

The Awakened Heart

by Barbara Brodsky and Aaron



Deep Spring Publications

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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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Foreword

A note from Barbara

These talks were presented in the Wednesday night class over a six month period. Aaron did not offer new talks for the series every week as his intention was that we work with these practices and bring them into our lives, not merely hear them.

He repeated instructions and background frequently as the weeks and months passed, in order to clarify his basic intentions. We have chosen to maintain the integrity of these talks and publish them just as Aaron presented them. We found the repetition helpful, and trust that it will help you too, as you bring these teachings directly into your own lives.

Introduction to The Awakened Heart, excerpted and revised from the May 7, 1997 talk

Aaron: I am Aaron. Good evening, and my love to you all. I want to offer just a very few minutes of background. There are so many subjects that I could talk to you about. People want to know what the universe is about, who you are, where you came from and where you're going, what is the nature of human experience and what is the reason for human pain and confusion. People want to talk about somewhat esoteric subjects such as simultaneous, non-linear time. I'm happy to talk about all of these things, but my primary interest is to illuminate the incarnative experience and the use of that experience as pathway to maturity.

You're here, here with your joy and your pain, your clarity and your confusion. How do you live this life with more love, skill, and wisdom? While we do entertain a great many subjects here, the focus of most of my work is on this one question: How do you bring in love where there has previously only been fear? How do you bring in light where there has only been darkness?

I call you "angels in earthsuits." Each of you has this divine core of your being, the "angel," and here you are in your earthsuits. Sometimes the earthsuits feel very stiff and unwieldy. You feel trapped in incarnative experience and the angel in you wants to soar out of the body. Sometimes you feel so deeply immersed in the incarnative experience that you get lost in it and forget that you are angels. My hope is to guide you to find a balance. You are neither the angel alone nor the earthsuit alone, but quite literally are this divine energy incarnate into a human body, carrying an emotional and a mental body also. You are all of this.

Through this year, I will offer a series of talks which I have labeled "Awakened Heart." The premise for this series is as follows. Some of you for many years 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. Anger is just energy, for example. If anger arises it's not bad that it arose. Uncomfortable, yes. But you are not bad because anger arose in you. Jealousy, greed, impatience—all the same. If the conditions are present, the emotion will arise. I teach people to make more space around the emotion so that you do not

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need to fling it at others, which **does** do harm and for which action you **are** karmically responsible. I also teach you not to suppress it, because its energy solidifies in you, but to figuratively and literally invite it in for tea, just to make space around it, to know that emotion is present and not get into a relationship with it but come back to a place of clarity which observes how it arose and knows that it will pass.

For many years I have been talking about this process of making space around emotions and that emotions will arise if conditions are present for them to arise. 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.

I suggest that through a series of practices and exercises, one could more deeply open to that angel 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.

We will spend several months discussing how to connect with this Awakened Heart, how to experience it in the self. Then we will spend some time talking about how to stabilize that experience. Finally we will come to a series of talks about how to live from that Awakened Heart. That is all.

Acknowledgments

No work of this nature can come from just one, or even a few people. Aaron and I would especially like to thank those people whose energy, time, material resources and love have made this sharing of his work possible.

There are too many such friends to mention you all, but special recognition and loving gratitude must go to Janice Keller for countless hours of transcribing and to Ian Jaffray for editing and layout. These transcripts grew out of the hard work, commitment, and pure and loving energy of the Wednesday meditation group. Thanks to them for many hours of opening their hearts and thoughts to Aaron and inspiring his sharing.

This book is offered with the deepest gratitude to Aaron and the spirit and grace his energy represents. With humility and gratitude, too, to that lineage of which he was/is a part—to Aaron's teachers, and the procession of teachers before them who knew the value of these heart teachings, who each added to them with their own realizations, and passed them on to us. I hope they will touch your lives as deeply as they have touched mine.

For the clarity of these teachings, I bow to Aaron. For whatever may be confused or distorted, I accept responsibility.

Forehead to the floor and heart bursting with love, my heartfelt gratitude and devotion to my guru, Neem Karoli Baba, without whose grace none of this work with Aaron could have happened.

Barbara Brodsky

The Awakened Heart, Part One

December 11, 1996, Wednesday Night Group, Ann Arbor, Michigan

Aaron: Good evening, and my love to you all. I am Aaron. Tonight I am going to begin a series of talks in a somewhat new direction.

We have come to a time of year when you celebrate the birth of the one who was known as Jesus. I would speak of a place where Buddhist and Christian teachings come together. Buddhism speaks of beings called Bodhisattvas, beings who willingly return again and again until all beings find freedom from suffering. The Bodhisattva is a being usually thought of as an enlightened being who agrees to reincarnate to serve others, but the idea may be expanded to include any being whose deepest motivation is to serve others from a place of love. Clearly the one known as Jesus fits this description, that he came into incarnation solely to serve.

I have offered many teachings through the fall which are very precise mind teachings, observing the various contractions and watching the movements within what we have called "transition body." We must balance these teachings with the heart, and so this time just before Christmas seems like an opportune time to move deeper into a group of teachings of the open heart.

There is a word I want you to know, "bodhicitta." This translates to the pure Awakened Heart. It's not something that you will finally get when you're enlightened, it is within each of you. It's that part in each of you that's most deeply loving, that's generous, patient, kind and fearless too. Often your fears get in the way of your access to this loving heart. But it's always there. Within "bodhicitta" is the aspiration for service to all beings. While those of you who do not yet fully enact your enlightened state may not be here for the sole purpose of service, nevertheless service is still a high purpose to you. Service opens the heart to bodhicitta and bodhicitta inspires service.

The chain of teachings I would offer are not original to me. They were offered in formal context first by an eighth century teacher named Shantideva. I do not merely offer you a translation of Shantideva's teaching, for you could simply go and read it. I offer you my own interpretation, sometimes subtly different, sometimes very different. Nevertheless, what I plan to teach you for the next few months is drawn from Shantideva. I wish to credit this great teacher for clearly elucidating this path.

The teaching is broken into three parts. First, encouraging, nurturing, this loving heart. Second, once you've discovered, really made contact with this loving heart, how do you stay connected with it? What prevents that connection from disintegrating? Third, how do you really live from that heart? We've talked here of a progression of view, meditation and action. Perhaps in this case we could call the view the awareness of the loving heart and meditation that which supports it; then the action is that which takes it out boldly into the world.

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What is this pure Awakened Heart? I'm not talking precisely of rigpa here, although that is part of it, of course. I'm talking more about the deep loving aspiration within each of you which is present and observable when you are not fixated on your fear, aspiration which leads you to take care of, support and nourish others and help them be free of suffering, help them find joy, understanding and peace.

There is not one of you that's not familiar with how it feels to connect with this clear and loving space within. One small aspect of the feeling is the opening of the heart when you see a kitten or a puppy or some other baby animal. That animal's helplessness calls out in you that which wants to give and nurture. That's only one part of it, though.

There is also the part of you that deeply understands how things are, from your experience. When you see somebody who is suffering because they don't understand how things are, part of you wishes to help impart more clarity to that confusion and pain.

An example here is what one might experience observing a child watching an advertisement on television. The child wants that toy; she's got to have that toy. Of course you know that doll is not really going to walk and cry "mama." The child really doesn't understand the whole marketing strategy and that it's meant to ensnare. When you're free of anger, your heart goes out to that child who is suffering so much because of her desire. That's a very simple example. We can take it to much more profound levels, to understanding what creates suffering and where freedom really lies.

We have talked here a lot about the naturalness of the arising of physical sensation and emotion. When the conditions are present for an itch to arise, an itch is going to arise. When the conditions cease, the itch ceases. When the conditions are present for certain emotions to arise, those emotions will arise. And when the conditions cease, the emotions cease. Through the years I have worked hard to help you understand this truth, because so many of you chastised yourself because those emotions arose. I have said, and I stand by my statement: as long as you are in human form, emotions are going to arise.

This doesn't mean, though, that you just sit back, shrug and say, "Well, Aaron said anger is going to arise so just let me be angry." That is no more skillful than hating yourself because the anger arose. There's got to be a balance where you note the conditioned process of the arising of the emotion, note that amongst the conditions that led to that arising is ignorance and fear, and then work lovingly and skillfully to shatter ignorance and fear, not with hatred, never with hatred, but with kindness. You forge ahead and move into the place where ignorance is shattered, where fear is gone. So, yes, as long as you are in a human body, these emotions will arise, **but** they will arise less and less and less and have a much feebler grip on you as you gain in understanding and leave behind your old patterns of ignorance and fear.

We have worked with the wisdom path of understanding the conditioned nature of arising, watching the contractions in your body around that arising, and not fixating on what has arisen. We have not talked as much about nurturing this loving heart, through the nurturing of which fear is shattered and the emotions do fall away faster.

Let us use an example here. What are the various paths you may take when anger arises? First is mindfulness, which allows you to understand the conditioned nature of

the arising of anger and not be caught up in an identity as the angry one, which identity is both inviting and uncomfortable because the “angry one” is powerful. So mindfulness gives you space.

We’ve worked with the mindfulness practice of clear comprehension, and within that, “clear comprehension of purpose.” Within this practice, if anger arises and is noted as a conditioned arising and the conditions which gave rise to the anger are noted, you then have a choice and may ask, “What am I going to do with this anger?” Here you may ask yourself, “What is my highest purpose here?” Through understanding your highest purpose, which might be perhaps to create greater harmony and understanding, it becomes clear to you that you neither need to condemn yourself for what has arisen, nor do you need to enact what has arisen. If the highest purpose is to harmony, then you will not choose to enact the anger. If the highest purpose is to harmony, neither will you choose to attack the self because anger has arisen. The highest purpose leads you directly to compassion for the self and the entire situation. It leads to the clear seeing which allows the heavy emotion to dissolve.

Nevertheless, there are times when you do make unskillful choices, when your anger or other heavy emotion literally runs away with you because there wasn’t quite enough mindfulness or understanding. Here is where this “bodhicitta” comes in, this great loving heart. First, you’ve got to come in contact with this heart away from tense, emotional situations. You can simply practice bodhicitta. Practice it by observing the natural arising within the self of aspiration to serve others, just seeing that this natural desire is there and how loving it is. It is not a desire to serve others for your own benefit, just the natural loving desire to give and the great joy in participating in others’ happiness. We call it *mudita*, or sympathetic joy.

Finding this Awakened Heart within you, there is a very specific empowerment practice with which you can work when heavy emotion arises. The use of this practice allows you to transmute the heavy emotion into positive energy. The practice has four parts.

Step one is finding something in which you take refuge. This can be the Buddhist triple-gem of Buddha, dharma and sangha. It can be Jesus or Virgin Mary. It can be God itself. It can be goodness or kindness. This we call “finding the support.” In this step, when you look to this support, it’s not something out there, but you find that same lovingkindness and goodness within yourself. It’s a reminder that yes, this bodhicitta is within me and I can access it. It’s good to practice this before the heavy emotion arises so that when the heavy emotion comes up and you feel yourself being swept away by it, you can enter into that loving heart, that heart of the Buddha, heart of Jesus. So, step one is support.

Step two ... we could call this a mixture of regret and reflection. Perhaps the situation was that a very strong anger arose. Perhaps you did not need to enact that anger. You may criticize yourself for it, but you do understand how that anger arose out of a delusion of separate self and out of fear. Even though you were skillful with your anger, that angry energy still did reach out from you in certain ways, and your whole body reverberated with it. It certainly created discomfort, at the very least. Or perhaps you did enact your anger and said something unskillful or acted in an unskillful way. In either case, anger was experienced and at some level it caused pain.

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Whether the emotion was or was not enacted, we simply reflect upon how it arose and come deeply to understand the ignorance or delusion which led to this strong arising. This is not to be used as a cause to criticize yourself. You've not done anything bad. You're not evil. But there has been something unskillful that happened, and here you have the time to reflect with kindness on the various chains of fear and misunderstanding which led to the strong experience of this emotion. Recognition of the way negativity has arisen leads both to a regret and to reflection on how it happened. Within "regret" is not self-castigation and guilt, but an allowing to rise from the heart the strong aspiration not to allow the self to be so possessed by such energies in the future. There is true sorrow for what has arisen. Within "reflection" is the ability to see how the self's delusion was condition for the investiture into the emotion. Thus, one cultivates wisdom.

So this second step is regret and reflection on what has arisen. Regret feels from the loving heart that there is sorrow that this emotion arose so strongly as result of conditions. There's recognition that there was misunderstanding or delusion which was part of the condition. You are taking responsibility for what arose.

I want to be very clear this does not contradict anything I have previously said. We have observed the conditioned arising of emotion. We have learned to make space for our emotions and greet them with our open heart rather than entering into a war with them. My present teaching does not suggest that you enter into a war with what arose but that you now are ready to become more responsible for it and understand how it arose. You're not trying to fix blame here, you're only trying to see deeply and understand. The motivator must always be this bodhicitta, this deeply loving, pure Awakened Heart, which aspires to offer itself lovingly to all beings and without harm.

After a reflection and a sense of regret comes step three, a resolve not to repeat these unskillful words or actions, or even the resolve not to be ensnared by your anger in the same way, not to be caught by misunderstanding, even if the misunderstanding was not enacted. Here there is clarity that because you experienced the self as separate, because fear arose, and other conditions were present, certain emotions followed. So there is a deep resolve to work in more depth with penetrating the delusion of separation, to really bring non-dual awareness into your daily life and begin to see everything as made up of non-self elements, so as to be less likely to move into such fear and delusion which give birth to anger. Again I emphasize this is not a statement that what has happened before is to be met with condemnation. It's simply clear-seeing that what has happened has been painful and there are more skillful ways to do it, and that within this great heart is the ability to do it, the readiness for such responsibility.

So, we have the first three steps: support, reflection and regret, and deepening resolve. The fourth step involves antidotes to what has arisen, used skillfully, and various purification practices. Most religions teach certain purification practices, some of them more effective than others. In the Christian church, one goes to confession and then might say a number of prayers at the request of the priest. This is a kind of purification practice. In Buddhism one might do a number of prostrations. These do eventually create a certain kind of purification **when they are done skillfully**, but often they are not done skillfully but as punishment or recompense. Performed in this way, they do not really get to the heart of the issue.

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There is nothing bad about these practices. Used with skill, they can be useful. But they also can tend to avoid the real issue. So I prefer to apply the antidote rather than to depend solely on purification. This is one place where my teaching differs to some degree from Shantideva's original.

What are the antidotes? Where there is fear, lovingkindness, just the repetition of *metta* or lovingkindness meditation could be an antidote. If there is fear that leads to clinging, then a conscious practice of generosity can be an antidote. When I say "conscious practice of generosity" I mean that truly as a formal practice. What we do, for example, is to notice the fear, to greet the fear with a smile and with kindness, not with criticism, and then to consciously ask ourselves to go directly into that fear.

May I offer a very simple example. We've seen this happen at retreat. There is the lasagna in the pan and the last yogis come into the room. Everybody else has eaten. There's one piece of lasagna left. In the kitchen they say, "I'm sorry, we don't have any more." You came in first perhaps and you already took it on your plate and then somebody else appeared. You might note that impulse that sees somebody coming and wants to grab at it first, says, "mine!" So the antidote here is very consciously to offer it, just to observe it with great mindfulness, "How does it feel if I give this away?" This does not mean to become a martyr. First, simply, you're not going to starve; there is other food. More important, there's got to be nobody that's giving. If there's a martyr that's giving, that's just another place of misunderstanding. But how does it feel to give it? Here's where you touch that loving, ever-pure and open heart and let that heart touch your actions.

Somebody said to me recently, "When I'm in a situation where I'm confused, I think to myself, 'What would the Buddha or Jesus do here?'" Of course, you cannot always do it. For example, there are stories about the Buddha in his earlier lifetimes before his Great Awakening. There's a story where he came upon a starving mother tiger and her cubs. The animal was starving and so he literally offered himself, let himself be eaten that these animals might feed. He was ready to do that and could do it from a place that was not self, not martyr. You are not thus ready. So you might say to yourself, "Well, this is what the Buddha would do or this is what Jesus would do, but I can't do that." That's okay. You must be honest with yourselves. You're not trying to inflate self. You are merely finding that already existing generosity and letting that be the antidote to fear.

So you can ask, "What would the Buddha, or Jesus, do here?" and use that as a guideline, following it as far as you are able without more self arising. What you are really capable of is not something the brain can direct, it's an experience of the heart opening. And when you do it often enough, fear simply ceases to arise so fiercely.

If strong desire arises, the wisdom of impermanence can serve as an antidote to that desire. You want that item so much. You sit back and begin to think about what's going to happen after you get it. Maybe it's a beautiful necklace and you think about your dresser drawer in which there are a half a dozen necklaces, including some that you desperately wanted ten years ago and now they're tarnished and scratched, not really pretty any more at all.

So reflection on impermanence can be an antidote to desire. We move into the heart of desire, into the truth of suffering as it arises from craving, and see that the state of desire is just a movement of the mind and need not be treated as solid. This is hard

work. Your support, regret of previous acts, reflection on how such movement happened, and resolve not to repeat it are the foundations of this hard work and make it possible!

I'm not going to speak tonight about the antidotes to each type of arising, only to state that there **are** antidotes. We have spoken of them all here before. Beyond that, you don't need anybody to teach them to you. Your own intuition will tell you what they are. **The difficulty is not in knowing what the antidote is, it's in opening the heart and getting in touch with that deeply loving resolve which is willing to apply the antidote rather than to hide in fear and ignorance.** Of course there is fear of applying the antidote, fear of purification, because through these processes the self thins and becomes transparent, and self is a firmly established habit! But keep in mind the continual suffering which is the alternative.

This four-step process, then, is very profound and deeply empowering. In fact, the traditional name given to this practice is the practice of the Four Empowerments. It takes you one giant step beyond the simple awareness of what is arising and non-fixation with it. It brings in the ever-open heart and the deep resolve to live your life in love and non-harm. It is equally exemplified in the lives of Buddha and of Jesus. Let them be your models.

On further nights I will talk more about this practice of the loving heart and how you can bring it directly into your life with specific practices like the one I've just taught you. The greatest gift you can give to the one known as Jesus at this time of his birth is to find his bodhicitta in yourself, to allow that pure heart increasing power, and to take responsibility, so that when heavy emotions do arise, as of course they will, you are able not to fixate on those emotions but to truly begin a healing and growth process. In this way the emotions themselves become a gift because they become the catalyst which leads you back into the loving heart and helps you to further enact the love of that heart rather than acting in fear. The emotions themselves are wisdom! That is all.

Q: Would Aaron briefly review the second step of the process he described?

Aaron: I am Aaron. The second step is a combination of reflection and regret. When I say regret I don't mean self-chastisement and guilt. Guilt is not productive. Guilt enhances self. I mean truly getting in touch with that within you which feels sorry for that which has arisen, and the ways it manifested itself, with that which sees clearly. One does not say, "It's my fault," and use such blame to criticize the self in ways that solidify self. One sees clearly that this did arise because certain conditions were present, among them one's own unwillingness to be more present with one's fear, one's own unwillingness to move more deeply into the truths of emptiness of self and non-separation.

In other words you might see that because you maintained a certain deluded belief, that condition gave rise to certain further emotions which were painful to yourself and others. So regret here is not chastisement and guilt, it really is a very kind opening of the heart, which allows one to feel sorrow not only for its own misunderstandings but for the whole universe of misunderstanding. Here are reflection upon how things really are and regret for the kinds of confusion that you have nurtured through your own fear and ignorance.

The Awakened Heart, Part Two

January 15, 1997, Wednesday Night Group

Aaron: Good evening and my love to you all, and a deep bow to you for braving the snowstorm. I am always moved by the sincerity and the love of those who come here seeking for deeper understanding, and that you are willing to put yourself to some discomfort in order to nurture that understanding.

For many years we have worked together on a primary distortion which most of you carry. That is, the distortion of the idea that you should not have heavy emotions. So many of you have aspired so deeply to offer your energy with love to the world and have been moved to great judgment and attack of the self because negativity occasionally arises.

Our primary past work together, then, has been to help you deeply to understand that emotions, like physical sensations, will arise when the conditions are present for them to arise, and that as long as you are in human form, you're not going to do away completely with those conditions. Our focus through the years here has been two-fold: the acquisition of wisdom which understands how emotion arises, and a greater equanimity with those emotions so that there's no fixation on them, so that you don't own them nor they own you. You begin to understand arising as not-self. In this way you have come to understand that you need neither be reactive to them nor suppress them, but simply can view them as that dark cloud passing across the sky, noting the passing with kindness. All of you have worked with me on these understandings in depth, and you have all become proficient to some degree at not condemning yourself, nor getting into a relationship with what arose.

In December we began a new phase of our work with just one class, the notes of which have been handed out tonight. This is an ongoing teaching that I will be offering for many weeks through this spring semester. While you understand that heavy emotions will arise if the conditions are present for their arising, you also understand that you do have some say about those conditions. You understand that there are practices you can do which help to minimize the conditions under which heavy emotion will arise. Our present goal is not the cessation of heavy emotion but simply to move deeper into heart-centered practices, purification practices and antidotes to weaken the conditions which give rise to the heavy emotions.

We are not attacking the heavy emotions. If they arise, they arise, and there need be no relationship with them. But they are uncomfortable. Some of the energy of them does leak out regardless of how much you try to confine it, regardless of how centered you may be with the arising. And so it is more skillful not to have them arise, and more comfortable.

The practice that I introduced before Christmas is one phase of a larger practice. I introduced you to four steps that have been named the Four Empowerments or Four Powers. Within that practice, first you open your heart to that which supports your resolution to offer your energy to the world in great love, to do no harm, to do only

good. You may turn to the Christ energy, or the Buddha, or to any beloved teacher, or merely to the force of Love itself, and from that being find support for your resolve.

The second stage—I pass through these very briefly; you have just received the transcript of that talk with details—the second stage is one of reflection about the mind state that has arisen in you, such as anger or jealousy or greed, and a reflection on just how that arose. The reflection takes you into the wisdom mind which understands dependent arising, understands how it arose out of conditions, and does not send out blame for it, but simply sees that it arose because of delusion and ignorance and fear. Within this reflection there is regret for, or more accurately, sorrow for that which has arisen, and an acceptance of responsibility for the delusion, fear and sense of self which did serve as condition for that negative mind state to arise.

The third part is the resolution not to continue that habit. The resolution comes from a deep place of love which sees that the habit, for example, of jealousy, has created suffering for yourself and for others, and that it is merely a habit, that it does not need to be perpetuated. It sees that from the most centered place of loving wisdom there is no delusion able to give rise to jealousy. The fourth step is a willingness to engage the various specific antidotes to anger or jealousy or greed or whatever that habitual negative pattern may be. I asked those who were present to practice with these four steps with some current catalyst and mental formation.

Now I want to take these four steps and put them into a larger practice. I would like to state first that while what I am offering here may seem long and intricate, you do reach a point where you can go through these steps very quickly. By way of example, let us use impatience. You may feel impatience arising. Just note it and feel the tension in it. You may note that there is no contraction around the impatience, no need to try and push it away, no need to enact it, but that it does still carry a tension that's uncomfortable. Very quickly, in just a moment, your mind may turn toward whatever Being may be your choice, a Being who you feel in your heart has thoroughly transcended impatience. This may be a being such as Buddha or the Christ, or a recent being such as Mother Theresa or Gandhi.

Within just a few seconds you can bring the sense of that impatience into your heart and allow yourself to feel real regret for it. The reflection need not be lengthy, you already understand how it arose, so it's not a lengthy process of understanding, just an acknowledgment of the understanding which already exists: this impatience arose because certain conditions were present. Perhaps you may note, "Fear and a sense of solid self are present and are causing pain within this mind-body experience." **The resolution is not to get rid of the impatience, the resolution is to work more firmly with that which gave rise to the impatience. We do not chase after the result but attend to the conditions. This is not getting rid of, we're going back to the source, which is not even ignorance itself, but lack of mindfulness, inattentance to fear so that there is clinging to ignorance.**

At this moment you don't know what the antidote is. That is part of the larger practice we are going to get into. But with the resolve not to perpetuate the habit of impatience comes the **willingness** to apply the antidote. It's not the application of it yet, but the willingness to apply it, which is primary. This is important. If you are willing to apply it

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then you will find the proper antidote and will learn to apply it. The heart must be there and be willing. There must be willingness not to continue to take refuge in your fear.

When I spoke of these practices in December, I said that they were all a part of a teaching that I find defined very specifically in Buddhism but it is also found in Christianity, in Judaism, in Islam, in Sufi teachings, in native American teachings of some kinds. I'm going to teach it to you using the Buddhist model not because that model is better but only because it is the one with whose vocabulary I am most familiar. But I'm not teaching you a Buddhist practice, I am teaching you a spiritual practice. I ask you to take it back into your lives and make it your own.

What I teach here comes from an eighth century Buddhist teacher named Shantideva. It is not unique with him. He wrote it out in a very beautiful poem, but he did not originate it. It is the practice of bodhicitta, or Awakened Heart. This Awakened Heart is not something you must seek to create, it is something that has always been there but is obscured by the clouds of delusion, ignorance and fear. So all I am teaching you is a way to more deeply open to the bodhicitta already present in the heart.

We begin in a very specific way a practice that is variously called "the seven-fold prayer" or "the seven-branch prayer." There is a very similar practice in ancient Judaism, whose Hebrew name I will not attempt to offer. I would ask you at this point to sit erect for meditation and I'm going to take you through this process step by step.

The function of this process is to help to open the heart, to help to nurture bodhicitta, or this fully awakened and loving heart. When you have access to this heart, it is a tremendous support in your resolve to move away from the old habits of fear and negativity. Seven steps. The four-part step we have just reviewed, that which I taught in December, is the third step and the most intricate. The others are far simpler.

First, I would ask you to bring to your heart and mind the image of one whom you regard as teacher, or if there is no specific being that fills this function for you, simply bring in either the thought of all beings who have preceded you, who have done this hard work that you now do, and moved beyond third density, have clarified their energy in that way. All of these are your teachers! Or simply bring in the image of Light itself, the Ever-Perfect, the Divine, in whatever form you experience it.

Open from your own heart to your willingness to honor this energy, be it a specific entity, living or past, or a collection of energies, or be it that which we call Ever-Perfect. I'm going to be quiet for a moment and ask you to offer this love, this devotion, to the principle which this entity stands for and, if applicable, to the entity itself, from your heart.

(Pause)

The second stage is one of offering. You offer all of yourself to this energy. This that is all-good, all-beautiful—what do you offer it? You can offer it the white snow and clear mountain streams, moonlight and sunlight, flowers and the laughter of children. No, these do not belong to you but you are a part of these and they are a part of you, because you are inter-connected to everything, and so you **can** offer sunlight and laughter. Offer also that which is immediate expression of the self: your body, your mind, your energy. There needs to be a fervent wish here: "Whatever I have that can be

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used by the forces of light for the alleviation of suffering, I freely offer it. Use me. Let me be a channel for love and for light." Again I will be quiet.

(Pause)

Then we move on to the third phase. The term that is traditionally used here is confession, but I think that word may have negative emotional connotations of a demeaning of the self, rather than simply as "surrender," for some of you. This step is simply an opening of your heart that acknowledges, "I have used my energy in ways that have harmed others. I have acted, spoken, or had thoughts that were unskillful, and if fixated upon and perpetuated, would lead to harm." This is the four-part practice of which we just spoke: support, then reflection and regret, and so forth. You have already done the first part, which is support. Then this reflection and regret, then resolve not to perpetuate those habits and a willingness to seek out and apply the antidotes, and to purify the self. I will be quiet while you do this.

(Pause)

The fourth step is to move out of yourself. When you look around you see that there are other beings who have done harm but there are also vast numbers of beings who have done good. The fourth phase is a nurturing of sympathetic joy or *mudita*. Some of you met this word last year when you worked in meditation class with the heavenly-abode or *brahma-vihara* practices.

This is simply looking around at those who are able to greet heavy catalyst with an open heart, without greed or jealousy or fear. Instead of feeling threatened by what they do, you allow yourself to experience a deep joy that beings are able to open their hearts in this way for the good of all beings, including yourself. Of course, if there is jealousy in seeing that they can do this and you can't then you simply work with the jealousy, not attacking it, just recognizing it and seeing it as another cloud, seeing it as a habitual cloud. Offer the self deep kindness that it arose but also offer the intention to move past this particular habitual pattern and a willingness to apply the antidotes.

We're touching here on that old question, "What if I wasn't feeling fear or anger or greed or separation or whatever? What might I be feeling?" As you have worked with that question through the years you've learned to be very honest with yourselves. Fear is a habit. It grows out of the illusion of separation. You do not need to continue to practice this habit. This practice of sympathetic joy is an essential part of the seven-fold teaching. It's also something quite valuable to practice independently.

In practice of it now, what I would ask you to do is to bring to mind something that happened in the past day or two, somebody who acted in a loving way, somebody who could have been greedy but was generous, somebody who could have acted as if they were threatened but instead was kind and receptive to criticism, and so forth. Choose just one situation. Observe how that person opened in a way that may have been difficult for you in the same situation and, as much as you can, let your heart open to what they gave and offer thanks for it. I pause.

(Pause)

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The fifth step. This is to offer thanks that there are those such as the one you just reflected on who are teachers of love, and to ask them to remain available to you. Let us do this.

(Pause)

If it is useful to you to address these thoughts to a very high being such as the Buddha or the Christ, of course you may do that. Please recognize though, that you are addressing teachers at every level, and asking that they continue to be available to you. And the sixth step, which may be merged with step five, is from deep within your heart to ask to be taught. You have acknowledged that there are places where you're stuck. You have acknowledged with joy that there are teachers. Now you ask to be taught. Within that asking there's a sense of surrender; you are not going to cling to old patterns, but offer a willingness to learn. I pause while you do it.

(Pause)

The seventh step is what is traditionally called "dedication of merit." You simply ask from the heart that any value that grows out of the work we are doing not be kept selfishly for the self but be offered in love to all beings.

(Pause)

This then is what we call the Seven-Fold Prayer. If it feels appropriate to you, I suggest you use it at the beginning of your meditation on a daily basis. It doesn't need to take long, but also you're not taking time away from your meditation. This simply becomes the beginning of the meditation and gives you great support for the practice that follows. Please feel free to amend it to fit your own situation, your own particular religious path.

This practice and what I taught in December comprise the first three chapters of Shantideva's poem, "The Bodhicaryavatara," which I am using as a model for this teaching. His entire poem is ten chapters. The first three are about opening bodhicitta, about experiencing the Self, finding that open and loving heart. Further chapters are about very specific instruction about how we stay connected with bodhicitta, stabilize it and enact it in the world. Through the coming months we will cover those other chapters one at a time. I will not speak on this teaching every week because I'd like to give you some time to work with it. It's not something I want to race through, but regularly through the coming months, perhaps twice a month, I will speak about it. Let it be a balance for you to the wisdom practices that we have done, to insight and clarity.

I will pause now to hear your questions, both about that which I have spoken of or any other personal questions you have carried with you to today's session. That is all.

Barbara: Questions? D?

D: In the talk from December, Aaron's description of the second step focused on how fear is a manifestation of the illusion of a separate self. That's fine, but it's an intellectual issue for me, especially when I am in the midst of fear. Is he suggesting that we just remind ourselves of that fact, or to try and experience in detail our fear and the details of what we are frightened about? Or just kind of step back and say, "This fear is based on old reasons." How specifically do we investigate?

Aaron: I am Aaron. I hear your question, D. All of the above, is my answer. You do understand from your meditation experience it's not just conceptual. Each of you has experienced a place where self seems to fall away and you deeply experience your interconnection. In that space there is no fear. So each of you have the insight that fear is a habit that is resultant from this illusion of separation. Granted, in the moment of fear, this remains conceptual idea: you're not feeling integration of what the heart knows and what the human is able to manifest. This is why we have spent years learning how to work with fear in skillful ways. But you can spend the rest of—not just this lifetime but innumerable lifetimes—working with fear in skillful ways and still practice the habit of fear. At a certain point, just to continue to work with fear is to “practice” it, as would be denial of that fear. Then you must rest in the deepest truth of the Self, which is fearless. To begin this, at some point there's got to be the insight, “This is just a habit. Maybe I don't have to do it this way any more.”

We are working with fear. You know enough to bring kindness to the being that's quaking with fear and not to shame that being. This much you've firmly established. All of these supports—the awareness that others have gone before you and climbed this very steep mountain, the awareness that these teachers are available to you, your deep aspiration to do no harm, to do good—all of these supports help you break the habit of delusion and of fear, and thereby rest in clarity. Perhaps “break” is not the best term, help you transcend that habit. If fear clings, let it cling. You've become quite skilled at not being very reactive to it. Whatever bits of reactivity there are, there will be. Simply remind yourself, “I am not alone here. Teachers and teachings are available. Hope is available. And this great heart of mine can carry through with its resolve not to get quite so stuck.” Note how I'm phrasing it, not “not to get stuck” but “not to get quite so stuck.” Clarity is already present, but you find access to it gradually. We're simply beginning to say, “No, maybe I don't have to get so stuck here, and keep doing it this way.” Does this answer your question, D? I pause.

D: For now.

Barbara: Aaron says, what we've essentially done is we've climbed a great big mountain and reached the top and realized that there's another mountain going beyond! And now we're preparing to climb the next mountain.

Di: Now we all want to know: how many mountains are there!

Barbara: Aaron says there is only this one more!

Ca and A: It's a chain!

Barbara: I'm paraphrasing Aaron. He says there's just this one that started out with foothills and became very steep. As we learned to work with the heavy emotions, and deepened vipassana practice and learned to understand dependent arising, slowly we have come into a kind of plateau. Now we really are becoming aware; when we look back there's a vast view, there's a lot more spaciousness in our lives. But, when we turn ahead and look, heavy emotions, or what Buddhism calls “the defilements,” or unpurified emotions, still exist. There's still the second mountain, he says, but it's not a series of mountains, it's just one more mountain. Then, at the top truly is the place where we no longer experience delusion or fear.

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Aaron wants to say here that, in December, what he taught—which was step three of what he taught today—he taught as a practice to do right there in that moment as your heavy emotion or confusion had arisen, or if you had said or done something very unskillful. He says that there's a subtle difference in what he's teaching tonight in that this third step can be used right in this moment with this arising of the heavy emotion and its enactment, or, as taught tonight, it can be used in this extended practice, simply reflecting on the ways that we've acted with heavy emotions, and with arising regret, offering our resolve not to do them any more. So, one use is in the present and one is reflection back as part of this longer practice.

Ce: I am wondering about Aaron's use of the expression, "offer your energy." Is that a way to say, "Offer yourself without self or 'I'"?

Aaron: I am Aaron. I hear your question, Ce. To "offer your energy" is to offer the purest aspect, that energy which truly is not "yours" but is only your personal experience of the energy of the universe.

Please remember all of this is process and practice. When you offer the self and it comes from a very deep and loving place, it may at first be very selfless. And then you may wonder, "How much is going to be asked of me? I've already given my body, my heart, my energy for the use of that heart of love and light in the universe, and now give more as I offer myself fully as instrument of the Light and Love. Do I have any qualifications to that offer?" So as you note the qualifications, such as that you will feel no pain, not be destroyed, or so forth, it's a wonderful place simply to note fear, to note how the self comes back. That which is not self knows it cannot be destroyed!

I say "offer your energy" to remind you that there is no self to offer it!

You're not asked to become a perfectly clear instrument which Light may use. You are asked to work toward that end. The working toward has as much value as the being of that instrument in itself. So it's very important that you not get fixed into an idea, "Now I am going to totally sacrifice the self," because there must not be a sense of sacrifice or there's a self that's doing it and there are ulterior motives. You give of yourself what you are able to give from a place of deep joy and love, and you mindfully note whatever fear ends the ability to give with joy. And right there, at that edge, is where you work to open yourself just a bit further. Do you understand? I pause.

The Awakened Heart, Part Three

January 22, 1997, Wednesday Night Group

Aaron: Good evening and my love to you all. I am Aaron. In the past weeks I've been talking about a very specific teaching directed toward learning to rest in the innate open and loving heart and, additionally, cultivating that within the self which aspires to offer its energy with love to all beings. All of you here aspire to offer your energy lovingly, but what "lovingly" means has shifted through your incarnations.

Once, many incarnations ago when you were young, you did not aspire to offer your energy lovingly to others, but primarily to the self. This service also is "love," but is a narrow perspective of love, biased by fear. You used your fear as an armor, and with that armor sought to cherish and protect the self no matter what cost to those perceived as others. As you matured, you began to understand that you could not find happiness and still separate yourself from others in that way, that your own happiness and the happiness of those around you was inextricably connected and so could not be selfishly derived.

All of you, as human, experience occasional fear and delusion. Out of that fear and delusion arise emotions of anger, jealousy, greed, pride and so forth. You began to believe that it was the arising emotions, themselves, which were cause for your suffering. Without those emotions, you believed it would be easy to offer the self in service to others, which openhearted offering of service was seen increasingly as the desired goal. So there was the thought that these heavy emotions were the cause of your confusion, and the work was to destroy the heavy emotions.

This distorted perception both supported and was fed by distortions in all of your major religions. Your traditional religions name the heavy emotions in ways that have very negative connotations. Christianity calls them sins. Buddhism calls them *kilesas*, which term is translated as "defilements," although I consider the proper translation as "tarnish." Certainly greed, pride, anger, jealousy and so forth, do create real pain. In the book on which I have been offering commentary, in the fourth chapter, Shantideva talks about these negative emotions as the enemy. He says you can't make friends with these, says he has been slave to them for how many lifetimes. He says that although his mortal enemies die, his heavy emotions continue to enslave him and trap him in misery. "I do not care if my guts ooze out ... never shall I bow down to the enemy, the defilements." (Chapter four, phrase forty-four.)

Certainly we can all understand what he means by this. And yet, such thinking does lead us in a direction of hatred of these emotions. Is he asking us to get rid of them, or to cease to be enslaved by them? What really ends such enslavement?

Here it gets very tricky. Certainly it would seem skillful to be rid of them. There's no argument with that. The argument is in how we get rid of them. Again, your different religions offer different slants on it, different techniques. But within most different techniques there is that twist of negative bias which says "I must conquer this" and

speaks of it as an act of will, and that you must literally cut out something from yourself which has attached to the self.

My dear ones, if you are already whole, how can you be asked to do surgery on yourself and cut away that which you have deemed "bad"? I ask you to visualize a garden. You plant flowers in healthy soil. Seeds of weeds also blow in and entrench themselves in the soil. Do you really need to get rid of the weeds in order to have healthy plants? If you fertilize these plants, give them plenty of water and sunlight and loving care, and gently bend away the weeds which are closest to the plants, the plant is going to thrive. If you tear out the weeds, might you not also disturb the roots of the flowering plants?

The metaphor loses its power here because of course the weed will also thrive. But if the plant gets big enough, eventually the plant will choke out the weed. You do not have to go in with a trowel and dig out the negativity in the self, but simply to note it with awareness, to note that it is not skillful, to deepen the resolve not to be enslaved by that negativity, and to come back to the loving heart, to the deepest strength, beauty and purity of the self which is and always has been there.

Please notice that I am not suggesting that you can just let the plant and weeds all grow together without any care of the plant. Yes, if the plant is not nurtured, the weeds will take over. If the loving aspiration to offer your energy with as much purity and clarity as possible is not nurtured, then these fear-based emotions will take over. So I'm not suggesting mere complacency, not suggesting that you simply shrug and say, "Oh, it doesn't matter." It does matter. Of course it matters. But how are we going to treat this fear?

Some years ago at a very traditional Theravadin Buddhist meditation retreat led by a well-known eastern meditation master, Barbara came into his presence for a private interview. He asked her what was happening in her practice and she described the mental noting that she was doing. Then he said to her, "It is good that you know how to note. Stay very present and aware and continue noting. If you are totally present, then there is no space for the defilements to arise. Be vigilant and you will conquer the defilements." She received this teaching very precisely, as the translator wrote it word by word in her notebook.

Barbara felt very disturbed after this meeting because she deeply wished to do just that, to conquer the defilements which brought her such pain and brought pain to others. And yet intuitively she understood that to wage war on them was simply to empower them.

A friend has told us of a similar meeting with a Catholic priest during a retreat. The priest suggested to her, each time a mind-state of anger or desire arises, abolish it, forbid it to be present, turn your attention instead to God and forbid the presence of that evil mind-state. It's the same teaching, the same distortion. We understand the intention, but there is a slant which must be noted and attended: kill the defilements!

I say to you so many times that as long as you are human, physical sensations will continue to arise because you have a physical body, and emotions will continue to arise because you have an emotional body. Do not give them power over you. They are merely tarnish on the wings of the angel! Yet, given that your deepest aspiration is

to express the purity and beauty of your true nature free of these heavy mind-states, what are you to do?

Those of you who have worked with me for many years have worked in depth with my fundamental teaching, "Whatever arises, simply note its presence and make space around it, and do not move into a relationship with it which will empower it." You all understand that teaching. Those who have worked with me for some time know how to do this quite skillfully. You've learned the basic technique for disempowering them, which is mindfulness of their arising, mindfulness at all the sense gates so nothing may arise without your presence, may not sneak in and take over like a bandit who enters in the night while the householder sleeps. There must be mindfulness of how they arise, due to conditions, mindfulness of how you do get snared into combat with them, and finally, a willingness to make more space around them so that you do not have to suppress them or enact them.

The teachings we are currently working with go one step further. I emphasized last week the importance of a willingness not to get into relationship with them. We talked about this process of reflection and regret that these had arisen, of deep resolution to move into a clarity within which they at least may begin to cease to arise so strongly, and a willingness to work with the antidotes to them.

