

No Chain At All

by

Aaron

Channeled through Barbara Brodsky



Deep Spring Publications

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Foreword

This work is channeled. That is to say I had the experience of “hearing” teachings and then speaking out loud those precise thoughts which were offered so as to share them with the class. Some of you are familiar with channeling and have no discomfort with the idea of a discarnate teacher. Others may be new to this process. Perhaps you’ve been drawn to this book by the subject but look askance at “channeling” or think of it as “new age mumbo-jumbo.”

I can not prove Aaron’s reality, nor does it really matter. I can only say he feels “real” to me, that I experience him as an energy outside of myself which offers me new understandings, but that also doesn’t matter. What is “real”? As we explore the lines offered in the Buddhist Diamond Sutra—

Thus shall ye look on all this fleeting world,
A star at dawn, a bubble in the stream,
A flash of lightning in a summer cloud,
A flickering lamp, a phantom, and a dream.

—we’re led to the question, “Am I real?” What or who am I? What is this earth on which I seem to live, and who are those “others” who share it with me? This present work asks us to consider those questions and to look at how much of our own and the world’s suffering grows out of that persistent adherence to our separate, ego-centered realities. Aaron’s deepest teachings are of non-duality and non-separation. So how can I state that Aaron is separate from myself?

I could tell you that those who have worked with Aaron find him to be a wise and compassionate teacher whose primary concern is to help us find freedom and alleviation of suffering. Aaron would be the first to say that also is irrelevant. Who he is doesn’t matter. Put “channeled” aside. I ask only that you read with open mind and heart. If what is presented here is helpful, take it and make it your own. If not, discard it. All that matters is that these words connect you to your own deepest wisdom, that they bring you back into your own heart.

Barbara Brodsky

Acknowledgments

No work of this size 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 Karen Weber for countless hours of typing, transcribing, and editing, to Ian Jaffray for equally countless hours of careful editing of a final version, and to David Brown for technical help. These transcripts grew out of the hard work, commitment, and pure and loving energy of the weekly study group—Lorna Brown, Cassie Cammann, Dottie Coyne, John Gutoskey, Donna Hall, Barb Linderman, Michele Matossian, Aiji Piphoo and Karen Weber. Thanks also to John Orr and Mike Rothbart who have spent many hours opening their hearts and thoughts to Aaron and inspiring his sharing.

Finally, a thank you to my family—Hal, Peter, Davy and Mike—who have put up with an abundance of reheated leftovers and order-out pizza, and suffered the hours and weekends of losing me to a computer or meditation, to allow me more time to work.

Questions of Aaron's reality put aside, 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 unknown 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 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.

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.

I welcome your letters to me and to Aaron and try to answer every one. I cannot personally channel Aaron's answers to your questions, but we will respond in whatever ways we are able. Please feel free to write.

Barbara Brodsky

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Contents

Foreword	iii
Acknowledgments	iv
Introduction	6
The Transcripts	
January 14, 1993	11
January 21, 1993	22
January 28, 1993	27
February 4, 1993	32
February 11, 1993	38
February 18, 1993	42
February 25, 1993	47
March 11, 1993	53
March 18, 1993	58
March 25, 1993	60
April 1, 1993	63
April 15, 1993	68
April 22, 1993	72
April 25, 1993, Special Session	77
Early April through May 16, 1993, Private Sessions	81
Continuing, May, 1993	85
April 29, 1993	88
May 13, 1993	94
May 19, 1993	101
May 27, 1993	104
June 10, 1993	109
Appendices	
Appendix A	117
Appendix B	121
Appendix C	129
Appendix D	137
Appendix E	144
Deep Spring Publications	Error! Bookmark not defined.

Introduction

This is not a book so much as an invitation. Of course you're welcome to just sit down and read, but our hope is that you'll combine that reading with regular meditation and practice with the suggested exercises, so the understanding you may have from these words becomes experiential. It's very powerful material when met in that way!

There are many forms of meditation. That taught by Aaron is Vipassana or Insight Meditation. Unlike those meditation practices which foster one-focused concentration and encourage us to rest in the bliss of that deep concentration, Vipassana asks us to stay in this moment with a natural concentration that is as fully present as is possible with whatever is predominant in our experience in this moment. We learn to be more fully present in our meditation, in our lives, and without judgment but with an open heart which greets our life with a choiceless awareness. We learn that we are part of what we experience, not mere observer of it. We learn that we "inter-are" with all that is, and in that learning, the illusion of our separation falls away.

Insight Meditation instructions are available in Appendix B. For those who want to pursue it further, many good books¹ are available, and there are teachers throughout the country who offer instruction and meditation retreats. Reading about it won't teach you what practice will, so I encourage you to read the basics, and then just leap in and meditate. If you have specific meditation questions, please feel free to write and I'll do my best to answer.

These transcripts have grown out of Aaron's talks to the weekly study group. This group has been meeting with Aaron and Barbara for three years. Some of the group members have been involved for all three years; others have moved away or new people have joined. There were nine people in the class the semester of this present work.

Through these years we have pursued many areas of spiritual inquiry with Aaron. Transcripts are available for many of the sessions. In 1991 and 1992 his teaching was focused on deepening our meditation practices. Much of our work with Aaron has basis in Buddhist teachings, for example the practice of Vipassana meditation. The teachings in this book also stem from Buddhism. I want to emphasize that Aaron does not choose to identify himself as a follower of any one religion,² but finds truth in all paths. These are not teachings of Buddhism, then, so much as ways of non-duality and non-delusion derived in part from the life and teachings of the Buddha.

There is an often told story of the Buddha. He was walking down a road after his enlightenment when a man stopped him, being struck by the deep peace and joy that radiated from him. "Are you a God?" the man inquired. "No," the Buddha replied. "Well, what are you?" the man asked. "I am awake!" came the answer. The teachings in No Chain at All are not offered to make us Buddhists or followers of any religion so much as to help us awaken.

1 I would especially recommend two: A Gradual Awakening by Stephen Levine, and Seeking the Heart of Wisdom by Joseph Goldstein and Jack Kornfield.

2 See Appendix A for a channeled introduction from Aaron, taken from the book Aaron.

Introduction

Regardless of what spiritual path or religion we follow, there are certain basics which apply for all of us as we move through incarnation. As we come into form, we all experience at least some sense of fragmentation and separation, and perceive our world with some degree of duality. That illusion of fragmentation and duality originated with our birth, or even before, in the fetal stage or in past lives.

The first illusion of being alone, unsafe, and not affirmed in our being may have left us with deep pain. The baby pushed the pain aside and acted in ways that seemed appropriate to feel safe, denying its own truths where necessary to find the safety and comfort it thought it needed. Each time it acted in this way, it further buried truth. We can not fault the child, nor the circumstances. Taking birth into the illusion of self, we act as best we can to preserve ourselves and have our needs met. Often new layers of pain at feeling abandoned or moving into the illusion of unworthiness grew out of situations such as an ill parent, or even one taking a vacation, and were not offered as abuse. It is not what happened but how it was interpreted that deepens the illusion, "separate, unsafe, unworthy."

Some of us have different issues that also grew out of the same illusion, fears that our needs wouldn't be met, leading to clinging and jealousy, for example.

We may have repeated those early separation experiences often in our young lives, through childhood abandonment, or just through the temporary departure of the caregiver. The reality of the situation ceases to be primary. We react, not to the parent who leaves us for three days to give birth to another child, but to the deeper fear of the unresolved primary separation. We all experienced the relative plane reality of separation at birth, and we all experienced that sense of separation when the original "spark" (to use Aaron's term) first experienced awareness and moved into the illusion of separation from God, by whatever label we call that "Unborn, Undying, Unchanging, Uncreated." These are the deep places of pain that provide fuel for the current conflagration.

This often situation-inappropriate reaction is clearly not reaction to the present circumstance but to what we call "old mind." Such movement out of the present and into our past experiences, and the pain around those experiences, is what provokes most of our present rage, terror, jealousy and other heavy emotions.

We are all on a path to coming to know our true selves and our interconnection with all that is. The catalysts described above are not burdens we've been asked to carry, but are the core of the lessons of the incarnation. Most of us try not to hurt others. We also seek the cessation of our own suffering, the healing for which we took birth. And yet we do react to our thoughts and emotions, and thereby cause pain to ourselves, to others, to the earth. As we mature and aspire more to harmlessness, we begin to look at how the illusion of our separation has been the fuel which constantly feeds our fears and reactivity.

Where is wholeness to be found? It is never found in denial of the ways we've needed to hide from our pain, but it also is not found in brutal uncovering of our pain through the ripping away of our armor. Rather, it's a gentle process of moving increasingly into this moment and learning to be courageously present with what we find there.

Introduction

There are many ways to learn to be present, many ways to explore old mind and see that what we thought happened is not the way it seemed. We look at a moment of felt rejection, for example, and at our response of “unworthy” or of anger at the other for rejecting us. When we look in this moment, we see that there is no rejection, just someone else feeling pain who can’t give us what we want. We may then begin to see how we jumped to that conclusion, how it was conditioned by prior misunderstandings. We begin to know that there has never been acceptance or rejection, worthiness or unworthiness, for example, nor good or bad, right or wrong. These dualities were all born of our illusions and fears. They are the products of conditioned old-mind fear.

Work may be done on many levels—body, mind and spirit. The path that Aaron has chosen to lead us in the following transcripts is a very ancient one, a path of meditation and deep awareness. As you read and work with the following transcripts please be aware that they aren’t offered as **the** path, but as **a** path, a very viable one. On this path, we first use mind as tool to deepen wisdom and compassion, and then these qualities become tools to cut through the illusions which have caused us such suffering.

In September, 1992, the study group began to work much more intensively with karma and with watching the arising of fear and the ensuing reactivity to fear. Aaron’s focus was on experiential, not intellectual understanding. We closely observed the habitual and ownership characteristics of karma³ in our lives. We learned to consciously identify the active moment, when there was shift from neutral response to whatever arose in our awareness, to positive or negative feeling, or when there was consciousness of resting in neutral. We watched the arising of fear and the arising of reactivity to fear as two separate phenomena. We worked with fear in what Aaron calls “lucid dreaming.” In lucid dreaming, one knows one is dreaming while still within the dream. Here he asked us especially to be aware of the arising of fear in dreams—as we dream and experience fear, to move to a state of awareness so as to know, “This is a dream.” Knowing the physical body is safe, we may re-enter the dream and practice non-reactivity to fear, in Aaron’s words, “sending love to fear.”

In January, 1993, we began a deeper study of a teaching called Dependent Origination, or *Paticca Samupadda*, derived largely from a Buddhist scripture called the Maha Nidana Sutta (*A sutta (in Sanskrit, sutra) is a Buddhist scripture*). This was not an intellectual study. Aaron’s focus was to introduce these teachings **as they apply to our lives**.

We offer the transcripts for any who wish to follow our sessions. They are not modified and “prettied up” to make a neat book, but offered intact. The order of the transcripts has not been changed. There are times when Aaron repeated himself from week to week, to strengthen our understanding. Even those repetitions have been left intact! I trust they will serve you as they served the class. The only changes have been to correct typographical or occasional grammatical errors for clarity. Those sessions which did not deal with dependent origination are deleted to save space, as are any discussions of a highly personal nature. The remainder is as Aaron presented it.

3 See Appendix C for an explanation of Karma.

Introduction

As you read these notes, it is our hope that you'll join us not only to seek intellectual understanding, but will read slowly, meditate,⁴ and **live** the material, experiencing the ways it moves through your own life. Please join us in the exercises or homework at the end of each class. For those of you to whom this is all new, Aaron has added some exercises which are a little more introductory in nature to the homework of the transcripts. These are written in italics. Aaron doesn't mention work with the energy body here, but most of us also worked in these ways, opening the chakras and balancing the body's energy, as we went along.

When you begin on the January 14 transcript, you may find new terminology. Be patient with yourselves; it will all unfold and be explained through the following weeks. At first glance some of the material may seem technical or unrelated to life. Again, please be patient. If the first two transcripts feel heavy with new words, just read through them, go on, and come back to them later for more detail as it's useful. Aaron's approach has been to offer us the tools we need first, including a vocabulary. **I have known of NOTHING more directly related to our lives than are these teachings.** Give yourself time to become acquainted. If you're new to this, a review of karma and meditation instructions in the Appendix may be of help.

You will notice occasional boldface type. This has been done at Aaron's request, for emphasis.

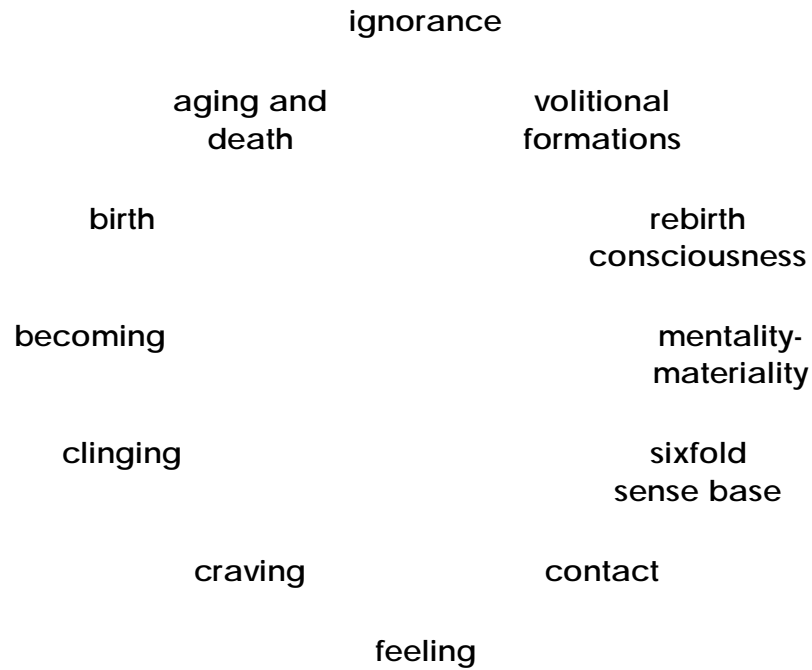
It is my understanding from Aaron that he intends this as part one of a two volume series. We are presently at work on part two.

As you read the notes of our sessions, please begin each session, or reading period, as we did, with some time of silent meditation and the inner affirmation that the work we do is for the alleviation of suffering of all beings, and not merely for ourselves.

4 Basic instructions for Vipassana, or Insight Meditation as it's translated, are in Appendix B.

The Cycle of Dependent Origination

This cycle is usually shown as a circle, with no beginning nor end.



January 14, 1993

Aaron: Good morning and my love to you all. We have been looking carefully at karma, especially two aspects, habitual karma and ownership of karma. Last week, I said that I wanted to begin work with the teaching called Chain of Dependent Origination. I want you to understand each step in this cycle, the way you've come to understand these aspects of karma. As we explore them, you're going to find that they tie together, that to understand karma it's necessary to understand dependent origination and vice versa.

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 entire doctrine of dependent origination is highly complex. On the surface it seems simple. When the Buddha explained dependent origination to his disciples, there was a beloved disciple who came to the Buddha and said (I paraphrase) "Lord, this process is wondrous but it seems simple to me." The Buddha said to him "Do not say so! It looks and seems simple on the surface, but as you penetrate it, the complexities of it become increasingly wondrous and deep." So, as we talk about this, if your mind grasps it, and it seems clear, remember, you've just glimpsed the surface. Keep going!

One could give many lifetimes to fully understanding the nuances of this doctrine, and yet, each bit of effort made to understand it will repay itself many-fold in movement toward freedom and away from reactivity. It will help make clear the consequences of many of your choices, and show you that your freedom really is your choice. We've talked here, at length, about this process of sense consciousness, perception, sensation and mental formation. In brief review, first the sense touches sense object, offering a contact. Mind picks it up, knowing the contact, resulting in consciousness. Then there is perception or knowing what it is that the senses have met. Sensation or feeling involves the move from neutral to positive or negative or staying neutral. Mental formation grows out of that movement, to clinging or aversion, depending on whether what the senses have met is liked or disliked. This is one segment of the entire wheel of dependent origination although not quite in its traditional form.

I am going to ask Barbara to briefly present to you the whole wheel, so that you can see the segment that we've looked at related to the other segments. We do this through Barbara because I prefer not to channel through her that which she is quite capable of explaining; her non-channeling will also facilitate discussion, as she can not easily move in and out of the channeling state. Then we will begin talking about each segment. I do not mean this to be an intellectual exploration. We're going to take each segment slowly, giving you a chance to experience how A leads to B, how B leads to C, how A relates to C, one step at a time, as you watch those interrelationships in your lives. That is all.

Barbara: *(Partial notes only. This is the essence of what Barbara said.)* We are simply labeling the steps of this wheel. We can start anywhere; it's circular. Let's start with the part we've already explored a little.

Contact: is the sense touching the sense object. The senses are existent whether they are touching the sense object or not, but that moment of contact is when they touch. Contact requires a sense object as well. Then there is consciousness of the contact. Mind which knows the contact is also a sense. For the mind to know contact, there first must be sense and sense object which connect. This all falls into this segment called "contact." Aaron's second step, perception, is not part of the traditional cycle. Aaron has broken it down in a different way. What I'm giving you here is the traditional cycle. Then I'll tell you the way that Aaron has changed it.

Feeling: as Aaron defines it, is the move from neutral, or further resting in neutral. This is where our "active moment" lies.

Craving: understand that aversion is, in a sense, part of craving, because we're craving comfort and safety. When something threatens us, aversion arises to it, but the root form of it is craving.

Clinging, or attachment:

Becoming: at the stage of attachment, new karma has been created as a manifestation of the delusion of a self—the "self" which is craving and clinging—and which leads into rebirth, thus, becoming. This differs from the segment "rebirth consciousness." Aaron or I will explain the difference later.

Birth, aging and death:

Rebirth consciousness: and its connection with **ignorance** or **delusion of self** and with **volitional formations**. We'll discuss this in great depth.

Mentality-materiality: is the formation of mind and body, in which process are formed the **sixfold sense base**, which leads us back to **contact**.

These interconnect in a variety of ways.

Aaron: From the wisdom of my final lifetime and the past five hundred of your years, I feel able to alter this traditional form, and share with you the way I now understand it, which I think will simplify your understanding of the process. My changes are not major. I want you to see it in the traditional form. I think it will be helpful to you to hear why I alter it as well. Know that if you share this with Buddhists with traditional background, they may tell you "No, you've got this or that detail wrong." We'll talk about it as we go on. That is all. Barbara will present the terminology of the traditional wheel.

Barbara: (*Diacritical marks for Pali words are given only in this first list.*)

Ignorance—Avijjā composed of moha, aññāna

Volitional formations—Sankhārā

Rebirth consciousness—Viññāna

Mentality-materiality—Nāma-Rūpa

Sixfold Base—Salāyatana

Contact—Phassa

Feeling—Vedanā

Craving—Tanhā

Clinging—Upādāna

Becoming—Bhava

Birth—Jāti

Aging and Death—Jarāmarana

Discussion: (*Most discussions through the semester are led by Barbara, not by Aaron, and they have not been recorded.*)

Aaron: Please remember that each step in the wheel does not necessarily lead only to the next step, but to many of the other steps. This is where it gets complex. When one says "Oh, I understand this," you can see the connection from A to B, perhaps, but do you understand the connection from A to many other letters? Let's take it a small bit at a time. First, I want to explain the basic terms here. Again, I will ask Barbara to share part of this in her words.

Barbara: Aaron has said that each relates to the other. There is a part of this teaching that says (*reading from Sutra*) "Dependent on ignorance arise volitional formations, etc. Dependent on contact, arises feeling. Dependent on feeling arises craving. Dependent on craving arises clinging." And then the reverse: "Through the cessation of contact, feeling ceases. Through the cessation of feeling, craving ceases. Through the cessation of craving, clinging ceases. Through the cessation of clinging, becoming ceases. Through the cessation of becoming, birth ceases. Through the cessation of birth, aging and death ceases. And sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair. Thus, there is a cessation of this whole mass of suffering." When you read it that way, this sutra runs through the entire cessation of ignorance and volitional formations, and reads through to the cessation of birth, where aging and death also cease.

Aaron: A note here. It doesn't quite follow that through the cessation of aging and death, ignorance ceases. It's not that ignorance has ceased through the cessation of aging and death, but that ignorance has ceased because there is clear seeing, and with the cessation of ignorance, each of the others follow. We must ask, how do we allow for the cessation of ignorance? Here is displayed their interdependence. Ignorance ceases when there is no longer delusion of self. What contributes to delusion of a separate, continuous self? I won't answer that now. Look at it yourselves.

Please notice, however, that you can break in at many points in the circle. One doesn't start by clarifying ignorance, necessarily. If you become aware of how movement from neutral to positive or negative creates clinging and aversion, and work in skillful ways with that clinging and aversion as it arises, that awareness helps to clarify ignorance. This is what I want you to understand, that there is a spiral nature to it. It's not that you completely take care of one step, and then the next step entirely ceases, because you can't completely purify any one step in your human form. Rather, you gain a bit of understanding. As there's more wisdom about how clinging and aversion arise, you find yourself less pulled into those. Then there's less craving, thereby less karma created. The whole thing keeps spiraling around with deeper understanding, clearer insight, movement more free of delusion.

The rebirth process, that law by which you take rebirth when there is existent unwholesome karma, can not be bypassed. You do have free will, but if you wish to move back into the light, if you wish to graduate from this plane, eventually, you're going to have to take rebirth. There is a degree of choice as to what form that rebirth takes. There is some choice as to when it will be. With each bit of deepening wisdom, with each lesson from awareness of reactivity, and with each opening of the heart with love and forgiveness, you are diminishing unwholesome karma, and moving into the potential of a rebirth where there will be far less suffering.

Let me explain that last statement a bit. Obviously, even the most enlightened being has suffered. When that being moves past suffering, it will still feel pain. No matter how enlightened, if it falls and breaks its leg, it's going to hurt. If a loved one dies, it's going to grieve. Non-attachment does not mean that there's no pain or sadness. We've been through the difference between pain and suffering many times. Perhaps the freest beings feel pain all the more deeply, because they no longer need to insulate themselves from the pain, and because they know their connection with all that is.

So we're not talking here about getting rid of pain, or even lessening of pain. And we're not talking about "getting rid" of suffering, as something you actively pursue just to get rid of suffering. Suffering will fall away naturally as you grow. We're talking about liberation from this samsaric cycle (*the cycle of birth and death*), graduation from this third density⁵ existence.

As I talk then, I want you to understand that while what Barbara has just read is true—when this ceases, that ceases, when that ceases, the next ceases; and the reverse: when there is this, then there is that, when there is that, then there is the next—within one lifetime it would be rare that anything **entirely** ceases. I would prefer that it read: when this diminishes, that diminishes, when that diminishes, the next diminishes. With diminish rather than cease, you can see the spiral nature of growth rather than the circle that starts and ends. There is no instant purification but a process of transformation.

Let us discuss the terms. We will not get completely through this today.

⁵ To clarify terms such as "density" for those who are new to Aaron's teachings, the chapter of the book Aaron titled "The Universe According to Aaron" has been reprinted as Appendix D.

Ignorance is simply the manifestation of the dualistic fixation. Three words pertain to ignorance: *avijja* is the Pali word translated as ignorance. *Avijja* is comprised of *moha*, which is delusion of a separate self, and *annana* or non-knowledge. So those two combined words, delusion and non-knowledge, are ignorance. They interrelate so it's never just one or the other. Delusion sees the world as duality; self and other. It grows out of fear which solidifies self. Non-knowledge begins as the non-knowledge of all phenomena as manifestations of Pure Mind. Thus, it is also fixated in duality, the dualities of light and darkness, good and evil, Pure Mind and not pure mind, and so on. *Annana* may be read as simply something you haven't met yet, and yet you may already know it in the wisdom of the heart, but fear creates unwillingness to acknowledge that knowing. Both come together for the word *avijja*. Please understand that this is an oversimplification.

In the beginning you were light, and let us call it Pure Awareness. There is a Tibetan word, *Rigpa*, which is handy here because it denotes specifically that primordially Pure Mind. I hesitate to use more foreign terms and complicate these teachings but sometimes these terms are highly specific and once understood, simplify the discussion. It is not useful to speak of what comes first, *moha* or *annana*. Perhaps some arising within that pure awareness was seen with distortion, as being other than a manifestation of *Rigpa*, or Pure Mind. This distortion was the arising of *annana*, and was the first move into dualistic thinking. To think of oneself as separate is an extension of that dualism. Yet the first dualistic thought may have been of "self/other," (*moha*) and led from there into further dualistic fixation. It is a subject that may be pursued at length; we will not do so here.

There is connection between *avijja* and fear. Without clear seeing of the Pure nature of all arising, there is fear that you will be hurt, fear of that which seems to be "NOT Pure Mind," as "evil." Then there is the contraction of defendedness, someONE to defend, someTHING to defend against! This distortion feeds delusion, the delusive attachment to an image of a solid, permanent self. Such attachment leads to unclear seeing that is based on fear. Without self, with understanding of your true nature, and the true nature of all that is, there is no fear. When fear clouds your seeing, then attachment and aversion arise to protect yourself, and to protect yourself you have a sense "I've got to hold on to this, or get rid of that." Here, the small ego self speaks loudly, and distorts what otherwise would have been clearly seen.

The second part of the circle, **volitional formations**, *sankhara* means all things that come into being as the effect of causes and conditions, and, in themselves are the causes and conditions for the arising of other phenomena. As used in the doctrine of Dependent Origination, sometimes this word, *sankhara*, is taken to mean only actions, words and thoughts that lead to reactions, in other words, that which creates adhering karma which keeps one captive to the wheel of becoming. I feel this definition is incomplete, and prefer the first, that is, everything that comes into being as the effect of causes and conditions, and in themselves are causes and conditions for new arising.

I prefer the first for this reason. *Sankhara* is that which leads to the formation of karma, **whether adhering or non-adhering karma**. When your loving actions free of self create wholesome and non-adhering karma, this does not further chain you, but karma is still

created. Only the *Arahat*, a fully enlightened being who does not need to take rebirth, has the wisdom and complete freedom from attachment and aversion to act, speak or think totally without creating karma.

Discussion: *(Taped but not transcribed.)*

(The following pages, 16 through 19, move into a technical discussion of karma, related to Aaron's chosen definition of sankhara. We have chosen to leave this in for those who may find it of help, but many readers may choose to skip these pages for now, begin again with Barbara on page 19, and come back to them later. For those readers, I'd suggest reading the basic material on karma in Appendix C. There is also more clarification of karma in the Jan. 21, 1993 transcript.)

J: Is it only unwholesome karma that leads to rebirth?

Barbara: Wholesome and unwholesome karma lead to rebirth. Every act, every word, every thought creates karma if that word, act or thought comes from a space of "self." The word karma simply means action. When somebody is insulting me, and I respond lovingly and kindly, I'm creating wholesome karma, I'm not planting seeds of hostility. But there's still karma if there is any sense of a self responding to the insult. If there's no sense of a self acting lovingly, there's no karma. But in the human plane, one never acts with 100% pure intention, except the *Arahat* with no obscurations, who has that depth of understanding into motivation.

We can use the terms wholesome and unwholesome karma. Aaron has preferred not to use those, because we think of wholesome as good, and unwholesome as bad. He's trying to use words that don't have any positive or negative connotations. Last year he used the terms adhering and non-adhering, relating them to those which lead to suffering and those which don't. They are not equivalent to wholesome/unwholesome though. Let Aaron speak.

Aaron: Karma is very complex and we're not going to get it straight in one sitting. Tuesday night, Hal came home from work very late. He was tired. Barbara sat with him even though she was tired. Part of her wanted to say "Here's your dinner, I'm going to bed." She was not moved to sit with him by guilt, but by love, because she knows that he's working late out of necessity to support his family and to be responsible to his job, not out of enjoyment. Her choice grew out of connection and caring. She loves him; he came home and he was tired, so she put her own tiredness aside. It was a decision motivated by love and made very purely, not from a sense of a self being loving, just love being present.

That night before they retired, they switched their cars because Barbara drives in a carpool early in the morning. It was snowing and sleeting, so they scraped the ice off of their cars and put Barbara's car behind. Barbara arose the next morning, discovered the schools were closed, and after her meditation, went back to bed. Because Hal was feeling loved, perhaps, he went out and scraped the ice off of Barbara's windshield, and backed her car out into the street, moved his car out and put hers back. It would have been far easier to get her up and say "Move your car, please."

This is non-adhering karma, or as close as the non-*arahat* with multiple motivation and various obscurations can come to it. It does create results. If you plant a seed of kindness, you get kindness. Not always immediately, of course, but eventually. You

don't do it to reap kindness; it's not done out of blackmail, but out of a loving and open heart. But very simply, when you treat another with love and respect and caring, from a place empty of small ego self, that is returned to you. "Wholesome" and "non-adhering" is the closest I can come. Please note that for karma to be non-adhering, it must come from a loving heart and **also be empty of self** in all its motivation and manifestation. If one of you can think of clearer terms to use, I would welcome that.

While the above is wholesome karma, the term "unwholesome" carries a connotation of negativity. If Barbara had said to Hal "I'm tired, I'm going to bed. Here's your dinner," and the next morning he had wakened her and said "Please move your car," each would be acting out of their own self need. Yet, if he were home two hours later, and if Barbara had been very, very tired, and had gone to bed, is there anything negative about saying "I need to go to sleep, now"? One must assess carefully: is there self there? Anger? Is there a desire to escape one's responsibility to others? Is there fear in it? We must not oversimplify. So the closest I can come to it is karma that does not lead one into rebirth, or that karma which leads into rebirth or re-experiencing.

Remember that there are multiple motivations. If A offers B some food because A sees B is starving, and offers that with real concern and emptiness of a self feeding another, that portion is wholesome, non-adhering karma. But the little voice that says, "Aren't I good!" that's adhering karma. There's *moha* within it.

The traditional interpretation of *sankhara* applies only to that which necessitates rebirth, our adhering karma.

A: How does wholesome karma relate to the wheel?

Aaron: It's very subtle. If Barbara said "I like it when Hal treats me this way; I'm going to go out of my way to be nice to him, so he'll be nice back to me," if she became manipulative, grasping at kind response, then the kind act will plant seeds of both that kindness and the manipulateness born out of fear. Let's use another example: if one of you won much approval for some work that you'd done, perhaps were teaching or helping another in some way and the other complimented you, those compliments might speak to a part of you that felt a bit unworthy. Anybody likes approval! Your sharing of yourself with another, you might think, is a creation of wholesome karma. And yet, if there's that twist to it, so that the approval becomes important, then you move into craving.

Now, it certainly is more skillful to serve others because you crave attention than to become a mass murderer because you crave attention. But there's still adhering karma in that craving of attention. The act grows from an ego-centered self. Awareness offers the opportunity to see that craving of attention and slowly to begin to purify the acts, to become more aware of the motivation. It's never going to become 100% pure.

This is where I have some disagreement with the traditional interpretations of this cycle, that it seems to indicate that you've got to be perfect in order to find liberation. If you see the multiplicity of motivation, and work to bring in love and compassion to that part of yourself that needs attention or approval so that the craving begins to dissolve, then the motivation becomes purer. Self recedes, even if it doesn't fully disappear. It doesn't have to be 100% pure. One does not have to be perfect to graduate from this plane. There will be considerable learning about this, a continuation of it, on the next planes.

Remember that the primary lessons of fifth density are wisdom, and it's not until the end of fifth density that there's complete purity about all this. Human incarnation is just part of the process of your maturation. That is all.

Aaron: (*Tape is turned. We have lost the beginning of side two, further introducing Sankhara or volitional formation.*) ... Please note that the term volition means will and implies conscious choice. Actions, thoughts and words arise out of that choice. I think you can see how each action, word and thought has a result. Every action, word or thought arises out of past conditions.

D: Aaron, why are volitional formations put after ignorance?

Barbara: He's asking me to reread his prior teaching about *sankhara*. "As used in the doctrine of Dependent Origination, sometimes this word, *sankhara*, is taken to mean only actions, words and thoughts that lead to reactions, in other words, that which creates adhering karma, which keeps one captive to the wheel of becoming. I feel this definition is incomplete and prefer the first: ... *sankhara* is that which leads to the formation of karma, whether adhering or non-adhering karma. When your loving actions free of self create wholesome and non-adhering karma, this does not further chain you, but karma is still created ..."

Aaron: Any action, word or thought (volitional formation), growing out of ignorance, is almost certain to create adhering karma. There are those two aspects to ignorance, *moha* and *annana*. The "don't know" aspect includes fear, choosing delusion because it's protective. If Barbara chose not to know that Hal was tired and hungry and, even more, that he simply needed love and attention, and had felt resentment, then her actions and words would have displayed that resentment. Delusion or ignorance could have taken the form of self-righteousness. "If he comes home late, why should he impose on me to take care of him?" This much is easy.

Actions, words and thoughts that do not grow out of ignorance, always create non-adhering karma. The problem is, as I've said, we're never 100% pure. Could any of you make a statement that any action, word or thought of yours has come 100% from clear seeing, that there's not even the smallest bit of delusion mixed in?

