual are represented in this issue because we believe people in practice *are* the authority on this topic.) We hope this issue offers you some reflection and a fresh perspective with which to practice or to stop.

In This Issue . . .

To practice, not to practice—this is an ongoing controversy in many spiritual circles. At the Center, we’ve found that practice can bring solace, strength, and clarity to life. Practice dissolves feelings of isolation and demonstrates the oneness that we are, bringing compassion for the world and its striving and pain. Practice softens the stubbornness of clinging to identity—until it melts away into the great ocean of emptiness and participation in life happens on its own. When the time is ripe, practice does stop, transforming into simply the presence of awareness endlessly riding the waves of nothing and something.

You will achieve nothing by your own effort alone; yet God will not give you anything, unless you work with all your strength. This is an unbreakable law.

—Theophan the Recluse (Christian)

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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 weekly Practitioners Groups 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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CENTER NEWS

Foundation Studies Annual Rollover

The Foundation Studies class of 2000-2001 completed the year with a graduation ceremony at the annual potluck. Their teacher, Tom Kurzka, and Joel congratulated them and students presented Tom with a gift certificate to a bookstore. Smart choice—they must have noticed he was missing a few basic spiritual books! Tom McFarlane is teaching this year's class, and we wish them all a successful year.

Summer Retreat

"Dismantling Delusion" was the topic of the first Center summer retreat, held at Cloud Mountain Retreat Center in Castle Rock, WA. On July 20 – 25, 2001, twenty-seven participants explored the story of 'I,' in which (in delusion) we take appearance and thoughts and create a story where we star as either hero or victim. This story focuses on a distinction between the "world out there" and a "me in here." Our practice progressed to a look at the neutral phenomena, thoughts, and feelings arising— independent of labels and stories—and proceeded to focus on the space of awareness in which all this appears. The teachings, enhanced as usual by humor, were given by Joel, assisted by teacher-in-training, Tom Kurzka.



RETREATANTS: (Bottom row from left) David Kindschi, Wesley Lachman, Todd Corbett, Gene Gibbs, Clivonne Corbett, Jim Patterson, Mike Craven, (middle row) Beth Mackenzie, Barbara Dewey, Shan Ambika, Dawn Kurzka, Tom Kurzka, Joel, Barbara Hasbrouck, Diana Morris, Mike Barkhuff, (top row) David Cunningham, Scott Matthews, Carla Wenzlaff, Damien Pierce, Maggie Free, Bob Hoitt, Miriam Reinhart, Andrew Cox, and Ann Everitt. (Not Shown: Anita Runyan.)

Fall Retreat

On October 11, 2001, twenty-eight retreatants gathered at Cloud Mountain Retreat Center to explore the theme of “Time and Eternity” under the inspired guidance of Joel and Andrea. We discovered that time, one of our deepest levels of conditioning, is the loom (of our own invention) upon which we weave the pattern of plot and character development that constitutes the story of “I.” This pattern defines our identity, which becomes the prison that shuts out the freedom that is our birthright. Joel’s and Andrea’s instructions in the Dzogchen practice were so clear that a number of us approached nearer than ever before to the eternal reality of NOW. What grace to have such teachers *and* a beautiful, supportive place for our practice!



RETREATANTS: (Bottom row from left) Peggy Prentice, Helmut Behrend, Shan Ambika, Maggie Free, Jim Patterson, Clivonne Corbett, Mike Craven, (middle row) Megan Greiner, Todd Corbett, Niraja Lorenz, Andrea Pucci, Joel, Robin Retherford, Vip Short, Diana Morris, (top row) Merry Song, Rich Marlatt, Loraine Baker, Fred Chambers, Ann Everitt, David Cunningham, Damien Pierce, Hanna Offenbacher, Lewis Bogan, Deanna Cordes, and Gene Gibbs. (Not Shown: Sharry Lachman.)

Enlightenment Day Potluck Celebration

The Center members’ end-of-the-Center-year potluck party was held once again at the home of Mike and Sheila Craven. This year, the weather was cooler, but sweater-draped attendees enjoyed Joel’s chicken barbecue and the other dishes as much as ever. We watched the eight members of last year’s Foundation Studies class graduate (see “Foundation Studies Annual Rollover”) before going in to enjoy music.

This year, again, we were fortunate to be joined by Lou and Vinnie Principe with keyboard, guitar, and some outrageous vocals; Steve Zorba Frankel on an *always* extraordinary violin; Wesley Lachman and Gene Gibbs on guitar; and

rhythm instruments passed all around. An overflow crowd bounced and swayed through the different offerings, among them those lovingly assembled into a special songbook by Wesley Lachman. In addition, we were so gratified when Gene brought out his humorous spiritual songs, that he was forced to play and sing almost all of them. The revelry lasted long enough to make any sane person forego a nighttime meditation. What an influence!



Seven Things to Do when Samsara Gets You Down

by Joel

It is only natural to feel shock, sadness, and dismay at the terrorist attacks of September 11, and the events which have followed. Still, it is a little surprising that, as spiritual seekers, we were caught so off guard. After all, have not our greatest teachers been telling us all along that life lived in ignorance of our True Nature is *inevitably full of suffering, a vale of tears, a land of exile*? What happened on September 11, then, was simply an unusually violent reflection of our fallen condition, which (lest we forget) has produced worse horrors—Bosnia, Rwanda, two world wars, Hiroshima, and the Holocaust, to name but a few of the most recent examples. Welcome to samsara!

What is more surprising, however, is that even now, four months later, so many seekers are still ringing their hands, wondering what to do. Have not these same teachers taught us that all our suffering is rooted in the delusion of self, which gives rise to those afflicted emotions—greed, envy, hatred, and pride—that play out on the stage of history in cycles of oppression, terror, retribution, and war? And have not they also taught us that the only real way to end this suffering is to undertake those spiritual disciplines and practices (self-inquiry, meditation, morality, and devotion) which can dispel our delusion and allow the Selfless Love and Compassion of our True Nature to manifest. What we can do, then, is to roll up our sleeves and start putting these teachings into practice. For example, you can...

1. BEGIN WITH YOURSELF. as the prophet Muhammad said. This is an excellent time to take stock of your life. How much of it do you actually devote to spiritual practices and how much to the pursuit of worldly pleasures? If you are not already practicing on a regular basis, start today. If you are already engaged in practices, renew your commitment to them.

2. DO NO HARM. The great rabbi Hillel was once asked if he could teach the entire Torah while standing on one foot. He replied, *What is hateful to you do not do to your fellow man. That is the whole Torah, the rest is commentary. Go and learn it.* The way to “learn” this is to keep those precepts of self-restraint found in all the Great Traditions—not to lie, cheat, steal, commit sexual misdeeds, or otherwise cause harm. If you have no tradition to spell these precepts out for you, make a set of your own.

3. PRACTICE CHARITY. Practicing charity is the first *paramita* (perfection) of Buddhism, a *mitzvah* (commandment) in Judaism, one of the *seven cardinal virtues* of Christianity, and the *third pillar* of Islam. The reason for this is that, while many people talk about love and compassion, few actually do anything to manifest it. Practicing charity allows you to put your money where your mouth is. If you are not already donating to charitable organizations, choose one or two and begin to do so now. If you are wondering how much to give, take Mother Teresa’s advice and *give until it hurts*.

