

Seven Days: A Journey Into Awareness

Days One to Three

by Barbara Brodsky and Aaron



Deep Spring Publications

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Offered by Deep Spring Center for Meditation and Spiritual Inquiry
3455 Charing Cross Road
Ann Arbor, MI 48108

An Introduction to Deep Spring Center for Meditation and Spiritual Inquiry

Deep Spring Center offers teachings about our spiritual nature. Questions related to our deepest purposes here on earth are explored. What have we come here to learn, and how do we best learn it? What influence and participation do we have in the events in our lives? How do we begin to relate to the world in a non-dual way, rather than from a place centered in the small self? How do we live our lives with more wisdom, love and compassion? Fundamental to our spiritual inquiry is the practice of meditation, through which one can learn to directly experience the deepest truth of being. Deep Spring Center, then, also teaches meditation techniques. This work helps us to live our lives more skillfully, and we are increasingly motivated by love rather than by fear.

Deep Spring Center is, at heart, a community of individuals who are asking these types of questions and finding answers within ourselves and our own direct experience. Much of the teaching that we offer comes from a discarnate energy that calls itself Aaron. Aaron is channeled by Barbara Brodsky, who also provides meditation instruction and spiritual teachings through Deep Spring Center.

Deep Spring Center, the organization, is located in Ann Arbor, Michigan. We offer meditation retreats, sponsor meditation classes and conduct workshops on a variety of topics in our home community. We publish a newsletter and spiritual manuscripts and also offer a web site.

While the meditation practices we teach derive from Buddhism, we are not a Buddhist center, nor focused in any one religion.

More information about our spiritual inquiry and meditation practices can be found on Deep Spring's web site: www.deepspring.org

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Introduction

At Deep Spring Center we offer different formats of instruction including workshops and retreats. While both focus on spiritual inquiry and meditation, there is a real difference in these forms. The focus in retreat is on learning the techniques of meditation and deepening that meditation. The base practice is Insight, or Vipassana, meditation, and is the primary practice taught by me and Aaron. Insight Meditation is a simple and direct practice: the moment to moment investigation of the mind/body process through calm, focused awareness—which allows us to experience sensations, emotions, thoughts and consciousness with greater clarity and balance. This frees our mind from conditioned patterns of self-centeredness, negativity and confusion, opening our heart to deeper wisdom and compassion. This process of opening non-judgmentally and compassionately to ourselves moves from the sitting period to the whole of our lives. We begin to know each moment as practice for our growth toward wholeness and harmony. Insight meditation derives from Buddhist teaching but no special religious beliefs are necessary to its practice.

We balance insight practice with a deepening awareness of our true nature, not as something which we strive to manifest but as that which is eternal and present NOW. These teachings are drawn from the Tibetan Dzogchen tradition. Again, no special religious beliefs are necessary to its practice.

A retreat is silent by nature, with instruction in meditation, regular discussion periods which offer the opportunity to raise questions involving the meditation practice and our experiences with it, short private meetings with the teachers to look together at what is being experienced in practice, and a daily dharma talk, that is, a talk on some subject related to this opening to deeper Truth. Beyond these, there is no talk at retreats. Most of the time is spent in silent sitting and walking meditation practice. This isn't a statement that talk is "bad" but only a commitment to use this retreat time to move past the limits of the servant brain and into non-discursive mind wherein we may discover the deepest truth of our being.

A workshop has a different focus. There is meditation instruction but also more words. The workshop emphasizes spiritual inquiry with talks from Aaron, discussion, and some meditation to support that inquiry. Before many people are ready to commit themselves to deeper meditation practice, they often have the same very real and important questions meditators have: Who am I? Why am I incarnate? How do I learn to live this life with more wisdom and compassion? What do I do about the difficult mind and body states that seem to block skillful living? Ultimately, meditation answers these questions best, but we find that people often do need to talk about their situations first, to enter into a certain level of intellectual understanding before they are ready to let go of intellect and move deeper. This is an opportunity for the discursive mind to become more comfortable with the intertwined relative and ultimate nature of being. Those who already do meditate find that a workshop offers the opportunity to bring up the questions with which they're working and to share their investigations and findings with others.

I don't consider one of these forms, retreat or workshop, to be superior to another. We are all at different places and must be honest with ourselves, Each has a real value.

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Thus, Aaron and I have a commitment to offer both of these forms so that people may find the learning situation that speaks most clearly to their present condition. I do, however, believe that eventually one must learn to meditate and to deepen that practice so as to move beyond the limits of discursive mind.

I find that wherever I travel—different cities, different countries and continents even—people have the same basic questions. Whether in workshop or retreat, the primary questions are: “How do I learn to love more fully and live more wisely? What do I do with the difficult energies I’ve learned to judge or fear in myself and others? How do I begin a meditation practice that will allow more clarity, love and understanding?”

With these questions in mind, we recorded and transcribed the entire contents of a workshop, and then a retreat ... seven days. This book is the collection of these two transcripts. It differs from Aaron’s prior books in that my own talks and instructions are included, so it presents both of our voices; this feels appropriate as we do co-teach both workshops and retreats. Aaron provides a very clear spirit perspective and I’m able to offer a human experience and interpretation of those teachings.

It’s my hope that the entirety of the work will provide those unable to attend such events a foundation in both the background concepts and the meditation practices, and will offer those who have attended workshops and retreats a convenient reminder of the ground we’ve covered. The book is also our answer to the need we have heard expressed from people who want a consolidated version of Aaron’s and my basic teachings on meditation and spiritual inquiry.

Part One, “Days One to Three,” is the transcript of a three day workshop in Mexico City in November, 1996. The workshop was attended by about 80 people, most of whom had some form of meditation experience, mostly through Catholicism and the practice of various mantra and visualization meditations. The first two days were a time where we would alternately discuss what might be termed “spiritual questions” and learn and practice insight meditation. The days were not silent; with several exceptions, there was conversation during lunch and breaks. On the third day some of the workshop participants gathered for a day of more formal meditation practice. The day was held in silence except for instructions and question periods.

In April of 1997 a retreat gathered outside Mexico City, in a quiet spot framed by mountains. All the participants had attended the workshop. This four day retreat was held in silence except for instructions and question periods, The practice and questions built upon the November sessions and went far deeper.

The November sessions are available here as Part One. The April retreat will be Part Two of the book, and will be available in early winter. We’ve chosen to make Part One available now rather than wait for the final transcribing and editing of the April material. We will make Parts One and Two available separately for some months and then combine them into one volume.

The transcripts are edited for typographical error but neither Aaron’s nor my words have been otherwise altered, except very occasionally for clarity. As usual in our books, no attempt has been made to convert spoken talks into written material.

With special thanks to Karen Agne for her patient transcribing; to Sally Seymour for her editorial skills, and to Ian Jaffray for his final and wonderfully clear editing and layout.

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Thanks also to Jocelyn Arellano who organized the sessions in Mexico and to the loving, enthusiastic community there whose hearts and questions inspired these words. And thanks to the Deep Spring Center Board of Directors and volunteers whose work allows these books to flourish.

My heartfelt gratitude, also, to the entire lineage of teachers, through the centuries, who have given voice to these teachings. None of it is original with Aaron or with me, but is the voice of Love sometimes loud, sometimes dim, as it has echoed through the centuries. Where I've expressed it clearly, I thank my teachers for leading the way. For any errors in understanding which may be present, I accept full responsibility.

My appreciation to Aaron for the love, gentle wisdom and constancy of his presence is beyond words.

Forehead to the floor and heart filled with love, my gratitude to my guru, Neem Karoli Baba, without whose grace none of this work would have been possible.

Finally, my love and gratitude to all who walk this path with me, for the privilege of this joyful sharing of the way.

Namasté,

Barbara Brodsky

Day One

Mexico City, November 1996

Barbara: Hello and welcome to you all. You know that Aaron and I will be leading this retreat together. Some of you may be unfamiliar with the idea of working with a discarnate teacher. You can see me, but who is Aaron? For that matter, who am I and what leads me to be sitting up here? To begin, I'd like to introduce myself, talk a little about Aaron and how I met him, and tell you about what this spiritual path has meant to me.

I lost my hearing in 1972, soon after my first child was born. I coped well with the loss, on the surface. I continued with my sculpture and teaching and had two more children. Through those years I was aware that although I did what I needed to do for myself and my family, I was very bitter about the isolation my deafness seemed to impose.

This anger didn't negate the fact that my life was full. I had a loving and beautiful family, work I loved, and caring friends. I honor in myself that I was able to cope well with so difficult a situation. But in striving to cope, I didn't allow myself to feel the pain of my isolation, which is real. In my fear that pain would overwhelm me, I denied it, and turned my anger to outward things. I couldn't see that it was the anger, not the deafness, that deepened my sense of separation. I was angry at people who talked in my vicinity when I couldn't understand and angry at God. I lost all sense of a spiritual aspect to my life.

Slowly I became aware that I had to look at what was happening. My previous religious affiliation was as a Quaker but it had been years since I had attended Meeting for Worship. I began to meditate again as a daily practice, although with no clear sense of direction. I also wrote daily in a journal, a tool that put me into deeper touch with my subconscious mind. I felt drawn to read from spiritual teachings, especially those ideas from eastern religions concerning reincarnation and karma. As I opened to myself and became more caring and forgiving, I found an increasing inner peace.

Despite all that I was learning, I still felt rather stuck. I was still bitter, cut off from normal human communication, and blamed others for my situation. If only they would write ... or talk slower ... My isolation felt like a punishment and a formidable burden. I began to pray for help, understanding that I just couldn't go any further on my own.

As the weeks passed, I began to notice that in the question/answer format I often used in my journal, the "answer" part was beginning to speak from a new perspective, pushing me to open myself to new ideas and ways of thinking.

Soon after that, I met Aaron. Suddenly, one day during meditation, I was aware of a figure standing just off to one side. I asked him who he was and very simply he told me he was Aaron, and was my guide. I felt overwhelmed; I got up, left the room and got some tea. When I came back, he was still there.

I'm not going to suggest that I took this casually. The idea of a "spirit guide" was new to me; I wondered briefly if I was hallucinating. But every time I looked, Aaron was there, just patiently waiting for me to be ready to move ahead. It was important that I never

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felt any pressure to accept him. He made it clear from the beginning that we had all the time I needed to be ready for any learning that he offered. I wasn't frightened because I felt so much love, felt a gentleness and connection dimly remembered from some unknown past.

At first my rational mind tried to ask, "Who is Aaron?" Slowly I realized it didn't matter. I began to listen with my heart, and not play mind-games. I understood that it was irrelevant whether Aaron was simply a deeper part of my subconscious or was external. I was getting information that I needed for growth and to which I hadn't had previous access. As I began to trust that information, and my own ability to hear it, I became clearly aware of Aaron's existence as a separate entity.

He tells me he is a being who has evolved beyond the need to return to the physical plane. He is from "beyond the causal plane." He defines himself as a "being of light," which he says we all are. I've come to know him as a being of infinite love, compassion and wisdom. He also has a wonderful warmth and sense of humor. He is a teacher.

As my trust deepened, Aaron led me on a beautiful journey into myself, into past lives to unearth the sources of some of the pains of this life, examining the questions of isolation and separation on which my deafness forced me to focus.

(We're asked to stop while the microphone/simultaneous translation setup is adjusted.)

Barbara: I want to suggest something to you while we're waiting, part of our whole process of being here for these three days. One can wait the way one often waits, with a little impatience, or one can just sit, breathe, and be here in this moment. You have a choice. We're here to share and learn, and to be quiet too. We have expectations about how this learning will evolve. We look for it everywhere but in the reality of this moment. But that's all there is, just this moment!

You can be tense, wonder "What's going to happen, when will we start?" or just relax and do what you're here to do, which is to meditate. I invite you to simply breathe a bit and bring attention to that breath. Know when you're breathing in; know when you're breathing out. If you feel tension in your body consciously bring gentle attention to it too.

I once was at a long retreat. I had an interview with the teacher, and he was busy with something, I don't know what. He sat me down in a hallway and I guess he forgot about me. I sat there for one hour, agitated. "Why is he keeping me waiting this long?" A second hour ... winding down a little bit. Third hour ... finally, by the middle of the third hour, I was very peaceful. After another hour he came in, astonished to find me there. He was very apologetic. "You're still here? I'm so sorry." But I was just meditating. Especially at a retreat! What else did I have to do? The first irritation and impatience was just an old story about the way things "should" be. That's all that made me angry that first hour.

Again, with apologies to those who cannot understand, I'll keep the words very few. Close your eyes, bodies relaxed but erect. *(Pause)* Bring your attention to your breath, just where it touches at the nostril. Feel the cool air coming in, warm, soft air flowing out. *(Pause)* Don't label it, "In ... Out." These are concepts. I want you to be aware of

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the experience of the breath, of the physical sensation of the in breath, the physical sensation of the out breath. *(Pause)*

(We do this for several minutes.)

(We are notified that the sound system is working now. Bell sounds three times.)

Barbara: I was talking about myself and my first experience with Aaron. I began, with his help, to see the difference between my deafness as physical experience and my relationship with my deafness. The deafness was just deafness. Some of us may walk with a limp, or have a bad heart, or not have good vision and need thick glasses. So, I was deaf, an unpleasant experience, but not a big deal. My suffering and feelings of separation grew out of my anger around my deafness and my feeling that I had to fix something, that something was wrong with me that I became deaf. Did I become deaf because I was “bad”? I was so angry, had always been angry, even as a child. Now I recognize I wasn’t more angry than most people, but to that child the anger seemed enormous. Now I carried the additional anger at not hearing people. This discomfort with and judgment of my anger was cutting me off and creating the sensation of isolation. Then, feeling alone, I attacked myself and the deafness even more.

Of course it was difficult to be with people and not be able to hear them, but with Aaron’s guidance, I found that I could sit very comfortably with friends. Instead of trying to grab hold of every word, growing angrier and angrier and pushing them further away, if I just relaxed they were very eager to turn and tell me what they were saying. And if I didn’t hear what they were saying for five minutes, that was okay. I could just let it go, without fear. I started really to relax around hearing and as I did that, my whole relationship with my deafness was changed.

As a Quaker, I had grown up with the idea that there is that of God in everyone. This is primary to Quaker belief. So, it was a concept. Fine, there is that of God in me, in us, in you. What does that mean? What I experienced personally was that when I felt happy and loving, I felt connected to God. If I felt angry, greedy or jealous, felt negative kinds of emotions, then I felt very cut off from God. As I explored my deafness and the anger it engendered, I started to understand how that sense of isolation born out of deafness was really the same experience, that I was separating myself. I started to see that the sense of isolation and separation from God was based on my own judgments of myself and not on anything coming from God.

There had been a dual relationship with myself, where I said, “This is good in me and that’s bad in me,” Now I began to find “God” in everything about myself. As I accepted myself more, I had much less need to react to what I was experiencing. If one is angry, it’s just anger. Anger is a kind of energy. We tend to think that we have to either bury our anger, and not express it, not let ourselves feel it for fear that it will leak out, or we have to enact it.

So, Aaron started to teach me another way of being—not only with anger, I’m only using that as an example—with any heavy emotion, just breathing it, knowing I’m feeling it, making space for it, not judging myself because I’m feeling it. I stopped fragmenting myself into what’s acceptable and what’s unacceptable, stopped wanting to take that “unacceptable” half and throw it away. I found an acceptance in myself and, with that acceptance, a very deep level of peace, because as I stopped

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judging myself, I stopped judging other people and found I could really listen to and hear other people more clearly. I wasn't angry at other people as much, so it was not only that there was more space around the anger, but also I stopped being as angry. I stopped feeling like others were purposely withholding words from me.

It wasn't only anger which decreased but any heavy emotion, whatever we're feeling when the little voice comes along and says, "I shouldn't be feeling this." Anybody here who's not familiar with the little voice that says, "I shouldn't be feeling this"? It really is this war with the way things are, with ourselves and the circumstances in our lives, which creates our suffering.

There's so much that comes up in our lives that we cannot control. You go on a picnic and it's raining. A loved one gets very sick. You aren't offered the job you wanted. We can't control those things. We have good health; we can't hold on to good health. Who knows how we'll be tomorrow? The house burns down. If our happiness depends on things outside of ourselves, we're never going to be happy.

With attention, we start to find acceptance of ourselves and our lives. Within that spaciousness and acceptance there's a tremendous amount of peace. We end the war with ourselves. What we learn about ourselves then is carried over to the outside world, and we end the war with our world.

After some time working with Aaron, learning to find more acceptance of my own emotions, my own thoughts, he asked me to bring that out into the world, to begin to see that in the same way I was judging certain thoughts or emotions in myself as good or bad and clamping down on them, thinking I had to get rid of them, or fix them, in just that way I was also relating to outside experience, such as somebody else's anger or uncomfortable opinion. It was something to judge, control or fix. We can also have spaciousness around all of these outside circumstances.

Aaron began to ask me a wonderful question about things that were disturbing me, "Is it coming in to bother you, or are you going out to bother it?" As very simple example of how that question works, if we're sitting here meditating and they start to mow the lawn out there, we would hear a lawn mower. We want it to be quiet. The mind thinks, "That lawn mower is disturbing. How can I meditate with a lawn mower?" The lawn mower is just being a lawn mower. What's really disturbing your meditation? Is it the lawn mower or is it your anger about the lawn mower, about the noise?

This doesn't mean that we don't work skillfully to control things in our lives that we can control. If we want it to be quiet and the gardener is mowing the lawn, we can ask him, "Can you go over there and mow for the next hour so I can have quiet?" Yes, that's fine. But, if you can't control it, if you find yourself wanting to meditate and you're sitting by a busy street and there are cars and motorcycles driving past and you can't stop the traffic, and you can't go someplace else, you can simply make space for it. It's your choice!

This extends into everything in our lives. You might have a sick parent who's very demanding, afraid, and angry. You say to yourself, "She's ruining my life. Everything was fine until she got sick." You can't get the sick parent better. What's really disturbing your life, her being sick or your relationship with her being sick?

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To me one big piece of what meditation is about is exploring our relationship with what comes up in our lives. As we do that, we start to see that our dissatisfaction in life comes much more from our relationship to what is and trying to change what can't be changed, or trying to hold onto to something we can't hold onto, than it comes from the things themselves.

If we want to be happy, if we don't want to be unhappy, first we need to understand what is the source of our happiness and what is the source of our unhappiness. My experience is that much of what makes us unhappy is trying to change the way things are in places where we really can't change them, or to hold onto things that we can't hold onto. This is something that you can look at in meditation and really see in your own life.

There are many forms of meditation. Some are very strong concentration practices, where you fix your mind on an object such as a mantra or a candle flame, and keep your attention fixed to it. Through doing that you can move into a very blissful state. Thought temporarily subsides. But when you come out of that blissful state, whatever is disturbing you is still there. What are you going to do with it?

The meditation we'll be doing uses concentration, but it's a different kind of concentration. It's a flowing, natural concentration that moves to whatever is predominant in our experience. We start with the breath as primary object most of the time. Some people who find the breath difficult can use the body or other things as primary object. Feeling the breath coming in at the nostrils and flowing out of the nostrils, or if for some reason it's hard for you to breathe through your nose, you can feel the rise and fall of your abdomen. That's a second choice. We directly experience the breath. So, it's not the concept of the breath, it's the direct experience of it.

People find that they can stay with it for three or four breaths and then mind goes off somewhere. It doesn't stay put. We often use the analogy of training a puppy. You sit the puppy, and you say, "Sit, stay," and the puppy sits. It looks at you with its big eyes, wags its tail, and gets up and wanders off. You simply bring it back very patiently, say, "Sit! Stay!" and slowly it learns to stay put a little bit better.

We're not trying to make the mind stay fixed on the breath, though, but asking mind to stay with whatever is primary in our experience. This is important. I am going to repeat it. We are **not** trying to make our mind stay put on the breath. That's just another kind of judgment like, "I must do this and then I'll be good." We don't need any more judgments in our lives. We're trying to ask ourselves to stay present with whatever is primary in our experience. When whatever has pulled our attention away from our breath changes or dissolves, we come back to the breath. If something else pulls our attention away, we move to that, stay with it as long as it's primary and then come back to the breath. The breath becomes a kind of home, like a chair you can sit on.

An illustration that may help is this. If I was sitting in a chair and suddenly the telephone rang, I would go and answer the telephone, say what needed to be said, hang up the phone. That finished, I come back and sit on my chair. Then maybe the dryer beeps and I think, "Oh, I need to check the clothes in the dryer." So, I go and check the clothes in the dryer. When that's finished, I come back and sit in my chair.

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Whatever is present in our experience we attend to, and as it's no longer primary, we go back to the breath. This is the process I'm going to be teaching to you for the next three days. Today and tomorrow I will be teaching this meditation practice and Aaron will be talking to considerable depth about why we're doing this practice. Thursday we'll have a largely silent day of meditation, alternating meditation periods and time for question and answers for those who are attending.

Aaron calls us "angels in earth suits." He says that we all have this angelic aspect, this divine essence of ourselves. You could call it the soul or pure spirit body. We're here in our earth suits, these physical, mental, emotional bodies. The whole point of our incarnation is not to get away from the physical, emotional, and mental bodies, ending up in some blissful spirit state totally unrelated to the world. The purpose of our incarnation is to live our humanness with as much love, as much wisdom, and as much skill as we can. To do that, we have to be here. So, Aaron will be talking about that and I will be teaching you meditation. Let's stretch and then we'll begin.

(Stretch. Short break.)

I'm going to teach you a little bit of meditation now and we're going to do some practice and then I'm going to give you to Aaron for him to talk for a while. We will also have time for some questions and answers and discussion. We have a nice size group, small enough to ask questions easily. If at any time you want to ask a question or don't understand what I've said, please raise your hand, speak up. Hal will sign it to me. We have an interesting process going here. Not only two, but three languages, because Hal will use sign language to me. Although I do lip read, I can't lip read at the distances in this room, so Hal will simply sign to me what you're saying. If you don't speak English well enough to ask your question, ask in Spanish. Hal is hooked into the translator, who will translate it for Hal, who will sign it to me. I love the whole communication process.

You've noticed that I'm sitting on a funny cushion. This is called a zafu. There's nothing fancy about it. It's simply designed to make it comfortable to sit on the floor and give your body the proper support. If I were to sit without that cushion, my back would be curved. The cushion creates enough lift that it's easy for me to sit with a straight back. I don't want it to be ramrod straight, but relaxed-straight. Body soft and relaxed but the spine erect. If you want to sit on the floor, any object such as a cushion or folded blanket that will elevate the buttocks will help you have a comfortable, stable posture.

You can also kneel with a cushion between your legs, resting the buttocks lightly against it. Some people use kneeling benches which are low enough to kneel and high enough so the lower legs slide underneath.

This zafu is usually paired with a similarly fabricated cushion that provides comfort under your ankles. When I travel I bring this small folding cushion instead. I find this (*demonstrating*) a comfortable posture. It gives me three bases of support, my knees touching and my buttocks touching, so that I don't wobble. Please note that I sit just on the front of the zafu, so it supports the buttocks and allows the pelvis to tilt in. This positioning aids straightness of the back. Don't sit way back on the zafu or any cushion or your back will be more inclined to slump.

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There's no reason why you can't meditate sitting in a chair, but I would ask you as much as possible to sit straight and on the front edge of the chair and not slump while you're meditating. If you're going to meditate in a chair at home I would like you to have a chair that's straight, and put a small block of wood, or a book or something under the back legs, so that you have a slight slant forward like I have here, so that you end up sitting erect and not needing to lean back. The only part of your posture that really is important is the back. Ideally, we do not want you to be leaning against the back of the chair, but to be self-supporting, back relaxed, but not slumped.

Now, I'd like you to take your thumbs and put them under your jaw, near your ears. Lift, as if somebody were lifting your head up. Or take a hair from the top of your head and lift. Can you feel that pull?

Along your spine you have extensor muscles. They are muscles that many of us don't use very much. They are the muscles that help our spines stay upright. At first if you're trying to sit straight you may find yourself tired. Your back may hurt, because you're using new muscles. Eventually they'll get stronger and sitting straight and self-supported will be easier.

The reason for sitting straight is that there really is a flow of energy from the base of the spine to the crown of the head and a movement of energy through the seven energy points within the body called chakras—the base, the spleen, the solar plexus, the heart, throat, third eye, and crown. An energy does flow through those much better if you're sitting straight than if you're slumped.

Feet: however you're comfortable. If you're sitting in a chair, I'd suggest you rest your feet a bit apart and firmly on the floor. Legs are open, not crossed. Arms: however they are comfortable. You can rest them on your lap. A classic meditation posture is to put the left hand on top of the right hand with the thumbs touching. There is energy flow through the hands, so there is a reason for that, but you don't need to sit that way. For those who move into very deep meditation practice, you may feel a difference with hands placed this way, but if you're more comfortable with your hands on your knees, that's fine.

One thing that's very important. If you put your hands far forward, can you feel the pull in your back? Now, put your hands too far back. Can you feel a different pull or discomfort? In time this will really ache. Now, move your hands until you reach a place where there's no pull. They can be in front of you; they can be on the side, a place that feels just right. Sometimes it's helpful to have something to rest your hands on, if your lap is too low and creates a pull. You can have a pillow or something to support your hands. If you feel uncomfortable at the start, it's not going to get any better, so you want to find a position that's basically comfortable to begin with.

If you need to move after a few minutes because there's pain in the body, first stop and note that there's pain. This is part of the whole process. We can move a hundred times in an hour and never get comfortable.

Instead of searching for that perfect position, can you begin to look at what is it that wants to be comfortable, that feels that every little bit of discomfort has got to be fixed? It's part of the way that we live our lives. Every little bit of discomfort has got to be fixed, and there's so much tension, so much suffering, real suffering as we try to control

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discomfort. It's like the lawn mower or the motorcycle going by. Can we change our relationship with these little bits of discomfort, the little wrinkle under your feet, the hair that's fallen down around your neck and is tickling? Instead of having to fix it, can you just notice it and ask yourself, "Can I just be here with this?"

If you're feeling real pain, of course, move. Shift your position. Just be aware of the intention and then of the movement itself. So, there's no set instruction of when or when not to move. Only, I would say, if you constantly have to move, then ask yourself to try to stay still and examine what's really happening. What kind of impossible comfort are you searching for?

We've got a comfortable and stable body posture, spine erect, arms and legs however. Let the eyes softly close. Not pinched closed tight, just softly closed, the head at an angle so that if the eyes were open you'd be looking at the ground about three feet in front of you. Let the jaw relax. The mouth may be hanging open just a little bit.

Go down the body. Shoulders soft, relaxed. Back relaxed. Chest relaxed. Belly soft. If you're wearing clothing with a tight waist or tight fit, I suggest you unbutton it. Give yourself breathing space.

Bring your attention to the breath coming in and out at the nostrils. When my voice intrudes as it is now, the ear is touching a sound. Notice the sense consciousness, "hearing," and simply note it as such, "hearing, hearing, hearing." And when, as will happen in a moment, when my voice ceases, the hearing ceases, come back to the breath. Please do that as I stop talking. (*Pause. Clapping noise.*) "Hearing, hearing, hearing." (*Pause*) By the time you noted it, it was gone. You're still hearing because my voice is there. As the hearing stops, go back to the breath.

We're going to sit now for five minutes. I want you to note every physical sensation in just this way. We'll talk later about thoughts and emotions. For now, if a thought arises and pulls you away from your breath, simply note it as "thinking, thinking," and come back to the breath. If a physical sensation, such as itching or tingling in the body arises, simply note it with whatever label is most appropriate. You don't need a dictionary to come out with the perfect label. As it changes or dissolves, come back to the breath. I'll be quiet now for five minutes and ring a bell at the end.

(Meditation. Bell sounds three times.)

At the close, again there was "hearing, hearing, hearing." Now, let's take this one step further. We have physical sensations. The physical sensations have a pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral quality. If you hear a car motor revving up outside, it may be unpleasant. The bell is probably pleasant. Very naturally, when something is unpleasant, some sense of dislike arises. Dislike is a thought. If something is pleasant, a sound or a scent, liking arises. That's also natural. Liking is also a thought.

We don't try to get rid of liking or disliking. There's no problem in liking or disliking. Where the problem begins is where liking gives way to grasping, or disliking gives way to trying to get rid of. Here, we can start to see just how our minds work. When we are present and notice liking, we don't have to hold on to the liking. We can see desire coming up in us and may feel a certain unpleasantness about the desire. We somehow think, "If only I could get what I want, maybe desire, this discomfort, would go away." Then mind starts to grasp. Baking bread is an example. Smelling the fresh

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bread, "pleasant, pleasant," then, "liking, liking," and then, "I want it." And there's a certain tension to that "I want it." The scent is lovely. The liking it is no problem. But the tension that says, "I want it" creates a certain kind of tension.

The tension can lead us into a skillful act of going and saying, "May I have a piece of bread?" But what if you can't have the bread? You carry the tension. Of course, I'm just using bread as a very simple example. It can be something much bigger than a piece of bread, something we really think we must have or will die without. Then there's a certain amount of tension that comes up.

Sometimes the object is out of our reach. We're not the ones who get to decide whether we're going to get the new job or if a loved one's health will improve. So, the idea of liking and wanting comes up and then there's the intense sensation of craving. The craving is something that we can note, seeing how it arose, experiencing precisely how we moved into this craving state, and that the craving itself is just another place where mind has moved but that it carries its own distinct energy and sensations.

Disliking is the same thing, something very unpleasant. Some jack hammers, those things that they break up the concrete with, may be going right outside the window, "unpleasant, unpleasant," and then, "dislike." And then the very strong contraction that says "I've got to get away from it."

We can watch how mind gets into these contractions. We do this in meditation practice by watching a thought and how we move into different kinds of thought. There are only so many places mind can go. We can go into remembering, into planning, fantasizing, and opinion types of thoughts, such as liking or disliking. When you're sitting and meditating, sometimes a physical sensation comes up and then a thought accompanies the physical sensation. This is the experience we've just looked at, smelling bread and then the thought of "pleasant" and "liking."

Sometimes it seems a thought arises with no physical sense connection. You're sitting and, for no apparent reason, suddenly mind is planning. A whole fantasy is spinning itself out. At that point you're not meditating anymore, you're simply fantasizing. As soon as you catch it and note, "planning, planning," it shatters it. The planning isn't happening anymore, so you come back to your breath.

With a physical sensation, if there is itching and you noted there is itching, that doesn't make the itching stop. So, simply stay with the itching until it changes or dissolves, but with a thought, as soon as you've noted that thought, it's not there anymore. It's not primary. Come back to the breath. If the same thought arises again, and again, and again, we keep noting it again, and again, and again.

After a few times, you may understand, "There's something here that needs to be investigated." For example, as I was sitting a thought came up in my mind to send post cards to my child. "Planning, planning." The thought is gone and I return to the breath. The same thought came up again, a second, a third, a fourth time. "What is this about?"

When I ask, "What is it about?" I'm not going to investigate it with my brain, just to note, "There's something in this planning, something I don't yet understand fully." I came back to my breath and allowed myself to feel whatever is there. The realization came up that I have some guilt about leaving as I did, leaving my seventeen year old son

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home alone. There are neighbors and good friends and people who are available for him for these twelve days, but I've been thinking to myself, "I should call Peter. I should send him a post card. Is he okay?" So I might note, "feeling guilt, feeling worry, feeling some anger at myself, some anger at him," whatever might be there, just letting myself know what feeling is there, without any judgment. Usually when one knows what it's about, then the thought stops arising in an obsessive way.