We'll play "what if" here for a moment. If Barbara had sat with Hal, talked to him, offered him tea, and 80% of her motive was clearly love and connection and wanting to offer him kindness, from a place of no-self, and yet, deep inside she recognized that some small percentage was "What am I gonna get out of this?" then what is the result? Confusion arises when we assume that any act is 100% one way, or 100% the other way; that's not how you are. Divide it up. The giving, empty of self, creates non-adhering karma; there is nothing sticky there to call you back. The grasping creates adhering karma. Both are karmic results of one act. You offer service to another. Is there a small voice inside that's wanting some approval? So it still takes you back into the ego, but in a different and less powerful way. The giving is clear. The part that wants approval, that is where consciousness is stuck in self and delusion.

In summary, then: action, word and thought, volitional formations that lead to adhering karma, do grow out of ignorance. Actions, words and thoughts that do not lead to adhering karma, grow out of clear seeing. But because there can't be 100% clear

seeing, except for the Arahats, even those kind and loving acts may also contain self centered motivation in which lies adhering karma.

Thus, maybe we can speak of karma that's—what is the Ivory soap ad, 97% pure?—97% non-adhering, and 3% adhering. There is nothing that you can do that's 100% non-adhering at this stage in your cycles of growth. You don't have to reach a point where there's zero adhering karma left not to need rebirth. You only need to be able to recognize that you have lapsed into delusion and move back out. Does that answer your question?

Barbara: This came my way from someone on Wednesday night. It's channeled, she doesn't know what the source is, but Aaron thought it was very beautiful. Just let me read it out loud, some of it, not the whole thing. It simply says: March 20, 1990, Tao Crystal Deva:

When you physical ones first recognize yourselves as beings of light, there can be great trepidation at having a physical body, and the associated responsibilities and activities. You wish only to become light beings, to reenter the rooms of light, and to exist there in bliss ...

The cycles that comprise your being are infinite. In this round, you have chosen to form yourselves at the physical level. In the physical realm, there exists that particular breed of frequency density, that particular breadth of amplitude separateness, and that particular degree of clarity that weave together to become what you call body. You have chosen this physical plane for its gifts and its unique lessons. You have come to physical to receive those gifts, which can be bestowed and received only on the plane of matter, where you now exist. We suggest that you enter into those lessons. We recommend that you release the longing to leave. Instead you may choose to eagerly gather the lessons and receive the gifts.

While you are physical, why not fill the larders of your being to fullness and completeness with the gifts that only matter can bestow, then, when you have thoroughly completed this round, and only then, look to the lighter, higher frequencies. As you gather the lessons, each gift received in your physicality will be useful, necessary, and vital as well, in the next rounds that you choose. As you integrate the lessons that you learn, you embody the qualities developed by those lessons. They are the very characteristics required to open you to the other realms, and the very tools to work effectively in those realms. When you yearn toward other frequencies that are presently elusive, know that they are elusive because you do not yet embody the characteristics to open you to them. Fill yourselves with the riches of where you are now, while you are there. Gather the lessons, receive the gifts, integrate the characteristics.

“When you have been fully prepared by the lessons of your present existence, you will not find yourself yearning for other frequencies, and bidding them to come. You will encounter them, and shift your focus to enter them as easily as a shift of glance. Then you will smile back at your impatient self. Stay fully committed to the very tasks and attachments that seem to hamper and limit you. They are the focusing chambers through which your physical self readies and ennobles itself. You are light, even as you feel that you must leave this physical plane of light to

get to other, lighter realms that are already a part of you, and the whole of you. Know that you are light: a light being. Strive ceaselessly to integrate this true reality into your knowing. You have already experienced yourself as light. You can be sure of this by noticing and acknowledging the intensity and specificity of your longing to re-experience this loss. Open your eyes to these millions of points of light that twinkle everywhere around you. At this moment, in truth, you are penetrating and being penetrated by the light. The rate, breadth, and degree of interpenetration expands with each year of your physical existence in time.

Barbara: Thanks to whatever spirit and whatever channel this came from. Back very briefly to let Aaron talk.

Aaron: As **homework:** (*Teasing groans from the class;* **Aaron:** (*teasing tone*) *You knew I was going to get to this eventually. (laughter)*) **I'd like you each to watch ignorance as delusion and non-knowledge. How do they relate to one another? Is there non-knowledge because there's clinging to delusion for protection? At some level, you already know everything. So, non-knowledge may be more correctly translated: conscious non-knowledge, what you have not yet allowed into your consciousness, usually out of fear. It is all put into the category: ignorance. Watch that ignorance. What is the desire not to know? How does it arise?**

What is delusion? How does it grow out of a desire to protect? And then, watch the arising of action, word and thought, of volitional formation, and see how it relates to ignorance, especially *moha*. Be gentle with yourselves. When you notice action, word or thought arising that seems very pure and light, and then you notice a little bit of tarnish on that, keep it in perspective. You don't have to hate yourself, put yourself out of your heart or condemn yourself because there is that bit of fear. Just attend as lovingly as you can to pain, and then the motivation will purify itself. Not to perfect purity, but to increasing purity.

For those just meeting all of this in this book, I would ask you to look at what this is that you call "self." What is self? Is it the body, the emotions, the thoughts? Is it consciousness? Can you show me "self"? If not, what makes you grasp at that illusion?

So, just those first two steps. Next week we'll add another step. Are there questions?

(Question not transcribed.)

Aaron: As you watch action, word and thought, look back at where it comes from. What is the motivation for this action, word or thought? See what part of the motivation is pure, and what part is motivated by fear. Where is there ignorance? What is the motivation for the ignorance? Do you understand?

Be aware, but be gentle with yourselves. When you see that there is a motivation for ignorance, treat yourself with mercy for that fear which has motivated ignorance.

You can see that the fear with which you worked last semester was laying the foundation for this work. I want you to continue working with fear, especially in dreams, but all through your waking and dream states. As we move into this cycle of dependent origination, you're going to consistently find fear behind adhering karma. Your ability to work skillfully with fear, then, is one key to freedom. Now, we're simply

January 14, 1993

understanding the process through which fear takes us. But work with fear is basic. Are there questions? (*No questions.*) That is all.

January 21, 1993

Aaron: Good morning and my love to you. I am Aaron. Before we go on to anything new, I want to attend to any confusion from last week. The first question: Why are we studying this material? It is a doctrine of great beauty. To me, it gets to the heart of the issue, how do we find freedom? It also helps us to understand the truth that we have always been free.

We have looked at karma⁶ in depth, at the habitual and ownership characteristics of karma. We have looked at the arising of fear. Each of you has seen in yourselves how fear solidifies a delusion of self thus leading to the creation of new adhering karma. We've looked carefully at that "active moment" where there may be movement from neutral to positive or negative, and identification with that movement, thus leading to craving or aversion. Traditionally, this space between feeling and mental formation with its craving is offered as the space where there is most opportunity for freedom. Now we may begin to look deeper at that and at other spaces where freedom can be found, to look at the interrelationships. Do not seek to look intellectually but to understand this doctrine through your own lives and meditation.

In its deepest essence, this is why we are here, here in this room, here in this life ... to grow in this way, to clarify delusion. When I say that you are here to bring light where there has been darkness, in a real sense I am saying, "to bring the light of understanding and clear seeing where there has been ignorance." The most important work I can do with you is to help you to understand how ignorance creates rebirth.

I talk about freedom. Please understand freedom in all its ramifications. Ultimately, we speak of freedom from this samsaric cycle of birth and death. Now I speak not only of freedom from this samsaric cycle—that is, ultimate freedom—but freedom in each moment, freedom from the delusion of a solid self, which delusion is the condition leading to unskillful choice as well as to rebirth.

Here I want to shift a bit and speak in more depth about conditionality. We spoke last week about these two steps: *avijja*—ignorance and *sankhara*—volitional formations. We said that the whole doctrine of dependent origination is about the understanding that when *this* arises, then *that* arises. When *this* ceases, then *that* ceases. This and that are in conditional relationship to one another. We are simplifying here. Buddhist teaching specifies 24 different types of conditional relationship. One can learn to identify each of those, to see relationships so clearly and instantaneously as to label the specific kind of conditionality. It is not necessary. You are not scholars. You are not looking for intellectual understanding.

A being that Barbara was some past lives ago could rattle off these 24 types of conditionality and perhaps offer you a 24 hour dissertation, an hour of explanation on each one. Needless to say, that being did not find ultimate freedom using that knowledge or Barbara would not be here. So what do you **need** to know? We can break down all of those types of conditionality into 2 areas. The first is **necessary conditionality**: this necessitates that. If A arises, then B must also arise. When A ceases,

6 See Appendix C for the meaning of the terms in this paragraph.

B ceases. When there is birth, for example, there must be death. Birth is a necessary condition to death. Whenever there is birth, death must follow. When birth ceases, death ceases. Many of these subtly different 24 conditions fit into that category, each expressing different kinds of relationships. But the link between them is this—when ever this arises, that must also arise.

The second general category is **causal conditionality**: if A arises, it does not mean that B must arise, but A is a causative factor in the arising of B. Furthermore, if A does not arise, then B cannot arise. An example of causal conditionality is the arising of sense consciousness and its link to mental formation. Sense touches the sense object and results in sense contact. Mind knows that contact has occurred; the knowing is sense consciousness. There is no necessary link here: contact of sense touching sense object opens the door to the possibility of sense consciousness, but you may remain unaware of the contact. Once there is sense consciousness, and then arising perception and sensation, there may be mental formation. Thus, sense consciousness is a contributory factor to mental formation, for example, to craving. Without sense consciousness, there can be no craving. However, all sense consciousness need not lead to craving. It is a contributory factor.

So, what's important about this? If each step in this process necessitated the next step, there would be no way to escape. It would be hopeless. What we do then is study the cycle to understand which links necessitate and which are merely contributory. In gaining this understanding, it will be vital that you not take my word for it, but examine it in your own life. Then you will begin to know each new place where there is choice and to understand how you slip into adhering karma. With each deepening of understanding of the process, you will find increasing freedom. Are there questions?

Discussion: *(Recorded but not transcribed.)*

(Barbara comments that where there are two necessary conditions (A necessitates B) to avoid the arising of B, we need to look not at how B arises, but at how A arises.)

Aaron: I want to correct some confusion about karma. Last week we began this study with *avijja* (ignorance) in its two aspects, *moha* (delusion) and *annana* (not knowing). I spoke of *avijja* as being a condition for *sankhara*—volitional formations. We talked about what *avijja* is. The focus here is on the delusion of a permanent, solidified self, and the ignorance as to all arising as manifestation of the Light, the Absolute, of Pure Mind, of God, or Rigpa, a Tibetan term about which we will speak much more. These terms are not perfectly interchangeable but any will suffice to aid understanding. We spoke of the importance of fear, but fear does not arise unless there is a self to be frightened. Fear does not arise unless there is that which is deemed to be "other than" and thus, threatening. Then we spoke about the arising of volitional formations. As we defined karma and agreed on our terms adhering and non-adhering, in reflection I see some confusion in your minds.

All acts, words, and thoughts create karma. When a word, act, or thought is based on delusion and fear, selfishness, greed—basically fear and its manifestations—unwholesome, adhering karma is created, karma which leads to a new moment or a new birth with an unpleasant fruit, let us say. If you act in anger, you reap anger which leads to the creation of the next moment and of the next life in which the fruits of that anger will be experienced. When you act in a way prompted by love but still with the

delusion of self—"I am a good person, I will act lovingly"—there is still an "I" performing these acts. "I do this for you"—here are self and other. There is still adhering karma, but what you might call wholesome adhering karma. Please note that the "I" is sticky! It is that notion of "I" to which the karma adheres.

I said last week that these words wholesome and unwholesome, which are often used here, have strong emotional connotations. We might instead say karma that leads to a pleasant, peaceful, joyful next moment or rebirth or karma that leads to a painful, sad, joyless next moment or rebirth. That is a mouthful. Wholesome and unwholesome are the traditional terms. They will do, but use them with awareness.

Note that both may be adhering karma that leads to rebirth. I did not present this as clearly as is possible last week and apologize to you. They are both adhering karma whether wholesome or unwholesome if they grow out of that delusion of "I"—self and other. Unwholesome karma always grows from an "I"; wholesome karma may do so. That part of the act which is empty of self is non-adhering. That part which contains self is adhering. I explained this last week in terms of no act being entirely pure. You may help another from a space of loving concern, but there is also that small bit of self. Where the self seeks attention, compliment, reward and thus there is need and a self that needs—"I need this," implying another from which to receive it—there is adhering karma. The aspects of the act that are pure breed wholesome karma. Nevertheless, as long as there is a self doing and controlling, every act, word, or thought based on that delusion of a solid, continuing self results in adhering karma.

This does not mean that you never act without adhering karma. Each of you has moments, sometimes many moments, of offering acts and words unlinked to self. These acts, words, and thoughts grow out of clear seeing that there is no self or other. The result of these volitional formations free of delusion, free of ignorance, is non-adhering karma. However, only the Arahant, that being who is fully enlightened and free of this cycle of birth and death yet still presently on the earth plane, only that being's **every** thought, word, and act is free of adhering karma. Movement from non-delusion is a process, a learning into which you enter. With mindfulness, courage, and open heart, that which flows through you becomes increasingly pure.

There are two parts to this learning. One is to see the repeated arising of delusion, to notice every act, word or thought which grows out of the delusion of self. The other is to learn to identify that space of clarity within you, that space of divinity, Pure Mind, and perfection, and increasingly to learn to rest in that space and to move from that space. In a capsule, these two areas are the focus of our learning for this next year, and perhaps for this entire life!

Karma is specific. This is one of the characteristics upon which we have not yet touched in depth. There is a wonderful story that illustrates this characteristic. In the Buddha's time, there was a woman with an exquisite voice. People came from all over to hear her sing. But she was so ugly—her face and her body—that they had to place a screen around her when she sang. People asked the Buddha why this wonderful voice and physical ugliness.

The Buddha said that in a past life this being worked on the construction of a temple. He hated his work. He hated the building itself. While he worked, he cursed continually about how ugly the temple was, big and unshapely. Cursing, complaining. When it

was finished, he looked at it and thought, "It's really not so bad. I've been unjust." Then he went out and with his own wages he bought an exquisite sounding bell and hung it at the door of the temple as a gift. From the cursing has come this ugly body and from the loving gift of the bell, the exquisite voice. This illustrates the characteristic of specificity of karma. You might also observe that both the beauty and the ugliness were adhering karma. There was a very solid self that bought the bell and gave it. It is wholesome and leads to pleasant fruits. Nevertheless, it is adhering karma.

In future weeks we will continue to look at the multiple motivations which move you, some from a place of self and some free of self, and see how those motivations influence karma.

Please be aware as I speak of rebirth that it is equally valid to apply these lessons to incarnational rebirth or to that instant rebirth into the next moment. Are there questions?

Long discussion: *(Not transcribed.)*

Aaron: There are many mentions of dependent origination throughout Buddhist literature. We are NOT here to become scholars but to find more freedom. We will not pursue this as scholarly research but as living guidance to moving beyond the creation of adhering karma. Traditionally this doctrine is presented as possessing 12 stages that interpenetrate. The most famous sutra which deals with dependent origination is the Maha Nidana Sutta. This sutra offers only 9 stages. We will not deal with the scholarly questions this raises, only take the different doctrines as guides to our learning. Thus there will be times when one writing is inconsistent with another. Please just let it go.

Think of this cycle of dependent origination as a spiral encircling three lives. The first steps we have looked at, *avijja* and *sankhara*, are part of the past. With the next step, **vinnana** we move into the present. *Vinnana* is rebirth conditioning. Again it is not important whether we speak of actual rebirth or the birth into the next moment. The last two segments of the cycle, birth and aging and death, are part of the third life.

In my talks here, I am using **Pali** words. I ask the transcribers to put them into boldface type the first time they are used, and thereafter, into italic. There are certain words which are almost a part of your English vocabulary, so familiar have they become. These are the **Sanskrit** words **karma**, **dharma**, and **sutra**. Because of your prior familiarity with these words, I have chosen not to use the Pali terms, *kamma*, *dhamma*, and *sutta* (except in a title, as Maha Nidana Sutta). All other terms will be given consistently in Pali.

Please continue with last week's homework, focusing on the questions we added in today's discussions. Especially notice, what solidifies self? What happens to the solidification when it is noticed with bare, non-judgmental attention? That is all.

(Out of time; some questions saved for next week or following weeks.)

J: *Why does so much clinging seem to create beautiful art, like someone seeing a sunset and wanting to paint it?*

K: *In considering necessary conditionality, does adhering karma arise when we experience either clinging or aversion to the necessary consequence?*

January 21, 1993

Aaron: *In partial answer to K, please note that clinging and aversion are part of the same thing. Yes. We will discuss this next week.*

A: *Aaron has said that one need not be completely beyond ego to graduate from third density, yet this latest channeling seems to imply that one would need to be beyond ego to escape the birth and death cycle. Can Aaron explain?*

January 28, 1993

Aaron: Good morning to you all. (*Transcribed while being channeled. Time spent trying to get rid of the computer's comments, cheerfully programmed in by mischievous young friends. The computer had been saying, "Go ahead, make my day" every time the space key was touched, and offering a Bronx cheer with the return key.*) Again, good morning to you all. Dare I say, go ahead, make my day! (*groans and laughter*) No echo from the computer??? I find myself fascinated with the tools with which you simplify your lives!!! I want to introduce the next step today, which is **vinnana**. This word translates literally rebirth consciousness. It is perhaps the most difficult and most complex of the steps to understand. Exactly what is it within that takes rebirth? What is consciousness?

There are many aspects to "consciousness." When we speak of sense consciousness, of smelling, hearing, touch, taste or vision, we are talking of the process which originates when a physical sense contacts a sense object. There is also that sense that we call mind. When the mind touches a mind object, let's call it a thought, then thinking or knowing occurs. This might be labeled mind consciousness. Some beings incorrectly limit consciousness to this awareness of contact of physical senses and mind. The physical body experiences the physical sense contact and the mind knows that contact has transpired. However I have no physical body and yet I see you all. I hear you. I do not see with physical eyes. I do not see your physical form but your aura, energy and light, perceived with a different sense than physical eyes. I do not hear your words; I have no ears. I hear your thoughts. The senses are not confined to the physical body. Telepathy comes through the mind. This is still just one part of consciousness, mind knowing the contact through senses, either physical or non-physical.

Volumes have been written about consciousness. We are not going to penetrate into the whole mystery today, nor even this semester!

As we begin, it would help to define our terms. I would like to make a distinction between consciousness and awareness. This usage derives only from my own perspective not from any written text or teachers. I want you to be aware of how I use these words so that our communication does not become distorted.

I choose to use *consciousness* to refer to that part of mind's knowing which arises from a sense of self. To clarify: **Consciousness is that which knows it is knowing**. There is some vestige of self there even if only a slender thread. I use *awareness* to specify that form of consciousness which is totally pure, no sense of a self being conscious. Yes, awareness may be "self-aware" in terms of awareness being aware of awareness, but there is no do-er, no self who is aware! When there is no conscious self but just pure awareness, this energy that is aware, for that moment of pure awareness, is functioning as a seventh density energy⁷. Then in the next moment it fluctuates back into its third

7 Aaron speaks of eight densities. Human is third. In fourth density we have dropped the physical body but retain the emotional and mental bodies. There is equanimity to emotions and thoughts but they still arise. Seventh is that level where the emotional and (*next page*)

density being, and consciousness with its ego content returns. Thus, *consciousness* equates with a self, *awareness* with absence of self. I emphasize that these are solely my definitions. You may find that other teachers use these words differently.

When there is pure awareness, no sense of the self being aware and thereby being a "doer," the acts, words and thoughts that grow out of such pure awareness cannot lead to adhering karma. These acts, words and thoughts plant no seeds for rebirth, whether rebirth as reincarnation or simply rebirth of self-containing consciousness into the next moment.

Since I've just said there is no rebirth of self-consciousness drawn out of the acts, words or thoughts created through pure awareness, one might be led by the above statement to the conclusion that once there is pure awareness it would be maintained indefinitely. It would be indefinite if the awareness were 100% pure but in human form there is always some mix. No human but the fully enlightened Arahat acts and speaks only from pure awareness with no bit of self. Even in the highly realized being, there will be moments when self creeps in. Awareness is so highly trained that it notices that self immediately, and with equanimity, and releases it before new adhering karma can take root. The pure part of the act plants no seed; the ego structured catalyst plants the seed. Therein are the conditions for the birth of the next moment.

Visualize a glass of the purest water, absolutely free of any pollution or microorganism. Take another glass that contains some impurities, of the sort that may give you a belly ache. Pour them together. Some parts of that water are pure, some tinged. If you drink it there will be that belly ache, differing in degree dependent on how much of the water was impure, how much was pure.

As long as there is an ego involved, and the primary delusion of a separate self, then even the most loving words, thoughts, or actions are somewhat shaped by this ego. While they may create wholesome karma, it is still adhering karma that leads to rebirth consciousness. In its simplest form, I want to you to think of this rebirth consciousness as growing directly out of the ego self. As long as there is an "I," a doer, a shaper, no matter how lovingly that "I" does its work, there is still rebirth consciousness.

You know that you cannot simply get rid of the "I." All conscious striving to do so simply solidifies self. This is just more doing. What one can do is to focus on those moments of brief, pure, connected awareness. Become aware of pure awareness. This will become one focus in this semester. I'm not going to introduce much new material in the next several weeks. What I am expressing is very difficult to shape in words but you can watch it in yourselves. See the times when you shift from total interconnection back into self and separation. Simply put, what works? What frees you from that delusion of self?

As you observe yourselves, it is not convenient to watch the seeds of rebirth consciousness from your last lifetime. Let go of "lifetime" and deal with "moment." The ego-self, expressed through words, thoughts and acts in the last moment, creates the consciousness from which you arrive in this moment.

mental bodies have dropped away, leaving the pure spirit body, totally empty of the delusion of separate self.

As you watch there may be moments of purity, and then it snaps back. There is again a doer. The more you try to get rid of the doer, the more forcefully it expresses itself. Then what works? This is your homework. Watch it and we'll discuss it next week.

There is such a wonderful and simple tool with which to watch: choiceless awareness. As you let that doer be, just watching it, clarity returns. Space returns. You begin to have a clear perspective. You know, "That doer, that is not who I am." You return to pure awareness, to your natural state. Each of you, my dear ones, is unlimited. Each of you IS pure awareness! Fear leads you to express your limited self.

Think of it in this way. Which feels safer to you, to be curled up in a snug nest, an easy chair, wrapped in a confining blanket, or to be in free fall in deep space somewhere between Earth and Mars, with a small breathing apparatus??? Can you feel the instinctive gut wrenching fear of all that space? I did not ask "Which feels more adventuresome?" but "Which feels safer?" Your sense of confinement, of limited being, helps you to feel safe. While part of you may choose adventure, one aspect of the self prefers to feel safe. So the mind denies limitlessness. The experience of emptiness of self is an experience of limitlessness. It may terrify!

Can you smile at yourselves each time you see yourself being somebody, whether loving or angry? Rather than seeking to get rid of that self, can you let it be and quietly watch the way it works? Compassion for the human aspect, with its physical and emotional bodies, does not grow from that small ego self with its boundaries but from the heart which knows its unlimitedness.

Your developing sense of compassion is what frees you. You just keep returning over and over and watching the process: fear, closing, awareness, compassion, opening, fear, closing. The periods of opening become longer. You rest in that pure awareness and let it stabilize. The times of fear and reactivity to fear become shorter. We will learn practices to identify and stabilize pure awareness. We will try one later today.

Have you ever watched a young child playing in sand or water? Sometimes it is somebody doing, trying to shape a structure in the sand. You can really see the shift to pure being. The child simply takes a delight in the textures, the sense, the movement. It splashes just for the joy of splashing. There is nobody doing the splashing. The child is not thinking, "Now I am doing the splashing." There is just splashing happening. No one is building; building happens. Then self-consciousness returns.

Watch keenly. I want you to become so aware that each time a seed is planted, be it of wholesome or unwholesome karma, something in you registers "seed planted, rebirth consciousness!" You will not recognize the times when no seed has been planted until you have shifted back from pure awareness to consciousness and remembered it. Do you understand that? That level of pure awareness totally free of self has nobody to note, "I have done this." If you are asking "Am I there?" you are not there. With pure awareness, the memory will come after.

Then you may reflect how the heart felt during those moments. You will find that there is a willingness to be vulnerable, to be undefended, which allows this ego self to dissolve and full connection to be experienced.

Next week, we will speak more about rebirth consciousness. I want to explain how I see that from my present perspective. Just what takes rebirth? What leads an energy to seek rebirth? Since you have free will, why does karma lead you to rebirth? We will save that for future weeks. The question has been raised, what is the first level of awareness of that spark of God which perceives a self and moves into the first illusion of self and other? When does pure awareness become consciousness. Is it useful to ask? I think not. I want to speak to last week's questions. First a break. That is all.

(Break.)

Questions from 1/21/93: Aaron has said that one need not be completely beyond ego to graduate from third density, yet the 1/21 channeling seems to imply that one would need to be beyond ego to escape the birth and death cycle. Can Aaron explain?

Aaron: The confusion, perhaps, lies in how karma is dissolved. There was that moment of which D just spoke, of total, open hearted connection. *(D spoke of hearing that a friend had cancer, feeling no ego self in the decision to visit, just a loving desire to be service, to be there for another, really free of a doer. There was that moment. But now, driving to Toledo, there is a doer, a visitor helping another. Here she assumes there is wholesome but adhering karma.)*

Now there is mostly wholesome, and some unwholesome karma, as she makes the actual trip. There is an emptiness, just loving support happening—no giver, no receiver, no adhering karma. There is also D, who wants to offer her friend love and support; that's wholesome, adhering karma—serving another. There is unwholesome karma in any resentment that arises, or any sense of "What's in it for me?" Because she is human, some of that is going to arise. This does not mean that she is going to have to visit ten thousand sick friends until she can make the whole trip from a space of emptiness. The human cannot do that, not perfectly. Emotions will arise, creating the seeds for both wholesome and unwholesome karma. Also note that the fear, "What's in it for me?" or the notion of being someone serving another, are where karma sticks and takes root.

Compassion and forgiveness dissolve karma. The more you fight against this doer, trying to get rid of self, the further you get from emptiness, compassion and forgiveness. The more the heart opens to the dilemma of this human, struggling like a fish out of water, gasping for breath, the more freedom you find. You do not find ultimate freedom from this cycle by ending the arising of all adhering karma. You can't do that. You find freedom because compassion becomes so strong, and mindfulness becomes so strong, that they penetrate the delusion of separateness and self. Remember, in ultimate reality terms, ego is illusion. How do you get rid of that which was never there? Rather, you return to rest in Pure Mind until that space becomes the stable one from which you interact with the world.

There is a beautiful bit of writing by Krishnamurti above Barbara's desk. Let us pause to read it.

When the mind is still, tranquil, not seeking any answer or solution even, neither resisting or avoiding, it is only then that there can be a regeneration. Because then, the mind is capable of perceiving what is true. And it is the truth that liberates, not our effort to be free.

What you are doing here is not getting rid of karma, which is a resultant phenomenon, but penetrating the delusion of self. The more awareness you bring to this work, the more fully you understand that this self is a manifestation of the fearful mind and is not who you are. The more you understand that fact, the more frequently you will be in that space of pure awareness where there is no karma. That space is not free of the arising of fear, but **it no longer owns the fear**. This is the vital difference. You do not have to get rid of all wholesome, adhering karma, but to find compassion for the human that slips into self. And, of course, to find forgiveness for that which serves as catalyst for unwholesome karma and fear, whether catalyst lies in the perceived "self" or in the perceived "other."

We will address the question about roots of karma next week. I want to share a meditation which is part of the homework. We have done this before.

Meditation

I'd like you to breathe with me, just inhaling and exhaling. Deep breath. I'm not going to direct the inhale or exhale, I want you to do it at your own comfortable speed.

Deep inhalation, deep exhalation ... Watch the breath moving in and out ...

Feel it at the nostrils, as attentive to it as you can be ...

Now, not while I'm talking, but when I stop, with the next inhalation after I've stopped, I want you to pause for a moment before you exhale. Not too long, just a fraction of a second.

Instead of seeing inhale, exhale, I want you to see inhale, stop, exhale. Do that now ...

(Pause. We do this.)

If the stop is not too long there is not space for any thought or sensation to enter. In that moment there is pure awareness. The pure, radiant mind.

So you carry this with you all the time. It's not something you must become enlightened, or do anything special, to experience. It is your natural experience. Please do it again. *(We meditate in this way for awhile.)*

You are constantly cut off from pure awareness by the arising of thought, emotion or sensation and the ensuing thought, "I must get rid of the thought or the physical sensation or the emotion to come back to this space of perfect quiet, perfect peace, perfect clarity." But Pure Mind transcends arising and stillness. Pure Mind watches it all, still or in motion.

As part of your work this week, please practice with this meditation, allowing yourself to rest in that space of Pure Mind. Do this not only while you meditate but during your active periods. Try to breathe in this way when you are feeling tense. What happens to the tension?

February 4, 1993

Aaron: Good morning and my love to you all. Know as you hold J in your hearts (*J is sick and in the hospital*) that your prayers and loving thoughts do have an effect. It is your thoughts, even more than actions and words, that create the next moment. For your thoughts create the actions and words.

No thought **stream** is entirely pure. Given that each thought is just this moment, there may be seventeen moments of clarity, empty of self, mostly purely intentioned, giving and loving, and then that sudden moment of fear. And then back to purity again.

Perhaps as you think of J and wish him better health and cessation of this suffering he's presently experiencing, a stray bit of thought creeps in of the ways J's energy has served you. There's a brief thought: "What would happen to me without J's energy?" Just a brief bit of fear. You may see that fear with a kindness to yourself and let it go. That fear has not created unwholesome karma, but there is adhering karma there.

When you notice how the thought arises, and how the solidified self arises with the thought, see that clearly with no ownership of it, the thought self-destructs, you might say. As it goes "poof" and dissolves without your having owned it, you find your mind back in pure awareness, empty of self again. There it rests until the next thought arises. When there is no mindfulness of the arising thought, it becomes condition for the next arising, leading the thought stream into deeper turbulence.

Since your acts and words are not determined by any moment's isolated thought but by the thought stream, it is out of that thought stream that adhering karma grows. When there is ownership of the thought stream, identification with it as "mine," then the ensuing acts and words reflect that self and karma follows. This does happen, of course. Within that thought stream occasional strong fear arises in the human, fear which catches you. As I have repeatedly suggested, that fearful entry into the thought stream is also not a problem, only a chance to practice compassion for this arising of human fear.

So you are sending loving energy to J. I have said that this really does reach J. How does this work? It is the same as with affirmation made for the self. When the thought stream is largely clear, there is no self trying to fix or change, only the purest of loving energy and light moving through you as if you were that magnifying glass we've spoken of, light focused where you project it. It is important to note that you are not doing this to make something special happen. For example, if your prayer is that J become physically healed, how do you presume to know that this is what J needs? Can you see that it is the fearful brain that makes specific requests? The heart's deepest wisdom only focuses that love and light to J and asks, "May he find the healing that he needs, whatever that may be."

You are familiar with the image I've sometimes used of fearful energy radiating out in sharp points, and loving energy as the concentric circles that absorb that sharpness with no fear, until that sharpness blunts itself into the softness of love. From my perspective, I can see this connection of your loving energy and J's present fear, even

when J is not consciously aware of the offering of that energy. On the etheric⁸ plane, J's frightened energy at his pain and helplessness becomes gently softened, as a frightened and crying child is comforted by loving, stable arms. The energy felt on the etheric plane transfers itself to the astral plane. The unaware being may only notice some slight lessening of its tension. The aware being, as J is, may be sitting in meditation and truly experience your energy at a conscious level. When the being is aware, the healing power of your energy escalates the softening of its fear. When the being is unaware, there is still a softening of its fear, although less profoundly experienced.

You have all heard this New Age statement: "You create your own reality." I have said that I'm hesitant to say it in those words because people so easily distort that statement and use it to blame themselves or another. How cruel it is for example, when one is seriously ill from cancer, Aids or even an inflammation such as J's, to ask them "Why did you create this?" Are you trying to help with that question or to insure your own safety from such illness with an inner statement "I'm too aware to do that to myself"? Certainly, J had no intention of creating such pain. If he understood why this was happening within him, it would not be happening. To say, "You create your own reality" is to suggest to the other, "You have control, you are to blame." While the other has control at a real level, the conscious mind did not choose illness. So, let us use this phrase with caution that there be no judgment in it.

What does it mean, then, "You create your own reality"? The thoughts of this moment create the next moment. The seed that is planted in this moment creates the fruit of the next moment. When the thoughts of this moment are very free of the concept of self, of a doer or fixer, manifest by the fearful brain, then those thoughts create no adhering karma. As soon as the brain chimes in "me, me, me!" and that "me" is related to with contempt, with judgment, or desire to get rid of, then self solidifies. When the open heart can smile at that "me," pat it on the head and release it, then that bit of attention-seeking self merely floats past and pure awareness returns. The me "self-liberates," as one teaching system phrases it. So it is not the arising of attention-seeking self but ownership of it which moves you into new, adhering karma.