4. TREAT ALL BEINGS WITH KINDNESS AND COMPASSION. While practicing charity is a good way to begin manifesting love and compassion, what is really required is a fundamental transformation in our outlook on life. *Instead of letting*

others serve you, learn how to serve others, is how Laleshwari put it. Jesus went even further, saying, *love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who despitefully abuse you and persecute you.* This may sound like an impossible ideal, but unless you try it, you will never know. The best thing to do is to start with what is easiest. Find concrete ways to be more helpful to family and friends. Then, make it a point to show kindness and consideration to the strangers in your life—the rude store clerks and harried waitresses. Finally, pick a specific individual you feel animosity toward and experiment with ways to love that person.

5. WORK FOR PEACE BY UPHOLDING JUSTICE. Jesus said, *blessed are the peacemakers*, but there can be no peace without justice. Moreover, upholding justice sometimes requires the use of force—a fact which causes anguish and perplexity for many modern seekers. How can peace ever be won by violent means? This is a valid question, which deserves far more space than we can afford here. For now, suffice it to say that few teachers have ever enjoined absolute pacifism on their followers. The Dalai Lama, for instance, once compared the use of force to very potent medicine which must be applied only as a last resort and only in the proper doses—otherwise, instead of curing an illness, it will make it worse. But whether you are an absolute pacifist or not, the real challenge is to try to right wrongs before force becomes necessary. So, instead of sitting around bemoaning the world’s evils, get involved, speak out, write letters, join causes. Make sure, however, that your actions are motivated by compassion not anger, love not outrage. Always seek to persuade rather than vilify, sow harmony rather than discord, unite rather than divide.

6. PRACTICE DETACHMENT FROM THE FRUITS OF YOUR ACTIONS. In the Bhagavad Gita Krishna tells Arjuna: *The wise man surrenders the fruits of his actions and attains perfect peace. The fool acts out of desire; he is attached to the results; his acts imprison him.* Planning for the future is essential to the conduct of human life. But if we cling to images of how we want things to turn out, then, when events take a different course, we not only suffer frustration and disappointment, we become distracted from the present reality. Practicing detachment from such images opens our hearts and minds to what is actually occurring so that we can respond appropriately. This is what it means to surrender your own will to the will of the Divine.

7. BE GRATEFUL FOR EVERYTHING—sorrow as well as joy, misfortune as well as good fortune, death as well as life. Indeed, adversity is our best teacher, for nothing brings our hidden attachments and self-centered conditioning more quickly into the light of awareness where they can be seen and surrendered once and for all. Moreover, no matter how painful it may seem, this process of Awakening is, itself, part and parcel of the *Great Perfection* or *Divine Play*. So do not turn away from this world, with all its apparent imperfections, searching for something better. Only by facing things as they are can you ever Realize the Truth that *the Kingdom of God is already here, and everywhere you look you see nothing but Allah’s Face*. Welcome to Nirvana!



TO PRACTICE OR NOT TO PRACTICE

by Joel

The aim of all mystical paths is to end suffering through a Realization (Enlightenment or Gnosis) of the Truth—namely, that our experience of being a separate entity or self, subject to birth and death is, in reality, a delusion. In reality, there is only Consciousness, Itself, (“God,” “Brahman,” “Buddha-mind,” etc.) in which all apparent ‘entities’ and ‘selves’ arise and pass like the seamless waves of a shoreless ocean.

In order to help us attain this Realization, mystics of all traditions have developed, over the centuries, a vast array of disciplines and practices for such things as conducting inquiry, training in meditation, cultivating morality, and kindling devotion. In recent years, however, there have appeared a number of teachers who claim that these disciplines and practices are not only unnecessary but actually obstacles and hindrances to Realization. What they recommend, instead, is a kind of *effortless contemplation* in which the practitioner is advised to abandon all efforts, cease seeking to attain anything, and just be still.

Moreover, by way of justifying such an approach, these contemporary teachers often invoke the words of some of the world’s most venerable Gnostics—particularly those belonging to the *Advaita* (“Non-dual”) school of Hinduism and the *Dzogchen* (“Great Perfection”) school of Tibetan Buddhism. For instance, the great 14th-century Dzogchen master, Longchen-pa, insisted that “sought-after truth is found by not seeking it”¹ and gave the following instructions for doing nothing:

*In the meditation which is great natural self-perfection,
There is no need of modifications and transformations:
whatever arises is the Great Perfection...
If you reside in the groundless state through detachment
from mind
You will accomplish spontaneously and changelessly,
the inconceivable sovereignty.*²

In similar fashion, the renowned 20th-century Advaita teacher, Ramana Maharshi, used to tell his students:

*Make no effort...your effort is the bondage...All that is required to realize the SELF is to BE STILL. What can be easier than that?*³

Nor are such teachings found only within the Buddhist and Hindu traditions. In fact, there have been mystics in all the Great Traditions who have taught precisely the same thing.

Listen, for example, to the 11th-century Sufi, Abdullah Ansari of Herat, who wrote of Allah:

*To find You involves neither time nor means;
the one who is dependent on seeking is veiled.
To seek You is a remnant of separation and dispersion:
You are before everything,
(so) what (would it mean) to seek You?*⁴

Likewise, the 13th-century Christian mystic, Meister Eckhart, declared:

*Whoever is seeking God by ways is finding ways and losing God, who in ways is hidden. But whoever seeks for God without ways will find him as he is in himself, and that man will live with the Son, and he is life itself.*⁵

But if what these teachers say is true, then why walk a spiritual path and engage in all sorts of arduous disciplines and practices? Why not dispense with all these “ways” and, instead, simply Realize your True Nature through effortless contemplation?

This is a good question. And the best way to answer it is to give it a try. So why don’t you do that, right now. Just sit quietly for a few minutes. Do not meditate on anything in particular. Do not even get into any kind of special posture. Above all, do not seek to attain anything. Simply be still and Realize your True Nature as Consciousness, itself....

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...If you Realized your True Nature, congratulations! As a matter of historical fact some mystics have, indeed, attained Enlightenment without ever engaging in any formal practices. One of the most famous was Hui-Neng, the Sixth Patriarch of Zen Buddhism. Hui-Neng, as the story goes, was an illiterate woodcutter who happened to be in a marketplace when he heard a monk reciting a verse from the Diamond Sutra. Suddenly, his mind opened up, just like that, without any effort! If this did not happen to you, however, do not be discouraged, for it is also an historical fact that such cases of totally spontaneous Realization are extremely rare.

The reason for this is that Realization can only occur when *all* seeking has ceased—especially the “seeking” or *movement of attention*. As long as attention is wandering about, seeking for some *thing*, it cannot Realize Consciousness, itself, because Consciousness, itself, is *No-thing*. Thus, when mystics like Ramana Maharshi say, stop seeking, and be still, they are not just talking about stilling your body. What they really mean is you have to still your attention so that it is completely undistracted by any *thing* whatsoever. If you are like most people, however, even though you might have been able to keep your body still for awhile, your attention continued to be distracted by all sorts of things—sights, sounds, sensations, feelings, thoughts, memories, plans, etc. In other words, it was still *seeking* this thing or that.

What’s more, if you tried to force your attention to be still by an act of will, you were still engaged in a subtle form of seeking, because willing and seeking go hand in hand. Whenever we will a thing to happen, it means we are seeking for something, even if that “something” is paradoxically a state of non-seeking. This is why Zen Master, Sengtsan, wrote:

*When you try to stop activity to achieve passivity your very effort fills you with activity.*⁶

So while it is easy to say, “stop seeking and be still,” such instructions are almost impossible for ordinary people to carry out, for the simple reason that willing and seeking are not normally under our control. They are conditioned activities, built into the very foundations of delusion. To understand why this should be so, we need to take a closer look at delusion, itself—how it arises, and what it actually entails.