Let us sit again and practice, noting thoughts, also, as they arise.

(A time of silence. Bell rings three times. Brief question period not recorded.)

We've very basically covered working with physical sensations, working with thoughts. There's one more bit of instruction I want to give you here, working with emotions. Often under a thought we find an emotion. Usually there's some kind of opinion about that emotion. As we get off into the opinions and thoughts and stories about what we could have or should have done, we're not meditating. If we stay present, just noting, "Here is a thought of planning. Under the thought here is some fear." Noting fear. Not telling myself about the story of the fear, but just noting its presence, that is meditation. When I get lost in the fear or in any emotion, I'm no longer meditating.

When an emotion arises, we try to stay with it as spaciously as is possible, just noting it. Breathing in, "I am aware of my fear." Breathing out, "I am aware of my fear," just noting, "Here's fear, here's anger, here's jealousy, here's pride," or whatever may be there. Whatever comes up we simply will let ourselves be spaciously present with it. We'll work more with emotional states later.

Remember, you're not trying to keep the mind fixed on the breath, but to allow it to be light, agile, present with whatever is predominant in your experience.

I want to read you something very short here, and then we're going to try this meditation for ten minutes. This is from a beautiful book that's a favorite of mine called Flight of the Garuda¹. It's a Tibetan book translated into English.

Once again, noble children, listen carefully!

Rest your mind loosely in naturalness and

See how the mind is when calm.

Observed, it rests calmly in the continuity of awareness.

Calm, and yet empty, thus is the state awareness.

Fortunate heart-children, you must understand this.

What he is saying is that as we meditate and see how mind latches onto physical sensations, thoughts, and emotions, we also find that there's a very quiet level of awareness that watches all of these mind states come and go without grabbing hold of them, without fixation on them or ownership of them. This is the core of the meditation experience. So, being present with whatever arises, well, I will not say it's not an end in itself. It's important to be present with what arises. But, the fruit of being present with what arises is that we start to find that within ourselves which is not attached to, not identified with what arises, but lets it flow past. Everything comes

¹ Kunsang, Erik Pema, transl. Flight of the Garuda, "Song 15," by Lama Shabkar, Tsogdruk Rangdrol, (Kathmandu, Nepal: Rangjung Yeshe Publications, 1988), pp. 55-56

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flowing past, all of our thoughts, all of our physical sensations, all of our emotions, none of it is who we are. Then we come to experience that state of pure awareness which just watches it all coming and going.

Give rise to a thought and observe how it arises.
Since it does not depart even in the slightest
From the state of empty and luminous awareness,
Arising and yet being empty is thus the state of awareness itself.
Fortunate heart-children, you must understand this.
This is how arising (*Barbara: arising of thoughts, of anything*) is the play of the
mind.

It's just mind at play, moving from this to that, nothing we have to grab hold of.

To illustrate this, no matter how many waves may arise,
They never depart from the ocean even in the slightest.
Similarly, whether still or in motion,
The mind never departs from awareness and emptiness, even in the slightest.
So rest, since whatever rests calmly is the state of awareness.
Rest, since whatever arises is the manifestation of awareness.

An illustration of that stanza would be the sun and sunbeams, if we used the sun as a metaphor for the state of pure awareness. Sometimes, when there's a cloud in front of the sun, you can see sunbeams coming out from the sun. They are an expression of the sun. When you see the light and shadow on the ground, that's also an expression of the sun. When you look at the light and shadow on the ground, the sun itself is in that light and shadow.

When thoughts arise, instead of thinking, "I have to get rid of the thought in order for mind to be quiet," the arising thought can take you right back into the quiet mind, just like the sunbeam can take you right back into the sun. So, we get out of the argument with thoughts coming up in our minds. Each thought, rather than being something we have to get rid of to come back to quietness, just reminds us to ride it back home to the place of quiet, to this place of what Aaron calls pure heart and mind, pure awareness.

I'm going to read the last paragraph again and one more paragraph.

To illustrate this, no matter how many waves may arise,
They never depart from the ocean, even in the slightest.
Similarly, whether still or in motion,
The mind never departs from awareness and emptiness, even in the slightest.
So rest, since whatever rests calmly is the state awareness.
Rest, since whatever arises is the manifestation of awareness.

To believe that meditation is only when the mind rests quiet,
And maintain that there is no meditation when the mind moves
Is proof of not knowing the core of stillness and movement,
And of not having it mingled, stillness, occurrence and awareness.

For this reason, fortunate and noble heart-children,
Whether moving or still, mind is the continuity of awareness.
So when you have fully comprehended the stillness, occurrence, and awareness,

Then practice these three as one.

We are going to sit now for ten minutes. What I would like you to do is start with the breath. Whatever arises in your experience, a physical sensation, a thought, label it. As it changes or dissolves, come back to the breath, just that. Let us do this for ten minutes, then take a short stretch, and then Aaron will talk for about half an hour and tie some of this together.

(Bell rings three times.)

So, a mind doesn't stay still, but it's okay that it doesn't stay still. We can be present with it wherever it is. What we're going to do now is take several minutes for you to stretch, then Aaron is going to talk, then we're going to take another break, and then we'll come back and have time for some questions and discussion and more meditation.

(Break)

Barbara: Again, we're waiting for the sound system, and for some people who walked outside. Are you impatient? We all want our lives to be stress free. It's wonderful to begin to see the things that create tension in us, such as this moment's impatience. When we're not present, we don't see that. But then you start to really experience the little things that create the stress. We need to understand how we start to feel stressed, what creates that. Where does tension gather in you, in your belly, in your throat? Where do you feel it? A wonderful meditation practice that you can do all day long is just to note ... "tension," or "contraction," to see it come up, see the body contract, and literally let it go. Letting it go is not getting rid of it. There's a very subtle, but important difference. Getting rid of says, "This is bad. I don't want it." Letting it go says, "Out of kindness to myself, I don't need this. I just release it. If it doesn't go, that's okay." With getting rid of, it's got to go, so there's more tension. Letting it go, we could almost just say, "Let it be." But there's a willingness to release it because one sees that it creates suffering. It's love, not fear, that's willing to let go.

Letting it go. Letting it go to do what it wants. It's like holding a bird in your hand. Your hand is closed on the bird. To get rid of, you throw and get rid of the bird. To let it go, you open your hand. The bird can fly away or it can sit there. Either one is okay. But it's kind and skillful to open the hand.

Okay, everyone is here and I have the go-ahead for the sound. What I'm going to do now is simply turn you over to Aaron. I'm curious. How many of you have never heard channeling before? It's new for many of you. Okay. I'm not really going to introduce Aaron. I'm going to let him introduce himself.

Aaron: My greetings and love to you all. I am Aaron. To some of you it may simply seem that Barbara is sitting here with her eyes closed, with some delusion that she hears a voice. So you wonder, am I real? My dear ones, I assure you that my own perception of myself is that I am real, but I have no need at all to convince you of that. You're hearing. Is that correct? There are words, words that frame thoughts. They come from somewhere. They are either helpful to you or they are not helpful to you. If they are helpful, take them into yourself and make them your own. If they are not helpful, discard them. It doesn't matter where they come from.

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Barbara has been talking about the process of meditation and given you some brief times of practice. I want to take this practice and tie it in a bit deeper to my own spirit perspective. Sometimes it's easier to do hard work when you have a clearer understanding of why you are doing it. Why should one sit quietly and label what arises? To what end?

Let me begin with some basics. I am a spirit. You are spirit. You have a body. I do not have a body. There the difference between us ends. I have a mental body, as you do. I do not have an emotional body in the same way that you do, so it's not only the physical body that differs, but also that I have no attachments and aversions. I do experience joy and sorrow, but I'm not caught up in them as emotions.

A brief aside here. Jocelyn, I am attempting to pace my speech and speak slowly for those less practiced in English. Might I request of you, if it would be helpful for me to go still slower, one firm longer touch on Barbara's knee would help me to know that. If faster, two taps. So, if at any time you need me to speed up or slow down, please let me know.

You have physical and emotional bodies. You do not want to be free of these. They are a gift, sometimes a challenging gift, but still a gift. They offer you the opportunity to practice being in your mental body, experiencing emotions, and to use these sensations and emotions as catalysts for the learning of kindness and compassion, and truly of unconditional love.

There is a story told of a spiritual teacher named Gurdjieff in France. Living in his community were many very loving people, but there was one man in the community who was very rude. He didn't do his share of the work. People found themselves very annoyed with his presence. He knew that he wasn't liked and eventually, he got up and left. Gurdjieff went after him and asked him to please come back. He said no. Gurdjieff said, "I will pay you to come back." So, the man agreed. The people in the community were aghast. "How could you ask him to come back?" Gurdjieff replied, "He is the yeast for the bread. Without him, how are you going to learn compassion?"

Your physical and emotional bodies and the circumstance of your lives provide just such a yeast. You are not incarnate simply for convenience or comfort. You are not incarnate to build bridges, to conquer space, or develop new technologies. These are simply things that you learn along the way. You are incarnate to learn how to love, to learn how to bring light where there has been darkness, love where there has been fear and hatred. Ultimately, you are here to learn unconditional love.

When I say you are here to learn it, a better word might be to "remember" it. There is nothing that you do not already know. Barbara has a book here from which I believe she intended to read, the writings of a twelfth century zen master. I may not quote him perfectly, but the idea he offers is, "Although you are inherently spirited and splendid, still you must go ahead and enact it in the world." In Buddhism they often talk about the idea that you are already enlightened, but that enlightened awareness is obscured by all the confusion, so you do not realize the enlightened state.

Another way of saying the same thing is to say that there is the essence of the divine within you. Yet, that does not deny the shadow that also occurs within you. I would ask for a sheet of paper. (*Paper is provided.*) Here is a perfect, unblemished, white sheet of

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paper. We could use this as metaphor for the essential perfection of each of you, not a perfection that you have to get, but an innate perfection.

(Barbara wrinkles the paper into a ball and then opens it out.)

Here we have a wrinkled sheet of paper. It's easy to see the wrinkles. Can you see that the perfect sheet of paper still exists? It's right there. The wrinkles are there. We do not deny the wrinkles, but why deny the perfection? Both are there. In your incarnate experience you get lost in the wrinkles. You think you have to smooth them out. You attack the wrinkles. You erroneously believe that you must get rid of all the wrinkles in order to manifest the perfect white sheet of paper.

You cannot ignore the wrinkles. You are responsible for the negative emotions that arise within you, and must attend to them. But that's not the whole of who you are. You are inherently perfect, are the perfect, unblemished sheet.

At a workshop some years ago, we asked people to make a list, two lists actually. One, we asked them to list all of the qualities they judged as "good" about themselves. And in the other list, we asked them to list all of the qualities they judged as "bad" about themselves. Think about this for a moment. *(Pause)*

We found several interesting things. First, the bad lists were much longer than the good lists. Second, there was a lot of crossing out on the good lists. People would say, for example, "I am patient." And then they would think, "No, sometimes I am impatient," and then they would write, "I am impatient." They felt that they might not honestly say, "I am patient." They thought, "Ninety percent of the time, I am patient. Only ten percent of the time am I impatient. But if I am impatient ten percent of the time, I am impatient. Cross out patient." The thinking was, "It's got to be one hundred percent or I can't claim that quality."

What human can be patient, generous, fearless, compassionate, one hundred percent of the time? Why do you ask this of yourselves? And so you condition yourselves to attack the negative, attack the wrinkles. And you pay so little attention to the beauty in yourselves. The way to practice a quality such as patience and nurture it is not to attack impatience every time it arises, but to notice patience, to notice how it feels to be patient, how spacious and in that way to nurture that quality.

You understand this in the raising of your children. If a child is noisy, you might say, "Shhh! Quiet!" But you understand not to tell your child, "Look how bad you are. You're always noisy. Why can't you be good?" Instead, when the child is quiet, you come and tell it. "I appreciate how quiet you're being. You really have the ability to be quiet." And in this way, you nurture that skill in the child. But in yourselves, most of you simply attack the self.

In meditation we observe the presence of both, the wrinkles and the everperfect. As you start to see these wrinkles as mere waves rolling across the surface of the ocean, you become more spacious in your relationship to them. When you cease to need to attack yourself, then you can offer that same spaciousness and kindness to others. This gives them happiness and helps them also learn not to attack themselves. Instead of identifying with the waves, meditation allows you to sink down to a place from which the waves may come and go. Yes, if the waves are very fierce, if there is tremendous rage in one moment, for example, you must be responsible for it. You must, in

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metaphor, see that a wave does not topple a boat and drown people, but the wave itself is just a wave.

Who are you when you are not caught up in your own physical, mental, and emotional bodies? Each of you has had the experience of the self, the purest self, at this time. It is a way of being that we could call pure awareness. It is a place where subject and object fall away. There is no one in this room who has not experienced that spaciousness. Perhaps you have experienced it while watching a sunset. No sense of self, just sunset happening. Or listening to a symphony. No separate self here. The music is simply alive and a part of you. You generally do not pay close attention to these moments. They come and they're gone. This is the space to which meditation opens you, this space of your deepest being, non-dual with everything.

We come here to the concepts of ultimate and relative reality. When I say non-dual, I refer to that core of being, that everperfect sheet of paper, pure awareness mind, which is the very center of your being and where you are not separate. Yet, in relative reality, of course there is the experience of separation. Some spiritual seekers would like to hide in ultimate reality and deny the relative being. Some of these high meditation states are very blissful. What happens when you come out of that state to somebody angrily knocking at your door, or to a phone call that your child has fallen off her bike, injured herself? You were in that blissful state and suddenly here's fear, here's anger.

From the ultimate experience you understand, "There is nothing out there that can hurt me, because there is nothing separate from me," and yet, right here there is pain. You cannot develop compassion in that ultimate state. Compassion comes from return to the relative without getting lost in the relative, without getting lost in your fear, or anger, or sense of need.

Meditation gives you access into the ultimate aspect of yourself. It helps you stably to rest in this perfect white sheet of paper **and** to attend to the wrinkles at the same time. There is no getting lost in either one.

As you attend the wrinkles with a deeper awareness of the true nature of your being, there is a natural spaciousness. You begin to see that everything in your experience is in some way an expression of the divine. I'm going to talk more about this idea, in considerable depth, this afternoon. I don't want to take it too far now. I don't want to talk so long that you cannot absorb the ideas I offer. I believe the plan is to stop now for a break for perhaps fifteen minutes. Then you will return and I will be glad to answer your questions, as will Barbara. We will close with a period of meditation before lunch. I thank you for your attention. That is all.

Barbara: This is Barbara speaking. I am laughing at Aaron because it seems like a game to him to get it precisely on that side of the tape, trying, but without any real attachment to it. It is just a game, but he was saying in the background as I was changing the tape, "Oh, I missed it. I had another minute to say."

(Break)

Barbara: We're going to give you a chance to ask questions to me or to Aaron, questions about what I spoke about, what Aaron spoke about, questions about meditation.

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Question: *(Question is asked in Spanish, translated to Hal, who signs to Barbara.)* Why don't you just answer the questions yourself?

Barbara: Aaron knows things that I don't know. The questions that I can't answer, I pass on to Aaron. He is my teacher; he knows more than I do.

Question: *(In Spanish) (About the relationship of Barbara/Aaron and about Barbara's own inner wisdom.)*

Barbara: I can only tell you what I experience. When I first met Aaron, I was confused about a lot of things that very slowly and clearly he led me to understand, not really by his words, which were just signposts, but by the meditation experiences to which he guided me. Then I could understand more deeply. I respect him as my teacher. There is much that I have learned from him, but there is still much I don't know.

If I understand what you're asking correctly, I have within me what I would call highest self, which is the deepest, wisest, aspect of me. It has much wisdom. I don't always have very clear access to it, and my experience is that Aaron is an older, wiser being. He takes some of it a step further, so that I do connect with my highest self and also with Aaron. We each have, what Aaron calls, highest self, which is the mix of spirit and mental body.

We each also have guides on the spirit plane. Sometimes these guides might not be that much wiser than our own higher self. Sometimes they may be much higher level guides. What we need is always there. When I channel Aaron, often the material that comes through is not something that I consciously know. For example, last month a medical doctor came to talk to Aaron about a patient of his, a patient who seemed to have a split personality disorder. And so he and Aaron were talking about some of the chemical factors and neurological factors involved. Now, this is something I don't know anything about at all.

Similarly, Aaron has taught me Buddhism with very specific, technical terms, terms that I have no experience with, so I know it's not coming from me, but it's coming from somewhere. So, I experience Aaron as a separate energy, but also the thoughts that come through are often things with which I have no experience. Could it be from my higher self? It could be. I can't deny that it could be. I don't experience it that way. I do experience my higher self and I experience that as something different from Aaron. This is funny because Aaron's primary teaching to us is that there is nothing separate, and yet I experience him as something separate from me. Who can understand that?

Question: *(In Spanish) (About Barbara's connection with Aaron.)*

Barbara: Basically, yes. Aaron first came to me as my personal guide. I understand that our connection goes back many lifetimes, that we knew each other in incarnation before his final incarnation. He tells us that his final incarnation was five hundred years ago and he has no more need to come into human form. But our connection with one another goes way back. So, he came to me as my guide. He is my guide in this lifetime. What he taught me was very valuable, and people started to ask me, "Could I talk to Aaron? Could you teach the meditation he is teaching?" So, I started to offer it to people. At that time I was still a sculptor, and I had been a professional sculptor for twenty-five years. This was the focus of my life. I had no conscious desire or intention to become a channel or teacher of meditation.

Aaron told me it was my choice. I could simply learn what I need to learn, and go back to my sculpture and teach other people just indirectly through my being. Or I could choose to channel him for bigger groups like this and teach this directly. It was my choice. So, nothing forced me to do that. It simply seemed this is what I needed to do with the rest of my life. It was a scary decision.

Question: Did you have spiritual experiences as a child? Did you experience Aaron?

Barbara: When I was a very young child, I used to meditate and experience the being that I've come to know as my guru. He was at that time a living being, but I didn't know him in body then, but experienced his energy. I had no idea who he was. I was a small child. It was very powerful to me, but as I grew up, I put it aside and didn't consciously meet Aaron until thirty years later. During that span of thirty years I did not directly experience the presence of spirit. I meditated and prayed, had spiritual concerns, but I never even considered trying to experience spirit directly as I do Aaron.

Question: Do you always experience Aaron?

Barbara: When I meditate, generally it's a silent meditation, not talking. Aaron's the one that promoted this when I first began to work with him. He would talk to me for a few minutes and then he would say, "Enough words. Go and meditate," so as not to understand it only on a cerebral level, but really understand it on a heart level. I know he's there but there's no intrusion on the silence.

Then, while meditating, a question may come up, or at a time when I'm not meditating, I may simply have a question for him. Last night, we had a small session, and afterward a number of us were gathered around the table. People asked me some questions that I could answer and other questions where I really felt I couldn't answer, I feel Aaron's energy. I can only liken it to a nonphysical gentle push. I just feel his presence there. I feel his thought pattern and energy pattern as if he's saying, "I would be glad to answer this one if you would like me to." He never forces himself on the situation, but if there's a question that he'd like to answer, he simply says, "I am open to speaking now." I really always feel his energy around me. It's like, if Hal and I sit in the same room, in the living room, and we're both reading. We're not talking to one another, but I feel Hal's energy sitting in the room with me. And if I want to ask Hal a question or to hear something that I've read, I simply say, "Hal, do you know anything about this?" And we talk. It's almost the same thing with Aaron.

Question: Is he always there? Can you invoke him? Or is he away somewhere and then you call him?

Barbara: As I just said, it's like sitting in a room with Hal, and Hal is just sitting there, but he's reading his book and I'm reading my book. We're not talking to one another, but if something comes up in my book that I want to share or that I have a question about I can just say, "Hal, what do you think about this?" It's the same thing with Aaron. If something comes up that I have a question about, I simply ask him and he's there. Since I have made a connection with him, I've never experienced him not being there.

Question: In other words, he's always with you?

Barbara: Once he told me he was going on vacation. (*Laughter*) I was going to be on a silent meditation retreat, and I didn't need his instruction. We discussed the retreat

and then he said, "You're all set. I'm taking a vacation." He said, "If you need me, call and I'll come." And I knew it wouldn't take long. I wouldn't have to wait around for a few hours for him to drive back from somewhere. He described his "vacation" this way: Aaron basically is spirit body. He puts on, he says, a cloak of personality. He uses his mental body as a tool in order to express himself, because he's using this personality and mental body to be able to participate and teach us. It doesn't pull him out of the clarity of his spirit body, but does require effort, to maintain this "cloak." So vacation was an opportunity just to rest there and be spirit. So, when I asked him, "Where did you go?" he said, "I simply allowed myself to be spirit for that week, not to bring in the mental body at all.

Question: To your knowledge, are you the only channel for him?

Barbara: Aaron says so, yes. However, several people that transcribe these tapes regularly have found that when they have a question about the material, such as if when the tape is turned they missed a sentence or two, if they ask Aaron, he tells them. They underline it in the transcript for me to check it out with Aaron, and it's usually right, so they're getting it clear.

Question: Can we ask Aaron if there are other spirits in the world who channel other people?

Barbara: Oh, absolutely there are. Everybody has a personal guide. You are all capable, to some degree, of hearing that guide. Our only problem with hearing it is our own disbelief that we can do it. Something comes to us and we say, "I don't trust that." We're not used to trusting that we can hear spirit. Your intuition is a wonderful example. Your intuition really is your own highest self, not a spirit guide, but your own deepest wisdom. Sometimes we listen to our intuition and sometimes we don't. Sometimes we say, "Where's that voice coming from?" and we don't pay attention. And usually, we wish we had paid attention, later.

Question: My friend would like to know if anybody in the room would be able to channel their own spirit guide? Would it be possible?

Barbara: In learning about channeling, something we do in Ann Arbor is hold "How to Channel" workshops. Maybe twenty people will attend. Aaron and I teach people how to open to their spirit guides, how to channel. How to hear it, how to trust it, and then we start practicing, so that people actually start vocally channeling their guides. Hal did this. Many people have done this. Very few of the people that do this take that on to channel for large groups like this, but many students with whom I work with regularly in Ann Arbor now channel their own guidance for themselves. They tape it and then they write it down and listen to it afterwards or they write it out as it comes through. It is not hard to learn to do that. The hard part is to learn to trust it.

Question: Do our guides know our faults? Do they always know what we need from them or do we specifically have to address that?

Aaron: I am Aaron. We are capable of knowing your thoughts. As Barbara said, at certain levels of being telepathy is very easy. That doesn't make me exempt from basic rules, however. You have free will. You are entitled to privacy. No positive energy will invade your privacy and read your thoughts against your will.

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If you send out a thought as a question to your guide, it's not necessary to phrase it in language, because we are telepathic, but we request that you ask. The asking is part of the process. To ask denotes your willingness to hear and receive an answer. You see this with school children all the time. Teachers sometimes teach at children and the words just go past, but when a child is ready to learn and asks, then they're ready for an answer. That is all.

Question: *(In Spanish)* On what plane does Aaron exist? Is the difference on the "quantum level" or the "energy information level"?

Barbara: That's one I have to give Aaron.

Aaron: I am Aaron. I understand your question, but the terms do not quite fit themselves together. You exist on what I would call the causal plane, that is, you are still subject to the laws of karma. I exist, let us simply say beyond the causal plane. In essence I am energy. All of you are that same energy. The pure energy that you are becomes distorted by the various filters of ego, of mental thought and emotions. My energy is not influenced by those distortions although clearly, I do offer thought.

What I would like to ask you to do is visualize a very clear and open energy stream. You could see it as a clear, cold waterfall. If you subjected that waterfall to some kind of pressure, perhaps a strong air force of wind blowing against it, it would contract. You can visualize this simply as a cluster of string hanging down. It hangs straight, but if you grab it there's a contraction in it, a pinch. That energy contraction comes only on the causal plane. It is the foundation of the distortion I speak of. Because I have no emotional body, my energy flows very straight and uncontracted.

When you talk of quantum level, I don't think the difference is there at all. It's all energy, my energy directed into thought patterns moves through without distortion. Your energy of thought pattern becomes distorted by the various emotions and images of self which compress upon those thought patterns. I do not know if I have answered your question. If not, I would be glad to attempt it again if you would rephrase it. I pause.

Question: *(In Spanish)* Don't you call your experience "energy information"?

Aaron: I am Aaron. I prefer to call it pure awareness, which expresses itself as information. There is a subtle, but distinct difference. Do you understand? I pause.

Question: *(In Spanish)* Can you talk about the resurrection?

Barbara: Aaron is asking, are you talking specifically about the Christian belief in the resurrection of Jesus or are you talking more about the redemption of all beings in whatever form that redemption takes?

Question: The latter.

Aaron: I am Aaron. This is a helpful question. It leads us back into the question, "Why are we doing this spiritual work?" Different religions have their own way of expressing the same truth. In the Christian idiom, one may die and find oneself in a hell or purgatory state. The belief is that through the Christ one is redeemed and eventually finds its way to paradise. Some Christians would take this quite literally, that through this specific being's energy, which they believe to be a direct manifestation of divine

energy, this happens. It comes through the effort of the Christ. A looser interpretation is that there is that which we would call Christ consciousness. Buddhists call this same thing Buddha nature. It is the place that, when you are there, you're totally within God and God within you. It is the highest level of your being. When you rest in that highest, purest level of being, you are instantly free from the hell realms. Their solidity shatters. This is also through the Christ or Buddha, but not necessarily through the being who bore that name.

Whether we are speaking of death and afterlife, or simply the moment to moment redemption and freedom, this is your birthright, this redemption, this freedom. Freedom to experience the highest divine level of being comes when you access this Christ consciousness, Buddha nature, pure awareness, however you want to name it. Through this experience of the divine, you manifest your own divinity. It's not, then, that Christ doesn't save you, it's simply a different way of interpreting salvation.

I will not get into a religious or philosophical debate here. I find what I teach really is consistent with most religious philosophies, but not if you take them absolutely literally. If you prefer to take it literally, and my words are inconsistent, then put my words aside and follow your own heart.

This sense of redemption through Christ, then, can loosely be translated as redemption through resting in the divine in the self. One can reasonably argue that one is introduced to that divine through one's love of Jesus or with one's love of the Buddha or any other great master.

There is something interesting that Barbara recently read in a book which I'd like to share with you. I believe she has the book with her. I pause.

Barbara: One moment please, while I find out what Aaron wants me to read. Okay, this is a book I'd like to recommend to you, anyhow. It's called, The Ground We Share. It's a dialogue between a zen master, Robert Aitken and a Jesuit priest, Brother David Steindl-Rast. It's a very beautiful dialogue in which they're exploring similarities between their religions. They're not saying differences don't exist, only exploring similarities. Let me see if I can find what Aaron wants me to read.

This is from Brother David. They've been discussing the relationship between the historic Christ and, what Brother David was calling, the cosmic Christ. Brother David says, "The relationship between the historic Christ and the cosmic Christ is very subtle. You could say that the historic thesis was totally alive with the cosmic Christ reality, but did not exhaust that reality.

Each one of us, when we find our fulfillment is totally filled with the Christ reality, but none of us exhausts the Christ reality because that is the spirit or life of the totality. Robert Aitken goes on to talk about how that compares with Buddhist teaching and the same idea that we cannot exhaust the Buddha nature, that these are very comparable terms.

I am paraphrasing Aaron here. He is saying that what he considers our redemption comes when we become fully awake to the deepest truth of our being, however we name that truth. As long as we believe in the myth of our brokenness and limitation, we enact that in the world. When we discover our divinity we may choose to enact that divinity. Then the small self becomes transparent and eventually falls away.

Question: *(In Spanish)* Can you meditate anywhere?

Barbara: Absolutely. One practice that Aaron has taught me and that I have worked with for many years is when I first wake up in the morning he's asked me, first, to be aware "Am I breathing in or breathing out?" with my first awareness. Then, he requested I not change my position, but lie there in the position in which I woke up and simply note, "comfortable, pleasant" or "uncomfortable, unpleasant." He's asked me to really be there, lie there and meditate, lying right there in bed, for five or ten minutes, letting awareness come into my body. Then, if I get myself up out of bed, I can go and meditate elsewhere.

If you wake up in the middle of the night, you can meditate there. If you're stopped in your car, not at a traffic light, but in a traffic jam that's clearly going to be ten or fifteen minutes, that's a wonderful place to meditate. It doesn't matter what you're sitting on. It doesn't matter where you are.

A student who's a nurse, who works a night shift from seven at night to seven in the morning in an intensive care ward where people are very, very sick, so the work is very intense, finds that she needs time to meditate and the nurses' lounge is too busy. So, she goes into the women's restroom and the only place to sit is on the toilet seat with the lid closed. She goes in there and meditates, and it's very quiet and she sits there for ten or fifteen minutes. You can meditate anywhere.

Question: *(In Spanish)* Is it better to meditate sitting straight and in a formal meditation position?

Barbara: I never want to give hard and fast rules. People who are sick may need to do it differently, for example. A friend who was dying of cancer couldn't sit, but that doesn't mean he couldn't meditate. If your body is healthy, there's a benefit to sitting up straight, being self-supporting. Part of what we're learning is that we do not need to lean on things; we can fully support ourselves. It's part of learning our wholeness.

On the other hand, if the situation is such, like driving ... Hal and I were in Taxco for the weekend, before we came here, and drove back in a crowded bus. The seat I was sitting on leaned back and the seat in front of me was in my face. There was no way to sit up and I wanted to meditate. Of course, I can meditate leaning back like that. So, we have an ideal. But in certain circumstances we do what we can with what we've got.

Question: *(In Spanish)* *(Inaudible)*

Barbara: Are you talking about these chairs here in this room? Okay. Because of the slope of the seat and back, it may cause back pain if you try to sit up, so if you need to lean against the back of the chair, that's fine. If you're going to meditate at home, put books or wood blocks under the rear legs of the chair, so that the seat is slightly sloped with the rear higher. Then, you don't have to lean back. You don't want your back to hurt. We have enough pain in our lives. We don't have to create artificial rules and generate more pain. Generally speaking, if you have a choice and can sit in a chair that allows you to sit without leaning back, that's to be preferred.

If you can't, if there's no choice and there's some irritation that there's no choice, that mind state is a perfect place to practice. What's creating your dissatisfaction, your

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suffering even? Is it the chair itself or is it your quarrels with the situation? We have such a lot of opinions about how things should be, but conditions are seldom ideal. Where is peace to be found in those situations where we can't change the conditions?

Question: *(In Spanish)* Can I meditate at night in bed?

Barbara: I don't want to be facetious, but it depends on whether you're awake or asleep. Meditation is awake, present. When you close your eyes and you're falling asleep, everything is shutting down and often you're not very present. I recommend to people that they meditate before they go to sleep, but not lying down in bed, because that just puts you to sleep. Sit on a chair or cushion and meditate. Then, you'll be in a very quiet but alert state, very present, very quiet. Then, go to sleep. You'll sleep more soundly. If you find yourself falling asleep while sitting on the chair, you have a number of choices. I'll talk later about working with sleepiness.