It's like the two year old child playing in the kitchen while you are preparing dinner. It pulls out all the pots and pans and it clatters them for awhile. It wants your attention. It's hungry and tired. It opens the refrigerator and suddenly there are broken eggs on the floor. Anything to get mom or dad's attention. For that child, negative attention may be better than no attention, so it may prefer being scolded to being ignored. To really quiet and calm that child, you tell it, "I see you need attention." You pick it up, hug it,

8 Aaron talks of many interrelated planes. Each is one larger, and contains all that comes under it. We are on the physical plane. Just beyond the physical is the astral plane. This is where we are between lifetimes. All beings on the physical plane are also on the astral plane, but not all beings on the astral plane are physical. The causal plane is next. As long as we are within the laws of cause and effect, we are within the causal plane. All of us physical beings are also on the causal plane. The etheric plane is that which lies beyond the causal. It is the plane where the pure light body is found. There is no self in that light body; it is the plane of total interconnection of All That Is.

set it down on the counter and give it a spoon to stir the dish you are preparing. You know that this is what calms the child so that small ego self stops screaming “me.”

Can you doubt that you have the same needs? You do not judge the child for wanting attention; you understand that this is the nature of the child. Why, then, do you judge yourself? This is the nature of the small ego self within you. My dear ones, you do not need to get rid of that small ego self. The more you attempt to get rid, the more it screams “me.” “I will stifle myself,” you say. But this small ego aspect of you is part of the incarnation. Trying to get rid of the self, reluctance to be in the body, are all factors that take you further from that desired ability to unconditionally love. You are here to find loving acceptance for the bumbling human that manifests itself through your own energy and through others’ energy. It is only in that acceptance that true equanimity lies. It is only in that acceptance that freedom from this samsaric cycle lies. The threshold to fourth density experience is not total absence of emotional and physical fear. Rather, that threshold is lovingkindness, a readiness to nod to the small ego self and let it be. It is here that rebirth consciousness ceases.

I am going to do a lot of talking today. I want to give you an opportunity to have a break. Then I will talk about rebirth consciousness, *vinnana*, and the next segment of this circle—the Pali word is *nama-rupa*—mentality-materiality. That of which I have just spoken will tie in directly to this exploration of rebirth consciousness—what it is and when it ceases. Barbara is smelling the fresh bread so enjoy your break and then we will continue. That is all.

(Break.)

Aaron: Last week we just barely introduced *vinnana*, rebirth consciousness. Today I want to introduce *nama-rupa* and talk in more depth about these two. Do you remember the five *skhandas* or aggregates of self?⁹ Buddhist teaching suggests that the “self” is comprised of these five aspects: **form**, as the physical body—the *rupa* of *nama-rupa*, or materiality—**consciousness**, and then those aspects that grow out of consciousness, the three *nama* or mental states: **feeling** (by this we mean neutral, positive or negative; I have called this sensation), **perception**, and **mental formation**.

I said to you last week that different presentations of dependent origination show the chain in different ways. We will not concern ourselves at all with the scholarly aspects of why there are different schemes. Many schemes show these twelve steps as we introduced them last month. The sutra that goes deepest into these teachings shows only nine steps. It leaves off the first two that we’ve just discussed: ignorance and volitional formation. It begins with rebirth consciousness. I mentioned that the whole scheme of twelve steps might be thought of as composed of three lifetimes. Ignorance and volitional formation of the past lifetime create the rebirth consciousness of this lifetime. Ignorance and volitional formation of the last moments create the seeds of rebirth consciousness of this present moment. It does not matter whether you view it as

9 Five skandhas or aggregates of self are: **form**, or matter, which includes the elements of heat, solidity, fluidity, motion and the senses and sense objects; **sensation** which speaks of all the pleasant, unpleasant or neutral sensations which come to us through the senses (mind is considered a sense); **perception** in relation to the six senses and the corresponding sense objects; **mental formation**; **consciousness**.

a reincarnative cycle or simply the rebirth into the present moment. However, since most of you do not have clear vision of what planted the seeds for this present incarnation, it is more helpful to work with *vinnana* as moment to moment rather than lifetime to lifetime.

While we focus, then, on the unfolding of each new moment, be aware that the same principle needs be applied to the unfolding of each lifetime.

The sutra that goes most in depth into the complexities of dependent origination, the Maha Nidana Sutra, begins with the inter-relationship of rebirth consciousness and mentality-materiality. Rather than the relationships being demonstrated as a circle, including *avijja* and *sankhara*, *nama-rupa* (mentality-materiality) is shown as with an arrow backward to *vinnana*, rebirth consciousness, which has an arrow right back again to *nama-rupa*. It moves through the next steps to the end where there is the same arrow going down and back again, back and forth.

Perhaps you can see that this *nama-rupa*, with its factors of feeling, perception, and mental formation, is really no different than the arrow coming the other way from ignorance and volitional formations into rebirth consciousness. We spoke of the difference between consciousness and pure awareness. Feeling and mental formation manifest from the consciousness that thinks it is a self, not from pure awareness. There can be pure perception, bare perception, but mental formation and feeling do not derive from bare perception, only from old mind consciousness grown out of a self. We can talk more about this if it puzzles you. This is complicated and not necessary at this stage of your learning. It really doesn't matter. I only mention it in passing to provide some clarity to those of you who puzzle over why the presentations differ. For today, we're going to concern ourselves only with these first two steps.

So, here are these two factors: *vinnana* and *nama-rupa*. We are not going to cover these interrelationships in a half an hour. It will be several weeks at least before we add another segment to this list. Do not feel that you must understand this all today.

The most vital question that I wish to address is: what is rebirth consciousness? What follows is not the traditional Buddhist way of explaining this phenomenon. But then I am most certainly not addressing a group of traditional Buddhists.

Vinnana connects directly with this new age term: "You create your own reality." The universe offers you that for which you ask. We've talked about this before. If your focus is on creating abundance, there is also a sense of wanting to move away from lack of abundance. The impetus for this focus then may be fear and grasping. If you affirm: "I will have abundance in my life, I am worthy of abundance in my life ..." that's also a statement: "I will not have lack of abundance." There is no duality. The focus on abundance is equally a focus on lack of abundance and the aversion to that lack.

When there is a fearful self striving to create abundance, a doer, the universe may read that focus and hand you non-abundance. The harder you try, the more non-abundance your fear inspires. When your focus instead becomes meeting the fearful self with kindness, transcending both abundance and non-abundance and instead focusing the energy on trust and allowing harmony with universal energy, the universe reads differently that surrender of self and need to control. There is no more self

grasping fearfully, so, the universe provides you with that upon which you are now focused.

When there is this small ego self that flings its arms about and shouts, "me, me, me," and it is greeted with disdain and an attempt to get rid of it, that solidifies self. It creates adhering karma. When there is no solid ego self, no doer, fixer or controller, the energy of the universe moves through you. In that moment, that slice of the thought stream, your thoughts, acts, and words give rise only to non-adhering karma.

In your human form, an aspect of each of you is the small ego self, just as an aspect of each of you is the physical body. Rebirth consciousness is expanded each time that small ego self strives to continue itself and is greeted either with desire to maintain ego or with fear, suppression, or desire to get rid of ego. This solidifying of ego, recurring over and over and over again, is the planting of the seed of rebirth consciousness. As soon as there is rebirth consciousness, these aspects of materiality and mentality appear. The universe is providing that upon which you have focused, offering the mind and body to continue the ego experience.

In reincarnative terms, when you have passed beyond this present life, the adhering karma that brings you into rebirth is manifestation of this ego thinking itself, planting the seeds, and also manifestation of resistance to the ego thinking itself, which resistance solidifies ego and plants the seeds. Movement from *vinnana* to *nama-rupa* is a relationship of necessary causality. As soon as there is rebirth consciousness, materiality, feeling, perception and mental formation necessarily arise. And you are into the next life or the next moment.

Yes, you do have free will which gives you some choice of when and where that life will be. If you are on the astral plane between incarnations, you have already manifested that free will as pertains to setting the stage for necessitating the next life. That was part of the free will decision of how you related to the ego in your last moments of the prior life. You create your own reality. When you fight the ego self, you give the universe the message: "I am focusing on existence of/non-existence of ego ..." and the universe gives you the opportunity to practice that seeming duality yet again by creating the next moment in incarnation, replete with ego.

My dear ones, ego is not a dirty word. You are here in human incarnation. Is "body" a dirty word? "Emotions" are not a dirty word, not anger, nor jealousy, nor greed, nor any of it. Our aim, if there is one, is to find equanimity with all that is entailed in being human, including ego. It is to embrace, not be rid of, humanness!

We are almost out of time. I would only add here that while rebirth consciousness is a necessary cause for *nama-rupa*, the existence of mentality and materiality is a contributory and not a necessary factor to rebirth consciousness. Here, then, is one place where the cycle can be broken. You practice with the catalysts of your mind and form, over and over and over, seeing what gives rise to this fearful ego self and what gives rise to the reactivity against the ego self. Repeatedly you remind yourself to smile at the arising of fear until that practice becomes so strongly ingrained that you cease planting the seed for rebirth consciousness.

This, then, is your homework: watch it in yourselves as carefully as you can. When you see yourselves moving from a place of pure mind, or emptiness of self, and

suddenly, self creeps in, notice the arising desire to get rid of self. Smile at both the self and the desire to get rid of it. Use a modification of Thich Nhat Hanh's practice, "Breathing in, I am aware of the arising of self. Breathing out, I smile to that arising." Use the breathing practice we did two weeks ago—in, pause, out ... Take a deep breath and remind yourself: it's all okay, thereby allowing yourself to come back to center and to plant a different seed. As you notice self arising, and notice aversion to that which arises, as you ask "From where does this arise?" see that ownership of arising dissolve. Nothing on which to become fixated. Can you physically feel the constriction dissolve? What is left? Rest in that space of pure awareness, awareness aware of itself. Feel the spaciousness and light of that space.

I will not introduce any new steps for several weeks. I want to give you opportunity to share what you observe about this in your own lives. Our goal here is not intellectual understanding, but deep experiential understanding, which will lead to increasing freedom. Please remember how much you are loved and how much your courage is honored as you work with all of this. That is all.

February 11, 1993

(We began with silent meditation and by sending love to J, who is in the hospital. Aaron spoke about where, precisely, to send that love, about the work J was doing.

Barbara gave a brief description of rebirth consciousness, explaining again just what it is that conditions that consciousness.

During today's session there was no main talk from Aaron. Most of the session was discussion led by Barbara. Aaron spoke only in answer to some of our questions.

In answer to some confusion, Aaron has been re-explaining wholesome and unwholesome karma. Transcripts of the study group are not taped but made as Aaron speaks. We did not start transcribing this explanation at the beginning.)

Aaron: ... Wholesome adhering karma derives from that place where there is pure, loving aspiration to serve, and, simultaneously, the fearful aspect of self that wants to be **someone** serving. "Wholesome" derives from the loving aspiration; "adhering" derives from the fearful "somebody." Even when the aspiration to serve is pure, if there is still that small desire to attain something, to be the good one, to be accepted or approved—even if only by God and not by humans—the karma grown out of that fear is adhering. What adheres is that small voice of fear which does not yet recognize the innate perfection of itself and all else. There is still grasping to be something, rather than simply resting in its own perfection. Here is your wholesome, but adhering karma, still planting that small seed of self, of fear, which then takes rebirth into the next moment or the next lifetime. Please note that both are present consecutively, wholesome adhering karma where fear has touched, and wholesome non-adhering karma where there has been no fearful self.

Let us use an example of a student taking a vocabulary test. It knows many words and defines them correctly. On other words its understanding is confused. Some words it does not know at all. When it is given a retest, only the confused and unknown words are included on the list it must study. The rest are already clear, and added to the useful vocabulary

Through many moments of mind there may be service with no sense of server or served, no self or other. No adhering karma is there, only wholesome, non-adhering karma. There is no self to which that karma might stick. Then a notion of self appears, and for several moments there is constriction of the energy and a question, "Will my needs be met? Will I be okay?" Or perhaps there is only the small degree of self which asks, "Am I doing this well enough?" Here are the places where karma sticks. Here are the places where the illusion of solid self is still owned, and more practice is needed to clarify that confusion. Here is adhering karma. As illusion of separate self dissolves again, the being's acts are once again free of adhering karma.

Remember that this is a mind stream containing many mind moments. When there is not presence in the moment, and if that moment is clouded by self, it shadows the next moment and the next. When there is mindfulness which sees the being moving toward fixation on self, and allows the being to return to pure mind, then there is less adhering karma, fewer unwholesome seeds planted.

In a sense, we could say that all adhering karma is unwholesome in that it derives from a place of fear. While this is accurate it is easily distorted. We will always suffer from some distortion when using verbal concept to represent experience. Since mind moments comprising a mind stream cannot easily be separated without distortion, I prefer the less severe distortion of employing the blanket term “wholesome adhering karma.” Let us define “wholesome adhering karma” as that karma which is the summation of connected mind moments where there is real loving aspiration to serve, but also the occasional arising of fear that sticks into delusion of self. When these arise, so quickly one following another, as to be undiscernable where one moment’s arising leaves off and the next starts, we may label that thought stream and the actions and words it prompts as wholesome adhering karma. When the thought stream continues long enough in clarity and absence of self that it may be seen as a whole unit of moment to moment continued emptiness, then it is non-adhering.

In the moments when you are clear of fear, when you recognize the perfection, not of the human, but of the Christ or Buddha mind—which is no different than the innate perfection of all phenomena as manifestation of Pure Mind or of God—and allow that divine perfection to simply channel through your human aspect, there cannot be unwholesome karma. The wholesome karma created in those moments of absolute clarity is non-adhering. It plants no seeds. There is no rebirth consciousness created. While there is *nama-rupa*, (mentality-materiality) it is only a hollow shell of physical and mental body through which the Great Energy flows, nothing there to create rebirth. There is no **ownership** of mind and body; they are seen as manifestations of the Absolute, of Pure Mind.

The more you allow this state of being by dealing lovingly with any movement toward self, toward any fear that arises, the more quiet space you create around you. Perhaps some of you have had the deep joy of knowing a being around whom everything seemed a bit more peaceful. This is a being who is allowing Divine Energy to move through. That peacefulness you experience is the absence of adhering karma. You feel the Source Energy move through that being, the “Pure Mind.”

I am happy to tell you that this peaceful experience manifests itself constantly in the upper densities. It is my experience always. It is something wonderful to look forward to, but nothing to grasp at. For now, you are exactly where you need to be. That is all.

A: When third density beings are practicing wholesome but adhering karma, and non-adhering karma, is it likely that there will be some shifting back and forth between the two?

Barbara: Always.

Discussion: *(Of above. A talks about complimenting a neighbor boy who always seems unhappy. There was desire to offer him kindness, truth in what she said, yet also a self concocting this plan to compliment, not for personal gain, only to make the child feel good, but still felt as self.)*

Aaron: There is a constant movement back and forth. Trying to get rid of that movement, ironically, also solidifies self. Can you accept that the joy you felt at that child’s smile registered in two ways? One was the self that patted itself on the back and said, “I did well. I helped.” While there is deep love in that desire to help, side by side

with that love is the fear, "I'm not pure enough. I need to prove repeatedly that I am loved and loving." Here is the small seed of doubt of one's innate perfection. Until you believe that utterly, you can not purely and continually manifest that Divine Energy, cannot allow its unblocked passage through you. We will talk about ways of deepening the perception of ultimate reality—of the perfection of all that is. How do we learn increasingly to rest in that Pure Mind and know all that arises as manifestation of Pure Mind?

Can you see yourself as a pipe, a conduit, through which this Energy may flow? That bit of doubt is just the tiniest impurity, the tiniest fleck of dirt inside of this conduit, a subtle distortion to the energy flow. You are still channeling that high level of Energy. In your human form, you will never be rid of all the distortion. I have talked about fear with its projecting points and loving energy as concentric circles. When you see that grain of fear and touch it with compassion, instead of a sharp point projecting into this conduit, you have a rounded bump on the wall, far less distortion. To graduate from this plane the inner wall of the conduit need not be polished perfectly smooth. It can be filled with bumps, which you will polish in fourth and fifth density. That is the work of these densities. but there may not be any sharp points. You may be afraid but not afraid of your fear.

Discussion: *(M has talked about her job interviews. She spoke of seeing her fear and moving through it, seeing the fear and tiredness of all the people there. She began to let go of "Will I get the job" and just to ask, how can I bring love into this situation?)*

Aaron: I am Aaron. We are talking here about where focus is placed, on a dialogue with fear or on the true self which is beyond fear. Using M's example of her job interview, as soon as there is focus on getting the job, there is also focus on that sense of unworthiness that fears it may be insufficient for this job. That sense of fear does express itself even in hidden ways.

There is a difference when there is deep trust. "I make the effort to allow the job interview to happen by writing appropriate letters and so on. I expend the energy to come here for the interview. And then I fully trust, if this job and I are to connect, that will happen. I have done what I need to do." Then, as M so beautifully expressed it, her focus was on, "What service can I do here? Perhaps my being here is not to get the job at all, but merely to bring some light into the situation. I trust the whole thing. I cannot make them offer me the job. That is beyond my control. I can only express my energy as lovingly, as non-aggressively, as purely as possible."

If, during that period, the fear arises, "What if I don't get the job?" I can remind myself to speak to that fear with kindness, not to get caught in it. Then I am free to return to the clearer state of being service. Happily, when your energy expresses itself in that way, you enhance the likelihood of your getting the job. You are not doing it manipulatively to get the job, only because there is nothing else to do.

C, your recent situation with this trial is a perfect illustration. I would ask you to share this if such sharing is comfortable. No pressure here. That is all.

Discussion: *(Sharing from C about the woman who had sued her.)*

February 11, 1993

Discussion of last week's homework and our practice with this aperture between the breath and the ways it allows us to rest in Pure Mind. Aaron asks us to continue the same homework this week.)

Aaron: I am Aaron. I bow deeply to you all for the effort you are making. **Will you continue this work, simply watching the planting of the seed and the ways it shifts: wholesome, unwholesome ... wholesome, but adhering ... non-adhering. Just that.** Is there anybody that is not clear on this work now? That is all.

February 18, 1993

Aaron: Good morning and my love to you all. I am Aaron. I intend one more class with little new material. I want to hear from each of you how you are working with rebirth consciousness, the planting of the seed. I want only to mention the next two steps on this chain today. I will not bother with Pali words, we will write them into the transcript where they serve a purpose for clarity.

These next steps are of necessary conditionality. Given the existence of *nama-rupa* or mentality-materiality, there is necessarily the **six-fold sense base**, the five physical senses and the mind. These are the **internal bases**, eye, ear, etc. There are also the **external bases** which are the sense objects. Given the six-fold sense base, and an external object, there is necessarily contact (**phassa**). This contact is conditioned by both internal and external sense bases. When the internal sense contacts the sense object there is sense contact. Realizing that mind is a sense, when mind contacts the sense object of mind there is contact. When there is **knowing** of the contact through the mind, there is sense consciousness. Contact and consciousness are not identical.

These two aspects of the chain are self explanatory. As is obvious, even if you shut yourself off as a hermit, the senses will lead to contact. If you do not wish there to be contact, you need to move backward to *vinnana*, rebirth consciousness. This is the place where one can work.

So we are back to rebirth consciousness and discussion of what plants the seeds for adhering karma? What strengthens the sense of self and solidifies it, and what dissolves it? **This is what I would like to hear from each of you—what works for you when delusion of separate self is firm? What works to allow it to dissolve?** I will also offer some suggestions, but turn it to you first. That is all.

C: Confusion about what Aaron just said. If we have senses we will have contact?

Barbara: Yes. Once in rebirth we have senses and contact. So we focus on what comes before and after contact, on what plants the seed for becoming or for the creation of adhering karma that solidifies self. Aaron asks, "What are our strategies?" If we had no adhering karma, then whatever comes would come. Total purity. But we can't do that.

(Barbara talks about last night and the fear that arose when she found out she had been given only one and a half hours in which to teach what she'd expected to have three hours for. But she had time to sit and allow the fear to pass and so there was little adhering karma.)

D shares idea of laughing and singing; the ways that humor and openness dissolve self.

Barbara begins reading from a letter that came yesterday from a man reading Aaron. He also talks about humor and the ways it returns him to "center."

X comes in, very upset about her son's self-destructive threats. We shift to talk with her.)

Aaron: X, I hear your pain. My dear one, as you well know, you cannot make him take care of himself. You cannot keep him from suicide, should he choose that. My conjecture is that he uses intimations of suicide as another way of controlling you. It's one of his tools. I cannot promise you that he will not act on that threat. He has free will. But control is much more on his mind than self-destruction.

It is a very painful situation, magnified of course by your experience of H's death. There is not only your genuine love for your child, but the agony of your gut feeling, "Could I have prevented this" should he choose death. My friend, you cannot prevent it. If he were seven years old, I would speak differently, but he is an adult. I suppose you could forcefully hospitalize him, but there is no reason for him to be held. These are his growing pains. As with any of the growing pains of your children, you as the parent, may suffer.

You know I seldom give any concrete suggestions, but will do so here. It feels to me that you need to talk very honestly with this young man, and to be sure he hears: "I love you. I cannot keep you from destroying yourself, whether suicide or that slow destruction which is your present path. I will not allow you to hold that threat of destruction, fast or slow, as a sword of control over my head. My love for you and fear for you are my own work. Sometimes the voice of love must say no, rather than yes. You are an adult. I love you, but I am no longer responsible for you. You must begin to be responsible for yourself or suffer the consequences of your irresponsibility. I feel this is the most loving thing I can say. I do not say "no" with anger. I say no with love. You may not come back to this house unless you contribute. You may not abuse me, may not threaten me. I love you. I welcome you if you will live with these conditions. I take your getting a job and contributing financially as evidence of your sincerity, that you truly do want to grow and become more responsible. I also take your finding a counselor as evidence of sincerity. If you choose to do so, I will offer you all the help I can. It is your choice."

You have said this in some way or other to M many times. He's learned where you are vulnerable, where he most hurts you. If there is a hint of self-destruction, your terror lets him in, dissolves your "no." If it is five degrees outdoors and he would freeze, your fear allows him in. He knows how to manipulate. If he could focus a fraction of that energy in positive terms, there would be much healing and growth. Perhaps that possibility of growth is his terror. For whatever reason, he will not allow himself to be independent.

X, I only remind you here to look down the road ten years. This saying no firmly may be the hardest thing you've ever had to do. If you keep saying yes, is there any guarantee he won't eventually kill himself? There are no guarantees either way. You can no longer afford to base your choices on what seems to protect you both in this moment. You cannot protect him from himself. Should he choose suicide, it would be agonizing for you but **you are not responsible**. You only prolong his movement into learning his own responsibility for himself. Please know that I love you. That is all.

(Barbara continues reading from the letter from a reader: "Myself as a creek bed for the flow of universal love. When experiencing separation, humor as a bridge back to Joy." (From Bob H., Cincinnati, OH))

(Barbara reads part of last week's transcript, page 2.)

While there is deep love in that desire to help, side by side with that love is the fear, "I'm not pure enough. I need to prove repeatedly that I am loved and loving." Here is the small seed of doubt of one's innate perfection. Until you believe that utterly, you cannot purely and continually manifest that divine energy, cannot allow its unblocked passage through you. We will talk about ways of deepening the perception of ultimate reality—of the perfection of all that is. How do we learn increasingly to rest in that Pure Mind and know all that arises as manifestation of Pure Mind?

Can you see yourself as a pipe, a conduit, through which this energy may flow? That bit of doubt is just the tiniest impurity, the tiniest fleck of dirt inside of this conduit, a subtle distortion to the energy flow. You are still channeling that level of energy. In your human form, you will never be rid of all the distortion.

I have talked about fear with its projecting points and loving energy as concentric circles. When you see that grain of fear and touch it with compassion, instead of a sharp point projecting into this conduit, you have a rounded bump on the wall, far less distortion.

To graduate from this plane the inner wall of the conduit need not be polished perfectly smooth. It can be filled with bumps, which you will polish in fourth and fifth density. That is the work of these densities. but there may not be any sharp points. You may be afraid but not afraid of your fear.

Aaron: Once you absolutely know this perfection that you are, and can stably rest in that space of pure mind, all rebirth consciousness will cease. As our letter writing friend has said, humor becomes a bridge. You do not laugh at, but with the self. It is a gentle reminder, come back to who you are. Over and over again, come back to who you are. Attend to the fear, smile to the fear, let it be. From where did it arise? Was there ever anything separate of which to be afraid? Was there ever anything which was not manifestation of pure mind? Come back to who you are, with a smile at the self who was caught in distortion.

My dear ones, perhaps the loudest voice heard on the higher planes is the voice of laughter and joy, the voice of the angels singing praise of the Eternal. Where there is laughter, in that moment, there is no delusion. I do not say there is no fear. But fear is seen for what it is—just the small self, jumping up and waving its arms around to be noticed. With laughter, the heart remains connected. Fear is known as distorted manifestation of Love.

Please understand that there are diverse kinds of humor. I do not mean sick jokes but loving laughter that would make you feel better. What I speak of is the laughter of that being who has just fallen SPLAT in the mud puddle, feels a moment of wanting to curse the mud, takes a good look at itself, and laughs; the heavens laugh with you. In that moment you are totally clear, no shadow. Yes, shadow comes back, but less forcefully, the more you practice. I once suggested to Barbara a sign above her desk: "Am I taking myself too seriously?"

How do you make the transition from the being cursing at the mud puddle to the deep laughter? It can not be forced. But as D suggested, the willingness simply to say "ha ha ha" does flip a switch. What works for you?

In abusive situations there is a fine line between a **self** that says “no” and “no” said from a selfless place. The self that says no is acting from anger, defending. Acting from a selfless place is not acting from anger or protecting. The NO comes from a connected place, connecting to the fear of the other.

When you sense the presence of fear, of self, you may use specific coping strategies: Walk out. Say, “I need to be alone, I’ll be back when I’m quiet.” Hold your speech until fear is no longer the motivator.

Question: When there’s pain in my dealings with others, the ego tends to protect by not even revealing the emotion such as fear within. What to do?

Aaron: In that kind of situation, you are not transcending self, but building a shield around the self. You can’t make ego or self disappear by willing it. It can’t be done. It is not the connected heart that feels battered, but the small ego self. So when you try to get rid of that small ego self, calling attention to it, ego is actually strengthened.

Perhaps you are trying to escape the pain by chopping off the arm to keep the finger from hurting. Pain increases. If you notice the ego wanting to defend itself when there is attack—just noticing “turmoil”—and can hug that self, it relaxes. You all move to defend when you feel attacked. This is very natural response for the human. The more the focus is on protecting the self, the more enmeshed you become in the illusion that there is a self that needs protection. The heart may feel pain, even grief, and disappointment that the other falls into so much reactivity. The heart has room for that grief without need to defend. The ego is what moves to defend.

When Barbara’s children were young, there were times when the baby would come into a room where the five year old was playing with Lego blocks. When the two year old came into the room and reached to grab the forbidden toy, the elder one would stand to keep the tiny blocks out of the baby’s reach. The baby would cry, even throw something at his brother, call him all the terrible names that a two year old can dredge up. The elder was a sensitive child, strived hard to be loving to others. It really wounded him to be called names when what he was doing was protecting his brother. There was confusion; which was “bad,” to withhold the toy or to offer the toy that could harm?

In tears, he would seek Barbara, who would hold and hug him, tell him how kind and brave he was to insure his brother’s safety even at his own expense. Slowly the small self that needed to be assured of love would dissolve. He began to really hear the baby’s frustration. He learned how to give himself that help, to know “I do not have to please my brother.” Acting responsibly, sometimes, means displeasing. Each time he did so, he learned to speak to that aspect of self that wanted to be loved, and instead, to act from a deeper wisdom. From the space where he could hear that in himself that sought love, he learned to hear it in his brother. He found ways to interact lovingly with his brother, to start a new game or otherwise skillfully divert his energy.

We visited with a family in which there was an alcoholic. The parents kept liquor in the house to serve to guests. The son repeatedly invaded that store and drank. There was in the parent both loving concern for the son, and tremendous anger, which they could not allow themselves to express or even acknowledge, but which found its channel through the act of keeping liquor in the house.

February 18, 1993

What Barbara's elder child learned was to acknowledge how much anger there was. He could have just sat with the Legos, and the baby could have been hurt. Because he was able to acknowledge his anger, the ego that said "ME!" was seen so that he could act responsibly, rather than act as did the parents of the alcoholic child.

The more you try to get rid of the ego, the more it sabotages through indirect channels. The more love you can bring into fear, the less control the ego has. Think about these two stories and apply them to your own life situations. We are out of time.

(Discussion of homework. More of the same. Watch for the moment when the seed is planted, be it wholesome or unwholesome, through the solidification of self. What works to bring you back into connection?)

February 25, 1993

Aaron: Good morning, and my love to you all. I am Aaron. K shared with us last year a prayer taught to her by her grandmother when she was a young child.

I am the place that God shines through
For God and I are one, not two.
I need not fret nor will nor plan,
She wants me where and as I am.
If I'll just be relaxed and free,
He'll carry out His plan through me.

This idea makes a great deal of sense to each of you. You understand that to be that channel, is your heart's intention. The big question is "How?" "If I'll just be relaxed and free." How? When you are in that space of big mind, Buddha or Christ Mind, Rigpa, relaxed, free, no small ego self—a channel for the divine energy of the universe—there is no adhering karma, no becoming, no new seed planted. Ironically as soon as there is *someone* doing anything, even attempting to become relaxed and free, there is adhering karma. There is a self replanting the seed of self.

Barbara: (*Inserted while cleaning up the transcript.*) While cleaning up transcripts Aaron got into a discussion with me on the Tibetan words, **sem** and **Rigpa**. These are the two levels of mind, discursive, self-other mind (*sem*) and the mind that rests beyond thought or separation (*Rigpa*). We don't need these terms just to use fancy words. They do provide a precise language which we otherwise seem to lack. I mention it only because I found it interesting that Tibetan Buddhist teaching does state this in its own terminology. He said the teaching is that we may "rest in Rigpa." I like that. He said, **"When the mind is stirred and exhausted, allow it to come to rest in that vast spaciousness which is beyond all thought. You exhaust yourselves contending with the relentless turmoil of racing mind, like a sky laden with storm clouds which you try to chase away. Find the clear blue sky beyond and rest there. This is your birthright."**

Aaron: (*Continued.*) We have looked at the ways in which fear blocks the natural pattern of being relaxed and free. What we have been doing here the past two weeks is exploring the ways that you may note fear, and come back to center. Not grasping at "relaxed and free," but allowing it, allowing your true nature to express itself. Last week, there was input from many of you about what works to move you back to center. I promised this week to offer some of my own suggestions.

Let us take a giant step sideways, and regard ourselves from a perspective beyond the small ego self. You have heard me say that you are angels—angels on the astral plane and in incarnation. The same angels! It doesn't matter what you are wearing or not wearing, form or no form. When you first take birth, you **know** you are angels. I want to share a story told by M R.

He was attending Quaker meeting in Philadelphia. Some one told a story about their child. This couple had a 3 1/2 year old and were expecting a baby. The young daughter asked them, "When the baby is born can I have some time alone with it?"

They said they didn't know, that they would think about it. It seemed important to her. The infant was born and she asked again. "Okay," they said. The baby was in its crib, awake. The sister entered the room. The parents allowed her to close the door. There had an intercom and switched it on so they could hear what might transpire. There was silence for some moments. And then they heard their young daughter's voice question the baby. "Tell me what it's like to be with God. I'm already forgetting."

You are angels; all of you. You come seeing as I see. An infant sees the light energy of each object. It does not see an adult's form or facial features but light and energy. It perceives that adult the same way that it saw it on the astral plane. It is not yet accustomed to these eyes, makes no sense of the shapes. What is that plant on its dresser? It sees it as motion, light. In inanimate objects, it sees much quieter light. The world is new. It has not yet learned to label. It has no expectations. It is only beginning to enter the illusion.

It does not understand depth perception. While the plant may be on the dresser, the plant seems much closer than the dresser, because its energy is so much more alive. Slowly its perception shifts. It begins to use the physical senses, and the non-physical senses are laid aside as it enters more fully into the illusion. There is no diminishing of those senses. They do not atrophy from misuse. You forget about them as illusion solidifies.

Studies have been done with human children. First the child was led to trust an adult, to play together. After that rapport was established, one day a wonderful plant was in the playroom. Adult and child entered the room together, saw the plant. The adult simply said, "See the plant; do you like it?" "Yes, yes." "Describe it to me," said the adult. Over 60% of the children included a description of the aura with the plant. These are beings 3 and 4 years old. So many children have what their parents call imaginary friends. Can you really suppose that child is not fully sharing its adventure with its spirit guides? Certainly, it may perceive that friend as a another child, even a teddy bear, or fairy. We do not have form. The child can see its guide in whatever form it chooses.

Then you enter into the illusion. You let go of that experience of God. You put aside the auras and the friends because the adult says, "This isn't real." "All right," says the child, "I'll play your game." To the child it is a game. Let go of the reality, enter into the illusion. And so the forgetting becomes complete. Outside of the illusion, there is no fear. In this moment, there is no fear. And there is no ignorance in any of its forms. There is no sense of a separate self. There is nothing that is not seen as manifestation of God, of Pure Mind. As you enter the illusion and cease being present in the now, there is fear.