The delusion of self begins with a simple error in cognition—the mistaking of an imaginary distinction between ‘subject’ and ‘object’ to constitute a real or inherently existing boundary. Prior to the reification of this First Distinction, there is only Consciousness, itself, bathed in Perfect Happiness and enjoying Eternal Bliss as it radiates pure Self-less Love, expressed in a Dance of its own Infinite Forms. Once this First Distinction becomes reified into a boundary, however, everything changes. The Non-dual Nature of Consciousness, itself, is suddenly eclipsed, blanked out, and in the next moment the ‘self’ is born as a pure formless awareness beholding an objective world of forms, which it now perceives as being *not-self*. But while this initial cognitive error may be the beginning of delusion, it is by no means the end of it, for it alters the entire field of awareness in radical and devastating ways.

Because the self now seems to be cut off and isolated from the world of forms, the Perfect Happiness of Consciousness, itself, turns into its opposite—namely, the experience of suffering—which manifests as a profound, existential Loneliness. But because the self also “intuits” or “remembers” the Bliss of its Former Paradise, out of this Loneliness arises an equally profound and existential Longing to Return to it. Now the only way the self could accomplish this would be to wrest its attention away from the objective universe and direct it back to the boundary between subject and object long enough to Re-cognize that it does not truly exist. But because this boundary is precisely what now defines the self, the prospect of discovering that it does not exist seems tantamount to self-annihilation. As a result, the pure Selfless Love of Consciousness becomes transformed into an overwhelming Fear of losing self.

Thus, from the moment delusion arises, the self is caught on the horns of an unbearable dilemma. On the one hand, Loneliness and Longing compel it to find some way to escape its suffering and regain its Lost Happiness; while, on the other hand, the Fear of self-annihilation prevents it from taking the one step that could actually bring this about.

With the way back blocked by Fear, the self, then, decides to keep its attention focused in the opposite direction, on the world of forms. Although, in reality, this “decision” has been dictated by an existential Loneliness and Longing, to the self it seems to arise from within, as an act of “self-will.” In any case, the self now embarks on what will become a lifelong search for happiness somewhere ‘out there’ beyond itself. And the way it goes about carrying out this search is to continue creating and reifying more and more boundaries.

In order to locate itself in the world of forms, the formless Self of pure awareness creates and reifies a boundary around a particular body-mind. Having identified with a particular body-mind, the self’s search for happiness becomes channeled into an effort to grasp and hold those things the body-mind desires, while avoiding those things to which it is averse. But, since all these things—as well as the body-mind, itself—are impermanent, this strategy inevitably yields only temporary happiness, followed by more suffering. And yet, because the self now takes the body-mind’s desires and aversions to be its own, it seems to have no other option but to continue on its ‘chosen’ course.

If the body-mind the self has become identified with happens to be that of a human being, possessing a capacity for

“... *Realization can only occur when all seeking has ceased—especially the ‘seeking’ or movement of attention.*”

thought and language, it can try to further enhance and protect itself in conjunction with other human beings possessing the same capacities. In addition to physical boundaries, thought and language allow human beings to create and reify socially-constructed boundaries, which further define and solidify the delusion of self. For example, kinship boundaries establish and delimit the self's family, clan, and societal identity; class and caste boundaries define and delimit its relationships to others within that society; economic boundaries define and delimit its relationships to different forms of property; and ideological boundaries define and delimit its membership in various religious, philosophical, and political communities sharing similar views and values.

Yet despite the benefits which come from creating and reifying these social boundaries, the self still cannot escape its suffering or find lasting happiness. In fact, for each advantage the self gains there arises some corollary misery it must endure. Thus, while relationships with family and friends may produce feelings of fellowship, love, and joy, they can just as easily excite jealousy, hatred, and grief. And although social and economic relationships may bring an increase in wealth, power, and position, they also produce poverty, injustice, and oppression. And while identifying with a particular religious or ideological community may give life some semblance of meaning and purpose, such affiliations also lead to conflict, aggression, and war.

Moreover, the deeper the self becomes enmeshed in these social relationships, the more they act back on the self, to shape and condition its own internal dynamics. Experiences of past successes and failures give rise to likes and dislikes which, over time, harden into more or less fixed attachments to objects, people, places and things. These attachments, in turn, mold the self's present and future actions into conditioned patterns of behavior which at once limit its freedom of action while simultaneously intensifying its sense of personal identity.

Finally, the human self's capacity for thought and language allows it to not only create and reify an increasingly complex web of external boundaries, but also to monitor its own progress in trying to navigate through them. This it does by translating its lived-experience into an interior stream of ideas, images, symbols, memories, expectations, judgments, narratives and commentaries, which it then weaves into an intricate and ongoing story—*The Story of "I"*—in which the self sees itself starring as the central character, forever driven by Longing and Fear to seek an elusive happiness in the world of ephemeral forms.

Thus, although the delusion of self begins with a mistake in cognition, it evolves into an elaborate and multilayered ego-drama which, like some fascinating soap opera, completely captivates the self's attention and so keeps it perpetually ignorant of its True Nature.

This is why cases of spontaneous Realization like Hui-Neng's are so rare. In order for attention to return to its Source in and as Consciousness, itself, it must become totally detached from *The Story of "I"*, along with all the self-centered patterns of conditioning upon which this fiction is based. For most seekers, however, just becoming aware of these patterns, and the various levels at which they operate, requires a lot of hard work—and that means a lot of practice.⁷

Moreover, this was something recognized by virtually all the great masters of the past. For example, even though Meister Eckhart maintained that God is hidden in ways, at the same time he was adamant about the need to practice such "ways" before they are abandoned:

*This is like someone who wants to learn to write. If he is to acquire the art, he must certainly practice it hard and long, however disagreeable and difficult this may be for him and however impossible it may seem. If he will practice it industriously and assiduously, he learns it and masters the art....Then, when he has the art, he will not need to think about and remember the letters' appearance; he can write effortlessly and easily.*⁸

And even though Abdullah Ansari of Herat called seeking a "veil," he knew seekers could only dispense with their seeking after traversing all the stages of the path, for as he himself wrote:

*The last stages cannot be confirmed without authentically securing the early stages, in the same way that a building cannot stand except upon a foundation.*⁹

This was also understood by the traditional teachers of Dzogchen and Advaita. Thus, although Longchen-pa did, indeed, say that "Sought-after truth is found by not seeking it," he also declared:

*The unexcelled Buddhahood is impossible to attain until one completes the paths and stages....because it is necessary that the defilements (of the different levels) be abandoned, and the virtues need to be achieved... Therefore, one should endeavor in the training of the pure stages and paths...To practice Dharma with efforts from the heart is essential.*¹⁰

And even though Ramana Maharshi told his students, "Make no effort...your effort is the bondage," he also insisted:

*Sadhanas [practices] are needed so long as one has not realized it. They are for putting an end to obstacles. Finally there comes a stage when a person feels helpless notwithstanding the sadhanas. He is unable to pursue the much-cherished sadhana also. It is then that God's power is realized. The Self reveals itself.*¹¹

The purpose of spiritual practices, then, is to step-by-step liberate attention from the delusion of self. In general, they do this by dissolving our identification with all those reified boundaries upon which *The Story of "I"* rests, and by weaning us from our attachments to the objects of desire and aversion which fuel the story.

In particular, practices of inquiry give us direct insights into the emptiness and impermanence of the things we try to grasp, as well as the emptiness and impermanence of the ‘self’ doing the grasping. Practices of meditation train us to disengage from that stream of thoughts, images, memories, and plans which constitute *The Story of “I”* and, instead, to rest our attention in the naked awareness of what actually *is*. Practices of morality allow us to interrupt actions based on our self-centered conditioning and to replace them with actions based on the Selfless Love and Compassion inherent in our True Nature. Practices of devotion encourage us to relinquish our own will and to open our hearts and minds to that Divine Will, Grace, and Guidance which continually flow out of Consciousness, Itself.