This is the last question and then we'll meditate for a bit.

Question: *(Inaudible)* *(About sleepiness.)*

Barbara: When we lie down and close our eyes, we're used to thinking of it as sleep time. It's just conditioning. So, when we close our eyes we need to recondition ourselves to be present, that it's awake time. Another reason we get sleepy is that meditation opens us, so that much of what we've repressed starts to come up. There's resistance to experiencing some of it, so much of our sleepiness is simply a statement of our resistance. We can learn to work with that. It's very workable. I'll talk more about it this afternoon.

We have twenty minutes. What I would like you to do is simply the meditation that we've already discussed. I'm not going to give any instructions here. I just want you to meditate for twenty minutes. Be present with whatever arises. Label it. As it changes or dissolves, come back to your breath. I'll ring a bell at the end.

(Meditation practice.)

(Bell) May all beings find freedom from suffering.

(Bell) May all beings come to dwell in a heart of love and connection.

(Bell) May all beings everywhere find perfect peace.

Barbara: We'll have lunch now. This is not a vacation from the work we're doing today. We're simply moving from more formal meditation into mindfulness, being present while you eat. It doesn't mean you can't talk with one another, but as you eat, as you chew your food, note ... sometimes it's pleasant; sometimes it's not pleasant. Note how liking and craving come up. Be aware what makes you choose this morsel rather than that for the next bite. When you're still chewing, when does your fork go into the dish to get more? Have you swallowed what's in your mouth yet? Where is the impulse coming from to take more? Is it from liking the good taste and wanting more of it? Eating is such a wonderful place to explore these different states of craving, of wanting, even aversion if there's something that you don't like.

Be very mindful as you eat. Be mindful now as you get up from your chairs, as you go wherever you're going. Be aware of the body, of movement, of the sense contacts with objects. Carry the meditation practice with you, so it's not just something you do for twenty or forty-five minutes a day, but something that eventually becomes an

attentiveness, twenty-four hours a day, literally. You find yourself practicing in your sleep, if you're really persistent. If you're in a dream and something is chasing you and you feel anger arise and then you feel a spaciousness around the anger and you find yourself going right into the meditation practice and doing it right there in the middle of your dream. So, we do this twenty-four hours a day.

Learning to meditate is like learning to swim. You can absorb a lot of theory. You can have somebody on land showing you how to do the strokes, but eventually you have got to get into the water and practice.

(Returning from lunch, we begin with twenty minutes of meditation.)

Barbara: *(Beginning lost.)* ... We're going to move on in our discussion to questions that pertain to meditation and the ways we experience ourselves and the world. I understand that all of the metaphysical questions that come up are important to you. Aaron is sometimes willing to talk about them and did answer some of them this morning. He calls them "furniture of Heaven." He says we don't need to know the furniture arrangement in Heaven. That's not where we are. So, he'll speak to those questions a bit. Sometimes they're very important questions for us that help us to understand really "Who am I and why am I here?" But with limited time, I want to confine our discussion now to areas related to meditation.

In the book, Aaron, there's a chapter called "The Universe According to Aaron" in which he covers this whole field of metaphysical questions, "Who are we? Why are we incarnate? What happens to us after the physical incarnation?" and so forth. For those of you who have more questions in that direction I would refer to that chapter in the book.

I want to read to you from a small book called Meditations, by Krishnamurti. Krishnamurti is a spiritual teacher who lived earlier this century.

Meditation is one of the most extraordinary things and if you do not know what it is, you are like the blind man in a world of bright color, shadows, and moving light. It is not an intellectual affair. But when the heart enters into the mind, the mind has a different quality. It is really then limitless, not only in its capacity to think, to act efficiently, but also in a sense of living in a vast space where you are a part of everything. Meditation is the movement of love. It isn't the love of the One or of the many. It is like water that anyone can drink out of any jar, whether golden or earthenware. It is inexhaustible. And a peculiar thing takes place which no drug or self-hypnosis can bring about. It is as though the mind enters into itself, beginning at the surface and penetrating ever more deeply until depth and height have lost their meaning and every measurement ceases. In this state there is complete peace, not contentment, which has come about through gratification, but a peace that has order, beauty and intensity. It can all be destroyed as you destroy a flower, and yet because of its very vulnerability, it is indestructible. This meditation cannot be learned from another. You must begin without knowing anything about it, and move from innocence to innocence.

When he says it cannot be learned from another, again it's like learning to swim. I can give you pointers. I can explain to you how to do it, but you've got to jump in and do it for yourself. I cannot experience meditation for you. Also, when he said it can all be

destroyed as you destroy a flower, and yet because of its vulnerability it is indestructible ... meditation happens on different levels. On one level it's a process, an activity. That's the very first level at which we meet meditation. At a deeper level, it ceases to be an activity and it simply is a way of being. The doing is gone. It's just pure being. At that level, it's indestructible. Once you meet that state in which the mind is fully at rest in meditation, you know it exists. It doesn't take faith anymore that that part of you is in that indestructible center. You really have it. You can't lose it. Then, there might be an onslaught of different uncomfortable experiences which pull you out of that pure awareness state, but you know that it's there. It's not something you have to go somewhere to get. It's right there, within. You know you can open into it again.

A very beautiful image that was given to me once in a story by Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese zen master. He fled from Vietnam during the Vietnam war years ago and lives in exile in France. He's a poet. He writes beautifully. He teaches beautifully. He tells a story. He ran an orphanage in France, as well as a meditation center. He had a young Vietnamese orphan child living in his house. She was playing outside, came in and said, "Uncle, I'm thirsty!" They all called him Uncle. So, he poured her a glass of cider. It was filled with sediment, little bits of apple floating inside the glass. She looked at it and said, "I don't want that." So, they left it on the counter. She went outside to play and she came back in half an hour and said, "I'm still thirsty." He pointed to the cider. All the sediment had settled to the bottom.

This little girl had grown up in this meditation spiritual community. She looked at the glass of cider and said, "Oh, it's been meditating."

The sediment in us is still there, but with meditation, it settles! We enter into the quietness and purity of that center. It really is indestructible. It's a peace that I find to be a really true peace, because I don't have to worry about losing it, as opposed to an artificial peace that I feel I have to keep doing something to hold onto it. It's very powerful.

I want to read from "The Soil²," by Krishnamurti.

The soil in which the meditative mind can begin is the soil of everyday life, the strife, the pain, the fleeting joy. It must begin there and bring order and from there move endlessly. But if you are concerned only about making order, then that very order will bring about its own limitations and the mind will be its prisoner.

Again, let me say something about that statement. Some of us move into meditation because we want to find a place of peace. We want to create some kind of order to make ourselves feel safe. We push certain things away; we hold onto other things. We find a place that really feels safe, but there's no peace in it because we have to keep painful thoughts and objects away and we have to hold onto pleasant ones or we don't feel safe anymore. The mind that feels safe in disorder is the mind that really knows safety. So, if meditation just becomes another way of feeling safe, then you're simply trapping yourself in a different way. What we're here to do is let go of all the traps. That's where freedom is.

² Krishnamurti, Meditation, "The Soil," (Boston and London: Shambala Pocket Editions, 1991)

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If you are concerned only with making order, then that very order will bring about its own limitation and the mind will be its prisoner. In all this movement, you must somehow begin from the other end, from the other shore, and not always be concerned about this shore and about how to cross the river. You must take a plunge into the water, not knowing how to swim and the beauty of meditation is that you never know where you are, where you are going, what the end is.

We're not meditating to make anything special happen, but just to be here with what is, here in this moment as fully as is possible. It's a constant process of looking deeply, of understanding, of letting go. At first the process itself seems uncomfortably mechanical or precise to some people. They come to each experience and label it. But the labeling is not an end in itself. At a certain point when you become very present, the labeling gets in the way of the direct experience and then we let go of the labeling. The labeling is simply a device to help us be present until we get to that place of absolute presence where we don't need the labeling anymore. Then if mind starts to drift, we pick up labeling again.

For all of you here in this room now, today and tomorrow I want you to label because I want you to learn the process, but if in the coming months you feel yourself getting to a deep place where the labeling seems superfluous, that's fine. Then, let go of the labeling. It's just a device.

Meditation is a route to freedom. It's freedom from the old reactivities of mind. Our minds become so conditioned that in certain situations we react in the same way, without thinking about our words, acts and thoughts, without understanding where that response is coming from. What's driving that response. What conditions it? We don't look. We don't know.

In meditation we start to see the conditioned processing of mind. It's a very precise process. It's something you can find in your own experience. We have five physical senses, eyes, ears, tongue, nose, touch; and we also have mind, which is a different kind of sense, but is also a sense. When eyes touch an object, seeing results. Ears touch a sound, hearing results. Mind touches something and thinking or knowing results. Whatever the sense consciousness, be it hearing, tasting, smelling, thinking, it will have an either pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral quality to it. If it's neutral we tend not to pay much attention to it. If it's pleasant, liking arises. If it's unpleasant, disliking arises.

This is all very natural movement in us. If liking arises, then various mind states, such as craving and clinging arise. If disliking arises, then different states of aversion, anger, wanting to push it away, be rid of it, arise. We tense around these states. We talk about burning with desire. Desire can be a very powerful unpleasant state. "Wanting, wanting." We tense with aversion, wanting to push it away. We may note it as "aversion," or just "tension."

We may look deeply. We can see that there is fear underneath, fear that something will come and get me and hurt me in some way, fear that my needs won't be met. Often our minds get very busy trying to order, to control the environment so that we won't need to feel that fear. It's not the object that disturbs us but our discomfort with the difficult feeling of fear. The same is true of other emotions.

Fear is a very uncomfortable sensation. None of us likes to be afraid. None of us likes to feel threatened or helpless. Yet, often the fear is ... it's as if I had a very small object and a big light so it casts an enormous shadow on the wall. I see the shadow and think, "Oh, it's enormous." But what it's really about may be very small. Some of what makes it feel enormous is this old mind conditioning.

What happens is, for example if someone was a child whose needs were not met and whose parents were so involved in their own needs that they couldn't pay attention to him or her, then she might feel very afraid. Whenever she saw something that she thought she needed she would want to grab hold of it, hold onto it, because she had learned very early that nobody else was going to take care of her. She believes she's got to collect and hoard or she won't be safe. Then, in any given moment, perhaps she's feeling thirsty, just as simple as that, and thinks, "I need a glass of water." She sees somebody walk by with water and may feel she needs to grab at it, or to hoard it if she gets it. A strong fear comes up in her. It's totally out of proportion with what's happening, "I'm not going to get what I need."

In this moment all that's happening is she's feeling thirst, but there's so much old conditioning about that thirst, about not having been attended to when she was young.

As I said, if instead of just the thirst, there's an enormous shadow, what she reacts to, then, is not the small thirst which simply knows, "It's okay. I can go for an hour without water." It's the enormous shadow, the fear which creates obsessive thought and great aversion or grasping.

This was an example of desire. Examples of aversion mind states such as anger, various mind states of wanting to get rid of, offer a similar experience.

If someone had a father who was always very angry, always yelling at him and putting him down, made him feel humiliated, when somebody approached him now as an adult and was rude to him, instead of just experiencing rudeness, all of those memories of old humiliation would come up. Then, a tremendous amount of anger might arise. It would make it impossible for him to hear this person who was being rude and to understand that their rudeness comes out of their own fear or their discomfort. So, instead of being able to hear them and respond appropriately, he will begin to react based on that tremendous shadow, all of the old mind movement.

When we understand how we move in ways out of proportion to what is happening, based on the old experience of mind, we realize that we have a choice. There's a tremendous amount of freedom in that choice. We tend to think of ourselves as victims, but it's our choice whether we're a victim or not. When we understand how we have gotten into these misunderstandings, then we have the opportunity to make different choices.

Sometimes—I don't know if this is the case in Mexico as much as in the United States—people go into therapy with a psychologist or psychiatrist and look at incidents in their childhood to try to understand the painful things that influenced them. Often they find that even after they understand them there's just as much pain. They may not have to act them out so much anymore, but there's still great pain.

Meditation addresses this pain from a very different angle. Instead of looking at the old pains that we've had and intimately inspecting each one, picking it into pieces, we just start to understand there has been old pain. We start to be able to distinguish what is in this present moment and what is old. We just give it a label, "old mind," "old conditioning."

The pain does **not** instantly dissolve. We find some space in this willingness to be with experience. If I'm terrified of dogs because one bit me as a child, I might not be able to be in a small room with a large dog but could be comfortable in a large space where the dog was confined behind a fence and I could just watch it. Meditation allows us to give our old fears more space.

We don't have to trace and retrace a pain's roots in our childhood, although I'm not suggesting that for some people that's not helpful; it can be very helpful. But we get to a point where we just know this particular tension or discomfort is from something that happened in childhood and it's old. For me, knowing that means I have a choice. I can put it behind me and come to this moment, and in this moment I can know my wholeness and I can enact that wholeness in the world. I can be with this fear. I can be with this discomfort or pain and I don't have to react to it or run from it.

So, we start to develop a new way of being in the world and it's very powerful, because we find that instead of reacting from the accumulation of so-called "wrinkles," as in Aaron's wrinkled paper metaphor, we start to re-identify ourselves with the perfect sheet of paper that's always there and just to remember, "That is who I am."

Then, in meditation we move deeper and deeper into that experience of our true being. All the wrinkles are still there, but they are just the surface, like waves on a sea. Instead of fixating on the waves, we sink into a deeper level of our being where we directly experience wholeness and we start to be able to live from that wholeness.

I would like to hear just one or two questions related specifically to what I've been saying, with questions to me or to Aaron. Then we're going to spend some time in meditation and then come back and Aaron will answer more questions. I would like to add that you may write down a question and pass it forward instead of saying it out loud.

Question for Aaron: You speak of learning to love others, which is the highest form of love. We are not yet so developed, so could you speak about the need to be loved?

Aaron: I am Aaron. Every sentient being, that is, every being with consciousness has the need to be loved. Many of you observe that need in yourself with a sense of fear. It is as if, feeling unloved, you must exclude from awareness the need to be loved because it is so painful to have a need go unfulfilled.

First, you must come to grips with that pain, and acknowledge that there is a need to be loved, a need present not only in yourself but in everyone. Then, you must begin to investigate why it is so difficult for you to love yourself, because the need to be loved is a need to love the self. This is not pride or ego. I am not talking of self-inflation here, which grows out of a fear of unworthiness, but honest appreciation of the divine in the self. Until you develop that in yourself, your seeking of love from another is simply an attempt to bandage a wound. But it doesn't last. The bandage falls off and the wound is raw and sore again.

One choice is to respect yourself enough to give yourself this gift of silence for a half hour or more each day, to simply watch and to be present with the movements of mind. Then all of those old judgments of the self start to lose potency. What blocks respect, even love, for the self? What has conditioned you into the belief that you are unworthy, not only of human love but perhaps even more precisely, unworthy of the divine? The divine seems pure, stainless. Because of the many fear-based impulses of the mind, you view yourself as impure, and therefore as unworthy to experience union with the divine. Meditation allows you to understand the conditioned nature of experience and that you were never "bad" simply because certain thoughts were present.

Barbara: Is there a question about what I spoke of, this whole process of observing the movements of mind, seeing how uncomfortable mind states arise, and how we can create more space around them? (*Pause*) No? If not, let us simply go into meditation and try it. We're going to do a longer sitting this time. I want you to do just what we've done before. Note sensations. Label them. As they change or fall away come back to the breath. Note thought in an appropriate way, labeling it, "planning, planning," or "remembering, remembering," or "judging, judging, judging," whatever kind of thought it is, and then coming back to the breath. If there's a strong emotion, be with the emotion. If it's very powerful, is so strong it really feels like a tidal wave coming at you, just breathe with it. Note that which wants to flee. Breathing in, "I am aware of my fear," or anger, or impatience, or whatever it might be. The discomfort, or desire to get away, really becomes the primary object.

You may experience restlessness. That's a big one that people sometimes find when they meditate. Breathing in, "I am aware of my restlessness." Boredom is another big one. People experience boredom. Breathing in, "I am aware of my boredom." Breathing out, "I smile at my boredom." And you've got to literally give a little smile. Really relax and allow whatever is there to be there.

What is boredom? What is restlessness? What is anger? If the mind state is very strong, try asking yourself, "If I were not experiencing this now what would I be experiencing?" Often we find fear or a sense of grief, or loss. Often there's something under that surface emotion of anger or desire or restlessness or boredom. Sleepiness is another one. "If I were not feeling so sleepy, what might I be feeling?"

This isn't something to dig into with the brain, it's something to question, to let your mind give rise to the question like a scientific investigator with a microscope, and then come back to the breath and be there with the emotion, with whatever is there. Be there with the physical sensations in your body. How does anger feel in the body? What is the experience of anger? How does restlessness feel? Nobody ever died of restlessness, but sometimes you feel like you're going to. What is restlessness? What is sleepiness?

Of course it won't all be heavy. You may experience tremendous joy, see lights or feel a sense of real rapture. Is it pleasant? Does it lead into craving, grasping, holding? The process is the same. Whatever is there, be with it. If joy leads to attachment to joy, not wanting to lose it, just know there is attachment.

Whatever is there, just be there with it. Whatever you are experiencing is okay. You don't have to change it in any way. You don't have to make it go away. You also don't

have to hold onto it. Just be there with it. Let it be there as long as it stays. When it goes, come back to the breath. Are the instructions clear? Okay. We'll sit then, for about thirty minutes.

Question: *(In Spanish) (About the breath. Very long question, somewhat agitated.)*

Barbara: I'm not sure what you mean when you say you stop breathing. You stop being aware of your breath? I think I understand your question and I do want to allow us to get into the meditation. Will you sit down? Let me speak to it briefly and if I do not understand it fully, at the close you and I can talk more about it. Okay?

The breath rises and then sometimes we notice what's called an aperture, a break in the breath, then it falls. Watch your breath rising, and then there's a small space, and then falling, then another small space. Do you feel the gap between the inhale and the exhale, exhale and inhale? Sometimes when you move into a deep meditation the breath seems to slow. It seems to become very irregular. Actually, it's just settling down, slowing down.

A different experience can be one of feeling like you can't get enough breath, like you begin controlling the breath. None of these things are problems, they're simply places to look. "This is what I'm experiencing right now. Can't get a breath. Tension. Tension. What is it about?"

Often people who want control in their lives find that as they let go of controlling the breath and let it breathe itself, they're very uncomfortable. This discomfort leads them back into the question, "What is afraid and needs to control and order?" Just the awareness that "something" is afraid and wants to stay in control can be a very important understanding. What if the breath is breathing itself? None of it's a problem. Whatever your experience, it's part of your practice. Just let it be there. Go deeper into it and let it be there. If there's real discomfort, let attention touch the discomfort with real kindness, real mercy.

Everything in your experience is part of your practice. The questioner spoke of tension in his work, carrying the tension into his meditation. Not a problem. It's a chance to look at "What is the tension about?" You're not meditating to escape tension but to deeply understand the process of arising tension so it no longer is in control. Whatever comes into your practice, whatever you're experiencing, like employees who don't show up or not enough money coming in, is simply an invitation to look at, "Here is fear."

We always have this basic choice, relating to the world from a place of love and openness or from a place of fear. Fear views what happens in our lives and says, "I've got to push back. I've got to fix this." When we observe how we move into that confrontational place of fear that wants to push we start to see that we have a different choice.

A wonderful place to observe this is in meditation. If fear comes up, if the thought of something that's uncomfortable for you comes up, it's just part of your practice.

Okay. We're going to sit for thirty minutes. Please get yourselves comfortable. I'm not going to talk during this practice period. I want you to go as deeply into the practice as you can. Whatever you experience is okay, restlessness, bliss, whatever is there. Please remember there is no bad or good meditator. If you look at your neighbor and he

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seems very settled and you're feeling restless and mind says, "Why am I the only one who's restless here?" just note it as "judging, judging," and come back to your breath. You're not trying to be motionless but to observe any movement, to be present. Let's start.

(Thirty minute meditation.)

May all beings be happy. *(Bell)*

May all beings everywhere love and be loved. *(Bell)*

May all beings find perfect peace. *(Bell)*

Stretch slowly and bring awareness into your bodies. If you're stretching, know you're stretching. If it feels pleasant, know it feels pleasant. What I would like you to do is, silently, to stand up in place. Reach your arms up. Stand on tip toes. Stretch. Feel your body stretching. As you stretch up, breathe in; then bring your arms down and exhale. Arms up again and inhale. Arms down and exhale. Do it two or three more times. Be as present in your body as you can be.

Now, let us sit.

I want you to do two bits of homework tonight. One, mindfulness practice. I want you to pick something, something that you're going to do anyhow, like taking a shower, brushing your teeth, even driving home now. Be as present as you can be while you do that. If mind wanders off into planning, simply note "planning, planning," and come back. If you're driving and you're seeing, really see. If you're taking a shower, really feel how the water feels on your body and feel how the towel feels as you dry yourself. Be there. Five minutes. Whatever it is that you're doing, really be present with it.

Second, I want everyone to meditate twice, tonight before you go to bed and tomorrow morning when you get up. If five minutes each time is all you can do, do it for five minutes. If what you do is simply to sit on the side of your bed before you go to sleep with your feet on the floor and just sit there for five minutes, fine. Do that. If you feel moved to meditate for fifteen or twenty minutes, or even longer, wonderful. It needs not to be an "I should" kind of obligation but must come from a place of kindness and love for yourself. We all take care of our physical bodies. We need to learn to take care of our spiritual bodies as well. So, let this be a gift to yourself and not an obligation. Five minutes or more, tonight and tomorrow morning.

We are going to have some question and answer time and then we're going to end with a guided meditation on loving kindness. May I hear your questions?

Question: What about concentration meditation like repetition of a word? Does Aaron teach this? Do you do it?

Barbara: Deepening concentration is always helpful. Mantra meditation is basically a concentration practice, however, it has its limitations. It takes us to a very blissful place and then we let go of the mantra, we come out of the meditation and we're right back in the daily world. There's not as direct a transformation in it. So, yes, it's a useful support practice. It also can open the heart, as a kind of devotional practice. Aaron does not teach it as a basic practice, nor do I. It's a support, helping one learn deeper concentration. You can get addicted to the kind of blissful states that mantra

meditation leads to. They're wonderful, blissful states, but they're an escape from the world.

Question: Barbara, how long do you meditate each day?

Barbara: I hesitate to use myself as an example. This is my life. Friends of mine tease me because they go to church or something on Sunday morning, while I go out and take a long walk because I've been doing formal spiritual practice of one sort or another all week and this is my break. Personally, I meditate about three hours a day. I get up very early in the morning at 4:30 or 5:00. I get very little sleep. When I move into deep levels of meditation, it's very restful. I'm not asleep at all, but it's very restful and is more supportive for me than the additional hours of sleep. But this is something that comes gradually. Then I meditate at night before going to bed.

I suggest to people an ideal of two sittings a day, finding times that work for them. If you're a night person, trying to get up early in the morning and meditate for a long time isn't going to work. And vice versa, if you're a morning person, you're going to find it very hard to meditate late at night. The best times depend on what your schedule is like. If you have small children and you're home during the day, and the children are taking a nap or are at school and you have free time, then meditation during the day is ideal. Sometimes people like to meditate when they come home from work. Many people find it works to set their alarm five or ten minutes early for a few days, and then five or ten minutes early again, and again, until you're getting up half an hour or forty-five minutes early. But, it's a gradual process. You're not just suddenly asking yourself to lose an hour of sleep.

Or you can turn off the television, or put aside the newspaper and meditate for a while at night. Ideally, you would have one longer sitting—half an hour, up to forty-five minutes—and one shorter sitting—at least ten or fifteen minutes, but longer is fine.

Question: I used to meditate ten to fifteen minutes, but something happens now. I was uncomfortable in the chair and everything was uncomfortable. People were moving, there were noises, I was sleepy.

Barbara: We were meditating after a big lunch. That's a difficult period, when people are generally sleepy. But, also, as plainly as I can put it, life is messy. We're never going to get it right. We sit and it's too hard, it's too soft, it's too cold, it's too hot. We're never going to get it right! This is just exactly what we need to bring into our practice. On one level you're finding it hard to meditate, but the hard meditations are sometimes the most useful ones. Those are the ones we learn most from, because we learn about that part in us that wants to be comfortable and is always pushing and pulling, trying to get it just right. And there's a certain kind of surrender that happens, where we just relax into what is and find the peacefulness there. That's real peace; it doesn't depend on conditions being "right."

Question: Well, I try to do that, to relax and meditate, but then I feel angry.

Barbara: That's fine. If there's anger, then feel the anger, whatever is there. It's just good to find out what's there. That's a big step. Anger isn't bad, it's just energy. Be there and feel it.

Question: *(Inaudible)*

Barbara: How about Aaron's life? Aaron tells us he has lived thousands of lifetimes. He says we all have lived thousands of lifetimes. Christmas Stories tells a little bit about some of his lives. Mostly, he doesn't give a lot of information about his lives, except his very final human lifetime in the sixteenth century when he says he was a meditation master in Thailand. He talks about how, in that lifetime, he thought he was very free, that he really had reached a state of enlightenment, and then something happened that was very painful for him and he saw how much attachment, how much anger he still had and that he was still trying to get rid of his anger. And so he went off into the jungle and meditated in much the manner he's teaching us. He saw how he had been trying to control his thoughts and emotions, judging them. He came to a place of real equanimity with them and was able to move beyond attachment, beyond fixation on keeping or getting rid of. This way he really did find final freedom. And so he says much of what he teaches comes from what he learned in that lifetime. Though it comes from all of his lifetimes, it especially comes from that lifetime. Other questions?

Question: Is there a special meditation practice that can bring us in touch with our spiritual guides?

Barbara: I promised you this morning I would answer that. I'm going to answer it very briefly. The best process I know is to meditate for a few minutes and get settled and then ask a question that you know you don't have an answer for, a question that's been a pressing question for you, and just send it out. Ask for an answer. Have a pad and pen at hand and let yourself simply, as you feel a kind of a "push," pick up the pencil and start to write. Don't monitor what you're writing. Usually when we write we think and then we write, we think and then we write again. Just let it pour through you. It may be three words; it may be three paragraphs. Whatever it is, after you stop feeling that energy pushing through you, stop and read it. If it's helpful, good. If you don't understand it, ask, "I don't understand this. I need more explanation."

Just keep going with it. It's not a one time project. You're going to have to do it day, after day, after day. The problem is not really getting in touch with your guides, but trusting what you hear, writing it down and accepting, "This is something I know and it's helpful." It helps you to trust the guidance that's coming through you. Then, after a while, you can leave off writing and just listen. But writing it first is very important because it gives you something tangible to look at. It helps you feel you're not just making it up.

Question: I found that I had a difficult time labeling my thoughts. I didn't know if it was remembering, if it was planning, if it was judging. It was like a jungle. And I found the labeling distracted me from meditating.

Barbara: Okay. At this point, simply note it "thinking, thinking." Don't try to figure out what it is. What I suspect is happening is that you're not catching it immediately. So that maybe, for example, maybe there was planning first and then some judgments came up around the planning, and by the time you noticed it, it all started to pile up. As you get better at the process and catch the arising of thought faster, then knowing what kind of thought it is will be clearer and easier. But, for now, just label it "thinking, thinking," and as you label it and the thinking has stopped, come back to your breath.

Or if there is some physical sensation in the body that predominates along with the thought, you may choose to rest attention on the physical sensation.

Question: Okay. And I have another question. I have a lot of pain in my back and I have no idea how to label that or what to do with it.

Barbara: There are a number of things we can do with that. First, you can just label it "pain, pain." If it has a burning quality or tension, tingling, sharp pain, however it feels, you can label in that way, but you don't have to be that specific. At the beginning, just labeling it "pain" is okay.

Our body often feels pain in meditation that it has not felt at other times. Part of our habitual process is holding the pain of our body away, not fully getting in touch with it. Sometimes as your body settles when you meditate you allow yourself to get more in touch with the body and the sensations of the body become more acute. This doesn't mean there's more pain, it simply means that you've become more aware of it. Also, though, at times there really may be more pain because our body stores certain tensions in certain ways. For example, if whenever anybody is angry at you, you tense the shoulders and upper arm, you may store it back here on our back. Then, as you are meditating and some of the old sense of sadness about being attacked in that way comes up, your body releases some of that energy. It comes to the surface now as your body is settled and you may actually start to feel that pain, pain that you didn't let yourself feel when you were being attacked.

So, part of this process is that pain does come through you and then it dissolves. It's not that you are always going to feel that pain when you meditate. It's a process of releasing it, and in releasing it you do bring your body to better health, to more balance and centeredness, so that it's not stored there anymore.

I find it interesting that you said "... what to do with it." It's so habitual in us to feel pain, discomfort, something askew, and then to immediately concentrate ourselves on fixing it. But doing that just generates more "self," leads us deeper into the idea of a self that must control, must fix. What if you just relax and allow it to be there?

Question: (*Asking about restlessness and stillness, about "good" and "bad" meditations.*)

Barbara: Everything is a meditation. There is no "good" or "bad." There is more comfortable meditation and a more uncomfortable meditation. So, more correctly, what you were experiencing was a more restless and uncomfortable meditation. But, as I said, the unsettled meditations often teach us more than the very settled ones. The settled ones are wonderful, they're blissful, "Ahh, everything is wonderful." Great joy. But, often we learn a lot more from the restlessness, and usually, if you meditate regularly you find a balance of both.

Question: (*In Spanish*) (*About thinking.*)

Barbara: Ultimately, you get to the place where there's no longer any identification with thought. So, you almost stop noting it as thinking. It's just something happening on the surface. It's as if you were scuba diving and there are buoys and boats on the surface. If you look up from ten feet under water, you may see all of that. At first you may be very concerned about it, but after awhile, while you still know it's there, it's just boats passing by, but there's nothing you have to do about it. You stop even noting that there are boats passing by. It's no longer primary to your experience. This is not non-awareness, just a spaciousness that doesn't need to get involved.

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This is simply attention settling down. At that point, the thoughts do cease to arise. It's a little bit like a child who's tired, hungry, and whiny, and keeps pulling on you and saying, "I want this. I want that." As long as you keep paying attention to it, it increases the child's whininess. But, if you give the child a cracker, say, "Dinner will be ready soon," set it down with something to play with and make it clear, "I'm not going to pay attention to your temper tantrums," the child sees that he has nothing to gain by the temper tantrums, so he stops having them.

If each arising is accompanied by the thought, "I've got to fix this. I've got to fix that," then mind keeps feeding in more and more things to fix. When you notice that tendency to "fix," and give mind the message, "I'm just not going to get caught in this," with a kindness that says, "I notice that this thought is here. I'm not condemning the thought, but I don't need to do anything about it," mind stops getting the feedback it wants and it stops giving off all of these thoughts and then it does get very, very quiet.

Question: And when you're at that quiet stage, are you conscious of your breathing?