Since you are born into this forgetting, it is not a contradiction to say that fear is part of the plan. It's this old story you've heard me tell. Gurdjieff, and the yeast for the bread. *(Gurdjieff, a teacher, led a spiritual community. A man whom no one liked lived there. He was lazy, rude, dirty. One day he tired of the criticism and left. Gurdjieff went after him and asked him to return. NO! He offered to pay him to return. The man agreed. The community members were aghast. How can you pay him to come back when we hate him? Gurdjieff said "He is the yeast for the bread. Without him, how would you practice compassion, letting go, non-judgment?")*

What if you took incarnation, and there was no illusion? What if there was no pain on the earth, no seeming obstacles? What if you knew your unlimitedness and power, and

could freely manifest the love, joy and peace you desire, always? What would be the catalyst for learning? There are planes like this. You have heard me speak of them. There is learning at that level, but very slow. No, there is no rush. But your work with the catalysts of the earth plane does deepen your ability to love. As I've said before, it is easy to be loving in heaven; can you be loving when the situation is more difficult? Your earth catalysts are the fire that tempers the steel.

Some beings choose not to enter the illusion. They hold fast to the spiritual experience and push away human experience. You are here in human form to experience the physical and emotional body. Why waste a good incarnation clinging to the spiritual and creating duality between spiritual and human? Why not practice what you came to practice? Be gentle with yourselves here. See the need to pull away with no judgment but do then ask yourselves to return to the fullness of human experience.

So there is fear and we ask, "How can I embrace my fear?" The reason it is so hard to be "relaxed and free" is that most of you struggle with fear, and thereby get into a dialogue with it, rather than embracing it. Because this dialogue has been your habit, it seems easier to push away fear and loudly affirm, "I will be relaxed and free" than to make the decision to be conscious of fear and, each time it arises, to make the effort to embrace it. But this embracing, call it equanimity if you like, is what you are here to learn. The arising of fear offers the opportunity to practice regarding fear without becoming enmeshed in it. Through that practice you finally come to distinguish reality from illusion and to live comfortably in both. My dear ones, it really is as simple as that.

Perfection is not expected. Each time you practice awareness that allows noting the first arising of fear and offers a reminder of compassion toward the being experiencing fear, the process becomes a bit easier. You are embracing and transcending fear each time you practice those steps. It is a way of remembering, "I am an Angel."

This is what I want you to watch, the incessant dialogue with fear. The dialogue reflects the bargain with fear. Can you see the strong determination to get rid of it, the anger at it and the self recriminations because it arises?

Fear is the ultimate illusion. The angel does not know the meaning of fear. Keep coming back to that. "I am an angel. I embrace this illusion, and allow myself to learn as I move through it." Allow yourself to rest in your angelness, in your radiant perfection.

And yet, here is a subtle part. While fear is illusion, it still must be treated with respect. You are that actor on a stage and you are also the audience watching the play. Angel in earthsuit—body, mind and spirit! If the actor just mouths the words with no emotional involvement, clearly disassociated with the whole thing, what is gained by the audience? In any fine play, well acted, you as the audience can find deep chords of response in yourselves, and profound learning. When the actor clearly has no respect for the play, there is no learning for the audience.

There must be simultaneous awareness, "This is a play. I can't turn my back on the audience or cover the mouth with hand. I play to the audience," and also full involvement with that part, belief in that part, feeling that pain and love, or else the performance is meaningless.

You are angels in earth suits. You must play both parts, the angel and the human—actor and audience. And you can. That is the wonder, that you are given everything you need to play both parts.

When fear becomes solid, and you find you cannot be relaxed and free, look hard at the fear. When you are present in your life, there is no fear in this moment, this now. Can you rest in that space of NOW, of Pure Mind? There you know that even death is just another step. This moment to this moment to this moment, with a transition of consciousness. Death is a walk from one room to another. What pulls you from NOW?

You learn early not to be present. You learn fear early. Fear deepens the illusion of separation. When there is a perceived separate self, there is that which can be threatened. In the habitual way of the illusion-dweller, fear promotes the solidification of a self seeking safety. One of the places you learn to seek that safety is by moving out of the now. The child plays peek a boo; it hides and thinks it is invisible. Sometimes the thrill of play is so intense for the baby that it needs to become invisible to quiet its feelings. You play peek-a-boo with NOW. You move into the past, into memory, you move into the future to fantasy and dreams. It helps you to feel in control, to feel safe. This practice is a basic way of dialoging with fear. When you can notice feeling unsafe, and the secondary aversion to that feeling of insecurity, and come back to center, fear dissolves. The angel quality manifests. You know who you are and thus feel empowered and unlimited.

(Further channeling from Aaron on "the dialogue with fear" will be available in Angels in Earthsuits, to be published in early 1997.)

Homework. Watch this in yourselves. No judgment. Just notice each time it happens, "I am getting into a dialogue with fear. The angel does not need to do that." You might try for several weeks to merely remind yourself "I am an angel," just to see what effect that reminder has. As a final suggestion today, there is a brief visualization, something you can use in the moment when fear arises. Try it with me.

Visualize the physical body. In place of the heart, see a rosebud ...

Feel yourself open, breathing in light, joy, peace, love ...

Watch the rose unfold ...

Each lovely petal opens to the delicate, sensitive center ...

Undefended ...

(Pause; some time of silence.)

As the last petals open, see the brilliant light, the sun, radiating out of the center ...

"I am an angel. This light is my true being ...

Allow yourself a gift, to rest in that light, in that true self.

Come back to it over and over and over. If the sun goes behind a cloud and the petals close, simply note "defended," and start the process again. No dialogue with fear. Come back to your true self. Remember you are an angel. That is all.

Questions and discussion:

M: I thought the angel density was far above even Aaron. Is Aaron speaking metaphorically?

Aaron: **NO, NOT METAPHORICALLY AT ALL!** I am not speaking in metaphor when I call you angels in earthsuits. This is precisely the point. If you left your angels "up there," you could never hope to move beyond adhering karma. You could never manifest your divinity. It is the real fact that you are this angel, not just that you have a bit of angelness. You are the angel. You are Buddha. You are already perfect. That reality makes incarnation a viable path to maturity.

You are here to deepen faith, and to learn love, here to find equanimity with everything in your experience. Your angelness, your penetration of the illusion and of fear, is the tool by which you may find that love and equanimity. The one caught in the illusion cannot do it. If you stepped into a giant mud puddle, said "I've got to get out," and flailed around, you would mire yourself deeper. In essence, your **awareness** of your angelness is a huge hose that carries clear, pure water. It washes away the mud. Then you see the mud, and there's no fear. "It's just mud. I am an angel." You keep moving from the thought which mires you to Pure Mind which knows its perfection and rests there.

C: Aaron answered a similar question from her this week. He said that the higher self is the angel, overlaying the mental body, and so on down to the physical self. But it's all one, not to be broken into parts. Body, mind, spirit.

Discussion: (*Image of transparent overlays.*)

Question: (*About "higher" angels.*)

Aaron: Ariel is an archangel. (*Ariel is Aaron's teacher, who is very occasionally trance-channeled by Barbara.*) Each of you are angels, little angels. You are not small in your potential but in your present actualization of that potential. Your perception of your power is that it is not as large as Ariel's, but you mistakenly feel it is less because **you** are lesser. NO!

There is no difference in your own Buddha nature, your own Pure Mind, and that of Ariel. There is an equal sized "connector" from the source to you, as from the source to Ariel, but far more energy flows through to Ariel because there is no contraction or blockage. Thus, Ariel manifests its energy more purely. That the "connectors" are the same is why I say you are unlimited. But Ariel knows its true perfection and you are as yet unawakened to it.

You both reflect that perfect light which is also your own true nature, but Ariel reflects it more clearly because the mirror is clearer. You have only to allow your clarity and unlimitedness to manifest. This voyage of purification and expansion is your work through the journey of all your densities' experience. By the end of third density, the work is just well under way.

At some future time we will begin actual work with the light body and with energy, learning new ways to open the blockage and contraction and to allow the fullness of light to move through.¹⁰

One more thought. While I express the above, remember it is all metaphor of relative reality. In ultimate reality terms, there is nothing being done. It is all illusion. You are already perfectly clear and unlimited. You are already Buddha. Your work is really not to clarify and expand but to recognize that there is nothing to clarify, nowhere to expand. This is the ultimate cleaning of the mirror!

Visualize two hoses of equal diameter. One is caked with debris, the other is clear. They each flow from the same source, each flowing into a separate pond, and on out of that pond through a stream, they feed into the sea. The clear hose pond will be fuller, the stream more forceful. But the water quality is identical, the potential for moving water identical in each hose. The congested hose needs to be cleared. That is why you are here. You do not clear the hose by attacking it, but by bringing awareness to the obstructions and gently allowing the waters from the source to cleanse away the blockage. That is all.

Question: Is there a difference in how much energy you can manifest if you are incarnate or discarnate? Are we third density beings clearer on the astral plane than while in incarnation?

Aaron: Will answer some other time. Time to end.

(Barbara was away March 4, 1993, so there was no class.)

¹⁰ This work was begun in September, 1993. It is available in the books [Path of Natural Light](#), Part One, and [Path of Natural Light](#), Part Two. These books are also available on disk in Adobe Acrobat Portable Document Format.

March 11, 1993

Aaron: Good morning and my love to you all. I am Aaron. I am going off on a tangent today. I had originally planned to move on to the next steps of Dependent Origination but will wait one more week.

Barbara and I spent much time conversing this weekend, while she was on vacation. Last night I shared some of the fruits of our conversation. Since none of you were present, I would like to talk about this with you. What follows is not original to me but is simply wisdom offered through the ages.

For some time Barbara had been pushing herself at a very rapid pace and was feeling a bit of, not really exhaustion, but numbness. It took a day or two for that numbness to begin to recede. As she skied on these lovely paths through the woods, her heart truly singing in joy, gratitude, and praise of God, she asked me the simple question, "Aaron, why am I here in incarnation? To do what? When I feel such love and joy, simply being outdoors like this, and such pressure and stress that I sometimes lose track of the joy during the constancy of my work, should I not choose that in my life which leads me to be able to express the joy? You say we're here to bring light where there has been darkness, but sometimes I feel like I'm part of that darkness."

Yet can you avoid stress in your lives, even on vacation? The light is always within you. How do you practice so as to allow it to shine, no matter what the circumstances?

We spoke about the fact that Barbara, as most of you, has lived monastic lifetimes concentrating deeply on the spiritual, but often living in countries where the teachings of spirit emphasized renunciation of the world, where there was deep poverty, where the focus was so strongly on the spiritual that little attention was paid to the material side of life. Many in those countries still lack the basics for a healthy life. Spirit becomes an escape from the realities of physical existence. Enlightenment touches the spirit but leaves form untouched.

Now, in this Western society, there is material plenty and spiritual impoverishment, as your technology has brought you out of harmony with spirit and the environment. You, in your Western culture, are looking for deep spiritual traditions, while those who have been raised with those traditions are looking for Tupperware! Looking for more than that too, but grasping at the material which they increasingly see in the world around them and which their culture has so often lacked. Yes, it is wonderful to live simply, but not when that simplicity involves disease, hunger, cold, lack of the barest necessities. Think of the wonder of a bowl with sealed lid to keep your flour from insects, and thereby help your children be free of disease. This is not materialism, but survival.

Those of you presently incarnate in non-physically deprived cultures are in a wonderful place where your efforts and love may begin an actual transformation of the world into this Garden of Eden where all beings know their true spiritual nature and where all beings also have food, shelter, clothing, medical supplies, books and educational materials, music, poetry, all the material necessities to live physically without pain. This is the time for the drawing together of form and spirit, of transcendence of that duality.

It is valuable to sit in private meditation. It is lovely to walk in the woods or on a warm and sandy beach and enjoy that beauty and sense of connection. Your joy at those moments does offer light, does have real value. But at physical levels it does not touch the fundamental deprivation in the world. How can you allow that connection with spirit to now begin to transform the world?

This does not mean you should not take holidays, but your work is in the world. How do you bring joy and love back into the stressful situations? Would you worship a hollow god that stands above the world, superior to the world, that will not get its feet dirty? Would you strive to pull yourself up to those heights and leave the world to suffer with itself in the dark alleys? Or do you give your love to a loving God, less absolute perhaps, but not seeking to enhance itself by diminishing others? Rather a God willing to partake in pain through entering the human illusion.

This is why Jesus' life speaks so powerfully to so many. I do not wish here to promote one religious tradition over another. Many traditions have truth and great beauty. I use Jesus here only as one example with which many in this culture are familiar. The beauty in Jesus' incarnation is that this was the coming of God to Earth. Here is God not staying in the heights to be worshipped, but God touching the suffering of mankind, God offering love and receiving love. It is a reciprocal relationship.

There are two different views of God. One must ask, which one holds true for me? To know my relationship with the world, I must first understand my relationship with God. Because I have that of God within me, that spark of divinity, to know my relationship with God is to know my relationship with myself and all else. My relationship with the world and its suffering is a reflection of my relationship with God. I have the potential, each being has the potential, to express God's divinity and love through loving relationship with the world, or to express that aspect of God that it sees as absolute and all-powerful thereby reflecting a different aspect of God.

Yes, God is absolute. We have often offered a quote from the Udana scripture in which the Buddha says to the assembled monks, "There is an Unborn, Undying, Unchanging, Uncreated ..." God is all of that. It is easy to distort that truth to say that this Absolute, Infinite, All-knowing is separate from the world. We may then end up worshipping God so as to selfishly raise ourselves. God has infinite power. Do we try to please God, so as to grasp some of that power? Many have done so, with the sense, "God is on *our* side." The Old Testament portrayed God as a strong and even wrathful God having dominion over all. It is to teach this change in our relationship with God, to clarify this distortion of man's image of God, that Jesus took birth, simply, to bring the message, love is the most powerful force in the universe and God is love.

We emulate what we worship. If God is worshipped for being superior, dominant, and all-powerful, is it not natural that those who worship this image of God attempt themselves to become all-powerful? They may claim that power grows out of love, to control others because they know best what others need. Do the ends ever justify the means? Can we dominate others because we think we know what they need? In fact, this direction reinforces ego and self-service.

I believe you will remember Ariel's talk¹¹ about the creation of Earth and the move into negative distortion by those angels whose energy was the foundation of the world. Some of those beings moved into distortion because they sought to control out of love. Their love was so fierce it became protective, denied free will, and in a sense became dominating. This was the beginning of negative polarity on the Earth. While this powerfulness and absoluteness are undeniably attributes of God, they are not the most significant attributes. Absolute power must be balanced by absolute love. This is the truth for which Jesus' life offers us reminder. What is our relationship to be with God? God is love.

I spoke last night of a council of Bishops in the 4th century after Christ, by your figuring of years, 325 A.D. This was called the Council of Nicaea out of which grew the Nicene Creed. The debate that prompted the Emperor Constantine to call this council was involved precisely with this question, what is God? What is the attribute of this infinite God which is most true to humans, which most inspires you and draws you to the expression of your own divinity and to the expansion of God? What allows you to reflect that glory back to God?

One view at this meeting was that of a priest named Arius. Arius was very angry at the Creed which grew out of this gathering and said that CHRIST WAS BEGOTTEN OF God and therefore shared that divinity. The Creed says specifically, "begotten, not made ...". Arius preferred the image of an absolute God. He failed to see through the distortion that an absolute God which dominates all teaches domination. There are many on Earth today who still worship Arius' God and place themselves in position of power over others, claiming a religious righteousness in doing so. I ask you to see the negative polarity in this, the twist of service to self done in the name of God.

The chief one who answered Arius was a bishop, Athanasius. This man said God did not make Christ as subject makes object. Otherwise the whole universe would be one of duality. God gave of Itself, bestowed the seed of divinity into this being, and—I take that one step further—into all beings. For that same seed of divinity lies in all of Creation.

The debate is not ended. This leads us to today's discussions of what is called "original sin" versus Matthew Fox's teaching of "creation spirituality."

Yes, you incarnate as third density seeking to serve and also incarnating for karmic reasons. Yes, the one known as Jesus incarnated only to serve and was a much purer energy at the time of that incarnation than you are as you incarnate. Nevertheless, that seed of divinity is within each being, not only the human, every being.

Again I use Jesus here not to promote one religion above another, but only by way of clear and familiar example. Jesus taught us what to do with this gift of divinity. "It is not for me, not to make me powerful." In the Gospel of John, ch. 14, he says, " whatsoever ye may ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son." So God gives him divinity and he does not use that to empower himself, but to serve

11 Ariel is an upper sixth density being, and is Aaron's teacher. On occasion this entity is trance channeled by Barbara. Aaron is here referring to one of these sessions. The transcript is available.

others. He does not reap the glory of that service for himself, he returns it to God. This is the model of positive polarity: service to others.

You are third density beings, imperfect at service to others. Fear arises. Your desire to serve another in genuine gratitude and love becomes distorted by that fear. When you ski down a mountain path or walk by a lake taking in the beauty and peace, it is easy to feel gratitude and love. When you reach out to others, serving in whatever ways you can, there is the small voice of the ego that says, "What about me?" We've talked about this many times, how to work with that ego self and its fear, with compassion, not judgment. I will not repeat those lessons here.

But your work will be far easier if you can keep awareness of these two different models of God before you. When you give and ask, "What will be returned to me for this giving?" notice the fear, the desire to control, to be dominant, to keep the self safe and separate, even if there is also loving motivation to serve others. Remind yourself not only of the teachings of Jesus, but of so many who have lived the model of service, not claiming or holding anything for themselves. At first this seems a terrifying path, not to hold on to anything for yourself. "Will I not be emptied, destroyed?" Yes, the human may well be destroyed. The human Jesus lost his life. What is it with which we identify? The ego self or the divine self?

In offering himself fully, even to the death of that body, he made the definitive statement to negative polarity, "Your attempt at domination will not work on me. You have no control over me because all you can take is the body. You cannot touch my divinity. You cannot touch my soul. Your fear has no dominion over the power of love."

My dear ones, you are human. The ego self is going to arise again and again and again. I am not asking you, nor do any ask you, to go and get yourselves crucified, to be martyrs. Only to be mindful of the arising ego self that seeks to dominate, to use that arising as a warning flag, and to come back to true self.

You each incarnate over and over and over to learn to express this divinity with increasing purity. In your early lifetimes, you sent out very little light to the places of darkness in your illusion. As you polish away the ego, the soul mirror of the Divine shines brighter, so that divine light and love shined into you are reflected back with increasing brilliance. As you evolve you claim less of that brilliance for yourself because self is dissolving. Instead you come more and more to emulate those pure beings who returned that light fully to the Source.

It is this continual process toward positive polarity that brings light where there has been darkness and love where there has been fear. This is why you are here. Remember that you are always in process. You are not God, but of the same nature of God, truly begotten by God. Remember who you are and fear will not win out over love. That is all.

Discussion: *(Not transcribed. About reciprocal relationship: giving and receiving are one.)*

Discussion: *("God is not absolute." What does this mean? ...)*

Aaron: I am Aaron. You may see the relationship between yourself and God expressed through God's relationship with Christ. God did not make Christ as subject to object. As

spoken in the Creed of Nicaea, Christ was begotten by God, Christ is of God, and returns all that he is to God. There is a reciprocal relationship. Thus, as the energy of each of you is purified and returned to God, God expands. One cannot give without receiving. God is able to receive. This does not imply needy, but receptive. Needy indicates a void. Receptive indicates room for expansion. Thus, God is ever-expanding. God is in reciprocal relationship with every soul. With each bit of work done by each being to purify its own light, that light is not held onto but returned to God. This is the model of service to others. That which is returned to you is not for personal gain, but handed back to God. Please enjoy your break. That is all.

(Break.)

Aaron: (Homework.) I am Aaron. For this week, go back to watching *vinnana*—becoming, or rebirth consciousness. You cannot watch this as a lifetime to lifetime process. Watch it as a moment to moment process. What plants the seed? See a bit of irritation in yourself, the impatience in your reaction. Watch how another person bounces off that impatience, and how the seeds of the next moment, reflecting some tension between you, are planted. What solidifies self? When you are mindful enough to see the seed you're about to plant, notice—"Feeling irritation, I do not need to speak or act with impatience, I will take a few deep breaths and offer merciful awareness to the irritation, make a space for it, so I can plant a different seed." That is what I want you to watch and practice, always with gentleness to the human.

You will not be perfect at it. That's fine. Notice judgment of yourself if you feel, "I **should** be doing this better." That's just another seed. What is being planted? Through what ignorance, what delusion of an ego self, what delusion of duality is this seed formed? Through what motivation on my part is the formed seed planted? **Watch the forming of the seed and the planting of the seed, and see that you do not have to plant every seed that's formed. It is your choice.**

You might envision yourself this week with a little sack in which you can throw the distorted seeds of anger, jealousy, and greed so that you do not need to plant them. Then at the end of the day when you meditate, pull out these distorted seeds, sit them in the sunshine of your awareness and see how they may transform into clearer and more loving seeds. Are there questions?

March 18, 1993

(Aaron's opening talk did not concern anything related to the study of dependent origination, and has not been included here.

A long personal discussion about his talk and about the homework was not transcribed.)

Aaron: (Homework.) Next week we are going to talk about the next stages. You are familiar with my teaching of the process of consciousness, perception, sensation, mental formation. We have talked about sensation where you remain in neutral or move to positive or negative. There is a step in sensation where there is not necessary causality. In preparation for next week's class, I want you all to watch the following in yourselves as carefully as you can. What is the relationship between comfort/discomfort, like/dislike, and clinging/aversion? See the move from neutral to positive or negative and watch the arising of mental formation out of that positive or negative. Watch it with as much awareness as is possible. That is all.

From Barbara, for those who are reading the book and are new to these teachings: Aaron will be explaining it all through the coming weeks. In very brief summary, we don't simply move into an emotion or thought but arrive at it through a process. When one of our six senses touches an object, first there is *contact*. This is just bare sense contact, sense to sense object. We have not yet determined what it is, nor even that the contact has taken place. Seeing may be taking place, for example, but we don't yet know what we're seeing. Next is the knowing of contact, which is *consciousness*.

In order to label the object we must move back in memory to similar objects. This takes us from the bare experience of this present object and lumps this moment with all the past, related objects of our experience. We call this stage *perception*. If we stay with those memories, we have a perception based in *old mind*. If we simply move into memory to label and don't get caught in the old emotions that may accompany the memory, then *bare perception* is possible. As much as we can, it is helpful to our lives to stay in the now, in this moment, relating to this object or thought freshly, and not weighed down by old mind.

When we first know that object or experience, there is a moment when we're fully neutral about it. This phase is *sensation*, Aaron's term for "feeling." Sensation may stay in neutral or we may be pulled to positive or negative sensation. If we move away from neutral, there are stages of experience. We may move into comfort/discomfort, and still be in neutral. Like/dislike pulls us out of neutral. Now there is a sense of self. Clinging/aversion may follow, or we may notice the self in like/dislike, and come back to no-self.

These stages are hard to define because, for example, there is not necessarily clinging to comfort. The clinging is to safety, something different than the sense that experienced comfort. Comfort may simply be the next consciousness, about which we rest in neutral. The shift to clinging and aversion accompanies the move to old mind, and to ownership of and/or avoidance of our experiences.

March 18, 1993

The stage of *mental formation* is the mind state we move into in relationship to the thought, object or experience. We may experience equanimity or we may experience any of the wide range of emotions from fear or rage to bliss and wonder. This whole range of emotion is possible without the arising of clinging and aversion. The key is **ownership** or non-ownership of what arises. When we are someone having this experience, we tend to cling or push away, thus creating new adhering karma.

The best way to understand this whole process is not through the intellect but through experience. Put the words aside and **watch** the process in yourself.

March 25, 1993

Aaron: We have explored this chain up to the point of the six sense bases. These are your five physical senses and mind. First I want to offer you the next steps in the traditional scheme. Then I would like to explain my own perspective of that scheme. In the traditional scheme, once there is the six-fold sense base, and the sense object, contact is a necessary result. Thus, for there to be contact there must be the sense organ; for example the eye, and the sense object upon which the eye rests. Then there will be contact. This is obvious but we will use this distinction between sense organ and sense object further along.

In the traditional chain, from contact arises feeling, in the sense of positive, negative, neutral. Again, this is a necessary result. It is not necessary that you move from neutral to positive or negative. You may remain in neutral. But there will be feeling of one sort or another. If the feeling is one of aversion or liking, craving arises. There is not craving to obtain that object which is met with dislike, but craving to defend the self from that object, to be safe. Craving for escape. The traditional chain still calls this step craving. I believe that you can see that craving and aversion are part of one another. Those three steps in the traditional presentation are all that I wish us to consider today.

Last month we looked at *vinnana*—rebirth consciousness—in much depth. In a sense, we are now coming back to that for an even deeper look. You have heard me speak before about the leap from neutral to aversion or grasping, to like or dislike, or the staying in neutral, calling that moment of staying or movement the *active moment*. This is the moment when the seed is planted, the moment of rebirth consciousness. When we looked at this process last month, we talked about adhering and non-adhering karma. We saw how non-adhering karma grows out of absence of a separate self. Each of you watched in yourselves what solidified self and what led to dissolution of self and the clearer experience of connection. What we will do next is to come back to that with a movie camera in which the frames may be stopped so that we can take an even closer look.

I have told you that the traditional presentation of dependent origination assumes three lifetimes. We looked at the first lifetime, how ignorance and volitional formations give rise to rebirth consciousness which brings us into this lifetime with the formation of mind and body and senses and on into contact, feeling, craving. You have all heard me discuss this small segment of the entire chain before. I want us to look at this now and in the upcoming month with as much awareness as possible. What is happening in this moment? Let me first remind you this is my own presentation of this part of the chain. Please note that I move aside from traditional Buddhist labels. This is not written in the standard books, but is my own perspective which I think offers the human a clear understanding of the process.

There are the senses. The sense organ touches a sense object. If you live on the Earth plane, even if you are physically deprived of all use of your senses besides mind, the mind will still touch on external objects. You interrelate with your environment. You do not experience the results of that contact in a constant way. One who loves to swim would be delighted to see a lake on a hot day. One who fears the water will tremble at the prospect of immersion in that coolness. One sniffs a spicy curry and its mouth

waters. Another inhales that same scent and pulls away with disdain. It is obvious that some of your relationship to that which you encounter does not come from the experience of this moment but from the past, from old mind experiences. Therefore, when you meet whatever sight, sound, odor, taste, physical sensation, or thought, it is not that object itself that draws you out of neutral. Rather it is old mind conditioning.

To find some freedom from our biases, it is useful to notice that old mind conditioning as it arises. You do not need to look into every past experience you've had with mud or apple pies to know why one appeals and one does not appeal, only to register that there is, in fact, a conditioned response occurring. Just the awareness of that conditioned response helps draw you back into center.

In my own terminology, I have broken down this phase of contact into three parts. The first I call contact. This is the simple moment of seeing, hearing or whatever. The second is consciousness—mind knowing there has been contact. The third part of the experience is perception. This is where old mind is inevitably drawn in. Have you all had the visual experience of looking at something and not understanding it? You stared and tried to draw on past images: "What is this?" You wanted to label it. "What am I seeing?" Perhaps you experienced a sense of relief when it finally fit into a pattern.

I would like you to visualize with me here for a moment. You have just made a journey in a space vehicle. You sat for that journey in a comfortable but uninteresting room, no windows. Now this ship has touched down. A door ahead of you opens and through some telepathic communication you are aware that it is safe to emerge. By safe, I mean you will be able to breathe the air; you will not burn up or freeze.

Stepping to the doorway, your gaze settles on what seemed to be billowing blue, purple, and rose-colored clouds. Each is swirling like a small tornado about twenty feet high. There is the familiarity of what seems to be a solid ground surface and a space, perhaps air, above you. These small tornadoes do not settle but are constantly in motion. On the ground or what we will call the ground, is a writhing mass of seemingly millions of snakes of different sizes, yet they seem to have no head or tail but interweave and grow out of one another. There in the middle of this writhing mass is a liquid area. It would seem to be a stream of water from a higher level of the earth-type mass, falling in what might appear a very traditional waterfall and then flowing out again. This writhing snakelike mass covers everything else. And yet, you see it is possible to walk for there are creatures, not like yourselves but not so different as to be startling. There is a core of a body and appendages. They move; as they step the writhing mass on the ground separates itself to give room for the next footstep.

What do you do with this scene? I ask you to be as present in it as you can. Would you get over your squeamishness at the snakes and try to talk to the moving figures? Would you withdraw in fear of the small tornadoes? Can you see the process in yourself whereby your conditioned biases lead you to what, in this case, would be most inaccurate assumptions? I ask you to notice those biases. (*pause*) It will be reasonable to exercise caution, to put a foot gently on this seemingly solid surface to see if it offers adequate resistance to your weight, to see what these snakelike creatures do. Take a few steps out and discover that you are safe. (*pause*) Notice any arising of fear of the writhing mass at your feet. (*pause*) Notice whether the biases fade as you observe that

you are not attacked. *(pause)* And yet, for those of you with deep fear of snakes, there may still be real discomfort.

Look carefully at this writhing mass. You begin to notice thinner areas and bulbous areas and cannot make much sense of that. What next? Would you turn to the beings that somewhat mirror yourself? *(pause)* Can you again see the bias there, the conditioned response? If you simply announce your presence, with thought, with word, you would find on this plane that the intelligent voice that answered you belonged to the small tornado, that the formed beings with appendages were the second density forms of the plane.

I offer this visualization to help you see the shift from sense consciousness to perception and how much that perception draws on old mind patterns. This is important. **You can do nothing about your biases until you are aware that they exist. The first homework assignment I offer then is very simple. I would like each of you, for a few minutes a day, to spend some time with some sense object as if you had never experienced it before. See if you can differentiate the truth of that object or song or sight from your own biases about it. Really explore it. Stay with one thing through the week or explore a different object, a different sense, each day, as you choose. What happens to the experience when you bring freshness to it? What happens when you stay in this moment? The second homework assignment, to notice contact during your formal meditation, then consciousness of contact, and finally the perception of what the contact is, labeling it.**

This is the first phase then, contact, and sense consciousness and then perception. The next step, which we will explore next week, is how sensation arises. Here I have substituted the word sensation for the traditional term, "feeling," simply because of the common association that you have with the word feeling as emotion. I wish to distinguish that what I mean is not emotion but simply liking, disliking, neutral, so sensation seems a less biased term for you. For this week we will take it just this far, the three parts of contact. You will notice yourself move from the neutral of first perception into like or dislike. That's fine. Notice that. But for now, I would like your focus to be with perception. We will pause here for your break and then speak to questions. That is all.

(Break.)

Questions and discussion: *(Not transcribed.)*

April 1, 1993

Aaron: I am Aaron. Good morning to you all. I'm going to ask you to look at that today which you must be in a quiet place to really see. May we start with a few more minutes of silence. (*We meditate silently for an additional ten minutes.*)

Last week we looked at two stages of the traditional chain: contact and feeling. I converted those into my own terminology: contact, consciousness, perception, sensation. That was as far as we went. I asked to you to focus especially on the difference between consciousness and perception, to come to sense experience as freshly as you could, as if you had never before seen, heard, or touched that object. Before we go any further I would like to hear your experiences with that work.

(*Group sharing. Not transcribed.*)

Aaron: We spoke last week of perception growing out of old mind. It is almost impossible to name a thing without old mind attitudes and biases about that object arising to touch present sense consciousness. There is far less distortion when we **know** old mind is involved. The present is just seeing, just tasting, just touching. Can we ever know anything just in this moment? There may be comfort or discomfort in this moment, but the biases of old mind are never essential to this moment. With fresh seeing free of old mind bias, or aware of and transcending old mind bias, you are more able to rest in neutral, even if the perception is of comfort or discomfort.

Old mind interprets what sense consciousness touches. Old mind wants to know all about the history of this object so it feels safe. Knowing gives a sense of control. "I know this; it tastes good. I can eat it. I know that; it's soap. It will make me feel sick." With memory of the taste of soap perhaps revulsion arises. I am not suggesting that this is bad. Without this mechanism you could not survive. But with perception's move to old mind comes the shift from neutral to like or dislike, based not on what is present in this moment but on past history.

One does not need to feel aversion to soap to skillfully choose not to eat it, only to know that this is not appropriate for mouth contact. It will taste unpleasant; it will make one sick. Aversion to the idea of being forced to eat soap is NOT aversion to soap but aversion to force and unpleasant results of that force. The soap has little to do with it.

And one does not need to prevent old mind from arising. That is just more aversion—"I must NOT let this or that into my experience." Rather, when old mind arises to give bias to perception and leads one into aversion or clinging, then one needs to **KNOW** old mind is influencing perception. One needs to know, "I am experiencing aversion, not to this object, but based on old experiences of similar objects." Then one may quickly return to neutral. Perception may be almost clear of bias when one sees the bias arise immediately upon the heels of the perception, and knows that the bias reflects the associations with the particular sense consciousness and not the sense experience itself.

The more you observe these patterns, the less they pull you out of center. You become fast at recognition so there is no reactivity to the memory, just recognition that memory has occurred and that within that memory were the seeds of craving or aversion.