Finally, we reach a point where, as Ramana Maharshi says, our practices are exhausted and we are unable to pursue them. This is quite different from *choosing* to abandon them prematurely. When you are *unable* to pursue your practices it is because your own will has been completely surrendered. Then, with no will to direct it, all seeking ceases, the *Story of “I”* dries up, and effortless contemplation becomes not only possible but unavoidable, for the simple reason that there is nothing else you *can* do. Once attention has been freed from all distractions, it naturally returns to its Source in and as Consciousness, itself, and there is the opportunity to Realize for yourself: “Oh, of course, THIS IS IT! THIS IS WHO I AM! THIS IS WHAT EVERYTHING IS!”

So what our latter-day Advaita and Dzogchen teachers say is true...*in principle*. All that is required to Realize your True Nature is for attention to stop seeking anything and BE STILL. It is also true that if you cling to any practice after its purpose has been served, it can, in fact, become an obstacle. What must be understood, however is that, as with all teachings, these are stage specific. And these particular teachings apply only to seekers who have reached the last stage of the path. So, how do you know if you, yourself, have arrived at this stage? Well, here is what Shankara, the founder of the whole Advaita school, had to say about it:

*Of the steps to liberation, the first is declared to be complete detachment from all things which are non-eternal. Then comes the practice of tranquility, self-control, and forbearance. And then the entire giving-up of all actions which are done from personal, self desire....He who has completely overcome attachment is ready for the state of liberation.*¹²

If this is true of you—if you have given up “all actions which are done from personal, self desire,” and “completely overcome attachment”—then you are ready for effortless contemplation. If not, then you had better heed the advice of the great Sufi poet, Hafiz, who wrote:

*Although Union with the Beloved
Is never given as a reward for one’s efforts,
Strive, O heart, as much as you are able.*¹³

1. Longchenpa, *You Are the Eyes of the World*, trans. Kennard Lipman and Merrill Peterson (Novato, CA: Lotsawa, 1987), 38.
2. Longchen Rabjam, *The Practice of Dzogchen*, 2nd ed., trans. Tulku Thondup, ed. Harold Talbott (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1996), 330.
3. Ramana Maharshi, *The Spiritual Teachings of Ramana Maharshi* (Boulder, CO: Shambhala Publications, 1972), 49, 76.
4. A.G. Farhadi, *Abdullah Ansari of Herat* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1996), 130.
5. *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, trans. Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 183-184.
6. Sengtsan, Third Zen Patriarch, *Hsin Hsin Ming*, trans. Richard B. Clarke (Buffalo, NY: White Pine Press, 1973), no page numbers.
7. In fact, Hui-Neng, himself, attributed his unusually quick attainment to the good karma he had accumulated in previous lives—see *A Buddhist Bible*, ed. Dwight Goddard (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), 498.
8. *Meister Eckhart*, 253-254.
9. Farhadi, *Abdullah Ansari of Herat*, 79.
10. Longchen, *The Practice of Dzogchen*, 389, 340.
11. *Talks With Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 8th Ed. (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, T. N. Venkataraman, 1989), 607.
12. *Shankara’s Crest-Jewel of Discrimination*, trans. Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood, 3rd ed. (Hollywood: Vedanta Press, 1978), 42, 45.
13. Dr. Javad Nurbakhsh, *In the Paradise of the Sufis*, 2nd ed. (New York: Khaniqahi-Nimatullahi Publications, 1979), 22.

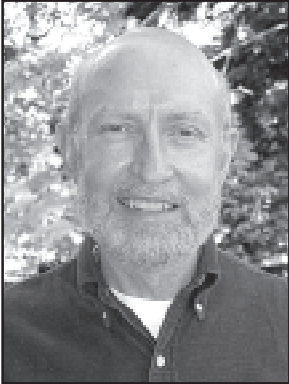
❖ Joel, Fall 2002

The prophets and saints do not avoid spiritual combat. The first spiritual combat they undertake in their quest is the killing of the ego and the abandonment of personal wishes and sensual desires. This is the Greater Holy War.

—Rumi (Muslim)

What Does Practice Mean to You?

During late September and early October, we spoke with six Center members about their practice. We encouraged them to consider all forms of practice—formal and informal—meditation, inquiry, devotion, and morality. Within these parameters, we asked about previous and current practices, obstacles and highlights, changes in commitment and times of no practice, evolution of practice and its effect on their lives, how important they feel it is and why they do it. In essence, we asked what, how, and why.



Bob Carnes' work as an engineer/metallurgist brought him to Eugene. He and his wife moved here two years ago from Texas, where their children and grandchildren still live. Raised Catholic, he joined the Center 1½ years ago and says it's just where he needs to be.

I think practice is the most important thing. I was doing a practice I didn't know was a practice before we moved up here, before the Center. I would say "Our Father" while I was working out. I would take it phrase by phrase and think about each phrase. I thought that was calming, and I felt like it was a good thing to do. So meditation—once I heard about it here—sounded like a good thing to do.

For the first year or so, I had trouble with meditation. But in that period of time I had more insights about myself and I thought maybe that was the reason for doing it. Now, if my mind is quiet and I'm ready when I sit down, then I'm at a place where there aren't any thoughts and things are peaceful. I go back to the breath if I have trouble and sometimes I fall back into that place. Sometimes I don't do very well at all. It's not a mantra or sacred word, but every once in awhile there is a phrase. I don't invoke it. It just happens.

I've become more committed, but that waxes and wanes. I know where I want to go, but I've got this ego that doesn't want to go there. I'm very much in the world with my job, but I haven't yet convinced myself that my job isn't part of my practice. In the Bhagavad Gita where Krishna's talking, he makes the point about service, about what's put before you. I'm really of a mind that what's put before me is this job. I need to do it as well as I can. I hope that is part of my practice and that I'm being successful. And if God wants me to do something else, when that time comes, hopefully I'll be able to see that.

I've got a real healthy ego. It takes a lot of beating and still comes back. In Greek Mythology they call it hubris, and it is

always punished by the Gods. When I was full of hubris I didn't practice. When I was in trouble, when I felt lost, then is when I would practice more. I think you're in a lot better shape if you can *not* be in trouble and still be mindful and still have the practice. Hopefully one of these days I'll reach that point.

My wife would say I'm a lot calmer and a lot less impatient. She tells me she likes me a lot more now than she used to. One thing is, I'm much more sensitive. I can be touched by something, I'll get teary-eyed. That never happened before. I make an effort to empathize, be with people and not make judgments. I think I'm making a little progress.

I feel like the path I'm on right now is the place I need to be. I really am thankful that the Center exists. I feel really grateful for having access to Joel. The last time he guided us during meditation, I had a meditation that was better than what I'd had before. It had a different texture. It was one of those times when I was aware of being present. I didn't grasp or push it away or mess it up by thinking something wrong. That was a highlight.

I guess at the bottom I feel like God wants us to reach some state. "Enlightenment" is a better concept than any other that I've run into. I feel there's a desire to do better, to be better. I feel that God wants me to. It's not something I can explain; it's something I feel very deeply. I know that, before I ever heard anything like that, that knowledge affected my actions—even when I was my most arrogant.