Barbara: The quiet states go deeper and deeper. These are various fruits of practice. There's a place where you are resting in a state of pure awareness where you are very aware of the breath, of arising of thoughts or sensations, or lack of them. Then, we move into what's called dissolution of body. The whole body seems to dissolve. All the sense of self seems to dissolve. Physical sensations stop first. You may stop being aware of the breath or there may be a very thin thread of breath. You may stop labeling it if there's nothing left to label. Body is gone. Just awareness there. It's a tremendously expansive state where there's simply no body.

From that space, we move into ego dissolution, where not only the body is gone, but the whole sense of self is gone. Here we really start to experience what no-self means. It doesn't mean that I disappear, it means that the personal self disappears and all that's left is this central core which is not me but is part of everything. It's a very powerful, really life-changing experience.

So, as meditation deepens we keep moving into these deeper and deeper states. Then we move into what I think of as the "heart" of the Unconditioned. Maybe we can also call it "God." Often we're not aware of anyone present to experience this as we move through it, but we have a memory of it as we come back out of the meditation, and back to a conscious mind. Something remembers. We bring that memory back into our personal life.

So there are many levels. I'm going into this in more depth for those of you who are quite experienced in meditation. If you are newer to it, please don't look for these states. They will arise when you're ready for them. We don't grasp at these experiences, but allow them.

Now we're going to end with a *metta*, or lovingkindness meditation. Metta means "lovingkindness" in the Pali language, the language spoken in countries where such practice originated.

A short metta (lovingkindness) meditation

Barbara: The practice traditionally starts with the self but I find it's often harder to wish the self well than to wish the same thing to a loved one. Thus, I start with the loved one. It opens the heart a bit.

Bring into your heart and your mind someone for whom you have much love. It might be a parent, a teacher, a dear friend, someone who's nurtured and supported you. Sometimes we tend to take such people for granted. We don't look deeply at it. We just take what they give us. Choose one person.

Look deeply at that person and see the ways that person has suffered. Talk to them. "You have been afraid. You have felt alone and uncertain. You have felt confused or angry. You have been in physical pain. You have known loss and grief."

What do you wish this person?

"May you be happy.
May you love and be loved.
May you find the healing that you seek.
May your heart open and flower.
May you find joy.
May you find peace."

I'm going to be quiet for a few minutes. Please continue to offer whatever wishes feel most appropriate. Keep it very simple, repeating the same few wishes most appropriate to this person. Let the wishes come from your heart. Sometimes people feel it useful to coordinate it with their breath, so that with each out breath comes a wish. This way you can stay in touch with your breath and offer wishes.

(Pause)

Let this person go now, and bring in your own self. If there is any resistance, just note it, "resistance, resistance ...". In the same way as you did with the loved one, look deeply into yourself. "I have suffered. I have known loneliness and fear. I have felt confused. I have known physical and emotional pain."

"May I be happy.
May I love and be loved.
May I find the healing that I seek.
May my heart open and flower.
May I find joy.
May I find peace."

Please continue for a few minutes. Again, keep it simple and let it flow from your heart. If there is resistance to offering yourself these wishes, simply note it as, "resistance, resistance," and soften around it. No need to fight with resistance here. Resistance and the deep inner movement toward love are not mutually exclusive. Note resistance and allow the heart to continue to offer loving kindness.

(Pause)

Release yourself from the center now and bring into your heart and mind someone with whom there has been difficulty. This doesn't have to be the most painful relationship in

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your life, but let it be someone with whom there's been some conflict, a difficult person. Remember, what we're doing here is not offering forgiveness. Forgiveness is part of a process which begins with hearing and understanding.

Whatever that person did to you, however he or she hurt you, you may not feel ready to forgive. And that's okay. But it's so painful to put someone out of our hearts. We can begin the healing process simply by observing that this person also has known pain, has suffered, and by allowing our innate kindness to offer them well-being.

Speak to them. "You have hurt me so much that I have often not been able or wanted to see you clearly. My anger has obstructed clear seeing. When I look at you, I see that you have been afraid. You have known loneliness, grief, and pain. You have felt confused and angry."

"May you be happy.

May you, even you, love and be loved.

May you find the healing that you seek.

May your heart open and flower.

May you find joy.

May you find peace."

Notice any resistance to offering these wishes and notice also that there's a loving place within you that wants to allow healing, that is happy to offer loving wishes. You don't need to get rid of the anger, pain, or resistance. Just allow it to be present as a witness and to also allow the loving wishes to emerge. Keep it simple. Let it come from the heart. Whatever wishes seem appropriate. I'll be quiet.

(Pause)

May all beings everywhere be happy. *(Bell)*

May all beings find the healing that they seek. *(Bell)*

May all beings everywhere find perfect peace. *(Bell)*

Thank you for being with me today. Have a good evening and I'll see you in the morning.

Day Two

(We begin with twenty minutes of silent meditation.)

Barbara: We're going to do standing meditation. I would ask all of you to stand up in place now. Close your eyes, feet about six or eight inches apart, so you're comfortably balanced, hands relaxed and to your sides. Feel the weight on the soles of your feet. This is a different primary object than the breath. Note it please as "touching, touching, touching." Feel how your body balances. Can you feel the weight in your hips? Feel the way your shoulders sit to balance you. Really be in your body, "touching, touching."

Now, I want you to put most of your weight on your right foot. Now shift it back to the left foot. Note "shifting, shifting." I don't mean to stand solely on one foot. Be comfortable, but let the weight shift so that most of it is on one foot and then back to the other, "shifting, shifting." Do that for a moment or two at your own pace, each time noting "shifting," and then after you shift, note "touching, touching," the weight on your foot, then shifting again, "touching, touching." Now bring the balance back so it's centered. I'm going to be quiet now for a moment. Just stand and be aware.

If a thought or physical sensation arises and pulls you away from the primary object, label it just in the same way you did with sitting practice. Stay with it until it changes or dissolves.

(Some time of practice. Bell. We all sit.)

Barbara: We covered a lot of ground yesterday. Today we're going to go deeper, both more meditation instructions and also more concept in which to ground those meditation instructions. A lot of what I teach is about non-duality. I like to draw my teachings from many religious traditions, because I find, much to my joy, that these same teachings are written in many different traditions. I want to read you a few pages from a book ([Open Secrets](#)³) written by an acquaintance who is a rabbi. This book is simply his translation of letters that belonged to his great, great grandfather. This ancestor moved from Europe to the United States and wrote to his rabbi. These are the rabbi's words back. I find them very beautiful. I'm going to read excerpts from several pages.

You ask me of God, to define the nameless, to place in your palm the ultimate secret. Do not imagine that this is hidden somewhere far from you. The ultimate secret is the most open one. Here it is. God is all. I am tempted to stop with this, to close this letter, sign my name, and leave you with this simple truth, yet I fear you will not understand. Know from the first that all that follows is but an elaboration on the simple truth, God is all. What does it mean to be all? God is reality. God is the source and substance of all things and nothing. There is no thing, or feeling, or thought that is not God, even the idea that there is no God, for this is what it is to be all. God must embrace even God's own negation.

Some would argue that God is a spark inside each being. Others would argue that God is above and outside creation. I teach neither position. God is not inside or

³ Shapiro, Rami, transl./ed. [Open Secrets](#), (Miami FL: Light House Press, Inc., 1994)

outside. God is the very thing itself. And when there is no thing but only empty space, God is that as well. Picture a bowl in your mind. Define the bowl. Is it just the clay that forms its walls or is it the empty space that fills with soup? Without the space the bowl is useless. Without the walls the bowl is useless. So, which is the bowl? The answer is both. To be a bowl it must have both being and emptiness. It is the same with God. For God to be God, for God to be all, God must manifest as both being and emptiness.

Being is the manifestation of God that appears to us as separate entities, physical, spiritual, psychological. Emptiness is the manifestation of God that reveals all separation to be illusory. Everything is simply God in differing forms. This teaching is called schlemut, the completeness of God. To be schlemut, God must contain all possibilities and paradox. To be complete, God must transcend the notion of opposites. God must be both being and emptiness simultaneously. Being and emptiness both reside in and are expressions of God's wholeness.

These three terms are crucial to understanding God and almost everything else. They are the key to your spiritual awakening and tranquillity. Learn them well. The details of the world are the myriad seemingly separate beings we humans perceive when we look at the world from the perspective of self. This perspective is not the only one. If we learn to look at the world from a position of selflessness we see no separate beings, only a wondrous unity. This can be likened to a person viewing the ocean, first from shore and then from beneath the surface. From the shore the sea is a vast field of waves, each separate and unique. From beneath the surface the waves disappear into a sameness, a unity. Which view is right?

Both are right. The waves are no less real for the ocean's oneness, nor is the oneness less real for the waves. Separation and unity are both part of the greater reality that is the ocean.

Barbara: I find this very beautiful. At times it almost reechoes word for word both Christian and Buddhist teachings. These are universal.

When we speak of non-duality, when in meditation we speak of reaching that place in which the self disappears, we're not speaking of negation of the self. We are not saying that the human has no value or that we get rid of the human, but that both exist simultaneously, the human and this pure spirit essence or pure awareness.

The way the Buddhist teachings offer this idea is to talk of the world of phenomena as conditioned. The teachings say that everything that arises in this phenomenal world arises when conditions are present for it to arise and ceases when conditions for it cease. We can see this in our daily lives. If hunger arises it is due to certain conditions—empty stomach, our body's need for nourishment. When we fill our stomachs then the hunger pains stop. If a feeling of coldness arises because cool air is blowing on us and we put on a wrap, then the sensation of cold disappears. It's very straightforward.

Buddhist teachings also talk about an Unconditioned. Buddhism is a non-theistic religion. In other words, it does not talk of God. However, in the Udana scripture, the Buddha said to a group of monks, "Monks, there is an Unborn, Undying, Unchanging, Uncreated. If it were not so, there would be no reason for our work." I can't personally

think of a better definition of God than unborn, undying, eternal, changeless. So, there is an Unconditioned which we can experience directly in meditation.

Yesterday I spoke about some of the fruits of meditation practice, of finding more peace in our lives, less judgment of ourselves and others, and this is very important. But there is a greater fruit. As meditation takes us deeper, we do come directly into this experience of the Unconditioned or of God. Then, God stops being something out there, and takes on a personal meaning. We really understand what I just read, that everything is an expression of God. Experiencing this truth was a very powerful teaching for me. I had understood that my anger, for example, was not something evil, that my opinions or judgments were not bad—sometimes unskillful, but not bad. I had understood conceptually that it was all an expression of God. But, in meditation I was able to directly experience it so that the words “It’s all God” stopped being a concept.

I read to you yesterday from [The Ground We Share](#). In the conversation between the Jesuit priest and zen master a big piece of their dialogue is about this precise experience that the zen master calls the experience of the Unconditioned, or enlightenment experience and the Jesuit priest calls the experience of God. They talk around it for a while.

It’s very hard to find words to fully express one’s experience, so we have to really listen to one another. We frame our experience in the language of our own religion and culture. Sometimes we can’t directly share the experience. When they get past the language differences, though, it’s so clearly the same experience.

So, I offer this to those of you who have asked me, “How does using a Buddhist meditation process fit for me as a Christian or practitioner of any other religion?” We’re not talking about the ways in which your own religion may take that experience and interpret it. We’re talking about the experience itself, this direct experience of that which is nameless, of the Unconditioned or God.

Some Buddhist teachings take all of this one step further. Here I’m going to share with you some ideas and, for the sake of clarity, three specific Sanskrit words. I’ve tried as much as possible to avoid any technical language. You’re all familiar with the word *karma*, yes? Is there anyone here who doesn’t know what the word karma means? Okay. It’s a very useful word. In English it has no direct translation. I don’t know if it does in Spanish. So, we use the word karma. The three words I want to give you also have no direct translation and, rather than talk around them, I’d rather just give you the words.

First, a short word, *kaya*. It simply means “body” in Sanskrit. *Dharma* means “truth.” So, *dharmakaya* is the truth body. I have come to understand this basically as the Unconditioned or God, that which we enter into in the deepest meditation practice, that which is the core of each of us. It’s not identical, but close enough so we can translate it in that way, for now.

At the opposite end is *nirmanakaya*. *Nirmana* means “form,” so this is the form body. In the book that I just read from, the rabbi talks of being, emptiness and completeness, using Hebrew terms. Being and emptiness both are *nirmanakaya*. They are both forms. The completeness is *dharmakaya*. As he pointed out in different language, right there, within the *nirmanakaya*, is the *dharmakaya*. They are not separate!

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The relationship of these three aspects is subtle. It's important. I want you to think about all of this for a moment. It's easy to see that being is a form. A book is a form. A tree is a form. A human body is a form. A thought is a form. There are many different kinds of forms, mental forms, physical forms. So, it's easy to see that being is Nirmanakaya.

The space within the bowl is also form of sorts, an "empty" form. The being and the emptiness are both expressions of God. They have no separate existence. So, we have dharmakaya or truth body and nirmanakaya expressions of the dharmakaya. Dharmakaya expresses nirmanakaya. Within the nirmanakaya, we find the dharmakaya seed. Aaron phrases it, "The relative resides in the ultimate. The ultimate resides in the relative."

These teachings emphasize the fact that being and emptiness are not dual nor are they dual with the completeness of which they are expression. It's exactly the same thought offered by the rabbi. Within the completeness of God, within the Unconditioned, is both being and emptiness, the form bodies in all of their myriad expressions, millions of expressions of God. They're not separate from one another.

The third term is the hardest one to understand, *sambhogakaya*. The English translation confuses some people. It's "wealth body." Aaron uses the term "transition body." Sambhogakaya is the bridge between the divine itself and the formed expression of the divine. For example, from the very, very purest part of me there may be a very deep love which finds its final expression in giving something. That giving is the outermost form. The pure core is the source. All the intentions within me, all the deep aspirations, all of that energy, that's the wealth. That's what inspires me to give.

In the same way, if fear arises in me and the outer form, the nirmanakaya expression of that fear is to push somebody away, all of the tensions, the anger, the desire to protect, those are the sambhogakaya expression. I can feel that contraction in me. The pure core remains the same; that dharmakaya cannot be distorted. But at the sambhogakaya level there is distortion which is one condition touching the expressed energy. So sambhogakaya is not just "positive" wealth, but the fear-based emotions also may be part of it.

None of these three kayas are separate nor are they stagnant. Think of a spring of fresh water deep underground. Let's use that as metaphor for dharmakaya. Underground we have no access to it. It's really on another plane, existent but out of reach of the relative universe. It emerges through the surface. That first stream of surface water is nirmanakaya, yet the spring, the pure core, is right there in the beginning of the stream. There's no separation.

The stream is nirmanakaya/form body and also will become the sambhogakaya/wealth or transition body. Picture this spring as it first bubbles to the surface. There is no river yet, only the first stream of water just emerging from the ground. This is the end form in this moment. But the newly emergent stream becomes that which feeds the river. Then the river is nirmanakaya and the stream is sambhogakaya. No sharp edges separate them. In each moment, the form body serves as the condition for future arising and that new form becomes the outermost expression.

There is only one sambhogakaya, not many, but in that moment when dharmakaya first expresses into the relative universe, but has not yet been touched or conditioned

by that universe, we have what Aaron calls the “seed level” of the sambhogakaya or transition body. This is the place in our everyday world where we have clearest access to that everperfect of dharmakaya. Returning to the spring metaphor, here is where the pure spring water first emerges. It has not yet been touched by the outer environment; there is no pollution.

The reason that I emphasize these three kayas and bring them into my talk today is that we can begin to get in touch with the experience of sambhogakaya, wealth or transition body. It's very valuable when we do this. Sambhogakaya is not just a concept. It is energy that can be directly experienced if we are attentive and understand what to look for.

Sambhogakaya manifests as the whole level of intention. We can know when we are present, resting in pure awareness, resting, really, in that mouth of the spring where it first emerges into and touches the relative plane. Then, if a catalyst appears, we may begin to feel the contractions of fear in our body. When a thought gives rise to fear and leads us to the intention to react in a certain way, at that moment our experience is like the stream newly bubbled out of the spring. It is no longer the pure spring but it's not yet a wide and solid river. The course it will take has yet to be established. When we note what bubbles out with kind, spacious attention and observe the conditions that give rise to it, we add a new input to those conditions. Our deep aspiration to offer our energy with love becomes a force, as does the innate kindness of the Awakened Heart. Increasingly, the river is informed by the Heart and not by fear and delusion.

We must begin to know that we have a choice. We can't shrug in helplessness at the rivers of fear, anger and greed that pour out of us. We can hide in our fear or we can declare a deeper truth that exists alongside of the fear, a truth of love, fearlessness, spaciousness and joy. Do we choose to express only the fear-based part of our truth or all of it? We **do** have a choice!

There's more. Above I'm still talking about fear versus love. I've explained it as if they're different and said that we can choose love. However, as long as we think in these dualistic terms, preference, aversion and attachment will appear. There will be clinging and getting rid of. But fear is an expression of love, of God Itself. There is nothing that is not expression of the dharmakaya, expression of God. Nothing! Thus, to choose love does not mean to enter a battle and conquer fear as if it were a mortal enemy. To choose love means to find that heart of love of which fear is expression, to draw the fear into that loving heart and allow the heart to transform fear. From the center of Awakened Heart, we observe fear without engaging in a battle with it, without getting into any kind of relationship with it. Fear is not an enemy but a reminder to find the core of which it is expression and rest there again.

Yet, in truth, battling our fear and negativity is old habit for most of us. We have come to believe that if we are to be the “good” people we aspire to be, then we must get rid of the “bad” or shadow in ourselves. How do we begin to understand it differently? I'd like to offer a new metaphor. First I'd like you to think of the brilliant sun. We can't get into the sun ourselves or we'd burn up, but we have some notion of what it might be like to be right in the middle of that sun, the intense heat, the intense light. When you see sunlight on the ground, that's not the sun itself. And yet, when you see the sunlight on

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the ground, there's nothing there that's not the sun. Can you see that? It's the sun. If you turn your back to it and you feel its heat on your back, that's also the sun.

We'll use "sun" as a metaphor for God or Unconditioned. The sun itself is dharmakaya; the sun on the ground is the nirmanakaya, form body level. The heat, radiance and energy, they are all sambhogakaya, en route to becoming nirmanakaya. The final light or heat is the form body of this moment.

When we experience this heat and light, when we look at the sun on the ground, we have absolutely no doubt but that the sun exists. It takes us directly back into the sun. In the same way, a loving act like the act of giving takes us right back into God. Now, here's where our dual minds get caught. What about the shadow? What about the fear, for example, that grasps and hoards? Is that an expression of the sun? Yes. Shadow needs an object to cast the shadow, but without the sun, the shadow can't exist. The shadow is also an expression of the sun. Delusion of separate self is the object that casts the shadow. The sun is still there, is always there! Seeing the shadow, we can come home!

We erroneously believe that the love-based mind states are God, but the fear-based mind states are evil, and antithetical to God. Based on that belief we move into the distortion that we must conquer these states, abolish or destroy them. Certainly we must work so as not to act them out in the world, but that's very different from hating and fearing them.

If you start to look very deep in meditation, you start to understand fear. What makes me start to give and then grab back? Fear. Fear is basically a distortion of love. There's some kind of self-love, some kind of distortion happening. The grabbing back is not a skillful or loving thing to do, but as in the book that I read at the beginning of today's session, there is nothing that's not God. I don't have to hate my fear, don't have to hate myself because fear is present in me. To do so only empowers the fear and solidifies it.

We really start to see it simply as, "Here is the voice of fear." Instead of judging that fear and hating ourselves because we have enacted the fear, we begin to offer kindness to ourselves.

When we can say, "I am feeling fear," and, like in the loving kindness meditation we did last night, simply say to ourselves, "May I be happy. May I move past my fear," we can start to offer kindness to ourselves rather than judgment. Often kindness dissolves, or at least softens, fear and then the giving becomes possible again.

This, to me, has been one of the greatest misunderstandings through many lives. The clarifying of it is one of the greatest fruits of meditation, to really come to understand what non-duality means, that there's nothing that's not God.

You can take this into your life and apply it in many ways. It's not a statement of freedom from responsibility for our heavy mind states. But we don't have to hate those states. Aaron says, "we draw them into the heart of love."

Probably most of you in this room, including myself, at some time have felt inadequate or unworthy. It may not be a way you feel constantly so that you have to hide from the world. You may be basically a very happy person who likes yourself. But, sometimes we feel unworthy or inadequate. Maybe you walk into a room where you see several friends. They're busy talking and they ignore you. Anger comes up and a feeling, "Why

are they ignoring me?" and then, perhaps, the thought comes, "What's wrong with me?" My guess is that most of you have felt that sometime.

We get into so many kinds of judgments about ourselves. We are so uncomfortable with our anger, with our heavy emotions. We think, "This is good; this is acceptable; this is God. That is not good; that is not acceptable; that is not God."

Aaron talks about something that he calls old soul syndrome. He says that those of us who are older souls—not better, just more mature and have experienced more lifetimes and accumulated a bit more wisdom—we reach a point where we want so deeply to live our lives with love and to really be worthy of the divine. When negative emotions arise in us we feel we are not worthy, that we have to be perfect to be worthy of God. We're never going to be perfect, so we put ourselves into a trap. We want so much to express our energy with love and we want so much to feel worthy of this unity with God that the more we want that, the more we condemn ourselves.

When we walk into this room and we see two friends busy in conversation and they ignore us for whatever reasons, anger arises. This is a very natural response. Here is a group of conditions that give rise to an emotion. Anger arises. Then, often we judge the anger. We say, "I'm bad. I shouldn't be feeling this. I should understand that they want to talk, therefore if I were good enough or understood clearly enough I wouldn't be angry, so I'm bad." Do you get stuck in that? Yes?

With attention and practice we begin to see that anger is just an energy. Pride is just an energy. Jealousy, impatience, any emotion that you can think of is just an energy. It's not good. It's not bad. We might say it's a distorted expression of God. It comes from a place of love and some misunderstanding. It comes from a place that loves the self and wants to protect the self.

We start to give ourselves permission to feel these emotions. Each time it comes up we can check it out. "Is this an expression of God?" Aaron uses a shortcut question. He says, "Is it other than?" by which he means, "Anything here that is other than God in one of His expressions?" There was a period of time when he had me asking that question two hundred times a day. Whenever a thought came up and a judgment of that thought, I would feel Aaron behind me saying, "Is it other than? Check it out."

After a while it becomes so clear it's just energy moving through. It arose because of certain conditions. It's like stubbing your toe on a rock. Pain arises. You don't say, "I shouldn't be feeling pain." But, if you stub your emotional toe on those two people ignoring you across the room, and anger arises instead of pain, then you say, "I shouldn't be feeling anger."

Nothing is "other than." This is a core teaching of so many religions, and it has become so misunderstood, largely because we so much want to express our energy lovingly, want to feel worthy of union with God. And so, we have trained ourselves and been trained since childhood to pounce on these negative emotions, to try to suppress them, to get rid of them. Where are they going to go? How deep can we bury them? They're still going to come up.

So, what Aaron has taught me, which is very primary to his teaching, is that we draw everything into the heart of love. We can't express it by flinging out the anger. We don't want to do that. We don't want to act out the negative emotions. We also can't bury

them. We draw them into the loving heart. We allow them to be transformed in the loving heart.

We begin just by sitting in meditation and watching different negative thoughts come up, watching our judgments of them, learning very carefully, step by step, to make more spaciousness around them, to watch the whole process around our reaction to them, our fear of negative thoughts. We learn, "I really don't need to do it that way anymore," and slowly we start to offer more kindness to ourselves. Then, we can offer that same kindness out to others.

I said before that Aaron has given this particular experience of unworthiness the name "old soul syndrome." He says that the more we aspire to union with God, the more we condemn ourselves, so that many people who are far advanced on a spiritual path experience a lot of unworthiness because we're asking such perfection of ourselves.

Working in meditation we can look at unworthiness itself and see that it's just a concept. The anger came up. I didn't want to express the anger. It felt bad to express the anger. So, I attacked myself and said, "I'm unworthy." We've all experienced that movement in so many different ways.

That unworthiness is just a thought. That's all it is. Has anyone ever really been unworthy? What could it possibly mean to be unworthy? At the same time, has anyone ever been worthy? If we're not unworthy, then we're trying to be worthy. But, that's just another concept. It's meaningless. We can be loving. We can be generous. We can be patient. But, we can't possibly be worthy or unworthy. These are dualistic concepts of our western culture.

As you begin to watch in your practice how concepts such as unworthy come up, they start to shatter. There's no substance to them anymore. It's part of this whole process of bringing kindness to yourself.

We're going to sit in meditation now for about twenty minutes and then open the floor to questions and answers. Aaron and I both will answer questions. Continuing with the silence, and with much mindfulness, I would ask you to stand up in place and stretch. Be as present in your body as you can. Feel the muscles. As you reach your arms up, feel the breath come in. Then, put your arms down and let the breath go out. And now, reaching up, really fill your chest with air. Release it and sit.

(Meditation. Bell rings three times.)

Barbara: I'd like to hear your questions.

Question to Aaron: *(In Spanish) (About evil and sin.)*

Aaron: Good morning and my love to you all. I am Aaron. I hear your question, my sister. I can only give you my perception of it. I do not see a division of the universe into good and evil, light and darkness. By that I do not mean that darkness and evil do not exist, only I do not experience them as dual with good and with light, but as distortions of good and light.

That which expresses itself as evil may be very much in darkness and may offer much harm to other beings as it manifests its distortions, but everything, and I mean

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everything, is in a process of moving into the light. It may take it many tens of thousands of years to do so. There is nothing in the universe that is inherently evil.

Question: Could you speak more about life after death? As a matter of fact, I would like to ask Aaron, if it's not too impertinent, how is life after death?

Barbara: I am going to speak to this very briefly. There is so much we could talk about here, so many different kinds of questions you all have. Maybe we should do two or three different workshops, one focused on meditation, one focused on spiritual inquiry, one focused more on just abstract metaphysics, things like simultaneous time and life after death. Our purpose here as described in our flyer is to focus more on meditation and what we learn in meditation. We spent some time on these metaphysical questions yesterday, so today I don't want to go too far afield. Can we learn about what happens after death in meditation? Yes and no.

The experience of death is the experience of death and in meditation we can only have related experiences. It's clearly not the same as death. In meditation there is a very clearly described progression of insights that we move through. I see the movement through this progression in many students, although not always in the same precise order.

People begin to understand the mind/body connection, how the mind works, how thoughts arise as conditioned phenomena and how the body responds to those thoughts. Then, they begin to see how the whole conditioned realm arises out of the Unconditioned, a very wonderful experience. Then comes insight into the impermanence and dissolution of everything, how everything that has arisen will dissolve. We really can't hold onto anything. Everything is in a constant state of change. Everything that we love and hold dear is dying, literally. I don't mean to be morbid as I say that. It's simply a fact of life. From the moment we're born, we start dying.

So, we begin to see how everything is in a constant state of change, and that we can't hold onto this. We literally begin to see everything begin to dissolve. Sometimes there's a lot of terror in that experience, and a lot of sadness. Then, we come to a place of equanimity with arising and dissolution, a very centered spaciousness which sees how things arise and dissolve without grabbing hold or pushing away.

At that point we allow the whole sense of body to dissolve and of ego to dissolve, and we move into an experience that is called dissolution of self. From what Aaron tells me, this experience of dissolution of self is very much parallel to the death experience. So, yes, to that extent, meditation can take you to a place where there is no longer a central self, or where at least we experience that self basically as a tool, as something which has come together to live the incarnation and then passes on, rather than something that is constant and ongoing.

We come here to the Judeo-Christian concept of soul. When Aaron talks of soul, he talks of the pure spirit body without the mental, emotional, or physical bodies. That pure spirit body has no concept of self and yet, it clearly exists. We're not talking, then, about a negation of being. We're not talking about voidness and saying, "Nothing exists," or "I don't exist." Only the "I" that exists is not the self as the conscious mind knows it. It is what we experience at that deepest level of meditation.

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What happens when self “dies” as it does in meditation? There is a tremendous sense of freedom, interconnection and spaciousness.

Aaron does talk at some length in the book, Aaron, about the whole experience of what happens after death; you can read about it there. He declines to talk about it here with the group as he does not wish to take us too far off the base of our work. He says simply that there is some degree of consciousness, as I defined it yesterday, in the being that has just died, and slowly its perspective shifts from that consciousness into pure awareness.

So, more directly in answer to your question, simply, yes, we can experience something akin to what we would experience after death in meditation, and it can be very helpful in having some idea what to expect.

There’s something else I want to talk about very briefly here, which is that in meditation we learn a spaciousness with mind states that come up that are heavy and uncomfortable. We really develop a pattern of doing that, a habit of doing that. We’ve become very skilled at doing that. I said yesterday that we begin to do it even in dreams.

At night, when I dream, if I have a bad dream and something is chasing me, I’ve learned instead of letting terror arise to simply do that same labeling I do in meditation. I do it in my dreams, “feeling fear, feeling fear,” and I find myself able to turn into this nightmare in my sleep and just look at it. The experience of fear in a dream state becomes no different than that experience while awake.

Aaron says when we die, what we meet after death is really the statement of our own mind, the outgrowth of our own mind. With practice then, mind is less fearful, less rigid and hard. Also, if in our meditation practice we come to the point where we really can offer love to fear, then when the fear-based expressions of our mind emerge after death we can offer those love, so that we move with this transition process much more smoothly and without getting caught up in the various hell realms that all of our religions describe. Other questions?

Question: I am participating in many activities, such as tai chi, yoga, reiki, and meditation. How can I pick one of these to use, or more precisely, how can I integrate the above into my meditation practice?

Barbara: Not only are these all forms of meditation, but everything in your life is meditation. It’s not just yoga as meditation or tai chi as meditation, it’s eating as meditation, using the toilet as meditation; everything is meditation. If you begin to approach everything in your life as meditation, then the problem of integration stops. The real issue is learning how to relate to everything in your life as meditation.

If you think of yoga as something separate, simply a way of moving my body, attending to my body and then when you’ve finished yoga you go out and play tennis and you treat it as something different again, you’re not going to be able to integrate it. Yoga is one kind of movement. Tai chi is one kind of movement. Tennis is one kind of movement. They all come together.

Sometimes we want so much to evolve spiritually. We want so much to grow and learn. We start grabbing at everything in a vast spiritual market place. A famous Tibetan

teacher, Chogyam Trungpa, wrote a book about what he called spiritual materialism. We need to be very careful about this. We can start grabbing at too much and not deepen anything.

The question, then, isn't "What do I choose?" but "Why am I choosing it?" If your choosing it is coming from a place of love that really sees, "Ahh, here is something that speaks to my heart and that I feel I can learn from," then, go into it. If it's coming from a place of fear that says, "Oh, here's one I missed. I've got to get this one. I might be missing something," you don't need it.

So, the question isn't "What shall I do?" but "Is my desire to do it coming from a place of love or fear?" This isn't just true of spiritual disciplines. It's true of everything in your life. Work with whatever you're doing as part of your practice and it will integrate naturally, or it will fall away if it was just something you grasped out of fear and don't really need.

I would also strongly recommend that you take just one practice and work with it in depth and let the others be supporting practices. For some of you meditation may be the focal practice. For some of you yoga may be the focal practice and meditation may support that. Any of these practices can take you very deep if you work with them and allow them to deepen.