You have got to know deep inside, "I'm willing to do this hard work." It would be as if you had a deep splinter in your foot and it was painful every time you took a step. You might build a fence around the pain, try to pretend it wasn't there, but it is there and it does agonize. At some point you're going to have to go into the wound, open it up and pull out that splinter. This is the antidote to the splinter, and the application of it can be painful. So the natural tendency is to try everything else first.

Note that the application of these antidotes can be painful. Have you tried everything else? Are you willing to continue to live with the powerful arising of these emotions? If not, what helps support the resolve to offer the antidote? Let us use the example of fear-based greed. I'm not talking here about somebody who is very stingy, someone who will never give of themselves but deeply enacts their fear, I'm talking about the kind of people in this room who offer their energy, material resources and their hearts very generously to others, but are aware of the occasional arising of fear. You have learned how to attend that fear and not need to be reactive to it.

Now, what if I say to you, especially to those of you for whom this is a primary issue, one of the antidotes to this greed is the conscious practice of generosity? What if that which I ask you to do is, whenever something comes to you which is of special delight, to give it away? Can you feel yourself recoil from that idea? "But Aaron, it's too much." Give it away!

I'm not talking about giving away the air you must breathe, I'm talking about giving away the pretty pair of socks you got for Christmas, or the record. Listen to it, enjoy it, and then give it away. You must do it mindfully. There must be deep awareness of the fear that's present. There must be a willingness to be present with that fear and to offer deep lovingkindness to the human who is afraid.

Just for trial's sake, give away that record and promise yourself, "If I can't live without it, I may go out next week and buy myself another copy. But just for now I'm going to see

how it feels to be without it, and, with the practice of *mudita* (sympathetic joy), to relish somebody else's enjoyment of it." Don't be harsh with yourself; don't push yourself far beyond your limits, but do push yourself right up to those limits and then just a little bit beyond. Keep challenging yourself.

For those of you for whom anger is a primary issue, I would ask of you to sit in meditation and from the heart to look deeply into the situation or at the being toward whom there is anger, to reflect upon the thoughts and emotions that gave rise to that anger, to allow your heart to touch that which really feels sorrow about the anger, and to allow the heart to touch on a deep resolution, to transcend anger in your life. Of course we do this with implicit forgiveness toward the human self who is not going to be able to perfectly transcend anger. If anger arises, anger arises. There's nothing there to become excited about. But each time it does arise, I challenge you to move through this process of reflection, regret, resolution and a willingness to apply the antidote.

And here, one antidote to anger is service toward the one toward whom you are angry. You must really connect yourself with that person or situation. If it's your boss, and this boss is overbearing, judgmental, never gives you credit for your work but always complains, I would ask you as part of this challenge to put first into your mind the question, "How can I offer this very unhappy human some release from its pain?" Of course, you can't make anybody else happy; he must find his own happiness. But in what way can you serve him so as to bring a bit more joy into his life and still not compromise your own truth? I'm not asking you to become a doormat to his abuse, not asking you to allow yourself to be abused by him. You must say no, lovingly, to abuse. But perhaps he'd like that record album. Perhaps there's some other small kindness you can do for him.

You try to look deeply and to see a suffering human there. This opening into the heart of compassion, and nurturance of sympathetic joy, is one of the antidotes to anger. But you must be willing to apply the antidote, which means you must be willing not to hold onto your anger for your own empowerment. This is the hard part. In order to do it well you must be very honest with yourself. You must look deeply at that which wishes to hold onto greed, to anger, to pride. You must look deeply at the way those emotions have made you feel safe, or whole, and you must be willing to find your safety elsewhere. This is very difficult and demanding work, but it's workable. It can be done. And—as aside—it needs to be done without pride or enhancement of the ego! Aha!

The defilements, sins or however we name them—I prefer the very neutral term, "heavy emotions"—these will arise. No matter how hard you work, at some times they still will arise, but they will arise less and less and less until you find yourself very largely free of them. This will not happen by willpower nor by attack of them. It will not happen with a "fix it" mentality which fragments the self. It will only happen by coming to know your wholeness, and by taking increasing responsibility for being the whole human being that you are, not hiding behind your heavy emotions, not hiding behind blame.

The greatest support for this work is what we have been discussing for the past two weeks, opening this deeply loving heart, what the Buddhist tradition calls inspiring *bodhicitta*; what the Christian tradition might call dwelling in the Christ Self. Know, my dear ones, that you **are** divine and it is your choice whether to enact that divinity or to hide it in helplessness which does not yet feel able to declare the divinity.

There are many other supports for this work. The practice I described last week, called in the Buddhist tradition, “The Seven-fold Prayer,” is a very powerful support. I remarked last week that this prayer finds its parallels in every other religious system. I offered the Buddhist model only because it’s the one in which I have the deepest understanding. But it doesn’t matter in which tradition you find it, the process is the same.

I’m not going to repeat these seven steps. The written transcript is available. In coming weeks and months, however, we will expand on the practice of bodhicitta, using these seven steps as a base. We’ll take a closer look at various pathways toward more fully living from your divinity, and how to nurture the willingness to do so. It must always come from a place of deep kindness and love. And if you fall short on occasion, there must always be compassion and forgiveness. In this way you cannot help but succeed in the end.

The fourth chapter in Shantideva’s book is about carefulness or vigilance. As I close I would speak briefly about that chapter. I have already stated that I contradict the interpretation often given to Chapter Four, which says these are my foes and I must attack—yes, he does say that, but the translation is a bit distorted from his original intent. Within his original intent there was some distortion toward attack, but translations all carry that distortion further.

Chapter Four is about vigilance. There must be carefulness, as the poem suggests, but towards what? Not carefulness toward eradicating the heavy emotions, but carefulness toward nurturing this ever-present, deeply loving heart and its aspiration to express itself with great purity and love. Carefulness not to let these difficult mind states arise without awareness lest they deepen their habitual hold on you and further the unwholesome karma which surrounds them. Carefulness to be mindful and note each arising of the heavy emotions with a wisdom and spaciousness which does not invest those emotions as “self,” nor deny them, but looks deeply and compassionately with an intention to understand so as to deprive them of power, all of this for the good of all beings. This is the carefulness one requires, constant mindfulness that doesn’t cease the nurturing of this aspiration for a moment, but that attends every moment of experience with clarity and truth.

Barbara: *(Question and answer in italics added August 5, 1998 while proofreading the transcripts.) I have a question, Aaron, about this new chapter and the teachings on vigilance. So many of the sutras speak of the need for restraint. It’s often phrased “restraint of the sense gates.” I’m not comfortable with that phrasing. How do restraint and vigilance relate?*

Aaron: *There is fear-based restraint and love-based restraint. Restraint based on fear closes the sense doors so that the conditions which might give rise to the heavy emotions are no longer present. Restraint based on love stands like a guard at the sense gates, observing all that enters. That vigilant guard pays close attention. If one enters who carries a formidable weapon, the guard does not restrain him, that is, forbid him entry, but watches carefully to see what will follow. He notes that harm could come from this fellow if he is not watched. He acts in ways to prevent that damage from arising.*

I offer an example. To see that which is beautiful is not a necessary condition for arising of craving, but is a contributory condition. Without the contact and sense consciousness, craving can not arise, but with the sense consciousness, craving will not necessarily arise. In other words, because “seeing” arose does not mean that craving **must** arise, but only that it may. We call this a causal rather than necessary condition. Seeing arises, and may lead to craving **if other conditions are also present**. We must note “seeing” and watch what comes from that seeing. In seeing, can there be just seeing? If it is pleasant, what does the mind do with that sensation? Exactly where does simple seeing, or the sensation “pleasant,” shift into craving. Here the process and observation become wisdom!

Would you never observe the beautiful? How severely you would limit the incarnate experience. If craving arises upon seeing beauty, the work is not to cease seeing beauty, not to cut off either object or consciousness, but to use this experience (of the arising of craving) as a motivator to investigate the sense of self in whom craving arose. It is ignorance that is the issue, not the object nor the consciousness of the object.

Vigilance is that which stands guard, not to prevent the entry of contact and consciousness but to be present with the entire processing of that consciousness and observe the move through feelings of pleasant, unpleasant or neutral, and into mental formations. The mental formation did not arise because of the open sense gate nor the object, but because of the move into a “self.” This is what must be attended.

The arising mental formation may be painful. Let it be a teacher, a reminder to such vigilant awareness, not something which is seen as evil or as enemy.

However, there are situations where the being is not yet able to deal with the power of the contact. We don’t invite a starving man to a banquet and expect that craving will not arise. Rather, one employs restraint, limiting the sense contact wisely to that which feels manageable within the limits of that being’s wisdom and experience. One person may manage the whole banquet; another may need to choose only rice and gruel. As wisdom grows, that which the sense gates perceive may be broadened. The mental formation is still teacher, even when it overwhelms, but then the teaching becomes more difficult and unwholesome karma is increased.

I thank each of you for your attention to my words and thoughts. My deepest love to each of you and my greatest respect to you for the hard work that you are willing to do to learn how to express your own divinity and offer it to the world. I will be glad to answer your questions, both related to my talk or questions of any sort which you have brought with you tonight. I pause.

Barbara: I’m paraphrasing Aaron. He says he’s especially interested in your practical, real, everyday life questions. How does one apply this? He says, does his challenge to you sound possible? What do you think of that? He pauses.

J: Not only possible, very do-able. And I wish to acknowledge and thank Aaron for the teachings provided as I personally have been working diligently, and now see the situation much more clearly.

Barbara: Aaron says he thanks you. He says you say “very do-able”—do you also acknowledge “very difficult”? (Yes.)

Other questions?

Aaron asks again, how do you feel about this challenge he has offered? He says, a few of you may be feeling angry, saying "Don't push me!"

Ce: I'm ready to learn and I accept the challenge. I have learned a lot in the past few years, particularly around the relationship I had. I was glad to have learned from that. And now I am beginning a new relationship and some of the same things are coming up.

Barbara: Aaron asks, are you surprised?!

Ce: I am conscious and able to work with what we have learned, but, yes, it is difficult.

Barbara: I'm paraphrasing Aaron here. He's saying, do you see how important willingness is, that this is the vital ingredient and what you guard with care, nurture and protect, is this increasing willingness to take risks, to step out from behind the old fears and sense of limitation.

Aaron is asking me to talk about my experience many years ago, the first time I was asked to lead a meditation retreat. John asked me to come down and lead a retreat with him in North Carolina. It was the first retreat that I was to lead. I said, "Who me?! I'm not ready to do that." I could see how much fear there was of making a fool of myself. There were questions like, "What if I don't teach it well and I hurt people?" But there were much more ego-based fears than that, such as "What if people don't like me? What if I'm an inadequate teacher?"

I could see very clearly there could be ego working both ways: if I was really not ready to teach it, it would be ego to lead the retreat. But if I trusted John and (name of another teacher) and Aaron too, who were telling me "You are ready to lead a retreat," then I would need to put aside that sense of limitations. So there had to be a real willingness to confront the fear. And no matter how enormous the fear, I had to say "Okay, I surrender this fear. I'm not going to be a slave to it." It's in part the practice I've done with you of clear comprehension of purpose, but there also must be great honesty and a deep connection to that which is deeply touched by suffering and knows it's capable, in some way, of supporting freedom.

Aaron is saying, that's the kind of willingness we need to nurture. Sometimes it feels very risky. He would like to hear from you some of your experiences with this kind of risk and how you feel about his challenge. Also what past experiences you have that make you feel, as J said, it's workable, it's do-able.

L: ... Whenever I have taken a big risk, the support has always been there, interestingly.

Aaron: I am Aaron. I thank you, L. You must nurture that which is willing to take the risk. You say, whenever you have taken such a risk the support has always been there. But there must be enough presence and mindfulness to see the ways you might be inclined to sabotage yourself. For instance, if Barbara had not been entirely honest with herself in leading that first retreat and with her fears about it, she might have surreptitiously manifested incompetence. She might have failed to teach well because she became "the teacher" or allowed herself to become deeply confused or unfocused and forgetful. Part of her readiness was simply the readiness not to need to indulge in such sabotage!

Her highest motivation was not to manifest such incompetence. Her highest motivation was to share the dharma as she understood it. But if she had not been honest with herself about her fears, she might have experienced as highest motivation, instead, to protect the self and avoid embarrassment. She might not have gone in the first place. If in having gone, her highest motivation was never to have to face such a situation again, she would have manifested absolute failure, and then she would have said, "See? I told you I'm not ready."

The support is there but there must be absolute honesty that there are multiple motivations. Some are love-based and some are fear-based. It is only when you no longer need to react to the fear-based ones that you allow the self to connect with the support to enact the love-based motivations. Thus, awareness of the support's presence is token of your own inner work. I pause.

Barbara: Others?

V: I am working with my anger, especially toward my mother. This Christmas I went home. Usually my sister is there with me but this year she couldn't come. So I was alone with my mother and step-father. I do that very consciously as an act of service to them. But not always with a completely loving heart. So it is often very difficult for me. This year went very well overall, partly because my mother was very sick and in pain, which made it easier for me to open to her. Also it makes her kinder. My mother is a better person when she is in pain. But there were several moments when she touched on subjects that made me so angry and were so large that I couldn't cope with them, so I avoided her eyes and we changed the subject. Those are still areas I need to engage with her on, but I think I need to be able to do that in a way that is loving. So I need to work on that by myself first.

Aaron: I am Aaron. I thank you, V, for sharing of yourself. My dear one, can you see that a big factor in your success in this visit was your increased kindness toward yourself when anger was present? In the past you have chastised yourself for that anger. There's got to be a balance. Ultimately we seek the cessation of anger, the transformation of anger, but for now, if anger arises then anger is here and we must be honest with ourselves. So I think that this was a major factor for you. Because you were able to be kinder to yourself about your own anger, you were able to be kinder to your mother. I pause.

V: I can see that.

Barbara: Aaron says that's not the only thing that was happening, of course. But there was much more mindfulness. But there was also much less self-judgment. Others?

J: When that anger is directed towards oneself rather than another, what are Aaron's suggestions in treating with lovingkindness?

Aaron: I am Aaron. I have two suggestions, J. The first is simply to be aware that the anger is directed toward oneself. Perhaps this anger toward oneself is displaced anger toward another. Just consider that possibility. The question you might ask is, if I were not angry at myself right now, is there something else I might be angry at? Is there some devious safety that I gain through directing the anger toward myself? Here there must be honesty and clear-seeing.

The second part of the answer is simply "lovingkindness." Here one brings to mind all the different painful things that have happened in the past and are happening now, and how all of these conditions are coming together to create a condition of fear which is expressing itself as anger. If your best friend was telling you this story, you would feel such compassion for their pain. Can you allow yourself to feel compassionate toward your own pain? More precisely, what blocks such compassion? Such compassion is not a statement of permission to enact the anger. There still is the resolution to understand it and resolve it. But there's not judgment about it. There is a willingness here to move into that which transmutes the anger, no longer to hold it as a barricade in some way or another. Do you understand? I pause.

J: Very well, thank you.

Di: What antidote does Aaron have for spiritual grasping?

Aaron: I am Aaron. The antidote for spiritual grasping is very simple, Di. It is knowing the truth of yourself. Very specifically, your dzogchen meditation practice can help you more firmly to rest in that truth. Practices such as the sky yoga and guru yoga practice are of help. There cannot be spiritual grasping when you realize deeply that there's nowhere to go, that divinity is already present. So, that is one antidote.

The other is simply to note this as you note any kind of grasping, being deeply aware that there's some kind of fear which lies at its base. Acknowledge the presence of that fear. You may ask yourself, what is my highest priority here, to perpetuate this fear or to move past it? Here you may work with practices such as those elucidated in my book, The Path of Natural Light. The practices on release, at the end of Volume One and the beginning of Volume Two are useful here. First you come to see this is old fear, that you do not need to perpetuate it, but it's okay that it is here. There's no attachment to get rid of it, but it's skillful to release it. Then you work very precisely with these release practices. That's another kind of antidote. A third, when working with fear of any sort, an antidote to fear is lovingkindness. And so, simply, note the fear-self that wants to grasp, and stop and do *metta* (lovingkindness meditation). This helps to shatter the power of fear.

Of course, one must also attend to grasping, as to any mind state, with clear awareness of the nature of that which has arisen as a conditioned phenomenon which is impermanent and not-self. One observes these characteristics in all arising, and knows that when they are not clearly understood, then suffering arises. This is another type of antidote, the willingness to stay present with all that arises, and not be taken in by it. But this work must be done with kindness.

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

J: I lost Aaron's last part of his last comment, regarding lovingkindness and fear. Would he repeat it please?

Aaron: I am Aaron. My statement was simply that the antidote to fear is lovingkindness. You must first note that there is that which is attached to the perpetuation of the fear and cultivate a willingness to move beyond fear. Once there is willingness, and the willingness is noted, then you may simply do a formal lovingkindness meditation. Does that answer your question? I pause.

The Awakened Heart, Part Four

February 5, 1997, Wednesday Night Group

Aaron: My greetings, and love to you all. I am Aaron. I welcome our new friends here tonight with the comment, please process whatever I say through your own discernment. If my message is not in accord with your deepest truth, simply lay it aside. If it is helpful to you then bring it into yourself and make it your own.

In December, I began to offer what I said would be a series to be offered occasionally through the winter and spring. This is the fourth part of that which I intended to be an approximately ten-part series.

All of you here want to live lovingly in the world. All of you wish to live with non-harm to others, with kindness. There is occasional confusion over what harm is. When one asks of you that which feels distorted, is it harm to say yes, or to say no? What I choose to address tonight is not this question of **when** do you say no, not what **is** non-harm, but how do we offer non-harm at a time when there is a separate voice within of fear which desires to protect, to grasp, or in some other way to separate the self and perhaps to put the self's needs above others' needs. How do we best speak to that fear so that the final message may be one of non-harm?

I'm going to spend just two or three minutes here on review, not only for our new friends but because some others of you have not heard all of parts one through three. For years I have been teaching you that as long as you are in a physical body, fear, anger, greed, pride, impatience, jealousy, all of these fear-based emotions, are going to arise on occasion, just as physical sensations are going to arise.

If you step on a tack there's going to be pain and blood. There's no way around it; you're in a physical body. You're not bad because there's pain or blood; you accept this is the normal way of things. If you metaphorically step on an emotional tack, there's going to be pain and a reaction. Neither are you bad because that pain has arisen, nor because anger or greed or any other emotion has arisen. We see that whatever sensation or thought arose did so because the conditions were present for it to arise. You learn that you do not need to act out that emotion or suppress it but learn to make space for it in the ever-growing compassion of the heart. Then the emotion itself is gateway for wisdom.

It is in this way that you first conquer negative emotion. And yet, such negative emotions **do** continue to arise, no matter how skilled you have become at creating this greater space.

With this series of talks, then, we're moving in to address the issue: what do I do about this recurrence of negativity? Is there any way in which I really can clarify these emotions, not because I've labeled them bad, and not with the misconception that I can cause them entirely to cease to arise, but simply because they clearly are painful to myself and to others?

You understand that such emotions arise because conditions are present for their arising. You cannot attack the emotion. That doesn't help it at all. To see anger arising in the self and say, "No, I won't be angry!" well, where is the anger going to go? To see anger arising in the self and know it as resultant of conditions, impermanent and not self, that is helpful and true but this wisdom may be disconnected from the heart. To see anger arising in the self and note that fear is present and has given rise to anger, if that's the situation, or to note very precisely the conditions that gave rise to that anger—such as habitual attitudes—will lead you into a deepening compassion which knows it need not enact the anger. When you understand the conditions, your experience of them changes. This understanding is what changes the conditions, and then changes what has arisen from those conditions.

When you understand, for example, that somebody came in and verbally attacked you because they were feeling such dreadful pain upon hearing, perhaps, of the death of a loved one, that does not justify the attack, but with the understanding of their pain, your anger fades. Their anger does not change, but your experience of their anger changes, leading you to a response of compassion rather than perpetuated anger. When you understand that your anger arose because of old feelings of helplessness or fear that you would not be safe, that clarity similarly changes the anger itself. The question to be raised here, then, is how do you nurture those mind states which wish to deeply see and understand, and become less controlled by those mind states which desire to defend?

I said in part two of this series that certain specific ingredients are necessary in order to walk this path. First, with the arising of heavy emotion such as fear or defendedness and the anger they precipitate, there must be an awareness, "This emotion is not bad, but it is painful. I feel sorrow that this emotion is arising strongly and I resolve to reflect about the conditions under which it has arisen; to find the degree of understanding out of which I need not move deeper into such negative thought." We do this by a very specific process of reconnecting with the ever-open, ever-loving heart. This Awakened Heart of infinite love is not something that you need to "get" or to create, it's innate in you, so I very precisely choose the word "reconnect."

In Buddhist teachings, the word used for this Awakened Heart is "bodhicitta." I've preferred to hold onto that name because it expresses things that are simply not translatable into English. Bodhicitta is a combination of understanding, compassion, willingness, discipline and resolve. It's the pure awakened mind which really sees how things are and is willing to accept the way they are even if there's some discomfort to the self.

So you may work with various practices that touch this already existent Awakened Heart and allow the armor around it to dissolve, a process much like that of penetrating the clouds around the sun so that its radiance may shine through. Practices which support this work were delineated in talks one and two and I will not repeat them here.

In talk three I spoke of willingness and its relationship to resistance. I used a metaphor. If you have a splinter in your foot, walking on that splinter may be painful. You may try to close off the pain and pretend it's nonexistent, but after awhile you're going to need to admit, "This hurts." The antidote to the splinter is to take a needle and tweezers and dig

it out. Yes, that's going to create some pain, but there is the awareness, "This needs to be removed. It is kindness to remove it, and so I am willing to tolerate this pain."

In the same way we must be willing to apply the antidotes to these heavy mind-states. One example that I used two weeks ago was about the arising of fear and greed, clinging to what you have with a fear that your needs may not be met, that you must hold on to it. When you see that kind of clinging arising, generosity is an antidote. I suggested to the group that night that anybody for whom that was a primary issue spend some time in the next two weeks giving things away. I suggested, take that record you got for Christmas and give it to a friend. Do it gently with awareness of your own fear. Move deeply into the experience of sympathetic joy, observing the joy of the one to whom you gave it. I said that you could promise yourself that if after a week had passed, you felt, "I really need this. I can't live without it," then you might allow yourself to go out and buy a new one. I requested that, just for experiment's sake, you try it. How does it feel to give unconditionally?

Can you see that this is like pulling out the splinter? There is the wound, the wound of ancient fear, which wants to cling to everything for protection and for safety. It is not bad that the being that you were felt unsafe. What's there is simply old fear, no judgment about the fear. But this mind-state of fear and clinging is very uncomfortable. I give the antidote, literally to give it away with mindfulness and see how it feels. It's like digging out the splinter. The first thought is, "This is going to hurt." But once you try it you find there's a sense of relief, because you see, "Yes, I **can** give that way; yes, the armor around my heart opens. It feels good to give in that way. And I did not need that which I thought I needed."

We talked similarly two weeks ago about the antidote to anger. One antidote that I offered was service to another, especially to one toward whom you felt anger, or offering energy in some loving way to that person. Later this evening I would like to hear your experiences as you worked with these exercises.

So there has got to be willingness. The open heart is always there. There has got to be willingness to confront your fear, to confront the illusion of limitation and separation, if you are to access that Awakened Heart.

As I've been offering this series of talks, they have been given in conjunction with a book written in the eighth century by a monk named Shantideva. What I'm offering here is not so much a commentary on Shantideva. Rather, I'm using Shantideva's teaching as a framework, a foundation to support my own accompaniment.

In the first chapters of Shantideva's book, he talks about his ideas of how to allow the clouds to part so that this ever-awakened, radiant heart can express itself. Now we shift to the question, once the heart is exposed, how do we continue to enact the movements of that heart? What offers us support to do that rather than to reapply the armor?

There are a number of tools that you have at your disposal. Once you have found this radiant heart and found the willingness and the deep resolve to live from this heart for the good of all beings, the next tool is mindfulness. I want to go into this in a bit more detail.

Mindfulness is a catch-all phrase. We can talk about it at three levels: mindfulness, bare attention and pure awareness. It may not seem useful to some of you to differentiate, while others of you who have been practicing meditation for some time will find the distinctions very helpful. So for those of you for whom this distinction does not feel immediately useful, please just let it pass through you and trust that it will be available at that time when it becomes helpful.

Mindfulness means knowing what's happening in any given moment; being present with the body, speech and mind and the ways they interrelate amongst themselves and with other objects. If there are sensations, know there are sensations. If there is speech, know there's speech. If there is movement, know there's movement. When feelings and thoughts arise, know they're present, and be aware of the interconnections, the way mind gives rise to emotions, movement, speech and thoughts. With such mindfulness, you start to understand that actions and speech arise because certain physical or mental conditions were present. You see the interconnections of mind and body. You understand how everything in the conditioned realm is at once the result of other conditions and, in itself, serves as condition for new arising (*sankhara*). None of it has an independent "self."

Bare attention is that which is willing to go deeply into any facet of what has arisen. Mindfulness brought it to you; bare attention moves deeply into it so as to allow understanding of it. The relationship of bare attention and mindfulness would be like looking at a pond from a distance and seeing that it looked murky, then coming up and looking at the water closely. Mindfulness attends the presence of "self," "eyes" and "water" and observes the possibility of seeing. Bare attention allows the clarity of that seeing, undisturbed by old conditions. Bare attention does not have preferences—clear water or cloudy water—it merely brings attention and understanding. With bare attention you look deeply into the conditions which gave rise to the object, in this case murky water. Mindfulness is the doorway to understanding and bare attention is the key.

The third aspect is pure awareness, which is that level of awareness which is empty of self. There's no "I" in pure awareness, there is simply being fully present with and seeing clearly from the face of emptiness and absolute clarity.

If you were in a hypothetical situation, where you came in from the desert to a small oasis, and with you were people who were almost dying of thirst, if in that oasis there were animals playing, stirring up the water, mindfulness would be aware of the situation, aware of the needs including the self's need. In mindfulness there would be seeing the situation, experiencing thirst, knowing the thirst of others, seeing the pleasure of the animals, seeing the muddied water. Mindfulness might also be aware of the arising of thoughts about the situation and perhaps also of fear or anger.

Bare attention would look clearly and deeply at it all. It would look at the humans in pain, the biases and opinions of the self, any present emotions, sensations or thoughts. Bare attention would look without bias on the self's biases! From bare attention there would not be a preference voiced as "I want" but merely a preference that says, "For the good of all beings, the water needs to be allowed to settle. The animals need to be escorted out."

Pure awareness is awareness that sits back and looks at the whole scene, sees how it really is but from a different perspective than bare attention. It sees the people who are extremely thirsty, sees the animals that have come to play, sees the potential for clear water once the silt settles. Pure awareness doesn't contract or try to fix, it simply is there. Pure awareness sees the whole without contraction. There is no one to contract. And it sees the innate perfection. With bare attention there is "somebody" who is paying attention. And mindfulness is the doorway which allows bare attention and pure awareness to be present.

For those of you with much experience here, it is not only useful but essential to foster all three. Clarity is derived from all three. Mindfulness and bare attention offer clarity in the relative realm; pure awareness allows clarity in the ultimate realm. Skillful choice derives from the balance.

For those of you who are newer to this work, I would simply say that you must be present. In a gambling casino you might find a sign, "You must be present to win." You must be present! It's not as simple as it sounds. You cannot will presence. You must be willing to observe the resistance, observe that which wants to stay safe, which wants to stay distant, wants to work in the old ways of separating the self. Those ways have created pain and yet they've given an illusion of safety. You must be willing to observe those arisings with a will not to enact them into the physical experience.

When I say you must be present, then, this is not a dictated presence from some military sergeant which shouts, "Attention!" Rather, it's a very soft and loving presence which continually re-invites you to come back to this moment and whatever joy or pain this moment might hold, over and over and over.

I want to move away from the abstract and into concrete example. It's fine to say "be present," but it may be difficult. If you have a room full of people whose deepest aspiration is to offer their energy lovingly to others, you also have a room full of people who sometimes fall short of that resolve because their own fear arises so strongly that it prevents the natural action of loving response. I can ask you to be present with that fear, but sometimes that suggestion is too broad because it's hard to pin down exactly what the fear is about. So it's very useful to use specific practices with which to foster mindfulness in areas in which fear is most common, such as that the self may be hurt or the self's needs may not be met. One practice that comes to mind is generosity. I do not mean here simply generosity as giving of objects but generosity of energy, generosity of sharing of your time, your love and self.

To practice this kind of generosity, you must be present with any sensations and thoughts that arise, but there's something more specific to watch so it's easier. Each time that a thought arises to give something to another, you deeply consider, "Can I do that?" I'm not suggesting that in a parking lot if you see somebody walking in the rain you hand them your car keys and say, "Here, it's yours," but suggest giving in ways that seem more possible. If the thought to give arises and some small voice says no, challenge that voice. Who is saying no? Is this the voice of fear? If what you hear is, "I am afraid. If I give this, I will have not enough for myself," of course, you're going to need to consider the situation. But what prevents you from giving of your energy or your self in any way? If it's a voice of fear which does not have a basis in the present

The Awakened Heart, Part Four

moment but mostly basis in old habit, what allows you say to that voice of fear, “No, you may not direct this, not this time.” Love must say it, not further fear.

It’s the same challenge I offered two weeks ago: give it away—give the record, give the socks, give that twenty minutes of your time. I repeat, I am not talking about situations where there is real reason for fear. I’m not suggesting that you pick up a stranger in your car in a bad section of the city. It is not fear but wisdom that stops you. You all understand the kind of contraction we’re talking about, that little voice that says, “I will be hurt. My needs may not be met.” It’s ancient fear. Attend to it and ask yourself, “As much as possible, can I just give, and do it very mindfully and see what happens?”

Deepening moral awareness is another area of support. As example, what if your neighbor’s car wasn’t working and she came over to see if you were going to be going to the market. You said, “I need to go but I don’t have time.” She replied, “If I may borrow your car, I’ll do both our marketing, just give me your list. I’d be happy to do that for you.” You give her your car.

She comes back and leaves the headlights on. The car won’t start when you go out an hour later. Observe the irritation that comes up: “Look what she did!” Observe the desire to go over, knock on her door and say, “You left my headlights on.” What’s to be gained by that? Is she going to learn anything by hearing that she left the headlights on? We’re presuming here that this is not an habitually irresponsible person or you would not have lent her your car in the first place.

The practice of non-harm brings mindfulness and bare attention to this arising sense of anger, helplessness and fear. You’ve just been deprived of the use of your car. You are inconvenienced. Look at the way you want to use that energy to attack another. Here is another kind of generosity, not needing to give that angry feedback. Not needing, also, to suppress it. You know, “I feel angry,” forgive your neighbor and let go of the whole thing. You find, when you do this, you come right back into that radiant heart. It feels wonderful to let it go, truly let it go. Can you see that you’re not getting rid of the anger because it’s bad. You’re not denying the anger, and you’re not enacting the anger. When you practice repeatedly in this way, these little moments that trigger anger cease to trigger anger. You begin to just be able to smile and say, “Ah! She left the headlights on.”

It’s not that anger doesn’t arise because you thought it shouldn’t arise, there’s simply so much space in this loving heart. It’s just a poignant moment: “Here is some human pain. Nothing I need to do about it; no doors I need to go banging on, nothing I need to harm, just a moment of human pain, the pain we all share.” It is some of the frustration of being human. It is in this way, through repeated willingness to be mindful of what has arisen and to allow the heart to open around what has arisen, that these heavy emotions cease to be a habitual response. You really are shifting one habit for another: shifting to a habit of spaciousness, compassion and kindness to all of you.

I would add here, of course, that if this same neighbor leaves your car in such a way three times, of course you’re going to tell her. That also is kindness. But the telling doesn’t have to come out of a place of anger. It’s kindness to say, “Do you realize you’re leaving on the lights? You may borrow my car but please be very sure the lights are turned off.” Your intention is to ask her to pay attention, not to insult or discomfort

her to assuage your own anger. We expand this into all the ways that you must not be a doormat to another, for to do so is simply a different way to offer harm.

What I'm talking about here is simply the issue of noting arising of anger or greed or whatever mind-state may be there and developing the skillfulness to begin to diminish that habitual arising of anger or greed. You do so through mindfulness, through willingness to be present and through the great resolve of the loving heart that you are not going to continue forever to be caught in the grip of such habitual heavy emotion. It's very workable.

In Shantideva's Chapter Four about attentiveness, he again addresses the heavy emotions as an evil. My dear ones, it is so important that you not think of anything that arises in the mind or body as evil, but that you simultaneously be aware that certain mind-states that do arise are very painful and that you do have a choice. This takes us back almost to my very first teachings with this group many years ago. The choice of fear or love. It really is as simple as that. In those days I simply said you can choose love, a new idea to some of you at that time. But now we must refine that as you discover how you choose love and what aids your resolve to choose love.

I pause here. I would be very happy to speak to your questions. That is all.

Ce: I have a question about finding the right antidote. Aaron said on a different week that we need to use our intuition if no teacher is there. So tonight after he described mindfulness and bare attention and pure awareness, does bare attention produce the antidote?

Aaron: I am Aaron. When you say, does bare attention produce the antidote, the clarity as to the nature of the antidote is there in the awareness of the pure mind. But in order to get at that mind you must move the clouds away. Bare attention pierces the clouds and dissolves them. Resting in that spaciousness and brilliance of the clear sky, of pure awareness mind, the antidote shines out, speaks its truth. I pause.

Barbara: (I'm paraphrasing Aaron.) He asks, can you see how that works? (Yes.) He says to get at the sense of intuition that already knows what skillful and loving action is, we've got to get through the storm clouds. Mindfulness is that which reminds us of our willingness to penetrate the storm clouds, and bare attention is that which actually penetrates them and gives us access to our intuition. He pauses.

Ce: It seems like I have been practicing more, not with actions of kindness but with thought. Aaron suggested giving things away as part of discovering the nature of fear; that action is easier for me. I'm working more with clearing away thinking that clouds over the open heart.

Aaron: I am Aaron. I understand your statement, Ce. Both are necessary. You can practice this forever on the mind level and not bring it into the relative experience. You can note the arising of fear. Forgive yourself that such fear is present, find the space around that fear, not need to enact that fear in terms of throwing it out at other people, but there's still a contraction of fear present. So what we're asking here is seeing that the contraction of fear wants to stick and be in control. What begins to dislodge it? Here is where working back to relative reality and simple action becomes very useful. If the fear is stuck there, we give ourselves a little push by asking ourselves, can I give something away? Or in some other way, give of myself, not really in opposition to the

fear but testing the fear. This choice leads us to reconnect with the deepest resolves of the Awakened Heart. Do you understand? I pause.

Ce: I think I understand. I will have to work with it.

Aaron: I am Aaron. We begin with the assumption that each of you has reached a level of spiritual maturity where you earnestly aspire to offer your energy lovingly. Then it becomes useful to differentiate between active and passive harm. What does it mean when we say, "Do no harm"? To do no harm does not mean only not to move in active ways that harm another, not to figuratively or literally throw things at another. If you withhold something from another of which the other has need, is that not harm? So what we ask is a dynamic sense of giving, of compassion. There is a Sanskrit word, "ahimsa" which applies here. Ahimsa is dynamic compassion. Ahimsa is rooted in non-violence and in harmlessness but ahimsa understands the need for action as non-harm.

A very simple example. If somebody is abusing you and anger arises, to throw your anger at them is harm. But simultaneously, to simply be the victim of their abuse is also a way of harming them. So you must say no to the abuse but you must not say it with anger. While you may deeply resolve to do that, all of your old habit is geared toward another kind of response. It's geared either toward throwing out the anger, or toward strict censure of the anger, or perhaps toward drawing the anger in toward the self. So you want to respond lovingly but you really don't know how because you don't know what to do with your anger, how to transmute that anger into compassion. That is what these teachings are about.

In response here to Ce, I think part of what you're talking about is that you have worked with the part of it which allows compassion for the other's pain and you have learned somewhat skillfully to say no to the other's pain. You understand they may not abuse you because of their pain. But you have not fully processed what to do with your own pain and how the actual application of antidotes can transmute that pain. So I think that's precisely the next step that we're talking about. I pause.

Barbara: Others?

Di: I have always liked Aaron's metaphor of the spider in the box. I kept going back to that to see a metaphor for this new step. I saw myself watching the spider, getting used to it, having a bigger room, more space, oh yeah, that spider again, until finally I put down a puppy next to it and watched that also. I try each time I see that spider to put down a puppy, and finally instead of the spider it is a puppy.

Barbara: There's so much old conditioning that says, "Splat!" to the spider and says, "Awww" to the puppy.

Aaron was talking about that spider metaphor today. Do you know the metaphor? Briefly, Aaron has said if we found ourselves in a tiny little box with a big tarantula, we'd probably take one look and leap out of the box. If we found ourselves in a ten foot by ten foot space with a tarantula we might be uncomfortable, and as soon as it started to walk we'd leap out of the box or swat it. If we found ourselves in a room this size, we might be able to sit and watch it and, as it drew near, to get up and walk across the room, and just continue to watch this creature. We could stay in the box. So what he talks about is making this kind of bigger container for our emotions. We see our anger,

our greed, our pride, whatever emotion has come up as this kind of tarantula and say, "Aaaaa!" Swat! Or "I won't be near it," instead of allowing ourselves space to be near whatever discomfoting thought or emotion is present.

What he was talking about today is the habitual way we see the spider coming toward us and we don't even think of it as spider, we just say from all of our old habits, SPLAT! After doing that ten or a hundred times, habit has really hardened and I don't look any more to even see if it is a spider. Recently I felt a tickling touch on my arm, my hair raised on my neck, "feeling fear" I restrained myself from brushing it off, looked, and it was a lady bug! So the spider appears. Maybe I don't need to squash this thing, maybe I can just watch it. But that doesn't happen until we've squashed it enough times that we start to observe ourselves squashing it and ask, "Why am I doing this?" Aaron will talk.

Aaron: I am Aaron. I said to a friend earlier today that after you squash the spider mindfully a number of times, a certain kind of regret may begin to arise on doing harm to this being. "This is not what I really want to do." It's not until there is that degree of regret and mindfulness that you can begin to consider a different option, and then you ask yourself, "What choices do I have?" Here is where willingness and the application of antidotes comes in. That is all.

J: Would Aaron or you expand on the definition of ahimsa?

Aaron: I am Aaron. Ahimsa simply means "dynamic compassion." Non-violence is one aspect of ahimsa, but to be non-violent can come from many motivations including a very strong sense of self, someone who wants to be the good one, big ego and so on. Within ahimsa is the compassion which notes all of the multiple motivations of non-harm, finds forgiveness for those which are ego-based or fear-based, and deeply aspires to act from the heart on those which are based on the higher self and on love. Within this deepening awareness, the wisdom of the Awakened Heart, there is much clarity about what negative action must be withheld and also about positive response, the ways in which you cannot withhold actions from others or you do indeed do them harm. There must be consequences.

As very simple example, you may think, "I would harm a small child by saying no to it so I'm just going to let it explore." The child starts to push things into light sockets, or to turn on the stove. Certainly you are harming the child if you do not say no. The question is not whether you say yes or no but **what** says yes or no, love or fear. Ahimsa, then, is **what** speaks and acts from this deepest aspiration to be of service to others, and simultaneously from the clarity of the awakened self. Both factors must be present in ahimsa. Does this sufficiently answer your question, J? I pause. (Yes.)

The Awakened Heart, Part Five

February 19, 1997, Wednesday Night Group

Aaron: My greetings and love to you all. I am Aaron.

Tonight I want to take you a step further into this awakening heart series of talks. I do not wish this to be a series of talks that feed the intellect or it's of no use whatsoever to you. I request you to participate in this so that you find that you **can** live increasingly from this loving heart.

Our story to date: we have noted that as long as you are in a human body, physical sensations, thoughts, emotions, will arise as long as the conditions are present for them to arise. You have all learned how to make space so as not to be reactive to what arises, but nevertheless it still arises. Now we are looking at the tools with which you may begin to change those conditions out of which heavy emotions arise. You do not offer that challenge to the conditions because the heavy emotions are evil in any way but simply because they cause pain. It is skillful to bring them to a halt, or at least a diminution.

In the first two talks, I introduced you to a practice to open the heart and help you more fully to rest in this inherent Awakened Heart. I want to begin by simply moving through that practice with you quickly. We call it the Seven-Step, or Seven-Branch, Prayer.

The first step is support: opening your awareness to a being who for you is the very essence of love, invite that energy into your presence, invite yourself into its presence. Allow yourself to experience a sense of joy that such beauty dwells in the universe. Most often, this being will be a great saint or teacher, but it also could be simply a human teacher. When I say teacher I do not mean specifically one whose profession is teacher; it can be any human being who has taught you, and who, for you, deeply expresses love, such as a friend, parent or child.

Just sit for a few moments, feeling the energy of that being. Feel how that being represents all that is good, beautiful, and true in the universe. Then turn to yourself and be aware that although there is tarnish, there is also the same brilliance which radiates from yourself.

(Pause)

The second step is offering: offer the intense green of trees, the clear and brilliant sky, pure water and more, and deeply offer the self as servant. Speak to this loving one. "May I be thy disciple. I offer you everything that I have: my body, my energy, my thoughts." Speak to the universe itself: "I ask that the principle of love within the universe use me as an instrument through which it may flow, and I give myself freely." Let the offering of the self flow freely from the heart, out of love for all beings.

(Pause)

Now turn awareness back to the self and see that the self does have a shadow side, that you have acted in anger, spoken in anger, enacted your fear out into the world.