Please understand I am only bringing a magnifier to the process of experience. This magnifier will aid understanding exactly how craving and aversion arise so that you will be less trapped by those mind factors. I would like to hear more of your experiences. That is all.

(Group sharing not transcribed.)

Question: *(Not transcribed.)*

Aaron: It is not perception per se that leads you in the move from neutral to grasping or aversion, but the identification with old stories. It takes much practice for perception not to become linked to that move. If you notice yourself getting lost in the stories of that perception and can come back to the freshness of the experience, perception need not lead into like or dislike, then grasping or aversion. This subtlety is what I most especially want to explore with you today. **The difference is not in whether we perceive or do not perceive, but whether we perceive mindfully.** If you get lost in the story, know that you are getting lost in the story. "Getting lost" is the next experience! That is all.

(Extended group sharing.)

(Discussion of "skillful" perception/"unskillful" perception.)

Barbara: Whatever we see usually involves our **relationship** to what we see. We needn't free ourselves completely from that relationship, we need to know it exists, that this is not pure seeing. Remember that moving back into memory is not a problem in itself. Remembering can take place in this moment. Know you're remembering! The memory of old bare perception is enough to identify the fire as hot; that's very different from getting lost in the emotion laden memories of getting burned, or of resting with a loved one by a warm fire. But even if you get into those old mind memories, just know where you are! See how it filters the present experience.

Aaron: Homework. Please draw simple objects. First sit and look at the object for at least five minutes. just look at it. Then I would suggest two different processes. After looking for five minutes, put it aside and draw it as you remember. Second, after looking for five minutes continue to look as you draw it. Do it the first way and then come back to the object, so you look away and draw it, then bring it back into view and draw it.

Another interesting experiment would be to glance at it for only a few seconds and then draw it. Then look at it for five minutes, put it aside and draw it. Then bring it back and look at it while you draw it. Then compare the three drawings.

Question: Why do we move to old mind? I think I do that sometimes out of fear of the present. How do we retain freshness when "now" scares us?

Aaron: Is it *now* that scares you or your projections upon *now*, grown from old mind? Also, it is not the freshness that is the problem, but your relationship to the freshness. If there is fear of that freshness and a need to protect against being overwhelmed, one of the mechanisms by which you cope is to close off the freshness and go back into old mind patterns, to stop seeing. Again, you must simply be aware: I am closing off.

Sometimes you may skillfully choose to do that in order to deal with an overload. Only know that you are doing it.

You are smelling the fresh baked bread. Please stop here and sit for several minutes, noticing this whole chain of arising which may lead to craving the bread, or may rest in liking/comfort. That is all.

(Break.)

Aaron: *(Continuing on after break.)* I am Aaron. We are going to spend a number of weeks on this very small area: consciousness, perception, sensation, mental formation. I ask you to be patient with any confusion. We are not looking for intellectual understanding so much as seeing each moment in your experience. The question might simply be raised: what makes me reactive? Aside from simple restraint when there is uncomfortable contact, how can I work with this? Specifically, how can there be non-adhering karma in response to the catalysts of the six senses? When there is old mind, there must be "self." Then the response must include adhering karma. When old mind is seen as dictating bias and is recognized with no aversion to the fact that old mind has arisen, then there is the possibility of return to bare perception, empty of self.

I want to look at this step which the books call *feeling* and I have called *sensation*. I chose "sensation" because you in your American vocabulary equate "my feelings" with "my emotions." The word sensation is a reminder this is just the shift from neutral to positive or negative, or the staying in neutral.

The next step beyond sensation is what I have labeled mental formation. The traditional labeling calls this next step craving. We have discussed how aversion relates to craving. Craving safety and comfort, one experiences aversion to that which seems to threaten that comfort. Again, I prefer mental formations because people become confused when we say craving and what one is experiencing is strong aversion. Any mental formation that arises may be understood as an aspect of craving comfort and safety.

Now let us go back now for a closer look at sensation. I said earlier that the distortion does **not** arise out of old mind perception and mind bias entering into perception but out of **unawareness** that this is happening. When you can see the old mind's biases, then you can simply pay attention to the sense data and not be moved out of neutral. I want Barbara to relate an experience here.

(Barbara relates ... A lot of dog dirt accumulated in the yard; need to clean yard with rake and shovel; watching biases arise. Little actual smell, but revulsion at first, based fully on old mind. Revulsion soon passed.)

Aaron: I would like you to focus awareness on noticing when there is a bias that taints clear perception. Know if it's a bias grown out of old mind and not inherent in the present experience. Can you return to that smell or touch or thought and see it more clearly? What has moved you from neutral of "smelling" to dislike or to like? It doesn't matter whether it's like or dislike so far as adhering karma is concerned. If there is dislike that leads to aversion or like that leads to craving, you are pulled out of pure awareness and into this small ego self.

If you will look back on earlier work with karma, we spoke of wholesome and unwholesome karma and of adhering and non-adhering karma. As we looked at non-adhering karma we saw that there was no drawing back into this small self, that you remained centered and connected, free of the influence of the small self.

When you breath in a scent and there is the memory of dislike, "That's filthy," or "That could hurt me," then the self moves in to defend. Or if it's the smell of bread—"I want some," may arise because all the old memories of the deliciousness of fresh baked bread. Again, you feel yourself being pulled from empty perception of the higher self, of pure awareness, to the small ego self.

This is an important distinction, that **the higher or pure awareness does not have biases or preferences**. Pure awareness is very comfortable with whatever arises. The small self has those biases which have originated very naturally out of need to survive. You have to know when you see sea water boiling and red lava, "That's hot." (*This example was offered earlier today by one of the class who had recently seen volcanic lava, still red hot, flow steaming into the sea.*) There has to be a recognition of danger or you may not survive. But it does not have to move to dislike. We see then that the small ego self has a role, but it steps beyond that role. We will discuss this overstepping further in future weeks, especially as it relates to the roles of the various bodies. As awareness grows of what prompts ego to step beyond boundaries, we can train the small ego self to respond with appropriate memories that warn us of danger or tell of us of wholesome experience, without drawing in the emotional body likes and dislikes. Remember that the ego is servant, not master.

Here I come back to the importance of being aware of when you become lost in the stories of old mind perception. This is the move from mental body awareness to emotional body reaction to awareness. This point is crucial.

The physical body originates contact, "seeing." The mental body with its memory sees steam arising and says, "That's going to be hot." This is the perception of the mental body, with the emotional body uninvolved—Perception. "Seeing steam," with the recognition, "This happens when there is something hot."—Then the memories run on back, "I was burned when I was 4 years old. How it hurt!" It is at that moment of memory that you get pulled into aversion to the steam, not just caution about the steam. **You need the caution. The caution does not create adhering karma. You do not need the aversion.**

You are not being taught to cut off memories. We're not here to suppress the memory, but to learn not to be reactive to it, to begin to see with pure discernment, not old mind consciousness. What is happening here? Can we break it down further? "Seeing." Perception, "Seeing steam." Almost simultaneously the memories arise. They arise without mindfulness so you become caught in them, and you move to fear of the situation, fear of being burned, and the sensation of dislike. When there is no mindfulness of the conditions which gave rise to the fear, you think it is this present steam you fear. With "fear" we see the mental formation arise, in this case fear, aversion to the heat or even aversion to feeling aversion. That's another way it can go.

At that moment when old mind memories enter, there was a new sense contact—remembering, thinking—the mind making contact. This new contact moves in just the

same way, contact, consciousness, perception, sensation, mental formation. The perception of that mind contact was the memory of the 3 year old being scalded. You are still in neutral as you have that memory. Then you move from neutral to dislike, feeling the discomfort of that scalding. It is here that you almost simultaneously move into aversion of the present and to the memory of aversion in that past state. In fact, **it is not the present steam to which you feel aversion, but the past steam.**

This is a very complex response. I can not begin to describe it accurately in words. I can only give you clues and suggest that it is your mindful attention which will clarify it. Look at the process in meditation, perhaps with an itch. Look at it while doing some mindful chore. Stop and look. What is really here? Where does perception move out of pure awareness, the awareness of the mental body, and into the small ego self's consciousness? What pulled you back to need to protect? Can you see the feeling of threat? What happens to that feeling of threat and the reactions it engenders when you relax into it and just observe it, observe the not liking and the fear? This response has nothing to do with stepping skillfully away from the steam!

We will be spending a number of weeks on these steps. This is the focal point of our work on dependent origination. Don't expect it to be understood instantly, just watch and be patient. What moves you to anger? How does the self come into it? What moves you to any emotion?

We have spoken of the **active moment**, the moment of a shift from neutral to positive or negative, liking or disliking, or of the resting in neutral. In the past, I've simplified active moment to just that shift. Now we're going to take that much deeper, not just seeing the active moment, but seeing all the contributory factors in that moment, watching any need to protect and how fear solidifies self, watching judgment too, if that is a factor. I'm not going to enumerate the factors. This is not something that can be laid out, step 1, step 2 ... There are far too many interweaving strands. My only instruction as you work with this process is that you **let go of attempt to intellectualize and pin it down because the next experience is going to not fit what you've just pinned down! Instead, be with each experience as freshly as you can. Watch your own individual patterns. What solidifies self? What pulls awareness out of neutral and into liking or disliking? Who is liking or disliking?**

I would like you to take it just that far. We're not yet talking about mental formation. That's another step. I want you to be more focused and not spread your observation that far this week, so stop at that point. If there is reactivity, notice that, but let it go. Notice reactivity and come back to the beginning part of the process. Hold your attention there. Are there questions?

(Discussion and questions not transcribed.)

Aaron: Discernment is necessary for survival. You distort discernment into judgment because of your fears.

April 15, 1993

(We began with a long meditation and discussion of personal nature.)

Aaron: I am Aaron. My love to you all. It was my original intention to start with a discussion of last week's work to hear about your experiences. The discussion that you did begin with was very important, and I would not interfere with that talk. I do want to have an opportunity to present some new material so I'm going to reverse my original plan and speak first.

We have been talking about these steps: contact/consciousness, perception and sensation, which may involve the move from neutral to positive or negative. The next step is to look at the ways that mental formations arise. If the perception were straightforward, only one memory and emotional response, it would be easy to understand mental formation. But humans are complex, as are human emotional memories.

It is important to note that mental formation has not necessarily arisen out of contact or perception. It arises out of the sensation phase, which in itself is dependent on perception. As a simple example, if you are very, very hungry, aware of that physical sensation of hunger, and somebody places a platter full of food before you, there is sight contact, perception that this is good food, and the move from neutral to liking.

Let us then suppose that the one who had set down that plate says "Oh, I'm sorry, I made a mistake," takes that lovely plate away and sets down in its place a plate of three crackers, and hands that first plate to your neighbor. The mental formations of jealousy, grasping, clinging, greed, are likely to appear. The plate of food is not what leads most directly to the clinging, but your **relationship** to the food. And yet the clinging that appears seems to be to the plate of food.

Let us replay this. You have just finished a big meal, walked in and sat down at your friend's house, and this identical large plate of food is put before you. Moving through contact and perception, one looks into old mind condition and remembers the discomfort of overeating. With aversion to that discomfort, one has aversion to the plate of food. Once picked up and removed, and you get the crackers, there's a sense of relief. Since you had opposite reactions to the same plate of food, depending on your own hunger, or fullness, you see that it is not the contact, but your relationship at that moment, to that which you contacted.

It is easy to understand this, with such a simple example, but sometimes, the response is much more complex. Sometimes the emotional memories are varied. For that plate of food, let's substitute a chocolate or strawberry sundae, a bowl of fresh fruit, or whatever it is you truly crave. You are full as you see that plate being offered. There is an inward groaning, "Oh no, I couldn't eat another thing," and then you see what has been offered. Old mind conditioning that says: "This is my favorite food. This will bring me pleasure; it will be delicious," moves in and you are uncertain. "If I eat there will be physical discomfort, but I want to." The physical discomfort is the reality of this moment. "Feeling satiated." The wanting is the mind grasping, saying, "Yes, good, delicious." Again, this is a simple example, offered for clear illustration. Most of you would have no problem with this. You're full, it looks delicious, maybe just a taste.

Let us carry the example to something more complex. Sense contact and perception arises, perhaps seeing two dear friends arm and arm around each other. You may move from neutral into liking as you sense the warmth of their companionship, and feel your own connection, your welcome into that embrace. That move to liking, that mental formation of affection, still comes from the self, but from a whole aspect of self. The move to join them and share your own energy and love manifests wholesome, adhering karma.

Then not simultaneously, but just a blink of the eye beyond, may come the old mind experiences of rejection. Then self solidifies. Instead of movement to positive you move to negative, with the mental formations of fear that your needs may not be met, jealousy, and also confusion, because just a moment ago you felt connected. What distorted that connection? Perhaps you smiled at one and instead of returning that smile, a back was turned to you. Of course that back turned may have had nothing to do with you, but old mind enters, and sees it as rejection.

How often you go through this bewildering process in your inter-relationships with one another. There is so much pain, and the moments of joy and connection are cut short by clinging, by negative fears.

I cannot offer the most directly personal example to each of you. This acceptance/rejection and the feelings of comfort or jealousy, and anger it engenders is something to which you can all relate, even though it may not be your primary issue. Here is the opportunity to practice. The first step is to notice what is happening when you move strongly into craving or aversion, or into a bewildering see-saw between the two.

It is useful first to simply acknowledge, "Feeling stuck, feeling pain." Sit yourself down quietly and begin to watch the process through which self is solidified. I do not promise you that pain will instantly dissolve. But as soon as you see the process that has pulled you out of the moment and into old mind which uses its biases to manipulate the present in order to feel safe, then you are able to relax into the present.

When old mind is filtering the interpretation of this moment, you know that old mind is doing so. This simple act of knowing returns you to the present. It's very wonderful. You may need to do it over and over and over again. But you will find it to be a most valuable tool in avoiding reactivity and in coming back to center. When you do this often enough, you start to find a balance between the ultimate reality that you are always safe and the apparent reality of presumed danger. You begin to respond more to ultimate reality, to simply allow apparent reality to drift by like a cloud on an otherwise clear day.

You begin to see the small ego self that frantically struggles to be safe. That self interprets and reinterprets the received sense data, rushing around, trying to be in control. But you cannot always maintain control.

Who knows what that turning of the back means. Is there a part of you that wished it to be rejection, as well as the part that wants acceptance? Look carefully there. See this frantic being struggling to maintain safety. Sometimes what seems to be safe is not the skillful choice. We have used an example of unwholesome co-dependence. A is abusing B. B allows the abuse because it lets B feel valued by A who apparently seeks

and values a repository for its anger. Feeling valued is of overriding importance to B and pre-empts not being abused. B needs to feel valued. That feels safe.

In the example of meeting people on the street, perhaps if B invites A's rejection, that also allows B to feel valued, in a backward way, by A who needs to feel rejecting and superior. You do get into all of these complex patterns. My dear ones, as you watch these patterns in yourselves over and over you come to the point where you can only smile at yourself.

When one of Barbara's children was very small, he liked to crayon on the television screen. He was told "No," and asked to scrub it off. But he kept doing it. At first Barbara was moved to anger, impatience with this young one and his disdain at this learning. But finally she began to laugh each time she saw it. For whatever pull, he simply could not resist this behavior. Yes, it was unskillful, but he was caught in it. It is precisely that ability to see the patterns with a smile, instead of with harsh judgment which allows you finally to relinquish those patterns. You do not surrender the need to feel safe, but begin to understand that safety is not what you had imagined it to be. Rather, safety is being present in this moment, with as open heart as is possible.

It is here that you begin to balance relative and ultimate. Returning to the above example of seeming rejection and perhaps an experience of feeling unworthy, one may ask, "In this moment am I unworthy?" You see that all that is happening is someone has turned their back. The interpretation of "unworthy" is all old mind.

At first you may say, "Aha, then I'm worthy!" Eventually you come to know there never was "worthy" or "unworthy." They are meaningless terms you invented to explain your experiences. In the moment in which they arose, there was never worthy or unworthy—joy and pain perhaps, but never worthy/unworthy. With the clear seeing of how that duality was created, you come back to your true self, back to pure awareness, back to innate perfection of being. It is a wonderful moment of clear seeing. Simply rest there!

Next week we will speak more specifically about the process of movement through contact, perception, sensation, mental formation. **(Homework.) Two weeks ago I had asked you to focus on the shift, contact to perception. Is it bare perception or does the emotional body join in with its old stories? Could you see the old biases which tinted the reality of this moment? Now I ask you to carry that one small step further. Notice how that false tint leads you into the leap to aversion or craving.**

When you see that plate of food, and old mind or present hunger leads to craving or aversion, ask yourself to return to just you, this moment, and a plate of food. Can you see that food without the filters of old mind? When you do, what happens to craving or aversion? Can you see the friends hand in hand and experience the turned back with awareness of how old mind is conditioning interpretation? What happens to the solidified self as you look in that way? I would ask you to note this as accurately as you can. I know that the business of your life prevents you from doing this in each moment that arises. But as often as you can each day, stop and look.

Questions and last week's homework: (Aaron: "Did you draw? Were you able to see things just as they are, and to notice the old mind bias in the way that you saw that cup or flower or vase?" We share drawings.)

Question: (*About today's lecture.*) Once you move to negative, do you necessarily move to aversion? What is the difference between aversion and negative sensation?

Aaron: Negative sensation does not necessarily create aversion. And aversion is just aversion! Clearly noted, it self-releases, in the words of one teaching system, "self-liberates," bringing you back to pure awareness. Next class we will talk about the move to aversion **becoming** the next mind consciousness, versus the move to aversion and mindfulness about that move **creating** the next mind consciousness. This is like the story of B'rer Rabbit and the Tar Baby. We keep getting more stuck, the more we fight.

April 22, 1993

(We began with 15 minutes of silent meditation.)

Aaron: I am Aaron. Good morning, and my love to you all. I want to start today as I had intended to start last week, hearing from you about what you had seen arising in this segment of the chain from contact to mental formation. Have you been able to see the shift from neutral to liking or disliking? Have you been able to see the old mind conditions which influenced that shift? What happened when that conditioning was observed? Did you stay in like/dislike? Did you come back to neutral? What was observed? When you stayed in like or dislike, could you observe any arising of mental formation out of that sensation? Who was observing? Was there a self there in like or dislike? If observing old mind led to return to neutral, did mental formation still arise? Was there a self in mental formation? If the mental formation led to action, word, or thought, did those acts, words and thoughts plant a seed for adhering or non-adhering karma? Were you able to observe the planting of that seed?

Since each act, word and thought has multiple motivation, you will rarely have seen one that was entirely pure, but perhaps you will have seen more space and less reactivity, perhaps not. I would find it valuable for you to share with me and one another. Then we will look deeper at this whole segment of the chain. That is all.

Discussion: *(Old Mind concept very useful, for example, in chiropractic care for bad back—fear arising, noting this, moving back to neutral. Useful to see the old mind—difference between “bad” touch and “good.” Other examples. Therapist seeing this movement in clients, nurse seeing it in patients. Leads to more empathy. Discussion of seeing movement in selves and coming “home.” Talking about the last part of Aaron’s talk last week, the way the thought or emotion “self-liberates,” and one returns to clarity. Sharing our experiences of that shift and resting in pure awareness.)*

Barbara: Aaron has often said there are two parts: first, seeing the old mind patterns and giving ourselves permission to experience that old fear, and second, starting to separate the emotional body and the mental body where they have become entwined. When the mental body comes into clear seeing, then we know, “I don’t have to get caught.” We rest in that pure awareness. There’s so much freedom in that. Then we see the habitual aspect of the getting caught and can stop holding those habits.

Aaron: One might liken this to a situation in which you have a bog behind your house. Each time you go out you pull on knee high boots. You become used to the effort of stepping into calf deep mud, pulling the foot out, moving it and stepping back into the mud—a painstaking walking process. As you work with the bog of old mind, the sun of your clear perception dries the mud. For some time after the mud is gone, you may cling to your boots and that high stepping gait that was previously necessary. Each time you walk, you lift your feet to clear them of the now non-existent mud. If you pay attention, you may remind yourself, I don’t have to walk that way anymore. The boots are the last to go—a final act of freedom, taking them off and putting them aside.

We will talk more today about this connection between the bodies. We get increasingly complex. We need to take smaller and smaller bites so the concept does not run ahead of experience.

Look not only at where we shift from neutral, but why. Blaming is a way to maintain control. "If I can pinpoint what's going wrong, then I can fix it and stay safe." We must take care not to abuse these teachings in this way. It needs to be a deeper look, with the question, "How did fear arise?" not "Where can I lay blame?" There must be willingness to let go of barriers and feel vulnerable. Last night I gave a talk about feeling helpless and whining as ways of maintaining barriers. **One must ask, "What is the prime motivation here; to bring myself back to safety, or take the risk of discovering deeper truth?"** When you understand more of this, you will not misuse the practice to deepen the illusion of separate self.

C: (*Talking about jealousy, past lives and old mind in 3-way relationship.*) It feels like I'm such a failure when I keep recognizing old mind at work when I'm trying to create new, more loving response. I see how it arises but feel stuck in it. Is it karma that keeps locking me into the same misunderstandings?

Aaron: This is a good time to move deeper into karma. We have spoken of karma as the planting of a seed. If you planted just one seed, it would be quite simple. You plant a seed for sweet fruit and just sit back and watch. Add water, sunlight, fertilizer and watch the tree grow and blossom. What we are more realistically doing is taking an area of soil the size of this room. In places the ground has been tilled, the soil turned and smooth. In places there are rocks and weeds. Here there is a steep hill; beyond, it's level. You are not planting one seed but thousands, so here you come, two handfuls of seed thrown to the wind.

You have all been faced with a situation in your garden where a small plant is emerging, still very fragile, and immediately adjacent, gripping the soil tenaciously, is a weed. You can't pull it out by the roots without uprooting your small plant. You can be aware of its presence, perhaps snip it out at ground level, but it will grow again. Ultimately it must be uprooted. Nurture the beautiful plant that bears sweet fruit. Keep snipping. Skillfully, keep that weed under control, and nurture the fragile sprout which grows sweet fruit. When the sprout becomes strong and full, you will no longer have to uproot the weed. The strength of the sweet plant will have led that weed to dissolve.

Now remember, this is happening in a garden with not just those two plants, but thousands. Old mind conditioning cannot be simplified. For example, the child who was abused and hated that abuse learned fear and hatred because of the violation of its physical body. That is one seed. The child might have learned that it was valued when it completely subjugated its own need to another. In other words, it was valued as the receptacle for abuse, was loved when it was submissive and non-argumentative. When a situation arises which calls that abuse to mind, both sensations will move simultaneously through the now adult child. One is anger, desire to protect, even perhaps desire to flee the body, with accompanying rage and fear. The other, however distorted it may seem, will be the thought, "Here is an opportunity to feel valued even if only as that upon which others may wipe their muddy feet."

That's only two simultaneous catalysts. What happens in actuality is that the being may be even more confused, with a multitude of motivations and memories.

We learn to sort this out, to see the old mind conditioning that has lead not to just one pattern, but to an interwoven tapestry with strands of many patterns. One begins to see which are skillful, which are not. One begins to see the distortion out of which reaction arose.

Another part of this tapestry is the interweaving between physical, emotional, mental and spiritual bodies. The pure mental body is pure thought. It has no preferences. It is simply that aspect of mind capable of association untainted by attachment or aversion, and capable of both abstract and concrete thought. This pure mental body can look at the stories of the emotional and physical body, and see the attachments and aversion that have arisen. Memory process can note the aversions and stay in neutral.

Consciousness is aware that the mental body differentiates "I" in order to express itself but this "I" is understood as a tool, a useful manifestation of illusion. It has no solidity to it. For example, I, Aaron, must have a sense of self in order to access memories and choose the most useful information to share. Simultaneously I know that this self is simply something held in intactness as a useful tool. When it ceases being a useful tool, it will be released.

Buddhist teaching speaks of taking a raft to the farther shore of understanding. Your religious traditions and teachings may be such a raft. Your spiritual practices are such a raft, as is the Dharma itself ... Once you have crossed you do not carry the raft on your back. You leave it on the shore. The self, the illusion of self, and the mental body are such rafts. The mental body knows that the self is a useful tool. The mental body knows that even the mental body is part of that tool. When the being is ready to move into seventh density, that tool, too, is relinquished. It serves no more purpose.

There is confusion because we do not clearly distinguish what is the proper content of the mental body and what belongs to the emotional body. Anger, jealousy, greed, impatience, these are of the emotional body. Awareness that one is experiencing this or that is of the mental body.

What happens is that the ego wants to maintain itself at all costs. It snares the mental body into this maintenance, so the mental body moves to protect "I" as if it were real, rather than simply observing this illusion of separate self.

You have heard me speak of the frequency vibration of the light body. What follows is a gross oversimplification. Each of the four bodies has its own quasi-independent frequency vibration. In a positively polarized being, the spirit body has the highest vibration. The physical body, the lowest. Spirit body aspires to bring the four strands into harmony. When the emotional body is based on a foundation of fear, it resists that pull to harmony, wanting instead to maintain its present illusion of separation and safe reverberation.

This is why one must work with gentleness. The more the mental/spirit body judges the emotional or physical body, shames it with "should" or "shouldn't," the more it moves into unwholesome co-dependent patterns with those lower bodies. This judgment is precisely what the emotional body may be after. It continues the pattern as it has known it, attempting to reconfirm self, attempting to feel safe. When its fears are greeted with kindness, it is drawn into the process of relinquishment of fear, the process

of growth and of greater harmony to the whole. The physical body follows much the same pattern, but is slower to change. We will speak of this in more depth in the future when we begin to work with light and energy.

When you look at your old and unskillful patterns, you may clearly see the old mind conditioning shaped by the fears of what has happened to you in the past. You see that awareness of what created pain, and the desire, however unskillful or deluded it seems, to recreate that pain are both within you. You see how the semblance of safety lies within the dreaded pain. Traditional psychotherapy calls this patterning "repetition compulsion."

You cannot move past old mind conditioning with the statement, "I know what caused it; now I should let it go." No matter how much you retrain yourself, you are like one addicted. When the substance is brought around again, there's craving, even years later. One must observe that while the mental body has moved past that addiction and the emotional body has healed, there is still scar tissue, so to speak. This is scar tissue on the light body. It is illusion but you continue to react as if it were real. It must always be treated with love. Yes, eventually that scar tissue will dissolve, but it happens very slowly. Next year we will begin to look at ways to work with that scar material. For now, only notice and allow it to dissolve as it will, in the clear light of deepening awareness.

For some weeks we have been focusing on the process of watching movement into this active moment where old mind conditioning pulls mind out of neutral. We have needed to focus awareness on this process to understand it. Over the long run, skillful work with old mind conditioning is not just with mindfulness. We must recognize the addictive quality of fear. There must be a balance of nurturing that inner garden, creating skillful, joyful, peaceful spaces in which the being finds itself reverberating to a new note of harmony. Yes it is still a habit, albeit a more skillful habit. There is still adhering karma from an illusion of a self that nurtures. Eventually that, too, will go. For now, you might think of it as similar to a nicotine patch. You do not continue to provide fear for the emotional body to reattach to, but offer a replacement for fear which becomes so profound in the experience that the emotional body finally relinquishes its addiction to fear and comes into harmony with the spirit body. Think of it as a fear patch, its content being lovingkindness, self-nurturing, joy and peace.

Each time you move into that nurturing and relinquish attachment to the fear vibration, you come to a deeper sense of knowing your true self, the aspect of you that is empty of self, and fearless. Someday you will find that this true self becomes your deepest truth and delusion is seen clearly for what it is.

Are there questions?

D: Does there continue to be the forming of adhering karma while you're learning to be more skillful but still digress occasionally? What if I see the fear and don't react, but there's still someone not reacting? What if I could completely remove fear?

Aaron: I am Aaron. Yes, there is still adhering karma. This is a fear patch, not radical surgery which has cut out all fear and transplanted only total openness. It works gradually with your own effort and intention, which constantly change. It grows out of your free will. The radical surgery could only be done at the hands of another. While, if

such were possible, it might create complete purity of the past and on into this moment, in the first moment after the surgery when you noticed pain there would be aversion to pain, anger at the pain and the cycle would begin again. The fear patch provides a gradual weaning from the old addictions of fear.

C: I think you're saying that once we have a shift in mental body we begin the process of reprogramming emotional body. I assume that all of the work of being kind to ourselves and prayer and meditation are part of the reprogramming process. Is there a way of focusing attention particularly on emotional body reprogramming or do they happen simultaneously?

Aaron: I am Aaron. If the focus is on finding what is "wrong" with the self, getting rid of this or that, even if there is deep aspiration to purify and harmonize one's energy, that getting rid of will become the overriding message. It is part of this ongoing dialogue with fear. Here you are bargaining with fear, "If I get rid of this or that, then I'll be okay, then I'll be safe." Then action to "improve" the self becomes just another barricade that you hide behind. Meditation and prayer can be forms the barrier takes.

One must always watch what is the overriding focus: to find safety or to allow the self to become increasingly undefended? Is the intention to allow the delusion of separate self to dissolve, to come back into wholeness with all that is? When the latter is the overriding focus, meditation and prayer serve very differently no longer as barriers to connection, or places behind which one may stay safe, but as path to connection. Do you understand?

(Barbara shares a story about snorkeling, meeting with a shark, and moving into terror. Old mind! She also shares a spider story—a spider on her sweater that was really a burr. Old mind! We discuss how to work with such experience in the ways Aaron has talked of above, noting the arising of old mind, seeing any desire to stay in that place where fear is center, and then not "getting rid of" fear but allowing it to dissolve, replacing it, so to speak.)

Aaron: Homework. When fear arises this week, I want you to do two things. First, work with it as we have been practicing, seeing how it arises, seeing the old mind and returning to bare perception. Also please ask yourself, is there any attachment, at any level, to that fear. What if I were not afraid? What might I be experiencing? That is all.

April 25, 1993, Special Session

Aaron: I am Aaron. My love to you. What I wish to consider today is the whole question of ultimate reality, the paths we seem to take to understanding of ultimate reality and the fact that once we rest in ultimate reality, we know that we have never been anywhere else. While I have had many, many centuries to understand this, I have never before attempted to frame it in conceptual thought and to tie loose ends together. Rather than focusing my effort on a talk with smooth transitions, I wish to focus my effort on clear elucidation of the various compartments of this one whole understanding. Perhaps at the end I shall indulge in some cut and paste editing for smoother transitions. (*Aaron did not do this; we have left the talk exactly as he presented it.*)

There are many paths to understanding your true nature. I have spoken of the work on this plane being to move past reactivity to the emotional body. This is a "chicken or the egg" question. When there is no delusion of solid self, there is no reactivity. From that free space of no reactivity there is no illusion of solid self. How we grow into these awarenesses is the work of various spiritual disciplines. These are merely many paths to the same end.

We have seen that there is no adhering karma when word, act, or thought grows from a place that is empty of self. We have also seen how difficult it is to stay in that place. You may meditate for hours resting in a space of deep egolessness. You emerge from your sitting, walk out the door, someone slaps your face or calls you a name and self returns, anger arises. How do we continue to rest in the higher awareness in the face of the many ego-solidifying catalysts of daily life?

To add further complexity to the situation, when there is one trying to remain egoless, you are already not egoless. Yet there must be effort. Who makes the effort? How is it offered?

There are many paths to understanding of ultimate reality and to the ability to rest in that ultimate reality and live from it. You are each unique and the most useful path for one is not helpful to another. Some schools of Zen, through the use of the koan, try to guide you into an instant of clear seeing of who you are. After that first enlightenment experience the work becomes paying attention to how ego again arises, watching it arise and reminding yourself of what is illusion, what is reality.

Vipassana takes a somewhat different path: the moment to moment penetrating awareness of the arising and dissolution of all phenomena, including the illusion of self. "Self" is observed. A deeper level of being beyond the small self is experienced. Again, we recognize the places where we act from emptiness of self and how self arises. It is a similar path to Zen, simply the focus is different. Here we use the perceived self as the grounds for our exploration.

You know that I have faith in this path. It is not for all beings but, for those to whose way of being it appeals, it is a viable path. Furthermore, it is a path in which increasing understanding leads to increasing freedom and skillful living, even when there is not yet ultimate freedom. Simply put, it is a path which reduces suffering.

Vipassana does have its difficulties though. The practice of Vipassana begins where most practitioners are, which is deep within the illusion of duality. We, as subject, observe object. Even the breath may become an object. Here is the difficulty. When conscious mind "I" observes the breath, can "I" ever be fully in the experience of the breath rather than with the concept of the breath? The same question is valid regardless of the object, be it a cup, a tree, a fellow human, or one's joy or anger. The mind itself is limited. As long as mind is observing, there is a subject observing object. If there is subjective mind, old mind biases may arise. This locks us into the small-self mind, as differentiated from "big mind." Either way, there is still an illusion of duality.

Vipassana teaching can talk about transcending that delusion; the skilled meditation master can offer guidance. Other systems may offer other approaches. But ultimately, each being must find clarity for him/her self. So there is no "best way" to introduce non-dual awareness. But it CAN be introduced.