At times, you're more in tune with God. Sometimes everything comes together and, somehow, I know I'm doing what I should be doing. Those times, I feel like I'm in good shape. But that doesn't happen very often. It happens often enough that I know it's possible. I would think that feeling like that all the time would be about as good as it can get. If I'm able to see somebody who needs help, and be the help that they need, I think that's the greatest amount of satisfaction. I always felt like God gave me opportunities as little gifts. It would come on me to do something. After it was done I would know that what I had done was good. That was where I got my greatest pleasure.



Robin Retherford does life-coaching classes to help people live their life goals and experience fulfillment. She also offers training on conflict resolution and is a baker part-time. She shares a house in Eugene with two other humans, a cat, and a dog. She has been a member of the Center for two years following a

few years of sporadic meditation on an eclectic path.

I'd say practice is *very* important. I do a daily sitting meditation for 20 minutes—mostly I focus on the breath—and precepts. I've added two precepts to my daily practice, so I actually have twelve. I feel really bad when I miss a day, 'cause I look at it as a cumulative thing—the more that I do, I get more centered, I'm gonna be better at functioning. When I don't, I seem to have less skillful means in difficult moments.

For a while after the last ten-day retreat, I decided to do an experiment to drop all practices. I even stopped going to the Center. That didn't last long. I started to come back to suffering a lot more and I thought that meditation would help. I decided "Ugggh! I just want to be back there." So, it was an experiment and I got my results.

I think that practice has affected me in a very positive way by helping me to focus. If I'm in an argument with somebody, or under pressure or stress, usually what spontaneously happens is I go back to my breath. And I'm able to detach from what's happening and have enough wisdom and clarity, usually, to not say things I don't mean or that I would regret later.

Trying to meditate with another person became an obstacle. I would want to meditate but he'd have something else to do, so there was this waiting to get on the right schedule. Finally, I decided if he's not available, then I'm just going to do it. So, that was a brief obstacle. Other than that, there've been times when it's been really hard, at the beginning especially, when I was feeling really bad and couldn't focus. But now, even if I meditate and get lost in thought, I pretty much accept that.

I would say self-inquiry is the greatest highlight—the moments where I am able to have enough clarity to stop and question the stories that I've been believing. I'll often feel self-conscious about speaking out in group situations. The other day this insight came—it was an inquiry—something like "what have I got to lose?" or "is it really true that people are thinking what I think they're thinking?" Somehow it felt so free—it really doesn't matter what other people think. Self-inquiry always seems to be liberating. Another one is I'm scared to die. "Well, do I have any control over if I die or not?"

No, it's going to happen no matter how I feel about it." So, then I usually feel more at ease.

I have less urgency now—I used to have more frustration that I wasn't enlightened. Now I'm more focusing on what I need to do and accepting my life as it is—even playing with the concept that maybe I'll never be enlightened in this lifetime, and maybe that would be okay. So that's been a real shift—accepting life as it is.

It's become a real internal process at this point. It seems that being here now, practicing letting go, is the most important thing. And that has been the greatest evolution in my practice—I'm getting more that it's about being willing to be in this uncomfortable, uneasy space, this groundless space of not knowing. Recently what's been happening when I'm meditating is: I'll have thoughts and come back to my breath, and I see the opportunity to just drop what I know and go into right now—and it's very unsettling not knowing, but just being with that. Some part of me always wants to get away from it, but lately I've been trying to open to it, and use the inquiry there—"What's so bad about being groundless? Maybe there's something wonderful." And this amazing little evolution's been happening where I've started to explore it more and it's so spacious, it's so amazing, it's so free. So that's the next step for me. I'm looking more in meditation at completely letting go of what I know.



Shan Ambika is a professional yoga and meditation instructor. She has her yoga studio at her home in Eugene, where she lives with her two cats, Shakti and Lila. She's been a member of the Center for about four years.

I've been very eclectic in my path and I haven't found validation for that in many places. Coming to the Center was really a relief for me in a way—finding other people who were eclectics, who were mystics, and were interested in all the mystical traditions of the world and their commonality.

I started as a child as a Lutheran, and then I was atheistic for a while. I've tried many, many spiritual practices. I took Transcendental Meditation, then Hatha Yoga. The next influence was Vipassana, which I did extensively. I've done Zen, Sufi dancing, and Zikr. Recently, I've gone back to the Lutheran Church occasionally. The other main influence for me has been Bhakti Yoga, since 1988. I have a Bhakti guru, Ammachi. Upon meeting her, I began devotional practices which are still very important to me. I chant, write and perform devotional music, do mantra and prayer.

These fit very well with the three stages of meditation I follow: the first thing, concentration (I use my mantra); the second being choiceless awareness, which is Vipassana/insight, basically; and the third being spaciousness, which is what was missing from my practice before coming to the Center. So that's my formal practice. My informal practice is trying to be present and mindful during the day as much as I can. And if I have difficulty, then I backtrack to the first stage and do my mantra. So, of those three stages of meditation, I home in on whatever I'm able to focus on at the time.

Sitting practice is something I've had difficulty establishing over the years, so I would say I sit several times a week. I do devotional chanting once or twice a week and prayers pretty much every day. My mantra I do every day, even if I'm not doing a formal sitting; for example, when I did my exercise walking today, I did my mantra. I can adapt the mantra to just about anything.

Over the years, my spiritual practice has become more and more important to me—vital and essential. What would I do without it? I guess I consider my life my spiritual practice—being mindful, aware of thoughts and emotions. I'm aiming toward practice all the time. It gives me the most solace, it's a refuge, it's a practical way to deal with obstacles in life. For me it's also a livelihood—it's a way that I can share what I know with others—it's the most meaningful thing in my life. It is the meaning of my life, I guess.

There've been many peak experiences. Being with Ammachi, my heart opening with her, has been phenomenal and fundamental in my path, healing a lot of grief that's been stored since childhood. The Center retreat of July, 2001, was exceptional in that I was so spacious at the end, and I understood more of what Joel was saying, and judging mind was almost nonexistent. It was wonderful. What Joel taught just worked for me absolutely perfectly, step by step, it was just—ahhhh. So I'd definitely say that was a high point.

There have been times—"dark nights of the soul" periods—that I've had over the years; and during those times it's very difficult, if not impossible, to practice. One of the only things that's carried me through those times is some faith that my presence of mind will come back again. I think the obstacles—other than inertia, laziness [laughing], difficulty establishing a regular practice of the length I would like—I guess distractions of worldly life—busyness, work—that's been one. Also, the despondent times have been probably my greatest challenge.

One never knows. Just this summer, after the last retreat, I was in the most spacious period I've ever been. I would say it was a period of grace. But that ended, and then I was in a period of once again doubting and despair. How can I predict the future? Part of my practice is being patient with myself when these times arise, and being as spacious as I can. Even though I still have the dark times, overall I believe that I'm

happier and more contented as the result of my practice over the last almost thirty years. And I hope wiser.

Why do I practice? I've tried everything else. I've tried other activities—non-spiritual activities—and found them lacking, unfulfilling. That's been a teacher so that I realized how important the spiritual path is to me. How it provides the Truth, basically. What was the question? [laughing] Why not? What else to do? As Joel says, it might help, certainly couldn't "hoit." [laughing]



Tom McFarlane has degrees in physics, mathematics and philosophy and has recently finished a book called Einstein and Buddha. He lives with his partner Agnieszka, with whom he spent the summer traveling in Europe. He works as a patent agent and teaches this year's Foundation Studies class. He has participated in the Center since 1987, maintaining a connection even during years living in other states.

The Center was the beginning of the spiritual path for me. I can't even begin to imagine my life if I hadn't found Joel and the Center. It's influenced decisions I've made—life decisions, like moving back to Eugene. It's influenced career decisions. Before I met Joel I was studying physics and had these dreams of understanding reality through physics. Then I started learning a little about mysticism and it pulled the rug out from all of my desires to study physics as a career. I realized that physics wouldn't give me the ultimate answer.