The Awakened Heart, Part Five

Allow there to arise in you a genuine regret that this has happened. This is not a chastisement of the self, it is just a sorrow that sees the ways fear within the self has served as condition to lead you to bring pain and harm into the world. Within this reflection, maintain the deep, heartfelt resolve to offer the energy of the self in service to all beings and with as much purity and clarity as is possible. Also note the firm intention to act and speak and be in the world in ways that are harmless to all beings.

(Pause)

As you reflect on how distortions that led to harm came to arise, out of the deeply loving heart let the resolve arise, a willingness to look deeper at the conditions out of which such negative activity or speech or thought was enacted. Resolve to understand and let arise a willingness to apply the antidote. I repeat that this step does not grow out of criticism of the self but out of deep reflection on the loving potential of the self, and the deep aspiration of the self to be of service.

(Pause)

Turn your attention outward again, to all beings who serve the world, each in their own way. Let there arise in you a deep sense of joy at how much love is enacted in the universe. Some of those who enact it may be quite imperfect on the relative plane, just as you are, but each being is capable of offering some degree of love, of kindness, of compassion.

(Pause)

Allow to arise in yourself a sense of gratitude towards these beings and joy in their actions.

Be aware that all of these beings are your teachers: those who enact a small bit of lovingkindness and those who have mastered this movement to perfection. Thank these beings for their teaching and request that they continue to be available to you as teacher.

(Pause)

Allow the heart to be inspired, to open wide. We're not denying the pain in the universe but, just for this moment, we turn our attention to the wonder of deep love, wisdom and compassion, and how frequently beings enact those despite painful catalyst. Thus inspired, we deepen the aspiration to walk in their footsteps, not for our own glory but to serve, to be an instrument for the divine.

As part of our practice, any merit, any special good that comes to us through this deeply loving aspiration, we offer out to all beings.

(Pause)

(Bell rings three times.)

Thus inspired, let us go on to look more deeply at what tools we have at our disposal to work with the painful catalysts which do arise. I want to begin with a deeper look at what it means when we say, "Everything arises from conditions." Let us take an imaginary walk. I would like you to imagine that you have a lovely back yard with a stream that flows through it. By that stream you have just planted a beautiful garden. The stream has been very reliable; it is never empty and it never overflows. The day after

the planting of the garden, you walk back to look at what you have put into the soil. And there, instead of a garden you find a flood. The stream has overflowed its banks. Your small plantings and seeds are washed away. Can you see how you will look for a cause?

It rained very hard all night and morning. Should you be angry at the rain? And look! Just downstream where your neighbor has a small dam for a swimming pond, it looks like beavers have built a second dam that blocks the overflow valve of the pond. Should you be angry at the beavers? And your neighbor on the other side whose yard used to flood, he put an embankment in this winter so the surplus flowing into his yard is now flowing into yours. Should you be angry at your neighbor? And in digging the soil for your garden, you made small irrigation trenches, they invited in the water and added to the flood. What are you going to be angry at? The garden, the shovel, yourself?

All of these conditions came together. Any one condition would not have created the flood. Together they were sufficient that a flood resulted. The causes and result cannot be separated. Can you see that? They are a necessary part of each other. The flood itself then becomes one condition for future arising, such as of grief or anger.

There's nothing to blame. And yet, desire to blame does arise. We see that it arises. Pain arises, and anger. And we cannot deny that they have arisen. In the last Awakened Heart talk, I spoke about the importance of mindfulness, bare perception and pure awareness. I said that you must be present in that moment of arising of desire to blame. You must be present with that energy contraction that says, "Oh NO! My garden!" and wants either to weep or to throw things. The anger did not arise only because of the flood. That flood and the causes of the flood were just one condition. It arose because the flood wiped out your work and left you feeling vulnerable, helpless and betrayed, and so it called up the small ego self and its habitual reactions. It arose because there was an habitual desire of a self to feel certain and in control.

Let's use another example. You're replanting your garden and suddenly you feel a sharp sting on your shoulder. Turning your back you see a neighbor's child holding a slingshot. He is looking mortified. He did not intend to hit you with a rock, but he did, and it has created a hard sting and bruise. What are you going to blame? The child, whose aim and judgment were faulty? The stick out of which the sling was made? The rock? The parent who provided the slingshot to the child? Yourself for being there, digging in your garden?

These are merely the conditions out of which the catalyst arose. Because the catalyst arose, it triggered certain other conditions such as an ancient sense of wanting to be safe, ancient fear of helplessness, ancient survival instincts, learned reaction to pain. Those are all conditions. Through all of your life you have been reacting to pain in certain ways, trying to push away that pain or control it, whether it's the pain of seeing your garden wash away, the pain of the stone hitting or the pain of an argument.

You know the first step, which is to open your heart to this pain, to embrace it—both the pain itself and the one who experiences pain. Then you don't have to go tearing down the stream and destroy the beaver's dam. You don't have to break your neighbor's built-up shoreline or curse the rain. You don't have to chase the already terrified child. Nevertheless, the anger is still there.

The Awakened Heart, Part Five

Through the coming weeks we're going to speak of different tools. We don't bring just one to bear on the anger but we've got to start somewhere and my preference is to start simply with one and ask you to practice it deeply. Actually we have three words here: forbearance, patience and endurance. They're not the same thing.

We begin with forbearance. Forbearance means not to react. Forbearance takes self-control. There must be a willingness to stay with that which wants to react. There must be a willingness to open the heart ever so deeply to the pain of the self and the pain which the catalyst also may be experiencing. This forbearance must come from a place of love and never from a place of fear.

At first, if impatience is very strong, you'll simply want to use the practice, "Breathing in, I am aware of my impatience; breathing out, I smile to my impatience." Once you have enough space around that impatience, though, you must move into it with that bare attention we spoke of last week.

This next step is the practice of patience. Probably you will begin with patience for yourself, patience with this moment of arising anger, but long before you practice patience with this heavy moment, you have begun with the clear practice of patience in the myriad details of your lives.

What exactly is "the practice of patience"? It is the practice of kindness and of spaciousness. You cannot force these experiences. You allow them. You move deeply into the impatience and there, right there, you find patience also!

You can practice patience everywhere. If you have gone out to drive in the car and your friend or partner who was walking out the door with you went back inside, feel the impatience growing in you. What can you say to that impatience? You can ask, "At whom am I angry?" Certain conditions arose, perhaps the phone ringing, you don't know, you're in the car. He turned around and went back inside. So perhaps the telephone rang, perhaps he needed to use the toilet. Perhaps through his fear and lack of clarity he is abusing you. We do not deny impatience but hold it and go deeply into it asking, next, "What is this impatience?" What is it? In impatience there is wisdom!

I said last week that mindfulness was the doorway and bare attention was the key. Move deep into impatience to investigate—what is impatience? What are the conditions that give rise to it? Is there anything solid there? Is there any "self" there?

Whatever you find, of course, you simply offer love to it. There may be old memories of not being heard, of your needs not being met, a sense that others do not care enough for you, a sense of fear that you're not taken seriously. Those are just a few possibilities. Whatever is there, you must be with it and open your heart to it. Then there can be clear seeing, "In the past I felt that others did not meet my needs and I did not know how to ask more skillfully, so there was pain. But in this moment, just in this moment, all that is happening is another is answering the telephone, or perhaps another is expressing his fear or anger by being late." Just that! It is the other's lateness but it is **your** fear. You are each responsible for your own distortions. His actions cannot make you afraid.

If anger has arisen, that is not a problem. What will you do with the anger—use it as is habitual to blame or use it in a new way to aid healing? Out of the energy of that anger, deep clarity and wisdom can arise about the way this person who is keeping

you waiting has a habit of doing that. When you see deeply into him, that his fear creates his habits, then simultaneously there can be compassion for his fear and skillful decision from that compassionate heart that you will no longer participate in his fear. Then you may say, "I'm leaving," but the remark no longer comes from a place of anger nor from a place of trying to control another, but from a place of clarity and kindness.

You may see that this is an issue with which that person may need to be kindly confronted. It's a place where that person can grow. Your loving, but nevertheless direct words—"Are you aware you always keep me waiting? Please, will you look and see what has happened. The next time it happens I'm going to simply start the car and leave. I'm not going to wait for you"—now come not from a place of anger, but from a place of love, of loving respect to yourself and to the other.

So when I speak of patience, I do not mean simply sitting back and letting the universe roll over you, but understanding how impatience and fear arose in you; finding the place that is able to be patient because it so deeply understands how that contraction of impatience has arisen from many conditions; and finally, finding that which is able to say "no" from this place of love.

The third part of this is endurance. To be born in a human body is to experience pain. To be born with an emotional and mental body is to experience pain. The bodies are never going to be completely without distortion. Are you going to rage against your bodies or are you going to find a kindness which simply endures the distortions of the bodies while striving to bring those distortions into balance, not from a place of fear but from a place of kindness?

There is no self or other, and yet in the relative world that certainly is your experience. As long as you live with the experience of self and other, there is going to be pain. There is going to be that out there that seems to be catalyst, either taking what the self thinks it needs or threatening the self in some way. Out of patience grows endurance. Impatience is that which feels it must react quickly, find something to fix so it will be safe again. Endurance is that which is willing to just sit there and say, "Yes, this is uncomfortable but it's tolerable. So instead of needing to fix it, I am willing to sit here and understand it."

Again, endurance does not mean to be misused by others and permit that misuse. Endurance means a willingness to take what arises as catalyst for growth, a willingness to sit with it, hold it and penetrate it. Without endurance, you cannot do that. If your primary motivation is to make it go away, then you're not going to be able to sit with it and understand it. So endurance is that which allows you the space to manifest this aspiration, to use what has arisen as catalyst.

You must always investigate the foundations of endurance, must check to see if endurance is coming from a place of fear or of love. That which arises from fear is **not** endurance as I speak of it but is escape; it is another form of seeking safety, a willingness to allow discomfort, even horror, to just grit your teeth and tolerate it rather than look deeply into it. Of course, that is not what I suggest you ask of yourself. In other words, if you are enduring a tirade of somebody's verbal abuse because you are afraid if you speak up it will get worse or even turn to physical abuse, if you are sitting there hating that abuse and saying with your teeth gritted and your fists clenched, "I will

endure it!" that's not love. Of course not. The endurance I am speaking of is that which comes from a place of loving spaciousness which is so deeply resolved to understand how things are, to finally begin to put an end to this ongoing karmic cycle in which you have been caught, that it says, "I will stay here and investigate this."

I listed these in a specific order: forbearance, patience, endurance. But there is really no order to them. They each lead around and feed into the others, and strengthen the others. Each of these can be practiced alone and it is very useful to do so. It is especially useful to be able to identify the feeling of patience, the experience of it, the experience of forbearance, and of loving endurance. One must always ask after the motivation, and find the motivation for these movements, which comes from a deep desire to hold true to your resolve, to diminish the heavy emotions by understanding ever more deeply the conditions from which they arise, for it is only that understanding which robs them of their power.

Remember, my friends, the heavy emotions are not wicked. You are not getting rid of anything because you have judged it bad, but you are allowing the release of that which causes pain and are learning new ways of being with all of these catalysts of your universe. For those of you who will be at the meditation retreat, I think you will find patience and endurance are very wonderful to work with. You practice patience constantly. It can be an ongoing practice. Simply note the energy contraction that you would label as impatience. You could simply label it "contracted, contracted." See the whole sequence: contact, hearing or seeing or whatever; then any movement into the sensation of "unpleasant." Watch very precisely. I will not delineate the whole movement for you. Just ask, "What is this impatience? Without attacking impatience, how can I drop into my heart, transform this energy through loving attention and allow patience to blossom?"

In the afternoon of the first day, your body may feel rather sore and tired; the sitting may feel rather long. I suggest at that point you begin to investigate what endurance means. Not endurance as stoicism but endurance as love. I hope there will not be deep need to practice forbearance but if that kind of catalyst does arise, use it. I thank you for the opportunity to speak to you. My love to you all. I will be glad to speak to your questions. I pause.

Barbara: Aaron has implied to me that he is going to wait several weeks before going on a step because he wants you all to practice with this. He would like to know if there are questions either about his talk or about anything. He thinks that one of the questions that he sensed coming from the group, which is an old question we keep coming back to, is what is the borderline between patience and enabling?

Questions?

D: Elaborate on the question Aaron just asked, about the difference between patience and enabling behavior.

Barbara: Aaron is saying the question is, if that person is always late, always keeps you waiting so you sit down for dinner and a half hour passes and they're not there, at what point does your just sitting there being sweet and patient feed into this irresponsible pattern on their part? What is harm? What is non-harm? He says he would prefer that

people give real life examples from their experience. He says you can disguise it if you prefer but he would like to talk to issues about which you feel passionate.

D: I frequently have reactions which are partly here and now, and partially old mind. I think what works best is to deal with old mind so that I can work better with the here and now. Because, I don't think there are very many reactions that don't have old mind.

Aaron: I am Aaron. I hear you, D. And in the beginning it certainly is very useful and important to differentiate between present pain and old pain. But there comes a time where you do begin to see that there are simply many different conditions for this pain, some of them very present in this moment and some of them old. Regardless of how many different conditions there are, there's nothing you can point to and say, "That's what's at fault." At that point you begin to look at that in yourself which wants to find something at fault.

In other words, to pin it on old pain is still a way of controlling the situation and feeling safe. To distinguish and say, "No, this part of it is present pain," that's still a way of controlling and feeling safe. But what needs to happen at that point—and I emphasize this is not for the beginner for whom differentiation is useful, but for the being who is at the point where you see that although you can make more space when you observe that it's old pain, the anger and fear are still present—then you begin to work with the self in this moment, **knowing** that the conditions are both new and old. Work with the fear. Work even with that which wants to know old mind from present fear as basis for safety, just noting it as "fear, fear ..."

This is complex. When I say work with the fear, to say it's old is to suggest that it doesn't matter because it's old. Then you get caught in that place where you're saying, "Is this anger appropriate or is it not appropriate?" Anger or other emotion may diffuse when you understand how it's old but nevertheless it still tends to arise. This is where you shift and ask, "What am I going to do with it if it's going to continue to arise?" If the creek is going to continue to rise over its bed every time there's a hard rain, then you are either going to have to plant your garden elsewhere or to simply acknowledge that it's going to get flooded sometimes. Anger is going to arise. So what? You start to look into that anger itself and how anger has been something to which there is both aversion and attachment because it protects you, or seems to do so. As you look into that which was afraid or is presently afraid, you begin to understand that you don't need to be protected. Here is when anger will cease to arise, when "self" wears thin. **This** is what is old, and it's always old, this old idea, "I'm a separate self and I need to be protected." I pause.

Barbara: Aaron says, does this clarify the concern, or would you like him to speak further on it?

D: My point was that it is important to see what's old mind and what is new so that I can function better in the here and now. We were talking about the example of the person who is habitually late. If I am feeling the old feelings of being ignored, and feeling a lot of anger about that, I can deal with the person who is habitually late more skillfully if I can see the part of my reaction that has nothing to do with them.

Aaron: I am Aaron. I understand you, D. But look at it this way. It has been very valuable to learn to see what is old. When you see that you're discomfited because you feel you're being abandoned or ignored, and how that happened when you were a child, and in this moment the person simply is tied up in traffic, or the person is simply not very responsible and is always late, you see there's nothing personal in it. In that way, you find more space around your anger and do not need to react to it. The fear diminishes a little because you see clearly, "I am not being ignored." And yet there's too much logic there and not enough contact with feelings. Even though it's clear that you're not being ignored, the feeling within you may still be one of fear. Yes, the fear may truly decline as you see old mind, or there may be a feeling that fear "should" decline because logic says, "This is old." Both may happen.

Here's where checking to see that it's old mind can backfire. I don't want to diminish the usefulness as a tool in the right place, only to go deeper into the subtleties of working with it. It's essential to see what is old; but if seeing what is old is used as a shield protecting you against the present pain which has arisen because of old associations, then it's still a shield and you need to note that it's a shield and come back to the present pain. It's only through that holding and penetrating the present pain that you're going to shatter the old. Do you understand? I pause.

J: If Aaron is looking for real situations, I have experienced in arranging meetings from time to time where there is assumed clarity, that dates are not honored and shift. Then I feel anger rooted in desire to control and to feel safe. I am able to see several sides of this. Part of it feels very intellectual. At other times, just feeling anger. Just being with this anger. And also how do I lovingly present the issue to the one who doesn't honor dates?

Barbara: Aaron says you can't lovingly present the issue just because you wish to lovingly present the issue. You can only lovingly present the issue when you deeply understand the anger. But if anger does come out as you present it then simply anger does come out as you present it. And that is something honest that's happening in you. Others perhaps can learn something from the experience. He says we never choose to enact anger, but we can also constantly over-worry, "What if some leaks out?" He asks, can we simply trust the loving motivations in ourselves? He wants to talk more directly himself.

Aaron: I am Aaron. Much of what you are doing here is what I referred to as "shattering the illusion of a separate self." In any of these situations, as you look at what is old, what is present, the fear-based motivations, the love-based motivations, eventually you come to a higher perspective of awareness where you start to see that belief in each of these thoughts, such as that you were unworthy and would be abandoned, that you were unsafe, and so on, that belief in each of them was simply something you needed to try on. It's all part of the self-discovery of learning, "Who am I?" You are not your thoughts. You are not your emotions. They are catalysts which help you learn compassion and help you learn more truly who you are and learn to rest in that truth of who you are.

What I'm asking you to do here then is to see it from one rise higher up the mountain, from a different and higher perspective. The relative being does not choose to enact its anger. The ultimate being never experienced anger. And yet, that aspect of the

relative being which is afraid doesn't know what to do with that constant accumulation of its anger. It's all happening on the movie screen, parts that you're playing. One part that is angry, one part that's not angry, one part whose anger is from very old conditions, one part whose anger is born in a fear in this present moment.

When we talk about patience, part of the patience I request you to nurture is that which is just willing to be with the whole stew, as it is. Sometimes it's a highly pungent stew. You may wish to hold your nose. Can you still just be with it? No fixing! This is the value of patience and endurance. It doesn't negate the other tools, it just helps you choose a bit differently, and helps you more deeply recognize that nothing needs to be fixed. Then you begin to have better access to that place which is not and never has been angry. That pure awareness mind can watch the relative mind stepping up and down—afraid, angry, filled with energy and wondering what to do—and just give it a hug. Nothing needs to be done. The anger is just energy. It will dissipate. I pause.

Ce: I need to have some explanation of how these three steps (of patience) relate to the overall teaching. They are not part of the seven steps as far as I can see. It seems like these are tools for helping us to see more deeply into the process of how we process.

Aaron: I am Aaron. The Seven-Branch Prayer helps to connect you with that deep loving resolve. It helps to foster the willingness to seek out and apply the antidote and to understand what you're applying that antidote to. I used the example of a splinter. It's infected. It must be dug out. There's a certain point where you're going to need to suffer a bit more pain in order to rid yourself of the infection. When there's enough pain walking on this splinter, you finally have the resolve and say it's time, it's time to take care of it.

Is it time to take care of your heavy emotions? You've been learning about them with me, this particular group especially, for years. You've all done very wonderful work of opening your hearts to yourself. You have learned to cease condemning yourself that these emotions arise. Now the Seven-Branch Prayer is what inspires you to come to that place of willingness where you say, "I am ready to go deeper. I understand that I do not condemn myself because these heavy emotions arise, but nevertheless they do continue to arise and they bring me pain and bring pain to others. And so I desire to understand this more deeply in order that these emotions may not arise so forcefully and so frequently."

If they do arise you still must work with them in the old ways, finding compassion for the self, making space around them. Then once there is that space, instead of simply feeling content that you did not need to carry this emotion further, that it did not overwhelm, then you touch the resolve, "What are the deep conditions that gave rise to this beyond the surface ones I've understood in the past? What really is fear? What is the self in which fear arises?"

The last talk, this talk and the coming talks, offer specific tools: working with mindfulness, working with the practices of patience, forbearance and endurance. I'm not going to get ahead of myself and announce the others, but they are specific tools that you could use, not to get rid of heavy emotions but to learn more deeply this practice of holding them and penetrating the conditions that give rise to them. And in that penetration, there is understanding of not only the emotion but the whole illusion

of self and how the emotion arose. In that penetration there is freedom. So they are tools. Does this answer your question, Ce? I pause.

Ce: Yes. I am wondering if this is also part of Shantideva's teaching?

Aaron: I am Aaron. I am following the basic headings of Shantideva's teaching. He teaches patience but, at least as translated, he teaches patience from the bias of "getting rid of." He speaks with strong condemnation of the heavy emotions. So I am presenting his teaching in a new light, asking you to hold firm to that loving heart which does not need to condemn, which never acts from a place of hatred or attack. There is vast difference in the original text and what I am teaching. But part of his book does talk about patience and forbearance. I pause.

The Awakened Heart, Interlude One

This is not a new part of the teaching, but is more of a “how-to,” offering a real life situation and how these teachings may apply. This interlude is drawn from two transcripts, two sequential weeks of talks.

February 26, 1997, Wednesday Night Group

Barbara: We have a question that came in by e-mail which Aaron said he wanted to speak to. Aaron says you don't have to be steamrolled by people, that from a very clear and loving place you learn to say no. What if you say no and they still keep steamrolling over you? That was the basic question.

L: You can talk openly about the situation that I e-mailed you about ... the situation that I have out at that cottage with a neighbor who has put his dock and boat equipment in front of my cottage. It violates the boundary that is there. And he's also a provocateur, so he does these low-level provocative kinds of things and I hook every single time. So I've been really caught in this loop of getting really pissed off at this guy. I haven't done anything about it. He provokes and I get mad. It's just this little thing. I see it so clearly, what I'm doing, and I'm having a lot of problems keeping space around it and not opening into the provocation. Accepting this equipment being there and feeling ripped off because of it. That's the gist of it.

V: Usually with those kinds of people, they just ignore you until they do the next thing. Talking to them does not help.

L: That's right. Talking does not help, I've tried talking to them.

Q: What happens if you put your dock in right on the boundary line?

L: That's what I tried to do last year. He came out before I finished putting in my dock and put his equipment in my path. I thought of drilling holes in the ice.

(Other suggestions are offered: legal, mediation ...)

Barbara: We did talk via e-mail about the question.

L: It's going to take some work!

Barbara: What I said in my e-mail to L was that it's a wonderful, and hard, learning opportunity and there are three parts to it. What makes you so uncomfortable about the situation? Clearly he is invading your space. But what is that about? I talked about that phrase, “Is it coming in to bother you or are you going out to bother it?” There's this dock. It's across your property line, but it clearly looks bigger than it really is. So there's this for you to learn, what's really creating your suffering on this personal level. But it's not just about this situation but an opportunity to investigate the root of all suffering. It's not to “fix”; where does suffering dissolve without the situation changing in its outer forms? This is the second area. Third is the exploration of how to say “no” without anger. That ability grows from the investigation of the first two areas.

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My suggestion to L was to shift his tactics completely and say to the man, "I still disagree with the placement of the dock but I'm aware this has become a mountain between us. After all, it's just a dock. I wish it weren't there. I think you're trespassing. But I really want to just put this aside. We're neighbors. I want us to have a congenial relationship. I was in town and I bought this plant for you. I thought you'd enjoy it." And bring him bagels and coffee cake when you're in town. Get to know his children. Do it mindfully and watch what arises or shifts within.

L: One of his kids does like me.

Barbara: This is really bringing love to fear.

Ca: That's tough, that's really tough! Did L come to Aaron's Halloween story?

L: No.

Ca: *(Aaron's Halloween story is briefly told, about how, in a past life, he was trapped by a man who wanted to kill him. He told about how he escaped and then realized that this man would just do the same to someone else, hurting himself and his victim. So even though he was afraid, Aaron felt he had to go back and find a way to help this man see the divinity in himself. He was able to do so. He points out that even if he had not succeeded, it was something he had to do for himself, to resolve any sense of duality of good/evil. He needed to be able to see that this would-be murderer was also an expression of the divine.)*

L: So it may be an opportunity.

(Group comments omitted.)

Barbara: It's basically what Aaron did in the story and I'm glad Ca brought that up because it was perfect. Just bringing in love. Not to fix or transform or trick your neighbor, but to know yourself. What happens when we give to others in a difficult situation, using generosity as a tool.

Ca: Just to be clear, that is asking more than most of us have been asked before. It's a big choice. It's a very possible choice but so is ...

L: ... ignoring him and doing nothing.

Ca: It becomes a—I don't know, I just honor you for even considering it.

J: It offers a tremendous opportunity to break through many barriers.

Ca: The fact is, I don't believe it should be undertaken to change the neighbor, but only to heal your own rage. And if it does change the neighbor, that's a wonderful and very possible outcome. But nothing guarantees that.

Barbara: Precisely. If there's any part of the intention that maybe this will work and the neighbor will move the dock, then grasping and self arise. You've just got to be clear, at least for now, "For this summer the dock is just going to be wherever it's going to be, and I'm just going to watch my response to it and I'm going to be ... each time that any anger arises in me I'm going to let that anger be transformed into lovingkindness." Aaron wants to talk about this directly. This is the basis of *satyagraha* or "soul force" as

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used by Gandhi, to feel so clear in your own truth that you must offer that truth, regardless of the response it may provoke.

Aaron: I am Aaron. Each of you at some level has a fear that your needs will not be met, that you'll be hurt. It touches you in different ways. Some of you can be so generous about so many things and yet in one small area of your life there is contraction. For example, I would highly conjecture, L, that if this man did not have trees between your properties, and if this man's children played football or catch, and their game ran over onto your yard on occasion, it would not trouble you at all. You would simply see the children playing. I think that there's such contraction about the dock because it displays a premeditated selfishness and fear.

We have talked about the ways that we recoil most against those patterns in others that we are most sensitive to what we think of as possible of in ourselves. This doesn't mean that you are greedy, it means that you are afraid of your own greed and grasping. They are discomforting to you. You condemn them.

By way of example, if you know that you are very patient, you may find another person's impatience unpleasant, but it's just impatience. You look at what is beautiful about that person and you notice their impatience with tolerance. If their impatience comes too frequently and forcefully, you may decide not to be with them very much. But still it doesn't arouse deep aversion in you.

But when they mirror a quality that you are afraid of in yourself, the situation is different. Let us pretend hypothetically that impatient thoughts often come up in you. You never act them out, you are the model of patience, but part of the reason that you are the model of patience is because you keep these negative impatient thoughts under such strict control. Somebody else's impatience then is very threatening to you.

What I would ask you to do then is to begin to look deeply at that in yourself which really understands this thing, that in yourself which, if you did not stay very conscious and aware but lapsed into the unconsciousness in which he dwells, really could act in similar grasping, greedy ways that are harmful to others. Look deeply at how repugnant that possibility is to you. In forgiving him, you forgive yourself. And in forgiving yourself, you forgive him. You no longer need to act out those feelings. He still does. Can you forgive him for that also?

This, then, is the major part of it, the possibility for healing this in yourself. My conjecture is that by the time it really is healed, where seeing his dock there is simply a reminder for compassion for you both, and it no longer arouses strong feelings of any sort, at that point he will probably move away or move his dock. But it won't matter much to you at that point.

We come to another side of this question which this instrument raised. I have said repeatedly that from this place of deep compassion and clarity, you still must say no, because to let another being walk over you, use you as a doormat, is harmful to both you and to them. I stand by that statement. But before you can say no in that way, there must be the space of clarity from which the no comes. If you say no from a place of fear and anger, you're simply participating in the whole situation of fear and anger.

Certainly it depends on the kind of situation. If you are in a relationship with someone who is very verbally or physically abusive, and if you are deeply afraid, discomforted,

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saddened, by their actions, before you have clarity you still may need to say no, simply to remove yourself from the situation because so much harm is being done. If you felt that to be your situation here, yes, you could elect to move away. So you need to look at each situation independently and assess it.

Here is a situation that allows for patience, allows you to just be there and learn. I would liken this much more to living with somebody who is self-indulgent, selfish and thoughtless, than living with somebody who is violent and constantly abuses you. In this situation you can take the time to find that clarity in yourself.

However, you also are saying no in a different way. You must be very clear when you bring him a first gift: you are not apologizing. You are not saying, "I'm sorry I blocked the way, of course you can put the dock in anywhere." You are making it clear, "I do still disagree with where you put your dock, but we are neighbors. This is really a trivial matter. I want us not to wage a war out here in this place, where we both come to be at peace and enjoy ourselves. We don't have to be close friends but I want us to feel a general liking rather than antipathy toward one another. I don't want to be angry when I see you and I don't want you to be angry when you see me. It doesn't make our life enjoyable. So let us end this conflict between us."

This is a different way of saying no. You're choosing your fight. You're not saying no to the dock, you're saying no to the ongoing hostility. The matter of ongoing hostility is more important at this time than the dock. You are refusing to participate any further in that ongoing hostility. He has pulled you into it. The dock is just a symptom. If it wasn't the dock it would be something else. You're making the decision, "I'm not going to be pulled into this hostility any more." Then, you look for the antidote.

Last month I suggested an antidote for anger is in giving to the person at whom you are angry. We were talking about it in terms of the overbearing boss, what one might do for that being. In what ways can you be of service to that being, to really be kind and be helpful? It might not change them but it will change you. So here's a perfect example of a situation where that would work.

If you decide to do this, I would suggest that you do a good deal of *metta* (lovingkindness) meditation first. I gather you have at least several weeks before the time when you begin to see this neighbor in a regular way. Simply sit with his energy with a formal lovingkindness meditation. Begin with a loved person, looking deeply into that person, seeing the ways they've suffered and wishing them well. Then do the same thing for yourself. And then bring up the difficult person, this neighbor. Contemplate, reflect on, the kinds of fears and pains he may have suffered which have made him so frightened and greedy, so unable to hear another. Reflect on the way he must suffer because of the way he cuts himself off from others, that through his greed he cannot give and connect in ways that are deeply meaningful and joyful. You're not reflecting here that you're better than he is, you allow to arise in you a real sense of sorrow for this being, and a heartfelt wish, "May you be free of suffering. May you learn what it means to give and receive. May your heart open and flower. May you abide in well-being. May you love and be loved. May you be happy."

I would work with that practice in depth for several weeks. See what blocks in your heart, what blocks the offering of such wishes. You must also work with yourself as I said, start with a loved person, then yourself and then your neighbor. You wish yourself the

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same things: may I be happy, may I love and be loved, may I live in connection with my neighbor.

There is also the third area mentioned by this instrument. When there is less turmoil, you may reflect back upon the nature of suffering itself, its causes, its arising and cessation. I will not talk in depth about this now. I pause.

Ca: In doing that metta, at first it may most probably not be a heartfelt loving wish. The wishes are very formal, even if you don't feel loving or even kindly at first, it's okay. It's okay just to wish those wishes. And if it's too hard to wish them to the neighbor himself at first, pick the child who likes you and work with that child, and then with another one of his children, or someone in the family who is easier. Work your way into the process. It's a long process. It doesn't have to be long but it will take however long it takes. It pays to work gently into it. Before you take any gift to the neighbor, you need to see clearly the truth of it. That does have to come from a very true place in yourself.

Barbara: Thank you, Ca. It's important not to demand of yourself that your heart be opened, but Aaron is saying at the same time, you do ask of yourself just to look deeply into him. You find the place where the heart is open to him. It doesn't mean the anger is gone, but you find the place where there really is compassion.

L: I see so clearly how he represents a part of myself.

Barbara: Aaron says, he is "yeast for the bread." Aaron says there will come a point where you can bring him cinnamon buns or a rosebush with a real sense of gratitude that he's living there for all he's teaching you!

Aaron says that's why he's suggesting that you work with lovingkindness first. Take it to a point where you're ready to bring this gift. He says, remember the gift is not a statement that the dock is okay but a statement "Our enmity to one another is not acceptable and I want to take whatever steps are necessary to end that enmity." He says, this statement is a truth that you do feel.

L: I'm feeling really humbled by all your responses. Thank you.

Barbara: You're welcome.

March 5, 1997, Wednesday Night Group

Aaron: Good evening and my love to you all. I am Aaron. Tonight I would like to expand a bit on last week's session, to help put it into a clearer context.

We have been talking about working with heavy emotions, going one step beyond our work of the past years wherein we've often spoken of the natural arising of heavy emotions and how you must not condemn yourself because they arise. I noted that even though you no longer need to act out those emotions and you do allow the experience of them without suppression, nevertheless they do arise and they're painful. In this series on the Awakened Heart, we have been talking about how to reduce the force of arising of those heavy emotions by work with the antidotes to them, antidotes which you must apply only with great gentleness and mercy, and with no judgment upon the self in whom these emotions arose.

Last week, L spoke with some pain about his country neighbor who places his dock on the shoreline in front of L's cottage instead of in front of his own house. He talked about how angry he was and that this neighbor would not hear him, that L felt it was indeed a trespassing. So we spoke of this question: I have said often to you, you do not need to allow yourself to be a doormat to others but the no must come from a place of love. What happens when that no doesn't work and the trespass continues?

I observed to L that the focus of his question had become different. At first the focus was how to say no to the neighbor's setting his dock inappropriately. He literally was trespassing. But as L has gotten caught up in this issue with his neighbor and become a participant in the anger of the issue, the question became not so much, "How do I stop him from placing his dock inappropriately," as, "How do I say no to my involvement, my angry involvement in this situation?"

Nobody can make another angry. Something happening within us brings up that strong anger. How do we say "No, I will no longer be a participant in this rather unskillful dialogue between us"? If L won't hit the ball back that his neighbor is hitting to him, his neighbor is going to have to find somebody else to bash with his ball. Admittedly, the dock will still stay there. But the issue has gone beyond the dock to the fact that the neighbor is looking for somebody to control, somebody to dominate. The neighbor's outward act is a form of domination, but L really can choose to ignore it and then he will not be a participant in this domination.

So we asked L to do something extraordinarily difficult. Two things, really: to begin more deeply to observe the anger, not at the dock but at his neighbor's controllingness, his neighbor's inability to hear another. I requested he understand the nature of that anger, how it reflected not L's own personality but what L feared might come to the surface in himself. To which L said, "Yes, right on," that he could see that characteristic. Second, I asked L to begin to apply this antidote, which is truly to seek to treat his neighbor with love.

What happens when somebody hits you and you offer them back Jesus' "other cheek"? What really happens? Not "What happens in them?" You're not doing it to make anything special happen in them. What happens in you? You begin to find that

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place in yourself which is innately loving and which has immense compassion for the fear out of which this inappropriate action on the neighbor's part is coming.

Of course, this doesn't stop his placing the dock inappropriately. What happens is, once the inner work has been done on the self so that the neighbor's various trespasses are truly met with compassion both for his fear and for your own fear, then the setting of boundaries can begin again. But this setting comes from a place of love and not from a place of fear and anger. L's prior attempts to set boundaries came from a place of anger.

I said that I wanted to put this into a clearer context in terms of the whole Awakened Heart series. How do you do this difficult work? We are talking about any situation which arouses strong anger, impatience, jealousy, greed, fear or any strong emotion which involves another.

Do you remember the steps of the Seven-Branch Prayer I introduced in January? The first is support, deeply opening your heart to that being, be it human, historical, mythical or simply to divine energy, to that being who is the essence of lovingkindness and truth to you. Therein, find deep support, deep connection for your own innate lovingkindness and truth. The second step is offering. See in the beauty of that being the potential for the self to also express its divinity; deeply offer yourself to all beings, that you may walk in the steps of this blessed one, may also serve all beings in such a profound way.

Move into that longer third step of three "R's": reflection, both upon the divinity of the self and also upon the fear and sense of limitations of the small ego self, and the ways that the small ego self has acted out of that fear. Within reflection is understanding of how that action arose, not in condemnation of the self—no, no, with kindness. But there is also regret or sorrow, deep regret at the ways one has moved in habitual patterns that harmed. Deeply seeing that harm has been done, there is desire to do no more harm. This is the third "R," resolve.

I cannot be too careful in my expression of this step that it must not involve castigation of the self, but only the deepest desire to offer the self in love, and sorrow for the harm that has arisen through ignorance. That desire is innate to you and expresses itself when fear is not predominant. You will not reach that desire through arousing fear by creating contempt for the self. So there is reflection and regret, and then there is deep resolve that you will live from this Awakened Heart, and a willingness to look deeply at what prevents from you doing so.

The further steps in the Seven-Branch Prayer are very important but are not as directly relevant to our present discussion. Very briefly, these were that one once again sees not only this first divine one or ones, but all beings who have been teachers in one form or another, who have offered their energy purely, who have become what one might call "enlightened beings" who cease to enact their fear. One offers one's gratitude to these teachers, a sense of deep sympathetic joy that such enlightened action can exist on the earth. Ask those teachers to remain present as guide to you in your daily life. Ask them to teach you.

Out of all of this inner movement grows the willingness to understand and apply the antidote to whatever emotion is arising, not because that emotion is wicked but simply

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because that emotion creates pain and is a force for harm to self and to others. You understand that the emotion arose because certain conditions were present for it to arise, and that you cannot deny what arose, which is result. You must look to the conditions themselves. In the case of L's story he must look to his own fear: what is it that gives rise to this disproportionate anger? In order to get at that you've got to be willing to work with certain antidotes, and those antidotes can be quite painful. I have offered the metaphor that to remove a splinter from one's foot, one may have to dig with a needle. The digging can be painful but ultimately it is necessary if one is to get out the splinter and resolve any infection.

It must be done with as much kindness as possible. There must be a willingness to endure some discomfort, not just to continue to run from discomfort. When we hand L this very difficult assignment, all of the Awakened Heart practices, all of the lessons of kindness and awareness, provide support for his work.

Can you feel the difference? What if I said the same thing to L but without this support? "Simply go into yourself and see what the roots of your anger at your neighbor are. Bring your neighbor some gifts, make an effort to mend your relationship and deeply to treat him with kindness." The words are the same but can you see how all of that could become just more of ego's movement, an inflated self who is going to be noble, who is going to put on a pretense of lovingkindness, even an inflated self who is going to figure out what's wrong in "self" and fix it.

But this isn't what I have in mind at all. The setting is of vast importance. This work must be done within the framework of already accessing this innate Awakened Heart. It must not come from the ego. If L is to give his neighbor a plant, there must be no one giving, as much as is possible. If he is to do lovingkindness meditation, there can't be somebody doing the lovingkindness meditation for the purpose of forgiving or opening the heart to somebody else, or it won't work. This is perhaps the most difficult part of it. One has got to be immaculately honest, and even that honesty must come from a place of mercy and graciousness. You can say, "I can be honest, I'm going to be honest," and it's somebody being the honest one. When you deeply connect your heart with the Christ, the Buddha, with all the great beings of past and present, and understand that you can walk not only in the footsteps but right there beside them, that you also are capable of deeply loving, selfless action and thought, this reminds you of the deepest truth of your being and you begin to be able to express your energy from this truth.

My dear ones, of course you're not going to be perfect at it. If "someone" is there, if ego is there, just notice it and that it too arose from conditions. It is your choice whether or not to become identified with that somebody, that ego. Here is the point where you work! The innate wisdom mind is always there. With what do you choose to identify, and why? Just as clouds may cover the sun but cannot fully screen out its light, so the clouds of delusion cannot hide the true self.

Over and over and over, you are going to make mistakes. That's fine. Each mistake is just a mud puddle. Wipe off your shoes and keep walking. You will become quite adept at spotting the mud puddles and learn how to skirt them more successfully. In short, if L offers his neighbor a rosebush for his yard and his neighbor says something abusive, and anger comes up, L will see the various mud puddles of his own anger, his

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judgment of his anger, his extreme discomfort with his neighbor who mirrors kinds of emotions that L himself experiences, although L has the maturity usually not to enact them on others. Seeing those various mud puddles, with practice L will learn how to work more skillfully with them and that he doesn't have to fall flat on his face. But if sometimes he does, then he does.

And this is true for each of you. To be human is to accept that you are going to fall in the mud! And also that you know the way out. You know where the pure water is to wash yourself off and you have the courage and love to continue.

If you are afraid of the mud, the earth plane is not the place for you. Since you are in incarnation, I presume you have at least to some degree decided to test your ability to make peace with the mud.

This opening talk is shorter than usual. I would ask when it is transcribed it would be combined with an abbreviation of last week's talk, and that this be put into the bodhicitta series in whatever way is possible to preserve anonymity and privacy.

The questions I am touching on tonight connect for all of you. It really is the essence of incarnate experience. How do you deal with your sadness, your fear, your pain? How do you find the courage to endure? How do you remember the deep joy, connection and beauty that are possible during those times of sadness, alienation, and fear? Your ability to remember in that way is what allows you to tread lightly through the mud and not get mired in it. I pause here for you to stretch and then welcome your questions about either my talk tonight or any issues that you have brought with you. I pause.

Ce: When we do the Seven-Branch Prayer, can we do that right on the spot when something is happening?

Barbara: Aaron says, "Absolutely."

Ce: But lots of times you can't. So is it not also in meditation that we can look at the situation and go through the steps there?

Aaron: I am Aaron. I hear your question, Ce. We use it in both times. The deep practice with it step by step in meditation provides you with a foundation. Then when you're in an intense situation in which you might be reactive to another or deeply judgmental of the self, you find yourself with more spaciousness out of which more immediate skillful action and words may arise because of the foundation. I would liken this to learning various swimming strokes and perfecting those strokes with daily swimming in your swimming pool, practicing your arm stroke and your breathing and your kicking, building up your endurance until it becomes second nature to you. Then when you are paddling a canoe in heavy current and the boat tips over, you know exactly what to do. You're able to use what you have practiced. At that moment you don't think, "How do I move my arms, how do I move my legs?" the body knows how to do it.