Before proceeding, let me offer some further foundation. There are specific words for various types of consciousness. Rather than attempt these Pali words, let us simplify and generalize a bit. Let us simply call the observer, "small mind" and that which arises as small mind's senses touch on sense object, let us call that "consciousness." Because the *skandhas* are a manifestation of ignorance and rebirth consciousness, the *skandhas* can never be free of self. This does not imply that there cannot be pure seeing, pure hearing, pure insight; but these arise from a different level.

The work that I have done with the class begins to allow the distinction between sense consciousness as being fully in this moment with no old mind bias, and sense consciousness which moves into old mind bias. **Sense consciousness with no old mind bias does not grow out of the skandhas as we have come to know them, arisen through ignorance as delusion of self. Rather, this pure sense consciousness that does not move into old mind comes from what I would call pure awareness. Seeing is happening. There is no one seeing. Touching is happening. There is no one touching.**

It must first be understood that this distinction exists, of consciousness and pure awareness. As you watch the shift from pure awareness, pure perception, into old mind bias, into liking or disliking, and on into mental formation, certain understandings begin to gel. You understand that perception can momentarily be free of old mind bias. You see this self solidify and dissolve over and over and over. Here is where effort enters. You ask yourself to work skillfully with your fear.

In the traditional Buddhist path, one has taken certain vows, agreed to live by precepts of non-harm and service to all beings. These vows serve as a foundation through which right effort flows. They are a reminder when fear arises, "I will not become a slave to my fear and thereby offer reactivity which deepens suffering." We work here without the formality of these vows, but with the supposed intention of students to offer non-harm at all times. Because I know each of you well, it is an adequate foundation.

So we see self solidify and dissolve. We become aware that there are moments of clear seeing. With practice you begin to dwell more continually in the moment, pure being in the experience of this moment, rather than in the concept which draws you out of the moment and into old mind. At those times of pure awareness, pure being, you are free. At those times you are enlightened. Adhering karma must grow from the illusion of self.

In pure being there is no self. Thus, there is only non-adhering karma, nothing to plant seeds for rebirth.

Here is another place where Vipassana practice is limited. Traditional practice asks that we note even those times of egolessness and the states of bliss and connection which accompany egolessness. As soon as you note, you return to duality, observer, subject-object. Here is where I deviate from traditional Vipassana teaching. Yes, there must be skillful noting if there is attachment to bliss or connectedness. Liking does not necessitate attachment. Liking is not synonymous with attachment. **Liking is a contributory condition to attachment and craving. Craving can not arise without liking or disliking. Craving cannot arise when you remain in neutral. But the move to like/dislike does not necessitate the arising of craving.**

For craving to arise there must be both liking and fear. When that fear is noted and attended to so it dissolves, you are back with the bliss, liking the bliss, liking the state of dissolution of ego, but with no attachment to maintaining it. Can you see that as soon as there is desire to maintain it you're back to duality, a self desiring to maintain?

I deviate from traditional Vipassana instruction here, at this place where we begin to notice those glimmers of pure mind. Instead of observing, we simply rest in them. This is it! There is no place to go. This is the ultimate being-ness: nothing to do, no doing. Through various training methods, which I have begun to teach the class but will not elucidate here, we rest in that place of clarity until something pulls us out. One need only be awakened to the reality of that Pure Mind. Nothing to attain, just resting in what has always been there.

The effect on the experiencing human is this: if you were walking on a very rocky and rutted path high up on a mountain with a sheer slope dropping off, your perspective would be limited to each step, maintaining safety. You would be "doing." Resting in those moments of pure awareness is like being swooped up on the back of a giant bird. You lay there and see the whole path and then you move further out, expand outward, and the path itself becomes but a hairline in the mountains. Expand outward, the mountains become but a hairline in the continent. The continent, a small bit of the Earth. Outward. The Earth, one shining spot in this galaxy. And outward again. There is simultaneously the entire universe and this rock which must be carefully stepped over. **One does not leave relative reality to experience ultimate reality. One observes that relative reality is a part of ultimate reality. But just a small part!**

This combined awareness is what we are approaching. The first step to this awareness is cultivating those moments of pure awareness, learning to distinguish old mind perception from in-the-moment experience. So this learning is where our class is now. But **this learning is only one step** on the path toward clear awareness of our non-dual nature, of living from that non-dual perspective.

I have guided Barbara to an experience of standing astride a threshold. On one side, one foot rests in relative reality. That part of you is busy doing, observing, being mindful, using self-restraint when necessary so as not to harm. The other foot rests in ultimate reality in which there is nothing to attain, nothing to be gotten rid of, nothing to do, only pure awareness. It is here that the breath breathes itself, while on the other side we are busy observing the inhalation and the exhalation.

Most humans live in relative reality. If they practice a spiritual discipline there are likely to have been glimpses of ultimate reality. But there is a sense of an infinite wall separating these two experiences, as if you stood at such a real doorway and there was a solid barrier, infinite, between the right hand and the left hand. Our work with dependent origination is to familiarize one with the real existence of the ultimate reality side. Only after ultimate reality is not just glimpsed but rested in and taken as truth may one begin to truly live from that space.

This infinite barrier has an interesting aspect: it is only experienced as barrier from the relative reality side. When you shift enough away from conceptual mind and into pure mind that you are able to turn and look at this barrier from pure mind, you see it doesn't exist. It is total illusion created by the fearful solidified self of relative reality. The self thinks it's busy patching this wall. When you shift to look from the other side, the self's patches are transparent, there's nothing there. It is at this phase that you truly understand no duality: "Form is emptiness, emptiness is form." Darkness and the most brilliant light merge in dawn and in dusk. They are a part of each other.

I emphasize that your work is not to *attain* this view from the ultimate reality side of the threshold, but to continue to penetrate the arising of illusion, to continue to strip away the layers of ego, until you allow yourself to be where you have always been. You are not striving to become enlightened, you are allowing yourself to experience your natural enlightenment. It is a wonderful process through which you pass. That is all.

Question: Could Aaron give a brief description of the Christian path as he did with Zen and Vipassana?

Aaron: I am Aaron. I can speak to this, but not briefly. This is a path of opening the heart and allowing that open heart to lead you past ego and the defilements manifest by ego. It is a path of immersing yourself so deeply in God's light and love that that light and the accompanying grace of that light literally burn away the shadow side of the self. What emerges is the heart that knows its deepest connection with all that is: the Christ consciousness.

Both Zen and Vipassana practice, each in their own ways, lead one to transcend movement from ego by deepening awareness of the arising of ego. The Christian path leads one to transcend ego by deepening awareness of God and of love. As one comes to rest in that truth, ego becomes known as merely the shadowy substance of fear. It has no solidity; it falls away. This is vast oversimplification. It is a question we could perhaps dwell on at length at another time, speaking in depth about different spiritual paths.

Question: You spoke of "various training methods" to learn to live from that space of "pure awareness" and said you wouldn't list them here. Will you be teaching more of them to us?

Aaron: Yes, but not at this time. First is to introduce you to this Pure Mind, which we do continually. Then is the deeper recognition of that space and the practices to stabilize it. Until it is stable we can go no further.

Early April through May 16, 1993

Private Sessions

Aaron, Barbara and transcriber (K)

(This was not a formal talk but a series of conversations between Aaron and Barbara concerning the material to be presented in future classes and a follow up on that material. Barbara's questions are not all included, since Aaron speaks to them without Barbara's voicing them.)

Aaron: I would speak first of the two ways we use the word "mind." What is mind?

In Vipassana we practice **with** discerning mind—knowing, labeling, using mind as a tool—until we reach that place of ego dissolution where pure awareness transcends the mind expressing small self. Here we see the two aspects of mind: the ego mind that filters through the lens of self, and big mind which transcends all notion of separate self. Tibetan teaching uses the word *Rigpa* which is useful for our purposes. I have used this word already with the class. When we use this term we mean that aspect of mind which is pure awareness, and thereby perceives truth as absence of all duality. It may be thought of as the opposite of *moha*, although it includes *moha*. Since there is no duality in *Rigpa*, it is not just mind, but the totality of all that is, the energy in which mind rests as well as the mind itself.

For the other use of "mind," let us use the term "ego mind." I do not mean ego here in a negative sense, such as "He is egotistical," only that there is notion of self in this mind. It is entrenched in the delusion of duality, and thus perceives an other and a separate self, thus, ego. There is nothing negative about ego mind in itself. It is a useful tool for survival in the world. The infant must begin to discern the self as separate from the mother, for practical reasons. "Ego" has negative connotations because ego mind leads one to act as if one were separate, which may initiate fear, selfishness, and other such characteristics, often termed "defilements." We must differentiate the experience of ego mind from reaction to the experience.

In fact these minds may work together. The watching of the arising of phenomena presupposes a watcher. As one practices, one sees "self" doing this observing. Meditation *practice*, by its very name, implies a doer, one to practice, one to be mindful. It employs the mental body along side the spirit body.

When you are mindful, a higher perspective watches the watcher, sees with pure mind that small mind is separating into subject/object. It begins to see the process by which small mind works to control and to understand, and that this duality is an artificial construct created for convenience, safety or to penetrate to understanding. When one knows one is separating into subject and object, this knowing is the path to non-separation.

Eventually the dual mind falls away. Big mind is the pure spirit body, pure awareness with no **one** to be aware. Not until you **know** you are dwelling in the illusion of self and separation can you shift into big mind perspective which sees the separating without

identifying with it. It is only then that self becomes a useful tool, to be employed, then laid aside.

Here is where you find the balance between wide view and relative reality. You stand on a threshold with a foot on each side. With clear seeing, you know it is only a door frame. There is no wall dividing ultimate and relative reality. It simply becomes useful to understand that the illusion of relative reality is another tool, to be employed where useful. You dwell in Ultimate reality but must live in a world of relative reality. You balance between them, never mistaking relative reality for anything but the tool.

You use a screwdriver when you want to tighten a screw. You are not the screwdriver. Your hand holds the screwdriver. You know it is a tool. When you wish to transcend small ego self and experience true being, you use meditation practice as a tool. You use a watcher as a tool.

And yet this analogy is not quite accurate. Meditation is the tool and also the end. Meditation is most accurately a state of being, not an action. We use the techniques of practice to arrive in a space of meditation, at which point we know there is nowhere to go. There was never anywhere to go, only to arrive where you have always been. In this space you are not aware, but are awareness. **Being** aware is freedom, not **doing** awareness. I do not wish to become confusing. No accurate analogy can be offered. The tool is put down when the screw is tight. There is no longer separation between the parts. The raft is left on the far shore. Ego mind with delusion of a self who practices is released to deeper truth.

It is this deeper truth of which I wish to speak, and the ways we may arrive at that truth, at that resting place which is non-dual awareness, Ultimate Reality, or call it what you will. As I have just said, meditation practice is a tool to help remove the obstacles to pure awareness so you may enter this natural state. Thus, meditation is not a path to achievement. How can you gain what you already have? Rather, it is a path to releasing that which blocks pure awareness.

Vipassana meditation encourages the yogi to watch each moment with mindfulness, yet one can watch this forever and not find freedom if one continues with the misunderstanding that one is going to gain something that's not already present, through one's practice to move into some altered state in which there is liberation. Rather, **at this further stage of the path, the focus of deepening practice needs to be the growing awareness of the simultaneously present pure mind which has always been hidden by the clouds of delusion.**

We have been speaking of dependent origination and the "contact/feeling/craving" steps of the chain. I want to break down the process further, probably over several weeks of class. We start with contact which is clear—sense touching sense object and resulting in sense consciousness. As we have discussed, contact has a necessary conditional connection with the existence of mind/body—of *nama-rupa*, and of the sixfold sense base. Once there is the sixfold sense base, there is necessarily contact, even if the contact is of "void." Once there is contact there is necessarily consciousness. We have investigated these relationships which are of necessary conditionality or of necessary reciprocal conditionality. Now we come to those relationships of contributory or support conditionality where the chain may be broken.

“Contact” has several parts. Contact and consciousness are not synonymous. Consciousness lies within contact. The relationship between consciousness and contact technically would be called a necessary non-reciprocal, contiguous conditionality, which is a fancy way of saying that consciousness necessarily overlaps contact. These are the natural unfolding of sense upon sense object. Remember, mind is also a sense. One of its objects is awareness of the contact of the physical senses. Consciousness does NOT cease when contact ceases; it becomes conscious of lack of sense contact.

Do you remember *proximate* and *contiguous*? Proximate lies adjacent to; contiguous overlaps. These are not sequential time relationships but space relationships. The texts mention these 24 types of conditions and, as I have previously stated, to avoid intellectual ensnarements we will not define them unless there is reason to do so. I mention this term only to remind you that these relationships exist. We will come back to why these specific ones are important here.

Contact is the bare touch of sense to object; consciousness is the mind’s knowing there has been contact, even if there is as yet no perception of what that contact is. Initial consciousness is always with bare perception. Once there is consciousness, we move to perception, which begins our relationship with the object. In contact there is no “relationship,” and no “self” to relate. This is subtle. Can you see the shift?

At the moment of transition from consciousness to perception, there is always bare perception, even if that perception is of “don’t know.” Old mind moves in later, perhaps only a fraction of a second, but there is always a moment of pure perception before old mind enters. These steps from contact to consciousness to bare perception are very subtle. It is not useful to **attempt** to distinguish. Such attempt pulls in a self and is detrimental to this stage of meditation. Distinguishing will arise naturally during moments of intense mindfulness.

When one stays in bare perception there is never a shift in sensation from neutral to like or dislike. There may be comfort or discomfort, even awareness that it is skillful to move away if the discomfort is strong. Discomfort and dislike are **not** synonymous. Dislike implies a self to do that disliking and a separate object to be disliked. In bare perception there is no self or other, and thus, no dislike.

It is not useful to ask which comes first, a sense of self, a sense of fear or the arising of old mind bias, whether these arise simultaneously or alternate. This is not the same issue as you addressed last year with the simultaneous or alternate arising of fear and compassion. As you noted, it was useful to distinguish. Here it is not useful. Please look at this for yourself to understand why I say it is not useful.

(Barbara: As I looked at this, I see that both fear and old mind bias grow out of moha. When there is no self, both mind states are impossible. Each is contributory to the other when there is self. Each contribute to the shift that allows the delusion of self. When one ceases, the others necessarily cease.)

When one moves from bare perception to old mind, **then** it is vital to notice that shift. There is already self for old mind to be present. It is also important to note any judgment appearing as aversion. The aversion to old mind entering is not old mind

entering. The more precise you are, the less you will get stuck, the faster the self dissolves and you re-enter bare perception.

Continuing, May, 1993

Aaron: I am Aaron. What we are attempting here is to delineate some of the possible shifts from pure awareness into self and back in order to better understand the arising of unwholesome mental formations. When consciousness moves through bare perception to sensation, sensation stays in neutral regardless of whether there is comfort or discomfort. Then the mental formations of separation cannot arise. Please note that while I speak here of unwholesome mental formations, even those mental formations which we would consider wholesome—lovingkindness, patience, compassion—are a source of adhering karma if there is a self experiencing as subject to object. We will return to this idea. Also remember that there are multiple motivations. There is no adhering karma in the experience of patience, but there is adhering karma in being the patient one. What adheres is simply the delusion of self.

Let us look closer at the perception/sensation stage. Touch—contact—hand to hot object. Bare perception: knowing, "Feeling heat." Thus far, sensation is neutral. There is no mental formation, no aversion or craving. The mind sense observes: "discomfort." That is the next consciousness: discomfort. It is not just the mind. The nerve endings experience pain and the perception is: "Knowing burning." If there is bare perception of pain, we remain in neutral. There's no need to hate the pain in order to skillfully withdraw the hand. The dislike is a product of old mind. Discomfort, or even severe pain, is in the present moment.

To understand this process, one must distinguish between the first consciousness and perception, feeling heat, and the second one, feeling pain. One can see the same process if one is accosted by an angry being. The original consciousness is seeing, hearing or feeling—seeing the angry face, hearing the angry voice, feeling the angry energy. Perception, bare perception, takes this multitude of contacts and it knows it is in the presence of anger. If no old mind bias arises, awareness stays in neutral. There is no self to like or dislike. The response is as skillful and empty of self as the drawing away of the hand from heat—compassionate, non-judgmental response that also does not need to become involved with or victim of the other's anger.

If discomfort arises about the anger it need not lead to dislike. The next consciousness and perception are of feeling pain. Just as there is physical pain to the nerves when feeling something very hot, there is real emotional pain, real pain to the energy body. I might suggest an image: energy nerve endings. This is not old mind. You might think of the body as having energy body nerve endings just as it has physical nerve endings. Bare perception experiences pain. It is erroneous to assume that this is just old mind. It is judgmental to the self to say, "I should not feel pain at his anger." You would not say, "I should not feel pain" in the physical nerve endings when you touch the hot stove. This misunderstanding causes much confusion.

When you understand that there is very natural discomfort when touching angry energy, you can more easily stay with bare perception of discomfort, remain neutral about discomfort—no like or dislike, no self—and act skillfully. There is a sense of knowing when old mind enters and we become defended. Then we can make a skillful decision to return to center. We do not do this as a series of conscious steps; we just get out of the way of the naturally open heart. We become aware of arising

defendedness, touch it with compassion, and let it go. The heart KNOWS how to respond when mind with all its judgments and fears doesn't get in the way.

I want to emphasize this point. If you hear a painfully loud noise, it creates pain, real pain, and there is discomfort in this moment, this experience. It is crucial that you begin to treat energy and the nerves of the "energy body," for lack of any better term, as respectfully as you treat the discomforts to the physical body. Then distortion need not arise.

What about fear? Something approaches which threatens you. It is perceived through the physical senses. There is perception of feeling threatened. There is awareness of this energy as hostile to you. It's the same thing. The energy aspect of you feels that shift from harmonious to disharmonious. We might liken it to listening to the violin. You are in neutral but there is comfort and a level of liking which does not employ self. We might call it comfort and harmony. Then there is a jarring, discordant note. If there is self and old mind, we move into dislike and aversion. The self feels threatened—"They are taking away my lovely music." It wants to hold on to that harmony. The same discordant note can be noted with bare perception. It creates discomfort because of the way it touches the ears. There is the same desire to move away as with the hot stove, the same discomfort without aversion as with the hot stove.

Barbara is raising the question, what is disharmonious to some is harmonious to others, whereas, what is hot to one is usually hot to most. I simply remind you in answer that there are fire walkers. But we deal here with the typical reactions of the various bodies. A flash of brilliant light is painful. Something very hot is painful. A discordant noise is painful. Angry, hostile, or threatening energy is painful. All are painful in this moment, without old mind.

When you feel threatened, then, the perception is first of pain of that energy, discomfort. If no self is brought in, if you stay in neutral, discomfort becomes the next perception. There may be an involuntary tightening of the gut, a faster heartbeat, other physical symptoms of fear. These truly are involuntary reactions. They become the next consciousness. Just as the hand jerked back from the fire is not judged, the involuntary body responses to fear are not judged, just observed. It may also be noted that these physical responses to danger create comfort in some people. This is why some people seek frightening adventure. There is enjoyment of these involuntary responses, a sense of empowerment, deeper awareness and control.

The important thing for our work is that all of this can be noted without self arising. There need be no move to aversion or craving. There may be skillful moving back from the threat. There is no self, no adhering karma.

Often we don't catch it at that stage though. No matter how scrupulously mindful you are, there will be moments when the catalyst is so strong that bare perception and neutral mind shift into old mind, into the solidified self which accompanies old mind, to like and dislike, leading into aversion or craving. We have yet to discuss the connection of like/dislike to aversion/craving. We will save that for later.

When there is a move into old mind, you may not catch that as it happens. The first indication that you have moved from bare perception to old mind may be the noticing of like or dislike. Barbara is asking if this move and the action of liking or disliking brings

adhering karma? Yes, there is a self sending out liking or disliking energy that may touch another with discomfort. It could even be argued that there is some intention to harm, that there is a separate self and one is preferring to insure the comfort and safety of that self.

This is subtle. There is adhering karma, but without verbal or action response, that brief moment of fear, anger, jealousy, greed does not create severe adhering karma. There are degrees. How perfect do you need to be to graduate from this plane? I have said that there will always be emotions. With practice, the heavy emotions, or defilements as Buddhist tradition calls them, arise far less frequently and remain strong for a far shorter period. You see their presence almost immediately. If that seeing instills a sense of compassion rather than judgment for the human that you are, you shift back to bare perception. The reverberations of that emotion may echo through the physical body for some time and are simply noted as discomfort.

For example, you hold a rock over a pond. If something jars your hand severely, just as some external catalyst might jar your emotions, almost involuntarily the hand opens and the rock drops. If there is careful noting of the process of being jarred, immediately after the rock has dropped, the hand softens. The ripples continue to spread long after the hand has softened. The ripples are just ripples. The rock is no longer dropping. The reverberations of emotion in the physical body are hollow echoes after there has been skillful noting and return to bare perception and neutral sensation.

You cannot prevent emotions from arising then. You cannot prevent the occasional shift to old mind. Your immediate mindfulness prevents reactivity to that old mind. It prevents the planting of new seeds of adhering karma. That bit of adhering karma created by the arising of negative energy is dissolved by the compassion that you feel and by your self-forgiveness.

In terms of readiness for fourth density, I have repeatedly said that you are not devoid of emotional body in fourth density, but non-reactive to it. The primary fourth density lesson is compassion. Can you see how perfectly this works? When your practice of compassion to yourself for whatever arises is strong enough, then in fourth density if you encounter another's emotion there is no judgment of that. Yes, at first there may be some judgment. You work with it; you find compassion for your own judgment and the other finds compassion for your judgment. This is what offers you practice. How would compassion deepen if you were emotionless in fourth density? But you must be at that stage of almost non-reactivity which allows the growth of compassion.

That is one unit of thought. Are there questions?

(Question: Where, when, why does the sense of a separate self enter? Aaron will answer this, in part only, in following weeks. He says in part, we don't need to know. Not a useful question.)

April 29, 1993

Aaron: I am Aaron. Good morning and my love to you all. I want to pick up with some of the questions that have been in your minds on the work of the past weeks. I have presented this segment of the chain in simple form, attempting to strike a balance between simplifying and the necessary distortions created by simplifying. Now we need to turn up the magnification to break down this consciousness, perception, sensation, mental formation phase and look even closer. As a prelude to that I want to speak a bit about karma again. Yes, again and again and again.

We have looked at just what it is that adheres, seen the self that provokes sticking, and seen that movement from a space of absence of self offers only non-adhering karma. Let us explore this a bit.

When you offer another a gift, that **action** of offering is a contributing factor in the resultant karma. The other factor is the **motivation** for the offering. If you offer another a slap, that act is also only one factor, the second being motivation. Let us suppose this first gift is something that will be very precious to the recipient. However **you** want to give it; there is a self doing the giving. Part of the motivation is to serve the other, to give them joy, but let us suppose there is also a self that wants attention, wants to be loved through this offering. Here we have wholesome adhering karma. It is wholesome in that no harm is done, but only good, wholesome in that which is offered. It is adhering because of the self. Technically, the act is wholesome, the part of motivation which seeks attention is unwholesome, but we cannot separate the act from the motivation. We can simply label the whole as “wholesome adhering karma.”

Let us suppose the gift offered, instead of being that which would be cherished, is a bottle of wine offered to an alcoholic. This being has not had a drink for ten years. You did not know that being when it drank, but you had heard from a friend that this one had been an alcoholic. What is the intention? Was there intention to harm? At some level was there hostility that is being expressed through this gift?

The same gift made to another, would be deeply enjoyed, a gift of love. You can see then how much the importance lies in the intention. A slap to hurt another made in anger, or a slap to another who is falling asleep in a dangerous situation—is there intention to harm or to help? Is there a self wanting recognition for that help or service? So many variables. It is not merely the act or word that determines the nature of karma but the **intention** and the **self or absence of self** involved in the motivation.

Please remember that this is further complicated by the fact that there are always multiple motivations! Each one produces its own specific karma.

Let us take this information and come back to dependent origination. Contact is easy—consciousness—just the physical sense contact and mind knowing that contact, or mind touching a thought and knowing it, resultant in sense consciousness. Perception is where the first complexity lies. We have discussed two forms which perception may take: bare perception, which does not label the object nor conceptualize about it, but moves into intimate experience with it, and perception which distorts by moving into old mind biases. You have been practicing seeing freshly,

watching old mind arise, knowing that the filter of old mind is distorting the present experience, and then as much as is possible, returning to that fresh experience.

We have two different pathways here. It is almost impossible for the human to live its life without any touch of old mind bias. This does not mean that you cannot experience freshly, only that it comes and goes. It is truly a learned skill. Have you ever come indoors with your sunglasses on, wondered why it was so dark inside, and forgotten, "I am wearing sunglasses"? When you remember that the sunglasses are on, even without lifting them away, clearer perception takes place. Something registers in the mind, "It is not so dark. I am looking through dark lenses." You don't have to take off the sunglasses to know you are looking through dark lenses. You do not have to get rid of old mind to know that old mind is influencing the experience of this moment. When you recognize that you are looking through the filter, it helps you to see any attachment to the filter. Seeing the attachment allows it to dissolve.

When we move blindly into old mind there is a knower, observer, or thinker, and a conceptualized object. Then there is separation. There is someone with opinions about the object. As we move from perception into the sensation stage there is then someone to like or dislike. As soon as there is a separate being liking or disliking, mental formations may arise because there is somebody who needs protection, somebody who feels threatened that there will be not enough, or will be too much of, this object.

We must notice however that it is not the liking or disliking that leads to mental formation. It is the liking or disliking **from a place of identity with that self**. One would then ask, can there be liking and disliking with no identity with self? Can there be liking and disliking that does not lead to craving, greed, aversion, fear or hatred?

Please think here of your experience of a symphony or a sunset, or the smile of a child perhaps—something personal for each of you—something that you watched, heard, touched with any sense, found very beautiful, but there was no grasping to hold onto it. You have each experienced that. In Barbara's experience, many sunsets come to mind. There was no one watching the sunsets, just sunsets happening. Pure experience. Only after the experience, in memory, was there experiencer. There was no comparing with other sunsets. There was no desire to hold onto each, to slow it down. And yet, certainly there was liking, not just appreciation, but liking and enjoyment.

It is easier to like without self than to dislike, but this also can happen. If you touch a hot stove, there's pain. There is dislike of that physical sensation of pain. There must be or you would not survive your childhood. Physical pain is a skillful warning system of impending danger to the physical body. Usually you then move into dislike, "I was burned; ouch!" sometimes followed by aversion. Most of you have found that you do not need to react that way to physical pain, at least not always. There can simply be the awareness: this is truly unpleasant to some physical sense. The smell of a skunk perhaps—dislike. But it need not move into aversion's "I must get rid of that." It is harder with dislike. Let the process of like without movement into attachment be a clue to understanding dislike without aversion.

Perhaps the words "like" and "dislike" are confusing here and we would be better to say only "comfort/find pleasant" or "discomfort/find unpleasant." More specifically, there is sense contact, seeing with bare perception or old mind, finding that sense contact

pleasant, or liking it, then the possibility of grasping when there is self and old mind, no possibility of grasping when there is no self and only bare perception. The same is true of the process of unpleasant/dislike/aversion. We will talk more about this next class.

Moving back then ... Self is a bit like a light switch that may be turned on and off with a dimmer switch. Sometime it's all the way off, sometimes all the way on, mostly somewhere in between. When perception is only bare experience and contains no old mind, it is empty of self. Old mind draws in the delusion of self. If the move to self is not noticed, the dimmer switch is turned up. Identity with that delusion arises, and act, speech or thought from that space carries adhering karma and plants the seed of rebirth. Since it is impossible to eliminate old mind entirely, the best one can do is to know "Old mind is present. I am looking through filters that distort." Those filters bring in the solidified self, bring in the move into subject relating to object. Once there is subject and object, there must be the possibility, even the likelihood, of ownership of that which arises, of act, speech or thought from that "self," and thus, of adhering karma.

The arising of notion of separate self, which distorts bare perception to ego based old-mind perception, is not in itself a condition which necessarily leads to the move to mental formations of attachment and aversion, and thus to adhering karma. The arising of notion of separate self has a relationship of contributory causality to the creation of adhering karma. The arising notion of self is not the definitive factor but your relationship to that which has arisen. When you notice old mind bias quickly before there has been movement based on that bias, when there is no judgment of that bias arising, only noticing, "Old mind is entering, self is entering," then you return to bare perception. Then the arising of old mind becomes seen as a manifestation of pure mind, absolutely nothing in itself, just a cloud passing through. Once again there's no perceiver. Perhaps old mind enters again. You note it again. When you can clearly see the way old mind arises and dissolves, the struggle with its arising and dissolving is gone. It is the struggle which solidified the self! Now there is again no self trying to control this show.

At one level there is bare perception, and one might say, Ultimate Reality. At another level, there is a human mind doing, making sense of this reality, entertaining old mind. From the higher perspective you observe this human moving in and out of old mind. You see that old mind which is **known** to be present and accepted openheartedly creates far less distortion than old mind which solidifies self with a statement, "I have got to get rid of old mind so I can come back to pure mind." There can't be pure mind as long as "I" am getting rid of this or that. Old mind is not different from pure mind but rests in pure mind. No duality! When you understand this, begin to just watch old mind arise and dissolve, with more space around it. There is a basic shift, as sudden profound awareness arises, "There's nobody doing anything here. Old mind arises, old mind dissolves."

This understanding becomes problematic if one has not first done considerable work on oneself because one could use this as an excuse to be irresponsible. One could say, "Old mind arises with fear and prejudice; I do not have to—indeed, can not—get rid of that fear. Therefore my reaction of arising fear that harms another is okay." That is why these teachings are not offered until the being has reached a deep level of

commitment to live one's life in non-harm and service to all beings. When you merge that commitment and the basic understanding, "It's just old mind; I do not have to get rid of it, just to know it is creating distortion," then you move into a space of freedom. Then the wise mind and heart chooses appropriate, loving word or action.

Here you experience the "I AM" connectedness, pure being. "Big mind" begins to shine with a brilliance in your experience. If pleasant and unpleasant sensations, thoughts or emotions arise, they arise from a place that is empty of self. They do not lead into craving or aversion. There is only this shining luminescence that you are which is no different from the shining brilliance of your neighbor or of God. Over that luminescence drift occasional clouds of old mind of bias, of like, or dislike. The heart knows skillful action. It is no longer moved by any of these clouds. It rests in center.

I want to offer a very brief example here. Barbara is very free of racial prejudice. She has dear friends of many skin colors. She has risked her life to make the statement that one must look past skin color. This week her doorbell rang. She opened the door and there were two young men outside, adolescents, both a bit tough looking unrelated to skin color. One was as tall as she, the other smaller. Both black. The big one said, "Where's your son?" Barbara noticed that she immediately became defensive. Her first thought was, "Why are they after Peter? Is he in trouble?"

She said, "He is not home now. Why do you want him?" at which point the smaller one stepped out from behind the larger one, and the basketball he held became visible. "We want him to play basketball." Peter has black friends. It is not unusual for a black child to ring the doorbell. But Barbara was acutely aware of how old mind distorted perception. Had these been white children she would not have felt that sense of fear for her son. The difference here is that because she knew immediately, "Fear is arising, perception is distorted," she had no need to respond in any hostile way. Her, "Why do you want him?" was not hostile but inviting. She was already back in center. There was no adhering karma; there was no defending; only that moment of noting distortion, and then it passed. No like or dislike, no aversion or clinging, no need to make anything happen.

My dear ones, so much of this is so very hard to verbalize. My words are meaningless as intellectual guidance. You must watch this so carefully in yourselves and meditate and then you will understand it.

We have been focusing on perception. In just the same way that there can be bare perception free of self, or old mind perception, there are pleasant and unpleasant physical sensations free of self. Such sensations that are experienced from a place of center do not necessarily create the move to mental formations. There can be liking of pleasant sensation without clinging; there can be disliking of unpleasant sensation without aversion. Mental formations cannot arise without the movement from neutral to liking or disliking, but all move from neutral does not create mental formation. Is there a self there waging war with the like or dislike, trying to maintain safety and comfort, moving to clinging or aversion? Forget about the like and dislike and notice the war. Come back to center. Let these clouds of like and dislike drift by.

You can see how easily that teaching can be distorted by one not ready to work with it, to give self permission to like and dislike and act upon the like and dislike. You understand that this is emphatically **not** my meaning, only that old mind arises, like

and dislike arise. You can stay in center and watch it arise and fade away. There is no identification with a self who likes or dislikes, only the bare perception of those sensations arising. In that center there is no craving, no aversion, no self to plant a seed of adhering karma, no ignorance with the delusion of self to lead to rebirth. That is all.

Question: I'm still fighting with dislike, saying "I shouldn't dislike." I think this tendency grows out of having been taught to become pure, to get rid of defilements. Talk more about how like/dislike is a manifestation of Pure Mind.

Aaron: This is that experience of one foot in ultimate reality and the other foot across the threshold in relative reality. The part of you experiencing relative reality feels the physical or emotional experience of pleasure or pain. Some bit of self arises. There is someone experiencing pleasure or pain. This movement just barely precedes the noticing of liking or disliking. To like or dislike involves subject-object; some momentary notion of separate self is necessary to like/dislike. Noticing that very momentary delusion, you return to center.