But I still love physics. One of my practices is reading and contemplating physics and mystical philosophies. I believe that every person has some unique gifts to offer, and I try to take whatever talents I might have and use them in a way that might help. For example, I believe that quantum physics and how it relates to eastern philosophy can play an important role in transforming our worldview more in line with spiritual principals. It could have a far-reaching impact on the happiness and well-being of millions of people. To contribute to that, I do service through trying to relate physics to mysticism and show how they're compatible.

I have a practice of endeavoring to be mindful at all times. Other things are practicing the precepts, or more generally trying to live a moral life. Joel often talks about the prime directive of compassion and selflessness, and that overrides any one of the precepts. This is a practice that did

come into play a lot when I was traveling around. If anyone's traveled, they know that lots of unusual circumstances come up and things can push our buttons. So there are lots of opportunities to be mindful. I try to practice love and compassion and also working for what's best for everyone. If I'm making a decision that might affect another person, that precept spurs me to try to understand their point of view. It ties in with my practice of mindfulness. Because if something is getting me going, if I'm not aware of that and I'm reacting, it's impossible to practice trying to do what is best for everyone. So they tie into each other that way.

I've gone through phases of my life where I've been so consumed with commitments to other things that my formal spiritual practice has very little time or space. So I've learned to be very aware of the commitments I've made, the relationships I have, and basically the circumstances of my life. If I'm not making an effort to create the kind of life that supports practice, I'm not allowing myself to be committed to practice. Part of the foundation of my practice is making these decisions, sometimes hard decisions about my life and how to live it.

How important is practice on my path? It *is* my path. In the best of times, I would say that I do spiritual practice for the same reason that I breathe—because it's what I'm naturally doing. Spiritual practice just happens. I try to sit at least once a day and I usually do a combination of breath concentration and choiceless awareness. There've been turning points that have affected my practice, and my whole life in general. For example, there was one point in the summer of 1987 that I had a Gnostic flash. It profoundly affected me, affected my practice a lot—the bliss that precipitated from that, the challenges of becoming attached to that. I remember describing to Joel what had happened. He said to be careful not to become attached. But it's not something that I could decide not to do. All you can really do is try to be aware of it when it happens.

When I found myself becoming attached to bliss and meditating in order to experience that bliss, I made a decision to stop meditating for a while. You might say that itself was a practice. It was very frustrating because the states of bliss that one can experience make everything else in life pale in comparison. That has been an obstacle for me and for a long time I felt it was a kind of curse. I feel like overcoming it has been a very gradual process—practicing detachment from very pleasurable spiritual states of consciousness. For many years that was one of the main issues in my inner life. It affected my practice because it brought up lots of stuff to work on. I felt like the flash also opened a door for me. An initiation. It kind of cleared the way in many ways for my path to continue on a much deeper level.



Merry Song, a writer and teacher, is grateful for a health crisis in 1985 that thrust her onto the spiritual path. Since that time, she has wanted nothing more than to discover the True Nature of her Being. She has practiced Vipassana with Ruth Denison since 1989 and has received teachings from Joel since 1993.

Practice is my path. It is such a part of my life, I don't even think about it anymore. And that's the beauty of it—it's a natural unfolding. For years I did put more effort into the practice of cultivating the receptivity of the mind. And I have to thank my great teachers—Ruth Denison, Joel, Andrea, and other teachers that I've had—who've helped get my attention to the moment and to turn me back to myself, into the truth of that moment.

I think it's been twelve years now since my first introduction to Vipassana meditation. Probably I've been practicing it all my life, but I didn't have a name for it. I'm not sure how this happened, but I cultivated the ability to meditate deeply at a very young age without any support. As I grew older, it'd always come back. I also had a mantra that I developed as a child, which is, "Thank you, God. Thank you, God, for everything." And that has become such a part of my frame of mind that even when some disaster strikes or some tragedy happens in my life, these words arise.

When I discovered Vipassana through the Ruth Denison tradition, it was natural. Vipassana practice is something that you can do all the time, any time of the day, and even in the night when you're asleep sometimes it comes through then. And what it does is cultivate awareness to the moment and help you to look at the truth of the moment primarily through the sensations of the body.

I recognize the great value of cultivating awareness through a sitting practice—that your mind becomes more receptive to practice in every moment when it's asked to practice in those short capsules. I have to admit that I'm not a very good sitting meditator. Sometimes I practice very diligently. Sometimes I find at the end of a long retreat, I go on an anti-retreat—I don't want to sit in meditation. So at this point in my life, I see a natural unfolding happen. It doesn't matter whether I sit every day. It matters that every moment of every day is being watched by my observing mind. My mind is cooperating at this point. There's a big spotlight on everything I do inside my mind—I see it. And that's what the practice has cultivated in me, that ability to notice, to be aware.

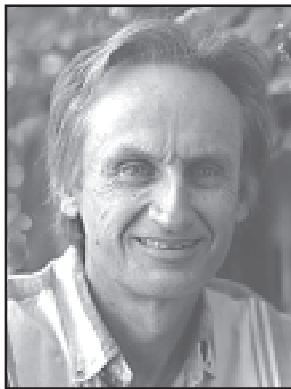
Since I came to the Center, one of the things that has meant a lot to me is the practice of precepts—the ten selfless precepts have unfolded in my life in a very great way. I even see myself practicing in dreams. They come up all the time. They work hand

in hand [with Vipassana], so there's never been any disharmony for me in taking those practices on. As a teacher in the classroom, for example, everything that arises—good or bad—it all becomes, as Ram Das says, “grist for the mill.” I see it happen, immediately in some cases, and the precepts can click into place. I see the value of them as they apply to everyday situations.

The change that I've noticed is that I once felt so urgent and desperate to get to the Truth. I've noticed a real relaxation happening here. It's still *the* most important thing of all, but there's more of a gentle acceptance. I would say that since I have noticed the unfolding happen, that practice is every moment. So there are periods where I don't do sitting meditation, but the mind is still under the spotlight. And, the practice continues.

I think the greatest obstacle is my own mind—when my mind wants to distract me from staying in awareness. I watch it create stories to pull me out, but very quickly I'm able to see that and come back to center. The greatest way of dealing with it is to be really friendly to it. I laugh at the mind and its incredible attempts to preserve a sense of self. That's what it's up to. It'll try to create all kinds of things to keep me separate and solid.

I guess the highlight of my practice is a feeling of deep gratitude. It's a great pleasure for me to bow to a teacher as a thank you—all of these great teachers—they all offer so tirelessly these selfless teachings. So as part of my practice, I continue opening the heart of gratitude to say thank you and to be prepared in any way to serve this teaching.



Gene Gibbs lives in the country where he has a small apple orchard. He volunteers in his local community and travels briefly to warmer locations in the winter. Two cats keep him company while at home, where he writes songs that are big hits at Center parties. He has been a member of the Center for about ten

years, where he volunteers in the Library and gives the Sunday morning service welcome and introduction.

Practice is very important. Sometimes I'm very committed and other times I get a little overwhelmed and want to do an 'anti-retreat.' There've been times when I haven't sat, but I don't think there's ever been a time when I haven't tried to pay attention to what's going on, even if it is nothing. I think that trying to follow the four basic principles of attention, commitment, detachment, and surrender—to remember them and put them into practice in my daily life—is the biggest part of my path underlying all my practice.