In just the same way, if L's neighbor does something quite obnoxious next weekend, if L has been practicing with this, he's going to see the anger arising. Along with the anger will be the wisdom that understands the roots of the anger. Then deep compassion may arise. He will be able to think of that great teacher and ask himself, "What would this being do?" Now, he's not going to respond with absolutely perfect skill and

openhearted love, but he'll come a bit closer than he has before, and each time a bit closer.

When I say that you practice this right in that moment, perhaps I mislead you a bit. You do not sit down and go through each step, spending two or three minutes on a step, sitting there for twenty minutes while someone is ranting and raving at you. But within that person's ranting and raving, right there, comes the image of the beloved, the awareness of innate perfection, and your own deep resolve to enact that perfection also in your own life, to enact that lovingkindness. This gives you the strength to make space for the anger and fear that may be coming up, and work skillfully with them so that increasingly skillful, selfless response is possible. And then yes, you take the whole thing back to your meditation. Reflect upon it and work even more deeply with it.

Does this clarify it for you, my sister? I pause.

Ce: Yes, it does clarify it a lot. I just wanted to add something I think is very helpful, and that is, what we talked about in vipassana meditation class on Monday and also on a Wednesday night session a few week's ago. And that was how to look at an object or a person without self or attachment.

Barbara: Seeing with bare perception.

Ce: I find that helpful because I remember how I have been at times when I am involved in intense emotion and at those times I say to myself, "Refuge! Refuge! Where is this refuge!"

Aaron: And where do you find it? Refuge cannot be a hiding place. Refuge is strength. It's your own innate strength and not something which you hide behind.

Ce: I think of refuge in order to start the process, the Seven-Branch Prayer, but I cannot get beyond the first step because I cannot connect with any inner strength.

Barbara: At that point, just work step by step and trust the path. Connect with whatever you find, simply with divine energy or a specific expression of divine energy such as the Christ or Buddha or some living expression, whatever expression is useful for you, something that is "truth" for you. Simply hold that being up as a teacher or that divine energy itself up as a teacher. Then the second step is offering, and that's what helps you connect with your own innate strength, because when you deeply touch the aspiration to offer your own energy with the same purity as that blessed teacher, then you find within yourself the ability to do that. Aaron has said if you're very honest with yourself, you know that that perfection is also in you. The question is really, then, one of willingness. Aaron will talk.

Aaron: I am Aaron. I will say this myself. You are approaching the ability to make the choice, "I am willing to let go of my defendedness, to let go of my barriers, to let go of all the means I have used to remain safe and in control in the world. I am willing to do this because the aspiration is so deep in me to offer my energy with love. And so I am willing to endure whatever discomfort there may be as I move through this transformative process." It really is the fire that purifies. I pause.

Ce: He said "endure discomfort."

Barbara: He says, "Precisely."

Ce: I don't understand. I thought it was the discomfort that blocked me from access to the innate wisdom ...

Aaron: I am Aaron. It is **not** the discomfort, my dear one, but your relationship to the discomfort. Can you see that you are still attached to comfort, and thus are doing all these practices, at least in part, to make the discomfort go away? I do not blame your dislike of discomfort, but you can not push it away. What are the roots of discomfort? Only that understanding will resolve it. To understand, you must be willing to go further in to the discomfort, to "endure" it rather than to try to control it. What allows this willingness to go further in?

If you come to a bed of hot coals that give off a great radiant heat, you're going to turn and walk the other way. That's human nature. If certain situations create anger within you or pain, you're going to choose to move away from them. One of L's first questions last week was, "Shall I sell my house and move?" It's human nature to want to avoid situations of pain and this isn't bad. Indeed, without that instinct, most of you would not survive. But you do not need to put up all of these barriers and defenses to be present, fully present with bare perception, with an emotion like jealousy or impatience. It's going to lead you deeply into certain experiences of grief, fear and confusion. They are experiences that you have strived to avoid at all costs. You've created certain habitual emotional patterns because those patterns seem to protect you, patterns of control, of denial, of distancing.

It is precisely because of the deep aspiration you become willing to take these burning coals literally in your hand and investigate. Of course, if they burn too much, you're free to put them down and say, "They're too hot. I need to start with something that's not quite so fiery, not quite so formidable." Then you build up your muscles, so to speak. But there is endurance there.

If someone beloved to you was on the other side—let's not call it burning coals but burning sand, 130 degrees outside, brilliant sun, literally blistering. You're standing in the shade and somebody who's dear to you who is in the water screams "Help!" are you going to endure the sand? Of course, because of your deep aspiration and love. Might there be fear? Of course, but there is also willingness to endure. The self fades.

In order to act from that deep aspiration and love you must become connected with it in a conscious way through your meditation practice. Does this explain it, Ce? I pause.

Ce: I understand but I also would like to add how I am beginning to see how useful that exercise is, of looking at an object or person to see its divinity, how useful that is to me now.

Aaron: I am Aaron. Yes, it is one way of beginning to see that everything is expression of the divine. Several weeks ago in one of the Awakened Heart talks, I talked about the movement of mindfulness, bare perception, and so on. This practice provides another way of understanding the same truths. We give these teachings to you in different forms. Those who do not choose to come here for the channeling sessions but choose to meditate learn the teachings as part of vipassana practice. In the classes I present here, I put it in a bigger spiritual format. It helps to provide clarity and really to help you find a deeper sense of the inspiration for this very difficult work. It helps take it out of the

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more mechanical format of precise mental noting of vipassana. It puts heart into it, you might say. It's the same practice, though.

Receiving whatever arises, you are with the breath, and if there is then hearing, such as hearing my voice now, simply know there is hearing and receive it with a sense of wonder, as if you had never heard anything before. No concepts about the words themselves, the sound, the content. Just presence with it. If thoughts arise, you allow yourself to be present without thought about the thought, just seeing thought blossom, exist and then dissolve, as if you had never had a thought before.

For those of you who were not present at Monday's meditation class, which Barbara taught, she brought up the cup which is on the windowsill. She held it up just for a few seconds then covered it and asked people to draw it. People became aware of how much they were invested in the concept of "cupness" rather than the direct experience of this cup. Then, she held it up for a longer period of time and asked them to draw it again. Finally, she passed it around the room and asked people to connect with this cup and draw it again. She requested that people do this at home with a shell or plant, with something simple like a leaf, not the whole plant. Directly experience it with that sense of wonder, free of the concept. See how concept separates you from experience. She asked, "Does concept protect or is it merely habit, or both?"

Then she requested that people take that material experience and move it into the human frame. She suggested sitting with a friend or willing partner, just looking into one another's eyes. See how directly you can experience that person, not your concepts of them as you want or expect them to be, but just present with them exactly as they are in that moment. And finally, that you be with your own thought, such as an experience of fear or anger or jealousy or desire, in just the same way.

The mental noting that we do in meditation is both extremely helpful and also limited. It can push you into categorizing experience and thereby separate you from experience. So it's very important to employ this two-step process. Work with these factors, technically, "vitakka" and "vikara," holding and penetration. And you must do that with everything in your experience if you are to be able to experience it. Here is where the willingness comes in. So much of experience you have not wanted to touch because it felt dangerous. So much of the sense of danger of it was in your old concepts of it and not in this specific experience. But because old history told you this is likely to be painful, you said no to it and did not let yourself get near it. Now you are asking yourself to hold it and penetrate it. Willingness to do that must come from one of two places: either sheer will power, which really is more a force of fear and judgment, or this deep aspiration as expressed through this Seven-Branch Prayer, in which you connect with that which we might call Love, which is willing to endure discomfort in order to experience truth, and through truth to find freedom. I pause.

The Awakened Heart, Part Six

April 9, 1997, Wednesday Night Group

Aaron: I am Aaron. Good evening and my love to you all. Tonight I want to offer the next piece of the Awakened Heart series. I will backtrack very briefly to fill in your memories.

We began this series by talking about the various heavy mind states, and noted that our work up until then had been simply to learn to make space for these mind states and not to judge the self because they had arisen. Implicit in that statement is that you are not acting out these mind states, that you have that degree of self-control and resolve not to harm others. Nevertheless, the mind state is there, it's very uncomfortable and some of the energy of it leaks out.

In December I pointed out that since these mind states arise when conditions are present for them to arise, you cannot cut off the mind state but you can begin to more deeply investigate the conditions that lead it to arise. To do so is very difficult. This entire series of talks is to familiarize you with the various supports for doing this difficult work. In offering this series I am borrowing from a beautiful, lengthy poem by a teacher named Shantideva. I emphasize that this is not a re-statement of Shantideva, nor commentary on his poem, I've simply used his thoughts as a rough outline to build upon with my own teaching. Most of that teaching runs parallel but not all of it.

We talk of the Awakened Heart, the ever-loving Awakened Heart, that is inherent in all of you. This is not something you need to attain but something you nurture so that that seed that's already there will blossom. To look deeply at the conditions that give rise to fear, anger, greed and delusion, it is most helpful when there is access to the heart which is deeply opened and loving. It can't be reached in a mechanical way or with force. The open heart must present itself willingly.

We observed and practiced with the various steps to open to the Awakened Heart. This is the Seven-Step Prayer. Then we talked about those practices which help to keep the heart open and accessible—primarily, deepening carefulness, awareness and patience. Now we are moving into part three with the question, "What supports your aspiration to live from that Awakened Heart?" You've made contact with it, you've stabilized it, now you want to live from it. Shantideva offers three factors and I'm going to discuss each of them on a different Wednesday night. None of them is sufficient unto itself. They must support each other. These are: energy and effort, deepening concentration and wisdom. Tonight, we will talk about energy and effort, what right effort really means.

All of you understand what it means to make an effort, to have some goal in mind and make an effort to meet that goal. I believe you can clearly see that the motivation for that effort can come predominantly from a place of love or a place of fear. There may be strong effort in a distorted direction to get rid of anger, which effort takes the form of an attack on the anger, or there can be effort from a place of love, which deeply

opens the heart and chooses skillful means to understand the conditions out of which the anger arose. Only with such understanding does anger cease to arise.

What might these conditions be? Clearly the illusion of a separate self is primary condition for fear-based emotion. But if that illusion exists, you can't just say "I don't want it any more" and throw it out. You cannot approach it by saying, "I want to get rid of the illusion. Where is a knife that will cut it away?" Here is where your dedicated spiritual practice becomes the tool that cuts through the illusion. You could begin with the steps of the Seven-Branch Prayer, with deep-seeing that there is an inherent Christ or Buddha nature which you can express in the world, with regret for the pain that your illusion causes yourself and others, and with a deepening resolve to understand.

Here is where you can begin to feel the heart open. Then you may still be aware, "I am living in the delusion of a separate self," but instead of a need to attack, there is a gentleness and mercy. The open heart simply notes the way you move into separation based largely on fear. It brings kindness to the human which is afraid, and also starts to see you do have a choice. You know, "I do not have to jump into this illusion of separation in order to feel strong and in control. I can rest in the spaciousness and connection in which unlimitedness equals infinite power."

To work with great effort in this way, four supports are offered. Let's take them one at a time. The first is **aspiration**. In some texts by Shantideva it's translated as "desire." But desire here is not a grasping and fear-based energy, which is how you usually interpret desire, but is aspiration. This grows out of that deep resolve to purify your energy, to offer your energy lovingly to others, to do no harm. So for effort, there has to be aspiration, and it must come from a place of love or it becomes distorted and shifts us off into this whole fear-based distortion of getting rid of the heavy emotions, killing them, attacking them.

I present these in my own order. The second support, traditionally listed as third, is **joy**. Earlier this week I spoke to a friend who talked about the way his spiritual path seemed to lead him increasingly into a narrow and dark place. If you view the heavy arisings of the emotions as something evil and have the misconception that you must destroy this evil in order to be pure and worthy of God, then spiritual practice is going to lead you into increasing darkness. Where is joy? Where is love? When you read the writings of some of the great mystical teachers through the centuries—Theresa of Avila comes to mind, as does the poet Rumi—their writings of God express a love affair, literally. There is such deep joy offered.

Everything is an expression of God: sorrow, anger, fear—these are all faces of God. As you move deeper in your spiritual work, you come to see that these are distortions of love. We've talked about that idea here before and I will not speak in depth to it now, but will only say that you can easily see that fear is a distortion of love. When there is a thought that one will be hurt or one's needs won't be met, that leads one into a distortion of fear because of love of the self. But the self is no less divine than anything else. It is a love-based distortion.

So we could say, perhaps, that the truth of God is love, and all else is a distortion of love. Within love is joy. Yes, of course there's sadness. For example, if that which is beloved leaves, departs or dies, there's going to be a sense of sadness and loss. But even the loss and sadness carries an aspect of joy because of the depth of your loving

and the wonder of your memories. Nothing can ever really go away. When Ramana Maharshi was dying, his disciples were gathered around and saying, "Oh no, Master, don't leave us! Please don't leave us!" He looked around and said, "Where would I go?" Where would anything go?

When you rest in the divine and understand your interconnection with all things, there is joy. When you cease to attack the fearful arisings of the self, but learn to offer love to them instead, then there is joy. For right effort, there must be joy. If your effort is taking you increasingly into a place of darkness, then here is a spot where you must stop and ask, "How have I gone astray?" Ask your own inner wisdom. Ask God. Ask your friends. Where has joy gone?

I'm not talking about one who spends his life in constant laughter which denies suffering in the world. Rather, there is a certain deep joy which comprehends the suffering of the world but has such deep acceptance, love and faith that it finds beauty even in the suffering. It looks at a flower which opens its blossom just for a few hours and then dies, and sees both the loss of that flower and the exquisite gift of the few hours of its blossom. Its ephemerality makes that beauty even more precious. That's not denial, in my mind, but clear-seeing. This clear-seeing and the joy it carries are great supports for right effort.

The third and fourth facets I would take together, and that's why I have changed the order. The third in Shantideva's book is called pride, and here again we have a semantic distortion. What this third factor really is is **self-confidence**. It is knowing who you are, the deepest truth of yourself, and of what you are capable. If you deny your divinity, then fear will continue to overcome you. Effort will be difficult because you will feel, "I can't do it anyhow." Then there's a certain kind of laziness. What is laziness? The word for laziness in Sanskrit, "allasya," translates to "not taking hold of what is there."

"Not taking hold of what is there." What blocks you from taking hold of what is there? What really is laziness? There's lack of aspiration in laziness. There's lack of joy, which one could translate simply into fear, depression and darkness. There's lack of self-confidence, lack of getting in touch with the deepest truth of the self.

There comes a certain time in your spiritual growth when you have largely moved past the arisings of fear-based pride which wants to be better-than so that it can feel safe, comfortable and loved. Then you become increasingly willing to consider the deep truth of the self, your wonder, your brilliance, your divinity, and that you do have the ability to enact these in the world. The great ancient Zen Master, Hongzhi says, "... you are inherently spirited and splendid, still you must still go ahead and enact it."¹ This thought of inherent divinity is not based on ego-centered pride but an honest assessment. Certainly the mind wants to play with that evaluation. The ego likes it and says, "Oh, am I really that good?" Don't be afraid of the way the ego grabs hold of it. Just say, "Shhhh!" to the ego and come back to knowing the truth of who you are.

The fourth factor is the balance to this self-confidence. One might call it **moderation**. In knowing the truth of who you are you must also know if you have human limits. A very

¹ Hongzhi, Cultivating the Empty Field, (North Point Press, San Francisco, 1991), "Practice Instructions; Simply Drop Off Everything," p.10.

simple example. If you are on a ship that sinks a mile off from shore and you have two babies in your arms, you may have enough confidence in your swimming ability that although it would be very difficult, you **can** make it to shore with these two babies. Fear might lead you to say, "No, that's pride. I can't do that. I'm not that good a swimmer," and to drop one. But a deeper confidence knows, "Yes, I can do this." You begin to swim when you see a frantic splashing a hundred yards away, and see that another child is also in the water, clinging to some fragment of wood. To make the decision not to try to save that child is in some ways harder than to make the decision to try to save it. Here one is honest with oneself, "No, I cannot do this. If this child is to be saved, it will have to be saved in another way. Perhaps it will be able to hold that fragment of wood until I get to shore and return." A will-based pride might prompt you to say, "Well, I'm going to save the third one, too" and you all drown. It takes as much wisdom and courage to say "no" as it took to say "yes."

This is a very hard call, as this instrument would say. You have got to be utterly honest with yourself. You also have got to be deeply tuned in to the inner wisdom of the self, resting in the place of the divine in the self. If the voice prompts you, then go, go to the other child, don't be afraid. Then you've got to be willing to follow that voice knowing this is not the ego, that perhaps that scrap of wood will be strong enough to support all four of you and you can kick your way to shore. If the same voice says to you, "No, you cannot do this. Save these two," then that is what you must do.

How do we know whether it's the voice of fear or the voice of love? This is a very difficult thing to know. The ability to discern comes as a fruit of ongoing spiritual practice. One trains oneself to listen. One trains oneself to feel how fear is experienced in the body and how one feels when one is deeply open. This kind of discernment cannot be learned instantaneously; it comes as a fruit of practice. As you become more confident in your ability to make this kind of discernment, effort becomes easier because you are not plagued by doubts but have a sense of clarity. When resting in center, you know you are resting in center. When out of center and pushed by the discursive mind, you know that you are being pushed by discursive mind. This is essentially the practice of connecting and resting in the Awakened Heart, combined with your vipassana practice which teaches you deep awareness, honesty and fearlessness.

These are the four traditional supports for right effort, and I would add one more, which is **endurance**. What do I mean by endurance? I want to share a story with you, of a Japanese Buddhist priest, an abbot. It was a time when Russians had taken over that particular area of China. The Japanese people who lived there were told they must leave and go back to Japanese territory but only those who were capable of walking out of their home on their own two feet might go. They were packed into buses to be transported back into Japan, but they were forced at gun point to leave the babies behind. All of the townsfolk were not moved at once; but, this block and then that block. After the parents were packed into the buses and taken away, not knowing what would befall their babies, the Russian authorities simply came and boarded up the houses, leaving those infants to a dreadful fate.

This abbot had chosen to stay. What he did was, at night after curfew, to sneak out, wind his way through dark alleys and listen. If he heard a whimper or cry, then very stealthily, because if he was heard he would be killed, very stealthily he would pull the boards off a window or door, creep in and find the child. In this way he found and

brought a great many babies to safety. They were cared for and sneaked out to a secret place. Then people began to get sick with some kind of fever, maybe typhoid; the abbot also got sick. He was very thin, feverish, but he did not stop. He knew he had only a certain amount of time before these children died. As parents were forced to leave, his rescue was an ongoing process over several weeks. Despite his typhoid, despite his illness, lying in his bed he would think he heard a baby cry, drag himself down the street with his heart open, asking, "Where is this child I need to find?" and allow himself to be drawn to it. When he heard it he would open that house and rescue the baby. He became famous for what he had done.

He was not driven by fear. He was not driven by ego. He was driven by love. We might call this part of aspiration but it's really something different. It's a mixture of aspiration and effort. They come together. Aspiration is only the dream to do; effort can become distorted by ego. But aspiration, clarity and effort married together become joyful, infinite endurance.

So these are the supports for right effort. It is very possible to nurture these in conscious awareness. Simply bring attention to whether or not the supports are present and, if they seem not to be present, ask what blocks them. Please remember that these qualities of aspiration, joy, self-confidence, moderation borne out of wisdom and endurance are inherent in you. When the clouds of fear are dissolved, these qualities will shine forth.

Once you have the support in place for right effort then you must ask, "Effort to do what?" Traditionally, right effort is described as having four aspects: to nurture wholesome mind states already arisen; to support the arising of wholesome mind states that have not yet arisen; to prevent unwholesome mind states from arising; and to allow the dissolution of unwholesome mind states already arisen. In the fourth, the traditional phrasing is "get rid of," but I find this phrasing to be distortion. We simply "allow to dissolve." There is never attack on the unwholesome mind states, but just deep awareness of their arising and the conditions out of which they arose. With mercy and understanding these conditions, such as the delusion of separate self, themselves lose their solidity, and then the unwholesome mind states which are resultant from the conditions naturally dissolve.

Four parts. "To nurture wholesome mind states that already have arisen" might seem to be easiest but in some ways it's very hard. It is difficult because you are all so critical with yourself and do not honor yourself when these mind states are present in you. You can't nurture them if you deny that they're there. You tell yourself, "It's ego. It's pride," to feel that this wholesome state is present. My dear ones, cherish yourselves. Cherish your beauty. Cherish your divinity.

"To allow wholesome mind states that have not arisen to arise." Here you must be aware that the mind state truly is already present but is hidden beneath the surface, like a seed in the soil. You must ask over and over, "What blocks it?" and attend lovingly and with great dedication to this question, to understand what blocks it and allow it to dissolve.

As you work to let the wholesome mind states grow and ask what blocks them, you are led directly to the unwholesome mind states. As soon as you ask, "How do I allow wholesome mind states that have not yet arisen to arise?" you become aware "I do this

by attending to unwholesome mind states." You note the presence of these unwholesome states and allow the light of non-judgmental, choiceless awareness to shine upon them and the conditions out of which they sprang. In this way you allow them to dissolve and also allow the force of your identity with those states to shatter. Coming to know your innate perfection, you cease to be caught in the myth that such unwholesome mind states as pass through you now and then are who you are. You see them simply as the play of conditions, the play of the mind and of the universe. There is no longer self-identity. Rather, the arising of such mind states becomes an ever more powerful reminder of non-duality. Each heavy thought is also expression of the Unconditioned and leads you back, repeatedly, to the truth body, to rest in pure awareness which watches all arising without fear, contraction, or need to move into relationship with that arising.

Here we're dealing with karmic tendencies, where the tendency was the blame of others and the statement of helplessness, that very thought of "It's not my fault," solidified the relationship with the mind state and created an oppositional pattern. To be helpless/to control; they are directly related. When the thought was the blame of self as antagonistic criticism, that thought also kept you safe from the pain of the situation, gave you a way to attempt to wrest control. The root is still helplessness and control, and the illusion of separate self out of which these ideas spring. Such a pattern keeps you caught in the re-creation of such mind states. There must be willingness to see that this pattern exists, a willingness to let go of old, fear-based patterns. Such willingness grows out of such practices as the Clear Comprehension of Purpose and the steps of the Seven-Branch Prayer, such as resolve.

It is out of that willingness and resolve that change begins. These supports assist you to look into and more deeply understand the nature of conditioned arising and the truths of impermanence and interconnection of all things. Then you can regard the forces that push you into unwholesome mind states and can understand, "I do have a choice. I do not have to get into a relationship with this mind state. I do not have to act it out. I have a choice."

Right effort, then, is one of the three supports which must be nurtured for continuous expression of bodhicitta or Awakened Heart. The other two are deepening meditative concentration and wisdom. When you ask yourself in sorrow, "What do I do about the anger, greed, jealousy or pride which continues to arise in me?" please recognize that there are these wonderful supports for understanding the conditions that gave rise to these mind states, supports for disconnecting yourself from identification with the mind states and need to enact them. With skillful practice, the mind states do decline but even more important, there is no contraction about them when they do arise. We simply note their presence and they lead us deeper into compassion as we allow the wind to blow them away. That is all.

Barbara: Are there questions?

Ca: I'm not sure I understood this correctly. (*Inaudible question about Rumi.*) Did Aaron say the self is distortion?

Barbara: Aaron says he was talking about Rumi's deep devotion to God and the deep joy he expresses in union of self as aspect of God with the Divine itself.

Ca: In talking about the great love the mystics have for all that is, including the self ...

Barbara: Aaron says, forgive his interruption but there is no differentiation between the self and anything else. It's all expression of God. But this particular expression of God wishes to experience full union with God. For mystics such as Rumi or Theresa of Avila, union was there every moment and through that union there was such a deep experience of joy. Aaron is saying all that separates us from that deep experience of union is our own belief in the negativity in ourselves and our own belief that we're not worthy of that union. Because how could we ever be completely separate from God? He wants to speak for himself.

Aaron: I am Aaron. What I am saying here is that you do not allow yourself to experience joy because you dwell so strongly on the negative arisings of the self, find such blame and judgment, move into the distorted fear-based track that you must get rid of these, must attack and kill them, and then you'll be worthy of God. You erroneously believe you must destroy the negative side rather than just coming back to the divinity of the self. I don't mean that you don't have to attend these heavy emotions. But you attend them with love, not fear which attacks. The joy comes when you allow the experience of the union to whatever degree you're able. And the myth that you must attack and kill some part of the self is what brings closure and darkness. I pause.

V: The concept of the self is not a dualistic concept, then.

Aaron: It is a concept which depends on another concept, that of duality, for it's existence. Duality is not ultimately real; it too is a concept. Separate self is another concept. The true "Self" is like the drop of water in nondual existence with the sea.

Ca: But the concept of a separate self is dual.

Aaron: Self is merely a concept! It does not exist. How can it be dual when it is illusion? But duality is also concept and illusion. The concept of a separate self is an illusion which bears a causal relationship to the concept of duality.

Barbara: Have we any questions?

L: That's a pretty profound statement, that the limitation on our joy is the result of our negative feelings for ourselves. Am I hearing that right?

Barbara: Aaron says, yes, that is the way he sees it.

L: Pretty profound.

Ca: I would like to share a story from this week. J and I were working at the hospice with a man who was in the final stages of dying. He was having a great deal of difficulty breathing and having a very difficult time getting into any comfortable position. He could get comfortable for about five minutes then he began to cough and he couldn't breathe. He was in a lot of pain and discomfort. His mother and sister were with him and his young nephew and niece were there too. We all worked together to help him get as comfortable as possible.

At first, I was noticing a lot of contraction in my own body around his pain, but I was working to be gentle with myself about my own pain, not having to fix him for myself, but offering love to everyone and praying a lot just to be as open-hearted as possible.

After about an hour he was sitting on a couch with J on one side working with his energy and his sister was supporting him on the other side. She began to pray a very traditional prayer about, "Jesus be with us all. Jesus be with this man. Bring comfort to his body. Jesus we love you, Jesus we thank you." Very repetitive prayer. As she was praying, I was aware of a deep melting in my own heart and an ability to just be present. Somehow, joy was what came up. We all were there together for the next half hour or so and there was so much love and joy. He began to relax and was not in as much pain. It was one of the most profoundly joyous experiences I have ever had. Somehow it seems to relate to this whole practice. It was about letting go of any negative emotion I had about the entire situation and allowing my own joy to emerge. Somehow while Aaron was talking it helped me to understand at a deeper level the emotional experience of that. It felt as if I was resting in rigpa. We were so deeply able to touch love. There was very little separation.

Aaron: I am Aaron. Thank you for sharing this story, Ca. This work takes you to the same experience that Rumi or Theresa of Avila is talking about: the direct union with God. As soon as you acknowledge that your work is with divine energy, that you are simply instrument for that energy, the small ego self dissolves and you are left with that which is inherently pure and with that experience of union. It may not be a full and profound experience, but nevertheless it at least touches on that union and there is much joy. As soon as the spirit acknowledges its truth, it opens into the light and into joy. As long as it hides itself in the delusion of separation, it maintains its fear. It cuts itself off and holds itself in darkness.

Several years ago, K made a profound statement that is written in one of the Project Expand transcripts. She said that she realized as she was meditating, that although she has given lip service to wanting union with the divine there is that within her that really did not want it. Not just the small ego self that wanted to maintain separation for safety, but as she came to investigate that first self-awareness, she saw the ways that that newly aware self began almost immediately to vie with God, to see the ideas of power and glory and so forth, and want some of that for itself. So it set itself up, in a sense, in opposition to God. So she said she began to see how the shame about doing that was one of the primary factors that prevented her from letting go into this experience of union, of complete emptiness and cessation of arising and dissolution. I pause.

J: I want to add a piece. I also experienced that unity, and had deep understanding in that space. Afterwards the director came up and asked what was going on with this man, where was he, related to death. Was it imminent? I could feel myself wanting to reject the access, clarity and insights that had come through me. I could feel the fear of having such access, wanting to deny it.

Barbara: I understand that very well. That's something I experience in channeling, especially in private meetings, that as I'm channeling Aaron sometimes I also have real clarity about what's happening in that person. I'm not quite catching Aaron's words but see it through my own clearest awareness. It's scary, there's a sense of—I don't want to label it super-humanness, and it's not just that it appeals to the ego in small ways and that I want to push that away. For me it has more to do with responsibility.

J: Assuming the responsibility and resting in this very deep sense of joy.

The Awakened Heart, Part Six

Barbara: Aaron says this is the responsibility of the one who is saving the children a mile out from shore, and can feel immense joy in saving the two children even if he can't save the third. He knows what he can do and what he can't do and accepts whatever message he gets: go and save the third child or leave the third child. There's a deep sadness in leaving the third child but there's a deep sense of joy simply in participating with the universe in helping everything just be as it needs to be. He says part of what you've just described is your increasing non-need to save these people who are dying, your ability to just be there and let them die with peace and love.

The Awakened Heart, Interlude Two

This is not a new part of the teaching, but is more of a how-to, offering real life situations and how these teachings may apply. This interlude is drawn from two transcripts, two sequential weeks of talks.

April 23, 1997, Wednesday Night Group

Barbara: We've been working with the Awakened Heart transcripts. The first section was opening to awareness of the Awakened Heart. The second was stabilizing it. And the third are the different tools we can use to really bring this Awakened Heart into our lives and enact it in the world.

The last talk Aaron gave was on effort. He says effort and the energy go together. He wants to talk more about energy. He says many questions have been coming in from people in the last two weeks about energy, and it relates to effort. It also stands on its own. Since energy is not included in Shantideva's work, this will be in the final transcript as another interlude.

Aaron: I am Aaron. Good evening and my love to you all. I wish to talk about energy in a number of its aspects. We will begin with a short guided meditation.

Please bring into your heart and mind the image of a being who represents for you a personification of love and of truth. It may be a living being or a great master of the past. If no such being at all presents itself to you, but the image of a flower or brilliant light presents itself, use that.

It is fine to use your imagination. The imagination bridges the gap. Bridges more specifically that gap of fear or doubt, resistance, which builds barriers. The spirit world is all around. It is only these barriers of fear or confusion which keep you from the direct experience of spirit. So use your imagination if it's helpful.

Allow yourself to come as fully as is possible into the presence of this energy. See this being turn its attention to you in a very loving way. Allow yourself to feel his or her love and blessings. See how this being radiates light. (I'm going to use the pronoun "his" rather than constantly saying "his" or "her" but please be aware it can be of either sex or of no sexual bias at all.) Feel his radiance. You can almost see light coming into it through the crown chakra and then radiating out through the aura into the hands.

After you embrace this being, I would ask you to sit at his feet, or kneel if you prefer. You also have a crown chakra into which universal energy flows. Again, using your imagination if that helps, as best you can allow yourself to experience this being's light gentle touch on the crown chakra and also on the third eye. Feel yourself open. In this being's presence, offer silently your own deepest truth. An example might be the offering of your energy in service to the light, in service to all beings, or a statement of aspiration to ever more fully purify your energy for the service of love and light. These are just two examples. Please offer your own truth. I'll be quiet for a minute.

(Pause)

The Awakened Heart, Interlude Two

Now thank this being for his presence and ask of him that he continues to be available to you to teach you. Offer your deep wish to be taught, to be guided, inspired by such a powerful personification of truth and of love.

You may note that what we've just done is an abbreviated variant of the Seven-Step Prayer with a special bias toward allowing yourself to feel positive energy within the self.

Now we're going to take a slightly different step. Before we take it I simply want to say that every being contains some balance of positivity and negativity. Think of an iron filing on a sheet of paper. If you hold a magnet with its positive pole at one end of the paper and one with its negative pole at the other end, the filings on the sheet will all align themselves. When we think of positive and negative polarity in that way, we do not think of it as good or bad. Very simply, two different biases, positive and negative.

Somewhere in the middle of the magnet it is neutral. The brief meditation we just did was an opportunity to connect more deeply with the experience of your positive pole. Remember that these poles are part of the same magnet. The magnet cannot be entirely of one pole. It has to have two ends.

Here the metaphor breaks down because the magnet is not inherently biased towards positivity or negativity, but you as third density human **are** thus biased. Those of you here in this room are all positively biased. You still have a negative pole. Beings who we think of as negatively polarized, very angry beings filled with fear and greed, still have a positive pole. Not only that, but in all beings, even those who evolve into sixth density as negative polarity, the inherent bias is positive. Eventually that positive bias will shape the whole. Certainly there is very powerful negative higher energy, fifth and sixth density energy. I do not argue that it does not exist. But even that energy has inherent light as core. As example, no matter what changes you make in water, adding salt for example, it still had the elements of hydrogen and oxygen, in particular balance, as core. Eventually that positivity will embrace and draw negativity into itself, transmute it, until all that is left is the smallest tinges of negativity which remain to remind you to have compassion.

Your work is not to cut the magnet in half and get rid of the negative but to allow the positive end to work its way down, transforming negativity, drawing negativity into the beloved heart.

As the second step in this exercise, I would request of you to draw into your mind and heart the memory of something which frightened or angered or discomfited you, ideally something that happened in the past week. You may let it come in and reflect upon how you felt. As we did the earlier exercise, your energy field was so open, powerful, clear. As you recall this anger or fear, I ask you to recall the contraction. Let your body really feel that contraction you felt then. I want you to be aware of the actual sensation of the energy field shutting down. The way that I see it is as if there was a very open circle made up of hundreds of small flat panels, each one approaching the circle at a slightly different angle, like sheets of paper, spaced out, each one 1 degree off from the next, 360 of them around the circle. With contraction they begin to close in, that open circle closes. Like a mouth open and shutting. This closure is especially visible to me on the energy cord that comes down to the crown chakra. It's as if it were being squeezed. I'm going to be quiet for a minute now. Please really bring in this memory and allow yourself to experience contraction. I pause.

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Feeling some contraction, even if subtle, I request you to turn again to this beloved teacher or master, this personification of light and love. Without shame at the thought of anger, greed or fear, come before this being again. Sit at his feet. (Let us switch to female here, just for balance.) Take her hands. Offer even this fear and negativity to love, to the personification of love. There is no need for shame, but if shame arises in you at the presence of this negativity, offer that shame also. Accept this great master's help. She does not do it for you, she helps connect you to your own inherent positivity. It is your positivity which embraces the negativity. It's almost like an infinite sponge. No matter how much negativity there is, love is greater and can absorb that negativity. It doesn't have to be wrung out like a sponge, it just evaporates. But there must be intention to let it do so. There must be willingness to enter the process.

This is not getting rid of negativity, it's simply working skillfully with it. You are choosing to allow yourself to come back to your innate perfection, your wholeness, your truth, so that the negativity is disempowered. If it wishes to just sit there beside you, let it sit. As with the water, it will evaporate when it is ready to. The greater the sun, the faster water evaporates.

Once again, feel yourself returning to spaciousness, to light. I said earlier that the small bit of negativity that is left in a very open and positively polarized being is powerless but remains as reminder for compassion. You could think of it as a scar, evidence of the hard work you have done to disempower darkness. I pause.

Let us bring this meditation now into some practical use in your lives. I want to talk about two types of negativity that you encounter. One is energy negativity and one is a more physical activity such as somebody's anger or even their slap or punch. We could call it the negativity and the material expressions of negativity. I am speaking here in part in answer to several very specific questions that have arrived in person, by e-mail and by letter.

What do you do if you feel yourself invaded by negative energy that seems external to you, something that seems to want to grab hold of you? What do you do if somebody transgresses against you in a very real physical way? Builds their dock in your front yard, yells at you, yells at ones that you love. Sometimes in the presence of negativity, we feel ourselves becoming absorbed into that negativity so that we become more and more angry. The orifice that connects you to this eternal source of love seems to shrink and you feel really dominated by the negativity.

One important thing to remember, when you feel yourself contracting with such negative energy, is that you don't have to be afraid of this. Realize it is quite literally a gift. The only way that negative energy can begin to work changes in you is when it is building upon your own untended negativity. If somebody else is angry and a sense of real negative energy surrounds you, it's not only very discomforting but gives rise within you to your own fear and anger, in increasing ratio. This must point out your own untended negativity and the need to attend lovingly to it. Instead of closing up further and putting up barriers, how wonderful to be able to turn to that negativity and actually say "Thank you!" It is your teacher.

If you are painting a wall white, step back to see the results and see several places where dark old paint showed through, you don't hate that darkness, you simply use it as reminder, "Here's a place that I missed. Here's a place that needs to be attended."

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Whenever you feel yourself contracting with negativity in reaction to some external force, material or non-material, a first step then is to remind yourself, "This also is a teacher." Literally thank it. Offer your loving gratitude.

This great master can help you open your heart, open your energy. This is not because she is all-powerful but because given the invitation, the energy field opens back into its positivity because that is its inherent nature. Negativity cannot control unless you invite it in. As soon as you allow this closure—which I hope you experienced at least subtly in the exercise—to re-open, and remember positivity, and then allow yourself to thank the negativity that has opposed you for pointing out to you your own places of confusion, fear and distortion, as soon as you do that, you offer the strongest answer possible to that negativity. You issue it an invitation also to find its own positive heart. If it chooses to do so, fine. If it does not choose to do so, that is its own choice.

You do not thank it, go through this process as blackmail, knowing that it's uncomfortable with love and light and offering these to make it leave. You must do it with sincerity.

In the process of offering this silent thank you to the negative catalyst such as to your boss standing there stomping his feet and saying, "This report stinks!" you offer the same gratitude to your own hidden negativity. Can you see how that thank you transforms the situation? "Thank you for teaching me. Thank you for reminding me."

If the negative energy feels very powerful to you, and you're very uncomfortable with it, you can literally ask for protection. Here you again restate your deepest truth and say it to this negativity, "I will not be pulled in. I will not get involved in a relationship with you. I offer you love and invite the support of the forces of Light." You may call upon the forces of light and ask for help in many ways. This instrument, when she channels, sets herself within a circle of protection. She envisions the four archangels: Ariel, who is my teacher, in front of her; Michael and Gabriel on either side and Raphael behind her. When I say she envisions, she does not actually see them so much as call upon and feel their powerful energy. At other times she may call upon a circle of elders, very high and loving beings, some of which she can name and others of which are nameless. But they simply feel like a loving support shield to her.

You have to practice with this independently and see what works. Please know that it is not imagination, that such support **is** available to you. This is why it can be very healing and powerful to meditate and have the experience of anger or fear arise, because it gives you such a wonderful opportunity to work with it in a positive way.

When it arises outside of meditation in a real-life situation where somebody is treating you shabbily or cruelly, it's harder to use it right then because you must deal with the situation. But you will find that if you regard their anger as teacher, there will be opening. There must be no self-righteousness here, there must be real compassion for their anger. But with that compassion, if you can say silently to them, "Thank you. Thank you for reflecting my own anger back to me so I can look into it. Thank you for reminding me that this anger needs to be drawn into the loving heart," when you do that, you will find that you really can change the situation.

Two different questions that came to this instrument this week were about possession by evil or by negativity. I do not suggest that you cannot be possessed by negativity,

but I am not comfortable with the word possession, because possession seems to mean that you are acting against your will. Any being that allows itself to be grabbed by negativity has in some way allowed that situation, either because they do wish to explore their own negative polarity or because they wish this opportunity of reflection, the opportunity to note the places where there is still weakness, where there is still that which is unintended.

I repeat, nothing can possess you against your will. As soon as you are able to re-open into your own positivity and are able to say thank you to this teacher, draw in positive energy again, it can't hold onto you any more. It's as if you had suddenly become slick, with no surface for it to grab. There's nothing for it to hold. Your anger gives off little spikes, like Velcro, something to stick to. When the anger resolves, your energy field feels very smooth. There's nothing left for negativity to hold onto.

Part of what we're talking about here comes back to this, I quote myself, "contraction around the contraction." Fear, anger, greed, jealousy, confusion, lead to a contraction of the energy field. They're going to arise. When you contract around that initial contraction with stories about how it should or should not be, rather than just being present with "contraction," you close your energy field, close that orifice coming into the crown chakra.

I want to rephrase that. This orifice can never really close. You move into the delusion that it's closed. It's as if somebody said to you as you walked into a room, "The oxygen is very low in there," and you saw beings inside the room through a window gasping for breath. As you walked through the doorway, you might start to gasp also and feel, "I can't breathe." The more frightened you became, the more you shut yourself off from breath. But the whole thing is really an illusion, the oxygen level in the room is just fine. Fear closes the orifice. This energy channel into the crown chakra does not actually shut off. You move into the delusion that it is shutting off because of your fear, because of your darkness.

When you do this, you also bring upon yourself distortions in the health of your physical body, distortions in your sleep pattern, distortions which lead you further into confusion, fear and doubt. In short, you bathe yourself in negativity. I repeat, it is not a problem. Retain the clarity, "I have invited this in for some reason. It is my teacher." Ask for the help you need from your own positive polarity, your own positive nature, and the loving nature that surrounds you. As soon as you soften like that, you, in metaphor, start to believe there is oxygen in the room. "I **can** breathe." Your fear subsides a bit, you take a few deep breaths. You open further. And then you may begin to ask, "What is it here to teach me?" and to do some of this more difficult inner work of learning about the long-held old opinions and beliefs and fears, so that they may be released.

When we use the term "purify" or "clarify one's energy," this release is what we really mean. The energy field is always clear, pure and open but the contractions of fear make it seem closed. Negativity is not an enemy to be conquered. It is a gift to bring you back into the light, to remind you of your work, to remind you of compassion.

A number of you have quite concrete questions about how what I have just spoken of would work in a very specific situation. If you wish to ask these questions aloud, either as they truly exist or changing them subtly if you do not wish to offer the exact situation, I would be glad to speak to them.