"Self" is a useful tool for the incarnation. It is not the notion of this self that is the problem, but getting caught in it, forgetting it is tool, which leads to subsequent movement to **identification** as that self. The arising notion of self is just another arising. What is the relationship to that arising? When this is all seen for what it is, the delusion is known as a manifestation of Pure Mind, really a distortion of Pure Mind, and not as other than pure awareness. There is nothing to be gotten rid of, no war. When you get into a fight with that arising and try to change it, self solidifies. You are deeper into the current. There is ownership of that which has arisen. When you simply notice the whole thing cloud by cloud by cloud and relax around it, self recedes and perspective shifts.

Here is a flower, just this flower. Here are four or five different colored filters on sticks, resting above the flower. One is here, one there, with space between them. When you press your eye against a filter, there is no sense of any reality but the filtered one. But you move your eye away, see briefly without the filter, then return to another filter. You begin to know when seeing in this way, "I am looking through a filter." It is as it seems, red, yellow, or blue, but you do not take it for ultimate reality. The space between filtered looks gives clarity. That is the shift you must create, to allow yourself space. As you observe old mind and know, "This is old mind," the filter shifts from directly before the eye; there is space. You see the filter but you can peer around it, so you are no longer caught in the filter. Bare perception returns. Then any sense of self controlling this whole show dissolves. You move back into this Ultimate Reality. This will be our focus next class. I also want to talk more about the relationship between comfort/discomfort, like/dislike, and attachment/aversion.

Questions: What is Ultimate Reality? What is enlightenment?

Aaron: I will speak to this but let you decide the final answers for yourselves! **For the coming week, please watch the multiple motivations for your choices and see if you can understand the karma that grows from each motivation. See if you can experience the full diversity of karma ensuing from a word or act. Can you clarify that karma as it arises? What happens when there is awareness that an act or words comes from a foundation of self? No fixing it; no judgment. Just watch it.**

I also want you to return to the dream work we did last spring, working with fear. The renewal of this exercise is in preparation for further dream work. That is all.

(Last year Aaron worked extensively with us with interpreting dreams.¹² Then we went on to work with awareness of dreams, becoming aware that we were dreaming. After we were aware of the dream state while in it, he asked us to invite in fear before we went to sleep, then in the dream to know it was a dream, that the body was safe, and to confront that "dragon" with love, but not to run from it. We spent many months working with this dream practice. The beginning of this work was to begin to record dreams, be aware of their content, and know when we are dreaming. For those new to this work, I suggest that as a first step. Before bed, state your intention to remember your dreams. Put a pad and pencil or tape recorder beside your bed. When you awaken, read what you wrote or listen, then just sit with it.)

12 Basic information on dream interpretation is offered in Appendix E.

May 13, 1993

Aaron: Good morning and my love to you all. I want to begin today by clarifying some questions that arose from last week's class. We have moved through the first two steps: contact and perception, which may be bare perception or old mind based perception, usually some mixture of both. I have talked about the fact that the arising of old mind in itself, need not jar you into the delusion of solid self. You see there is a filter here: old mind. Seeing that filter of self, you are not pulled to identify with or own it. The shift to old mind is clearly seen—that it is habit, partially resultant from fear, and has grown out of myriad conditions.

Without identification with old mind consciousness, it merely drifts in and drifts out. You are then acting, speaking, thinking from a place of clarity or pure awareness that knows that separate self is delusion. Awareness may regard "self" as a useful tool to deal with worldly concerns. If you wish to tighten a screw, you pick up a screw driver, use it until the work is done, and then lie it down. There is no illusion that you are the screw driver. If you see a situation, perhaps, where there is injustice, and it seems useful to speak forcefully about it from a place of personal experience, you pick up the tools of memory, of speech, even of speech with deep emotion in it, but it is clear that these are tools. Your most powerful work comes from this space where you can bridge the gap, being a deeply involved and caring human, but with the space of equanimity, of seeing even your passionate concern without identification of, "This is who I am." The actions and words that grow out of this space plant only non-adhering karma.

What I have just said was review. I believe it is clear to you. Let us now explore several pathways in which experience may move.

The clearest, but one that rarely occurs, contact, followed by bare perception, fully in the moment of this experience. In the sensation stage, one stays in neutral, neither aversion or attachment arise. The opposite extreme: contact, with perception very little in the moment, strongly filtered by old mind conditioning, pulled to strong liking or disliking. A solid self is doing that liking or disliking. Strong aversion or attachment leads to reactivity, planting seeds of unwholesome adhering karma.

As I am sure is clear to you all, most of your experience does not touch either extreme. We could not possibly describe every path, nor is it necessary. The key is simple. Where there is the delusion of a solid, permanent self, and movement from that delusion, there is adhering karma. We have explored this idea in our study of karma last semester and through much of this one. I'm sure you have heard enough about it!

You see that there need be no shift into identifying with self when old mind consciousness arises. It is NOT old mind in itself that leads into the solidification of self but one's relationship with that arising old mind. When there is ownership of any arising emotion, thought or sensation, illusion of self becomes solid. The open hearted awareness of its arising keeps you centered in Pure Mind. Whatever has arisen is clearly seen as just a cloud passing through. You skillfully note the arising thought, ask where it comes from, and see it is old mind. In the words of one teaching system, it then self-liberates. There is no adhering karma.

Furthermore, you begin to know that arising, not as something different than pure mind that needs to be gotten rid of, but that **each arising is nothing other than manifestation of pure awareness**. Each time thought, emotion or sensation arises and is worked with in this way, pure awareness stabilizes!

Enough repetition! Let us look at the next step here, the step we call sensation, which involves staying in neutral or the shift to positive or negative. Even if there has been bare perception, staying fully in the experience, the experience may be pleasant or unpleasant. A warmth of a fire is pleasant on a cold day. It brings relief to physical discomfort. There does not have to be a self identified, only "Warmth is happening." Cold was uncomfortable. The awareness of pleasantness, that the mind perceives of the warmth and the comfort to the physical body, is not **quite** the same as liking the warmth, nor is liking the warmth the same as attachment to the warmth. Can you see them as steps? Each moves a bit deeper into self.

Awareness of pleasant, unpleasant, may be firmly anchored in no-self. There is no adhering karma when one is shivering and moves to sit by the fire. There is no adhering karma when one touches a hot coal, registers pain, just pain, not, "I hate this pain," and withdraws one's hand. **If one moves to sit by the warm fire, notices enjoyment of that warmth, and notices liking, that liking is not a necessary condition for adhering karma. One must be aware, however, of the question: "Who is liking?" "I." "Am I drifting into solidified self?"** You cannot constantly live from a space of total emptiness of self. There must be an "I" that chooses to sit by the fire rather than freeze. If you watch very carefully, you can see where self solidifies with identification with that "I." Can you see the shift from liking to attachment or greed? From disliking to aversion? You can pinpoint where self has solidified without awareness, drawing in ownership, and karma shifts from non-adhering to adhering.

This is your **homework**, to watch that shift as closely as possible. Yes, I know you have already done it. Now go deeper! When you observe that shift from the space of pure awareness, what happens to the liking or disliking? Can you see this moment where thought self-liberates and you return to pure awareness? If you learn only one thing in this semester, this is the most important, to learn to see that return to pure mind, to experience all arising as manifestation of that pure mind.

I almost need not go into mental formation, into aversion and attachment. Once you are there, you are back in adhering karma, back with a solid self, back into the *moha* aspect of delusion. The seed has been planted and taken root. The chain moves into the necessary causal stages, all the way around again through death and rebirth, whether incarnative or death of this moment and into the next moment.

Each moment of sense contact becomes a new place to return to center. Each arising sensation, emotion or thought is a gateway to liberation! This is why I so deeply stress the importance of moment to moment mindfulness. Let each breath, each touch or scent or sound or thought bring you back to your true self. A fresh start, over and over. Moment by moment. However, if the next sense consciousness is met deeply emerged in that space of *self* experiencing attachment or aversion, there will be no clarity. The *self* will experience that next arising, rather than *pure awareness* experiencing that which arises, creating a spiral deeper into delusion.

This is all part of your training, the emphasis on mindfulness. It is not mindfulness as an end in itself, but mindfulness that allows you to rest in that space of ultimate reality, empty of separate self, until you come to know that reality. Then phenomena will come and go, rise and fall, but nothing will pull you out of center.

Barbara had an interesting experience on her way to Georgia. The plane was landing in Atlanta. It came in, a normal approach. The wheels just barely touched, when suddenly there was an upward thrust, followed by a far, far steeper ascent than a plane usually makes. Fear gripped the plane. Purses, books, cups tumbled. Barbara also felt a moment of terror. Perhaps it helped that she could not hear, as many people screamed. It was practice, and only practice that enabled her to note first the consciousness, "Plane rising, something is wrong." Then a jump to, "Seeing discomfort, fear." She could see the whole thing, step by step. The movement into fear of a crash, fear of being out of control. Then she knew, "What I can control is how I die—peacefully or with terror and aversion," so she just sat and breathed and waited for the next moment—inferno or open space—with preference, yes, but without attachment. Just seeing how old mind grasped at safety brought release from solidified, attached self. Discomfort, but no adhering karma.

Please enjoy your break and tea. Do you see the habitual response in yourselves that has you sniffing hopefully for fresh bread when I mention "break" and "tea"? That is all.

(Break.)

Aaron: Last week I was asked, what is enlightenment? It is nothing special, just being balanced in this moment as clearly as is possible. Yes, one will have so called enlightenment experience—profound experience of one's true nature and the nature of all things. That experience opens the door and gives you a glimpse but it is your constant work with mindfulness, your constant awareness balancing your energies, opening your heart, and allowing that true nature to manifest itself, which allows you to live as an enlightened being—a far different thing than just having, or "owning" an enlightenment experience. Some people collect enlightenment experiences!! What growth in that? No matter how often you experience clarity in meditation or daily life, *moha* will re-arise with no awareness of its re-arising, lead to ownership of the self, and keep you from true liberation—unless you **live** that experience and integrate it into daily life.

Enlightenment experience is just a start. Once you know who you are you must live your life true to that understanding or it is just another experience. I ask Barbara to read here from something I told her several years ago,

Barbara: *(Reading from the manuscript of her book, With Love as my Guide.)*

Aaron: What is enlightenment experience? Let us use the Buddha's river. You cross and find yourself on a new shore. But immediately you realize that you've just set foot on land. There is a whole world beyond. You are nowhere but at the beginning.

In a sense it is the rite of passage into adulthood. When you finally are an adult, what do you do with that? If all you do is to sit and tell people, "I'm finally an adult," to brag or let that state be an excuse from your work, then you are still a child wearing adult garb. The true adult has no time to mention this nor even think

about it. Rather, he is busy **being** an adult—being responsible, serving others, doing whatever needs to be done.

When you first become an adult, know that you are a very young adult. There is much you do NOT know. Keep your humility about you. You are truly just on the threshold and you must work tirelessly and ceaselessly if you are not to simply stagnate with a prideful, “I made it.” Enjoy the bliss of the deep peace you will experience and let it be a balance to the heightened pain. Stay aware and trust. It is really no different than any place else on the path; simply, your clearer vision gives added responsibility ...

There must be tireless devotion to practice and to continued work on yourself.

And further on:

What does enlightenment experience mean? NOTHING! It is NOT the experience but what you do with the experience that matters ... To be enlightened is merely to understand that you are nothing, empty of self, just energy and light, and that is all you need ever be, that this is the substance of God and the universe. “I AM THAT!” It is truly “lightening,” rather than “enlightening,” a divestment of the illusion of self so that you need no longer carry that burden.

That knowledge is the threshold but you walk the same world, only with new perspective that asks constant mindfulness, constant responsibility, constant love. Enlightenment drops the burdens of ignorance and fear and picks up many new parcels in their places. Yet in carrying that new parcel—of unconditional love, of service, of oneness—is perfect freedom! ... It is the space where you can finally hand the reins to God, let go of control, simply be and do what is required and serve with love and an open heart. It is the most joyful space I know ...

Aaron: I want to leave time for questions. We will speak about this more next class if you wish. I would like to conclude this segment of the work on dependent origination in the next class, leaving us the classes in June to meet outdoors without the computer and to share more as a group. That is all.

Questions:

C: Please talk more about the transition between appreciation and liking.

Aaron: There are tiny steps of transition, each bringing in a bit more self. It is easiest to see with discomfort to touch. Contact—hot. The mind does not think “This is hot, I had better move my hand”; the hand moves. What steps have occurred? There is contact and consciousness, of course, then perception of hot, and sensation of discomfort or pain. But at another level, the process moves so quickly that it seems that the hand itself is conscious, and withdraws. If there is awareness that there is discomfort, no self need arise from that discomfort. Dislike brings in a self, and conversely, a self heightens dislike. If I dislike **that**, we’re separate, subject and object.

Discomfort does not yet relate to the source of discomfort as separate object. There is no registering THAT is burning me, only discomfort. With no “other,” I do not feel attacked and move to defend, I only feel pain and may soften around that pain, moving deeper into connection with the source of pain. This connection does not prevent my skillful withdrawal from the heat. There is no self, no aversion to the hot

object, no karma. There may be aversion to the burn, if such occurred. That is a new consciousness. *Hot object* is no longer the catalyst, but *painful burn*. The process starts afresh.

Go back to the image of sunset. There's a difference between noting pleasure which comes from seeing a sunset when you are fully engrossed in that sunset, and the response when the sunset is object related to the see-er. When there is no self seeing a sunset, merely sunset happening, there is really not liking. We get deep into semantics here. To like implies to me someone who does the liking and something to be liked. To rest in harmony with does not necessitate self/other. Can you see the difference?

J: It's the difference between being in the moment and stepping outside the moment.

Barbara: In part. We can make old mind connections and still stay centered. As long as we know there's liking and disliking we're not stuck. Adhering karma comes from identifying with the old mind, disliking or liking with ownership of it.

Aaron: Appreciation moves into liking when there is unmindful shift to old mind and a self starts to solidify out of that old mind. The solidification may be conditioned by unaware identification with the memory, in which there was someone to hold onto something pleasant. Remember that liking is not yet clinging. If the liking is seen and fear noted, there is just the bare perception of an old memory, and present liking. It need not move into clinging. In response to J, the memory is in this moment when it is bare perception of memory. Self arises and we move out of the moment when there is shift to old mind perception without awareness of that shift.

C: I'm working with one issue, jealousy, through many lifetimes; now it's falling away. It no longer catches me much. I realize there are other issues connected to it, like digging out a big weed. When one root is cut there are still others that need work. It seems endless. I keep getting caught in the network of roots!

Barbara: We start to make space around these issues and find freedom. We balance more between ultimate reality and relative reality. If jealousy arises we stop being so hard on ourselves and owning that jealousy, judging. We start to know, "It's just stuff I had to do; it's not important any more. It's not who I am."

There's a story in book by a meditation teacher—I don't remember who it was—who was at a retreat with a well known teacher. He was asking questions and not getting answers, not getting the attention he wanted. He started to feel frustrated and angry. Days went by. Finally he decided to tell the teacher how angry he was. The teacher listened respectfully, then got up and acted out what he'd just heard, kicked a bench, then acted like he'd hurt his foot, held it and hopped around. Then, as suddenly as he started, he stopped and sat down. He was showing that we just have to go through this stuff. Sometimes we act it out.

Yes, if we hurt someone doing that acting out, we're responsible. There is adhering karma. We do have to pay attention. But we don't have to hate ourselves, just to smile and acknowledge, "Caught me!" We keep learning to pay closer attention. We also learn to relax and see the humor in it. So get the perspective on past lives; see the new offshoots. But relax. Every time the war starts again, self solidifies and there's a new root sent out! Relax! Breathe! If you see more jealousy, it's just stuff. What happens to it when you see it as offshoot of old mind, nobody being jealous? Does it dissolve?

C: Yes.

Barbara: Just rest in that space; you're back to Big Mind, into the ultimate reality of it. See the jealousy in another perspective as manifestation of pure mind.

C: What when another issue brings you around to that old set of issues again and again?

Barbara: Do the same thing again. Where did jealousy arise from? Where is it going? See it again and again as manifestation of a distortion of pure mind, not as anything different from pure mind, just a contraction in that pure mind. Seeing that distortion into old mind and self, let it go. Let it dissolve again. The more often it arises, the more you can practice with it!!!

D: Does it help to look each time at how it arose?

Barbara: We can look at the places where we are still reactive but once we've done that we don't need to look at the details and/or the side issues. Just know what's arising, "Here's reactivity," smile to it and let it go "poof!" Come back to rest in pure mind, in ultimate reality. Remember this isn't **getting rid of** the uncomfortable feeling like jealousy. But when we see how it's just the pattern of old mind and don't come up, grab it, say, "That's MY jealousy," we give it space. It does dissolve. As Aaron says, "poof!" Then we can rest in that space of who we really are, not caught in old concepts of who we thought we were.

Aaron has cautioned against letting that ultimate reality become a place of escape. If we're doing that, it's just something else to watch—here I am being jealous, "jealousy arising." Noting how it arises from old mind, we see that there never was anything to be afraid of; it was just an old pattern. Watch it dissolve. If there's attachment to the comfort of that dissolution, wanting to escape from the burning of jealousy into the space of Big Mind, just note that. It's the next arising. Eventually it all gets so clear there's just awareness resting in awareness. Nothing else there!

M: Fear about anger—increases the solidified self. Afraid to look at the old anger ...

Barbara: Who's experiencing it? There's nobody there to experience it. What owns it?

M: Fear is owning it.

Barbara: Whose fear? What happens when you see it's nobody's fear. You thought it was yours. Now you know it's not. What happens to the fear?

M: It dissolves.

Barbara: What's there when the fear dissolves?

M: Just anger.

Barbara: No self owning it?

M: No.

Barbara: What happens to the anger when you touch it with awareness?

M: It dissolves.

Barbara: Then what's left?

M: Nothing, just awareness.

Barbara: Okay; just rest there.

M: What about when fear arises again?

Barbara: Do it again!

M: What makes it solidify? Judgment?

Barbara: That's another one. Do the same thing with it. Where did it arise? Whose judgment? Just allow the fear, make enough space. Don't get into a fight with it. Fear doesn't necessitate judgment. The fight with it—your relationship to it—opens judgment.

M: So powerful!

Barbara: Your primary consciousness is no longer the anger but the fear of reactivity. Notice when it shifts. Be with the anger in this moment. See that the fear, anger and judgment are all different. Give them each space. No ownership of any of it.

Aaron: Homework. Walk outside barefoot. Slow walking meditation. Feel the softness and sharpness. Note what arises, as contact, consciousness, perception, sensation, mental formation. Look for the nuances of comfort tuning into liking, discomfort moving into disliking. Look for the degrees of self. What moves it to clinging or aversion?

May 19, 1993

Aaron: I am Aaron. You have been questioning the distinctions between comfort/discomfort and like/dislike. In bare perception there is no self or other, and thus, no like or dislike. There is no self in comfort/discomfort, just awareness of these sensations as arising. There is no subject or object. Like/dislike implies a self to do that liking/disliking, and a separate object to be liked/disliked. Thus, in like/dislike there is notion of self. But there is no identification with that self; it is not yet solid, only the useful fringe of self which lets you know of imminent danger or pleasure.

When you walked outdoors in bare feet just now, you were watching the arising of consciousness, perception and sensation. Each time there was contact, there was awareness of the perception of soft, comfortable or sharp, uncomfortable. When there was a step onto something very sharp that might damage the foot, there was a shifting into self.

Essentially, old mind came into play as dislike/danger registered. We must distinguish here between two levels of old mind. There is that which draws on past aversion and attachment, all the old stories about "This happened to me and I got hurt." Here there is fear.

The other level of old mind touches only bare perception in old mind. You do not have to run a thorn through your foot a thousand times to learn that if you continue to step down and apply pressure when there is hard sharpness underfoot, you will have that sharpness pierce your foot. Old mind is brought in **as memory of past bare perception**, not as memory of old stories. This is not to be considered old mind but present bare perception based on past bare perception. We distinguish, choose skillfully to exclude the past aversion and attachment, and focus only on that aspect of past experience based on bare perception. **This is NOT old mind, only useful memory used as tool.**

Yet when you do bring in even that level of old mind, a self must enter to remember. **The mental body is employed as tool, which requires a doer.** With that self, like/dislike usually enter. When there is knowing that this process is happening, then there is no need to move to craving or aversion. One employs the tool and puts it down when it has served its purpose. Then one returns to emptiness of a self and to non-duality.

Are there questions?

Q: Is this the only time like/dislike arises?

Aaron: No. Like/dislike arises preceding any move to aversion or craving. When there is no mindfulness, you move on into these forms. Like/dislike also arises with the beginnings of the stories of old mind. If there is mindfulness, like/dislike is a yellow warning flashing "... self entering ..." Then the one who is mindful will observe the movement to old mind and what has pulled one into that state, the fear or whatever may be present and will allow it to fall away. Then you return to bare perception.

When one moves from bare perception to old mind, **then** it is vital to notice that shift. There is already self for old mind to be present. It is also important to notice any

judgment appearing as aversion. The aversion to old mind entering is not old mind entering. The more precise you are, the less you'll get stuck, the faster self dissolves and you re-enter bare perception.

Question: Last week we talked about fear and reactivity. I see myself continually getting caught, getting into a fight with "being caught," feeling like a fish caught on a hook. I don't know what to do about it. I'm sure I'm creating more unwholesome karma. I'm stuck.

Barbara: Can you allow yourself to be stuck and just watch it? What's the great fear or discomfort about being stuck? Aaron said to me some weeks ago (*reads from private April/May transcript*):

The important thing for our work is that **all** of this can be noted without self arising. There need be no move to aversion or craving. There may be skillful moving back from the threat. There's no self, and thus, no adhering karma.

Often we don't catch it at that stage though. No matter how scrupulously mindful you are, there will be moments when the catalyst is so strong that bare perception and neutral mind shift into old mind, into the solidified self which accompanies old mind, to like and dislike, leading into aversion or craving.

When there is a move into old mind, you may not catch that as it happens. The first indication that you've moved from bare perception to old mind may be the noticing of like or dislike. K asked if this move and the action of liking or disliking brings adhering karma? Yes, there's a self sending out liking or disliking energy that may touch another with discomfort. It could even be argued that there is some intention to harm, that there is a separate self and one is preferring to insure the comfort and safety of that self.

This is subtle. There is adhering karma, but without verbal or action response, that brief moment of fear, anger, jealousy, greed doesn't create severe adhering karma. There are degrees. There will always be emotions. With practice, the defilements arise far less frequently and remain strong for a far shorter period. You see their presence almost immediately. We're **not** just pursuing this as an intellectual game. How do we live our lives more lovingly, more skillfully? How do we allow the manifestation of that Buddha nature which is our true being? We attend to what blocks it, by choiceless awareness. Can we see, for example, the rise of defendedness when we feel threatened, and the ensuing desire to attack that which seems to threaten, to protect this solidifying self? If in that seeing, we return to a sense of compassion rather than judgment for the humans that we are, self dissolves, sense of separation dissolves, and we shift back to bare perception. The reverberations of the emotion may echo through the physical body for some time and are simply noted as discomfort ... (*added to this book from private transcript, April-May*)

Aaron recently gave me this example (*again reads from transcript, from Aaron*):

You hold some rocks over a pond. If something jars your hand severely, just as some external catalyst might jar your emotions, almost involuntarily the hand opens and a rock drops. If there is careful noting of the process of being jarred, immediately after the rock has dropped, the hand softens. Rocks don't continue to

drop. The ripples continue to spread long after the hand has softened. The ripples are just ripples. The rocks are no longer dropping. The reverberations of emotion are hollow echoes after there has been skillful noting and return to bare perception and neutral sensation.

You can't prevent emotions from arising. You can't prevent the occasional shift to old mind. Your immediate mindfulness prevents reactivity to that old mind. It prevents the planting of new seeds of adhering karma. It draws you back home! That bit of adhering karma created by the arising of negative energy is dissolved by the compassion that you feel and by your self-forgiveness.

Barbara: The important thing is that we cease to identify with this old mind as who we are. We've talked of that threshold we stand on. One foot is in relative reality which keeps getting stuck in emotions, old mind, fear, self. The other foot is in ultimate reality and begins to feel a tender compassion for this human who gets caught. Thus, we begin to manifest that Buddha nature, to more fully allow ourselves to be what we are, to dare to offer love rather than anger to the painful catalyst of our lives.

(Meditation and much more discussion, not transcribed.)

May 27, 1993

Aaron: I am Aaron. My love to you all. Today I want to tie together some loose ends and to address the question: What do you do with all of this? This semester has given you what I hope will be valuable tools to observe the solidification of self when that solidification is in process. The more solid self becomes, the harder it is to move back into clear perspective of who you are. The more solid self becomes, the more firmly entrenched you become in the habit of self. What we are doing here essentially, is taking off layers of armor, learning to feel what you are feeling including your most profound grief, anger and greed; and to keep the heart open through all of that pain.

You can really experience this process in yourself: you hear somebody saying something that feels threatening, feel the closing up of the heart, the aversion to hearing and the fear. What happens when you take a deep breath and ask yourself, "Can I reopen, can I just listen without judgment?"

Using a hypothetical example, let us say that some one has just told you that you have unpleasant body odor. This is a common concern in your society. You can see that part of you would not want to hear about it. You would feel attacked. There would be a sense of pain. You might withdraw into yourself. It would touch on old issues of rejection or unworthiness. Anger might arise. Desire to find something to blame might arise.

All of these reactions are planting new karmic seeds, or passing on inherited karmic seeds. Self comes in. Anger arises. Fear of unworthiness arises. If you do not see the process happening and move back into bare perception, these very specific seeds of reactivity are the same seeds that will take root the next day, and the next—the next incarnation and the next! The same reaction may grow from any catalyst which threatens your sense of safety. Perhaps your employer says to you, "This report is inadequate." Again pain, anger, defendedness. The constant catalyst is here met with unawareness which pushes you deeper and deeper into these issues of anger, fear, feeling unworthy. Then you find you need to explore these issues so you very literally manifest more situations in which you are threatened. If there is never clear seeing, the seed falls, takes root, grows a new tree, which drops its new seeds which take root and so on.

I want to offer a different perspective of this karma. Visualize your own energy as a spinning ball, an energy ball. Light. When you feel full, joyful and whole there is no concave part of that ball. Feel it now.

Big breath ...

Ahhh ...

The surface is solid when you experience your energy that way.

Then feel something painful. Feel the contraction and pain ...

Feel the cavity that forms.

When a seed from this karmic tree falls on a convex plane, there is no contractedness, no delusion. The seed simply blows off. No place for it to settle. When there is a contraction, a fear, a self experiencing that fear, there are depressions. I see them like

the dimples in a golf ball! The karmic seed falls into a depression. It catches in there and takes root.

It is far easier to attend to and heal those depressions in the first place. There is no aversion nor grasping here, just skillful attending to whatever moves into the experience. Then you deal with the occasional adhering karma that comes along just as new seed. You do not have to deal with the firmly rooted tree.

You will be working with both seeds and rooted trees. In effect, each time you are deeply mindful, feel the contractions of fear, know it as old mind, see the arising of delusion of a self that cries for protection, and come back to center, you push out the concavity and the roots of that tree lose their grip.

We have been talking a lot about resting in Pure Mind, Pure Awareness. When you do that, there is nothing to which the seeds can adhere. When you greet each arising with the question, "From where did it arise? Who is experiencing it? Where will it go?" you will see that which has arisen change its texture. It no longer appears solid and unworkable, but is ephemeral, as a cloud passing through. Touched with the sunshine of awareness, it dissolves, "poof!" You are back to that pure mind in which you may rest. Even the contraction of fear or pain is seen differently, not as something which must be gotten rid of, but just as further manifestation of the All. When you end the struggle with arising, and start to greet arising and stillness as the same, just watching the flow of it all, then the energy ball is expanded, no concavity in which karmic seeds may root.

If you do it often enough, and with deep awareness, the tree falls—the tree of delusion! In effect that is the enlightenment experience. As there is pushing up of all the depressions, so that the forest falls, you must still attend to the occasional roots that remain leftover after the trees fell. They may be gripping at almost nothing—no soil there, no depressions to collect soil—but are still able to send up new shoots.

What we have talked about, especially in perhaps the last eight weeks, to me is the keystone to finding freedom. It is a precious toolbox of awareness. You might think of it as a locksmith's set of tools with which to attend to the many locks that have been jammed closed and have entrapped you. Remember that mindfulness is also just a tool. **Mindfulness is not liberation. It is a way of life which opens the doorway to liberation.**

The content of this semester has fallen into two basic areas. We have pointed out the places of necessary conditionality. Those places are dead ends that sometimes entice those on a spiritual path. An example: A friend speaks of a monastery where he stayed for some time. There were rules. Rule #1, "No anger will be allowed here." Yes, it would be lovely to live without anger, but how? The spiritual path is not to dictate impossible behavior patterns and create judgment about them when they arise, and competition to see who can be the least angry! This is a dead end.

Once you are at that stage where anger has arisen, and then judgment against that anger, there will be becoming, rebirth consciousness. How do you eliminate anger? What I hope you have learned this semester is that once anger is already present, and a solid self closed around that anger, you can't backtrack and say "No, no anger."

Adhering karma follows that sense of self. There is just as much adhering karma created in the **aversion** to anger, the self getting rid of anger, as there is in the experience of anger. First there are seeds growing out of the anger. Then, there are new seeds grown out of the adverse relationship to anger. Does it stop with "get rid of"? If you can stop there, seeing anger, seeing aversion or judgment if that is present, and just ask yourself to notice the old mind that is present, to come back to bare perception, with that move, self begins to dissolve. Need to protect begins to dissolve. And the planting of unwholesome seeds ceases. You must do it again and again and again. You are changing the habits of so many lifetimes.

Yes, enlightenment experience is essential, the clear seeing of how delusion arose, the seeing through eyes empty of separate self. Then there is continuous work with what has been seen. A light flashes on in a dark room and you see the walls, the furnishings, the layout. Then the light goes off. You must continue to work in the room, but you no longer work blindly, even though darkness has returned. There is much greater clarity.

Sometimes when you drive across the country there will be endless flat prairie. You come to a rise in the road, and in the distance you have just a flashing glimpse of mountains. What if you had never known mountains, only prairies. Someone had told you there were mountains but you had never seen them. That first glimpse would not be the experience of hiking in the mountains, becoming intimate with them. But, it would provide you with a new reality. Mountains really do exist!

The road winds closer. You continually have clearer and longer views, until you arrive in the mountains, and dwell there. You do not have to dwell continuously in mountains to live with the reality that there are mountains. You do not have to dwell continuously in ultimate reality to know that perspective. As your experiences deepen, you move closer to dwelling in that reality at all times. **You know that relative reality itself resides in ultimate reality. The planes and the mountains are not different. The mountains are simply a more vertical piece of plain.** Sometimes flat, sometimes rolling, sometimes steep.

You can use relative reality as an essential tool that connects you to the suffering of the earth. It is the tool that lets you perceive the sharp thorn and not step down. It is the tool that allows you to see greed in the world and in yourself, and the results of greed—starvation, disease, want—and work in the world to alleviate such suffering. Ultimate reality **must** include relative reality or it is empty of one essential aspect of experience. Then it becomes mere hiding place from the turmoil of the world. Pure Awareness does not mistake relative reality for ultimate reality.

It does not matter where you are on this path. Use the tools of mindfulness: distinguish bare perception from old mind; see like or dislike arise, and movement to attachment or aversion. Know there is nothing to be attained, nor gotten rid of. It is ALL manifestation of your perfection. Keep returning to that center with as much love as you can. Allow this place of Pure Mind to become stabilized in your experience, to know it as "Home." It is your constant awareness and commitment that will give you freedom. It is the reference point of "home" that clarifies perspective, yet no need to cling to that home for you can never truly leave it.

This is as far as we will go for this semester. It is essential that you practice with all we have done. Especially deepen mindfulness, and learn to rest in this space of Pure Awareness. We will use all of that as foundation for our continued work together.

There are several practices I want to introduce here, and hope you will work with them through the summer. You have done variations of them with me before. Barbara will lead them. That is all.

Barbara: There are three exercises from Aaron. I'm going to lead them as guided meditations, in the way he taught them to me. The first is done with eyes open.

Visualize, or use a picture in the room on which to focus, or a plant, a crystal or other object. For this first time, a picture of Jesus, or the Buddha statue, or one of the teachers whose pictures are here would be ideal. It needs to be someone who personifies truth for you in a deep way. Ultimately, the flower, or piece of dirt, or **anything** has the same nature, so it doesn't matter what you use. But the first time there may be more clarity with a beloved being.

Eyes open, soft, unfocused ... *(pause after each line)*

Breathe out, focusing on the exhale ... Breathing yourself into this beloved teacher or guru ...

Breathe in, breathing all of that being into yourself ...

Allow boundaries to dissolve ...

As much as is possible, rest in the energy of that being ... No separation ...

In that being's perfection, his/her Christ or Buddha nature, see your own perfection ...

No boundaries ... All as one ... Continue it at your own pace ...

(Bell.)

Barbara: Do this with a picture or visualization, do it with the sky, moving out awareness into that infinite space. Come to know your unlimitedness. No boundaries. When it's a bit stabilized, begin to do it with anything, especially that in which you've previously found it hard to see the Christ or Buddha nature. Do it with someone who's arguing with you; do it with the toilet as you clean it!