I have several ongoing practices: one around anger. I made it into a precept so I could remember it. And commitment to a teacher. It's always a gift when you can be of service. I fight it sometimes, but it's always joyful when we do have the opportunity. And of course, the meditation practice, the on-the-cushion-type practice, twice a day. I've actually gone back to the most basic meditation I could think of and that was counting my breath. Once in awhile, I start doing some of the “higher” practices, like Shi-ne [spacious awareness], and I feel like I need to bring myself back down to earth a little more.

Then, doing self-inquiry—that's been a big part of my path. Actually, what it's doing is kind of exaggerating the sense of self—it gives you the self and then you can look at it and go “well, who is this?” and that follows Ramana Maharshi's teachings of self-inquiry—who is the body, the emotions and the rest.

I'm constantly meeting people who exhibit things that I have an aversion to, and so I go “Okay, pay attention. What is it that they're showing me about myself that I don't want to look at?” And it's really been helpful. Sometimes, it's not so obvious, and it all goes back to those five afflicted emotions of anger, pride, desire, envy, and sloth [Tibetan tantra practice]. Usually, those are at the root of what they're showing me. That's really helpful. I've been blessed with all five of them very strongly. It used to feel like I was cursed, but then I realized I got blessed with those strongly so I can see them.

Actually, I think maybe nothing's an obstacle if it's all grist for the mill. Maybe it's the way you look at it whether it's an obstacle or not. There have been some things around desire that feel like obstacles. I've worked with them from overindulging to total restraint—going to both extremes and then feeling totally defeated—and they're still obstacles. So, just surrender and have compassion for that part of myself that seems like nothing works. It's like there's that pit in my stomach that can't be filled no matter what I do. I think it will be 'til the end.

Sometimes I feel like my practice is practicing to die, because I'm afraid of death. [laughing] Suffering, too, really started me on the path. But, along the way, I guess the fear of death really motivates me, and the suffering that goes along with it.

Sometimes it doesn't feel like my practice has evolved at all. It's been a struggle—the sitting, the retreats have all been pretty difficult. They've gotten easier lately. There've been highlights where I feel like I've had deeper realizations of things, and then it wasn't like something happened and I was a different person, but just little things that add up over the years. I'm more mindful of what's going on around me, and I'm more capable. I can see my thoughts and cut them off sooner than before where I'd just follow them to the moon and back. For the most part, I don't feel as anxious. I feel more content, maybe a little more patient. I think I don't get so involved in it all.

❖ All interviews conducted Fall, 2001

**CSS Library Hours:****Tuesday evenings 6:00 - 8:30 p.m.****A special announcement for our library patrons . . .**

Did you know there is a difference between Sunni and Shi'i Muslims? Would you like to read a concise article on the three bodies of the Buddha (dharmakaya, sambhogakaya, nirmanakaya)? Did you dream about bears last night, and wonder how various traditions have interpreted their significance? If you would like answers to these and other questions without having to read an entire book on the subject, *The Encyclopedia of World Religions* is for you.

Last year CSS's board of directors approved extra funds to purchase this eight-volume set edited by Mircea Eliade. Professor Eliade earned a reputation as one of the twentieth century's most renowned scholars of comparative religion. The set contains in-depth articles on virtually all the world's religions, their history and development, doctrines and rituals, saints and sages, terms and symbols. *The Encyclopedia of World Religions* is located in our reference section. Ask any library assistant to help you find it.

Book Review: Carefree Dignity

by Tsoknyi Rinpoche Rangjung. Yeshe Publications, 1998

Dzogchen (literally, "The Great Perfection") is an ancient body of Tibetan Buddhist teachings that, according to the Tibetans, themselves, provide the most direct route to Enlightenment. Perhaps for this reason, in recent years it has become quite popular with western spiritual seekers. Still, many remain either misinformed or mystified by its seemingly paradoxical practice of abandoning practices. Expressions like, "leave everything as it is," and "reside in the groundless state without making efforts," are widely quoted, but how does one actually accomplish this? *Carefree Dignity*, written by an authentic Dzogchen master, Tsoknyi Rinpoche, is a book that brings much needed clarity to this puzzling tradition.

In precise yet highly accessible language, Tsoknyi Rinpoche gives very concrete instructions for formal meditative training that eventually leads to moments of "undistracted nonmeditation" in which the True Nature of Mind (*rigpa*) stands revealed in all its naked purity. Once a student has gained such experiential "introduction," the author goes on to explain how the student can continue to discover the True Nature of Mind even in the midst of ordinary daily activities. Although dilettantes looking for an easy way to Enlightenment will no doubt be disappointed, serious seekers will find *Carefree Dignity* to be an extremely illuminating and useful text.

THANK YOU ❖ THANK YOU ❖ THANK YOU

The Center for Sacred Sciences depends on the generosity and volunteer labor of its members and friends to sustain it. We would like to thank some of our friends for their gifts and contributions above and beyond their membership pledges.

For donations to the library of books, tapes, CD's and/or money, we thank: **Loraine Baker, Mike Barkhuff, Ben Bochner, Todd Corbett, Mike & Sheila Craven, David & Bailey Cunningham, Patrice Dotson, Therese Engelmann, Ann Everitt, Maggie B. Free, Margrit Hermes-Tompkins, Robert Hoitt, Inner Directions, Jennifer Knight, Dawn & Tom Kurzka, Wesley & Sharry Lachman, Niraja Lorenz, Scott Matthews, Tom McFarlane, Grace Mikesell, Peggy Prentice, Miriam Reinhart, Julie Rogers, Vip Short, Michael Taylor, Viha Meditation Center, and Carla Wenzlaff.**

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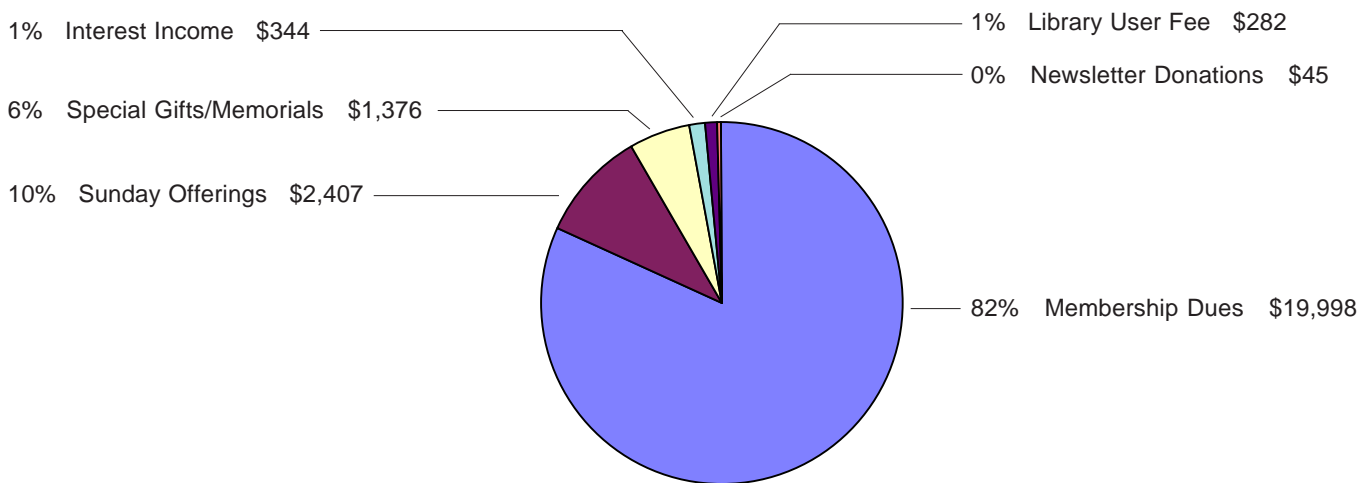
We thank the members of the work party who helped dismantle and remove the old rotting deck from the yard in June 2000; this group included: **Bob Carnes, Fred Chambers, Deanna Cordes, Zorba Frankle, Maggie B. Free, Gene Gibbs, Bob Hoitt, Wesley Lachman, Rich Marlatt and Jim Zajac.** A special thank you goes to **Michael Mooney** for offering his professional advice and help and lending us his equipment to build our brick patio, as well as to **Abdullah**, who graciously put in long hours of hard labor, hauling bricks for this project. Finally, we warmly thank **Gene Gibbs** for giving the Center introduction at Sunday Services on an ongoing basis for over two years now and, in addition, performing the Retreat Manager duties for the first summer retreat 2001 and assisting at the fall retreat. Thank you, Gene, for doing both with grace and a sense of humor.