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In our last meeting I spoke of right effort. Energy is part of effort. In order to offer the effort which is necessary to do this work, you must come back into connection with this stream of light within you. So working with very specific energy practices can be very helpful. Then, when you are in a difficult situation, you remember how it feels to have this open energy field and you know, "This is available to me." It is a very real support in the face of fear and darkness. That is all.

Barbara: Before we begin our questions, Aaron would like to point out that V's mother died a week ago. And he is inviting us all to just sit for a minute or two and send loving energy to V, to her family, to her mother.

Aaron: I am Aaron. We wish this woman a very joyous journey into the light. Please remember, V, that she has not gone anywhere where she would be inaccessible to you. She has simply moved on to a new phase of an ongoing process of growth. That is all.

Barbara: He wonders if there's anything you want to share about this.

V: I was just telling L a little about the last morning I was with my mother when she died, and how the night before, I had been doing tonglen practice, and had felt that I was working with the black clouds of her fear and negativity. That morning at the hospital she was clearly much closer to death. I sat with her and tried to do that again, but I couldn't find the black clouds. All I could visualize was a faint gray haze. Suddenly I realized that I was not doing it wrong, that's what was there and she had worked through all that and was ready to go. About an hour after that she died very peacefully with all of us around. It was very peaceful and loving.

Barbara: Thank you for sharing that, V. Two people have questions.

Ce: I am wondering about when a person has an addiction like a drug addiction, how is it in terms of negative energy. Can they be possessed in the way Aaron talked about?

Barbara: Are you asking when they are high on drugs can they still work in a conscious process with negativity that Aaron just described?

Ce: No. The fact that they have an addiction, does that show that they are used over and over by negative energy?

Aaron: I am Aaron. I want to make it clear that external negativity cannot "use" you or possess you without your permission. For the addicts, their own inner negativity which has been unconscious and unattended is what invites in the use of the drug, because there's too much fear to really confront the negative emotions or other negatively polarized aspects of the self. Fear leads to use of drug really as an escape. That's what drug use or any addiction is. It is really a very strong form of resistance. Unconscious fear breeds greater fear. Then the body becomes habituated to the drug and it builds up a physical addiction, yes. But the being that moves into addiction, that begins addictive behavior, is doing so because of fear. External negativity is not twisting it into that fear. Negativity is internal and abetting the fear. It's very difficult to work with, though, in a person who is addicted because when they are under the power of that chemical or mind-altering substance, they really cannot have clarity. So, first you've got to separate the person from the drug and tend to the physical addiction. Then they are

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able to begin to work with their own negativity and use whatever is “possessing” them as teacher. Does that answer your question, Ce? I pause.

Barbara: L?

L: I have been doing metta quite a bit and find real opening. Sometimes I use the very simple meditation of “Breathing in, I am aware of my fear. Breathing out, I smile to my fear.” My question is, could smiling to a feeling be a subtle form of trying to get rid of something?

Barbara: Aaron says, yes it can, anything can.

Aaron: I am Aaron. I would say this myself. But when you genuinely smile to it, it involves a certain softening of the barrier around the heart, a certain softening of the belly, which leads you into the ability more deeply to be present with the fear or discomfort. If there is fear of the fear, fear of the discomfort or emotion, and the smiling to it was offered as a way of not separating from it, the smiling does bring you back. There’s simply an awareness, “Here is resistance.” If the smile and process was offered as escape and you note that escape, that resistance to presence with discomfort, and then you smile to the resistance, again, it softens and brings you back. It’s very subtle but it’s very possible to catch it if you are able to be honest with yourself. Does this answer your question, L?

L: Why wouldn’t one say, “I see my fear, I accept my fear,” instead of smiling to my fear?

Aaron: I am Aaron. “Accepting” can be just as much a way of avoiding the direct experience of your fear as smiling to it. You simply have got to know, “Part of me really doesn’t want to be touched by this fear so it’s using devices like accepting it or smiling to it.” Here is the **concept** of accepting it. When you say “I accept my fear,” that’s a concept. Any concept can separate you from experience. If you think and say “I smile to it,” that’s a concept. No different.

But if you literally smile to it, it softens the body. If you accept it in the sense of really allowing yourself to be touched by it, asking for whatever support you need, and then opening yourself and letting this fear really touch you, then it ceases to be a concept. And that begins to heal. Acceptance or smiling: no concept! Because smiling is a physical act it is easier to be non-conceptual. I pause.

L: How about surrender?

Aaron: I am Aaron. Surrendering can still be a concept. The value of these practices such as the Seven-Branch Prayer is that it leads you into a direct experience of offering, which is a kind of surrender. When you’re at this place where all the barriers are released, then you are just there with fear. It ceases to be your fear, it’s just fear. You know then the negative and positive poles of the self, of all selves, and the heart fills with compassion for beings who are engulfed by their negative pole. Then you begin to feel your own strength and come to that place that absolutely knows and understands, “I have a choice. My old habit is to get into relationship with fear by doing something conceptual with it. To smile to it, to argue with it, fix it ...” and they’re useful to a degree. But when you come back and you’re just there naked, with no concept, with the fear, it is then that you discover the infinite depth of positive polarity, of strength, of love within

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the self, which no longer needs to use any old habitual patterns to cope with or control fear. I pause.

Barbara: Aaron says this is a process, please remember. I'm paraphrasing Aaron. First we learn to smile to it, to accept it, to make space for it. Then we start to investigate the self who is doing all of this and begin to understand that this has been a coping strategy, albeit a skillful and useful coping strategy. Then we are willing to take it one step further and begin to let go of the one who has to cope and come back to our wholeness and strength. He says this is where it shifts and it's a very dramatic shift, where we really understand this has been an old habit, to tame fear or anger in some way, and we don't have to do it that way any more. We suddenly know "self" as an artificial construct and shift into "no self." It's this first realization of wholeness, he says, which is really a part of what the enlightenment experience is about. He pauses.

L: It really works nicely. I'm amazed. I find myself having sighs of relief as it releases.

Barbara: There's such a difference between somebody who needs to release it and somebody who can just let it be entirely because you're resting in all the spaciousness of the whole self, who knows this is just like a bit of lint stuck to me. It's nothing. Then it releases also, but there's no one releasing!

L: Yes. I'm making some progress with my neighbor, too.

Barbara: Will you tell us a little about that?

L: I haven't talked to him yet but I've been having dreams that are kind of positive. So, that's good.

Barbara: I expect to see a picture by the end of the summer of you lounging in his hot tub! Others?

R: I saw a film the other night on Bravo! TV. It's about India. I knew there was poverty there. But the cruelty and the horror of the sadism really overwhelmed me. And then I started thinking about all the horrors that had been going on in, like, Yugoslavia. I don't know where to put it. I mean, it's beyond negativity. I would like Aaron to comment on it.

Barbara: Aaron says he will talk directly but he would like to ask you, have you ever seen people cooking little bits of meat on a fire, like hot dogs or something, on a low level charcoal grill, and a dog is smelling this and he keeps approaching, and he gets close enough to grab it and gets his nose burnt, and yip! backs off and then he does it again and again and again. There's so much desire, he just keeps getting burned. How many times will it take him before he learns, "I can't get at this"? How long will he then sit there silently before he decides, "I don't even need this"? He says the dog isn't going to have the same kind of human insight about suffering and its roots. The point Aaron is making is, we keep burning ourselves literally and figuratively until we're ready to learn lessons.

Aaron: I am Aaron. I will continue myself. I am not suggesting that everybody in these situations is there because they're stuck in some karmic place. Some of them have quite literally offered to be there as teachers to others. If there is one who does not grab the meat from the grill and burn himself, if there is one who does not sit there staring,

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panting, salivating, saying, "I want, I want," it's a very powerful force for others. It's inspired. It helps them to see there is another way.

Beings who grow up in a situation of extreme poverty, war or disease are there to learn something. This does not mean we don't tend to the war, poverty or disease. If that dog has not eaten in five days, he's going to simply get burned and steal the food. He'll keep stealing it, he'll simply suffer being burned. You need to be sure to feed the dog if you hope to teach it that it's not necessary to burn itself and steal from the grill. So what we can do is to attend to the situations that create the poverty and war and disease. Your work is to tend to it from a place that trusts it, so that you're not telling that person that they're broken, sending that message. Not telling them they need to be fixed. Simply offering that love and whatever skillful changes in condition are within your means to offer. If you live some distance away and do not have the financial means to help, it may be that simply doing tonglen or metta is all you can do, and living your own life here with as much clarity as you can.

An interesting side to the question R has raised is, why do you live relatively free of famine, disease, war? I find it interesting that in your Western culture, there are kinds of violence which are almost—I would not say accepted, they're abhorred by many—but they are standard, which you don't find in those kinds of cultures. In a society where there is much famine, people might steal for food and that is cruel, for to steal the other's food can really mean to kill the other person. If there is some kind of addiction of drugs, of course, that will invariably lead people to harm others to get what they need. But generally in those cultures there's a certain level of kindness to the other which is somewhat lacking in your culture.

If you drive down a busy street in a place like New York City, cars are honking, and a pedestrian is really at risk for his life if he cuts across. Everybody is for himself. There's an intensity to it. Whereas in many places such as India, in towns where people have very little food, they're still very generous and very kind with what they have. There's a personal violence that's lacking. It's just a different karma, a different lesson that needs to be learned, and a different place to which one has been drawn to learn a lesson.

R, you have asked me questions like this many times before. I would ask you to consider if some of your very deep pain in seeing others who are starving, who are wounded, and so forth, and live in such cruel conditions, relates to some degree of non-acceptance of your own tendencies to greed. I'm not singling you out and saying you're greedy, everybody has tendencies to greed. When we accept those tendencies with kindness in ourselves, then there's much more space for them. But when we attack them as "bad" in ourselves, judge them in some way, then one may see a situation where others are dying because of greed and fear and it's much more painful because we personalize it. There is a sense, "I could do that," a sense of horror with the situation. "I could do that, and I hate the possibility in myself that I could do that." When you say, "I could do that," and really offer compassion to the place that has such fear in you that it's honest enough to say, "I could do that," then it becomes easier to trust the situations that others find themselves in, while at the same time, helping in whatever ways are possible. I pause.

Barbara: I'm paraphrasing Aaron, at his request, because he sees confusion. He says certainly this is very sad, to see starving children, young men and women maimed by

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bombs and such, it's all very sad. Part of one wants to ask, why should such a world that's so cruel and awful exist? But there it is. He says it's simply karma. God has not created the horror. It's simply, we reap what we sow. These people are not being punished for something they did in a past life, not at all, he says. But they are encountering the seeds they sowed and have an opportunity to learn.

His point is that you are so deeply affected by this and it challenges you so much, it's so painful to you, and so in relation to his earlier talk this evening he would like you to look at the place in yourself that knows if you were in a place of such deprivation, you might act in very unskillful ways, and instead of being able to be compassionate with yourself, much judgment arises. Then your judgment of the situation is a reflection of your self-judgment, at the bits of negativity in you. He says, do you see what he means? He pauses.

R: Well, I can see it up to a point. I mean, when I think about the raping and the ugliness, that doesn't really have anything to do with starvation. The extremes of it, the cruelty that's inflicted.

Aaron: Wherever fear becomes dominant and leads to reactivity which harms another, it's cruel. How many times do people need to bang their heads against a wall before they learn it hurts? You reap what you sow. I cannot deny that it may seem a cruel process to have to go through. You really are forged and purified by the fire. And the fire burns intensely so that you shriek and scream.

And yet, beings must go through the process. You keep incarnating. I'm not saying that you have a choice. Once you're within this karmic field, you've invited the cycle of birth and death. But it is a healing process and a growth process. And please remember how many beings there are who are not engulfed in this kind of cruelty. Those who are, are either old souls who have taken a more negatively polarized path or they are young souls. As you mature and work with a more highly positively polarized path, the need to enact the heavy emotions declines considerably, and you do find yourself in much more peaceful situations.

I sometimes think that what you are trying to say, R, in your frequent bringing up of this kind of pain, is that there is some kind of anger at what you perceive as a whole divine plan which created a situation where learning is so very painful, where people literally seem to suffer the torments of hell here in incarnation. Who dreamed up this scheme anyhow?

But my dear one, God did not dream up this scheme with a sense of desire to punish. Rather, an incarnate path to maturity offered itself and those beings who wished to move through to maturity in the material world were given that option. From then on you have free will. If there is a path, a clearly marked path, through a swamp filled with poisonous snakes and quicksand, and as long as you stay on the path you are safe, if there is some gold over there, and delicious-looking vine fruit over there, and these entice you to wander off the path and then you find yourself in quicksand, who put you there? Did God put you there? How else are you going to learn about your greed and fear and that they have results? That's the partial purpose of the incarnative process.

I've said to you before that there are other non-material paths to learn and they are viable paths. Those of you who have chosen the material plane in large part have

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chosen it because you are aware that the power of the catalyst that you allow yourself to enter teaches you a compassion far beyond what can be learned anywhere else. It's still not the primary lesson of the earth plane. But by the time you reach the higher densities, your ability for compassion is so heightened that you go far beyond what had been thought possible. It's not that there's a conclusion of compassion and one cannot exceed that. One simply moves deeper and deeper into this ever-pure, ever-loving heart. So in effect, all of these beings that are struggling around you, they're all heroes. They're all beings who have agreed, "I'm going to do this and teach it to the whole universe, not for my own glory but out of love. And I am willing to endure whatever it takes, because I so deeply aspire to learn this wisdom and compassion as my own gift, the expression of my own truth. I will allow myself to be forged by the fire." Thank them and offer whatever help you can. I pause.

Barbara: We have time for one more question. J?

J: In our Project Light work (*energy/body-work class taught by Aaron*), we are working with chakras and other energy centers. What is it we sense when we are describing these as closed?

Aaron: I am Aaron. I will speak briefly to this, J, and turn to it in depth tomorrow in class. Nothing was ever closed. You have seven basic chakras. If you think of how something reacts when it spins, if it was not a fixed form, as it spins its axes would extend. The harder it's spinning, the more it extends. Can you visualize that? I pause.

J: I understand.

Aaron: I am Aaron. When it's spinning just as it should, then it's extended. This extension (*using index fingers of two hands*) touches that extension and literally makes a connection. That energy can usually flow through it. But if it's wobbling, if it's unstable, if it's not spinning, if it's lacking energy, if it's shut off from its own natural energy source, then it doesn't extend enough. It's not quite so much a blockage as a break, like Christmas lights—if one bulb burns out, the current can't go through. Do you understand? I pause.

J: Yes. Thank you.

April 30, 1997, Wednesday Night Group

Barbara: Aaron says that questions of many different sorts have come in during the week. He's going to save the new Awakened Heart talk for next week and deal with these questions, to include under "Interlude." He wants to start with a talk and then open the floor to questions.

To begin, Aaron is asking me to read to you several sentences here, from Shantideva's poem. "In solitude the mind and body are not troubled by distraction. Therefore, leave this worldly life and totally abandon mental wandering." It goes on to talk about worldly life and renunciation. He says "Enough," and he will talk.

Aaron: I am Aaron. Good evening, and my love to you all. I want to talk about stress, the alleviation of stress and the use of stress in your life. We will come back to the lines I asked Barbara to read a bit later on. I did not want to interrupt her channeling to read them later.

The question does often arise for you: what to do with the many catalysts in your life—the stress, the confusion, the physical pain? Is there any one of you who has not at some time dreamed of going off to some place of great solitude and dwelling there? You may have considered the idea of a monastic life, letting go of worldly things and all the stress contained in worldly things. Or you may have simply pondered running off to a South Pacific atoll, living under coconut palms beside the sea and plucking fresh fruit at your back door.

Certainly there are places such as big cities where there's much more bustle and energy, and the possibility of stress is greater. There are certain kinds of involvements that do create greater stress. But do you really think that there's any place that could be free of stress? A friend tells a wonderful story of one of the most stressful nights of his life, when he was a monk and lived in a cave and found a large boa constrictor beside him. The cave was on the side of the cliff. He had no flashlight or other modern convenience. There was no way to get away from that cave. Here he was a monk and had left a monastery in Asia to find even more solitude in the hills, searching for peace. And what he found was a giant snake!

Is there any place you can go where your mind will not come with you? If you renounce modern living are you going to renounce your mind too? Are you going to have some kind of surgery to cut out a portion of the brain, along with the outer world? Your stress is not out there! Your stress is from within and the relationships you get into with the outer catalysts of your lives. And those catalysts are not going to disappear no matter where you go.

I understand that some places are quieter than others and offer a certain peace, such as being in a beautiful woods or by the sea. A place in nature and away from the turmoil of mechanized life, away from telephones and doorbells and so on, is peaceful. But you cannot hide there, for doorbells and telephones will be replaced by another catalyst. Furthermore, you cannot do the work you came to do in the incarnation if you bury yourself off in some obscure wilderness. You need these catalysts, whether you may wish to entertain that idea or not. You need these catalysts.

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You can learn to be very creative with your pain, your stress, your confusion. You can learn to embrace them as teacher and not arm yourself in battle. And you can learn very practical ways of releasing them rather than perpetuating the relationship with them. For herein is the suffering, not in the touch of the object itself but in how you relate to that touch.

I emphasize release. This is not "getting rid of," it's release. You open your hands, and if it wants to go, it will go. If you pick up a very hot object, you have no difficulty releasing it. You don't think to yourself, "Should I let it go?" At that moment, fear may say, "Get rid of it," and you may toss it. Or a quieter voice may simply say, "Let it go."

It is this letting go that you must learn. Your pain, your stress, your confusion, give you countless opportunities to practice this letting go until it becomes second nature. You have lived your lives with one kind of relationship to the catalyst in those lives, which was a confrontational relationship, with a sense, "I must defeat this or that, control this or that." What is required is nothing short of a total change of perspective, whereby instead of being one who was in control of one's environment, one shifts from that place of fear that would control into a place of love, trust, and harmony, which is willing to be co-creator with the environment. I'm not talking here about surrender to the environment. That's a defeatist kind of attitude which denies your infinite power and divinity. I say "co-creator." To do that, there must be a relaxation of tension. Learning how to relax tension in that way comes both from specific exercises and through your formal meditation practice.

Let's begin here with an exercise together. A very simple conscious relaxation exercise. I want you to begin with your eyes. If the eyes are clenched close in any way, relax them. Let them be totally effortlessly closed. No tension in the eyelids, no tension in the forehead. Relaxed ... Move up into the forehead, feeling any tightness there. Just let it go. And on up over the top of the head. Bring attention to the crown chakra. Allow it to feel open, as if there had been a muscle holding an orifice closed, and you totally relaxed it. You really can relax at the top of your head ... Down the face into the cheeks and in the jaw. Let the mouth hang subtly open, no force to open or close it. Breath flowing in a great "Aaaahhh."

Relax the ears. I'm not being funny. Just as you relaxed the eyes and jaw, you can relax the ears. It's a slightly different muscle than the jaw. With the jaw hanging slightly open, lift the attention up to the ears. You may feel a band of tension that goes around the back or front of the head from the ears. Let it open. From the ears down into the neck, let your head roll sideways ... forward ... side ... back ... and the other way, back ... side ... forward ... other side ... back ... and up to balanced. Neck and shoulders relaxed. Feel the tension not just coming out of the muscles but coming from a much deeper place within you, a place that fears and believes it needs to control. As you work with this exercise, I request you to see if you can get in touch with that within you which knows it is safe. It's just a different aspect of your being. It's the divine voice which knows its divinity and perfection, which has tremendous faith and love. It is the place within where there is not, and never has been, tension.

As the clouds of holding which buried that tensionless place dissipate a bit, allow that clear place to emerge into the shoulders. Take the arms and shake them gently. Let the energy pour out any tensions and then rest them comfortably on your lap. Move

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down the back. Take a deep breath. Hunch your shoulders forward a bit to feel the stretching between the shoulder blades and then come back. Natural spine. Relaxed. And then into the front and into the belly, chest and belly. Open, relaxed. Belly soft. If your belt is too tight, open it. Let your belly expand. I pause.

"Aaaahhh." Feel that spaciousness when the body can open itself. Down into the hips and the legs, releasing tension. No hurry to make it go. Nothing to get rid of. Just a deeply loving recognition that you have been carrying this tension for hours or perhaps even for days, and you don't need to do it any more. It is as if you put on a heavy backpack at the beginning of a journey and have gotten so used to the weight that you've forgotten that you're bearing it. There's nothing bad about the backpack, but it's heavy and it creates discomfort. Bring attention to it and note, "I can put this down." It's as simple as that. I pause.

"I can put this down. I have a choice." So many of you are addicted to your tension. You feel naked without it. It has become your habitual way of being with the world. If you are not in a mode of oppositionality, you feel like there's no self there. It's as if there has to be something pushing against you, something to push back against, to reassure you that you exist.

As you move through your life, you will find myriad things that do push against you. Physical circumstances, other people's thoughts, energy and opinions. Your own emotions and those of others. When you were very young, in your first evolutionary third density experiences on whatever plane, physical or non-physical, you moved into the illusion of a self and believed that that self needed to be protected. This was not a matter of lack of love, only it was a confined love, love for the small self and for those things that were dear to the small self. But there was an illusion of separation: the self vs. the rest of it. You seemed to be offered lessons in self-preservation which said, "I must kill an animal that's attacking me or it will kill me."

Somewhere along the line you evolved into a deeper understanding that while there seemed to be separate selves, they were not fully separate. Consider your own hand and foot. If you were building a brick wall, let us say a stone wall, and the stone you were working with came unbalanced and began to drop, in that instant, seeing it was about to drop onto the foot, the hands capture it. The hands don't have to ask, "Why should I protect the foot?" The hands and foot are part of one greater being. At some stage in your evolution you began to ask the hard question such as, "Why should I put myself above all else? Can I really be happy if others are suffering, especially if I am adding to that suffering?"

When these questions began to arise, a new type of stress was added, that of self-judgment. But you still hadn't learned how to deal with any of this. The self-judgment was treated in the same confrontational way as another person's aggression. "Kill it! Destroy it! Get rid of it!" As soon as you move into that mode of being, your body tenses and holds on to the tension. It creates very real physical distortion such as headache or backache.

Ce, I would ask you to reread the stanza that Barbara read at the beginning of my talk, it is stanza two I believe, on the page marked, under "Meditation." He is not suggesting the need to escape into some place that is free of stress so much as to understand the relationship with that stress in your own mind. I pause.

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Ce: (*Reading*) "In solitude the mind and body are not troubled by distraction. Therefore leave this worldly life and totally abandon mental wandering."

Aaron: I am Aaron. That is not a perfect translation. "... totally abandon mental wandering ..." rather, totally abandon the confrontational stance with experience and the kind of wandering mind which is manifestation of the resistance and fear with which you experience yourself in confrontation. "Leave this worldly life ..." I do not mean, read that as literally pick up and go and find a quiet place physically, so much as leave the frame of mind which is worldly life, which to me is very specifically this confrontational stance. What is the opposite of worldly life? Centered life. That which knows it is in connection with everything, so there is nothing with which to be in confrontation.

This is truly the work of your lives, all of you in this room, at this stage in your spiritual practice and growth. It is a slow process of retraining. One could liken it to, if you had been paralyzed all of your life, could really not walk across the room and get yourself a glass of water or reach your arm out or bend your body. It would seem very difficult to get what you wanted. If suddenly you were cured and discovered, "Ah, I can move! I can move anything any way I wish!" the old habit would still hang on for a long time. Crying to others for help. Feeling immobilized, powerless and afraid. Each time that you wanted that glass of water and began to cry out, "Somebody help me!" you would need to remind yourself, "This is not how it is any more. I can do this for myself." How many times would you need to remind yourself before you let go of that old habit of helplessness, limitedness and fear?

Your spiritual practice is like that. You are not becoming whole, you have always been whole, but you have not realized it. Your practices are growing into the awareness of your wholeness, unlimitedness and divinity, and of your infinite power. Every catalyst in your life offers you the opportunity to practice. You practice every time there is contraction, if you observe this, what I call confrontational stance, and simply ask yourself, "Do I need to do it this way?"

"Can I release it?"—not get rid of—"Release this contraction? As I do release it, what do I experience?" You must look deeply. This wholeness has been hidden for so many centuries, so many lifetimes. But it's there.

Every confrontation is a gift. The harder the confrontation, the greater the gift. If you cannot stay fully open, present and aware of your wholeness, that's fine. It's not a problem if you can't. That's just another kind of a catalyst. Does judgment arise because you can't? Feeling closed and separate. That's just another push.

Pain in the physical body. Today Barbara and myself were privileged to spend an afternoon with a very wonderful woman. This woman had suffered a major physical trauma. You don't need to know the details, but through an accident, a certain portion of the main structure of the body was broken. She had many surgeries which had allowed her some degree of motion but has tremendous pain, so that she is totally disabled, one might say, and in constant pain. I would have to state that she is one of the most open-hearted, loving and delightful beings that I have met on any plane. She is new to the conscious practice of drawing this catalyst into herself as a tool for learning, and yet totally aware on a much deeper level. What I said to her stirred her own deep wisdom and memories. Her question to me was not "How do I get rid of this

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pain?" but, "This pain seems to be a given in my life. It must be here to teach me something. How do I learn?" My primary instruction to her is very connected with what I have just done with you. I pointed out to her a time when her body was opened and relaxed. Then, later, pointed out a time when she created a certain tension through her own self-judgment and how she carried that tension in her body and how it enhanced the pain. I asked her to see how that pain and her level of pain could give her constant feedback as to whether the heart was open, or whether there was self-judgment. And we talked about the learning of unconditional love.

Your bodies offer you such wonderful feedback if you keep checking in with your body, not only in meditation but throughout the day, simply noticing the difference between open and contracted. Do it 100 times a day. Then you will start to see how you move into the contracted state, the kinds of thoughts and physical situations that accompany the contracted state, and to understand you have a choice. The old fear-oriented small self clings to that contracted state because within that contraction comes a sense of power, control, safety. What does it mean to surrender the contraction, to surrender the armor? What happens in the heart when there's even the slightest surrender of that armor?

This, my dear ones, is your entire incarnate process. This is your pathway to return to the enactment of your divinity. It's not that there will not be contraction, it's simply that each contraction is not greeted as another push, another opponent, but as another reminder, "Come home!" Again and again and a thousand times again, "Come home to who you are."

This talk is preliminary to the Awakened Heart talk on meditation next week. This state of awareness of openness and contractedness, and the realization that one has a choice, is really preliminary to that form of meditation which is offered from a place of love rather than that which is offered as simply another "fix-it" technique. That is something I will address in the talk on meditation next week. That is all.

L: I've been reading Sharon Salzberg's book, Lovingkindness, and I'm at the point where she's asking one to meditate on happiness. And I wonder if Aaron might talk about what happiness is. Where do we find it?

Aaron: I am Aaron. To me, L, happiness is synonymous with peace. It's easier to define non-happiness than to define happiness. Happiness is, I would not say an absence of fear but an absence of need to get in a relationship with fear. It's not an absence of pain but an absence of any need to get entangled in any conflict with pain. Happiness does not come to you because dear friends are present or warmth or comfort or good food. One can be happy when one is alone, cold or uncomfortable, because there can be a spaciousness which does not need to wage war with those external events in one's life. At that level there is a deep peace. And that peace, to me, includes happiness.

Happiness and joy are not the same thing. Joy also does not relate to riding on a roller coaster or eating an ice cream sundae or holding the hand of your beloved. There may be joy experienced at those times, but the joy is not because you are having that experience. The joy is because with the wonder of that moment you are fully present. Joy is your natural state, and when you are fully present, you experience intense joy. There you are, feeling such joy, holding the hand of your loved one, and suddenly you

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glimpse a clock and you realize it's almost time for the plane to leave. She's going thousands of miles away. (*Clap*) Where's your joy? In that moment the heart closes in fear. "Will I be safe? Will I be okay?" It is not sadness but fear that closes the heart. Then, because the heart is closed, you separate yourself a bit from the experience, you are not present any more. And then there's no more joy.

Can there be either joy or happiness through the moment when the loved one climbs onto the plane to depart if that heart is present and open? I think there can be both. Happiness is the quality of peace and joy is the conscious experience of happiness, a peace that knows that, "No matter where this beloved goes, I cannot lose him or her." There's no fear. There's a spaciousness that accepts the situation, feels peace about it rather than at war with it. So there's an abiding sense of happiness. And as you experience that spaciousness of happiness, that in itself is the joy which emanates from the happiness. Does that answer your question? I pause.

J: Would Aaron relate, then, the state of bliss to joy and happiness?

Aaron: I am Aaron. Here we're dealing with subtle semantic values of words. I cannot give you a dictionary definition, only the way I personally understand this word. Bliss is not really experienced on the relative plane. Joy and happiness are experienced on the relative plane. Bliss is more of an ultimate plane experience. Please remember here that the relative rests in the Ultimate, so any Ultimate experience is also known on the relative plane. Bliss may come when the heart is fully open and present and you are resting deeply in that state of pure awareness mind, seeing the arisings of the relative plane but not caught up in them at all. Or, bliss may arise when you are resting on the ultimate plane and oblivious to the occurrences of the relative plane. That oblivion can be borne of a presence which has transcended the relative or it can be borne of a denial of the relative. So bliss is tricky. At times it's a full presence and at times it can be fruit of an escape. I pause.

Q: How can we tell if it is an escape or if it is not an escape?

Aaron: I am Aaron. How can you tell if it is escape or presence? Bring it back to the relative plane. If you're in meditation, experiencing bliss, simply bring in mental noting and note, "Here is bliss, here is bliss." Does it shatter when you note it or does it maintain itself? If it shatters, then you were in some altered state, separated from relative reality. If it maintains itself as you bring it back to relative reality by the use of mental noting with the conscious mind, then you are finding a place of balance, where there is presence and in which bliss is the fruition of happiness and joy. In the Sanskrit language, there are separate words for these two states of bliss. In your language there is only the word bliss. I pause.

Q: I don't understand why with bliss you may be in an altered state.

Aaron: I am Aaron. One moment ... What I offer here is an extreme hypothetical example. Imagine while you're climbing a mountain, you become lost in a blizzard, are sitting in the snow and your feet becoming frostbitten, literally numb and frozen. The pain is excruciating. You move into a meditation of intense concentration following the breath. Through that level of meditative absorption, you enter an altered state of bliss in which you seemingly withdraw from the conditions of the body. It is not that there is non-attachment, it's not that there's not aversion to pain, there is simply withdrawal into

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an altered state which escapes the pain. There you find bliss. You don't dare to come back to the experience of the body.

Some people with whom I have talked have reported moving into that state when in the dentist's chair. Even though there's not severe pain there's still attention and fear of pain. You quite literally move out of your bodies and some of you have told me you have quite blissful experiences. But it is a bliss gained through non-presence.

On the other hand we have that fully-realized being who feels his toes freezing, experiences the excruciating pain, understands that in this totally blinding blizzard there is really no place he can go and nothing he can do. He has no matches, no more clothes, he's already built a bit of a snow cave around him. There's nothing left. Fully present with the experience of the pain, the helplessness, the fear, he transcends all that and enters into a place of profound peace which realizes, this too is okay. It is Ram Dass' "Ah, so" that we talked about some weeks ago.

At first with that realization, there's happiness, then increasing joy and finally bliss. But it is a bliss that does not exclude any relative reality experience. So in this way, bliss is the fruition of equanimity. The other kind of bliss is simply a hiding place, easily shattered. True bliss cannot be shattered. But in the moment of experiencing, they may feel very similar. You can always test it simply by coming back to relative reality enough to offer that test through the noting process, noting "Bliss, bliss," just that. Does it shatter or does it stay? Note if it's pleasant. If it's pleasant, note it's pleasantness. Note how the bliss is being experienced in the physical body. If it doesn't shatter, it is true bliss.

The teachings define many states such as joy, bliss, and rapture, and talk about the physical phenomena experienced in these states. One may move through happiness, joy, bliss and rapture, and on into a different level of peace than the first peace. The first peace that I mentioned equated with happiness. It is peace experienced by the relative being still dealing with conditioned realm. The second level of peace that one finds as one breaks through the various levels of experience is a peace of the entry into the unconditioned world. Here it becomes subtle, because resting in the unconditioned realm you are not out of contact with the conditioned realm. It is the phenomena this instrument sometimes talks of experiencing as if there were a cornucopia, with the Unconditioned as its deep, still core and the whole conditioned realm exploding out. Within this level of peace of which I speak, this higher level of peace, there is the sense of resting within that core, within the Eternal or Unconditioned space. One is not oblivious to the presence of relative reality. One simply sees all of the relative realm exploding out of the Divine. At that level there is nothing to do, nowhere to go. That is a doorway to perfect peace. When everything seems to be in motion, one also rests in the stillness of that core, in absolute cessation. Everything is exploding out but nothing is going anywhere. It's all right there in the core. So that is a level beyond bliss and rapture. I pause.

Barbara: Aaron asks, is that clear? (Yes.) He says that is conceptual for you now. Simply test it with this test: if you're feeling any experience like joy or bliss or whatever, note it. If you note it and it goes, then it came from not being present rather than from deep presence. He says, but sometimes in the noting of it, it shatters. What shatters is the concept of joy or bliss that you were holding onto and you find yourself sink immediately right into the real experience of it. He says it would be like sitting and

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looking at a big picture of the ocean, a great big wall-sized picture. You touch it to see, is it real? And as you touch it your hand goes through it, there's the ocean. So, discovering that it's not real, just in that moment sometimes you can find reality on the other side.

Q: I look forward to doing my work and reconnecting with these experiences.

P: When you're in a somewhat hostile environment on a daily basis, how do you try to stay open and release contraction?

Aaron: I am Aaron. I don't mean to be facetious here, but all of you are in a somewhat hostile environment on a continual daily basis. By that I mean that there are, on the relative plane, those things that seem to come at you and push you.

Some of them seem bigger than others. You may find that you're able to wade into the ocean when the waves are two or three feet high, to feel just a tiny tingling of excitement at the size and power of the waves, but not any real fear. You can practice skillfully with such waves. But when the waves loom five feet over your head, it feels unworkable. Since much of your action, and your karma, is habitual, why reinforce the fear-based habits by surrounding yourself with that which overwhelms? It is best to practice with the three foot waves and build up your ability to work with such catalyst until you're ready for the bigger waves.

I would suggest the practice in your daily life of becoming increasingly aware of tension held in the body using the very neutral term, "contraction." No judgment about contraction. If you ask for a glass of water and I hand one to you, as your hand reaches out to take it, it contracts. As you draw in a breath and are ready to exhale, when the lungs are full, there's a contraction.

This process of opening and contraction, opening and contraction, is as natural as breathing or the flow of the waves upon the shore. So there's no value judgment there when we say "contracting." You simply bring awareness, "Here is contraction."

The question is not whether it exists but what you're going to do with it. Am I going to use this contraction to throw me into this confrontational stance or not? With contraction you may note fear is present. Are you going to use fear to push you into this confrontational stance? What if you take a deep breath and simply are present, present with whatever is there? This is the making of spaciousness.

We use a metaphor here, P, which I believe you have not heard. We talk about being in a box with a tarantula. If you were sitting in a three by three foot cardboard box and I placed a tarantula in there with you, I would venture to guess you would be out in a fraction of a second. If your box was about ten by ten foot, you might stay there for a breath or two until the creature started to move. But if you were in a box the size of perhaps thirty feet on each side, no furniture, very open, and I put a tarantula in the far corner, with that spaciousness you'd be able to stay there with it. If it got too close to you, you could pick up and walk to the far side of the box again. Eventually you might actually let it approach you because you would be able to observe it, to note its characteristics and observe this creature is shy and gentle, not vicious, it does not have intention to harm you.

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To do this with the small catalysts in your life, you've got to create a bigger container in which you and the catalyst can be together. Your awareness of tension is one of the things which helps create a bigger container. Your deep commitment to finding increased love and harmony in your life helps create that bigger container. Your verified faith through observing what has happened when you've stayed open and uncontracted, which lessons have taught you that it's maybe safe to do that, that helps you to create a bigger container. Through your mindfulness, your presence, through all of these varied tools of morality, of wisdom, of presence, you create a bigger container that allows you to be with this push, to note your own tendency to react to the push, to make the very skillful decision, "I'm not going to run, I'm just going to stay here with it. Breathe. Offer myself kindness. Acknowledge my fear or discomfort. In those ways I'm going to make a bigger container."

Soon the making of a bigger container becomes an habitual response to that pushing catalyst. Then you can relate to it with much more space and kindness. It really is a very precise process. It begins with either formal meditation practice or what we call mindfulness practice, beginning with a resolve to be present. If it's in sitting meditation, practice presence with a small push such as of a pain in your knee. Discomfort, unpleasant. Feel how your body reacts and wants to fight back. Then for just a minute or two, you'll ask yourself just to be present with the pain and relax, and reassure yourself, "After a few minutes I will stretch my leg." You can experiment and feel how it feels to be present with push. You do the same thing with an emotion that comes up in meditation, seeing that you can make space and be present with anger, jealousy or confusion. Then when it is stable in your meditation practice you begin to bring it out into the catalysts of daily life. I do not mean by that that you cannot work with it in daily life until you stabilize it in meditation, only you're going to find yourself far more skillful at working with it in daily life once it is stabilized in meditation. Does that sufficiently answer your question, P, or may I speak further? I pause.

The Awakened Heart, Part Seven

May 7, 1997, Wednesday Night Group

Aaron: I am Aaron. Good evening, and my love to you all. For our new friends I want to offer just a very few minutes of background. There are so many subjects that I could talk to you about. People want to know what the universe is about, who you are, where you came from and where you're going, what is the nature of human experience and what is the reason for human pain and confusion. People want to talk about somewhat esoteric subjects such as simultaneous, non-linear time or black holes. I'm happy to talk about all of these things, but my primary interest is to illuminate the incarnative experience.

You're here, here with your joy and your pain, your clarity and your confusion. How do you live this life with more love, skill and wisdom? While we do entertain a great many subjects here, the focus of most of my work is on this one question: How do you bring in love where there has previously only been fear? How do you bring in light where there has only been darkness?

I call you "angels in earthsuits." Each of you has this divine core of your being, the angel, and here you are in your earthsuits. Sometimes the earthsuits feel very stiff and unwieldy. You feel trapped in incarnative experience and the angel in you wants to soar out of the body. Sometimes you feel so deeply immersed in the incarnative experience that you get lost in it and forget that you are angels. My hope is to guide you to find a balance. You are neither the angel alone nor the earthsuit alone, but quite literally are this divine energy incarnate into a human body, carrying an emotional and a mental body also. You are all of this.

Through this year, I have been offering a series of talks which I have labeled "Awakened Heart." The premise for this series is as follows. Some of you for many years 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. Anger is just energy, for example. If anger arises it's not bad that it arose. Uncomfortable, yes. But you are not bad because anger arose in you. Jealousy, greed, impatience—all the same. If the conditions are present, the emotion will arise. I teach people to make more space around the emotion so that you do not need to fling it at others, which **does** do harm and for which action you **are** karmically responsible. I also teach you not to suppress it, because its energy solidifies in you, but to figuratively and literally invite it in for tea, just to make space around it, to know that emotion is present and not get into a relationship with it but come back to a place of clarity which observes how it arose and knows that it will pass.

At the beginning of this series of talks I noted that for many years I have been talking about this process of making space around emotions and that emotions will arise if conditions are present for them to arise. I said at that introductory Awakened Heart talk that 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.

I suggested that evening that through a series of practices and exercises, one could more deeply open to that angel 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.

We spent several months discussing how to connect with this Awakened Heart, how to experience it in the self. Then we spent some time talking about how to stabilize that experience. Finally we have come to a series of three talks about how to live from that Awakened Heart. Several weeks ago I spoke about effort, and emphasized that effort which allows living from that center of Awakened Heart must come from a place of love and not a place of fear. It's really very simple. You have a choice. We're not expecting you to do away with fear. What is your relationship with fear going to be? Fear is simply a distortion of love. It may be a self-centered kind of love, a confused kind of love. Nevertheless, fear is an expression of love, albeit distorted. Instead of solidifying around the fear and moving off in that fear-based direction, you can choose to find the love out of which the fear expresses.

Love is a big word. What do I mean by love? It's easier to say what love is not than what it is. Love is not attached, by which I mean, there is not a specific object that you love and grasp and cling to. Love is not contracted, it's open, it's spacious, it sees things as they really are. It sees the whole universe as display of the divine, and that everything from the smallest insect to the greatest redwood, from small ant to the human, that everything is an expression of God. Love is non-discriminative. It doesn't choose one object over another but cherishes life in all its myriad form. Love may find an object but that object becomes symbolic of all beings, otherwise it leads you into fear, into clinging. If you love something so that you need to grasp it, that is the distortion of love we call fear. Yes, it's still love, but it is not this divine love of which I now speak.

So I spoke several weeks ago about effort that comes from a place of spaciousness and non-contraction. This effort is the act of will but it is not a will that says "I must" or "I should" or "I should not," it's not a dictatorial form of the will. It is the innate action and speech of the loving heart. It is the form of will that offers food to a hungry person without thinking, "Should I or shouldn't I?" For example, you may have a very small and hungry child in front of you. You have an apple you're about to bite into when suddenly the child appears and holds out its hand. Love is what prompts you simply to hand the apple to the child, not to look around and say, "Did somebody see? Will I get credit for that?" Not to pat yourself on the back and say, "Look how good I am!" And also not to "fix" the child. But just because this is what your heart says it needs to be doing. There's absolute clarity. It is yourself that you're giving the apple to, your hungry self. It is all beings who are starving to whom you give the apple. There is also no question "Is this skillful? Will I create dependence?" Wisdom knows what to do!