Aaron has said to me that after the break he wants to talk about resistance. This fits in very well with what I'm saying about why we choose to work at a shallow level in many areas rather than at a deeper level in one area. What are our resistances about?

Question: *(In Spanish)* What to do about boredom? She is bored with some of the questions, intensely interested in others.

Barbara: What is boredom? It's a mind state. There are sixty or seventy different people in the room with many different interests and degrees of experience. The instruction and discussion are not constantly relevant for everybody. People come with an agenda and when the program doesn't fit perfectly, some aversion may arise. Might "boredom" be an expression of aversion, of irritation at not hearing what you hoped to hear? How about lethargy, a kind of tiredness or laziness of mind. If mind is asked to attend closely and feels lazy, doesn't want to attend, is boredom an expression of lethargy? What if I say something that threatens you and your mind hardens and doesn't really want to hear it? Might that armoring lead to boredom?

Can one just be bored? Watch the anger coming up. Maybe anger is too strong a word. Watch the irritation. "I don't want this. I want something interesting, or comfortable or something that makes me feel good about myself." Sometimes in our lives we're going to be bored. It's a wonderful place to practice.

It's okay to feel bored. Watch the tension around boredom. There's a lot of boredom in our lives. How many hours a day do you spend waiting, sitting at a traffic light, waiting in a line? What is boredom?

We have time for one more question.

Question: I've been reading some books and many of them tell you that meditation can be harmful, that you can get negative karma. They also say you should have a teacher.

Barbara: Anything can be misused. There can be negative karma in giving if I give for the wrong reasons, if I give to enhance my ego, for example. There's nothing inherent in meditation that will create negative karma. You can misuse meditation, though, especially without the guidance of a teacher.

It can become a hiding place from real life, for example, and then there's unwholesome karma. Or it can be used for self-inflation, to create a notion of the self as "meditator," as someone special. If a teacher is available, that's wonderful. A teacher will help you see where you're getting stuck. But, if a teacher is not available, then, by all means, don't let that stop you from meditating. Being without a teacher forces you to be more self-reliant. You have to be more honest with yourself. Instead of having a teacher point out to you where you're getting stuck, where your ego is grasping on being a meditator, for example, or misusing labeling to control an object rather than just to be present with it, you've got to be honest with yourself and see that for yourself. So, you've got to work harder, but there's nothing to be afraid of.

Enough words. Now we are going to sit.

(Thirty minute meditation. Bell. Break.)

Barbara: Aaron is going to talk about reactivity and resistance.

Aaron: I am Aaron. You are beings of habit. That is not a problem, but it is well to understand the roots of your habits and to investigate them regularly to see if they are still useful to you. If you grew up in a situation where you had many older brothers and sisters who were always tossing things at you, it might have been very skillful to walk around with your hands in front of your face to protect yourself. Thirty years later, in a situation where nobody is throwing anything at you, do you still walk around defended?

Often when we look at old habits we see they came from that place where we once were, where they were necessary or at least seemed necessary at that time. That little child had a choice between defending herself or firmly telling her brothers and sisters, "You may not do that to me." Perhaps defending herself felt safer, even if it would have been more skillful to just say, "No!" However the habit evolved, the real question is, "What do I do with it now?"

Many of you spend much of your life reacting, which I define as moving from a place of habit, rather than responding, which I define as moving from the present situation. In your meditation practice you may begin to note certain habits. You may begin to see that in certain situations certain mind states are triggered, such as self-judgment or unworthiness.

Each of you would need to look independently at this. What triggers anger in you? What triggers desire? What triggers unworthiness? From where do these mind states arise? There are two fruits to looking in this way. First, you begin to cut the identification with the mind state, to really understand, "I am not my anger, or my jealousy, or my pride, but these have arisen because of conditions." And second, you begin to understand, "I have a choice here." This choice is what you have often not seen. You may become so embedded in habit that you forget you have a choice.

Once you understand that you do have a choice, how do you choose?

Those of you who aspire to loving kindness want to choose a loving route, but often precisely what loving means is confusing. If somebody is acting rude to you, is it more loving to simply accept that rudeness? Or, is it more loving to say, "No! You cannot speak so to me"?

To answer what loving means, you must become increasingly aware of the old patterns. Sometimes the patterns are very deeply rooted. Every being wants to be valued. Every being wants to be loved. Since your parents are also human beings with their own fears, their own perceived sense of limitation, your parents asked you to be who they needed you to be. They may have asked you to be the polite and good child. On the surface, there's nothing wrong with that request, but what happened to that child when it felt anger? If the parents said, "No! No! You must not be angry. You must be polite and good," then the child was not able to validate its feelings and it began to think, "I am bad when I'm angry." This didn't mean the parent didn't love you. The parent was simply teaching what it had been taught.

Some of you may have grown up in the difficult situations where the parent was actively verbally or physically abusive. Again, the child needed to be valued, so if the parent said that the child needed to be the victim, the bad one, rather than our first example of the good one, the child also learned to comply. Again, there must have been rage, but it wasn't safe to express it. So often that anger was turned against the self and fed this concept of unworthiness.

I'm going to use unworthiness here as example, simply because so many of you nodded with recognition when Barbara spoke of it. If it doesn't fit you, substitute any concept of the way you are which is uncomfortable to you.

Sometimes people have difficulty with meditation, because in meditation practice they give themselves permission to allow to rise to the surface many thoughts and feelings which they have suppressed, and it doesn't feel quite safe to let those out. You've spent an entire lifetime developing the habit of burying that which was discomfiting and unpleasant, and sometimes that burying seemed skillful because it was your way of coping with an alien, uncomfortable environment. The child is, after all, a child. It does what it needs to survive and we must acknowledge and credit it for that, not condemn it because the choices were not the most skillful, but embrace it for doing what it needed to do.

These old, habitual mind states are now brought into the present. When we see them in meditation, we sometimes have the feeling that our practice asks us to get rid of those old habits. As soon as you start thinking that way, you're in danger. You're bossing yourself about and not hearing yourself. Meditation is not to do anything, but simply to be present with what is, to understand how things really are. With that understanding, the loving heart which is your essence—by that I mean it's not something you have to learn or develop in yourself. It's there, but it's been covered with clouds—that loving heart begins to be able to express itself, and the mind to hear and understand.

You order yourself about when you say, "Here is anger. I must not judge my anger." But if judgment arises, judgment arises. If you feel unworthiness and see that it's a result of anger and then you say, "I must not feel unworthy," that is also ordering yourself about. If unworthiness has arisen, myth or no myth, that's what the human is experiencing.

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You are not to get rid of the unworthy feeling, not to get rid of the judgment or anything else, but simply deeply to see how such mind states arise. What is their real nature? And so we open our hands, as we demonstrated yesterday (*holding a bird, we release it; open the hands and let it choose to fly when it is ready*), with a willingness to release that which is no longer needed and let it leave when it's ready, not an intensity which says, "Throw it away."

There is a metaphor which many people find helpful. I ask you to imagine this scene. You have come to a beautiful lake on a hot summer day and your friends are all in the water swimming. You walk out on the dock, but you do not know how to swim. The sun is hot and your friends are all talking to one another as they float twenty yards out. Then, I come along and hand you a life jacket and say, "Put it on." I show you how to fasten it.

With some timidity, you climb into the water and realize, "Ah yes, this really keeps me afloat." You begin to paddle your hands and feet, reach where your friends are visiting with one another, enjoy the coolness. With the life jacket you feel safe. Each day you come down to the water and put on your life jacket, week after week, year after year. It becomes old, waterlogged, rotten. Still, you put it on. You think, "Without it I will drown."

Now, suppose ten years have passed and I come back. I say to you, "Are you still wearing that? Take it off." Shame may arise, but also a strong voice of fear that says, "No! I need it."

What if, instead of shaming you, I asked, "Do you really need that anymore?" You might say, "Yes!" I might say in reply, "Why don't you try it and see. Get into the water. Stop moving your hands and feet and see if this life jacket still supports you." Of course, when you do that, you're going to sink because the thing is rotten. "Ah," you realize, "I know how to swim. I do not need this anymore."

As soon as you know that you know how to swim, but have honored that which wants to be safe instead of belittling that which wants to be safe, and you understand that the old pattern in fact was no longer supporting you, then nobody needs to tell you to take off the life jacket. No voice within you needs to say, "You **should** take this off." Of course, you just take it off and let it go. There's no need for it anymore.

Your mind states, such as unworthiness and some of your fears, are just such life jackets. The behavior prompted by fear, such as the mind state of unworthiness or an attitude of aggressiveness or a tendency to be controlling, at some time supported you. We will not argue whether they were the most skillful choice at the time that they were beginning tendencies and not yet habits. Simply, they were the choice that was made and we honor the child for making the choice to survive whether or not it was the most skillful choice.

So, you understand this tendency to believe in your unworthiness or limitation, or tendency to be a controlling, domineering person, supported you once. What perpetuates it now has nothing to do with the present moment. It is old conditioning. Figuratively speaking, you know how to swim.

When you touch on these mind states with an attitude of, "I must change that," then there is strong resistance. For many people, at that point the meditation practice begins to fall apart, because they have some subconscious sense of where it's leading,

and it's as if somebody on the dock was saying, "Get rid of that life jacket. Shame on you." This is the voice of the fear-self. It's a very ancient voice. There's little choice, then, but to escape, to stop meditating. It's too scary.

But, when you look deeply and with kindness, without any sense of "I must change," but just a willingness to see what is here, then, when resistance arises, it's simply seen as the voice of fear, no different than anything else. It's just another mind state. Resistance becomes yielding and workable, instead of a solid block of resistance.

Resistance takes many forms. It has two basic forms. The first could be called restlessness, an agitation of body and mind, where mind won't settle at all and where the mere act of sitting in meditation feels almost impossible. The other is the opposite—sleepiness, lethargy, boredom—drowsy, sluggish mind states, where it's very hard to pay attention.

If you remember that both of these mind states are simply the voices of resistance and that fear is the basis of it, this often becomes workable. There are very specific techniques for working with these mind states of sluggishness and agitation. I am going to put them aside and ask Barbara to explain the techniques involved in more depth this afternoon.

In working with resistance you must then be gentle, as I've just described. There's another force within you which can also help you work with resistance. It's really a meditation practice, one that gives you the inspiration you may need to find courage, to be present with your fear. This practice is called "clear comprehension of purpose." It's very simple. One must connect with one's deepest purpose and learn to move from that purpose.

There are several parts to this practice. First, there must be the acknowledgment of resistance, the acknowledgment of fear. Then, you ask yourself, "What is really my highest purpose here?" Barbara sometimes talks about this, relating a story of when she began teaching. I do not often tell Barbara's stories, but it fits well here and I do not want to ask her to come out of the channeling state to tell it herself.

Her teaching partner, a man with many years of experience in meditation and teaching had invited her to teach with him. She felt new to this, not certain she was ready to teach meditation. She was afraid of making a fool of herself. So, she thought, "I don't want to risk this. I don't know if I can do it well." Part of her reluctance was not wanting to confuse others through her ignorance, but a larger part of herself understood that she was ready to teach it, that John said she was ready, that I said she was ready, that others whom she trusted said she was ready, and that the reluctance was a sign of her own personal fear. "I want to be safe. I want to be comfortable. I don't want to make a fool of myself."

So, she had to ask herself, "What is my highest purpose here? Is it to keep myself safe? Is it to be comfortable? If so, then no way am I going to teach. But, if my highest purpose really is to share the beauty of these teachings with others, to help others find joy and peace in their lives, then I have to look at my own fear, make space for it, and go ahead and follow my highest purpose."

This can be very inspiring. It's not a voice of judgment that says, "You should not be afraid." That won't work. Then, you just suppress the fear and still carry the fear with you

into the teaching or whatever you are doing. But, if you can acknowledge the fear and work in your meditation to make space for the fear, then you may connect with your highest purpose and let yourself act and speak from your heart center, following your deepest truth.

You might find this works in a very simple situation, such as one where somebody has approached you in anger. You see the impulse rising in you to protect yourself. You also see the fear and pain in that person out of which his anger has sprung. In that moment you can ask yourself, "What is my highest purpose? Is it to defend myself or is it to hear and allow communication and resolution?"

It doesn't mean that fear ceases. It means that you resolve a willingness to make space for your fear. Working in this way is very much a part of working with resistance, because you begin to understand that just because there is resistance doesn't mean you have to stop, that when you acknowledge your discomfort and touch on that deeper area of love, it becomes a very strong moving force. The more you practice it, the more fear becomes a shadow. It still arises, but it's no longer solid. It doesn't push you anymore. You learn to bow to your fear, to smile to it, and just to invite it to come along and sit here with you.

There is a wonderful story about a Tibetan saint, Milarepa was his name. He was sitting at the mouth of his cave meditating when the demons of anger, greed and pride appeared. They were gruesome. Their skin hung in shreds over their bones, bones sticking out. They exuded a foul odor. Their faces were fierce, ugly. They had bloody knives and swords.

Milarepa took one look at them, so the story goes, and said, "Oh, I've been expecting you. Come and have tea." "Aren't you afraid of us?" they asked. "No. Your horrible appearance only reminds me to be aware, to have mercy. Come! Have tea." Throughout your life these figurative demons are going to appear. You can learn to invite them in for tea. In that way you can be with them and cease to need to react to them.

I would ask you to sit for five minutes and reflect on what I have shared and then we will open the floor to questions and answers. I pause.

Question: I have been aware of fear for many years. In the last few months it has become more intense, especially when I wake up every morning. When I notice it in the morning I concentrate on love, because I think this will make it go away. The fear is always there. Aaron says you hold it in your hand and let it go whenever it's ready to go. What if it never goes?

Aaron: I am Aaron. I hear your question. My answer is directed at two different levels of experiencing fear, but it is relevant to both. As long as there is the desire to be rid of fear, you're caught in a relationship with it. Yet, very naturally, it's so uncomfortable that you do want to be rid of it. The first phase is to make space around that discomfort. This is not space around the fear itself so much as space around the discomfort, the fear of the fear. Then the later work with the fear itself can be done with more openheartedness and less with the tendency to attack and destroy.

First, simply work with how uncomfortable the fear is, how much you want to be rid of it, offering love to the being who finds itself living with this heavy cloud and seeks the way

to be free of it. Let the poignancy of it touch your deepest heart as if it were your child who were living under some kind of heavy cloud. Feel how much love you would have for that child in his or her situation.

In this way you begin to make more space for your discomfort with the fear. It is the discomfort that is predominant. If it were not uncomfortable, then you would have no aversion to the fear. There is much discomfort. So, first, you acknowledge the degree of discomfort with great kindness.

As you are better able to just be there with the fear, then you are going to find that you can move into another level, which is to move deeper into the fear instead of away from the fear. The natural tendency is to withdraw from something that is discomforting or painful. Acknowledging that natural tendency and using the sources of inspiration that are available, such as the practice of clear comprehension of purpose, one can find extraordinary courage to go deeper into the fear and really come to understand it. By going into it in that way, it begins to break up.

You are not going into it to get rid of it. You are going into it simply to understand it. The fear arose from conditions, as did the desire to be rid of the fear. The discomfort arose from conditions. To attend to the fear and discomfort, you must tend to the conditions. This is what I call moving deeply into the fear. Here is where you begin to understand the conditions.

So, the first step is to find equanimity with the fear through embracing the human who observes herself so discomforted by it, acknowledging the degree of discomfort. Once there is a little equanimity with the fear, then the second step is to go deeper into the fear.

As you go deeper and begin to understand its roots—and I don't necessarily mean in a psychological way, although that may be part of it—you really understand how all humans want to be safe, want to be loved, want their needs to be met. Specific memories of how you did not feel safe or loved may arise, but they may not. It's okay either way.

As you begin to go into the fear, you begin to understand its elements better. The fear doesn't go away because you want it to go away. Fear goes away because there's nothing left to nurture it. As you begin to see how fear arose, for example, because you felt unsafe or threatened, then you realize, "This is old. Right now I am no longer threatened." You may begin to see that fear protected you from something.

We often speak of anger protecting you from fear, that if you weren't feeling anger, you would feel how afraid you are. It can work the other way. Sometimes, if you are not feeling fear, you would feel how angry you are, or sad, or out of control. There is no consistent pattern. Each person must look for themselves. The question is simply, "If I were not feeling fear right now, what might I be feeling?" and "Can I give myself permission to feel it?"

As you permit yourself to feel what is there, not drowning in maudlin self-pity, not clinging to emotion, just seeing clearly, space will open. And you will soon reach a point where there's enough space around your fear that if it wants to stay, you simply let it stay. We begin to come to some of these mind states with an "Oh, you again. I've been expecting you. Come in and have tea."

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All this work takes you to still another fruit of your practice. Once you are able to “have tea” with the difficult mind or body state, the “self” itself becomes transparent. In relative reality, somebody is feeling pain, but it ceases to be your pain and becomes, instead, the pain of all beings, the pain we all share. The heart we all share is big enough to carry it!

Does this sufficiently answer your question or may I speak further to it? I pause.

Question: I get very much involved with Barbara. I understand her work, but when I listen to Aaron I hear him as Barbara’s guide. Then I want to know about the past and the future and want to get involved with that through him. Talk about why you teach together and what the differences are in what you teach.

Aaron: I am Aaron. I hear your question. Before I answer, I would address your comment about past and future. There is no past or future. There is only now, this moment. I want you all to try something with me. Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out. With the next in breath, at the top of the breath and before you exhale, I want you to notice that there is a pause. We are going to elongate that pause just a little to emphasize it. Breathe in. Pause. Breathe out. Breathe in. Pause. Breathe out.

Of course, there is also a pause at the end of the exhale. We can work with either, but we’ll just work with it this way. Now, I want you to do this silently. Breathe in. Pause. Breathe out. I’m not going to say “pause” anymore. I want you to experience that pause, that aperture in the breath, as it is called. Please do it.

(We do.)

With the inhale, you’re coming into the breath. Then, there is a pause which is now. With the exhale you’re letting go of the breath. When you speak of past and future, please remember that every past was once now. Every future will be now. I exist fully in now. Of course, I can see into the past in terms of your linear time. I can see many probable futures, but I do not predict the future. The past contains the conditions out of which the future may arise, but it is your presence in this now that determines which future will unfold. The way the future will unfold depends on now. In each moment you make choices, create karma or free yourself of habitual karma, and these choices create the future.

Barbara is a human. While she has found much freedom from reactivity to the emotional and physical bodies, she still gets stuck sometimes. She’s still human. She lives in the balance of the relative and the ultimate, which is just the way she needs to live for a human. This living from the open heart is what she can best teach.

I am spirit and I come to you from my perspective as spirit. While I speak to all of your bodies, as a spirit I speak especially to the highest self, to that mental and spiritual body. I don’t really teach you anything, rather I remind you of what you already know, for you all have this wisdom deep inside of you.

So, yes, there is a difference in the way we teach. Part of the reason that we both teach, rather than only one or only the other, is that it does provide this balance in our two perspectives. I may speak of fear with memories of fear from my past lifetimes, but from the perspective of a being who literally no longer experiences fear. Barbara

speaks of fear from the perspective of a being who still does experience fear. The balance is useful. That is all.

Question: How long do you recommend to meditate each day to live in harmony and peace? How many times a day?

Barbara: If I tell you that you should meditate for a certain length of time, then that becomes a judgment and an obligation. If you don't do it, you're "bad." On the other hand, if I say just meditate when you feel like it, it would be like being a piano teacher and saying, "Here is a piano lesson and you can practice if you feel like it." Six months later you've learned to play a couple of notes and you say, "Well, I'm not learning anything." Well, if you want to learn, you've got to practice. The decision to sit needs to come from a place of loving aspiration, not from a place of obligation that says, "I should do it this much."

Do you exercise? Do you take walks or play tennis? Do you eat or do you starve yourselves? Do you take time to shower, to brush your teeth?

We take care of our physical bodies from a place of self-respect, because we want to be caring of ourselves. We need to meditate from that same place of self-respect. Your own inner wisdom will tell you what you need. I can give you some guidelines. They are only guidelines. Each of you is unique.

You ask how much to do so that you can live in harmony and peace. There are no guarantees. The piano teacher doesn't promise you'll become a concert pianist, only that you'll find increasing joy in music. This is the same. Heavy emotions will still arise but there will be less reactivity, more joy in life. You won't reach some ultimate level of love and peace perhaps, but will find increasing harmony, space and peace.

I'm not saying that you must meditate every day to find peace and that if you don't, you won't learn anything. Some of you are more attuned to meditation in your daily life. Some of you are not so mindful. But formal practice does enhance daily mindfulness. What you put into it will return itself to you.

These are guidelines only, then, not hard and fast rules.

First of all, I recommend you meditate every day. If you haven't meditated during the day, just sit on the edge of your bed for five minutes before lying down. Don't lie down and think, "I'll meditate lying down," because you'll fall right to sleep. Sit on the edge of your bed. If you're sleepy after five minutes, lie down and go to sleep. If you feel yourself alert, sit for another ten or twenty minutes. Once you say, "It's too late. I'll do it tomorrow," you know what happens. It's tomorrow. It's the next day, and the next day, and then, at the end of the week, you say, "Well, I haven't meditated all week. I should meditate for three hours tonight." That's not going to work.

Meditate every day. Let it get to be a habit, like brushing your teeth. No matter how tired you are, most of you probably brush your teeth. Same thing. Just sit for five minutes.

Ideally, I like to suggest that people meditate twice a day. Find the time of day that works best for you. If you're a morning person and wide awake in the morning, don't try to do a long meditation at night before you go to sleep. It won't work. If you're a night

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person, don't try to drag yourself out of bed at 5:00 a.m. and meditate. That won't work. Find a time that works, that fits into your daily schedule and your body's schedule.

For those of you who may work at a regular job, if you have a long time for lunch, sometimes that's a good time to meditate. If you have an office with a door you can close, you can sit in your office and meditate. If you have small children at home and they take a nap, meditate while they're napping. Find the time of day that works in your schedule. Once you find the time that works, write it into your schedule, "This is my meditation time!" If somebody calls and says, "Would you like to go for a walk?" you may answer, "Yes, in a half an hour. Right now it's my meditation time." I don't mean to be absolutely rigid. If something comes up that you feel you need to do right then, a friend calls and says, "I'm feeling very sad. I need to talk," of course you're not going to say, "Call back in an hour. This is my meditation time." Just cross it out and write it elsewhere, but do rewrite it into your schedule. It's the greatest gift you can give to yourself.

Make a place in your home especially for meditation. It doesn't need to be fancy. It can just be a chair or cushion in a corner and a table with flowers on it, something that invites you to relax and sit down and spend some time quietly.

When you ask me how long is ideal, in my experience, I like to ask people to build up to meditating for forty-five minutes a day. This seems to be a long enough time to really get into the practice without becoming a burden because it's so long a time. If it's too long for you, make it a half an hour. If this is new, don't start with forty-five minutes. Start with fifteen minutes. Then, add ten more minutes. Then, add ten more minutes. Build up to it.

So, once a day at a time that you've written into your schedule, do a longer meditation practice. One other time during the day practice for five to fifteen minutes, or longer. This is formal practice.

You will also want to practice with mindfulness, being fully present. You can do this throughout the day, beginning with just five minutes here, five minutes there. Brush your teeth, take a shower, eat a snack. Be fully present while you do so. If mind drifts, bring it back. Be present with the physical sensations, the taste of food, the texture, the sensation of hot or cold water on the body, soft or tingling. For one week, twice a day, simply remind yourself, "I want to be mindful while I do this." It doesn't have to be the same thing every day. One day it can be while you're driving your car, another day while you're taking a shower.

If mind wanders into planning or wherever it may go, simply note it, "planning, planning," and come back, right here, driving the car, sitting in the bathtub. Be present. The second week, do this three times a day. It doesn't have to take you any longer to do the thing than it would otherwise. You're just asking yourself to be present. The third week, four times a day. The fourth week, five times a day. Space it out, so that some time in the morning for five minutes you're being mindful, then in the afternoon, then the evening. Then keep it up. Let it become a habit really to be present. That mindfulness stretches itself out into the whole day.

There is a wonderful practice that I learned from a Vietnamese meditation master, Thich Nhat Hanh. I once did a retreat at his meditation center in France. Part of the

practice there is that every time a bell rings, a telephone or a beeper on your watch, or a chiming clock, any kind of bell, you stop, take three deep breaths and then just pick up again.

There's a big grandfather clock in the dining room and it chimes every half hour. You see people eating and the bell chimes. The hand freezes part way to the mouth, soup in the bowl of the spoon. Three breathes, and they go on, back to eating. If you have a beeper on your watch, you can set it to go off once an hour just to remind yourself, "Stop! Stop! Take three deep breaths. Come back into the body. Come back into the present moment." Just be here with three breaths and then go on. When the telephone rings—this is wonderful if you and your friends all learn to do this together—you take three deep breaths before you answer it and your friend on the other end is also taking three breaths during the ringing of the phone and waiting for you to answer it. You're both taking three breaths. When you answer, you're connected. You both had that quiet three breaths together. So, this is a wonderful device to remind you to come back and stay in the present.

I cannot overstate the importance of formal meditation practice. But, if you can't do it, if this is a time in your life when, for whatever reason, you find you can't meditate, continue with mindfulness, just being present. Each supports the other. Both are very valuable. If I had to choose one, I would tell you to be mindful, because that mindfulness will naturally lead you to want to meditate. But, they support each other.

It's also very helpful to meditate with others. Find, or create, a meditation group. Even just getting together once a week with two or three friends, to sit for half an hour and then have tea afterward, can be a very useful way to nourish your meditation.

It's helpful to have a teacher. As I said before, lacking a teacher, there are good books that are helpful. I can recommend some. There are tapes. There's a group called Dharma Seed Tape Library which offers many tapes with instructions on meditation by well-respected teachers. So, these are all things that can help support your meditation.

Question: How could I introduce my children into meditation?

Barbara: First, you cannot push them into it. There are two things that I did with my children that worked. One, when I got up in the morning, very early, I would sit and meditate. They would want a hug from Mommy when they woke up. They were invited to come and sit on my lap. I sat on a cushion like this, and I had candles lit, and the room was very peaceful. I had a blanket wrapped around me. A little boy would come in and sit on my lap and I'd wrap him up with me in the blanket. He'd just sit there with me, sometimes for five or ten minutes. When he'd had enough, he would get up and leave the room. The rule was, "you can sit here as long as you want, but you've got to be quiet." Sometimes I had more than one on my lap. When they had had enough, they would get up and get a book or crayons and come back and just crayon or read quietly right there in my presence.

And so, they experienced the atmosphere of meditation. They learned to respect the fact that this was something that I very much valued, and they enjoyed the feeling of serenity but no one said, "You should meditate."

The other thing that I did with them as they got older was to make it very clear, "I value this." You can't say to a three year old, "You can't disturb me if you need something."

Of course not. But to a six year old you can be very clear, "This is my meditation time. I love you, but this is important to me and I need to do this for half an hour and you need to respect it. Do you need anything? Are you hungry? Are you cold? Everything settled? Okay, for half an hour I'm going to meditate." And so, they really learned to respect that, that it was something that I valued, and because I valued it, they began to look into it.

I have three sons, aged sixteen, twenty-one, and twenty-four. The older two meditate. The younger one says he wants nothing to do with it, but last month in his room I found two of my candle sticks and some incense. I said, "Peter, are you meditating with these in your room?" He said, "I was just fooling around with them," but I noticed they're still there. So, I have no idea if he meditates or why he has my candles and incense in his room. He's a sixteen year old and what I'm doing, he doesn't want to be doing.

There are some very beautiful books about introducing your child to meditation. You can look for them in bookstores.

We need to break for lunch in thirty minutes, so I'd like us to sit quietly.

(Thirty minute meditation. Lunch. Rest.)

Barbara: We're going to meditate but I'm going to talk a little bit about sleepiness first. Working with any of the difficult mind and body states we encounter in meditation, with restlessness, sleepiness, boredom, strong desire or strong states of negativity and aversion, physical pain—the first thing to remember is that they are not problems. You don't have to get into a war with them. If that particular state of mind or body is there, it's there. We've got to be honest with our experience.

You see me sitting here with my legs stretched out. This is not how one traditionally sits when one teaches, but I have arthritis in one foot and if I keep it bent under me for a long time, it swells a lot. The doctors say that it's dangerous to allow that. So, I've got to stretch my feet out sometimes, then can fold them back in. I have to be honest with my body.

If you are sleepy, you are sleepy. Sleepiness is hard, because you can't really meditate when you're asleep. You've got to be awake. There are different ways to work with the sleepiness without getting into a war with it. First of all, if you're feeling sleepy and it's eleven o'clock at night and it's been a long day, you're sleepy. Go to bed. If you're sleepy early in the day, you can ask yourself, "Is this resistance? Am I pulling back from meditating, using sleepiness to avoid meditating?" If there's not really a logical reason for your sleepiness, you just got a good night's sleep and it's eight o'clock in the morning but as soon as you sit, you fall asleep, that may be resistance.

You can work on that in some of the ways Aaron talked about this morning, observing fear, for example. On a very practical level, if you're falling asleep, simply stand up. Just right here where you're sitting, stand up. It's very hard to fall asleep when you're standing up. You can open your eyes. That will help. You can go outside or put some cold water on your face.

We do a walking meditation. That can be helpful when there's sleepiness. There are over seventy of us here in a small space, so, we're not going to practice formal walking

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meditation today, but I'll describe it. Tomorrow we'll go outside and do it. It's similar to the standing meditation we've already done.

Walking meditation can be fast or slow. Instead of the breath being the primary object, the feeling of the weight on your feet, being in your body, and feeling yourself standing becomes the primary object. Instead of noting the inhalation and the exhalation, you simply note stepping, stepping, stepping, staying with each step and the touch of feet on ground. As you take each step, you know you're taking a step.

Then, you can slow it down. Concentrate on the feet, lifting, moving, placing, shifting my weight, lifting, moving, placing. And then weight shifts again, shifting. You start with a faster walk, step, step, step, step, and then you can start to let it slow down. Walk just a short distance, maybe twenty feet, back and forth, and back and forth. This is not a walk to see the scenery. This is literally walking meditation. Stepping, stepping, stepping, stepping, and then, as it slows down, you might slow just to lifting, placing, lifting, placing, and then even slower. Lifting, moving, placing, shift, lifting, move, place, shift.

(Barbara demonstrates this.)

You can do that in place of sitting meditation. It's wonderful when you're sleepy. It's also helpful when you're restless. Sometimes when there's so much anxiety or tension that you really can't sit, walking meditation is very helpful. Walking meditation is not just a replacement for sitting meditation when you're sleepy or when you're restless. It's a practice in it's own right. It's very easy to stay focused because your feet are moving. There's something very specific, like the breath coming in and out, but even more specific.

If a thought arises as you're walking, note "thinking, thinking." Be aware. Here is "remembering, remembering" or "planning, planning." If something captures a physical sense, such as seeing a bird in your path, note "seeing, seeing," then as whatever has arisen changes or dissolves you resume the walking.

Here in this room we can't do walking. We need more space, but if you're sleepy, you can stand up.

From Thailand comes the story of an Asian teacher who taught in a monastery that had a well. When his students complained about sleepiness, he would tell them to meditate on the edge of the well so they wouldn't fall asleep! We don't have wells in our homes, but we can sit at the top of the stairs. Get off your comfortable chair and go sit on the top step. It will keep you awake. So, there are different techniques that we can use with sleepiness that help dispel it. The important thing is not to get into a war with it.