As always, we are grateful for the generosity shown through Sunday offerings and membership pledges. Without this support from all of you, the Center could not exist as we know it.

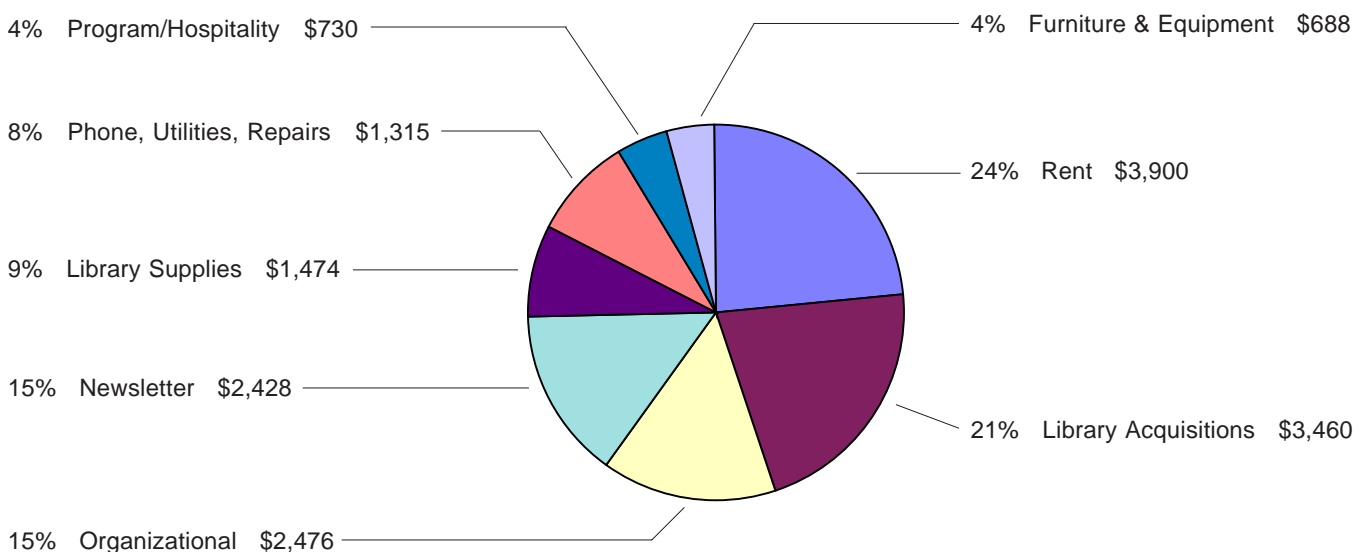
FINANCIAL REPORT: Fiscal Year ending 8/31/01

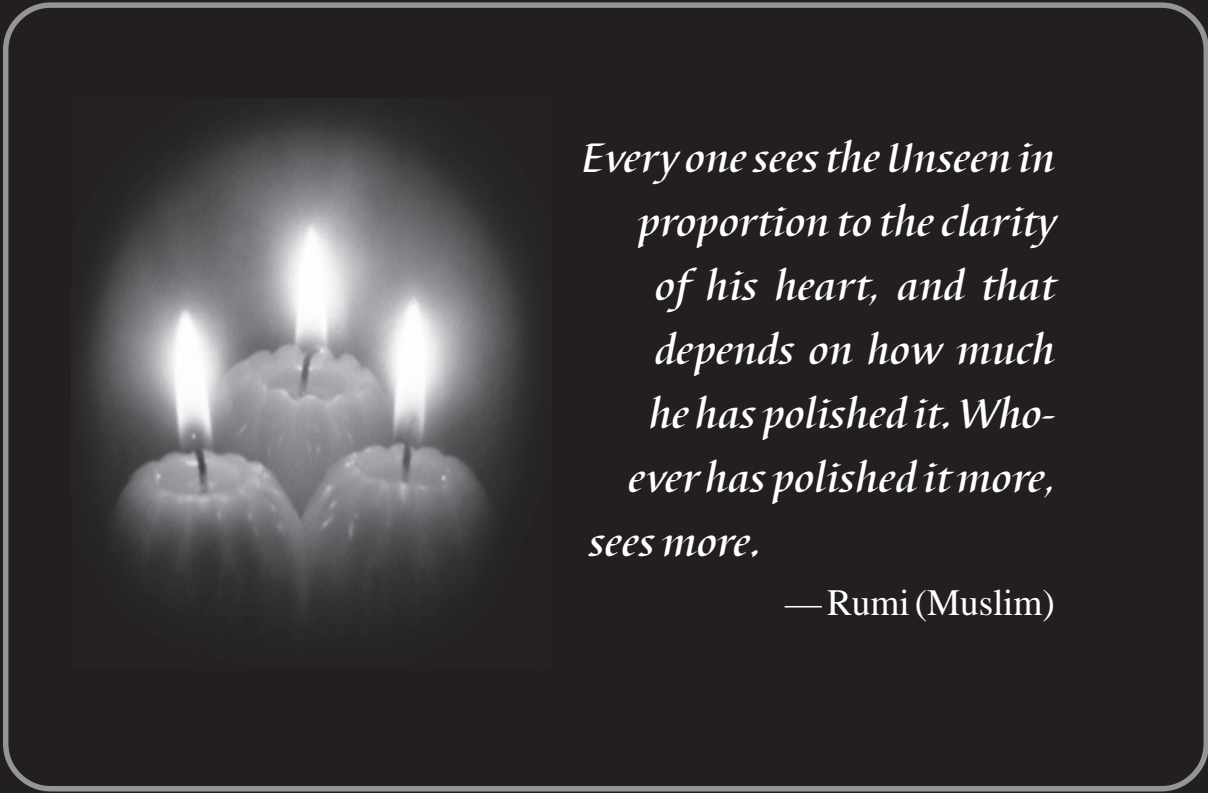
From its inception, the Center has been run as a labor of love by all those who work to bring you the teachings. Joel receives no compensation and, aside from three small stipends, the Center has no paid staff. The Board's ongoing policy of fiscal conservatism, combined with generous donations by members and friends, has allowed us to accumulate a surplus. This will help to support the planned expansion of our Internet site into a high-quality site dealing with mysticism in all its forms. In addition, it will be needed for the eventual publication of Joel's new book and the capital expenditures that occasionally are needed. We look forward to your ongoing support as we continue expanding services and inspiration for increasing numbers of seekers.

INCOME \$24,452



EXPENSES \$16,471





Everyone sees the Unseen in proportion to the clarity of his heart, and that depends on how much he has polished it. Whoever has polished it more, sees more.

—Rumi (Muslim)

 Center for
Sacred Sciences

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