When noting the arising of an emotion such as anger, right effort does not say "You shouldn't be angry." It doesn't make an effort to stop the anger so much as to allow the anger to remind you to have compassion. Thus, your heavy emotions cease to be a catalyst for hatred, for separation, and they all can become a catalyst for compassion. When anger arises, clearly there's some fear. When you can say kindly to yourself, "feeling fear, feeling fear," then your very skillful effort is not to make the anger go away so much as to meet lovingly with anger itself and with the conditions which gave rise to the anger; to attend to the fear, to attend to the pain or sense of separation or whatever condition may be there.

Our talk on right effort dealt with these movements of will, of volition, which effect the mental and emotional bodies. Tonight I want to talk about the second of these supports for living from the open heart: the support of meditation. I am not speaking here of a specific form of meditation. Those who know me know that I do teach a very specific form of meditation, but I am not speaking tonight of meditation as a practice, as a tool. I'm speaking of resting in meditation, of literally being meditation, not doing meditation.

Those of you who are on an ongoing spiritual path have a deep aspiration to purify your energy, to live your lives with more love and with more consciousness. You often have glimpses of the ways that you are unconscious and a negative energy or thought or speech pours out of you because you're not fully present. Then some of you decide to meditate as a way to fix this. You may then approach meditation as a way to move into some alternative space where the loving heart can be attentive and can express the deepest level of the human. But (there is always a but, isn't there!) can you see how this movement can come from a place of fear? Here is action or thought or speech that you have labeled "bad" and you're going to "fix it" through meditation. It's just another form of control. Certainly it's a more skillful form of control in some ways than it would be to pour out that negative emotion on the world. And yet it is still not coming from the open heart. It is still not expression of the angel in all its purity and clarity but is a fear-based expression. **Who** needs to control?

Sometimes those who meditate develop a very powerful concentration. They find the ability to still the mind so if there's anger or other strong emotion arising, then by the force of their meditation practice they literally can still the mind. I do not want to give the suggestion that I consider this bad in any way. I repeat, it is more skillful to still the mind than to erupt with all that emotion. But there's still a doer and you're still escaping into an alternative realm which does not fully embrace the human experience. This you must practice with, you must persevere in your meditation practice. But the goal is not to be a better meditator in terms of learning to control the mind.

The goal, if I speak of a goal at all, is to find that angel within you and learn to rest within that angel, within the experience of that angel in the midst of all the chaos and confusion of your life.

You are not escaping the chaos but finding a place that is so firm, so centered, so wise, so open and loving, that it is non-reactive to chaos. You are a mountain, immovable in the middle of a flood. You are the firm ground that cannot burn, even amidst the raging forest fire. You are the sea bottom that does not care whether its waves storm thirty feet high in violence or lie relatively still. You find that stability in

yourself, that place that does not burn, that cannot be washed away or blown away. This is the meditative heart, the meditative mind. This is what I refer to when I say, “Be meditation.”

One of the roots to being meditation is doing meditation. But people can do meditation for twenty or thirty years and never learn to be meditation. This being of meditation is the second support to living from the clarity of the Awakened Heart. When you rest there, you are totally unafraid, even when there's fear.

In other words, there is simply observance that fear is arising and there's no fear of the fear. You are totally unconstricted, even when there is tension of constriction in the physical body. When the body contracts in pain there is access to that spaciousness, the heart of the angel, which just says, “Ah, so this is how it is,” breathes a sigh and lets go again and again and again.

You can understand how this being meditation combines with right effort, an effort which comes from that centered place of love and not from the judging and controlling and fearful mind. They're each a part of the other. The more you practice this kind of effort, tensionless effort, the more you will find yourself able to be meditation. The more awareness you have of those times when you are resting in that center, the more awareness you will have to the arising of fear-based effort and the ability to make a choice, “No, I choose not to enact this now.” Fear-based effort is just another cloud passing through, another movement, contraction of the physical and emotional and mental bodies. You rest in that spaciousness and let the fear be.

It is in this spaciousness that you begin to find true wisdom. Wisdom is the topic of the next Awakened Heart talk. I will not speak deeply of it now. But when the mind is settled, quiet, not trying to fix or change anything, then and only then can you see how things really are. Then and only then can you know who you really are, truly know your divinity and understand that you do have the ability to enact that divinity. Then and only then can you have the kindness to acknowledge that the human will not enact that divinity perfectly, that it will continue to get stuck, and then you can smile at those places where you get stuck instead of hating yourself that this happens. It is all a movement of deepening wisdom and kindness.

This being meditation—there is not one of you in this room who has not experienced this. Each of you at some moment of utter turmoil in your life has experienced even briefly a very deep place of calm. But you have not trained yourself to identify that space of calm and you have not observed that you always have a choice: to move more deeply into that place of calm or to move rapidly around waving your hands and saying, “I don't know what to do! What am I going to do?”

A friend tells a lovely story. Long ago she was in India in a crowded city. She was to attend a week-long meditation retreat led by the teacher Goenka, starting in a day or two. She was walking in the street when suddenly a young puppy came out into traffic and was hit by a car. It being India where people would hardly look even if it were a human who was hit—I did not mean that as a slight on India, simply the culture is such that the cycle of life and death are taken much more calmly and naturally—so nobody moved to help this puppy. She picked it up and it bled all over her. She was frantic. The puppy was yelping. She said aloud, “I don't know what to do! I don't know what to do!”

Suddenly she felt a hand on her shoulder, just touching very gently, present, and a soft voice that said, "You do know what to do." He only said it once, "You do know what to do." She looked into the face, looked into the eyes, a quick glimpse, and then she said to him, "Yes, I do know what to do." She realized she did. She only had to be reminded, he didn't have to tell her what to do, she knew what to do. She had to be reminded, "I do know what to do." Fear is strong and you are addicted to fear. It gives you a sense of some kind of control to run around screaming, "I don't know what to do!" At least that seems to be doing something. It's a way of dealing with the tension of fear. It's a way of dealing with that aspect of your being that is afraid to be responsible.

If I could put my hands on all of your shoulders that way and say it to you, "You do know what to do. You always know what to do." She realized that a puppy that young must have a mother nearby. She looked for a few minutes and found the mother. She led the mother away from the road behind a fence and laid the puppy at the mother's side. The mother cleaned the puppy's wounds with her tongue while the puppy began to nurse. She knew just what to do. That moment, hearing this man say, "You do know what to do," and realizing she did, in that moment she was being meditation. She was right there, fully present with her fear, with her pain and the puppy's pain, with her anger to the driver, her anger at the culture that would let a puppy bleed to death on a curb. She was right there and present with it all and instead of it leading her deeper into separation and hatred, it led her deeper into compassion, into connection with the angel within her, and from that place of clarity she knew just what to do. Meditation is not separate from the world. It is out of meditation that you do know what to do, out of that clarity and love.

A wonderful side-note on this story. Two days later she went to the address for the meditation retreat, sat in the room with a group of people and then the teacher walked in and everybody bowed. And she looked up with some wonder because it was Mr. You-Do-Know-What-To-Do! The very same person, Goenka himself.

You do know what to do. Love knows what to do. Fear is not sure it's able to be that responsible. Fear wants to run around and say, "Help me! Help me!" Here is where meditation and effort come together and lead you directly into the Awakened Heart. I thank you for your attention. I pause here and will be very happy to hear your questions. That is all.

Barbara: Aaron would like to hear your questions.

Q: Are Aaron's talks on effort, meditation and wisdom part of the traditional bodhicitta teachings?

Barbara: Yes, Aaron says, but his talk on meditation has very little to do with Shantideva's poem. Aaron has been talking, not as a commentary to the poem but simply using the chapter headings of the poem as a guideline to talk about a similar subject, which is the Awakened Heart. In Shantideva's poem he talks about effort, meditation and wisdom as the supports for living from the Awakened Heart. But what he says about meditation is very different from what Aaron has said.

I'm paraphrasing Aaron now. Shantideva basically does talk about meditation as needing to be from a place of love rather than fear but he talks about it in much more

technical terms. Aaron says his wish is to make it applicable to all people so he's translating it out of the Buddhist idiom which Shantideva offered.

Q: I was going to ask, does Shantideva talk about being meditation, but I think that probably he does, even if he does not use the term.

Barbara: Aaron says, precisely. He talks about it in technical Buddhist terms with a very specific Buddhist devotional meditation practice and so on. But he's talking about the same essential experience of coming to that place of love where one is a meditation rather than is grasping at the meditative mind as an escape from pain.

Q: When there is confusion over an issue in your life and you use meditation to get clarity, that is not the same as grasping at meditation to make it all better.

Aaron: "... I can move into an altered state, a trance-like meditation space so the issue won't bother me any more." That's an escape. If you can take the issue and acknowledge how much pain or fear or anger or desire there may be in this issue, make more space around it, our old metaphor of the tarantula, give it a big space, then you choose meditation from a very wise and loving place that does not have to fix the issue but is very willing to look at it from a new perspective. You're not trying to make it go away, that's the primary difference. You're not trying to fix anything, just being present with it as lovingly as you can be, and let whatever solutions emerge from this wisdom mind, from this open heart, to allow them to arise. But there's not grasping at their arising, just letting them arise naturally. I pause.

Barbara: He says, can you see the difference? Yes. Other questions?

Q: When I meditate I fall asleep even if I'm not tired. Why is this? What's going on?

Aaron: I am Aaron. When one falls asleep in meditation, even if one is not tired, it is usually because there's some resistance. Occasionally it may simply be habit, the old habit that when one closes one's eyes, it's sleep time. But more often there is a sense of approaching meditation as a way of fixing something that one has determined to be wrong about the self, to meditate to become less tense or to become more loving, for example. The being has so many old systems of dealing with the chaos and confusion of the self, if you meditate with a plan that this is going to fix something, you're asking the self to give up a certain pattern of your being. But the small ego self doesn't want to get rid of it, so it says, "Let's go to sleep."

What if you meditate just to be present with what is? What if there is no design to use meditation to fix anything but simply a deep aspiration to experience meditation as a way of accessing a deeper truth of your being? Then there's no getting rid of.

If my old friends will forgive me here for something often repeated, I want to suggest a metaphor here. If you were a non-swimmer and came down to a lake on a very hot summer day, saw all your friends swimming 100 yards from the dock; it's 100 degrees; they look cool and happy. You want to join them but you can't swim. I come along and say, "Here's a life jacket, I'll help you put it on." Cautiously you lower yourself into the water; you say, "Ah! It does support me," and relax.

The life jacket becomes a habit. You put it on every day and you go out to swim with your friends. You have a wonderful time. We can't say the life jacket is a good or a bad habit. It seemed skillful to find a way to join your friends. But if you also do not take

swimming lessons, then you become dependent on the life jacket. We can't say it's good or bad, it's simply a habit.

Ten years go by. Every day you put on your life jacket and swim with your friends. It has become sodden and waterlogged, rotten. I come back, see you put it on and say, "Take it off! It's rotten!" Can you see how you would clutch it to you? "I need it. I'll drown without it."

What if instead of saying, "Take it off," I simply asked you, "Descend the ladder. Get into the water. Don't move your hands or feet. Just find out: does this life jacket support you?" Of course when the hands and feet stop moving, you're going to sink. Then you're going to realize, "The life jacket has not been supporting me, my own effort has been supporting me. I do know how to swim, I will not drown." Does anybody then need to tell you to take the life jacket off? Is there any attachment to it any more? It just falls away naturally because there is no more perceived need for it.

In your meditation you strengthen that which knows itself to be able to swim, figuratively speaking. You do not use meditation to attack the old and unskillful patterns but to enhance the strength and wholeness of the self. And then the old patterns will fall away on their own. And then meditation ceases to be a threat, resistance dies, and sleepiness stops. I pause.

Barbara: Aaron asks if that answers your question, do you have further question? (No.) He says, another question based on that simply is, how do you use meditation as a way to experience your wholeness rather than to attack anything in the self? He says the best place to start is just to be aware, as you begin to meditate, if there's any idea of fixing something. To remind yourself, "I don't have to fix anything. Right now, I'm not going to have any expectations, I'm just going to sit here for fifteen or twenty minutes. Whatever happens is okay. I'm not going to have any expectations." He pauses.

L: Last Sunday I had a wonderful meditation. It was so good that I was in an expanded state for several hours. That was good. A vast, still space.

Barbara: Were you conscious of being in that vast space while you were there? (Yes.) Were you conscious of your body, of the presence of a body? (Yes.) Just a great still space?

L: And a kind of a merging oneness, kind of spacious feeling.

Barbara: There was still a body but did it cease in any way to be your body?

L: Yes. It was a merging, expansive.

Barbara: Do you have a specific question?

L: Interestingly, I think I had a kind of rebound effect from it and I got scared. The next day felt quite contracted.

Barbara: It's like sitting on the edge of a cliff. There's always a thick fog and you can't see. So you don't imagine how high up you are and how big the space is around you. There's no fear. You sit there every day. And then suddenly one day the mist clears and there's this amazing view and you see that you're a mile high and that you're literally perched on the edge. Are you ready to be that close to the edge of nothingness? While you're there, it may feel great, but then reflection sets in. There is the sense that

when the small ego self dissolves as it does with that sense of merging and oneness, that you're going to annihilate yourself, there will be nothing left. Aaron wishes to talk.

Aaron: I am Aaron. Continuing where this instrument stopped. This is the importance then, L, of deepening the practice of resting in pure awareness mind in a more conscious and stable way, separate from that epitome of oneness and merged self. You've got to know you're not going to annihilate the self by having some sense of what is left when you're no longer busy being the physical, emotional and mental bodies. The more you can rest in this pure spirit body, Pure Awareness, the more sense of safety you will have in letting go of the various aspects of the small self. Do you understand? I pause.

L: Yes. It felt very natural to be there.

Barbara: Aaron says, (I'm paraphrasing him) it's the most natural place that there is. It's literally where you are when you're not being the small self. But it's also terrifying because we have so much identity invested in the small self. And he says it's quite natural that it's terrifying, you don't have to get rid of the terror. The terror's not bad, he says, it's just that there's an aspect of L that has learned to sit on the edge of this cliff and be absolutely exultant in the spaciousness and the view. And there's also the small child L who says, "But it's so much space, what if we fall? What if we're lost here?" He says really attend to that child the way you would a real child, very lovingly, not pushing it, not condemning it for its fear. But just letting yourself know from the perspective of the mature self, it's safe, it's okay. He says, "Patience. Kindness." He pauses.

The Awakened Heart, Part Eight

May 21, 1997, Wednesday Night Group

Aaron: Good evening and my love to you all. I am Aaron. Tonight I would like to take one more step into the Awakened Heart series. As you know, this series of talks is dedicated to the idea that while physical sensations, thoughts and emotions **will** continue to arise as long as you are human—including those emotions we consider heavy emotions—there is also within each of you the innate Awakened Heart, which has the ability to be so present with those emotions and with the conditions that give rise to those emotions, that the conditions do come to cessation. You must be willing to look at the conditions out of which your anger, your fear, your pride, your jealousy and greed arise. We do not condemn the self that these have arisen but encourage great compassion for the self. And yet, we do have a choice. Are you going to allow these emotions to arise forever without attending to the conditions, with a sense of helplessness, or to investigate the conditions which give rise to them?

These talks have included three parts: meeting the Awakened Heart, stabilizing the experience of it, and living from it. Within that “living from it” section I have given two talks, one on effort and one on meditation. The third leg here is wisdom. This is the third support for living from this Awakened Heart.

What is wisdom? You know that I am basing this series on a thousand year old poem by Shantideva. I am not offering a commentary on that poem. Many scholars have already done that. There’s no need for another commentary. But I like the foundation which he wrote. And I agree with him that wisdom is perhaps **the** primary support for living from this Awakened Heart.

Before we examine the question, “What is wisdom?” let us ask, what does it mean to live from the Awakened Heart? Another way of saying this is, what does it mean to live from your divinity? You’re all familiar with my term “angels in earthsuits”—what does it mean to enact the angel despite the fear and pain of the human in the earthsuit? It does not mean that you disregard that human and its fear and pain. It means that you cut through the human confusion, opening your heart with such deep compassion to the human and yet so stable in your wisdom of how things really are, so that you do not need to act out that pain, fear and confusion, but can come back to this very stable, centered, wise aspect of the self and really live from it.

When I ask, “What is wisdom?” one could almost answer that wisdom is the ability to live from the Awakened Heart. It’s interesting. Wisdom is what **gives** you the ability, and yet in another aspect of wisdom, wisdom in itself **is** the ability, to live from the Awakened Heart.

Wisdom is that which knows how things really are. It knows what’s real in terms of absolute reality and what’s real in terms of relative reality. It does not choose one over the other. It embraces both but understands that relative is relative and ultimate is ultimate. It further understands that the Ultimate is always present and the relative is an expression of the Ultimate. What do I mean by all of this? Let us take this wooden chair

for an example. I don't think there's anyone in the room who would say the wooden chair doesn't exist. In relative reality, we have a wooden chair. If you take this wooden chair to the top of a high building and drop it off, will you still have a wooden chair? You'll have a pile of fragments of wood. Do we say then that the "chairness" is simply in the assembly of the wood? Is "chair" merely a concept which implies something to sit upon? What happens to "chair" when the form changes?

The chair is made of wood. What if I bend a tree, a sapling, at such an angle that one can sit upon it. Is it a chair? You may say no, that for it to become a chair, there had to be other ingredients such as the logger, and the craftsman. There had to be intentionality. Let's bring them in, let the logger cut the sapling, the craftsman nail the pieces together as one would fireplace logs, piled atop one another. Is it a chair? Not quite!

What if we burn the shattered chair and the logs. Can you then tell which was which?

If we take that pile of wood that resulted from dropping it from a high building, burn it in the fireplace so it's ash, pile the ash in a little pile and invite one of you to sit on it, am I inviting you to sit on a chair? What's the difference? Why is it not a wooden chair any more? It's rearranged and chemically altered by burning, but the same elements are present in this altered form, and the logger and craftsman were once involved with it.

The wooden chair exists but it is simply a composition of elements. It has no independent existence, no "self." It exists when the elements that compose it are shaped in a certain way and relate to one another in a certain way. Then it becomes something else.

Along with the fact that it has no independent existence but is simply a construct created out of other things, we would say that it has impermanence of form or function. It was a chair. It has ceased to be a chair.

What about yourselves? Is there anything that has independent existence there? Do you have the same form you had eighteen years ago? What if we dropped you off the building? Are you permanent? No. Do you have independent existence in your form, in your thoughts, in your emotions, in your perceptions, in your consciousness? No.

Nobody needs to tell you that nothing in the phenomenal world exists in a permanent form. You can find it out for yourselves if you pay attention and check out objects as they come into your experience. You'll find nothing in the phenomenal world that has what we call inherent existence. And yet, if nothing in the universe had inherent existence, there would be no reason for anything. It would be complete nihilism to state and believe that nothing has inherent existence.

Shantideva's chapter on wisdom includes a great deal of philosophical debate, especially the prevalent debates of his time, debates between those who believed in the above kind of nihilism, and those on the other extreme who believed in an—I do not want to use the term "existentialism" ... this instrument cannot find a proper word—believed in a solidification of existence of objects. I take a middle path. We will avoid the various metaphysical and philosophical meanderings in this talk. They deal with concept, not experience.

What I want to bring to you is an answer to the question, what is wisdom? How is it useful in your life? How can you nurture it? In the last Awakened Heart talk I spoke

about being meditation rather than doing meditation. Similarly, I would speak about being wisdom rather than doing wisdom.

When you allow yourself access into the deepest and most centered wisdom of your being, which understands how things really are, then you see that both are true. The chair exists, the human exists, and because they exist, compassion is a necessity. They exist in relative reality but there is no inherent self to them.

It is traditionally taught that the Buddha denied the existence of a soul. Since the Buddha's life predated Christianity, we cannot talk here of the Christian concept of soul. Ancient Judaism and other religions such as Hinduism of the Buddha's time did have a concept of soul, or in Hindi, Atman. It was often personified, given attributes of thought and personality. The Buddha said to those who believed in that kind of a soul, in something permanent, with thought and personality, with "self," he said, "Self has no **inherent** existence." But to those who believed in nihilism and said, "Nothing exists," he said, "Look around you. Things exist." He said precisely that there is neither self nor no-self. This is not a contradiction.

When you understand that statement and can live it, then you have opened into your deepest wisdom. You must live as if there is neither self nor no-self, as if nothing exists, including this "no-self" which so quickly becomes a "something," and also you must live as if things do exist. To deny either is to misunderstand! Am I creating paradoxes? Please listen. But be aware that my words can only take you so far. My words can only be a map on a journey and not give you the direct experience that travel on that road would give you.

We observe conditioned reality—the chair, the arising of thought or emotion, the physical sensation such as an itch—these are all conditioned objects. When we investigate them from our own experience we can see that they are interdependent, that is, they arise because conditions are present for them to arise. When the various parts come together in certain form, we have a chair. When certain catalysts are present along with your own sense of self, certain emotions will arise. If certain conditions are present on the skin, and there is a nervous system and perceptive faculty, itching will arise. When the conditions cease, that which arose ceases.

There is a Buddhist scripture in which the Buddha is quoted as saying 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." This "Unborn, Undying" is the essence out of which chairs and itches, thoughts and emotions, ants, elephants and humans all spring. But it is **not** a "thing." We could give it the name God or Eternal, Unconditioned. You can name it in whatever way you like. Your names are a concept. It is within everything. But things are not **created** by this Unconditioned, they are merely form body expressions of it. There is nothing there that we could call Self, nothing we can point to and say, "This is it."

If I take a dozen eye droppers, each with one drop of water, if we drop each drop into the ocean, the drop of water existed—where is it now? Has it ceased to exist? Of course not. It still exists. But it has no independent existence. Because the sea exists, the drop exists.

Because that which we call the Unconditioned exists, the myriad expressions of the Unconditioned exist in the phenomenal world. We have what we would call the truth body, or Dharmakaya, that core—metaphorically the sea, the eternal, the Unconditioned, the divine—and we have the myriad form body expressions of that truth body, nirmanakaya. The expressions are no less real than the eternal out of which they have expressed, but they do not have independent existence. So, we say they have no inherent reality in their outer form. Does that mean they have no inherent reality at all? This is a tricky phrase, inherent reality. We cannot say it has or has not inherent reality. The form of the chair has no inherent reality. The form of each human in this room has no inherent reality. The form of the physical body, the form of the mental body, the thoughts, they also have no inherent reality. The perceptions have no inherent reality. Even consciousness has no inherent reality. And here we get to the hard part. Because it has no inherent reality does not mean it does not exist.

This core essence, call it pure awareness mind, pure heart mind, Christ Consciousness or Buddha nature, it can't be defined. There's no way you can look around and say, "Ah, that's it!" Anything that you can point to and say, "That's it," that's a conditioned phenomena and it can't be it. At best it's an expression of "It." The conceptual mind cannot know this pure awareness. And yet, when you rest there you have no doubt. There's no sense of self when you rest there. No self identity. But one who allows oneself to move into that profound meditation experience touches the ultimate reality which has given rise to the conditioned expressions and understands that these are nothing different and never have been and never could be different, than that ultimate reality. My series of talks on the three kayas and the relationship of Dharmakaya, sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya will help the practitioner to conceptually understand this teaching.²

Wisdom is that which begins to understand all of this, not just in the conceptual but in an experiential mode. It's that which can note the joys and sorrows, the health and illness, the happiness and the pain, and observe that they are all temporary, all conditioned states of being. You begin to understand that with one simple tool: presence! If you're not present, not awake, there's no way that you're going to have anything but conceptual understanding. When you **are** present, you begin to note both the fear and tension within you, and also that part of you with very deep wisdom that knows, "This is okay" and is able to make space for whatever has arisen.

This kind of wisdom does not open itself out like a light with an on/off switch, but is much more like a dimmer switch. It keeps getting brighter and brighter and brighter.

Wisdom becomes increasingly able to see how things really are. But it does not become deluded into the belief that either the relative or the Ultimate exist alone. The nature of the Ultimate, the nature of the divine, is to express itself. The expressions on the relative plane are no less a direct experience of the divine than is the experience of sitting in a profound meditational space, in what is sometimes called a cessation experience, cessation of all arising and dissolution, and cutting directly into the heart of that divine. If you are still saying one is better or more clearly the divine than the other, you are still suffering from a delusion.

² Seven Days: A Journey Into Awareness, Deep Spring Publications, Ann Arbor, 1997, pp. 43-46.

The Awakened Heart, Part Eight

Wisdom understands that both are real. And it learns how to walk the balance between them.

The important thing here is not to be wise but to live your life with love. To live your life with mercy and kindness and skill.

I said earlier that being wisdom allows you to live from the Awakened Heart. And when you live from the Awakened Heart, you are wisdom. Wisdom at this level is not separate from compassion. We're not talking about an intellectual understanding that is austere and comes only from the brain. That kind of understanding is simply fear's effort to be safe and in control. We're talking about an understanding that comes from the heart. It has nothing to do with control. In fact, with that level of wisdom the heart will break. It will break ten thousand times. You can't look at the suffering of the world and say "Oh, it's not real," or, "It's just their karma." You must attend to it with an open heart that lets itself be touched, be changed, by the suffering. And yet you must do it from a place that is changeless, from that "Unborn, Undying, Unchanging, Uncreated," from the center.

You let the conditioned aspects of the self be touched, and you live from the unconditioned. You work with all your might to alleviate the suffering around you, and at the same time you understand that there is nobody to alleviate the suffering. And there's nothing out there that needs to be fixed, it's all perfect just as it is, and yet you must attend to it. When I say it's all perfect just as it is, if a child falls off a boat and is drowning, you do not say, "It's his or her karma to drown, it's perfect the way it is," and sit back and let the child drown. You do everything in your power to save the child. If despite what you do the child does drown, then you don't blame yourself and say, "I should have done more, I could have done better." It's this kind of acceptance, this kind of wisdom which sees the terrible tragedy in a drowning child, and yet accepts that on the relative plane everything is impermanent. Everything does arise because the conditions are present for it to arise and ceases when the conditions cease.

We do not **fix** in this situation, we **attend**. There is a vast difference. Fear fixes, wisdom attends. Wisdom is present, loving and open.

I began by talking about the three legs of support for living from the Awakened Heart: effort, meditation and wisdom. Your wisdom leads you both into seeing how things really are, and into a willingness to be present with what is seen. You don't have to like it, just to be present with it. Then there is a vast change in you and it is out of this change that real freedom arises.

We have spoken here many times about the contraction when there is a noise. For example, this instrument will make a noise. Hey! (*Shouts and claps hands.*) You can feel your energy field contracting and then it passes. Is there a voice that gets into a relationship with that contraction and says, "I shouldn't contract"? Or "I should have done something different"? When a certain catalyst is present, certain conditions are present, then certain results will arise.

Wisdom understands that the relative self contracts. Wisdom also understands in a profound way that the whole sense of self which contracted is an illusion. Nobody contracted, no solid object contracted. Nerves and muscles and thoughts, the nervous system and so forth, all of this contracted. No different from the chair, just pieces. If you

The Awakened Heart, Part Eight

hit it with a hammer, it collapses. If you light a fire under it, it burns. In the human body, if you make a loud noise, there's going to be a certain response. There's no inherent self in whom that response is happening. When you understand that, when you allow your deepest wisdom to prevail, and open to the understanding, then and only then can there be deep compassion for the human in whom that contraction occurred. You don't have to fix anything.

That which views the contraction without needing to get into a relationship with it is that which literally is free of karma. It rests in that perfect balance, able to offer deep compassion to the human experience, able deeply to attend what needs to be attended, but without getting caught up in the idea of a self to whom it's happening. And thus, free of secondary contraction, the energy field stays open. When there is no notion of self, there is freedom. But as soon as the notion of no-self becomes a defense against pain, there's no longer freedom.

This wisdom truly is the fruit of every spiritual path. And yet, there is no fruit there and no path, because the wisdom in itself doesn't have inherent existence. That pure heart mind which is nothing else but wisdom and compassion together has inherent existence, because it is the Unconditioned, and not a conditioned "fruit." No self in it. There's nothing separate in it. So we think of "fruit," but what really happens is the obscurations are wiped away and you open into that which has always been, into the Buddha Nature.

Here we come back to the process of doing wisdom, nurturing wisdom, all of which are useful along the path. And finally, being wisdom. This being is not nurturing or grasping or gaining, it's simply allowing yourself to come back into the center of the heart, into what has always been there and always will be there, and to live from that space. No, in human form you may not be able to do it perfectly, and that's fine. The angel lives in an earthsuit and the earthsuit at times is enormously distracting. Your practice is in observing the myriad distractions. Having nurtured the willingness not to get lost in those distractions, the distractions themselves become a reminder to come back home. Is there pain? Are you contracting around that pain? Just remind yourself, this pain is a conditioned expression of the One, of the true heart. Let the pain itself bring you home.

If there is a very unpleasant physical sensation such as a loud noise, physical pain or acrid smell, don't contract around it. It's not "other than" the Unconditioned itself. But if contraction does happen, that contraction also is not "other than." Just be present with all arising and dissolution, without allowing the self to become stuck in it. Note the contractions and remember, this is an expression of the true heart, of the One. Let it lead you home. Is there rage? Fear? Desire? Note it with openhearted presence. Note the tension in the body that arises when these emotions appear. Note the desire to be rid of the catalyst for those emotions. Note all of this conditioned display, and ask yourself, "Is there anything here that is other than an expression of the divine?" When the answer comes back, "No," rest in that reply and let it lead you home. The Awakened Heart is always there. That which **is** wisdom is always there. You always have a choice: to be within that wisdom mind or to be pulled out of it.

When you are pulled out of it, know that you are making that choice, perhaps to defend the self, to be safe, to be comfortable. No need to attack the self, just notice

how you are getting caught in the delusion of a self. By nurturing wisdom (with a small “w”) you come back to the essential Wisdom Heart, wisdom with a capital “W.” When you rest in that Wisdom Heart, you are home. From there you extend yourself back out into the phenomenal world, with the utmost skill, compassion and kindness.

Let yourself be touched by this illusory world. Let the presence of your heart keep you in center, the presence of your joyful or aching heart. Let your love for all beings and your determination to help all beings be free of suffering invite you back to this Wisdom Mind, Wisdom Heart. After awhile you may surprise yourself and find that you do rest there much more often than you did before. As I said, it is a dimmer switch and the light glows with increasing brilliance, the light radiating from you, from that seed of divinity which is the essence of you. I thank you for your attention. I ask you to sit silently and reflect on my words. Then I would be glad to answer your questions. I pause.

Barbara: Everybody looks wiped out with Aaron’s opening talk. We ought to take a before and after picture!

J: It was an excellent talk. I enjoyed it!

D: I like the idea of the picture afterwards! Just an afterwards. And the caption would be: “After several sessions with Aaron, you too can achieve this level of enlightenment!”

Ce: Aaron mentioned briefly about cutting through to a place in meditation where one experiences the divine directly and there are no arisings. Does he call that pure awareness also, like what we were studying in dzogchen class, or is there another name for it?

Aaron: I am Aaron. I hear your question, Ce. This relates to dissolution and cessation. What is cessation? The term is used in several ways, referring to cessation of all arising and dissolution, and also to cessation of the negative mind states.

There are not degrees of this cessation experience in ultimate terms. And yet in relative terms there seem to be. If you are standing outdoors in the sunshine, that’s an experience of the sun. If you go ten feet underwater and look up, you’ll still see the sun but it’s filtered. We can say that there is a filter dimming your experience of the sun but it’s the same sun. If you go out of the earth’s atmosphere, you have an even clearer experience of the sun than you would on the ground. Less filters. And then you can go right into the heart of the sun.

In meditation this instrument often experiences what she has referred to as a kind of cornucopia, a horn or cone shape with a center and the entire conditioned universe pouring out of that center. In very profound levels of meditation practice, one can drop down right into the center. If you use this metaphor you would see that if you stood on the edge of this cornucopia, you’d see everything exploding out and would have a sense that there was a center out of which it expressed. If you went further in there might be more and more stillness but things are still erupting out of the center. But in the eye of the center, as in the eye of the hurricane, there’s no sense of anything expressing, it’s absolutely still. Nothing arises, nothing ceases. No arising or dissolution. This is called cessation. It is not quite a space, nor an experience, but simply **is**. It is the nature of everything.

The pure awareness practice we've been doing takes you to a place where you become absolutely certain that everything in the phenomenal world is expressing out of this center, and so you begin to understand that the center exists. I relate this to a human who has never seen the sun directly, who has grown up, lived in a place that was always cloudy. It could distinguish day from night but it had no sense of that which we call sun. Then one day there's a little rift in the clouds and a small bit of the sun, the sun itself, is seen through, just for moment and then it closes again. And it opens and closes, opens and closes, you keep getting glimpses of it. It's not a direct experience of the sun but now you start to know there's a sun there.

When you rest in pure awareness, in dzogchen practice, you rest in that which understands without any question the existence of this core of stillness out of which all expresses. It knows it experientially, not by direct immersion in the heart of it but by glimpses of it. This pure awareness mind is nothing other than that which eventually rests in the center. But we cannot say that it has as of yet rested in the center. There is the hint of cessation but not yet the full experience.

The other use of cessation is the cessation of the arising of negative mind states, which is a result of the first described cessation experience.

Does this answer your question? I pause. (Yes.)

Barbara: Questions?

R: (*Talking about a book.*) It's called Suitcases and it's written by refugees from the Bosnian war. It tore my heart apart to really read it. Every time I think about it I wonder what the heck is it all about? Where is the perfection? And I get filled with doubt about the harmony in the universe. Where is God?

Aaron: I am Aaron. R, you see only one small glimpse of one aspect of the universe from your human vision. If you sit in meditation and allow yourself to enter this space of center, then you enter the harmony in the universe, that center of the cornucopia where nothing arises, nothing dissolves, it's a place of utmost peace and harmony. Out of that center, everything expresses. God does not decide, "This is a good one and I'll toss it out, that is a bad one and I'll not toss it out. This is a good one and I'll reward it, that is a bad one and I'll punish it." That is not the nature of what I refer to as God. What I refer to as God is simply that heart of energy the nature of which is to express itself in infinite ways, and which possesses an infinite intelligence and capacity for love, in the highest sense of that word. It is ultimately drawing the entire universe into its pattern of infinite intelligence and love. But every expression must **move itself** toward that pattern, toward that center of love, in its own way and at its own pace. The way that it moves is to learn by figuratively flexing its muscles and seeing what happens. If something pushes you and you push back, you're going to get certain results. If something pushes you and you smile to it, ask it please to stop pushing, absorb its angry energy and return loving energy, you're going to get a different result. If something pushes you and you collapse under it, inviting it to push you further, you're going to get a still different result.

Because each being is at its heart of the same nature as the divine, each being eventually evolves into the profound wisdom founded in its desire to live in peace and create peace, to live free from suffering and create freedom from suffering. The road to

this wisdom is filled with peril of your own choosing—choosing the catalyst which will give you back the result you need to learn, what you need to learn so that you may then take the next step on the path. So, no, the experience of the universe on the relative plane is certainly not one of harmony but one of great disharmony. But it is disharmony moving toward harmony.

I think of the tuning of a stringed instrument here. One plays one string and then plays a note on another string and there is discord. One tightens or loosens the second string accordingly, getting feedback from the discord. Plays it again. Perhaps it is closer to harmony. Again you tighten or loosen, working with your feedback, until you bring it in to harmony. Then you start on another string. Each of you has many strings in yourself, tendencies toward fear, desire for power, to control and be safe, illusions of an ego, of a separate self. You work on all of these various strings, testing, getting feedback, sometimes moving further into discord, experiencing the discomfort of the discord and slowly coming back into harmony.

This is so difficult for the human because of your veil, of your limited vision. I assure you that things look much more hopeful when you transcend the human perspective. I pause.

Barbara: We have time for one more question. (*Reading question.*) "Illusions of an ego. Where does this ego come from? Is it created by self and is it in error?"

Aaron: I am Aaron. The ego is not in error, it is part of your agreement to be in this relative plane, in this earthsuit and to learn. It is one of your various catalysts which support your learning on this plane, the physical body, the mental, the emotional bodies and the illusion of an ego, a self. The illusion is painful. Because of the pain, you are led to pay attention and examine the nature of this ego, to ask, "What is this self I seem to be?" You cannot discover "no self" until you begin to attend to what seems to be self. So yes, ego is an illusion on the ultimate plane but just like the body, it's real on the relative plane and it's a tool of the incarnation. It's not something you need to attack. You cannot transcend ego until you accept ego and embrace it. And then you start to see through it and find the true self.

So much of our work here is about learning to live with this ego without identifying with it, to find enough spaciousness to learn to observe it, to make friends with it and see how it tries to run the show, see who it pretends to be. Then you observe that which observes the ego, and move into a deeper level of the aware self, and then ever deeper into this pure awareness mind in which ego is seen really for what it is. The whole process must be done with kindness, never with attack on this ego which is a gift, albeit a painful gift. I repeat, you are an angel in an earthsuit. If you only wanted the perceptions of the angel, you would not have moved into a body. Karma drew you here, but also, you incarnated for a purpose. It was part of the costume you agreed to put on. You don't have to believe in ego as having inherent existence any more than you believe this body as being who you are. This learning is the whole process of your evolution. That is all.

The Awakened Heart, Part Nine

June 4, 1997, Wednesday Night Group

Aaron: Good evening and my love to you all. I am Aaron. I want to provide a brief background for those friends who are new to our group tonight. Through much of the winter and spring I have offered a series of talks, ten so far, on what I call the teachings of the Awakened Heart.

My perspective of you is that you are angels, all of you, but you're here in an earthsuit, experiencing the heavy density of the earth plane. So I call you angels in earthsuits. The earth plane catalysts that you experience (physical, mental and emotional), are your invitations for learning. They are a blessing of the incarnation, experienced through the physical, mental and emotional bodies.

The angel is always there. You can always rest in that center of your being, but most of you have forgotten how to do that. We might call this center the Awakened Heart.

In my ongoing work with you, I have attempted to express to you that you do not need to be at war with yourselves and the experiences of these three heavier density bodies. If you step on a tack, your foot is going to bleed. There will be pain. You don't say it shouldn't bleed or be painful; you accept it. This is the nature of the physical body. If the emotional body is irritated in some way, such as through another's anger at you, and emotion of fear or anger arises in you, you're so hard on yourselves, you say, "I shouldn't experience this." Then you cannot learn.

I've spent many years trying to help you come to a place of openness to all that you are, knowing that you don't need to enact those emotions but that you may allow the experience of them. When you learn to allow the experience of these emotions, you must acknowledge that they do cause you much pain, and at times they cause others pain. Your fear, your confusion, your greed, your anger, all of it causes pain. You cannot say "I shouldn't feel this" but it's skillful to inquire into what brought up those emotions or confusion.

In this phenomenal world, everything arises because conditions are present for it to arise and ceases when those conditions cease. If certain conditions are present, anger will arise. You don't hate yourself for that, nor do you hate the conditions that led to its arising. That's step one, finding that spaciousness where you can offer kindness both to yourself and to that which catalyzed the anger. Step two is to begin to look more deeply into the conditions and observe the illusion of separation and its resultant fear and confusion which underlie the emotions. To understand the conditions is to grow in both wisdom and compassion. Finally we come to step three, which is to know that and come to know that you have a choice. You can begin to more fully attend to the conditions that led to the result, rather than just feeling anger or blaming self or other for the arisen result. You don't have a choice about whether external conditions arise. You have a choice in your relationship with those conditions.

Let me give an example. Perhaps often in the past when you were out walking, a large snarly dog chased you. Sometimes it actually bit you. Later, when you saw a dog, fear

would start to arise. Anger at that dog might arise. We're not talking about the same dog. There have been many different dogs that you have seen since the one who snarled and bit. Now, when you see any dog, fear and anger arise. You do not say, "I should not feel angry or afraid." You simply note, "Here is anger, here is fear. These have arisen in my experience. I do not need to act them out but I am experiencing them, and it's very painful." The dog is not the primary condition for my anger and fear; mind is the primary condition, mind and old distortions.

When you come to this point where you're ready to make a decision to look at this anger and fear, you may say, "How has it arisen in me? It has arisen because of my past memory of pain (in this example). The fear and anger I am experiencing at this present dog has absolutely nothing to do with this dog. It has to do only with my old memories. Therefore I have a choice. I cannot make a choice not to be afraid or not to be angry. I **can** make a choice to observe carefully the difference that this dog has not offered me any threat. This dog is wagging its tail!"

It doesn't matter if it's a dog or if it's a person. Perhaps during your life you were abused by others and now in relationships with others you contract and are afraid. You can't trust people. You have a choice. You can choose to act in such a way as to be safe, to withdraw yourself from the situation, to attack the other. Or you can make a skillful decision, "While I wish to be safe, and I honor that wish, I also do not choose to live my life in fear and behind armor. I choose to open and connect. I can make that choice of trust even though I am afraid." To make such a choice is to choose from the angel, to choose from the Awakened Heart.

Such a choice is difficult. Fear is deeply ingrained. Conditioning runs deep. One may examine such fear and conditioning psychologically and come to the point where one can choose skillfully even though fear is present, but fear is still present. The old conditioning remains! Thus, one must come to understand the nature of that conditioning, and investigate the ways that even the conditions will dissolve. To agree to engage in such investigation is itself a choice.

There are many supports to choosing from the Awakened Heart. In this series of talks I have introduced you to a number of them. I've based this series of talks on an ancient poem by a long-ago Buddhist teacher, Shantideva. What I have offered is not a commentary on his teaching but my own understanding of his teaching. I've used his teaching simply as foundation to express my own understanding of how one can live from the Awakened Heart.