The most valuable technique I've learned for sleepiness is, just as with anger or any other mind or body state, to go into it. You start to observe the sleepiness. "How does sleepiness feel in my body? Is it pleasant? Is it unpleasant? What happens in my body? Is there a relaxation or increasing tension with the sleepiness? What's really happening?"

You start to get interested in the sleepiness. The interest wakes you up. When sleepiness is not a form of resistance, part of the sleepiness is simply the feeling, "There's nothing

happening. I'm tired." We want some entertainment! If a band came marching through playing music, I'd wake up. "That's interesting. There go some elephants, lions and tigers. Wow! That's interesting. I'm not sleepy anymore. They're gone. There's nothing there but a wall, nothing to watch, nothing to do. I'm sleepy." Sleepiness can be its own marching band with lions and tigers. It can be fascinating. Watch it and then you're not sleepy anymore.

If none of that works, simply go and take a nap. Be kind to yourself. After you take your nap, come back and meditate, and if you start to fall asleep again, then you know it's resistance. Then, shift to walking meditation or something that will keep you awake while you meditate until the resistance opens a bit.

We're going to sit now for a half hour. Afterwards I'll answer more of your questions about sleepiness and talk more about working with other difficult mind states. If you feel sleepy, feel free to open your eyes. Simply look down at the floor in front of you or look at the wall. Or stand up, simply shifting to the standing practice.

There are basically four positions in which we can meditate, sitting, standing, walking and lying down. So, if you're standing, you're still meditating. No difference. If you're still nodding off and that drowsiness is there even when you're standing, go into it. Look for any judgment. Just be there with sleepiness. What is sleepiness? Investigate it.

(Meditation practice.)

May all beings be happy. *(Bell)*

May all beings find the healing that they seek. *(Bell)*

May all beings everywhere find perfect peace. *(Bell)*

(Stretch)

Question: When I try to meditate, I find myself trying to find another state of mind. I compare it to trying to view an optical illusion. I feel like I'm trying to get into somewhere that I'm not in. I don't know whether you really need to enter another state of mind when you meditate or if this is just what I'm doing.

Barbara: To meditate is just to be present with what is, whatever arises in mind and body experience. The meditative state of mind is a mind that doesn't have to get entangled with what has arisen. It's spacious. It isn't something you have to seek. In fact you can't create it. But it **is** there naturally and with practice you open to it.

There are many altered states you may experience in meditation but these are not a goal of meditation. If you experience such a state it may be very blissful. It's not helpful to get lost in that bliss and attached to it, any more than it's helpful to get lost in difficult states and wage war with them.

I do move into a subtly different mind state but I'm not grasping at it because it seems prettier or more peaceful or holier. It's that spacious mind I just mentioned. I can't get into it if I'm grabbing at it. Like the other view in the optical illusion is always there even if we don't see it, this spacious mind is always there. I allow myself to open to it. The difficulty is because there's dissatisfaction in our lives, we want to get into this spacious mind state which is peaceful, but the more that we grab at it the more we create a duality that says "this is ugly or unpleasant, that is beautiful." The more tension we create for ourselves, the further we find ourselves from that peace.

Where I find that peace is when I really enter into the experience of, in Aaron's terminology, "Nothing is other than." This view arises out of attention to conditioned arising, that everything in the phenomenal world arises because conditions are present for it to arise and ceases when those conditions cease. Nothing exists independently. Everything is just passing by and there is no need to cling to anything. The rose dies and rots into the soil out of which the new rose grows. So why cling to the rose?

I start to see everything becoming something else. For example, looking out the window now, there's blue sky and there are clouds. If I said to myself, "The sky's got to be blue. I've got to just have an experience of blue sky," I'm going to be miserable, because it could be ninety-nine percent blue, but if one cloud comes through, then I'm angry and tense. But if I can just focus on that one little patch of blue and let the clouds come and go as they like, then I enter a very peaceful state of mind. It is a different state of mind. Mind quiets down and stops getting in a dialogue with the clouds. Does that answer your question?

Question: Is levitation, flying, connected to meditation? I would like to know your point of view about this.

Barbara: In meditation, we start to really understand the connection between mind and body. When we understand the nature of matter and how matter responds to mind, we come to control our minds more and find that we can do many things that we didn't think we could do. They are tricks. Levitation would be an example of that. So it's possible but it's not why we're meditating. Meditation can lead us into many supernatural kinds of skills, but they're simply by-products of meditation and they're not something that I would ever want anybody to focus on, to meditate only with the desire to learn how to do this or that trick.

Questions? I would especially like to hear questions about meditation and meditation process, and also some of the things we've touched upon, such as work with heavy emotions, unworthiness, dealing with restlessness or sleepiness.

Question: About meditation, if you have to focus on respiration then how do you get to the problems you have if you can't think about them?

Barbara: We don't focus on our problems in the way that we do with the conceptual mind that's always thinking. Discursive mind latches onto problems with a "Let's fix it" mentality. When we're sitting here, not meditating, we can think about something and try to figure it out. This is a very different process.

When we're focused on our breath, what arises naturally in us will come to the fore. We all have certain tendencies. For example, some people have a tendency to be very controlling. They find that when they focus on their breath, they want to control their breath. When a thought arises, they want to control the thought. What they start to see is the whole nature of being controlling. As they look deeply into control they start to understand that that tendency arose out of fear and they see how the tendency to control has contracted their life. Slowly, there is increasing freedom from the need to be controlling as we test it in meditation and say, "Maybe I could just let go, just a little bit, and a little bit more, and a little bit more."

Another kind of tendency is judgment. Some people are very judgmental of everything. The neighbor they're sitting next to keeps scratching. "Why is she doing that?" It gets

quiet again. "Ahhh." And then somebody on the other side shifts their chair and it squeaks. "Why are they moving?" We start to notice that judgment is arising. We see how with each contact, "hearing," judgment follows. We may feel the fear that nourishes judgment.

We work with what we call choiceless awareness. By that I mean that we let ourselves be aware of whatever is present without any preference that says, "I'll be aware of this one, but not that one. That's a bad one." We just allow ourselves to be fully present, so we can watch a tendency like control or judgment, and slowly, we take it outside the sitting. We start to see, in our lives, how judgmental we are and how narrow and tight that feels, how uncomfortable it is to be that judgmental.

We're not trying to get rid of being judgmental. We're not attacking it. We just have a new insight about how judgmental we are and maybe how it relates to control and to feeling helpless. The thought may arise, "If she's moving and it's making noise and disturbing me, I feel helpless. I feel invaded." So, then we might start to watch that more in our daily life, how reactive we are when we don't feel safe. Without trying to change anything, we just notice more and more what it feels like not to feel safe. Who doesn't feel safe? We can ask ourselves when we're not feeling safe, "In this moment, am I really not safe or is this old? Is this just some conditioned habit from childhood?" And again, we let go of it a little bit more, and a little bit more. But there is no force involved, no judgment that says "I should do this or that."

So, it's not a thinking process at all. There are insights and then we get quiet again and we're just there, just with our breath, with what we hear, with what we feel, with what we think, and so on. Does that answer your question?

Question: I find myself perplexed with the labeling. I got a thought and then I spent a long time trying to label it. I say, "It's this. No, it must be this." And then, "Oh my God, I have to stop; I can't be thinking all this." So, then I go back to my breath and forget all about it, so how can I use it?

Barbara: Can you just look, then, at what it is that needs to be so precise? So many of us are perfectionists. We've got to get it just right. "Perfectionist, perfectionist." Smile at yourself and say, "Now, here's this tendency that I've got to be just right. What's pushing that? What if I don't get it just right? Are people going to judge me? Who's going to judge me? Are my parents going to judge me? Am I going to judge me? Where does that need to be perfect come from? Is it okay if I'm not perfect? Can I give myself permission not to be so precise?" Whatever comes up, work with it.

With the labeling itself, it is **not** necessary to be precise. You do know what the experience is. The label is just a tool to help you be present with the experience.

Question: In meditation I sometimes have a visual image. How can I know what that is? Does it mean I'm not doing good meditation or is spirit telling me something? How do I learn from those images?

Aaron: I am Aaron. I must address my answer to different levels of practice. For those of you who are new to the practice, I want to be very direct. I want you to simply note images as "images" or "seeing, seeing," and come back to your breath. This instruction is because you do not yet have the practice to allow you to differentiate between the

different kinds of images that arise. So, a very direct instruction. Simply note it as "seeing, seeing," and come back to the breath.

If you come back to the breath and the same image arises again, simply note it as "seeing, seeing," and come back to the breath. As practice deepens a bit, you still note it as "seeing, seeing," and return to the breath, but if it comes up again with enough force to pull you away from the breath, then it becomes useful to just sit with it, as you would with an itch or a noise. Is it pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral? As it changes or dissolves, you come back to the breath.

The third level of instruction is for those with a reasonable foundation in meditation, in other words, with the ability to let mind stay with what arises and move fluidly with a very ongoing state of awareness, touching whatever is primary in the experience. Once you have reached that level in your practice, when images arise we can presume that they arose for some reason. The same instruction applies at first; if it changes or dissolves, come back to the breath. If it stays there for a while, if you've noticed that it has a pleasant or unpleasant quality and you're just with it, noting it as "pleasant, pleasant" or "unpleasant, unpleasant" and present with the image, then it becomes useful to ask, "What is this image about?"

Here, we are moving out of the realm of traditional insight meditation. Most of what I teach is drawn from this foundation practice, but I do teach from a broader perspective. So, yes, at a certain time you do ask, "What is this image? What is it here to teach me?" You merely ask the question and then let go. Be present and aware and insight will develop.

Question: (*About wandering mind and arising images.*) How do I know if the image has some value or if mind is just wandering?

Barbara: First, mind moves. "Wandering mind" is not the moving mind but is mind that jumps without awareness. If you are with the breath and then an image arises, such as of a loved one, and you note it as "seeing," mind is not "wandering." Awareness is present with what has arisen in the mind. If I then slip off into a medley of thoughts about that person, memories of scenes we've played out together, things I would like to say to him, that's "wandering mind."

This is being aware of the form that has arisen and not getting lost in the content. I can liken it to being aware that a memory has come up of something that somebody did that made me angry and the memory of anger arises. I'm aware of the anger; I'm aware of the memory. If mind, then, wants to jump in and talk about what could I have said or how could I have handled it differently, how angry I was that this person always does that, and so on and so forth, it's just chattering mind. I don't need to get involved in the story.

It's easier to understand this with the stories of memories and planning, the way a thought might arise, "Company is coming for dinner." You're sitting and meditating and suddenly that thought arises, "Oh, what time is the company coming?" And suddenly, mind spins off into, "Do I have the right food planned for dinner? Do I have enough of all of the ingredients I need? Is everything set?" "Planning, planning, planning," and on into the story.

Images are much the same thing. There's an image. We can go into the image in the sense of just being present with the image. It's very different if we get into the story of the image and start trying to figure it out. That pulls us out of meditation. My experience is that these images will clarify themselves if we just leave them alone. That doesn't mean avoiding it; it doesn't mean holding onto it. It means just noting it "seeing, seeing, seeing," the same way you would if your eyes were open. If my eyes are open and I see an elephant walk past, I might feel surprised, but I don't have to figure out, "Gee, is there a circus in town? Where did the elephant come from? Is somebody leading it? Are they giving elephant rides?" I don't have to figure it out, just note, "seeing, seeing, seeing."

So, that's what we do with an image. Aaron just said because images can be so enticing and difficult to work with that he strongly suggests that the people new to practice simply note the seeing, and as it changes or dissolves, come back to the breath, and not try to work with images. As you become more practiced, then you can go deeper into the image and begin to let it unfold more.

There are very clear messages in the images. Sometimes they have a dreamlike quality. Sometimes we get into more images when we're almost falling asleep. At that point, you can simply ask yourself, "Am I falling asleep?" If the image persists, then it's useful to find out what it's about, just like anything that persists. "What is this?"

Question: *(In Spanish) (Describes meditation experience.)*

Barbara: That sounds like it was a very powerful experience. This is what we call an out of body experience, where we do literally leave our body and look down on ourselves. There are techniques where one can learn to do that. It's another kind of trick. When I say it's a trick, it can be a very powerful, very transformative experience. It can be, for many people, their first experience with seeing, "I'm not this body." And that's very valuable, but it can also be something we get attached to, almost addicted to, and it's not something we need to do. That experience of not being our body will come naturally in meditation.

My guess is that in that meditation with the Hindu teacher, you were using a fixed focus concentration, like a mantra. Were you? (Yes.) Mantra meditation or any fixed meditation practice will take you into many different kinds of altered mind states. A lot of people get addicted, almost, to those mind states. They're very peaceful, very beautiful states, but they don't resolve anything for us. They take us out of the present, out of our lives into some "never never land." They can be helpful in that, as I said, they can give you an experience, "I'm not my body." They can give you an experience of the kind of peace and blissfulness that is available to you in meditation. But then we have to ask, "How can that peace be available to me right now, while I'm coping with severe body pain or loss of a loved one?" Insight meditation is the kind of practice that connects what we're doing here, that helps make peace available to you all the time and not just when you're in an altered mind state.

So, if you want to practice these kinds of mantra meditation and altered mind states, that's fine. They do enhance concentration. They're fun, if nothing else, and very peaceful at their best, but they do have limitations. This is technically called astral projection. Astral means out into the astral plane, projecting yourself from the physical plane to the astral plane. The mind moves into the astral plane. There's a sense that

you're connected to your body by a thread, a silver cord, looking down at your body, looking down at everything. You can go everywhere. There's a freedom to it.

Question: *(In Spanish) (About the safety of astral projection. Has heard one can get lost.)*

Barbara: I've heard that question from many people. You cannot become detached from your body, I promise you. If you drift out of your body like that and something dangerous comes up, you're swept right back into your body. There's no danger to it at all. But, also, if you move into that deeper concentration, that's wonderful. Then, you need to learn how to focus your concentration in different ways. So, instead of moving into an out of body experience, you move into an experience that moves deeper into this whole mind/body connection. You have a choice there. At that point where concentration is that deep and you feel yourself slipping out of your body, if you simply note and label it "slipping, slipping" or "losing touch, losing touch" and come back to your breath with that powerful concentration, then you'll find that instead of following the astral projection path, your focus leads you deeper into the path of insight meditation. Astral projection is safe, though. You don't need to be afraid of it.

Question: The images I see sometimes feel and look so real. Can you talk about that?

Barbara: There are two ways that those kinds of pictures can present themselves. One may be a picture of a memory, conscious or subconscious. We store many memories, from this and even from past lives. We also all have the ability to be telepathic. There is a place where we all connect, the level of what might be called cosmic consciousness. Many different traditions give it different names. But, we really may see an image of something that's happening in that moment somewhere.

So, it can be either a conscious or subconscious memory, or a present image. In either case, if it's an unpleasant image or frightening in some way, the predominant thing in the experience is discomfort or fear. Instead of focusing on the image itself, focus on the sensation of fear. Simply note "feeling fear, feeling fear, feeling fear." Just allow yourself to be present with the fear. How does it feel in your body? Is your body contracting because of the fear? Note the way you want to escape from the fear, the unpleasant quality of the fear and how dislike grows out of the unpleasant quality, so that you need to retreat. In this way you don't get caught in the story of the image but remain in the present, in this experience of tension or contraction.

If wanting to retreat becomes predominant, simply note "wanting to retreat." Be with whatever is happening in that moment. It doesn't matter if it's an image or whatever it is. If it's something that's unpleasant and creating fear, fear is what is predominant and that's what you need to be with, not the image itself.

As example, while sitting maybe there's suddenly a strong cramp in your legs. Unpleasant. And then, with that pain, there's a strong desire to get away from the pain, a strong aversion to the pain. The aversion to the pain is not the pain itself. The fear about the image is not the image itself.

If the image is predominant, there's very little fear. If the pain is predominant, you're not feeling strong aversion. Once you're feeling strong aversion, the pain is no longer so predominant. Once you're feeling strong fear, the image is no longer predominant. Pain and image will still be there, but are no longer primary.

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The instructions are very clear. As it changes or dissolves, come back to the breath. If it was pain and suddenly you're feeling strong aversion to that pain, you just note it as "aversion, aversion," and come back to your breath. If it was a strong image and then a fear of the image arises, or even attachment to the image, what is primary has changed. It's no longer the image, it's the fear or attachment. They carry their own energy and are very notable. You can feel them in the physical body. You simply note "fear, fear, fear," and come back to your breath. Alternately, you may note how you experience that pain or fear in your physical body, such as "burning" or "contraction."

If the fear is still there or the aversion to the pain is still there and pulls you away from your breath again, then that's the primary object and you return to it. Then you just stay there with that fear or with that pain until it changes or dissolves.

We talk about two parts to deepening insight meditation practice. Let's pretend this is a brass bowl. I want to polish it. To do so, I've got to hold it and I've got to take a cloth and polish it, both. I can hold it forever, but if I don't go deep into it, I'm never going to polish it. I can polish it, but if I don't hold it, it just keeps moving away from me.

Focus is staying with whatever is primary. Fear, pain, whatever it may be. We hold it; we stay with it. We note mind's tendency, or even desire, to go elsewhere and stay firmly with the primary object. And then we have a willingness to simply go into it. By going into it, I don't mean trying to figure it out or trying to control it. I mean allowing oneself to really stay present with it and be present with whatever arises out of the fear, such as a sense of helplessness or an old memory. Be present with whatever arises. As it changes or dissolves, come back to the breath. It's an ongoing process. Do you understand? This is important.

Question: (*In Spanish*) You talked about form and emptiness, the bowl and the empty center. Where do I have to go when I go in? Do I have to go through form to reach emptiness? What goes into the form or emptiness?

Barbara: In order to go deeper, what part of the bowl do you go into? Is that the question? There is no separation between the empty part and the walls. You're going into the whole bowl. Whatever is predominant in your experience at first may seem like it's the form, but as you go into the form you find that emptiness is an essential part of the form, by which I mean that neither can exist without the other.

It's pure awareness that goes deeper. I don't really have another name for it. It's a place where conscious mind, the chattering, discursive mind, ceases. When discursive mind ceases, what's left is pure awareness.

I would like to give you an example of how insight meditation works in one's life, just a very simple example from my own experience. I'm trying to think of an actual example, not just a hypothetical one. A very simple one is, as I'm sitting I may suddenly remember some argument with my teenage son. He wants the car or he doesn't like what I served for dinner, blah, blah, blah, whatever. I feel him attacking me a little bit and I feel annoyed at that. So, the memory of that anger comes up as I'm sitting. "Feeling anger, feeling anger." When there's a little spaciousness about the anger and when it's not pulling me so much, I come back to my breath.

I'm not finished with it, though. Another image might come up of somebody else being angry with me. I note that, my own feeling of anger in response and the

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unpleasantness of the memory, feeling somebody being angry at me. It changes or dissolves. I come back to my breath.

A third, related image comes up. Then, I might note, "There's a connection here." Just that much, noting this series of images about feeling attacked. I allow myself to note "feeling attacked, feeling attacked." That's what the anger was about in all of these cases, feeling attacked. Come back to my breath.

And, in that quiet, I suddenly become aware of a sense of feeling helpless. Some very old images or thoughts might come up, being a child and being scolded by my parents, feeling inadequate in some way, as if I hadn't met their needs, feeling helpless. As I allow myself to touch with more kindness on this feeling of helplessness, I also become aware that there's a part of me that's very strong.

And, through all of this, I'm just noting these little bits of thoughts as they arise, noting them and coming back to my breath, not getting caught in the story of the memory. The sitting may end. It may be half an hour later that I realize as I'm talking to somebody that there's a discomfort of some sort in feeling strong. Surprise! So, I start to realize there's something within me that wants to feel helpless. But there's something in me that wants to feel strong, too. What is feeling strong? What is that about? What is this balance of strength and helplessness?

Then, in another sitting, I might sit with it and, because I give it permission to come up—I'm getting more hypothetical now and out of actual self-experience—I may start to see what feeling strong means to me, that it was scary to feel strong, that I wanted to be taken care of, maybe. Or maybe I got some kind of negative feedback when I was strong because my parents wanted me to be more dependent on them.

As I understand how all of this works, I find some freedom from reactivity to these mind states. That's one fruit of this practice, just this immediate level of added freedom.

I also start to access a place where I see that the entire pattern is just the different movements of mind. Certain conditions arose, the mind made certain responses, other conditions arose, habits started. I move, let's say, out of the shell of the bowl and into the center, increasingly into the pure awareness which can watch all of this going by and not have to get involved in it anymore.

There were all these patterns, feeling helpless, feeling strong, feeling angry, feeling good, feeling bad, etc., etc., etc. There was a strong idea of a "somebody" who owned these patterns and defined herself by them. I begin to see the conditioned nature of them and the self-identity with them weakens. I don't have to get involved in it anymore. So I bring to my meditation practice that spaciousness that starts to let these different mind states come up without having to own or fix them. Then I start to be able to bring it out into my daily life. Increasingly, I rest in what I call the true self, instead of in the fearful small ego self. So, I allow myself permission to live more from this place of center. The more I do that, the more peaceful I find I am.

This is just one piece of the practice. After I become better able to relate to my daily life with more spaciousness and without attachment and fear, then I let myself go deeper and deeper into this that I'm discovering is my true being and start to really understand what that is. It's something I can't define for you, but it's a continuation of the practice as the insight deepens.

We're going to end the talking here, to stand mindfully and stretch and have a short break.

Whatever your needs, to have some tea or use the bathroom, please do it mindfully and in silence.

(Break)

Barbara: As we come to the end of the afternoon, I want to teach you a meditation practice which can be a support for insight meditation. It's called *tonglen*, or giving-receiving practice. Many of you who work with people who are sometimes in great physical or emotional distress have asked me for a practice that can help you be with such people and offer something to people when there's really not much you feel you can do besides sit there and hear them or hold their hand. You've asked me how you can stay present in the face of great pain. This practice offers such a way. It's a way of opening ourselves and looking at the barriers we build around ourselves, letting ourselves be more open and less defended, and also less attached to what we feel is safe and good in us, letting it move out, practicing that kind of generosity.

It's a very simple practice with two parts. The first part, I want you to feel yourself sitting in a cylinder of light. If God is real for you, let it be God or the light of God moving through you, the divine within the self and all of the universe. Or you can be even more specific and let it be Jesus, the Buddha or some other Master. You can be very unspecific and just feel energy moving through you. You have many different belief systems. Personalize it as fits your own needs.

Feel this light coming in through the crown chakra at the top of your head—energy and light coming down to your heart.

With the in breath, draw it in.
Exhale.

Inhale. Let it enter the heart.

Exhale. Drawing the light further into the heart.

As you inhale, visualize somebody who is suffering, whether a present person or an image. Visualize the person who is suffering, and with the exhale, send that light out from the heart. If there is any desire to hold it for yourself, just note that desire with mercy and kindness. Note it as "fear" or "holding," or feel the tension of it in the body.

Inhale right through the crown chakra.

Exhale. Let it come down to the heart.

Inhale, visualizing the one who is suffering, intention to release it.

Exhale, sending it out.

Inhale light.

Exhale, bringing that light into the heart center.

Inhale, intention to release.

Exhale. Send it out.

Inhale light.

Draw it into the heart.

Intention to release.

Send it out.

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(Some time of practice.)

And then, the second part of the practice. Resting with the person who is suffering, visualize their suffering as a heavy, black, tar-like mass, very dark, sticky, heavy.

Inhale. Breathe it in. If there's resistance, simply note "resistance." If there's grabbing at it and wanting to be the martyr, note that, too. Breathe it in. As you exhale, let it also come in and touch the heart. Really let yourself feel that suffering.

Inhale. Intention to release.

Exhale. Release it out to the universe, or to God, the Buddha or Jesus.

Please note any desire to be rid of it. Just note it as aversion, fear or contraction. If there is desire to be rid of it, there is. No need to fight with that fear; just know it's present.

That's the whole second part. Inhale the suffering, exhale, letting it come into and touch the heart. Inhale, intention to release. Exhale, let it go.

(Some time of practice.)

We'll put the parts together. They alternate.

Inhale light.

Exhale. Light to the heart center.

Inhale, intention to release.

Exhale. Send it out to the one who is suffering.

Inhale, drawing in that suffering.

Exhale. Feel it in the heart center. Feel the heaviness of it.

Inhale, aware of the light that surrounds you.

Exhale. Release the heaviness.

Inhale light ...

That's it. Let's do it for ten minutes.

(Silent practice.)

May all beings everywhere be free of suffering. *(Bell)*

May all beings find the healing that they seek. *(Bell)*

May all beings everywhere find perfect peace. *(Bell)*

This is a very powerful practice. Besides doing it with another, you can do it with yourself. I taught this once to an elderly Catholic woman at a weeklong retreat. She had been walking slouched over and sitting slouched. She complained that she had chest pain and couldn't breathe. I kept working with her, trying to get her to sit up. We talked about her feelings of unworthiness and how she had been badly abused as a child.

So, I asked her to try this practice with her own self there as the one who is suffering, to breathe in that suffering and to release it to Jesus. She knocked on my door, after about three days, late one night about eleven o'clock. She was radiant. She was standing up straight. She just smiled at me and she said, "Jesus took it."

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It's a very powerful practice. Release it to whoever it feels appropriate to release it to. Work with yourself. Work with others. Often, when I'm working with people who are very sick, dying, I'm just sitting with them and I do this. I find it very helpful.

I'm sure there are a thousand questions left unanswered. You have all the answers inside of you. Trust yourselves. I want to thank you for being here with me for these two days. Tomorrow we're going to have a day with much more silence. There will be some instruction and discussion, but we're going to focus on meditation. So, those of you who will be there will have more chance to take this practice deeper.

I want to close by reading you a very favorite poem of mine, which really talks about what meditation means to me. This is by Kabir, a Sufi poet of the fifteenth century⁴.

The Guest is inside you, and also inside me;
you know the sprout is hidden inside the seed.
We are all struggling; none of us has gone far.
Let your arrogance go, and look around inside.

The blue sky opens out farther and farther,
the daily sense of failure goes away,
the damage I have done to myself fades,
a million suns come forward with light,
when I sit firmly in that world.

I hear bells ringing that no one has shaken,
inside "love" there is more joy than we know of,
rain pours down, although the sky is clear of clouds,
there are whole rivers of light.
The universe is shot through in all parts by a single sort of love.
How hard it is to feel that joy in all our four bodies!

Those who hope to be reasonable about it fail.
The arrogance of reason has separated us from that love.
With the word "reason," you already feel miles away.

How lucky Kabir is that, surrounded by all this joy
he sings inside his own little boat.
His poems amount to one soul meeting another.
These songs are about forgetting, dying, and loss.
They rise above both coming in and going out.

Aaron: I am Aaron. Please continue to go deeper into who you are. Let go of your myths of your brokenness, your limitation. Find the truth of yourself, your wholeness, your exultant beauty and perfection, and begin increasingly to enact that in the world. This is the gift that you can give to all beings, your own deepest truth and beauty. I salute and honor you all. That is all.

⁴ Bly, Robert, transl. The Kabir Book, Poem 43, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), pp. 57-58

Day Three

Barbara: Good morning. Today will be entirely silent beside instruction and question periods. Instead of the day being broken into meditation periods and then breaks when we talk, the silence creates a flow through the whole day. Not only the meditation is meditation, but stretching, using the bathroom, eating lunch is all a part of the meditation. We did some of this yesterday. What we seek in the long run is not to find a way just to meditate and then go on with our daily lives, but to make the meditative mind a constant in our daily lives.

During the sitting periods, I'll be happy to meet with you privately in another room if there's something that's coming up in your meditation practice that's confusing you and you feel a need to talk about it. So, please ask if you need to speak privately with me. You can sign your name on this pad. I will not ask you if you need to. It's your responsibility to ask me.

You have all received a schedule for the day. We're going to start with some instruction and then a formal sitting. You were with us Tuesday and Wednesday. I'm not going to repeat those instructions which are the basic foundation.

Yesterday, we talked about sense contact, the sense organ touching the sense object and resultant sense consciousness such as ear touching sound (*bell rings once*), "hearing, hearing." (*Pause*) In this case, it's pleasant. Then, the sound dies away. You return to your breath or whatever is primary, the primary object in your experience.

I want you to close your eyes, take a few deep breaths, then note the unpleasant quality of what you're hearing. Watch yourself carefully and see if it moves into what I call secondary contraction. "Hearing," and then perhaps your body is going to contract. (*Barbara beats on a pan.*) Can you feel that? It's a very natural response. Then, the sound dies. Even if it was unpleasant, there's probably no strong dislike. Your body doesn't hold the contraction.

I want you to observe how the primary object shifts from hearing to knowing it's unpleasant and then to dislike. The hearing is no longer primary; wanting to get rid of is primary. The focus of your attention is on wanting to get rid of. Close your eyes, listen, and watch the process. (*Barbara bangs on the pan repeatedly, loudly.*) Can you feel the tension that you hold as hearing gives way to dislike and wanting to get rid of? Can you feel that?

Question: Long after the noise is gone, I can still feel the tension in my body.

Barbara: Yes, note that just as "tension, tension" or "contraction, contraction." The noise is no longer primary. As you said, it's gone. Hearing is not what's happening. Tension is happening. So, we need to differentiate. We move through these stages, contact, consciousness, sensation of pleasant, unpleasant and sometimes neutral, and then mental formations, the mind states such as tension, aversion or desire.

If there was a wonderful smell coming from the kitchen just suddenly coming out into this room, you might note, "smelling, smelling," sense touching sense object, the sense consciousness "smelling," the sensation "pleasant." Then, perhaps, the door is shut and the scent dies away. The craving is still there.

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These are simply mind states. Note them as "desire" or "craving," or as "tension," "contraction" or "aversion." Feel the tension of these states. Then mind may start running into "How can I get that?" or "How can I keep that way from me?"

So much of our reactivity in the world grows out of these mind states. The mind state often has little to do with what's actually happening. I want to make a distinction here. If a wonderful scent which doesn't remind you of anything, wafts into the room and desire arises, then there's just desire in this moment. If the scent reminds you of something that used to be cooked for you when you were young and offered you much love, it brings all those old memories with it. Desire is not related just to that "smelling, smelling," but to all the old memories and desire to be loved.

While I clank this (*Barbara bangs on the pan.*), it's not just the noise to which you react. It's all the times in our lives when something has come at us and we've felt out of control and unsafe. All of those old mind states come up, so that we're not really just in this moment, we're also getting a lot of old conditioned mind statements.

When you're meditating and any physical sensation comes up, has a pleasant, unpleasant or neutral quality, and then you note the arising of wanting or wanting to get rid of, you don't need to figure out where that wanting or aversion is coming from, you just need to be present with it, to feel how it feels. That's the primary object, how much aversion there is or how much wanting. Simply stay with it. As you are with it, a memory may arise, a time when there was, maybe, a father who yelled. Loud noise! (*Barbara beats on the pan.*) Feeling helpless. We don't need to be able to figure it out, just to recognize, "In this moment there's only a spoon clanging against a pot. The rest is old."