So tonight we come to the conclusion of this series, although certainly not to the conclusion of learning to live from the Awakened Heart. We come to the end of the final chapter of Shantideva's poem, his last instructions. This chapter is about something familiar in Buddhist teaching. It is called "Dedication of Merit." In this process, what one does is to make the statement from the heart, "Whatever good might come from this work, I offer it out for all beings, for the alleviation of suffering for all beings. I do not hold it for myself."

What does it mean, not to hold it for yourself? When you help another, the teachings of every major religion say that you have found some merit for the self in doing that. For example, if you offer much generosity of spirit or possessions, in the Hebrew teachings that is a "mitzvah," a blessed deed. Charity, not only of money but giving of oneself in

every way, caring for others, is fundamental to Christianity: "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you." Give of yourself. Love your neighbor as yourself. And in Christian teachings those who do such good deeds are offered the blessing of being worthy of heaven. Buddhism has its own way of stating it. You accumulate merit. In some schools of Buddhism this is taken to be an actual point system, somebody up there with a calculator figuring how much merit you've accumulated.

Some of you may feel a sense of skepticism about all of these balancing systems which suggest that the soul becomes blessed in some way. I understand your skepticism, because from my perspective there is no external force keeping score. That part of it, from my perspective, is myth. But the basis upon which the myth is founded I find to be very real.

You are all evolving, all growing and learning. You are learning to live your lives with increasing love, wisdom and skill. Always those catalysts exist which will lead the human to the experience of fear, greed and anger.

The more you practice offering your energy in loving ways in the face of fear, the more you are able to overcome unskillful reactivity to fear. This is the creation of wholesome karma. In my first examples, your body was scarred from dog bites. Your being feels wounded by the various verbal and even physical abuses, abandonments, and so on, of others. Trust is so hard. Everything in your being wants either to hold yourself off or to strike out, to lash out and defend yourself. If in that moment you have the courage and love to say "no" to fear-based response, if in that moment you have the wisdom and faith to look deeply into the conditions that gave rise to the fear, to see the situation as it really is, and to know, "This dog is not offering a threat, that human is not offering a threat, I do not have to react from fear," each time you do that you begin the establishment of a different habit. The same process works with greed and the fear: "Will there be enough for me? Will my needs be met?" How much do you each cling to abundance far beyond your simple needs out of fear?

One power of dedication of merit is the simple fact that you do not hold this merit, these "points" for yourself but offer them freely to those who have need. In this process of dedication of merit, then, we are invited to look directly at our fear that our needs will not be met. You note, "Here I have done something good. Am I going to hoard whatever merit may grow out of that for myself or can I give it, literally give it?" The practice of generosity is a very powerful antidote to selfishness and the myth of separate self. It must be done with mindfulness. It's not a mechanical statement.

Dedication of merit does not mean refusing the gratitude of others. If people were hungry and you emptied your wallet and bought food for them and fed them and they thanked you, the Awakened Heart can say, "You are welcome." It is the ego which wants to be affirmed, wants to be loved and exalted, which grabs at that thank you and then fear believes it must abolish the ego and says, "Oh, I shouldn't accept thanks." It's afraid of the ego's liking it so it shoves it away.

Then you say, "No, it was nothing." Nothing? You fed fifty people. "It was nothing." Why not just "Thank you," "You're welcome"? There's the recognition, "I have done something in service of others. My ego wants to hold onto that, wants to feel affirmed, to feel good. But what I'm going to do here is to make the clear inner statement from the heart"—it doesn't have to be said aloud—"Whatever good may come of all this, my

ability to be generous, others' gratitude, the whole situation, whatever good may come of it, I offer it back out, just like I offered the money to buy that food, I offer this also back out for the good of all beings."

Can you see that to do that first you must understand that many motivations gave rise to offering your money and buying food. You find both the deeply loving motivation, empty of self, and also that which wants to be the good one, or that which is discomforted by others' pain and wants to fix them. Both the clear motivations and the ego-based motivations are there. To observe in this way and continue to offer yourself means you must find space for the ego-based motivations. They are there. They are no longer a driving force one way or the other. You recognize there is a purity of intention which is a primary motivator, simply an intention to serve suffering in the world from a place of love, empty of ego. And then the thank you comes, and ego thinks, "Well, at least I can have that to hold onto and inflate myself a bit." No, you can't have that either. But there's no disdain for ego, just awareness of it's arising. Take in the thanks and give it back out again: "This is for all beings and the alleviation of suffering."

By working persistently in this way, you constantly invite yourself to investigate the ego aspect of the self, to smile to it, to embrace it, and to come back to the Awakened Heart. Increasingly, that Awakened Heart becomes the primary motivator.

It doesn't matter what this dedication of merit refers to. It can be the situation I just described, giving material charity in some way, or supporting others and offering the whole situation and the gratitude of the situation back out. It could be your own spiritual work. You are sitting in meditation, working persistently, deeply, as many of you will be on our retreat in two weeks. Certain insights arise because of your own courage and faith and presence. Ego again wants to say, "Ah, look how good I am. This was so difficult and I moved through it. I now have all this clarity." Ego wants to run with this. Instead, do congratulate yourself for your hard work and then note, "I offer all of this clarity back out for the alleviation of suffering for all sentient beings. I don't have to hold it for myself." To do that you must look at the place of fear that believes it has to hold it, has to be better, has to be up on a pedestal. So to offer it out is to constantly step down from the pedestal. You accept the thanks but you don't have to sit on the pedestal. And you don't have to attack the ego self that thinks it would like to sit on a pedestal.

In Buddhist teaching, many perfections are listed. Generosity, which was one chapter of our Awakened Heart series, generosity is the first one. Generosity is no less highly regarded in the teachings of any major religion. This dedication of merit really is the practice of generosity. It can be practiced in a very simple and direct way which is this: any time that something joyful, pleasant, or supportive happens to you, simply remind yourself to share it. Whether it is physical or nonmaterial, share it. If people smile at you, share that smile, send it back out into the world. Don't keep it for yourself. If you happen to have the good fortune to win the lottery, share some of that money, send it back out into the world to places where there's a need. It's the practice of letting go. Dedication of merit is generosity and letting go, but it has one more aspect to it. It is a very conscious practice. It reminds you of the suffering of so many beings. It reminds you of your own resolve to serve beings who are suffering, your own resolve not to be part of the confusion but part of the healing.

The more frequently you make that resolve to yourself and others, the easier it becomes to live it. It becomes a natural gesture. You pick up an apple and cut it in half and offer half to your friend. You don't think about, "Will I have enough to eat?" With practice those fears do stop arising. So it is a wonderfully freeing practice. And finally, it really does attend to the world's suffering because so much of the suffering on your human plane is caused by greed, fear and aversion. When each of you truly learns of your interconnection with all beings and is able increasingly to enact that interconnection, much suffering will be alleviated. So this is not just conceptual, it's not simply the dedication of some kind of hypothetical point system, it's an actual extension of your own being and energy, taking whatever comes to you and sending it back out, over and over again, learning truly to express that love which is your true self. This conscious giving establishes the habit of giving, of opening the heart, and in the open heart, fear is resolved.

In conclusion of this talk, I would like to do tonglen and to teach it to those for whom it is new. It's a practice that's very much connected to this dedication of merit. It's not quite the same thing. But it's a way of receiving and sending out. Its roots are in Tibetan Buddhism. It's a very simple practice. What I teach you here is not what a Tibetan lama might teach you, but it's my own interpretation. Close enough, certainly, to be called tonglen.

I would ask you first to sit up so that your spines are more erect. I pause.

Visualize yourself sitting in a cylinder of light. Simply imagine it if you can't feel it. But you are all sitting in such cylinders of light. I see them surrounding you. Feel that light coming into the crown chakra. Breathing in, draw that light into the heart center and then simply breathe it out, release it. Again, drawing in light through the crown chakra, let it move through the body to the heart center. Now we're going to add the second step. Exhale and let it rest in the heart center. Inhale, visualizing a being who is suffering. It might be someone you know who is currently in pain. It might be a face that you saw on a scene on the television news, somebody suffering from some disaster or war. Breathe out this light and love, this energy that you brought in through the heart. Let it flow out through the breath, directing it toward that being. You're not forcing it out. You're offering it to them. You don't have to visualize them accepting or not accepting. Your part of this is simply to draw in light through the crown chakra and down to the heart with the inhale. Then to visualize the being who is suffering and send this light out to them.

You can do it at half-normal speed, a full breath in and out for each step, or full speed breathing in light with the inhale down to the heart, and with the exhale, seeing the one who is suffering and sending it out. Inhale light down to the heart, exhale, visualizing the one who is suffering and sending it out. Some of you find this practice more useful at this pace because mind does not tend to wander. It's a very quick pace. In, out, in, out. Some of you like to do it in a more conscious way, taking more time.

Breathe in light and as you exhale, feel it filling the heart center. Breathing in again, visualize the one who is suffering, and as you exhale, send it out. I'm going to ask you now to practice this for about one minute at whichever pace feels most comfortable to you. I will be quiet.

(Pause)

Now we will add the second step. I would state here that the second step is part of the traditional tonglen practice but it is also a useful practice simply to do this much, to be aware of suffering and send out energy as light to that suffering. For the second part, I ask you to see that suffering as a heavy black tar-like mass. You have just exhaled sending out your light to this one who is suffering. Now, as you inhale, see the suffering as a heavy black mass, inhale and draw it in. You might see a connection, that being's heart to your heart, and this heavy black mass traveling along a beam of light right into your heart.

This is difficult. It takes a great deal of courage to let it in. Allow in that suffering with the inhale. Exhale. Feel it in your heart. Observe any desire to separate yourself from it or defend yourself and just let it be there for this moment. Inhale. Intention to release it. You don't have to keep it, it's just moving through in the same way the light came through. You did not keep the light, did not hoard it for yourselves, but sent it out. Inhale the suffering. Exhale, feeling it in the heart. Inhale intention to release and with the exhale, let it move up and out the crown chakra, just send it out. Again, the second step may be done at half or double speed. The fast way, simply see that black heavy tar-like mass of suffering: inhale, breathe it in, exhale, release. Inhale, breathe it in, exhale, release. Inhale, light. Send it out. Inhale the suffering, the blackness. Exhale, release it.

And the slower way. Inhale light. Exhale, feel it in the heart center. Inhale, seeing the one who is suffering, intention to release. Exhale, send it out. As you send it out, there is awareness of this heavy black tar-like mass of suffering. Inhale, bring it in. Exhale, feel the weight of it and darkness of it in the heart. Inhale, intention to release, aware of the vast light and love of the universe. Exhale, send it out.

For those of you who feel a close connection with a great master such as Jesus or the Buddha, you can visualize yourself sending it out to one of these and that one receiving it. Or it can be any great master. For those who do not find the presence of such a being in your spiritual experience, simply send it out to the universe.

Let us do this practice at whatever pace best fits your needs. Inhale light, feeling it come to the heart center. Visualizing the one who is suffering, send it out. Inhale that suffering, letting it come into the heart center. Visualizing that loving energy of the universe, send it out up through the crown chakra. Breathe light into the heart center. Visualizing suffering, send out that light. Feel darkness and suffering and inhale. Feel it heavy in the heart center and visualize the spaciousness which receives it, breathe it out and release.

I will be quiet now for some time while you practice this on your own.

(Long pause.)

As you conclude, take a moment to clear yourself, letting go of any of that heaviness and darkness which you may not fully have released. Check your own internal reserve to be certain that as you drew light through you and sent it out, you did not in any way deplete the energy of the self. If you feel in need of more energy for the self, draw it in. And this time as it comes to the heart center, simply let it spread through your body. If there is surplus, let it go.

I know it is the intention of this group that these talks will be bound together in a book and made available. I consider this a very valuable service. Of course, there is much more that could be said, there always is. But the steps of the Awakened Heart practice which I have delineated through this year will be a great support to you as you strive to live increasingly from this very beautiful and divine aspect of the self, from this Awakened Heart.

That is all.

Barbara: Aaron is suggesting we take a short break. He says usually we go into questions here but he thinks people need a bit of time to make the transition from meditation into the questions ...

(Break and continue.)

Ca: *(Long question about a client in a mutually painful and potentially violent situation. Details omitted.)* My question for Aaron is, I feel I was working with the tonglen meditation sending love to both of these people. What is my responsibility here?

Aaron: I am Aaron. I hear your question, Ca. There are various levels of responsibility. In your role as a counselor, I do believe that you are legally required to make known to some authority if a person whom you are counseling is felt truly to be a danger to another. That legal requirement supersedes any confidentiality. And yet, she is only a danger to another if another first harms her. Certainly you do not want to act on your fear to put her into the difficult situation of being taken into some kind of custody because she might be a threat to somebody who is threatening her.

There are many strands here and I think it needs to be sorted out carefully. The ancient question, which is the voice of love, which is the voice of fear? This woman came to you for help because of her tendency to violence. If she can hear you, this is a perfect place for her to practice. My sense is that she is not yet ready to hear you fully but can at least hear you in part. You can't talk about forgiveness to her, she's not ready for that. But you can talk to her about how this other person's anger mirrors her own. How violence begins and may be stopped. How we bear the fruit of what we sow. If we sow pain and violence, its repercussions come back to us. But she doesn't need to be part of those repercussions in a direct and physical way. So it's an opportunity for her to learn something of immense value, perhaps through the very difficult and painful situation of the other's enactment of the threat.

I think that you can impart some of this to her: a fundamental understanding of karma; an explanation of how she has been given a situation in which she really has a choice, to move with her old tendencies or to withhold those tendencies and instead to seek to find compassion for herself and for this other person. As I said, not yet forgiveness but simply kindness and compassion, awareness of her pain, awareness of the other's pain. Most emphatically, this is such a valuable opportunity for learning.

From your perspective, Ca, you cannot control what she chooses. It is not your responsibility to control it. It may be that this other person will do harm to the pet. It may be that your client will kill the other person. Then both will suffer immensely. You can hold a door open for them, you cannot push them through. You cannot take away their suffering. You can show them through the open door that on that far side the grass is cool and green and on this side there are jagged rocks that are afire. You

cannot force them to choose the cool green grass. How many times must they walk on the jagged rocks before they learn? Perhaps to walk on those rocks is precisely what they need, to have their feet torn to shreds.

I am not suggesting that painful catalyst is needed for learning. But sometimes in our confusion, it seems to be what we need. If this is her choice, you cannot take it away from her.

I presume that you have taught this woman metta (*lovingkindness meditation*). And I would hope that she might be practicing such lovingkindness meditation for her beloved pet, for herself and then for the difficult person. Through the development of this kind of lovingkindness, we can develop the capacity to make space for immense suffering without needing to enact the inclination to attack that which has been catalyst for suffering. It is this ability to rest in this place of strength which is your greatest tool. You can impart this to her and actually practice aloud with her, talking about hypothetical situations and how she might feel. Encourage her increasing ability to see deeply into another's pain, which seeing is the greatest tool for alleviating her own outrage. It doesn't mean that she is to sit back and allow this person to destroy what she loves, but it's useful to point out to her there are legal channels. She does not have to be the instrument of retaliation.

Q: As suffering is brought through the heart chakra, whether it is someone else's or my own, is the suffering not transformed as it is released through the head chakra?

Aaron: I am Aaron. I hear your question. Suffering is fear. Suffering grows out of the desire to have things different than they are, not to want to be with what really is. This is not to be confused with a move to attend to that which is distorted. If somebody's thirsty, you offer them water. If your puppy has a thorn in its foot, you pull it out. But the movement comes from a place very empty of self. The basic movement of offering the water or pulling out the thorn is bringing love to pain, to fear, to distortion. From my perspective I see this literally as related to the density or lightness of the energy field. The being resting in a very clear space has an energy field which is very open, filled with light of a very high vibrational frequency. The being who is deep in distortion, and who, due to that distortion, invariably suffers, has a low vibrational frequency. The density of its energy field prohibits light.

As you work with a meditation like tonglen, drawing light in and releasing it, drawing darkness and suffering in and releasing it, the true transformation comes. As your own energy field takes that denser energy field in which there was suffering and literally lightens it, it's like adding cream to coffee or blowing bubbles in water. It's less dense. It's lighter. I do not have the words to describe the process technically to you. I would say yes to your question. The fact that it is moving through your energy field is what transforms it. And yet that is not all of the process because you as human do not have the ability yet to fully transform it. This is why you don't hold it within you and continue to work with it and lighten it. You let it go and take more and let it run through you and release it again. Then there are spiritual resources beyond you who also run it through themselves and lighten it further.

So you are just one step in this chain. Does this adequately answer your question? I would add here that I find this a fascinating question and would enjoy the opportunity to speak further to it. Precisely how does it work that you can draw light in and send it

out to others? What's happening there? What's happening as you draw that suffering in and release it? This touches on the whole question of your own infinite power. The clearer you are, the more in connection with your infinite power and your divinity, the more fully you can transform suffering. The more muddled you are, off-center and unclear, stuck in the various fears of your own ego which likes to be a savior, which likes to fix, which wants the attention and affirmation offered to it when it helps others, the less clarity you can offer.

If you are at war with those aspects of yourself then you solidify them. Then the negative aspects become much more involved in the process than the clear, divine aspect of the self. You can not clarify that shadow energy when you are unwilling to acknowledge your infinite power because your infinite power still frightens you, because there will still be ego self with which you are at war. I do not mean by this that the ego self must go but war must go. Then the ego self can just be there. It's just a cloud passing through, it has nothing to do with the pure self which is infinite and able to do very great transformation. Does this sufficiently answer your question? I pause.

Ce: Aaron had suggested during the meditation that those of us who felt drained of power and energy at the end should replenish it. What is happening then?

Aaron: I am Aaron. I hear your question, Ce. What is happening is that you're human. The ego self does get involved. If it was only the pure spirit body that was doing tonglen, you would be an empty vessel through which this energy flowed. You would not put any of your personal energy in because you would be absolutely certain of the sufficiency of that which flowed through you, that there was absolute abundance, and no need to fear that there might not be enough. There would be no personal self to contract and think, "I should do more," no personal self to feel guilt. But you are human, you are not the pure spirit body. And so the human, at whatever level of clarity it has, does this work as instrument for the light and also does pull in some of the human confusion. The thought of the being who is suffering and then perhaps the very brief thought, "Am I doing enough? Am I doing this well enough?" may arise together. These kinds of questions do tend to lead you to drain your own energy without opening yourself to replace that energy.

I would use here the analogy of a being who sees other people who are dying of thirst. You are a bit thirsty yourself and you have a half-dozen canteens of water. You give out the first four of them, sip by sip, and by now a day is passed. In the intensity of your work, you have not permitted yourself to drink. You look at the people around you and say, "They're dying of thirst, how can I drink this?" But if that sense of guilt and fear is directing you, then you will give it all away and not attend to your own thirst. I'm not suggesting you need to gulp down a jug of water all by yourself. That also would be a statement of fear—"What if I won't have enough? So I'm going to fill myself with it. I'll even pour it over my head so my skin absorbs it." On the other hand, what if you sip it? Then you're more available to others because you're taking care of yourself.

Because you are human, most of you get caught in giving it all away, reacting to the ego place that is slightly uncertain of itself as it gives. And then you deplete yourself. So we simply end the meditation by checking whether you feel depleted. It's like a sponge, it can only absorb so much. If you put the sponge in water and it's full, it won't absorb any more. You let yourself take what you need and then pass on the rest. You

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must ask yourself, "Is it fear that wants to take three sponges full instead of one?" You are to take what you need and pass on the rest. It really is very straightforward. I pause.

Appendix A

These talks on the elements were offered almost a year after the last talks in The Awakened Heart series. Because they are so related, we have chosen to include them in this book.

First Talk on the Elements

May 20, 1998, Wednesday Night Group

Barbara: I want to talk about background here, about our trip and the island of Santorini. This is the southernmost island of the Greek Cyclades Islands. It was once a round island, highest elevation over 2500 feet, with a volcano near the center. The volcano erupted in 1500 BC. What's left is a crescent-shaped island around a deep *caldera* or crater filled with the sea. On the far rim of the circle, across about five miles of sea, are several small islands which mark where the circle was. In the center is the still smoking volcano, about 2000 feet high. The land on the outer rim of the crescent rises gradually from the sea. There are beaches, then farmland, up a rising hillside to the summit, 2400 feet above the sea. Then there's an abrupt edge and the land falls away, not a sheer drop but close to it, straight down to the Aegean Sea 2400 feet below. The two biggest towns are built right on this edge. There are towns on the outer side but because there is no sheltered harbor, the harbor is within the crescent. Ships pull in, you disembark, and an engineering miracle of a road winds back and forth up the sheer cliff, literally carved into the cliff side. Buses meet boats and take visitors to town at the top. Needless to say, it's a breathtaking trip up the hill!

Some of the houses are built as normal houses, on land at the top. Many of the houses and other structures are built into caves which pockmark the face of the cliff. Thus, many of the streets are little more than stairs, each level of houses and other buildings perched atop the next lower, and all built into the cliff side. The place we stayed was two rooms with a courtyard about thirty-five feet deep in the front. The far edge of the courtyard had a railing and then plunged straight down to a courtyard a flight below, then another, and finally, down all the way to the sea. I'd say the incline was seventy degrees. The outer room had a window and door. The roof arched like a cave. The rear room was simply a cave, whitewashed or stuccoed. But rocks projected in. It was cool in the heat of day, dim. There was a stone slab floor. It wasn't at all rustic but very polished, lovely, but it was unmistakably a cave!

Sitting outside in the courtyard, on the roof of the dwelling below which was accessible down a steep flight of steps, my view was of an enormous sky, endless sea below me and as far out as I could see, and there was the rock under me, not a building but literally the island itself—rock! The hot sun and smoking volcanic cone in front of me completed the picture. I spent several hours a day meditating in this setting.

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Aaron had told me before we came here that this was related to the lost island of Atlantis and that there would be much to learn here. We visited the volcanic island and there was nothing there but lava flow, totally barren, even after all of these years. Very powerful. He talked about the earth forces which create such an eruption and how they relate to the energy in ourselves.

I spent a fascinating few days with Aaron talking to me about this and teaching me some meditation practices that pertained to this. He promised me at that time that he would talk about it more formally on the Wednesday night when we came back. So this is his program for tonight. I'm just going to let him talk ...

Aaron: I am Aaron. Good evening and my love to you all. This instrument has provided you with some background. I want to establish a vocabulary so that we're all communicating clearly.

I use a term "density" in a specific way referring to present-day human as "third density. By density I mean the density of the entire structure of the bodies, the energy density, the light density. Mineral on your present planet is first density. Plant and animal is second density; human, third density. You are evolving into fourth density. This is the meaning of this term, "new age," an age of fourth density human. Beyond that there are fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth densities. I am a sixth density being.

Third density on the earth plane has these four bodies with which you are familiar: the physical, emotional, mental and spirit bodies. The emerging fourth density human also will have these four bodies. Presently, since there is not yet full fourth density incarnate on earth, fourth density is made up only of the emotional, mental and spirit body. The difference between third and fourth density is not in the possession of an emotional and mental body but in that for the fourth density being there is deep equanimity with these bodies. By that I mean whatever arises, there's no contraction around it. No need to cling to it or get rid of it. I do not say there is no judgment, but when judgment arises, there is also equanimity about the arising of judgment. There is a clarity that whatever arises does so simply because the conditions are present for it to arise, and it is not you or yours, me or mine. Everything that has the nature to arise has the nature to cease. Therefore one does not get caught up in the resultant forms but sees those resultant forms as the very natural outcome of the conditions and understands that if the forms are unwieldy in some way, create discomfort for beings, that the direction to work is not in attacking the outer form but in understanding and resolving the conditions.

At present time, those who finish third density, who are at a point where they do not need to incarnate again on the earth plane, move into what I call fourth density energy groups. These are loosely structured. You always have free will. You are free to come and go. Nothing holds you there except your own free will decision to stay within the group and learn what you came to learn. Because there is equanimity with emotion and thought, if emotions and thoughts arise within you, there's no shame about them, and if they arise in others there's no judgment. In fourth density you are able to fully use your natural telepathic ability. I phrase it in that way because you do not suddenly become telepathic, you've always been telepathic. Presently you do not allow yourself to use your telepathic abilities because they're so uncomfortable, because there's so much shame and judgment.

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I often ask people, if everybody in the room were telepathic, would that be okay with you? And often people say, "No! I have had thoughts this evening of which I am ashamed. I don't want people to know my thoughts." When there is this complete equanimity with thought and emotion, then learning becomes possible not only through your own experience but through shared experience. There is complete understanding of another's experience. So learning comes much faster.

The chief learning of fourth density is compassion and secondarily, wisdom. The being who has moved through fourth density slowly withdraws from this group, moves back into a more individuated self with that self being only a concept, a convenient container within which to work, and not anything that is taken as ultimately real. Many fifth density beings are teachers of one sort or another. Many of your guides will be fifth density beings. Fifth density beings are advisors to fourth density energy groups, the elders of those groups, so to speak. The chief learning in fifth density is wisdom, and secondarily compassion, with wisdom being primary in fifth density and compassion primary in fourth density. Beyond that, as I said, there remain sixth, seventh, and eighth density. I'm not going to explain the details of those here tonight, because they are not directly relevant to my talk. Further discussion is available in my talk "The Universe According to Aaron" in the book Aaron.

What comes next is a bit of ancient history. All of this is already available in transcript form so I'm going to summarize, and if you wish more detail we will be glad to make a transcript available.

There have been many different kinds of civilizations on many different kinds of physical and non-material planes. The earth plane provided the first opportunity in the universe where all four bodies were expressed together. The foundation of the earth plane literally is love. There were deeply loving beings who have become known in your myth as the guardian angels of earth, very highly developed, evolved beings who gave of their energy and became literally the foundation of the earth plane. Different religions give them different names, but the underlying beings are the same. The whole myth of creation really springs from the willingness of these beings to be the foundation out of which earth—the earth itself and all that grows upon the earth—evolved.

In the old transcripts of which I spoke, the story has been told in detail of how there was no fear on earth, then how one of these guardian angels began to be protective of that which it had helped to co-create. There were two laws that governed the earth: one, a nonintervention policy, and second, that beings must be left to their own free will. Nonintervention means nothing can approach the earth but through human form. For example, I certainly have the ability to appear here in the middle of the room, but that would violate this nonintervention policy. My thoughts must be filtered through the human, through this dear instrument. Free will means each being must choose for itself and is responsible for its choices.

Since all beings have free will, however, they also have the free will to break this nonintervention policy. Beings of some negative persuasion were attracted to the earth. It is a primary piece of real estate, in galactic terms. Those who would guard the earth and maintain the nonintervention policy cannot maintain it in violation of the free will of a being who would intervene. Here, fear arose in one of the guardians, and an idea that they must protect the earth plane. The situation was the equivalent of a

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parent whose child picks up somewhat questionable playmates. Does the parent say, "No, you may not play with them," or does the parent trust the child to use this as a learning situation, to begin more deeply to differentiate positivity from negativity, love from hatred?

The guardian angel who did not trust moved into a distortion of protection, in violation of free will choice. This one thus introduced the vibration of fear to the earth plane. But remember that his motivation was one of love, however distorted that love became as it was influenced by fear. So we could say that fear was a distortion of love, one which grew out of love, as it always does.

These guardian angels were of differing opinions. Some of them felt that humans needed to be protected against the negative influences. One thing they were able to do was create a force field of positive polarity around the earth. Negative polarity has free will to come to earth despite the nonintervention policy, but positive polarity has free will to create such a force field of positivity. Negative polarity is repelled by positive polarity. Thus, what approached the earth was not highly negative at that point in your history but more neutral with a slight negative slant. Humans did not learn fear from that negativity which approached the earth. Humans learned fear from the guardian angel itself, the one who moved into the negative stance of fear, based on its love for the earth plane and that which dwelled upon it.

We come now to the beginning of my story tonight, the civilization of Lemuria. At that time of Lemuria, beings on earth were still fully telepathic. They were not really third density, it was a fourth/fifth density civilization. There were emotions but not fear-based emotions. For example, sadness. If one loves someone or something and it dies, there's going to be sadness, a sadness which could be differentiated from fear-based clinging, or a desire to hold to that which has left. One can let go completely and still feel sad. So, there were the love-based emotions of joy and sadness. There was an emotional body. But there was no fear-based emotional body until such fear was introduced into the earth plane by the guardian angels.

Centuries passed; millennium passed. Earth slowly devolved into a third density planet but there was still memory—we pause for a moment. This instrument and I are debating whether one can use the term "evolved" here, since it was a step backwards. She offered the word "devolved" and I suggested that this is not a proper English word. I will let it go. At the time of the civilizations that you know of as Atlantis, humans were third density. They still had the memory of how they had dwelt as co-creators of the earth, living in complete harmony with all that is. Some of the skills involved in healing and creation and so forth were still available, but there was a basic and unforgiving distortion. It is about that distortion that I wish to speak.

First I want to clarify my plural use of Atlantis. Lemuria was literally a civilization. As it—we coined the word "devolved"—stepped backwards, beings who had been creators and healers, fully in tune with the universe in that civilization, spun off, going here and there. By the time of Atlantis, this high knowledge was held only in memory of what had been. Very few could enact it. Those closest to it dwelled in three different parts of the world: one in part of what is now South America, one in part of what is now Philippines, which was the home of Lemuria itself, and one within this island of Santorini and the surrounding islands.

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What had these beings lost? Basically, with the arrival of fear came the contraction into the idea of separation. This is circular, each contributing to the other. The emotional body becomes solid and one is reactive to this body. We could say that this regression was a necessary part of the course of learning on the earth. That is another topic, to be saved for another night.

You are all familiar with the four basic elements, of earth, air, fire, and water, and what some consider a fifth element of ether, energy or space. The higher density Lemurians, before the beginnings of fear on the Earth plane, had no veil of forgetting of their true nature as you experience that veil. There was an absolute clarity of who they were, what their true nature was and what the reality of their existence was. They understood that they were not separate from each other or from anything. With this what you might call Buddha nature, Christ Consciousness, pure awareness mind, or whatever name you wish to give it, with this came awareness there was a Light within everything and that everything was also bound together by this balance of elements. The secrets of Lemuria are very simple. They knew how to hold themselves in balance and harmony with all that is, and they allowed the universe around them to reflect that inner harmony. When I speak of reflection, this process is no mystery to you. When you are angry and send anger out into the world, it is reflected back to you. You call forth the anger as reflection of your own anger. When you send out love, that is reflected back to you. Your outer world reflects the inner. The Buddha says it very elegantly in the beautiful scripture known as Dhammapada. The opening words are, "We are what we think. All that we are arises with our thoughts. With our thoughts we make the world."

Their primary concern was to bring into the physical plane the deep harmony of the nonphysical planes, to enact that harmony into this earth plane. Whenever there was an imbalance in the perceived self, it was noted immediately upon its arising and because of the deep intention to do no harm, to create balance and harmony, or more correctly, to serve as co-creator with all else in the establishment of balance and harmony, a being immediately did what it needed to do to bring itself back into balance. There was no judgment about imbalance. If you are walking on a log and begin to topple off of it, you hold your other arm out. You don't judge yourself and say, "Why aren't I in balance?" you simply bring yourself back. It's as simple as that. There was no thought about being good or bad, pure or impure. There was simply the living of what one might call the Law of One, as a brother, Ra, has phrased it. All beings, one body. Each being its own unique expression of that One, so each has its own form and function.

So each being learned how to balance itself and keep itself in harmony. This was the expectation made of any sentient being as it participated in the world. Thus, if it struck its arm on a rock and there was a cut, it perceived the imbalances and brought it back into balance. There was instant healing. If it fell off a cliff and broke its leg, there was instant healing. No miracle, it simply knew how to rebalance, how to restore harmony. Likewise it reflected these skills into the world.

Just as the human in Lemurian times could still fall off a cliff and break its leg, because the leg is fragile and can break, so the pressures under the earth could create the conditions for earthquakes, volcanoes, tidal waves. The one who broke his leg found instant healing with no scar tissue or deformity. Just so, the distortions of the physical planet were balanced, before damage could be done. Many beings, feeling the

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changes in the earth and the subtle imbalances immediately helped to draw the earth back into balance. Their own wholeness was reflected in the earth and the earth's wholeness was in them. Every thing acknowledged its responsibility to the whole of which it was partial expression. This ability to balance is what was lost. It was lost as "self" fell into an illusion of separation, fear and distortion.

You all have this ability. It is innate. To claim this ability you must acknowledge your own wholeness and divinity. There is nothing "other than," meaning everything is an expression of the Unconditioned or of the Divine. Everything. Not just what you see and judge as beautiful and good—everything. Some are distorted expressions, some are clearer expressions, but everything is constantly expressing, the whole conditioned realm bursting out of the unconditioned. In this knowledge comes awareness of wholeness.

So to begin to use this skill of harmonization or balance, you first must cease to consider yourself as separate in any way, must understand that you "inter-are" with all that is. Second, there must be the deepening of moral awareness. Buddhism uses the Pali term "sila." I try to avoid specific terms from another language where I can, but sometimes one term sums up what would take me a great many words to express. Sila doesn't just mean moral purity; rather, it is a moral awareness which grows based on the foundation of one's insight into inter-connection with all that is. One cannot possibly consider harming another when there is no self or other. So sila carries not only the idea of moral awareness but moral awareness as grown from this deep place of understanding of interbeing.

Sila must be nurtured. It's available to all of you. It must be nurtured by investigating that which experiences itself in some way as a separate self, and becomes greedy or possessive or finds judgment or aversion to others. This is not a statement that you get rid of greediness or aversion, so much that you are willing to consider not perpetuating greed or aversion. So often the human emotional field chooses to perpetuate because it finds it safe. As soon as it perceives a self and other, then it can feel threatened. Then it moves into a place of more power, more separation, grows boundaries that are even more solid, protects and attacks. You are working in the face of a millennium of animal instinct. You are no longer animal-man. You are human man and the shift to fourth density is taking you into a different realm, let us call it divine-man. But you're still acting out of the instincts of animal-man, who does not perceive the inter-being of all that is.

There must be a willingness to be present with fear, to allow the experience of fear without need to get rid of the fear, or to hold on and enact the fear.

This is difficult. There are teachings in every religion which say, "Abandon that which is negative." That idea is so easily shifted into "get rid of." So many of the Christian concepts of sin grow out of this distortion. This thought or that thought is evil, get rid of it. Buddhism is no better. "Abandon the kilesas." Directly quoted from the scripture. You've got to understand what abandon means. When there is a difficult energy, the absence of that energy is also present. To restore balance one has not to "get rid of" one so much as to return to the other. It doesn't mean attack.

There's a beautiful Buddha sutra, the Bhayabherava sutra. The Buddha tells the story of how, before his enlightenment, he wanted to meditate at a haunted forest shrine. Monks liked to go there at night to meditate, it was a place of great energy and power.

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But it was also fearsome, and he was terrified. How was he going to do this? His instructions are so clear. "I asked myself to sit with the fear and dread and allow the experience of it until it dissolved itself." A very difficult thing to do, not simple at all. Yet, that which is aware of fear is not fear itself. When you sit with and allow the experience of fear and dread, or the experience of craving, the experience of anger or prejudice or pride, or any other emotion, and simply allow the experience of it, it does dissolve itself. You can watch it fade and cease. Pure awareness remains!

We've done a practice here where we've practiced with a small object like a piece of crystal or a rock. This instrument has asked you to hold out your hands and placed a small rock or other object in your hands, asked you to sit there with it and just allow the experience of it, not try to figure out what is it, not try to control, just to allow the experience of it, be willing to take it into your heart, to bring it into you. You feel the characteristics of it, such as coldness or warmth, roughness or smoothness, and do not try to figure out or control but just to know it. Then we take that practice a step further, taking whatever emotion or thought has arisen and holding it in the same way with a sense of tenderness, curiosity and openness. You invite yourself to allow the experience of it and stay with it. Of course it will dissolve itself because it has no permanent self, it's simply a conditioned object which has arisen and will dissolve. Whatever has the nature to arise has the nature to cease, fear included.

These are the prerequisites, then. A deepening sense of *sila* and all the implications of that word. The growing wisdom about the nature of the conditioned realm, and a deepening presence in which you allow yourself literally to be present with whatever arises and following the Buddha's suggestion, to allow the experience of it until it dissolves itself, to see it all the way through to cessation.

When you have to a relative degree mastered these skills—I'm not talking about perfection, just that these skills are the starting place—when you can firmly state that your highest intention is to do no harm but only to do good, to do no harm through active doing, to do no harm through withholding of that which would serve others, then you have the inspiration to go further. Then you are ready to look deeply at this process of harmonization. I do not want to present this process as an ultimate step, it's just one step on the path. But it's a very useful step and in fact it is essential to this evolution into fourth density, if the evolution is going to be into positively polarized fourth density.

The practice which I began to teach this instrument sitting on that clifftop is rather simple, part of a much larger practice, a practice of presence, of awareness, of lovingkindness and so forth. Let us do this together.

I want you each to get in touch with the elements within you and see if they feel relatively in balance. I know the first question you are going to ask me is, "How do I do that?" Don't get intellectual about it. At a certain level you already know how to do this. If I start to give you verbal instruction, it's not going to work. Offer the intention to bring the elements within the body into balance for the good of all beings. Draw in a few deep breaths and release them. If any element feels out of balance, balance it; for instance if your energy feels very heavy, you might want to bring in more air or water. Which one does it need? Again, trust your intuition. If you're feeling a lot of tension, perhaps there's too much fire and air, perhaps it needs more earth and water. There's no way to state precisely, what "balance" means. It will vary from moment to moment.

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It's very much like walking across a log. You've seen tightrope walkers with a long stick that they use for balance. If you ask one of them, "How do you know when you're out of balance?" they would shrug, "How do I know when I'm out of balance? It's obvious. I feel like I'm falling." When you're out of balance in terms of the elements, it's the same thing. It's just something you haven't really paid much attention to. If you ask them how they use the stick they will shrug again, "I use it to restore balance!"

I'm going to be quiet for a minute or two while you bring yourself into balance, and then—and we will warn you beforehand—this instrument will make a loud noise. Even though you have been warned you are going to be startled, a little bit at least, I want you to watch what moves out of balance with the startling. I request you not to judge that you've moved out of balance any more than you would judge yourself if you were walking on ice and slipped a bit. You would simply reach out your hands and rebalance. Simply notice any shift out of balance as reaction to the startle and the noise. Offer the intention "for the good of all beings, I offer the intention to bring myself back into harmony, back into balance," and do what you need to balance it. And watch carefully what happened to that startle reflex. Let's take it just that far and then we'll take it a step further. I'm going to be silent now for a minute and ask you to create this first harmony. I pause.

(Pause)

Now I'm going to ask this instrument to make a noise. Simply observe in yourself what shifts there are in this harmony and bring it back into balance. No need to get upset over imbalance, just gently bring it back.

(Shout!)

You may find that the shout literally pulled you a little out of your body, that it needs grounding. To bring in more of the earth element, you can literally visualize forests, mountains. Breathe them into the self. Or you can feel yourself sitting as this instrument did, atop an enormous rock 2400 feet high. Draw in that rock through the base chakra, drawing in the earth energy. Perhaps you feel that the energy as you draw in the earth element gets a bit stagnant and needs more water. Visualize a vast sea. This instrument did have the opportunity to learn this practice in a perfect setting, with that vast sea literally displayed before her and a rock under her, and an immense sky and hot sun, all the elements displayed very clearly. But you don't need to be in the presence of it. Use your imagination. The difficulty is not to find a way to draw in more water, earth, air or fire energy. The difficulty is to come to the willingness to do so, because you are so used to perpetuating the distortion out of the fear-base of the small ego self. So what you must do here is to come back to the pure awareness self first, to that which deeply aspires to harmony and let that deep aspiration guide you. Once you're in that place of deep aspiration, the doing of it is not difficult.

Take a minute to center yourselves again, and then I'm going to ask this instrument to make a noise again. Watch yourself shift, perhaps only subtly, out of harmony. Decide what element or elements are needed to come back into harmony. I'm going to be quiet through the process this time. Noise is coming.

(Shout!)

(Long pause.)

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This instrument found that although she was the source of the noise, she also was startled by it and the first time it sent her out of her body a bit so she needed more of the earth element, more grounding. The second time there was more fire to it and water helped to balance it. So it's not always the same in the same situation. You've got to be present and feel what is distorted.

Now we're going to take this a step further. I want you each to think of something that has happened to you this week that was disturbing. It might be a memory of somebody who verbally attacked you, a memory of some very unpleasant situation such as having a bad stomach or headache, a memory of sadness or fear or worry about sickness, or discomfort of someone you love. It may be a memory of strong desire or jealousy. Allow that memory to emerge and allow the emotions to move into that pattern. Use your memory.

(Pause)

Now, aware that there is a distortion in the energy field, a distortion in the elements, I ask you to rebalance but with a very specific idea here. You are not rebalancing in order to get rid of this discomfort and emotion. You can't do it that way. You are rebalancing simply because of the deep stated intention to bring harmony where there is disharmony. The willingness to suffer any discomfort in that process of bringing harmony; for instance, letting go of some of your shielding and allowing yourself to feel vulnerable. All you are doing is inviting in harmony, rebalancing the elements. Once harmony is reestablished, look and see what happened to the emotion. I'll be quiet.

(Long pause.)

How are you doing? Remember, you're not after perfect harmony, you're simply inviting in greater harmony, greater balance. This instrument brought to mind the loss of several hundred dollars which seems to have been stolen in her travels. On one level she says, "That's okay, I can accept that." On another level there was a feeling of fear and vulnerability. Bringing in that memory, she saw the anger and the desire to hold onto that anger because it made her feel more powerful in the face of that vulnerability. This is ego's answer to the experience of fear and vulnerability. So she saw that first there needed to be a willingness to release the anger, to let it dissolve itself. Then to take the steps to allow that dissolution. Her experience of the energy imbalance was "too much fire." And also too much tightness, both earth and water tied together. So she felt the need to bring in more air—more light, more space.