Just be present with what is here, knowing that what is old, is old. We may not even know where it came from. We may just know it's old. But in this moment there is tension of aversion or desire, fear, pain or confusion. That is present in this moment, whatever its source, so we rest with it as the primary object, aware of the physical sensation of it in the body. Open to it gently; let the body soften around it.

So, we come back to this moment and we find it's unpleasant. (*Barbara beats on the pan.*)

I want you to close your eyes again. Can there just be space for this unpleasant noise? There will be a contraction. There will be awareness of unpleasant. Do we need to get into a relationship with it and try to chase it away? Can we just let it be here and know when it stops? It **will** stop!

One step further. If the body tenses, can the body just be tense without needing to get rid of that either? Aware of unpleasantness, aware of aversion, aware of the body's tension, space for it all. I'm going to make noise now. (*Barbara bangs pan repeatedly.*) Not trying to deny anything. Being there fully with unpleasant, with aversion, with body tension. No self that needs to get rid of any of this.

(*Pause while we do this.*)

You can open your eyes. I'm going to ask you to stretch your legs for just a moment and then we're going to sit for half an hour in silent meditation. Physical sensations are going to come up. Maybe a phone will ring. Can you hear traffic on the street? There

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will be noises. Maybe someone will sneeze. Note the contraction that comes with the first hearing. It's just a contraction. It's a very natural response and we don't need to fight against it.

If the noise continues or doesn't continue, either way, or if a physical sensation in the body like a cramp in the knee or a scent from the kitchen comes, whatever the experience may be, if the body tenses around it and moves into dislike and wanting to get rid of or into liking and wanting to hold onto it, be aware that this is not the physical sensation itself.

Very precise instructions. You stay with whatever has arisen as long as it is predominant. As it changes or subsides, come back to the breath. This means when you see that strong aversion or strong desire is present, the prior sensation of just hearing, or smelling, or touching, or the physical sensation of pain is no longer primary, you come back to the breath. If tension in your body around the loud noise pulls you away from your breath, then that's the new primary object. Just be there with this primary object. You are no longer with the hearing or other physical sensation, but what we could label very generally as "contraction, contraction," or sometimes more specifically as "dislike" or "desire," and just be there with it. Is this clear?

Question: What if the pain doesn't stop?

Barbara: Nothing is ever permanent. People sometimes tell me they sat with a strong pain in their leg for a whole hour. And I ask them, "Where was it in your leg?" "I think it was in this knee. No, it was in this knee." And really, it was many little pains that came and went. Desire's the same way.

Question: But then you say desire is the primary object?

Barbara: Is it the concept or direct experience of desire? How is "desire" actually experienced in mind and body? First, something wonderful is cooking in the kitchen, and you note "smelling, smelling." There's no desire yet, there's just smell. There's not even pleasant or unpleasant with that first smell. Then comes pleasant. Then, regardless of whether I can still smell it or not, there may be desire. I then come back to the breath, because desire is now primary, not smelling. If desire pulls me away from my breath again, as with a thought, "I want that," or an image of it, or a tension in the body, then I just label it as "desire" and stay with it. This is what's present right now in my experience. The object that stimulated desire may be gone. It doesn't matter.

We can label it in many different ways, "craving," "desire," "wanting," or even as "contraction" or "tension." You don't have to be precise about how you label it. Just know, "Here is desire." As it changes or subsides, come back to the breath, just that.

Question: But when you said mental formation, you mean desire is mental?

Barbara: At first. Desire is a mind state, precisely. What else could it be? It originates in your mind. Then the body picks up on it and contracts around it. With increasing meditation experience we keep getting more subtleties. For now, simply note it as "desire." As awareness settles down and becomes more precise, you start to differentiate between the mind movement of desire and the body's reaction to that desire, which is also not the desire itself. It sounds very technical and very mechanical, but it's not, because it's coming out of each moment's experience and we're just

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being in the moment, just being fully present. Whatever is there, is there. There's no need to do anything with any of it.

In my experience, it's a bit like watching a fireworks display in a big empty sky. You're just sitting. There's no stars, no moon, just a big empty sky, and suddenly fireworks go off, bright light. "Pleasant, pleasant," or maybe "unpleasant," but you see all these colored lights glisten and fade, and there's the empty sky again. Then, mind may pick up on it and say, "I want more of that." Then body tenses and says, "Yeah, more." The tension is held in the body. That's just another firecracker going off.

We tend to differentiate and say, "This is an experience I can't control," like the fire cracker in the sky, "and I can't do anything about it. It's just out there." But then we follow up with, "This is my reaction to the fire cracker and I should do something about it. If I don't like it, I should like it, or if I do like it, I shouldn't like it." We get so complicated. But there's a fire cracker going off out there. There's nothing to do about it. You can watch it and when it's gone, it's gone. Then here's another fire cracker, of liking or disliking, and when it's gone, it's gone. Another is the reverberations of all of that in the body. We just stay present.

I will talk more the next sitting about how this relates to thoughts and emotions. I want to keep it simple, one step at a time. So, we'll sit for half an hour.

I want to say something very briefly about posture, since most of you sat in chairs before. Those of you who are sitting on the floor, backs erect, I would prefer that you slide your body forward so the cushion is just supporting your buttocks. Rest on the front edge of the cushion. This allows the spine to be straight. Keep arms and legs whatever way is comfortable. If, as you're sitting, you find pain in your legs, first note it, "pinching," "burning" or however the pain feels, "unpleasant." Note the tension in yourself that wants to fix that unpleasantness, that wants to move. It's okay to move, but I don't want you to move immediately. This is a place to practice. Spend two or three minutes just being there with the pain. Maybe it will change or disappear. Note if you feel the fear and tension that it's going to come up again. Note the difference between the physical discomfort and the aversion to discomfort. If the pain stays and you need to move, note the intention to move and then, very gently, unfold your legs. When the pain is gone, if you want to fold your legs in again in a few minutes, again notice the intention that precedes the movement and then just bring your legs in again.

We have enough pain in our lives that we do not need to create artificial pain by forcing ourselves to sit motionless for a half hour. At the same time, we need to learn that things are never going to be just right. You can move every thirty seconds trying to find a perfect way to sit, but it's not going to happen.

So, we start here to learn how we relate to the unpleasantness in our lives and how that creates our suffering. Is it the pain in your leg that's really creating your suffering or is it this internal tension that says, "I've got to fix this"? Okay, let us sit.

(Meditation practice.)

May all beings find ease of well-being. *(Bell)*

May all beings love and be loved. *(Bell)*

May all beings find perfect peace. *(Bell)*

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Stretch your legs slowly. Be as fully in your bodies as you can. Whatever we're doing, we're doing it with awareness.

Now we're going to do walking meditation. I want to teach this to you. We're going to walk in a circle through all of these rooms.

Begin by standing as we did yesterday. Feel the weight on both feet. Now let the weight shift onto one foot. Now back to the other. Now back to center, feel your body balanced, the touch of the feet on the floor.

"Touching, touching." Let the weight shift almost entirely on one foot, "shifting, shifting." After the shifting is finished, the touching again becomes predominant. With walking meditation, a breath is not the primary object, but rather the sensation of the body, the weight, the touching. Now let the weight shift to the other foot, noting "shifting, shifting." See if you can catch that place where the shift is finished and touching again becomes predominant. Touching, touching, shifting back, touching, touching.

Now we're going to take this on to walking. Please open your eyes and watch me. We'll start with a faster walking, simply lifting the foot and call it touching and, as the foot comes down, stepping. Touching, stepping, touching.

(Some time of practice.)

Now we'll slow it down further. Feel the foot lift and know it as "lifting." Feel the foot move and know it as "moving." Feel the foot touch and know it as "placing." Then the weight shifts, "shifting." Then the other foot lifts, "lifting."

(Barbara demonstrates and we do this.)

Keep your eyes just a few feet ahead of you on the floor. Hold the arms still. This is not "taking a walk." The mind may want to be entertained after a few trips around the circle. Just note any restlessness and bring attention back.

(We walk for thirty minutes.)

(Bell sounds three times. There is a short, silent break with tea and then the group comes back to their cushions.)

Barbara: When we meditate, the mind that stays with each object as it arises, fully aware, fully concentrated, this is awakened mind. This is pure awareness mind. When we're meditating in that way, there's no place we need to go. We talk about enlightenment as something out there. In this moment, fully awake, fully with each moment, we're already enlightened. We begin to experience in our practice the truth about how everything arises because conditions are present for it to arise. And when the condition ceases, it ceases. We begin to see that this is the whole play of the conditioned universe. Everything is interdependent. This is because that is. Nothing has a separate self.

An example is this wooden chair. It comes from a tree. The tree exists because there was sun and rain and soil. So, the sun is right here in the chair. Water is also here in the chair. Clouds, rivers, the ocean are all here. Where is the self of the chair? Does it have any self? It's made up of treeness and sun and water and soil. The lumber man who cut the tree down is in the chair. The artist who crafted it is in the chair. This is what we mean when we say it doesn't have a separate self. Certainly there's an artifact that we

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would call a chair, but is there any one piece of the chair that you can take and say, "This is the chair"? Is there anything that we could call the "self" of the chair that doesn't come from other sources?

Question: Can you give the same example with a human being?

Barbara: I plan to. But, before we get to a human being, let's look at a cat. Its body content is largely water. It needed to have a mother and a father. A cat is carnivorous, so its food consisted of other animals and maybe of milk. When you look at the cat, it's all of these things. Everything it's eaten in its life is part of it. Its mother and father, the people who cared for its parents, the air it breathes, the cow who gave milk and the man who liked the cow, are all part of the cat. Within this material object we call a cat, is there anything that we can point to and say, "Here is the cat"? Is the skin the cat? the blood? the heart?

Shall we take this same thing to a human being? Water content, bones, skin, mother, father, light, oxygen, and then the non-material aspects such as thoughts and impulses; are any of these the human? Now, many people think of the human as having a soul. We say, "Ah, that soul is the self." Or we think of human consciousness and consider that to be self. But, what I experience is that when I get to that level of meditation when all sense of identification of me as my body has dissolved, all sense of identification of me as my thoughts has dissolved, all sense of identification of me as my emotions, or my impulses, or my opinions have dissolved, then I rest in a place where all the boundaries seem to have fallen away. It's not that I cease to exist, but this pure heart/mind, as Aaron calls it, pure awareness that's left has no separation from anything. I rest firmly in the Unconditioned, or in God, and there is no edge between us.

So, is there something we call a soul? The word "soul" is usually used with the connotation of a separate personal being. It's often thought of as the combined spirit and mental bodies. This is not what I experience. What I experience is also not a negation of the being. There's definite being, but it's not separate. The "I" that rests there is not Barbara. It is the pure heart/mind. While it's there, it cannot even have a thought of being there. This is beyond thought, beyond the mental body which is clearly seen as arising from conditions. There's a beautiful Buddhist scripture, the Heart Sutra, which contains the lines, "form is emptiness; emptiness is form." "I" contains the forms of body, thought, perceptions, impulses, preferences, and so forth but these are all conditioned aggregates, empty of "self." Beyond the conditioned realm, only pure awareness is there, and all the human aggregates are experienced as expressions of the Unconditioned.

I can only share my experience here with you. I can't ask you to take my word for it. Find out for yourself.

Buddhist teachings talk about the conditioned realm, the phenomenal world and the Unconditioned. Yesterday we talked about how those two terms, Unconditioned and God, can be used very synonymously. This is not God as a puppet master pulling strings and making things happen. This is God in a much broader sense, as a core energy of the universe. It's really not a something of which we can say, "This is God," because God is limitless, infinite, eternal. We can say, as the Buddhists scriptures do say, unborn, undying, unchanging, uncreated.

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When I am in that place where I'm very clear that I'm not my body, or my thoughts, or my emotions, I rest in this sense of just pure awareness. The closest metaphor I can give you is what a drop of water might feel like that had been pulled out of the ocean and then fell back into the ocean. It merges completely with the ocean. It doesn't cease to exist. It's not the whole ocean any more than I am God. But, there's no separation. There's no place where I can say, "This is me and that's the ocean."

The body, the thoughts, these conditioned aspects of our being act like the cohesiveness of the drop of water as it is out of the ocean. Then, it has form as a drop of water. Then we can say, "This is a drop of water," because it has form. Here in my body I am Barbara. I have forms—physical, emotional and mental. But, when I let go of the form, when I let go of all the different forms of Barbara, when I cease to identify myself by those conditioned forms, all that is left is this pure awareness, boundaryless, pure awareness.

There is a zen teaching, "The finger pointing to the moon is not the moon itself." I cannot give you the moon. I can give you a variety of fingers pointing to the moon. Some of these fingers will be useful for some of you. Other of these fingers will be useful for others. If one part of what I teach you doesn't help you, put it aside. Use what does help you.

We do meditation practice for many reasons. The most important reason is just to be here, to be fully present, because everything you need to know really is within you and accessible to you. But, in order to access what's already within you, that deep wisdom, you've got to be here, to pay attention.

I have never been to a gambling casino, but I'm told that there are signs that say, "You must be present to win." You **must** be present! In meditation, we can experience all of this for ourselves, really come to understand the whole interplay between the conditioned and the Unconditioned and move into a direct experience of the Unconditioned. That is, to me, one of the greatest fruits of this practice, that direct experience of the Unconditioned. It's also helpful to some people to understand conceptually, like having a road map of where they're going. And so, we also talk about it in words. The words won't take you there. The words are only a road map. The meditation is what will take you there.

(Lovely smell from the kitchen.)

I would like you all to stop and note the smell. "Smelling, smelling," sense touching sense object, "smelling, smelling, pleasant, pleasant." If any sense of wanting arises, simply note it. If there's no sense of wanting and the smelling diminishes, go back to the breath. I don't smell it anymore, but I see myself wanting more of that lovely smell. Okay, that was just a brief moment of opportunity to practice with what was coming through.

We are going to sit.

Question: Can we learn more about the relationship between the drops of water of the ocean and the drops of water themselves?

Barbara: I would like to put your question on hold for now. We'll have a sitting, and then a long question and answer period.

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(Sitting, with little instruction. Bells.)

(Question period.)

Question: *(In Spanish)* She wants to know what to do when distracted with thoughts of people. She has a lot of thoughts and it becomes primary.

Barbara: We're going to get into thoughts now. Before we get into thoughts, is there any question about working with physical sensations?

To some extent we have already worked with thought. When there's a physical sensation, "hearing, hearing," for example, and then a contraction around it that says, "I don't like that," or "I do like it and I want it," this is one kind of thought. All thoughts have something in common, which is that when you note that you are thinking, it stops. You cannot be noting and planning or thinking of people, or whatever, at the same time.

There is a difference between the physical contractions in the body that accompany the thought and the thought itself. The thought is just a thought. It has its own energy. It's just a thought. Then my body reacts to the thought in some way or other, a classical example, the good smell, the thought, the vision in the mind of what may be cooking, maybe remembering past experiences, and then the mouth starts salivating.

Each is separate. One is a physical response of the body. One is a thought. If the thought is about a person, remembering, seeing that person in our minds and a thought comes up, "I was supposed to call them and I forgot." Thinking, thinking. Then, the tension that follows the thought may be guilt or some related emotion. That tension is not the thought. The thought is just the thought. You've got to observe closely and it will be clear which is predominant.

Thoughts may run to planning. Next Monday I'm going back to the United States; I may find myself planning what will happen on Monday and Tuesday. I start feeling contracted, "Oh, so much to do." I find myself sitting and planning a time schedule. "How am I going to get everything done that I have to do on Monday to prepare for my classes on Tuesday?" Noting, "tension, tension." As soon as I've noted the planning, I'm not planning anymore. What is predominant is the tension. I come back to the breath.

If the tension is still there, it's not the planning. Is it fear that I'll disappoint people, not live up to expectation? What is it? I can't give you an answer as to what it is. You don't even need to label it precisely. All you need to do is note, "tension, tension." If the tension stays there, stay with it. As it changes or subsides, come back to the breath.

Also note the tension of desire states, as in a memory of a loved one and arising desire to be together.

If there's no tension in the thought, for example if a thought of a friend comes into your mind, "pleasant, pleasant," and as you note thinking, and you're not thinking anymore, you come back to your breath and the thought is gone. It's just like hearing, hearing, and then it's gone. There's no tension about it. It will not be a recurrent thought. If the thought, such as a memory or planning or fantasy is recurrent, it probably will carry tension. If there is tension about the thought, the tension is not the thought itself. Note the thought, come back to the breath. If the tension pulls you away from the breath, then go back to the tension. If it has a special quality, then you can name that quality,

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like “feeling fear, feeling anger.” If it’s just a tension that’s kind of nameless, just call it “tension, tension.” Sometimes you can find an area of your body that carries the tension and focus there. That can be helpful.

If you see faces, people, you could call it “seeing, seeing,” but as soon as you note it, if that vision is not predominant anymore, come back to your breath. If there’s no tension about it, but the person’s face comes into your mind again, note it again. If it happens twenty times, note it twenty times.

If there is tension, be with the tension. Is the tension around the relationship with that person, something unfinished between you? Tension could even be around wanting mind to be still and not move into seeing. “Self” wants mind to be still. That’s what the tension is.

As long as mind is present with what arises, you’re meditating. There’s a certain quietness which is not found in stifling the mind. Peace does not come by controlling what happens out there. Peace comes with the practice of watching it arise like a wave, and subside, and subside, back into the ocean. And then there’s another wave, and it subsides back into the ocean. There’s no involvement with it.

When I say there’s no involvement with it, I want to be precise here, using this ocean metaphor. If a wave is rising, you see a child on a raft and the wave is about to topple the child, you reach out and steady the child. The wave subsides and your motion ceases. There is no ego involvement in it. We do what we need to do, but we do it from a place of center, not from an ego self. We must respond skillfully to the world.

There’s something I want to read to you that says this very beautifully. This is from Cultivating the Empty Field, by a fifteenth century Chinese zen master, Hongzhi.

The practice of true reality is simply to sit serenely in silent introspection. When you have fathomed this, you cannot be turned around by external causes and conditions. This empty, wide open mind is subtly and correctly illuminating. Spacious and content, without confusion from inner thoughts of grasping, effectively overcome habitual behavior and realize the self that is not possessed by emotions. You must be broad minded, whole ... Such upright, independent spirit can begin not to pursue degrading situations. Here you can rest and become clean, pure and lucid. Bright and penetrating, you can immediately return, accord and respond to deal with events.

So, we’re not moving into a place where we separate ourselves from the waves’ rise and fall, but we attend to the waves without any investment in making anything happen. When there’s no repercussion within us, the energy doesn’t contract with, “Did I do that okay?” Ego doesn’t get involved. We just do what needs to be done from an empty place.

Peace is not gained by controlling the waves, but by simply observing their rise and fall from a place that doesn’t have to get involved, but the response goes forth when it needs to. Other questions about how to work with thoughts?

Question: What about daydreaming?

Barbara: Simply label it as “daydreaming” or “fantasizing” or “imagining.” As soon as you label it it’s like a balloon that’s been poked with a pin. Pop! As soon as you know

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you're daydreaming, you're not daydreaming anymore. It may keep returning, but in this moment it's gone. Come back to the breath. If there's a tension that wants to hold on to the daydream, it's not the daydream itself. Can you see the difference? If that tension remains after you come back to the breath, simply label it as "tension, tension" or as "wanting, wanting."

Question: When you say that thoughts are just thoughts, I don't understand, because sometimes my thoughts create anger in me, or fear, or pain. (*Questioner is crying.*)

Barbara: I would like to say here that some of what we're talking about touches very deep personal places. A Thai meditation master for whom I feel much loving respect, Achaan Cha, is quoted as saying, "If you haven't cried while meditating, you haven't really meditated." The work we're doing often reconnects us with strong emotions and we cry and feel pain. We may also cry with joy and other emotions. I want everybody in this room to know it's okay to cry here. You have permission to feel whatever pain you may be feeling.

As to your question, it's not the thought that creates anger, fear or pain, but our relationship to the content of the thought, which is another kind of thought, a secondary thought. We want so much to be safe; we are so afraid of many of our thoughts. And so we seek to control them.

Thought does have a form to it, an energy. The response to the thought is not the thought itself. If I think of a person who has abused me, if the image of that person or the memory of a scene between us comes into my mind, that is a thought. That image or memory gives rise to a multitude of other thoughts, memories of feeling helpless or victimized, or just the memory of anger in that one situation when I had to face that person and how much I wanted to hurt him back, or how afraid I was of him or of myself. Then there is anger, but the anger is not the image or memory. The anger arises as result of the image or memory and other conditions, all brought together. Along with the image or memory is all the desire to be loved; all the fear that one is not loved, not good enough to be loved; all the vulnerability; all our power and fear of so much power ... so many possible ingredients!

Thoughts and actions can both give rise to anger. If I came up now and slapped your face, it might give rise to an array of emotions and sensations out of which anger might come. The slap and the array of feelings about the slap give rise to anger. If you later had a memory of me doing that, it might also give rise to anger.

The slap is just a slap. The thought is just a thought. Memory is just memory. Anger is just anger. But we confuse them until it's one giant mix that overwhelms us.

The anger or other emotion that arises from the condition, whether that condition was a slap or a thought, is a movement of energy. What happens is through most of our lives, all of this onslaught of contact, sensation, thought, emotion has come so fast that it seemed to be one. It's like being in the ocean. Each wave, independently, is very workable, but we may feel overwhelmed when waves are coming from all sides. We'll drown.

With meditation we are slowing down our experience, so we can see just what it is and the kinds of habitual responses we have to it. Then we start to have more freedom, that we don't have to respond in that habitual way. If you begin to see that a certain kind of

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thought always serves as the condition for the arising of a certain emotion, you start to understand, "I have a choice here. This thought can lead to this emotion, but maybe it doesn't have to. What is the emotion about? Is it something in this moment, or is it very old and conditioned by past experience? Is my reaction out of proportion to what's really happening?"

For example, as you're meditating, a thought might arise of someone who had stood you up for an appointment. When that happened you felt angry. If somebody doesn't show up when we expect them, there is anger. In meditation, as the memory comes up, there is remembering. It's an unpleasant memory. You may have felt rejected or humiliated, or merely inconvenienced. Then energy contracts and anger arises. First we note remembering, and come back to the breath. We feel how solid the anger is. "Anger. Anger." As you allow yourself to be with that anger, don't try to do something with the anger, don't try to get rid of it or change it or judge it. Just be there with it. Judgments may arise such as a thought that the anger is out of proportion to the incident. Just note "judging," and return to the experiences of anger that are primary in this moment. Don't analyze it. Just be present, allowing the experience but not feeding it with additional stories.

Then a memory might arise of how when you were a child the people you loved didn't seem to consider your needs. How angry that child felt when a parent would say, "I'll help you," and three hours later they hadn't come to help. You might feel the helplessness of the child or how the child came to feel unworthy when others seemed to get all of the attention. You might become aware of how impossible it was for the child to express her anger, or how she was criticized when she did express it. This is **not** feeding the anger but going deeper into it. There is a real difference between, "It's not fair; it's never been fair. What a bitch she was; it was her fault," and the deep awareness of pain which may come without words, just a shudder in the body or tears. No one needs to be blamed. It was just a heartbreaking situation, often a repeated one. Can we open our hearts to ourselves and our pain here? This is the doorway, allowing us also to find compassion for the others who were involved. Instead of "the bitch," we may suddenly see another human trapped by her own fear. That doesn't condone what she did, but the heart begins to soften.

So, we start to see what the ingredients are in our anger. We don't have to look back at childhood and say, "This is because of that." This anger is because of ten thousand "thats." We don't have to see all of it. It's enough to just know, "This is old. A part of the tension I'm feeling is coming from so much old conditioning. Can I let myself come back to what is happening in this moment? Right now there's just the memory of the friend that didn't show up, my anger and all my judgments about my anger, my guilt, my discomfort, my wanting to blame someone, my wanting to be free of my anger; that's all that's here. Can I just be with it?"

As another example, perhaps you see a friend talking to another person and jealousy arises. Jealousy is a form of anger. The jealousy is intense. You can't just say, "I shouldn't feel jealous." The best that will do is to suppress it. When you notice the entire chain of events, that you were talking to your friend and then another person came and diverted her, and then jealousy arose, if you give all of that the space it needs, you may have a memory of how a sibling always intruded when you were talking to a parent. Perhaps you were always told, "You're the older one; you should let your sister

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talk." Perhaps you were scolded for displaying anger. This person who interrupted is not just this person but your sibling and all of those painful old situations.

Or perhaps no memory arises, just an intuitive sense that this present jealousy has old roots that enhance the present pain. We don't have to see the origins to know that we have had myriad painful experiences and moved to defend ourselves.

However it came, in this moment there is anger. It's there even after you remember how painful the sibling interruptions were, how unfair it seemed. You can't say, "I shouldn't be angry because this is just old conditioning." There is anger. The old anger enhances the new and it all needs to be dealt with. The first step is to acknowledge it and allow the experience of it without the telling of old stories that fuel it. In this moment there is no sibling. There is just the feeling that a friend has deserted you and the pain of that desertion. Without melodrama and blame, without enhancement, we acknowledge the situation and the pain. This, we say, gives it space.

You find that when you're with it just like that, and there gets to be a much bigger space around it, then it's much easier. Let me give you a metaphor. If I asked you to sit in a small box, and when you were sitting I took a tarantula and put it in the box with you, it would be very hard to sit there. If we took a bigger box and I put the tarantula in the far side, it would still be very difficult. If we took a space the size of this room and I put the tarantula on the floor, way over in the corner, and asked you to sit there, told you you could move if you needed to, you would find that you could watch it and you could sit. There's space for both of you. If it starts to walk toward you, you can get up and move. There's space to be with it.

This is what we're doing with our anger or other emotions. By just being present with them and seeing what they really are, there is space. Now, if someone put the tarantula right here in a little box, I'd scream and jump out. If it were across the room and I watched it crawling towards me and five or six times I got up and moved, eventually I might feel, "I'm just going to sit here and let it approach me. Maybe I don't have to be afraid of it. What is this tarantula? Can I let it crawl on me?" I have never touched one, but people tell me that they are very gentle and shy. Could I let it sit on my hand? Could I let myself become that intimate with it?

We become intimate with our emotions in that way. We can't become intimate with them when we feel crushed by them, because we feel that we need to flee from them. When we feel like we have space, then we can consider becoming more intimate with them. And then, we find that they're not really solid, that we don't have to be afraid of them.

So, this is how the process works. Does that answer your question?

Question: How do you differentiate anger right now in this moment and anger in the past?

Barbara: First, it doesn't really matter at the start. I just need to know that there is anger, or any heavy emotion. Just to know that is so hard for many people. We're so trained not to feel negative emotions, have been told it's wicked to feel them or are afraid of ourselves when we feel a strong emotion, that we'll hurt someone because of it. I have to allow myself to feel my feelings.

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When the emotion is present and acknowledged, then I can begin to look into it more deeply. I can ask, is this out of proportion to the present situation? If all that has happened is that a usually highly responsible and prompt friend didn't show up for lunch and there is great pain and rage, feeling unworthy, feeling abandoned, clearly there is a lot of old mind as part of the reaction. But whatever its source, the pain and rage are there and to acknowledge them is essential. So different than past reactions of trying to control them and force them away.

I note the presence of the tension we call anger and simply note it, "anger." If it has a special quality, like tightness or burning, I might note that. I just sit there and be with it.

A teacher named Thich Nhat Hahn has a very beautiful practice that I like to suggest to people. "Breathing in, I am aware of my anger. Breathing out, I smile to my anger." You must really smile! This softening just makes a bit more space in which to be with pain.

So, as we allow ourselves to just stay there with the anger, instead of doing all the things that we habitually do to try to control it or feel safe with it, part of the opening process is just letting ourselves know how unsafe we feel. We can allow ourselves to know, "feeling unsafe, feeling threatened." We see how much we want to control pain or blame someone for it, to push it away. As we give ourselves that increasing space, we do start to understand what part of it is old and what part of it is now.

We're not minimizing the old. It can be very, very, very powerful. There's no judgment that says, "This is old. Disregard it." If it's old, it still can be very present. It's not like we have a time line that we say, "Only this is now." If you were taught as a child, "No, you should not be angry," so that there was a real shame about being angry, when anger arises that sense of shame is present now, even though the voice that said, "Don't be angry" was back in childhood.

When I talk about distinguishing between old conditioning and what's present now, it relates more to what Aaron said yesterday about the life jacket. When we see that something is old and we don't need to respond that way anymore, but the response is just old habit, then there's a certain freedom. For example, we might be able to see that the adult who shamed you for being angry was really wrong and was speaking out of his or her own fear. You felt all that shame then, but you don't need to feel the shame anymore. The shame is what's old. The pain isn't old. The pain is right here, but the shame is just an old habit. So, I can see how much pain and shame I am feeling because anger has arisen and know, "I don't need that shame anymore. I can really turn to that adult and say, 'No thank you. I don't need it anymore.'" Literally, bring the presence of the memory of that parent or teacher into your mind and say, "I don't need your shame anymore. I don't accept that." Then, we can come back to the feeling of anger, and then it's just anger. It's not weighted down by the old shame, but if the shame comes up again, then we're here with the shame.

Many years ago I was at a month long, silent retreat. People had been told to respect others who wished to avoid eye contact. I noticed that as I walked, to meals for example, and looked at others who looked away, a strong feeling of rejection and unworthiness arose in me. It was very painful. I wanted that look and smile so badly as proof that I was okay. Yet it was almost funny because I **knew** that there was no rejection. These were strangers. I look okay. I don't have bad breath. They were just doing their practice. But the pain of unworthiness was there. It had nothing to do with

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the reality of this moment; there was no rejection, no one who was unworthy. But there was real pain.

As I worked with it through the weeks, it became so clear that the whole idea of “unworthy” was a myth that I had created as a child and for various reasons. I had felt lost, abandoned, and my anger was intense but I was told “Don’t be angry.” The one who had “abandoned” me had done so because of illness. Even as a child I understood that it wasn’t her fault. So I had turned that anger on myself. If the one who abandoned me wasn’t bad, I was bad. I was unworthy of her love. I was unworthy! I’d understood this pain through therapy many decades earlier and stopped having to act out the unworthiness, but the “fact” of it never left. It still was painful, through all those decades, even if I could explain it away.

Now I was face to face with the pain. For the first time, I allowed myself to know just how angry I had been, how vulnerable and afraid. And it finally became clear, not just in intellect but deep inside, that no one had ever been unworthy. It was a myth the child had thought she needed, a myth that offered some kind of support but for which she paid a terrible price.

Each time someone looked away, the pain arose. Each time, I began to remind myself, “I’m not unworthy; I have never been unworthy. The child just needed that myth to deal with the intensity of her anger and desire to destroy the one who abandoned and those who said ‘Don’t be angry.’” I became able to look and acknowledge, “All that’s happening here is that someone is walking past with eyes averted and that situation triggers old pain.” Finally I really saw I had a choice, to continue to support the myth or to let it go. Like the life jacket metaphor, there was nothing left to support it. I just didn’t need it any more.

Are there any more questions about the meditation practice?

Question: You say that when there is a need to change whatever is arising, that is ego?

Barbara: It’s one of the voices of ego. It could be fear or control, which are all voices of ego.

Question: We think there is somebody who needs to change something?

Barbara: Yes, but it also allows me to connect with that fearless place in myself, that absolutely strong place in myself that knows there’s nothing that needs to be fixed or changed, that is perfect. Then I can watch the arising of fear and the desire to change without needing to react to it, but if I do react to it, then I can observe with a kindness which embraces that very frightened part of me instead of criticizing it.

Instead of criticizing the frightened part of me, I recognize the ultimate self which is whole. It’s unlimited. It’s fearless. And I recognize the human who perceives itself as limited and who is not fearless. I can relate to both with balance.

We’re going to sit. First I would like you to stretch in place. Stand up for a minute. Stretch in whatever way feels suitable, with mindful awareness of the intention and movement. If you need to use the bathroom or get something to drink, do so also with mindfulness.

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If you're feeling very restless, a lot of agitation, so that you feel you just can't sit, get up and do walking meditation in the next room, up and down. If you feel settled, after ten or fifteen minutes, and want to come back and sit again, that's fine, or just keep walking. Sometimes, when there's a lot of agitation, the clearer focus of walking and the activity of walking as well, the movement, are helpful. If you're getting sleepy, simply stand in place. We're going to sit now for forty-five minutes.

(Meditation practice.)

May all beings be free of suffering. *(Bell)*

May all beings find the healing that they seek. *(Bell)*

May all beings find perfect peace. *(Bell)*

Take a moment to stretch, just here in place. I would like to hear from you what you were experiencing during the meditation, questions that may have arisen about the practice, and also how the practice was for you. What came up? How were you able to note it? What happened after you noted it?

Meditator: I felt a great resistance, even before I sat down, like I wanted to get out of here, and then I stayed with it, not fighting it, and began resolving it, not fighting with the mind, but a lot of thoughts arising.

Barbara: And were you able to simply note them as thoughts? What happened as you noted them as thoughts?

Meditator: I didn't have resistance. It was like riding the waves.

Barbara: Just waves rising and falling back into the sea?

Meditator: It helped me stay centered.

Barbara: So, there was a sense of resting in a deeper center that could watch the waves rise and fall without excessive fear. Okay, good. I want to add, as I say "Good," I'm always cautious, because somebody in the room who had thoughts arising and did grab hold of them will now say to themselves, "She's a good meditator. I'm a bad meditator."

We learn to work with it. There's a wonderful poster of a Hindu swami with a turban and a loin cloth. He's riding on a surf board. The caption underneath says, "You can't stop the waves from coming, but you can learn to surf."

If you find that a thought arises and it bowls you over, well, that's where you are. If it rises and falls, that's fine. That's where you are. If it hits you and knocks you off the surfboard and you get caught in its undertow, that's where you are. Just be there caught in the undertow. That's okay, too.

Meditator: I started okay, but very quickly thoughts started coming and I managed them the way you said. Then, I went back to my breathing and more thoughts came and more thoughts, so I feel I never went further. Thoughts kept coming, so I could not go very deep, but nevertheless I was conscious and afraid that it was going to be so long I was never going to finish. But then I felt that time had gone by very fast and I wasn't tired. So, I wonder if I ever went past the first two steps. I feel I never went further than just noticing the thoughts.

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Barbara: But, this is already profound, just to be able to be present, note the thought, watch it dissolve, and come back to the breath. Then you have a very profound insight into the nature of mind and how it's always giving off thoughts. There is a name given to seeing this, because it's for many people the first deep insight of insight meditation. We call it "seeing the waterfall," the waterfall of mind where mind energy just flows over and over the edge. Thoughts keep coming up. This is just how mind works.

I'm sure many of you heard small noises. When you heard you didn't say to yourself, "I shouldn't be hearing. Why doesn't hearing stop?" There was some external condition, the ears heard it and the consciousness "hearing" resulted. In the same way, mind is a sense. Mind thinks. Ears give rise to hearing. Mind gives rise to thinking. When you hear footsteps cross the room or somebody cough, you just note it as "hearing." If there's a contraction around the hearing, wanting to get rid of it, not liking it, unpleasant, wanting to hold on, that contraction is not the hearing itself. It can be very pure, though, just hearing, pleasant, unpleasant, and then it's gone. There are no tensions around it. And then, very present with the breath, and then hearing again.

Thinking is no different. Thoughts arise. There doesn't have to be a contraction around it, and it sounds as if, for you there was not. Thoughts just arose, and went. They were noted skillfully. You came back to the breath. A new thought came up.

What happens is that as we note our thoughts skillfully in this way, they do slow down, not in one sitting, but with practice at staying with the thoughts.

Do you remember yesterday we did an exercise of inhaling, seeing the pause, exhaling? We start to attend more to the space between the thoughts, just like we can attend to the space between the breath. The space between the thoughts is a very powerful, quiet space. As we note the presence of that space between thoughts and rest there more fully, sometimes thoughts arise less frequently, sometimes they're just so little that you're not pulled away from the silence by them.

It's like in every rustle of your neighbors, first you note every movement. It becomes predominant, so you note it. After awhile those rustles may not become predominant. They just pass by, noted but not predominant at all. Thoughts also become smaller and quieter. So, it sounds like what you were doing was fine. Keep going. Other questions?

Meditator: I had a wonderful, clear insight but I lost it.

Barbara: At some level, that is a small seed planted, and it will take root and grow with the process. It will come back.

Meditator: I was able to watch the thoughts and calm them, but the physical pain in my back and hips continuously detracted. I was with the pain. I was with the diversion, but the pain was too much.

Barbara: I have two different things to say about this. First of all, I don't know if you meditate regularly at home or not. (Yes.) Do you sit on a cushion or on a chair? (Chair.) Okay, I would like you to sit on a chair after lunch. See if that's more comfortable. You need to find a position that's comfortable enough that you can stay there for the meditation period without a lot of physical pain.

In any position, physical pain will come up just because our body is changing, releasing energy and so on. Certain emotions come to the surface and ways that

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we've held our bodies around those emotions, so that the body may tense in unusual places around thoughts and emotions that are coming to the surface. So, we can't avoid pain, but we've got to be comfortable to begin with. If you start uncomfortable, it's not going to get more comfortable.

When there is very severe pain, it's fine to change your position. If you need to, you can lie down, just flat on your back with your knees bent, just lie back that way. You can get up and stand or walk. I noticed you were standing. So, there's a balance, finding a position that's relatively comfortable and then working skillfully with physical sensations, knowing it's never going to be perfect.

Okay, we'll have more time for discussion later, and I want to talk more about working with pain but we'll have lunch in a few minutes and now I want to talk about lunch. We're not taking a break. We're beginning an hour of formal eating and resting meditation. When you eat, I want you first to be aware of the food in front of you. Spend a few minutes with it before you start to eat, just letting gratitude arise in you that here's this wonderful food that nourishes you.

Do you have any idea how many people have died of starvation in the world today, just today? So, really be aware of this food in front of you and what a gift it is. Then, as you begin to eat, bring a fork full of food to your mouth. Chew it. Really chew it. Spend time with it.

At Thich Nhat Hanh's "Plum Village" in France, people are asked to chew each mouthful of food fifty times. It's a challenge, especially when it's soup. Really be there with the food, and note pleasant, unpleasant. Notice when you reach for the next fork or spoonful. What's happening? The food starts to get stale in your mouth and you haven't swallowed it yet, but you want more of that fresh, good taste. See what propels the intention to reach for the next spoonful. Watch all the contractions of your energy, different levels of wanting and aversion. What if something tastes very good and something else doesn't taste very good? What do we do with that which doesn't taste very good?

So, eat very slowly, very mindfully. Be very present. We're going to eat in silence. If it takes you the whole hour to eat, that's fine. If it only takes you twenty minutes to eat, that's okay, too. You're welcome to rest. You're welcome to lie down and take a nap if you want to. People could go outside for a walk.

Please maintain the silence for your own sake and that of others. I know there may be temptation to talk if just two of you are alone in the garden. Note the desire to talk. How does that tension of wanting to talk feel in your body? Instead of talking, just be with the desire to talk. In a couple of hours, we'll be finished and you'll go home and you can talk there. So, we will ring a bell here at three o'clock and begin promptly. (*Meals are following a typical Mexican schedule; thus, lunch was at two.*)

(Lunch)

Barbara: I would like us to begin the afternoon with walking meditation for about ten minutes, and then, just very quietly, come in and sit. Walking meditation is not just a way of stretching between sittings, it is a meditation practice in its own right, and it has very real value. It may sharpen focus. Mind is less likely to wander off in walking, because the body and movement provide a clear primary object. That focusing can

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settle the mind. And because we just walk a path, up and back, up and back, after awhile mind stops looking for entertainment in the walking. So, let us begin by walking for about ten minutes in a circle, and then we'll come back and sit.

Yesterday somebody asked me, "Through meditation, can we learn to levitate?" A thought from Thich Nhat Hanh. I quote him: "The miracle is not to walk on air or water. The miracle is to walk on earth." We'll walk.

(Walking followed by sitting meditation.)

May all beings be happy. *(Bell)*

May all beings love and be loved. *(Bell)*

May all beings find perfect peace. *(Bell)*

Before lunch we were talking about being with very heavy anger. During lunch, several of you told me you thought you had to get rid of your anger first before there could be kindness and compassion, and that's why you try so hard to suppress it or force it away. I want to share a short story of a personal experience with great anger. In the 1960s, in the southern United States, there was a nonviolent movement for civil rights for blacks and people of other races. There were many nonviolent demonstrations of different sorts. I spent some time there in the south in those years.

Once I was on a bus on what was called a Freedom Ride, that is, a purposefully integrated bus whose riders had the intention to nonviolently break down the racial barriers and test the laws that allowed segregation. People in cars came and forced the bus off the road, so it rolled sideways. It hit a large pole, so it didn't turn all the way over but lay half overturned in a ditch. People fell out of their seats. Then the people who had forced us off the road climbed up to the top where the windows now were. They had metal pipes and bricks. They broke the windows and they began to beat at us and throw bricks and stones. People were bleeding.

A woman near me, a black sister, was hit on the head with a brick and blood was running down her face. I was so filled with rage. Jesus said to love those who oppose us. The Buddha said hatred will never destroy hatred; only love will destroy hatred. In that moment, I didn't know how to love, because there was so much rage, so much hatred. I wasn't conscious of feeling afraid. I had done this before and felt I knew and accepted the risks. I was just outraged at this senseless violence.

After the man threw the brick at the woman next to me, I looked up at him through the window. In that moment I met his eyes and I saw his fear and his pain. Something shifted suddenly. It stopped being his fear, his pain. It just became our pain, our fear. Suddenly, I felt my heart open. The anger was still there, but it was no longer directed at an object. In that moment I could see how my anger wanted something to attack, some way of feeling safe again.

In that moment I saw that anger and loving kindness could exist together. I really saw that I had a choice. Anger could be a catalyst for hatred or anger could be a catalyst for compassion. I think it was in that moment that I learned not to be afraid of my anger. It's one of the most powerful lessons I've ever learned.

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We do not need to be afraid of our anger or of any emotion. When we bring them into our heart, they stop being my anger, my fear, my pain. They become the anger, fear and pain of the whole world.

I would like to hear from you now about what's happening in your practice and what questions you have.

Question: This is a question that's been floating on my mind and I haven't been able to express it. It might be a very pedestrian question, but I need to clarify—I want to know if you can change people's lives even if they won't meditate. If they won't meditate, how can I help them?

Barbara: My experience is that we can help other people, and we do so on different levels simultaneously. In order to help other people, though, we can't be attached to helping. We can only help another if our own ego doesn't **need** to help.

For example, if somebody comes to my door and they're starving, I can invite them to sit down at my table, and I can offer them a meal. If they don't like what I made them and they say, "No!" and walk out, it's their choice. I can only offer it. If my ego needs to have them take it, for whatever reasons, then service turns into a sort of violence.

Question: What if they won't come to you, because they don't even know. I am talking about my children. I want to influence, not interfere with them. It's like praying. How can I help them without them knowing? What I really want to know is with this meditation can you change things far from you, like praying for someone?

Barbara: You can pray for them, but they can only change themselves. It's like offering them the meal. They have to take it. The best way that you can change them through your meditation is through your own example of doing your own inner work, becoming more clear, calm and loving. They are likely to notice that and maybe to ask you about what you're doing. Everyone wants peace. When we see a happy person, we naturally want to know their secret!

If they experience certain kinds of pain and you always need to have them free of pain, then you deprive them of the consequences of their choices. As you become clearer and can allow them to experience the natural consequences without such fear, they are more likely to make more skillful choices. So that's another way you can help them.

Question: I know that, but this is related to another thing. Maybe it's prayer, not meditation. I want to be clear about where meditation stops and praying begins.

(Barbara notes that Aaron wishes to answer.)

Aaron: I am Aaron. Prayer is a form of energy work. In your deepest prayer, that totally selfless aspect of yourself offers loving energy which another may receive. Your prayer may actually bring together the energy of loving spirits, but even in prayer you cannot change another. Only they can change themselves. Your meditation gives you the opportunity to look at that in yourself which feels such anguish at another's pain. What is it in yourself that must fix the other, as if the other was broken? When you attend to that in yourself which is fear-based, you begin to relate, not to the other's brokenness, but to their wholeness. Your wholeness speaks to their wholeness. It is still their choice whether or not to listen, but here you hold a door open for them by your clarity and love. You stop trying to fix them or force them.

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When your fear speaks to their brokenness, that is what answers. When your wholeness and love speaks to their wholeness, you give them the opportunity to open to their wholeness and, from there, to make more loving and skillful choices for themselves. That is all.

Barbara: Are there other questions or things you would like to share about your practice?

Question: My physical pain returned and I was with it, and tension arose, and from the tension a deep sadness came. I was able to stay with the sadness and experience it.

Barbara: It sounds to me like you're working with this very skillfully. You know there is no way to fix pain. Pain arises and goes, arises again and goes. Sometimes we know specifically what it's about. Sometimes it seems very general, or has a special quality like sadness. When we're present with it, it may open its secrets.

Throughout many lifetimes, not just this one, we've stored certain kinds of energy in our bodies in certain habitual ways. To illustrate, I'm going to make a loud noise now. (*Shouts, "Hey!!"*) Did you feel yourself tense? What tensed? Did you tense your jaw? belly? back? Different people react from different parts of the body. The tension occurs in different places and is stored there. If I were to walk up and push you, you would tense in a certain way. The next person might tense in a different way. We've stored energy in many ways.

Now, as we meditate, we're giving our whole body permission to open, to release some of those old patterns. As we move deeper into the meditation, our body almost goes into a reverse gear. First, it experiences the tension and brings it to the surface, and then it releases it. Sometimes we see people having what we call physical releases, where they might really start trembling. It's an involuntary movement. It's an energy release, really from the tissue/cellular level of the body. The only way to work with this is to be very loving, very patient. Sit with the pain as long as you can. Give yourself permission to move when you need to move.

I went through a period of time when I had terrible pain up and down my back when I sat. It started suddenly for no apparent reason. I had not injured my back, but as soon as I sat, there was pain. I found myself needing to lie down to meditate. I couldn't sit. I worked with this pain for weeks. Suddenly, in meditation, I had a very brief past life image of a woman who I had been. All I saw was myself as a mother with a baby. There was an opening like a cave mouth and a flat area, where the baby was lying in the sun. I had climbed up the hill above the cave to pick berries. Somehow my movement caused a landslide. There was just this brief image of the baby there and myself trying to hold back the rocks. I couldn't do it. For a little while, yes, but I couldn't hold the mountain back. There was no one to help. I couldn't go down and move my baby. If I let go, he would be crushed. There was nothing I could do.

So, I just let myself see that image, cry, and feel the real anguish and helplessness of that. And then I started to see how much my life had given me metaphorical landslides, things like somebody being angry at me or disappointed in me, and how I would try to hold back to protect myself, to protect another, how when I felt something pushing me my energy would tighten up as if I were holding back a landslide, and then my back would hurt. I could see that pattern in many different places in my life. I

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began to watch in my daily life how I literally tightened these muscles, and I realized, "I don't need to do it that way anymore." I asked myself, "What if something feels like a monstrous wave pouring over me? Can I just let it pour over me?" As I relaxed and stopped trying to control what came up in meditation as if it were a landslide about to kill somebody, there was no more pain.

Slowly, what we need to learn comes up. We **do** learn it. Keep working the way you're working. If there's too much pain, then shift your position. Be very gentle, very kind to yourself. Other questions?

Question: Will you repeat the instructions for the tonglen meditation or can we do it again?

Barbara: I was going to close with a metta, or lovingkindness meditation, the meditation we did on Tuesday. If most of you would prefer, we could end with tonglen. Do you have a preference? Tonglen. Okay, we'll close with that.

Question: Please talk about food. Especially, do I need to be a vegetarian if I'm sincere about spiritual practice? What else should I be aware of? Eating carefully is hard for me.

Aaron: I am Aaron. If you had a beautiful temple, would you store garbage inside of it? Each of you will need to determine for yourselves what supports your body and what is harmful to your body. I do not believe it is necessary to be a vegetarian. Do you think the carrot that you eat does not have spirit to it? What matters is not what you eat, but how you eat it. When there is gratitude to that being, be it a fish or a carrot, that has given its life to support you, you lovingly bring the energy of that being into yourself.

As Barbara spoke of earlier, all things are interdependent. The wooden chair is made of sunlight, soil, oxygen, grain and the energy of the carpenter. You are made up of the energy of all you take into yourself. What matters far more than the precise nature of what you take into yourself is what the energy of that being is.

A chicken that suffered, was kept in a confined space and fed, only to be slaughtered, has a very unhappy energy. A chicken that was allowed to be a chicken, to wander the earth and pick up good food, to enjoy sunlight and fresh air, and then was killed, not with trauma in an assembly room, but with as much kindness as could be offered, asking forgiveness and offering love; this animal offers very positive energy. The same is true of your carrot or your orange. It must be raised, harvested and cooked with love.

There are certain things that seem to be harmful for your body. Anything in excess can be harmful. Learn to ask your body, not, "What do I want?" but "What do I need?" We're not talking about the taste. Your body knows what it needs. Learn to ask it.

I would generally consider caffeine to be harmful. I would generally consider an overuse of an alcoholic beverage to be harmful. The occasional cup of coffee or glass of wine is fine. Does your body need it right then?

When you eat, if you learn to eat mindfully, you can begin to feel the effects on your body of what you take into your body. Does it make the body hyper? Sluggish? Is it difficult for the body to digest it? If the effect is negative, then put it out of your diet. So, there are no hard and fast rules, simply choose with mindfulness and love. I pause.

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Barbara: Are there any other meditation related questions?

Question: Do you say that we should meditate for forty-five minutes?

Barbara: I do not say you **should** meditate for forty-five minutes. I say that seems to be a useful length of time, not too long, not too short.

Question: All at once?

Barbara: Yes, forty-five minutes all at once. I like people to meditate twice a day. If one sitting can be forty-five minutes and another five or ten minutes, that's fine.

Question: I think the benefit is greater when I meditate longer than that.

Barbara: Longer is fine if it works for you. It's important not to get so involved in meditation that we neglect the rest of life. Meditation can become an escape. I'm always cautious when people report that they meditate for five hours a day or something like that, outside of retreat. It can be fine but we must look at why we're meditating for that many hours. Is there some grasping involved, some state we want to create, or some aversion to the sensations and emotions that arise outside of formal practice?

For many people, I do think that forty-five minutes seems to be a good time for a single sitting, because most people are able to develop the ability to sit still for that long. Longer than forty-five minutes, often the legs fall asleep more or there's more body discomfort. Less than forty-five minutes is okay, but forty-five minutes seems to be long enough for mind really to settle down and move into this fluidity of staying with whatever is predominant, to be awake and present. So, forty-five minutes seems to be a good length of time for one sitting. But, don't take that to mean that if you don't have forty-five minutes, you have to just say, "I can't meditate today." If you have twenty-five minutes, meditate for twenty-five minutes. If you can meditate for forty-five minutes, wonderful!

Question: Must we keep our eyes closed?

Barbara: I'd prefer that people keep their eyes closed for this practice. There are other practices where we do keep our eyes open. There's too much stimulus if your eyes are open. Too many things to attend to. So, if you close them, it's a little bit quieter. Okay?

Question: I felt like my body was moving constantly. At the end, I felt disconnected from my body but very happy, blissful. It was hard to come back. I felt angry.

Barbara: First, you said that your body seemed to be moving constantly. Then, you said that when I rang the bell, it was hard to come back. Was there still awareness, still feeling the body was moving or had the body quieted then? (*The body had not quieted, but there was no more discomfort with the movement.*) Let me answer this as best I can and if it still leaves you with questions, please ask.

Sometimes when you wake up at three in the morning with a very small insect bite, it tends to itch enormously. You're very aware of it, because everything is quiet. So, all your attention comes to this very small pain. In meditation, as everything quiets, we really begin to experience our bodies on a cellular level.

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I was watching not just you, but everybody. You were not moving a lot in outward ways. What you were experiencing was an inner movement of the body. It's very minute. As body quiets, awareness becomes more precise, more able to feel the very small sensations, like a heartbeat or the pulse. Sometimes we can really feel the blood moving through our body. We can feel food digesting. We really are feeling that. I think that that's what you're experiencing when you feel movement.

Now, the second half of this. Given the waves on the ocean's surface that rise and fall down into the sea and may feel wild and out of control, first we try to jump over the waves to try to control them or do something with them. Then, we just let them go. As you sat with all of this movement of the body, it began just to go past without your attaching yourself to fixing it. Then, you were in a very quiet, possibly even blissful place. Then, I rang the bell. You may have experienced the contraction of desire, "I want to hold onto that peacefulness," and anger arose.

Desire to maintain blissful or expansive states is just another kind of contraction to watch. We can't hold onto the peacefulness of meditation. To try to hold onto it destroys the peacefulness.

When there is desire to hold on to blissful states, a sense that we'll lose something, we can start to ask, "What is it that I can't lose?" Do you understand what I mean by that? I'm going to read you something I was re-reading last night in The Ground We Share, and which I find very beautiful. Brother David Steindl-Rast is talking. He says:

A long time ago, I was sought out by a Christian sister of a religious order who was doing intensive zen practice. She had been told by a teacher to let go of everything and found herself in a dilemma. How could she possibly let go of Christ? I got in some trouble for telling her there was absolutely no question, that she was obliged to let go of Christ, and that she didn't have to worry the least bit, because anything important about Christ would only come to her after she let go.

Do you understand what he's saying? Meditation is a constant process of letting go. We keep coming to a new edge, a new place where we've held on, and we let go. And then we go a little further. We let go again. A little further. We let go again. We have to let go of everything, of attachments, of aversions, of pain, of bliss, whatever there is that we're holding on to. That's the ego self holding on.

To come to the true self, we have to keep letting go. The ego self gets thinner and thinner. Then, we start to experience the true self. When you're in a meditation and it's very blissful, and then the bell rings, or it's time to get up and go to work, or whatever is happening, one wants to hold on to the blissful state. This is the small self that obviously prefers bliss. Whenever bliss is noted, not just at the bell but as quickly as the state is noted, such as "seeing lights," or "floating," just bring attention to it, like you do with anything else. We note contracting, wanting, smelling something good—"pleasant, pleasant"—smelling something pungent—"unpleasant, unpleasant." We note the contractions of wanting or aversion. Blissful states are no different. Note the state in whatever way seems appropriate. If it's pleasant, note, "pleasant, pleasant." Note any contraction of wanting to hold on to it. When the bell rings, we note, "hearing, hearing." If there's awareness of the blissful state, wanting to hold on, we just notice it as "wanting, wanting."

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The blissful states come and go just as uncomfortable states do. A peace much deeper than those blissful states takes their place when we stop needing to hold on even to the blissful states. This is so important I'm going to repeat it. The blissful states come and go, and a level of our being that is a profoundly peaceful level is experienced when we are no longer attached even to the blissful states.

It's time for us to close. Please stand and stretch silently. Then we'll end with tonglen.

Experience yourself sitting in a cylinder of light. This is not just imagination. You really are sitting in a cylinder of light, only there's not usually much consciousness of that. Right here at the top of the head, at the crown chakra, there's a light and energy cord entering our bodies. You can use your imagination and allow yourself to feel it almost like a shower of light, touching your head and shoulders.

Breathe in, bringing in that light into the heart center. Breathe out. Breathe in that light again. Let it come down and feel it in your heart. Breathe out. Again, drawing in light with the inhale, feel it in the heart as you breathe out. Now this time, breathe in the light. Feel it in the heart center as you exhale. Breathe in, visualizing a person who is suffering, ideally somebody that you really know, maybe an aging parent or a sick friend. Breathe out, sending that light out, almost as if it were a ray of light coming out of your heart. Send it out with the breath to that person who is suffering.

Breathe in light. Exhale. Feel it in the heart center. Inhale, visualizing the one who is suffering. Exhale, sending it out to them, a gift to them.

Breathe in light. Exhale. Feel it in the heart. Inhale, visualizing the one who is suffering. Exhale. Send it out. Inhale light. Exhale from the heart.

Draw in light, into the heart, intention to release. Offer it out.

Inhale, heart, intention to release. Exhale. Send it out.

In. Exhale. Intention. Send it out. One step for each breath.

And then, the second part of the practice. Resting with the person who is suffering, visualize their suffering as a heavy, black, tar-like mass, very dark, sticky, heavy.

Inhale. Breathe it in. If there's resistance, simply note "resistance." If there's grabbing at it and wanting to be the martyr, note that, too. Breathe it in. As you exhale, let it also come in and touch the heart. Really let yourself feel that suffering.

Inhale. Intention to release.

Exhale. Release it out to the universe, or to God, the Buddha or Jesus.

Please note any desire to be rid of it. Just note it as aversion, fear or contraction. If there is desire to be rid of it, there is. No need to fight with that fear; just know it's present.

That's the whole second part. Inhale the suffering, exhale, letting it come into and touch the heart. Inhale, intention to release. Exhale, let it go.

(Some time of practice.)

We'll put the parts together. They alternate.

Inhale light.

Exhale. Light to the heart center.

Inhale, intention to release.

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Exhale. Send it out to the one who is suffering.
Inhale, drawing in that suffering, experienced as a heavy tar-like mass,
Exhale. Feel it in the heart center. Feel the heaviness of it.
Inhale, aware of the light that surrounds you.
Exhale. Release the heaviness, the darkness.

Inhale light.

That's it. Let's do it for ten minutes.

(Silent practice.)

May all beings everywhere be free of suffering. *(Bell)*

May all beings find the wholeness that is their truth. *(Bell)*

May all beings everywhere find perfect peace. *(Bell)*

Deep Spring Publications

NEWSLETTER

Deep Spring Center for Meditation and Spiritual Inquiry Newsletter: 8 ½ x 11, stapled, 20 pages

The newsletter, published three times a year, is offered on a donation basis. Our cost to print and mail this to you is \$7/year (\$10 Canadian).

BOOKS

We offer books at our cost, including mailing. All our books are 8 ½ x 11 and Cerlox bound.

Aaron: 1995 expanded edition, 123 pages. Includes many new chapters and a new format. \$10 (\$14 Canadian)

This is a basic book of Aaron's teachings, with selections taken from the most frequently asked questions: Who are we? Why are we incarnate? How can we best do the work we came to do? How can we live our lives with more wisdom and love?

Christmas Stories, A Collection of Memories from Aaron: Newly updated, 97 pages. \$6 (\$8 Canadian)

Aaron's inspiring memories from the past life in which he was a "simple shepherd" who knew and loved that teacher we call Jesus. Each year at Christmas Aaron has shared memories with us as "teaching stories."

No Chain at All: 150 pages. \$12 (\$15 Canadian)

This is very much the heart of what Aaron's been teaching. While you can just read through it, the book is really a workbook which invites your participation. To quote Aaron, *"I find the expression of this law of dependent origination to be one of Buddhism's most valuable contributions to the planet. It is called 'The Chain of Becoming.' Teachings speak of the way we have each become caught in this chain, moving blindly from one incarnation to another, never able to find freedom from suffering. This is real, on one plane. Yet on another level, there is no **chain at all**, nor has there ever been. You are free. You have always been free. In the coming months we will explore these truths and come to see that they are not contradictory ..."*

The Path of Natural Light, Parts 1 and 2: Part 1, 224 pages. Part 2, 230 pages. \$14 each part (\$20 Canadian)

These are **complete** transcripts of the 1993-1994 Wednesday night classes on relative versus ultimate reality, and light/energy work. From the book: *"I see our work then as finding that balance between relative and ultimate—the horizontal plane of healing and the vertical plane of knowing there was never anybody that needed to heal. With wisdom and pure awareness, that sense of self dissolves ... the whole notion of fragmentation was an illusion, but it is the illusion of the relative reality, and the suffering*

within that illusion must be attended. The human manifestation needs healing ... In past months we have been discussing the light body, the perfect, unwrinkled sheet of paper, the illusory wrinkles and how the physical, emotional and mental bodies reflect those wrinkles ... We move ahead with this caution: what I teach is not escape from your humanness, but deeper embracing of that humanness, wrinkles and all ... again, I remind you, you are not getting rid of. There was nothing there to get rid of. Rather, you are freeing yourself of the delusion that there was something that needed to be gotten rid of."

Seven Days: A Journey Into Awareness, Days One to Three, Part One: 105 pages. \$9 (\$12 Canadian)

There have been many requests for a book from Aaron about meditation. This book offers in-depth material on meditation practice with specific "how to" instruction. In November 1996, Barbara and Aaron offered a three day workshop/retreat in Mexico City. In April 1997 they returned to lead a four day silent residential meditation retreat. This book contains the transcripts of all of the talks and instruction, offered by both Aaron and Barbara, during the first three of those seven days. The first days deal more with spiritual inquiry and basic instruction in vipassana or insight meditation. There is a progressive deepening of instruction. There is also considerable discussion of working with heavy emotions and the various painful catalysts of our lives, with specific instruction offered for meditation with heavy mind states, resistance, restlessness, physical pain and other difficult states of mind and body. "Days One to Three" is the November workshop. "Days Three to Seven," the April retreat, will be available later.

The Awakened Heart: 147 pages. \$12 (\$15 Canadian)

Approximately 1300 years ago, the Buddhist Indian monk/poet Shantideva wrote "The Way of the Bodhisattva," elucidating an important part of the Buddhist path. "The Awakened Heart" is not commentary on the poem, but uses it as background. In Aaron's words: *"For many years you have heard me talk about making space for the heavy emotions. A primary emphasis of my teaching has been that it is not bad to feel emotions, that when certain conditions are present, certain emotions will arise ... I teach people to make more space around the emotion ... If you don't want those emotions to arise you must begin to look deeply at the conditions out of which they arise, primarily the conditions of fear, of the illusion of separation—separation from other beings, separation from the divine ... Through a series of practices and exercises, one could more deeply open to that highest aspect of the self which does not choose to invite in the conditions which give rise to such painful emotion. This is not a 'getting rid of' anything, rather we note that side by side there is the tense and frightened human and there is the innately loving, open-hearted human. You have a choice: you can enact your fear or you can choose to note your fear, to observe that the loving Awakened Heart is always present, to nurture it, and to enact that loving heart. You always have a choice."*