As she brought in that space, the tension and anger around the loss simply resolved itself. Not all of it but a good part of it. I offer her experience as an example of how it can work. You are not doing this practice to get rid of anything. If the emotion stays, it will stay. You're doing the practice because of your highest intention to create harmony and to offer your energy for the good of all beings.

We will hear your questions about this practice in a few minutes. I would request you to take it into your daily life. First, take it into your meditation. As you are sitting and a thought or emotion comes up, if you feel an imbalance in the elements, offer the intention to allow that imbalance to come back into balance. Ask yourself which elements are out of balanced, what needs to be released or brought in. Then do it. Try to work with it in an ongoing way, rather than waiting for severe imbalance.

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And then observe what happened to the heavy energy you were feeling, to the emotion you were feeling. Start it in formal practice and then take it out into your life and let it become a constantly recurring movement. You are walking on a giant tightrope. Actually most of the time you're hanging by one finger or another on the tightrope or trying to get your legs back up. Isn't it time to get more centered on the middle of the tightrope? You don't have to spend your life hanging off of it. It is a deep kindness to yourself as well as to all beings to allow yourself to come back to center.

Until you learn this skill, the world around you is going to reflect your imbalances. This is the cause of all the violence and disharmony in the world. It's a reflection of human imbalance. Each of you has the ability to begin the process of rebalancing. Working with the elements of course is only one part of the whole of rebalancing but it's a very important part because it is dealing literally with the physical reality of your human experience and of the setting for that experience. Your heavy emotions and imbalances are a habit, your old ways of finding safety. To do this practice, you are going to need to reflect on the whole process of habitual tendencies and their outflows. You are going to need to make a choice, to return to the divine, the Awakened Heart.

This has been a long talk. I thank you for your attention and deeply appreciate the willingness of all of you to consider such a practice and the import of bringing it into your lives. I know that there are questions. I'll pause here and be happy to hear them. Perhaps it would be useful for you to stretch a bit first. I pause.

Barbara: J is asking if Aaron is using the elements in the way they use them in polarity therapy. Aaron is saying here he is using them in the ultimate sense, where polarity therapy extracts from that ultimate the relative practice of ... so he's talking about the ultimate element, polarity is the practice of that element.

J: Not a question as such. You spoke of this Monday night at meditation class. I have gone ahead and put it into practice. It is pretty interesting and does ... it is effective.

Barbara: I find it very powerful. He kept emphasizing to me, you're not doing it to change or fix the emotion, you're simply doing it because of the intention to restore harmony. But I kept finding as I persisted with it and brought myself back into balance, I can be experiencing subtle emotions but I can't be experiencing powerful, overwhelming kind of emotions and still be in balance. As long as I'm in balance, the emotions just fade away. And they may be subtly there on the outskirts but they're not pulling me out of kilter at all. I found it very, very powerful.

J: It was interesting to observe the sense of peace or equanimity, even with residual energy reverberating. It did not stick, just sort of faded.

Barbara: I'm finding a parallel between balancing and resting in rigpa. This term "resting in rigpa" is part of dzogchen meditation, that we teach here. It's a resting in the pure awareness mind, in the unconditioned mind. When I'm resting there, everything is balanced and everything is in harmony, and the only way disharmony can come up is when I shift back into the small ego self.

Aaron is asking, how did this work for you just now during the exercise. When I shouted, could you feel the imbalance and could you feel your own ability very naturally to bring it back into balance?

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Re: When you're in balance, don't you also at some point have to go out of balance in order to reach a different balance, a higher balance?

Barbara: (This is Barbara talking, not Aaron.) Yes, because there's constant change. Nothing can be stagnant. There's a constant movement of balancing and rebalancing, the constant movement of what Aaron calls kyo and jitsu energy. This terminology is part of shiatsu energy work. When you hold your hand out to receive something, jitsu is that readiness to receive. It's a dynamic tension. Then once something touches the hand, the reaching energy relaxes completely; the energy becomes kyo. And then it moves back into jitsu again. We follow this pattern with our breath. As we breathe out, as the lungs empty, there's a jitsu energy contraction. And as soon as you start to inhale, the energy moves to kyo until tension builds up again because the chest is too full. It's jitsu again. And then at the start of the exhale, it subsides and goes back into kyo again. It's like waves cresting on the shore and going back into the sea. So we're constantly rebalancing.

But there's a difference between this motion (*hand making a subtle waving gesture*) and that motion (*hand making a large waving gesture*). What Aaron has been saying is that so often we shift off into that more extreme imbalance, and then instead of simply attending to it and saying, "There's imbalance, just bring it back," we say "Oh, what am I going to do!" (*waving arms frantically*). We hang onto it or we try to fix it, which creates too much force the other way. Using the elements is a simple way to invite ourselves back into center.

He says, I'm paraphrasing Aaron here, we all intuitively know that feeling of the heart center and what's necessary to be within it. He says, if you are hot, nobody has to tell you to move into the shade. If you are cold, nobody has to tell you to move into the sun, it's obvious. You know when you're hot, and you bring yourself back into balance by moving into the shade. You don't stay in the sun and move further into the sun and say, "What am I going to do? I'll put a coat on." He's saying it's the same thing. It's very accessible.

With each step we take when we walk, we move subtly out of balance to take the step and reestablish balance. We must do this or we stagnate; we can't move. But we don't have to throw ourselves drastically out of balance to walk.

Others?

Re: I just want to add ... it seems to me that sometimes people stay out of balance in order to access certain creative energies which weren't accessible to them before.

Barbara: Let Aaron speak to this directly.

Aaron: I am Aaron. You are correct, Re. Each being must find the degree of imbalance that is most effective for it. To try to remain perfectly centered creates a very strong negative tension. There's so much grasping at staying at center. Everything is constantly in a state of flux. You can't hold yourself in perfect center. To not attend to imbalance also creates tremendous tension. These tensions are the basis of karma.

When you speak of people allowing imbalance for creativity, yes, sometimes people throw themselves out of balance or attach to imbalance with the illusion that it helps them be creative. I perceive this as a reaction against the idea of staying centered.

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The choice is not to stay perfectly centered or be radically imbalanced. If you see it as opposition in that way then you're going to throw yourself into the radical imbalance. But when you begin instead to see it as a constant flow, noting imbalance, bringing it back, but you're never going to be right on center and you don't have to be. It's a flow. However, one must remain attentive. It would be like walking down a road with quicksand on either side. First, just shallow quicksand and then deepening quicksand. The road is wide. There's a line right down the middle of the road. You don't have to walk on the line. But when you see yourself coming to the edge of the road, you do have to be awake, and note, "I'm getting too far into the sand. If I move too far to the right, I need to go left. If I'm too far to the left, I need to go right." I pause.

Barbara: He says, I'm paraphrasing him, that this is a very interesting question, that many of the most creative people in our western culture have traditionally chosen extreme imbalance. But it is a myth that this imbalance is necessary to creativity. That some of the most creative beings that he has known throughout his many lives were very highly realized beings who were very much in balance, and used subtle imbalance as a way of stimulating creativity, creativity here being one of the elements of response to change. It's a whole different concept of creativity. He'll talk.

Aaron: I am Aaron. I would state this for myself. The extremes I see are the personal creator caught in sense of "self," and the being who is beyond the small ego self and is working as co-creator, working within the subtle energy flow. As long as the ego is going to be the creator, there are power and control issues and the being swings radically from side to side and chooses to maintain imbalance. As soon as one resolves the notion of ego self and is willing to live more fully from the pure awareness self, then one is delighted with the role of co-creator and understands that co-creator best manifests when there is relative balance. I pause.

Barbara: Others?

Q: I relived a situation from work. And it came out much better with balance! Much better!

Barbara: It's a very empowering practice. For me it really shows the potential of the pure awareness mind when it, rather than the ego self, is running the show. Others?

Q: I thought of a conversation today that upset me. I wondered if I was wrong in the advice I gave someone. And in feeling myself come into balance while holding the situation, I realized strangely enough, that the other person did need to have a strong emotion to move her in some way. And it was okay for her.

Aaron: I am Aaron. Strong emotion is not negative. Identification with the emotion is very unwieldy and creates much pain for self and all beings when you are owned by the emotion or own the emotion. But the experience of the emotion itself is just an experience. It's like being in the sea where sometimes there are small, gentle waves and sometimes there are huge waves. They're all just waves. There's nothing inherently good or bad about them.

What is the effect of the wave? What is the effect of the emotion? In what ways is the human enslaved by the emotion? It's very useful to realize that sometimes strong emotion can be very helpful, very freeing. I pause.

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Barbara: Aaron asks, seeing that that person needed to feel the strong emotion, were you able to release any concepts of was I right, was I wrong?

Q: I am aware that I still have some confusion there and I can keep working with it.

Barbara: He's saying there's the reality that sometimes we're skillful or unskillful. He doesn't want to call it good or bad, but sometimes we're skillful or unskillful. And it's useful to recognize when we're being unskillful and understand why and offer an intention not to perpetuate that kind of unskillful action, speech or energy. He's saying so much of this is simply the power of intention. And he is saying intention of course is the root of karma. When we offer the intention to work with whatever arises in loving and skillful ways, we immediately become very much free of it, even while that energy is still moving through.

It's almost ten so I think we should stop ... Aaron asks you to practice this balancing of the elements. He says don't work at it, play with it. What he is saying here is, don't make it something that takes big effort and somebody to do it. Just delight in it, delight in the freedom and power that you find as you see that you really do have the ability to restore balance. He says, please share your findings with him next week. He offers his love and says good night. That is all.

Second Talk on the Elements

May 27, 1998, Wednesday Night Group

Aaron: Good evening and my love to you all. I am Aaron. There are a number of subjects related to last week's talk, about which question has been raised. My plan tonight is to give a far briefer than usual opening talk. I wish to speak about the elements in continuation from last week, and then reply to questions.

I want to begin with a guided meditation similar to the one we did last week working with the elements and then we're going to take it a step further. To refresh your memory, we spoke of the elements of earth, air, fire, water and what we might call ether or space. We spoke of the way these elements exist in every substance, animate and inanimate. It would be insufficient to say they exist in the human being, for each of these elements in its own precise balance exists in each cell of your body; in the bone cells, in the skin cells, in the blood cells. They exist not only in the earth itself but in each grain of sand within the earth.

I spoke last week of the loving intention to bring these elements into balance, to note when they are out of balance, not as a way of conquering difficult mind states but simply because there is distortion and the intention is to balance distortion, to restore harmony. Please note that when I use the word distortion, I do not use it in a negative sense. If you have a straight line upon the paper and then create waves in that line, each dip up and down is a distortion. There's nothing bad about these distortions. If you have water in the sea, and the force of tide and wind and current push the sea as waves against the shore, the force of the wave building up and crashing down upon the shore is a distortion. The pull back into the sea is another distortion. There's nothing bad about distortion. I spoke briefly last week about jitsu and kyo energy. Jitsu, reaching/receptive/taking energy that is tense and anticipatory carries a certain high-pitched tension to it. Jitsu. As that which is reached for is received, the hand relaxes. The energy field relaxes. All the tension runs out with kyo energy. Everything in the universe is in constant movement between jitsu and kyo.

We call these distortions but they are not negative. The effort, however, is to keep the distortion in balance. If you have too much jitsu, too much tense anticipatory receptive energy, reaching out, wanting, it builds up out of balance. If you have too much kyo energy, you wind up totally lethargic. Balance.

When I speak of the distortions within the elements then, and bringing it back to balance there is no statement of bad or good, only of the desire to aid in harmony by keeping things within some kind of a balance. It might be an extreme balance or it might be a very subtle balance.

Please remember then that your distortions are part of the incarnative process and are not inherently good or bad. In fact, in your desire to offer service to another, your distortions are part of that service. If you need to practice compassion, you need some catalyst with which to practice. If nobody or nothing ever irritates you in any way, with what are you going to practice compassion and lovingkindness? They offer you the

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service of offering a catalyst so that you may practice. Is their distortion bad then? Uncomfortable, perhaps, but also perfect.

Breathe in and out. Bring the attention to the breath. Feel the soft touch of the breath on the nostrils flowing into the body and then flowing out again. Allow yourself one at a time to perceive the elements in you. Let us start with earth. The material substance of the body is in part the earth element. And we note here that every substance contains all the elements, therefore we cannot say the material body is the earth element and the blood and other liquid flowing through the body is the water element. Every cell in your body contains all five elements, each in its own particular balance. I ask you now to focus on the earth element, both within the body and in the world beyond you. Feel the solidity of this house made of wood and brick. Bring to mind a forest or a mountain. Literally breathe in that stability which characterizes the earth element.

(Pause)

And now, air. Air is all around you, air in you. Perhaps openness and spaciousness are the most precise characteristics of the air element.

(Pause)

Water. Visualize a waterfall, a stream flowing and coming to a drop of many feet, water rushing down, gathered at the bottom, swirling and flowing on down the river. Then bring that waterfall into the self, feeling the river literally flowing through your body, flowing through your veins.

(Pause)

Fluidity is the primary characteristic of the water element.

(Pause)

And then fire. Here you might want to think of a raging bonfire with intense heat and brilliance of light. Feel the energy of it, the passion of it. You may also wish to think of the sun.

(Pause)

That which I call ether is part of the composite substance of each element. It has two aspects, energy and space. It is not easily experienced as a distinct element unto itself. As energy, it is the energy within the flowing water, the energy within the crackling fire, the energy within the strength and solidity of the earth, the energy in the movement of the air. As space, it is that which is empty, true *sunyata* of the Buddhist teachings. Energy and such emptiness are two expressions of the same ether. Think of molecules of water moving. These molecules are separated by space and have space. One might say the molecules both **contain** space and **are** space. Here "space" equates with the true nature of conditioned phenomenon as empty. Energy is found in the interplay, the kyo/jitsu movement of phenomena. The space and energy aspects are not different but part of one whole. This element is the most difficult to understand as it cannot be noted conceptually, and we will not work deeply with it now. Those of you who feel ready to investigate it further are invited to do so within your meditation.

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Feel all of these come together in the self and allow there to be a balance. Intuitively note what may be out of balance. In other words, any element which may not be there in useful balance to the others. Simply draw more of that into the self.

You will come to a point where you feel balanced, whole, open, comfortable, stable, and yet fluid. Energetic and yet not erupting with energy. I'm going to ask this instrument to make a noise. Note the ways that the noise pulls you out of this balance and simply invite the balance in again. We will do this now.

(Shout!)

I cannot tell you how to balance. Intuitively each of you does know how. Did you need to bring in more of the stable mountain? Did your energy suddenly start to dance off the top of the mountain? Did it perhaps become very solid, necessitating bringing in more air or water? Your needs will be different as each of you is unique. Let us do it again.

(Shout!)

Just right. Gently allow the self to return to balance. This is not a statement of aversion to imbalance but simply the skillful desire to be co-creator in the harmonious flow of experience. Not to maintain imbalance for ego-centric reasons, such as to heighten the power or to create shielding.

Open. Centered. Balanced.

Now, as we did last week, I invite each of you to invite in a strong emotion that you experienced within the past day or two. Invite in the memory of it. Really allow it to be rekindled in the experience. It can be an emotion such as anger or desire, jealousy or pride. It can be an emotion such as deep lovingkindness or compassion.

Note with the drawing in of emotion and the movement into the memory of that emotion, whether it serves as a small catalyst, whether the elements shift out of balance. If they do, then simply intuitively draw the self back into balance the same way that you have just done with the noise. I will be quiet while you do this. We will pause for two or three minutes here to allow you time.

(Pause)

I am Aaron. This is the basic practice which we introduced last week. Now I wish to add some subtleties. What we have done thus far is very simplified. It is the observation of the essential experience of each element in balanced form. This experience is like that of looking at a forest from an airplane, very different than if you descend and walk through the forest. From above you simply see a sea of green. But when you get into the forest you see the earth from which the trees spring. You see dry areas and mud or marsh. You see the woody trunks and the branches, the green leaves above, the roots below.

There are two points I wish to address. The first is to look closer at these elements and learn about their composition. The second is to more deeply address the question about use of imbalances which was raised last week.

Each element is comprised of all five elements in its own particular balance. Today we continue to lay ether aside and work with the other four, not because ether is

unimportant but because it adds too much complexity at this stage of the lesson. By way of example of this balance, I will share a story. Earlier today this instrument was walking barefoot and stepped on a sharp object on which she cut her foot. There was a moment of sharp pain and then as she sat down and stopped the blood flow, experienced the continuation of the pain, there was a bit of anger that this object was there on the floor of the lake where she was wading. It wasn't precisely anger at cutting the foot, it wasn't precisely anger at the object on which she cut the foot, it wasn't precisely anger at the idea that she was now going to have a painful foot for a few days, it was simply a tension of anger.

I asked her to stop and examine the balance that was present. Fire was predominant. Fire was out of balance. Instead of bringing in more water, air and earth, I asked her just to stay with the fire element and investigate the fire element itself. In fire, she began to see each of the elements clearly, that air, water and earth were present, but not in a balanced way. By "balanced" I mean each of the elements contains a balance of all the elements within it. In the water element, water predominates, but the other elements are also there. In the air element, air predominates but the others are also there. So the other elements were there within the fire element, but each presented itself as an imbalanced representation of that element, because in each, the fire itself was out of balance. Within the whole experience, fire was predominant and out of balance with the other three, and within the fire element there was imbalance. What I asked her to do then was not to balance the four elements overall but to attend first to the fire element itself.

By way of metaphor, if you have purple paint with too much red, and mix it with an equal portion of white, the resultant color will be a red tinged lavender. If you want it to be truly balanced lavender, you must mix the white with a balanced purple.

You can literally use these elements as a palette. A useful metaphor would be to use green, orange, and purple as metaphor for three of the elements. You see that within green there is yellow and blue, within orange there is yellow and red. Therefore with four elements, each which contains the four elements, you have sixteen segments to work with. Please do not become too conceptual about this, just work with it intuitively and begin to understand when it's useful to maintain subtle imbalance and when it's useful to restore full balance.

In this case what was useful for her was first to draw more air, and then more water into the fire element. And finally most important of all was to draw more earth into the fire element. She felt how her energy was bubbly, as a pot that is boiling too fiercely. The air and water helped but bringing earth in tended to bring this fire element into balance.

When the fire element was in balance, fire was also balanced in the other three elements. The result this one experienced was this brought the whole energy field down and quieted and stabilized it. At a certain point in that stabilization process, she noted to me, "Aaron, I feel the same fire energy. It's still predominant over the other three elements. But it's no longer expressing itself as anger. Rather, it's expressing itself as a powerful intention to go out and wade around and find what I cut myself on."

This was not to take that object and abuse it in any way, it was simply to take that object and lift it out of the water so that it would no longer be a danger to others. I asked her, instead of doing that, which would have been a skillful choice, to use this as

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a learning process, to note what happened if she then went on to the other step of balancing all the elements. I asked her to observe what had happened to the other elements, now that fire was balanced.

So she let go of the fire element itself and the sub-elements within fire and began instead to work with the other individual elements, observing them and bringing them into balance. She found they needed little further balancing, only a fine tuning.

As she worked and observed, I then asked her to balance the elements so that fire was no longer predominant in any way. After a few minutes of this she began to note the difference, that in the first situation where she had brought the fire element into balance insofar as the sub-elements, but left fire dominant over the others, anger had faded but there was still a strong energy, let's call it a fire energy, which was still very available and able to be used as energy. When she balanced the four elements together, brought more earth and water and air in, released some of the fire, she came to a place of equanimity. It was still possible to say, "It's useful to go and find that upon which I cut myself," but the energy force of it had dissolved.

This is very subtle. I cannot give you precise directions because each situation will be different. When might it be useful to allow fire or earth or air or water energy to remain subtly out of balance with the others? We got into this question a bit last week, I believe on R's question about creativity. You really could become a master using these as an artist would a palette, mixing colors together. Sometimes you want the red to be forceful. Sometimes you want the overall palette to have a blue tone. What does the canvas need?

In a situation when you're planting a garden, for example, it may be very useful to have a predominance of earth energy within the self to help you be more deeply attuned to the soil with which you are working. You can do this both by acknowledging the earth sub-element in each of the other elements and also by allowing the earth element itself, with its sub-elements, to take a shape of distortion of balance with the other elements, to be predominant a bit.

If you are hot, have been laboring or sweating, you find the body out of balance in terms of perhaps too much fire. If you are also feeling very solid and heavy, lethargic, there is too much earth. In such a case, bring in air and water. There are two ways to do that. One is the kind of balancing we did at the beginning of this session and last week, and one is to note these four sub-elements within each element. If you're hot in that way, experiencing an excess of fire and earth energy, you can find the air and water sub-elements within the fire and earth elements.

I do not want to become too complex and put this out of anyone's reach. I would ask three things of you. One, that you work with these instructions at whatever level feels clear and comfortable to you, and let go of the rest. Two, begin to see not just the elements but that each element contains all of the others, each in its own necessary proportions. Finally, that you experiment especially with the fire energy that comes with anger, because this is a place where it's very accessible to work with. When there is anger and you feel an excess of fire energy, instead of bringing in that which would balance the fire energy, I want you to pause and ask, "Is there any use to this excess of fire energy? How can I bring this excess of fire energy into a more workable balance

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and still leave fire slightly out of proportion to the others? Would that be skillful?" Just ask yourself these questions. Trust your intuition.

What you will likely find is that the intensity of anger from a fear-based place, where the anger wishes to control or harm or act in some way against some object, that anger fades but that a certain degree of fire energy remains simply as energy, as thrust. I request you to work with the arising of anger simply because this is the most accessible place in which to experiment.

I repeat that if this practice sounds too complex at this point, simply go back to what we began with, the four basic elements and the balancing of the elements. Slowly you will come to recognize the four sub-elements within each element and begin to understand how to bring everything into balance.

Several questions were also raised related to other points of my talk last week. One was about the transition into fourth density and of the nature of third and fourth density experience. I stated last week that part of what was lost by those higher density beings who dwelled in such as Lemuria was this ability to balance and therefore we were emphasizing the restoration of balance within the self and without. I described how those of Atlantis had lost this ability that their forebears had, to balance themselves and serve as co-creators with the earth and all aspects of the earth. Thus, volcanoes which erupted mirrored their own inner imbalance. The question that was raised is to ask more precisely what went wrong. How did this happen? And what can we learn from that ancient history? Also, a related question: can I be more precise about how the outer environment mirrors the inner? In what ways are we creating the outer environment with our experience?

These are all useful questions. I'm going to pause here to hear which of these questions, or all, are most relevant to you, what other questions you may have, and also what questions you may have about the more subtle step in this element practice, which I introduced tonight. I thank you for your attention. I pause.

Barbara: Aaron asks, first, are there any questions about what he introduced tonight? He says he knows it's very subtle and that you're going to have to experiment with it in order to understand it.

J: When I recalled an experience that I had yesterday, experiencing a sense of fear and anger, as I sat with that tonight, what I felt energetically was a vacating of little bubble-like particles, primarily from my mid-section of body and my head.

Barbara: It was being released?

J: From about mid-thigh.

Barbara: Aaron is saying, J, that what was actually happening was not a vacating from your body of little bubbly material, that that was simply the image that it took. That what was happening was a release of a certain imbalance, released as energy.

J: ... The elements seemed like earth. What was shifting felt denser than energy.

Barbara: He asks, could you feel that what was happening was that the earth element itself was coming back into balance in terms of the four sub-elements? As the earth element came into balance, it was able then to be utilized in balancing the four

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elements. He says the words are confusing. Within the earth element, the four sub-elements came into balance, thereby making the earth element more balanced and thereby able to be utilized in balancing the other elements.

J: Intuitively, yes. At the outset of reliving the experience, I felt that in reverse order.

Barbara: Aaron says this is a perfect example of what he is talking about, I'm paraphrasing Aaron. That the element J intuitively moved to work with was the earth element which had a surplus of both earth and fire energy in it. Some of this excess felt as if it literally bubbled out. It was a way of bringing the air and water sub-elements within the earth element into play so that the earth element came into balance. The earth element imbalance was then able to be used to bring him down from the anger which was part of the imbalance of too much fire element. You couldn't use that earth element at first because it was out of balance with its sub-elements, but as soon as it came into balance, then you were able to use it to balance the fire element.

J: This explanation is useful, as I have had similar sensations, but I'm trying to develop a workable understanding.

Barbara: Aaron is saying, for most of us, an intellectual understanding is not useful until much later along when we are able to do it and then to look back and see what we're doing. But at first, what's useful is simply to work intuitively with it without trying to figure out what's happening. Aaron will speak.

Aaron: I am Aaron. What is important here is simply to offer the statement to intention to come back into the degree of balance, the relative degree of balance that is most useful for the good of all beings. Given that statement of intention, there is no longer any aversion to the imbalance, only an awareness that it's out of balance. If you're on a raft that is tipping because all of the weight is on one side, it's skillful to move to the other side of the raft to help balance it, so beings don't fall into the water. There's no aversion to the imbalance, there's simply a statement, "For the sake of harmony, I am willing to allow balance to begin itself here." And then intuitively you allow that balancing without trying to push or change anything consciously, but simply offer the statement, "I invite in what is necessary and I invite the release of what is not useful."

But then observe the process and see how it happens, and begin to familiarize yourself with these elements. Begin to observe when they are out of balance not just in yourself but in the world. I pause.

J: The lesson this evening Aaron is speaking to helps because I have been aware that something else was occurring rather than simply just four elements. It is the multiple levels within each element.

Di: And also it helps me see that I am not **getting rid of** too much fire. I am paying close attention to that element that presents itself.

Barbara: Aaron says, yes, precisely. I am paraphrasing Aaron here, he says, to you as an artist that he recommends the image of mixing paints and colors. If you're painting with a palette and you put some color on that seems to clash a bit, perhaps you might feel that some degree of contrast is useful for the dynamic of the painting. But you might choose to tone it down a little, say to tone down the orange by mixing a slight bit of blue with it, just to bring it into a hue that's more harmonious with the rest of the

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picture while still being a dynamic element in the picture. He says use that image of how you mix color in a painting as part of the image here of how you're working with the elements. He thinks that will be helpful. He asks do you understand?

Di: Yes. But I, now anyway, think an intuitive approach will be best. The first time Aaron asked us to look at our balance, I recognized I needed more earth. I tried covering myself with moss and dirt but it didn't work. I went into a tree and that was what I needed. I felt the movement of water and the air at the needles of the tree, and all the elements. And then I could use earth. Before, I couldn't use the earth.

Barbara: He says, yes. It is just this kind of balancing, precisely, which is most skillful, to find out how to literally use each of the elements and to experience their interrelationships. Others?

L: I often get quite hyped at work and with my busy schedule. Where am I at on the matrix, in this paradigm?

Aaron: I hear your question, L. I am Aaron. Please all of you visualize the experience of total relaxation. Resting on a hammock, perhaps, or floating on a raft on a gentle lake. There is a state of low energy. It's not quite a kyo state, but it's close. Now I would ask you to visualize not only tension, of jitsu energy, but hyper-tension, of fear-based anxiety and grasping. Pushing, pulling, controlling.

Finally, visualize a balanced working energy. It cannot be as tension-free and kyo as the hanging in the hammock, and yet in order to relate skillfully to the persons and situations around you, it cannot be as high-pitched a tension as the strong jitsu energy and anxiety you've just remembered. You do control this. It's not an on/off switch, it's a dimmer switch. What I perceive specifically in you, L, and this will differ for other beings, is that when you reach that high-pitched level at work, fire energy is dominant as sub-element in all the elements. Fire energy is also out of balance amongst the four elements. Air is also dominant and out of balance. Specifically, then, as sub-element of each of the four elements, fire is out of balance. And in the four elements themselves, fire and air are out of balance.

You do not want to let go of all the fire energy. You don't want to shift to a lethargic kyo kind of state. There are two possibilities. The simpler is simply to invite in more water and earth and to release some of the excess fire. This is the rougher way to do it. It's possible but it's not as fine-tuned. It will serve the purpose of releasing some of the tension and bringing you back into balance, but it may not maintain the energetic jitsu energy that you need to do the work. More useful is to take this fire and air element which are each out of balance in their sub-elements, to find the fire sub-element that is out of balance in the fire element, to focus just on the fire element and how it feels, and bring the fire element itself back into a balance whereby it becomes a usable tool again.

You won't see this at first but after awhile you'll become attuned to the fact that as you balance the sub-elements in fire, and bring it back into a usable tool, that touches the fire sub-element in each of the other elements so that the fire remains as dynamic energy but it becomes a useful energy rather than an unbalanced energy. Would you like me to speak further on this or is this sufficient explanation? I pause.

Barbara: Would you like more information? (Yes.)

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Aaron: I am Aaron. When I ask you to picture the state of lying in the hammock, completely relaxed, you can feel that the elements may be in balance. They're in good balance for relaxing but they're not in good balance for dynamic action. Dynamic action does necessitate bringing in more fire energy. Can you feel that?

When there is tension, an anxiety-based, ego-based tension, as somebody that needs to get things done, needs to be in control, to be safe and keep others safe, to produce and so forth, then there is an excess of the fire element in the balance of these four elements. There's also an excess of air element for you in this situation, and for many people. The fire is the energy, the air is what keeps it going, like blowing on a fire in your fireplace. It produces hotter fire. The air keeps the fire energy in motion, stirred up. So there's a need for both water and earth to tone it down a little and make it workable.

This instrument, in making her bronze sculpture, uses a welding torch with 2000 degrees of heat. She must balance the gas and oxygen that fuel the fire in the torch. It's of no use to her if it's a 2000 degree blowtorch bursting out in an immense flame. She needs a fine-pointed flame. This is the kind of balancing you do. You don't want to get rid of the fire and air energy. You don't want to go back and hang on a hammock or the work's not going to get done. You bring attention first to the imbalance, simply bringing in more water and earth energy, releasing some of the air and fire energy, until the fire element feels balanced within its four sub-elements. You still have a vibrant, dynamic fire energy, but it's a balanced fire energy. You bring attention to it in the fire element because that is the one in which you most notice the distortion of balance in terms of the sub-elements. As you balance the sub-elements in the fire element, those sub-elements are naturally balanced within the fire sub-element in the other elements, bringing them all into balance.

Here we get into a non-linear process which it is sometimes difficult for the human mind to fully comprehend. It's a simultaneous movement. As fire is balanced in terms of the sub-elements, that which is next to it automatically also balances the sub-elements. It's difficult for me to offer a metaphor here because it's a simultaneous, not a linear, progression and this is not common in the human experience. I can only offer a metaphor which is in reality untrue to human experience, but you can perhaps comprehend how it would be if this happened.

If you have an instrument that has four strings and you want to bring them into harmony with one another, you may tune one string. What if when you tuned that string the strings next to it automatically tuned themselves, came into harmony with the first string? Basically that's what you're doing. As you create harmony within the sub-elements within the fire element, the other elements and sub-elements create harmony naturally in replication of the fire element and its sub-elements.

Again, I fear I'm becoming too complex here and leading you to a conceptual experience or to over-use of the intellect. Very simply, you note that the fire is out of balance, that that is what first catches your mind. First catches your body also. Simply act in the appropriate ways with the intention to create harmony there for the good of all beings by bringing in more water and more earth, releasing some of the fire and air, until the fire element feels balanced but dynamic. You're not putting out the fire. Balanced but dynamic. Then invite that dynamic balanced fire to be replicated in each of the other four elements. Observe constantly how you feel as you do this. If

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you're doing it skillfully, you're going to feel a release of the anxiety-tension and yet there will still be a dynamic energy to do the work. Is this sufficient explanation, L? I would be happy to speak further on it if it's useful. I pause.

L: I feel better just listening to the explanation. Is Aaron saying that I'm prone to air? Hot air? (*Laughing.*)

Barbara: Aaron says, somewhat. He says, "Better hot air than hot lava!" He is saying please do not let this become a doing, a conceptual "First I've got to do this and then that." Don't make a long list and check it off. He says it's an intuitive process and fundamental above all else is simply offering the intention to allow rebalance for the good of all beings. When that intention is strong enough, you intuitively know how to allow this. He says it's like driving on a highway. You don't have to think of how far to turn the wheel and how far to push the accelerator. You just observe the traffic flow and you observe, "For the good of all beings I intend to drive skillfully" and then allow self to do it.

D: I'm not sure which elements are out of balance, but I am experiencing a lot of resistance and aversion to writing my dissertation. What is the best way to get through a process that is very time-consuming and not enjoyable?

Aaron: I am Aaron. I would note here, D, that work with the elements is just one kind of practice. Very useful but not the most important practice in all situations. You are newer to our work here. There is much that has been said through the years that you have not heard. Working with the elements, it would be useful to feel the resistance and then visualize water element in a dynamic form, such as a waterfall, and bring it into you, feel it moving through you. A waterfall has much more fire element in it than a placid pond. Much more air in it also. So, working with the elements, you want to bring in something more dynamic and yet fluid. Cooling. This is useful, and I would certainly recommend it to you, but there's much more to this.

What is the resistance? Remember, you're not trying to fix the resistance, the resistance is not bad, nothing is broken. Resistance is simply a statement of fear. What is your normal pattern when fear arises? I would suggest from what I know of you that your normal pattern is to become a solid self that's out to conquer fear. Here is an invitation to begin to work with fear in a very new way. When there is resistance, it's a statement of fear. You don't have to know what the fear is about. Instead, feeling that resistance, can you begin to do metta (lovingkindness meditation)? Hold in your heart the one who is resisting, the one who wants so badly to do well and is afraid that it will not do well. The one who wants to offer good and is afraid it may offer harm instead. The one who needs to be in control and is afraid that if it offers its energy to this work, it may move into a space of not full control. Hold that, dear being, deeply in your heart and wish it well. See deeply into the pain of this being as if you were its sister and offer her wishes from your loving heart.

In this way, instead of trying to conquer the fear, can you make more space for the fear? As you make space, you begin to find that within which is not afraid, to allow that non-fear mind to shine and gain strength. Increasingly you will find you are able to say no to fear mind in a very gentle and kind way, not to control or get rid of fear mind, but in the same manner in which you would say no to a puppy with muddy paws who wanted to jump on you. "No," firm but kind. "It's not appropriate. No, you are not

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running the show". The same way you would say no to a whining child who wanted a cookie just before dinner. "No." It's not said with anger but with kindness.

So this is the kind of practice I would most request that you work with, bringing more and more love in to this fear state that's being expressed through resistance. I pause.

Barbara: He says, do you understand? (Yes.) He says do you see the old pattern to conquer the resistance?

D: That's me!

Barbara: He says that just sets up a conflict, increases the resistance. He says, just know that resistance is teaching. It's teaching you about the fear self and offering you an opportunity to create a different relationship with the fear self whereby the fear self is no longer either in control or something that must be conquered, but rather, something that you just nod to and say, "Okay, have a seat. But you're not running the show."

D: I should see this resistance as an opportunity?

Barbara: Aaron says please remove the word "should" from your vocabulary. He would prefer you to say it is possible to see this as an opportunity. (Okay. Thanks.) He says, but you "should" not remove the word "should" from your vocabulary! (*Laughter.*) He says, you *may!*

Q: In the talk Aaron gave, he told how he instructed you to work with other elements. As you did that, anger dissipated and you had strong intention to find the sharp thing which cut your foot and pick it up. He had you continue to work with the elements but he didn't say what happened then to the desire to find the sharp object.

Barbara: What happened was I meditated with anger/fire for awhile. At that point I felt the anger dissolve and felt, "Okay, I'm done and the bleeding has stopped a bit and I want to find what it was that cut me, so it's not endangering others." Aaron said, "Just wait, stay here and work with balancing all four elements." And I saw that as I further released the fire element, keeping that degree of imbalance enough, energy and intention remained to find the sharp object, but there was no more "self" looking, just kindness. There was another step though.

It was useful to keep enough of the fire element to keep me determined to find this thing, which takes a force of energy. I didn't say, "Why bother?" and go lie in the hammock. When he asked me not to go and find it but just to sit there and continue to meditate, and then to balance the four elements, what I found is when I released more of the fire energy, it came into a literal balance but it was a useful balance. There was no longer the thought, "I'm going to find this thing" from a place of anger. But after working with the four elements and bringing them into literal balance, I just felt like I wanted to take a nap! Let the thing stay there!

So I realized it's useful to keep that subtle imbalance. I drew in more fire and air, moved, not into anger, but into a more jitsu state of reaching, movement. Aaron says this relates to R's question last week about the imbalance in creativity. We don't want to be flat but to keep a controlled imbalance. We're creating the imbalance, not experiencing the imbalance thrust upon us. We're constantly working to create this dynamic imbalance that's a kind of a flow, which allows us to take appropriate action.

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L: I remember when I started working in sales that I had a difficult time gearing up. Now, I have a difficult time gearing down. Interesting.

Barbara: Aaron is saying, similar to his message to D, it's useful to use this element balancing practice but it's also useful simply to use vipassana and lovingkindness meditation, to be aware of that which arises from a fear base, and to bring that fear base more into the open heart and not have to fix it. Balancing the elements can become a way of fixing. He knows you understand that. And this element balancing practice is useful, but it's only ultimately useful when it comes from a place of equanimity.

Q: I would like to know how I can help evolve in my spiritual path, journey.

Aaron: I am Aaron. I hear your question. The first step is to relax and trust that everything you need will come to you. The second is to practice mindfulness and presence to the degree that when what you seek does come to you you're going to be awake and aware that it's come, otherwise it will simply pass you by.

We've been talking tonight of dynamic tension and dynamic relaxation, a balance between that energy I have called jitsu and what I have called kyo. There's a constant flow. The pattern of waves hitting the shore and then receding is a good metaphor for that flow. The deep aspiration to grow, the precise statement of intention to deepen spiritual understanding, to purify the energy, to do no harm but live in service to all beings—these statements of intention do set up a jitsu kind of energy, a grasping. When there is too much grasping, one cannot be present with what is in this moment. If there is no stated intention, then one is asleep. So the balance is found in stating the intention and then deepening in faith, allowing the natural arising of faith and trust that each moment brings you exactly what you need for that growth, and that you don't have to go anywhere or do anything to create it. And indeed the learning of faith and love are the primary lessons of this third density human experience.

How do you find this balance? First, simply meditate and be awake, be present in each moment as much as is possible. Second, recognize first in your formal meditation practice and second in daily life the moments where a distortion of fear is governing your thoughts and actions. When such distortion arises, you do not seek to get rid of it but as I just explained to D, to have more space for it. So you begin to recognize the habitual patterns that have been there in relationship to the various distortions that the self encounters. You begin to understand how mind shapes experience.

With habitual pattern you may ask after it, "Is this skillful? If not, what else could I be doing here?" For example, if there is fear and an intensifying contraction of one's energy field, one may ask, "Can I relax a bit? Can I bring in a bit more spaciousness and kindness?" To allow that spaciousness and kindness does not mean to create it. It already exists. The question then is not, "How do I create kindness?" but "Where have I misplaced kindness? How can I more fully invite the loving heart into this painful or difficult situation?" And then, we come full circle back to intention, the intention to allow the loving heart to be the foundation in your choices and actions. I would ask you to remember that fear is a distortion of love. Fear is not something antithetical to love, it's simply a distortion of love. There is love for the self and then there is fear that that self will be hurt or its needs not met. There's love for another and the same fear. When you

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meet fear, your work is not to conquer fear so much as to recognize it as distortion of love and literally to find the love in it. This is what creates space.

This is a rather general answer. I would not wish to violate your privacy in any way but I also suspect that you would be grateful for some more precise instruction. Like many old souls, there is much self-judgment when negativity arises. A very specific area of work to you at this point in your evolution is to begin to regard judgment, the whole process of judging mind. You're not trying to stop judging mind, just to observe how often it arises and to ask yourself, "What could be substituted here? Can I be a bit kinder, a bit more merciful to myself?" It's very difficult because there's such intense aspiration to grow, to purify the self. There's such strong desire to purify the energy so that it feels worthy of the divine. I ask you to remember that you are not and never have been anything other than an expression of the divine. None of that which expresses out of you, be it fear or love based, is anything but expression of the divine. There's nothing that needs to be fixed. Can there be more kindness to the self? Each time judgment arises, especially self-judgment, can there be a gentle reminder, "Maybe I don't need to be so hard on myself." I pause.

Appendix B

A Variation on Tonglen (receiving/giving) Meditation

(Instructions in parentheses are a variation for Christians.)

1. Sitting erect, note the breath moving in and out. Feel yourself in a circle of light (of God's or Jesus' presence, His Heart to your heart).
2. Breath in, feeling that Light and infinite love move into you.
3. Breath out. Let it fill your heart.
4. Breath in, note the immense suffering of the world, then direct focus to one place/person.
5. Breath out, sending that Love with the exhaled breath, to this suffering being. Here we are allowing ourselves to give freely, not to hold that Light which is so precious for ourselves but offering it freely in service to others.
6. Inhale. See the suffering as a black, thick, tarry mass. Allow yourself to draw it into your heart. Note any resistance, any fear of allowing in that suffering, any desire to stay separate; soften around it. **This is not a matter of forcing oneself, but gently opening one's heart to fear, to the fear that creates illusion of our separation from the suffering of the world. We MUST do it gently. If there is resistance, allow in as much as you can. No "shoulds," no judgment, just the heart that gently opens when its fear is met with mercy.**
7. Exhale, allowing yourself to feel the heaviness of the suffering.
8. Inhale, (remembering God); we as human need not hold the suffering and bear it ourselves.
9. Exhale, release it out to whatever accepts it (to God or to Jesus).

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NEWSLETTER

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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."*