It can be a short practice that you do at the beginning of sitting, and also something you do for five minute breaks during the day.

The second practice is done with the aperture in the breath we've worked with before. This isn't new.

Breathe in ... pause ... breathe out ...

Extend that pause just a bit, bringing awareness to it as NOW.

Just that. We've done it occasionally to bring us back to now. In that NOW there is pure awareness. In that moment we rest in Pure Mind, in ultimate reality.

The emphasis now is to stabilize that Pure Mind, stabilize our ability to rest in it. So instead of doing this just while sitting, we do it during times of tension, coming back from the arising thought or emotion to Pure Mind. But it can't be escape. If you're using

it as escape, to avoid discomfort or an emotion or thought, know you are doing that. It's okay. With awareness, we notice the desire for escape is just another arising. Breathe again; return to Pure Mind.

Try it.

(We do it for awhile.)

(Bell.)

Barbara: Try this as part of your meditation, to stabilize that resting in pure mind. Try it also during the day, when there's agitation. Does it bring you back to center?

The third practice is also one we've done before, but is expanded here. This is the practice Aaron has been teaching this spring, greeting what arises with that question, "From where did it arise?" seeing how it dissolves with the recognition that it's old mind, resting in that space of Pure Mind that we find ourselves in as thought dissolves.

I want to give you an example. Sitting, I see myself planning; note, "planning, planning." Back to my breath. Planning arises again. Here I note it and ask, "From where did it arise?" or "Who is planning?" With that question, I open a door to see very clearly a place of fear, wanting to be safe, not hurt, affirmed for doing good—some or all of that holds true for me. I may allow in a sense of pain born of that desire to be safe, pain that I've kept at bay before. It's so clear that in this moment, no planning is needed. I am safe. There has never been safe/unsafe. There's never been worthy/unworthy. It's all old mind conditioning. I don't need to do that dance anymore! At this point, for me, the fear and grasping at safety or affirmation dissolves. It just vanishes. I'm left with a very pure awareness, just resting there. There's a deep peace that has nothing to do with arising or dissolving—deep peace of resting in Pure Mind, in my true nature.

Practice this as frequently as you can, both during formal practice and when noting arising during the day.

June 10, 1993

(We are meeting outside on the lawn, under the trees. It is a magnificent June day!)

Aaron: I am Aaron. Good morning and my love to you. You have been asking about passion for several weeks and I have saved that for today. Love, joy, passion and equanimity. Are they compatible? Absolutely and unequivocally, yes.

Take a deep breath. Close your eyes. Smell the freshness around you. Feel the warmth of the sun and the gentle coolness of the shadow of these trees. Feel the softness of the breeze. Watch the breath moving in and out. There are many kinds of joy. Feel this quiet joy.

Moving from that general awareness of what surrounds you out here this morning, let us reprocess it. Feel the myriad physical contacts on your skin, to your nostrils. Notice the move through consciousness and perception. Physical touch of the breeze contacting skin; mind knowing there is a breeze. Heat and cool of sunshine and shade; mind knowing there is sunshine and shade. Just that far for now.

Now shift again. I'm going to be quiet for one or two minutes here. Know that there is breeze, shade, sunshine and sweet smells. Close your eyes and just feel all of these things. See if you can attune yourself to that quiet joy, peace and connection. *(Some time of silence.)*

Let us come back to contact, consciousness and perception. There has no doubt arisen in you a sense of comfort. We spoke several weeks ago about the difference between comfort and liking. We investigated the ways that the move to liking draws in a sense of self. Comfort and discomfort can be totally empty of self, containing only the bare perception of the experiences. Yet the perception stage necessitates some degree of self. In order to know that a breeze is a breeze, or that the smell of a flower is the smell of a flower, you go into, ideally, the memory of bare perceptions. But at times you may go into not only the memories, but also the stories of those memories.

If you know that this is not a memory of bare perception but a memory that contained self, you're not likely to get caught in it this time around. But you need that memory that "you" had, or "someone" had, in order to identify what is in the present. The emotional and physical nerves will tell you if there's pain. If another is emitting anger, you'll feel that through the energy body. If it's something burning hot, you'll know that through the physical nerve endings. But those things which do not create severe discomfort, like a breeze or the smell of a flower, need to be identified somehow, and so we do go into memory. That memory gives rise to like and dislike. When you are aware of the shift from neutral into like and dislike, attachment and aversion do not need to arise.

That's work we've done in the past, exploring the differences between like/dislike and attachment/aversion. I know you all understand it. I simply wanted to mention it in passing.

Sitting here and experiencing the beauty of this day, close your eyes again and feel it. Watch very carefully in yourself; as I make the following statement, what happens? "Enjoy the sunshine of this day my friends because this will be the last sunny day until September." *(As Aaron made this statement a large cloud covered the sun!)*

What happens when I make that statement? Can you see any aversion or attachment arising? When you were simply enjoying this day, there was not any need to hold on to it; there was no clinging. When somebody moves to snatch it away from you, then there is fear and a sense that you're going to lose something that is important to you. There is clinging and craving. You are going to have to watch this in yourselves. What happens to the joy and peace you were experiencing when craving arises? A very simple question: is the joy still there?

One of you is answering me: "Yes, Aaron, joy is always here." Yes, but you're not aware of it, because the contraction of the craving blocks it. When you sit here and relax into the beauty of the day, you're a wonderfully free floating ball of energy. Your energy fields are doing wonderful dances within themselves and with each other. When I say, "Hang onto this day because it's the last one," even though you know that I'm not serious in the prediction, it still has the effect of contracting your energy. It acts as a stifling blanket, like an opaque window shade being drawn, blocking the awareness of joy.

I see this opacity in physical terms as well. Several times I've drawn for you the heart center and the bits of shadow that surround it. Your energy projects out from there, and if it doesn't hit any shadow it just keeps projecting. Also, external energy moves in and touches your heart. In that space your heart is totally connected, energy-wise, to all that is. There is a deep, abiding sense of peacefulness, joy, even bliss, and connection. With the contraction of fear, all of these barriers go up and you part from your connection. The joy dissolves, the peace dissolves. Physically, from my perspective, it is as if someone had built a wall with some holes in it around that heart center. It is not a solid wall, but a wall nevertheless.

Some of you have had meditation experiences of very deep connection; very strong absence of self. You have also experienced the extraordinary bliss of these experiences, even moving beyond bliss to a state we call rapture. There are changes in the body's chemical composition at that point, changes in the pulse; the breath becomes very fine and short; the vibrational frequency is very high. Talk about passion! These are among the most passionate moments that you can know. The body response is somewhat similar to that of orgasm, but much more refined, much more subtle. The more self comes into it, the more opacity there is, the more that rapture, or joy, diminishes. You suddenly find yourself caught in this self. Grasping at this, pushing away that. Where is your joy? Where is your love? Where is passion?

So this is a process of careful watching and mental noting, of learning to see when self solidifies, and to send love to that fear that has solidified self. You return to more emptiness of self, and from intense like and dislike to neutral. That return allows you a much deeper passion. Of course, this is only part of the picture. I want to go on and talk about what you think of as sexual passion, and passion for an idea or a person. Before I go on I want to know if there are any questions.

(Discussion.)

Barbara: I'm paraphrasing Aaron. C was giving an example of what happened within her when he said: no more sun, just as the sun disappeared. She saw the contraction and let it go, no aversion, just released it. He says, "Can you see how that move back to neutral allows joy?"

Group: Yes.

Barbara: M has just asked if the process of noting can create self-consciousness? Yes, but that just becomes something else to note! If there's no fight with arising, there's no fight with seeing the arising of a "self" who is noting. We note the movement from neutral into strong liking, the movement out of bare perception into old mind. We note, as something separate, that there's a self doing this. Then the whole thing comes back to center.

Barbara: M is asking about spontaneity. She says this whole process feels so lacking in spontaneity that, for her, is a necessary ingredient in joy.

When you first learned to swim there wasn't a lot of spontaneity to it. There was: "Now I'm supposed to turn my head, and which arm do I move, and how many kicks?" Noting step by step: how do I do this and put it together? As you practiced it became very spontaneous. You don't think about swimming now, you just swim. It returns to spontaneity.

Barbara: Aaron is asking me to discuss something here before he goes on. He says he was talking about the depth of joy that comes with equanimity and how we lose that joy when we move into craving and aversion. He was talking about the very deep bliss of feeling connected. He is saying he thinks all of you have had that experience of deep connection at sometime.

What is passion? How do we define passion? Does it have to come from a place of self? A place empty of self? I'm not sure how we define passion. To me, I've had what I consider very passionate spiritual experiences.

(The following is several people talking:)

... We are not denying the passion of spiritual experiences. What we want to know is: what about physical, body passion?

... Or being really pissed off at someone, or fighting, or yelling at your partner. Working out problems in a passionate way. Feeling passionate about politics.

... All the things we get passionate about in our lives.

... It seems like all of those things connect us in some very deep and meaningful way that has to do with being human and not neutral.

... Including passion in making art.

... I remember talking to Aaron a couple of years ago about how my writing was more powerful when I was in a very passionate state. Especially when dealing with anger. Some of the most powerful writing came from being in the midst of the emotion and writing about it. He talked about the deep emotion opening some kind of door that then allowed love in.

Aaron: I am Aaron. This is complex, I'm going to try to break it into small pieces and see if we can put them all together. First of all, you as human are a bundle of nerve endings. There are quasi-physical nerves which discern energy. There are what I would call mental and emotional nerves, by which I mean if somebody touches you with a verbal pin, you also react. This is the gift of your being. You are not here to become non-reactive; to lose your very beautiful humanness. You are here to learn compassion

and love. If there were never any sensations there would be nothing that would push you into reactivity and nothing to open your heart to love. Some of you live somewhat volatile lives. Could you have learned the truths you've learned in recent years if there had been nothing that had caused pain in any way?

You have somehow got equanimity mixed up with becoming zombies. The person who lives with deep equanimity has the freedom to fully express his or her heart, the freedom to live with intense joy, because it is not a joy based on something that he or she fears will be snatched away. He or she knows it is not permanent, whether it lasts 5 seconds or fifty years, so the joy has nothing to do with attachment. This unattached joy is the deepest joy possible in the expression of your lives.

This truth does not apply just to spiritual areas. The person with no strong aversion or attachment can make a strong political stand, because there is no hatred or separation in it. The full passion is given to the truth as it's being expressed—the truth of each being's right to be free of suffering, of each being's right to free will and self determination. Your practice leads you increasingly into that freedom to express passion. If you can not express that passion, then you are using your practice as an escape, as another kind of wall to protect you from feeling. What we are talking about here is feeling fully and ever more fully, with no fear of the consequences. Giving ourselves totally to our lives, to our lovers, to our work, to each other and to ourselves. Can you see how it fits together?

Now, I ask you just this: how do you live this moment as if it were the last moment of your life? If it were the last moment of your life, would you not live it passionately? Whether you were gardening or talking or making love, would you not live it passionately?

But each moment **is** the last moment. The being who lives with deep equanimity, without craving and clinging, is not attached to holding on to this moment. He or she simply lives it fully and feels the deep joy or the deep pain of it, without the need to make it be joy rather than pain. He or she allows the pain to become the fire through which he or she passes, and which hardens the metal, makes him or her stronger, fuller and more resilient.

In the actual living of your lives, each of you gets caught over and over again. Self arises and there is a fiery argument with another. Your lover looks at another and there is desperate jealousy. Each of you is hurt by others and moves into a defendedness that sometimes feels rage or even hatred, a seemingly passionate rage.

I am not suggesting that it is in any way wrong or bad to experience any of this. But the seeming passion grows out of delusion, that there is a self who reacts to the world, a self who clings or pushes away **with passion**, who even loves with passion—but still, a self. In reality, that illusion of self binds you to the illusory concept of passion, not the real experience! There is clearly a different kind of passion, one that you can allow yourself to increasingly experience and which is so deeply blissful and free of suffering. This connects to your humanness.

What is this identity I've called self? Barbara just read a written interview of a woman who is a nun. She was asked about renunciation. Was it hard to give up having hair, buying things with her money and choosing what she wanted to do with her time? She said none of that was really hard. What was really hard was to put on these nun's

robes, to shave her head, and to join a community where she was just another nun in line. To be truly nobody. She talks about how she struggled against that for some time, how she kept seeing the arising of wanting to be noticed, wanting to be special. She says that after some years of that struggle it began to abate. She ceased needing to talk to people in order to impress them. She began to truly speak from her heart. She does not say it, but one can read between the lines that at that time she became truly passionate.

When I think of a passionate lover I don't think of a person who is being physical in a self-involved way and inviting my physical response. The most passionate lovers I have ever known are those who were fully present. They are there with such a startling presence, such a strong energy, that one totally melts into that energy and all sense of separation dissolves.

The same is true in the arts. When you deeply involve yourself in that work there is no self. There are those who were in agony in their lives and yet created magnificent art work. Yet if you look closely, that art work must transcend the personal. Van Gogh was not expressing his own anguish; he was expressing the human condition, human suffering. If it were purely personal and egotistical, you would not relate to it in the same way. This winter Barbara saw a very beautiful dance, choreographed about the dancer's cousin. This was a woman who experienced some strong mental pain in her life. If it had only been the dancer's story, how he felt about his cousin, people would have been yawning. What was so gripping was how beautifully his body expressed the pain that all beings feel when they relate to the pain of the loved ones around them.

Your passion does connect you. In order for it to connect you, emotion or thought must come to a place of center, and come from a place of center out into the world. Otherwise it's not passion. It's ego, acting to proclaim itself, which is not at all beautiful or moving to others.

True passion is empty of self. It does not mean there may not be strong feelings involved, but it essentially grows out of a place of deep connection, not a place of separation. What of the passion of a passionate argument? Somebody is attacking you and you are feeling hurt, criticized or wronged. Perhaps you're arguing about a subject that is very important to you. On one level, if it comes merely from personal needs and fears, it becomes very petty. But, when it comes from a place of deep pain in your heart, so that it ceases being "I want it this way," and becomes a cry of agony, then you are opening your heart to that agony of all beings. You're touching a deep place of center. It is that opening of the heart that brings you back and connects you again. It is why two lovers come so forcefully together after an argument. Their hearts are so open to their own deep anguish that they begin to really hear the anguish of the other.

I began by saying that you are not here in incarnation to become calm zombies, but to live passionately. Your emotional body is so terribly painful for you sometimes. The deeply passionate moments are so high, whether painful or joyful. But, through it all, they bring you back to what it means to be human. Because your passions bring you back into compassion. Notice the relationship of the words. Passion is the key to compassion. We do not turn off feelings to find equanimity. We move deeper into passion, and that provides the foundation for compassion, because the heart is open and connection is felt. Is this compatible with Vipassana practice? The practice is

necessary for mindfulness to become spontaneous. At first noting is awkward. Then it becomes so well practiced and so spontaneous that the pull into a strong ego self is noted quickly. Space is created for that pain. You come back to center and you are able to be more and more passionate, because you are free, without a self tying down that passionate open heart.

I know there are questions. We are also not at all finished with this subject, there is much more that could be said about it. I would especially like to further explore the sense of unworthiness, and its relation to passionate feelings. That is all.

Question: My friends have said: what happened to you? You used to have so much passion and you used to be funny. I can see what Aaron was saying, that I was trying to be perfect. The passion is lying at a deeper level of no self at this point, which also means accessing some of the deeper emotions of rage or grief that are inside.

Aaron: I am Aaron. I think that it is important not to get too involved in trying to categorize all this, to see that categorization as just another strategy to try to stay safe. Instead, just keep asking yourself the question: what is this feeling? Who is feeling it? If I was not feeling anger, or jealousy or unworthiness, or whatever it might be, what might I be feeling? Is this emotion masking something that I am protecting myself from? Can I begin to sink into that? And to know that that's also not me, it's just another layer of that which has arisen. Just something else to watch moving through.

I want to come back to passion here. Can you understand, as you do this work and find freedom from self, the ways in which you do grow increasingly passionate? Are there questions about that, about the deepest passion coming from a place of connection and leading you deeper into a place of connection. Can you see that striving to be passionate is just another kind of grasping that prevents you from feeling passion? Just come back to your heart. Keep letting go of defendedness and you can not help but be passionate. That is all.

Are there questions?

(M has said that this is an indirect approach to passion. What about a more direct approach like singing and dancing, and so on?)

Aaron: I am Aaron. By all means, sing! Dance! Make love! Argue! But do it with that degree of mindfulness which knows when there is a self-conscious self dancing and arguing and making love for its effect on others, to create an identity or self image. Begin to observe the ways that fear prevents you from being truly, open-heartedly passionate. Do you understand?

Barbara: Aaron has talked often about the balance between devotional practice and Vipassana. Vipassana leads us back into mindfulness, helping us to develop deeper and deeper awareness. Devotional practice is a way of expressing our connectedness; really nurturing that connectedness. Devotional practice does not have to mean formal sitting in meditation. It can be dancing, it can be gardening, it can be making love. When you make love, make sure the other is God.

J: When I was in the hospital, I was reading this article *(talks about balance)* ...

Barbara: I find that I keep going back and forth with this balance. That whenever I'm very immersed in Vipassana practice, to the point that I'm not taking any time to be

passionate in my life, I'm using my practice as an escape. It just becomes an intellectual pushing away of anguish, of staying safe and in control. When I see that it brings me right back home, opens my heart and allows me to acknowledge that pain. Then passion returns.

Aaron was talking before about passion/compassion. It is very important that we remember that we're not doing any of this work to become perfect or free of emotions. We're doing it all to open our hearts and develop compassion, to really learn to love one another and stop judging ourselves and each other. We keep moving back and forth as we need to, to form the balance.

Aaron is just suggesting that the reverse is also true. If you push your practice aside and just leap into the passion, you are also pushing away and not wanting to be responsible because that's too frightening. And the balance comes in again. Just noting, "Grasping at this or pushing that away; come back to center." Noting, I come back to center.

Aaron: I am Aaron. I have only this to add. When you are passionate this week, and I hope that you will be passionate, be mindful about the passion. Try not to intrude upon the passion and become an observer of it, so much as to ask yourself afterward: what was that passion? When it has quieted down again, sit down with the memories of it and see how it moved through you. Was it a passion that separated or connected, or was there some of each? Did it start with a strong, angry self? And as self emerged into its pain around that anger, did self dissolve? Did it begin with a body desirous of being touched? As self let go of self and merged its energy more fully into the partner, what happened to passion?

I'm not suggesting that you write a scientific treatise on each moment of the arising of passion while it's happening, which certainly is destroying of spontaneity, but look at it carefully afterward. See what you can learn about when you are most fully passionate. See if you can better define passion for yourself. Are there questions?

Barbara: (*We're talking about next year.*)

Aaron: Now that we've gone through some of this dependent origination work, I would like to bring you back to seeing yourselves as energy and experiencing yourselves as energy. I hope you will start to know the ways your energy relates to everything. How does that apply to healing? to dreams? to nutrition? to the environment?

In the fall we will begin to focus on another part of the chain where the conditionality is causal and not necessary. This is the move from ignorance through volitional formation and into rebirth consciousness. We will look deeper at the meaning of the term *sankhara* and the ways it relates to *vinnana*. We will also be working much more with this "Pure Awareness," and learning how to stabilize this level of awareness, not with attachment to Ultimate Reality as a safe place, but with clear seeing of the relationship between those which we call *relative* and *ultimate* realities. We will also be working much more directly with energy and light, and with the practice of lucid dreaming.

I want to get further into the light body. We've been dealing largely with mind. You've seen this drawing of yourself with the body chakras, the higher chakras and light body. We will explore that energy and light. How do you bring it into the totality of what you are? How do the body energy meridians and the energy within those meridians relate

June 10, 1993

to Universal Energy? In working with another's energy in healing, it is not enough to deal only with the physical body chakras. How can we work with the higher chakras for healing purposes, for ourselves and others? What is the relationship between energy blockage and old karma. We can clarify old karma in ways we have been practicing. How can we also work with it directly within the light body?

If there is interest I would also like to talk a bit more about what it means to be citizens of the universe. What is happening out there in this world beyond your immediate notice? How may you influence what happens there? That's just a suggestion, if there is interest.

It would be interesting to explore your infiniteness, how you express that power, or don't express it.

All of this grows from the ground of watching what moves through you, being aware of how you create adhering karma, being aware of motivation and of intention. As you expand your power more and more outward, you must be increasingly responsible. So much of the work this semester was to lead you into an understanding of that responsibility, before offering higher tools which can strongly influence others.

There are many more suggestions, which I will save. This is as far as we will take this work at this time.

I know you will all practice with what we've learned, with mindfulness and with formal exercises. Please enjoy your summers and enter into this work with a sense of joy, not of obligation. Especially the exercises offered last week will connect you to joy and peace. And remember that this has been so deeply ingrained into your understanding now that much work will happen unconsciously. If you are aware, awake, you cannot help but learn!

I wish you a joyful, indeed a passionate summer. That is all.

(Barbara: I gather from Aaron that it is his hope to continue this book. This present work will be part one of two parts. The second part will pick up here, where we left off.)

Appendix A

Aaron: A Channeled Introduction

(Taken from the book, Aaron.)

Greetings to you all. I am Aaron. Some of you may feel skepticism or discomfort at the idea of being addressed by a spirit. I ask you to look more deeply here. What and who am I? What and who are you? Understanding the emptiness of all form, what is the difference between us, or is there none?

I have taught that we are all beings of light. What does that mean? Some of you may be familiar with the meditative experience of the dissolution of ego and body. Those who have experienced this have ascertained that what they are left with is light. That's all; just light. There is no ego in this space. There is no sense of self or other. There is no permanence of form, no individual thought, no selfish will, no personal consciousness. Beyond all these attributes or "*skandhas*" there is pure awareness that the essence that was erroneously considered self is simply light and energy. This is what you are. This is what I am.

As we each evolve, we choose to materialize in whatever form is best suited to our growth and to our present learning needs. This earth is a schoolroom. You are here in material form because it is here that you will find the next lessons that you need. I have evolved beyond the need for material form so I have none. Nevertheless I am still learning and am in the form best suited to those lessons I now must learn.

Do not take my evolution beyond form to imply that I am better than you. All souls have equal worth. All I do have a different perspective. I can call on the knowledge and wisdom of all of my past lives, as well as the wisdom I've gained in these 450 of your earth years since I passed from your plane. But what I teach you must be filtered through your own processes. I can only guide you. The real learning must come from your own experiences. If what I say is of help and provides guidance, that is fine. Use it. If it doesn't help, what matter where it comes from. Put it aside and follow your own inner wisdom.

On your earth plane the greatest lessons for most of you are faith and love. On my plane the most important lessons are wisdom and compassion, and beyond that, a deeper moving into Love and Light. Here we have passed beyond any illusion of the separate, small ego self. We communicate telepathically, one spirit with another or many others. As there is no ego, there is no need to protect the self from embarrassment or to cover up unskillful choices. Thus our sharing is complete and honest. Wisdom accrues rapidly, for each spirit shares its own wisdom and experiences completely and I can learn from another's experiences just as well as from my own. Thus there is no longer the need to "live" it all myself.

I also learn deeper compassion and it is partially for this learning that I choose to teach. You remind me of the pains of being human, remind me not to judge another, but to keep my heart open in love. A great teacher has said "Never put anyone out of

Appendix A

your heart” but it is so easy to fall into that judgment on any plane. My contact with you reminds me that what I work toward is unconditional love.

I’ve said I have the advantage of the perspective of many lifetimes. My final lifetime on your human plane was as a Theravadin monk in Thailand, a Meditation Master. The wisdom and understandings of many lifetimes came together then, enabling me to find freedom for myself and also to help many beings to discover that path. Yet I do not teach you only as that Thai Master. I have been a monk in many, many lifetimes. I have wandered forests, dwelled in caves, and lived in magnificent temples. Through these lives I’ve practiced most forms of Buddhism. That is only a small part of it. I have been Christian monks in just as many lifetimes, priests, and positions that are higher in the hierarchy of that church.

I have been Muslim, Jew, Sufi, Taoist, and so many more. I have lived in all colors of skin, in male and female form, in many and diverse cultures. I have prayed in hovels and palaces. I have starved and lived in luxury while those around me starved. I have been a nobleman and a murderer. I have loved and hated, killed and cherished, in short, done just about everything in the realm of human experience.

So have all of you! What does it mean to have compassion for another? Can you see that the tyrant or the torturer is also you and move from judgment of him to compassion for his pain and situation? This does NOT mean condoning his acts. It means simple compassion, acceptance, unconditional love.

Remember that this learning is a process. If you were already arrived at that space of unconditional love and perfect compassion and acceptance you would not need to be here learning in a human body. Remember that I too am still learning this. Do not judge yourself here but be increasingly aware of your desire to judge another, that you may continue to learn and grow.

Let me return to my perspective that I’ve mentioned. I teach you as all of these beings that I was, the murderer and his learning so painfully gained as well as the beloved meditation master and his. Beyond that, I teach from my present perspective that knows the illusion of all form, that sees clearly that all any of us are is light and energy, slowly evolving to a brilliance and clarity as all self and ego are dissolved.

As such I do not teach Buddhism or any “ism” separate from the Truth. I know of only two truths here with a capital “T,” God and Love. All formal religions are merely paths to the understanding of these two Truths.

Some of you may squirm at my use of the word God here. I do not imply a deity with a long white beard. Call it the Eternal or Absolute. If you are a follower of Buddhism, call it the “Unborn, undying, unchanging and uncreated” of the Udana Scripture. These are labels. You find it so difficult to remember that this body is not your essence, but merely the borrowed form of this lifetime. As “Aaron” or your own name are merely labels applied for convenience, so “God” is a label. We need some common way to discuss this Force which is the Source of all Light. Call it God, Goddess, Ram, Krishna, All that is, The Absolute, as you prefer.

This Essence, this Force, is beyond all attempts to label. It is truly Eternal and labels can only limit. This is why Buddhism attempts to label only in the negatives of what it’s not—unborn, undying. This Absolute is the source of all love and all light. For simplicity’s sake

Appendix A

I prefer to use the label God. If that makes you uncomfortable, call it what you will. Be assured that your label is irrelevant. Can you build a fence around infinity?

Much of what I teach falls under the label "Buddhism." I had my greatest understandings as a Buddhist. I am not attached to this form, but do find it a useful tradition to use as a teaching tool. No pride is implied when I state that I was a wise teacher in that lifetime and my understanding of the tools of meditation helped many beings find their way. So it is natural that I again draw on that wisdom as I teach.

But I am not a Buddhist. I have a great love for that being who was known as the Buddha; also for he who was known as the Christ, and for many other great saints and teachers. I do not choose to label myself here.

I do stress the use of Vipassana, not as an end in itself but as a teaching tool. The practice of this meditation will lead you to a clarity of understanding of the three characteristics of impermanence, suffering and *anatta* or impersonality of all things. This as an intellectual understanding is also not an end in itself. You are not here just to understand these three truths but to learn from this understanding, to grow in love and faith, in compassion and wisdom.

The Buddha taught that there is no soul, and I speak about a soul. Here I believe we have what we'd call a semantic difficulty. There is no word in your language that is suitable for what I describe. I borrow the word soul as the closest. By soul you imply an individual. By soul, I mean that essence of energy which is totally impersonal, even devoid of memory and certainly devoid of self, but which is unique to you and is of the same material, the same essence, as the Divine.

You have many aspects. One of these is the personal that you now experience. This aspect has form, thought, and so on, but of course it is impermanent. This is the conscious self. Then there is what might be termed the higher self or superconscious mind. This aspect retains the memories of all the forms in which you have manifested and the wisdom attained by all those forms. Within the same memory pattern, misunderstandings may also be retained until they are resolved through the physical life experience. Notice that I have called this aspect "higher self." It is still a self.

Beyond that is what I would term the soul. This aspect is pure light and energy. Some of you have had glimpses of this aspect through meditative experience. Thus, you can come to know that this is your true nature. There is no self here, and no possibility of such delusion. There is only energy, manifested as light. Thus we are all, in essence, beings of light.

This is our true essence. We begin as sparks of that perfect Light. Choosing material form as your way of evolution, that spark is increasing in its brilliance and clarity, losing all shadow, so it will shine as a small sun. If you were to take my essence at this phase of my evolution, and place it in front of that perfect Light, you would see the barest edges of human form and a gray shadow cast against that brilliance. If you were to take the essence of a perfectly evolved being such as the Buddha or the Christ and put them in front of that perfect Light, they would be invisible! That is what each of you is evolving to: Perfect Invisibility. Immaculate Emptiness. Oneness with God.

Your meditation practice is the way to come to know your true nature by experience. It takes you past the delusion of a separate self. It leads you toward compassion and

Appendix A

away from judgment. I cannot overstress the importance of these paths of learning. From my many lifetimes of experience I've found that the most valuable forms of meditation to those beings who were in a place of readiness for greater responsibility on their path were a mixture of Vipassana and devotional meditation. Vipassana is hard work and requires courage and faith. Devotional meditation inspires you, reminds you of the reason for this work, of the path of your evolution to unity with that perfect Light which I have called God.

I thank you for this opportunity to speak with you. I hope I have left you with more questions than answers. Perhaps one day we will meet and I can speak to some of those questions, but please remember that the answers are all already there, within your own hearts. Practice well and find them for yourselves.

Go with my love,

Aaron

Appendix B

Insight Meditation Instructions A Series of Guided Meditations

(Drawn from retreats—John Orr and Barbara Brodsky.)

We recommend that you work with these instructions slowly, reading a section and then practicing with it before moving on. Eventually your practice will include all five sections, but there is no hurry. We hope you'll relax and enjoy meeting each section.

Beginning

It is helpful to establish mindfulness of body at the beginning for several reasons. One is that we tend not to be in our bodies, some of us, but rather more in our minds, thinking, not in deep touch with the physical aspects of our being. So when we do sitting meditation, standing meditation, walking meditation, a lot of our instruction is to be in our body. Awareness of posture is very helpful here. Awareness of breath. Awareness of physical sensation. Then we can move on to awareness of other sense consciousness beyond the body sensations, awareness of emotional consciousness and of mind.

You will be most comfortable with a zabuton or a cushion or blanket that you can place under your legs, beneath your ankles and feet and knees, so that they have something to rest on, something to cushion them from the hardness of the floor. A zafu or other cushioning underneath your buttocks will lift your spine. Position it so you're not sitting on the flat surface and rolling backward but rather, sitting on the forward edge of the cushion so that your pelvis tips under and the spine is naturally lengthening upwards.

At the beginning of the sitting, it may be helpful to take a few deeper breaths, deeper longer breaths, inhaling, and then slowly exhaling. As you exhale, allow your body to release tension in those areas where you habitually hold it—perhaps the shoulders, chest, stomach or the back. With each exhalation, feel your body softening and relaxing.

To bring awareness to posture, start with the base of the body, noticing the position of the legs, ankles and feet as a tripod. Bring your attention to this foundation. Notice the position of the legs and the pelvis.

You are not lifting the spine from the top or the bottom. Rather, bring awareness to the erector muscles on either side of the spine; these lengthen the spine gently upward towards the shoulder blades. You may feel as if gentle hands supported erectness by lifting under the edges of the rib cage. Feel a little bit of lifting under the shoulder blades too, lifting without tensing the lower back. Allow those lower back muscles to be relaxed.

Appendix B

As you experience this gentle lifting beneath the rib cage, beneath the shoulder blades, see that there's some space created between the bottom of your rib cage and your pelvis. Lengthening.

Roll the shoulders back; let the tops of the shoulders fall away from the ears. The tops of the shoulders are relaxed. Notice some roundness and curvature where the upper arm meets the shoulder socket. You can have your hands cupped one inside the other on your lap, perhaps the thumbs touching together, or rest them on your thighs if that is more comfortable. Each position has its own benefits. See what fits you. No rules here.

Slightly tuck under the chin while the throat remains soft, relaxed; gently push backward on the upper lip. The throat and the neck remain relaxed, untensed, as are all the facial muscles. Feel gentle hands lifting the head, just below and behind the ears, skull softly lifted to erectness.

Skin of the forehead relaxing down toward your eyes. Eyes very soft. Eyelids gently covering your eyes, unless you're used to meditating with your eyes open. If you are accustomed to practice with the eyes open and are comfortable like that, that's fine. Area behind the eyes relaxed, the corners of the eyes smiling.

You may wish to focus the closed eyes on the inner wall of the forehead, the third eye. See it as a blank screen upon which the inner gaze rests.

All the facial muscles softening, relaxing from the inside out. Any tightness in the face can release, any holding. As we smile and relax into our bodies, tension can let go.

Let the lower jaw hang open, so the lips separate a bit. Let the lower jaw hang open so any tension in the jaw joints can release. Slight smile in the corners of the mouth, the inner smile, Buddha smile, feeling of lightness in the corners of the mouth. We smile into the moment, into our body.

Bring gentle awareness to the throat, smiling into your throat, mid area of the throat, Adam's apple area. Be aware of any sensations as you smile into your body, moving now to the area of the throat. Perhaps sensations are apparent, perhaps not; either way, it's okay. Move awareness down into the base of the throat, your jugular notch.

Smiling down into the chest, left side of the chest, left lung, right side of the chest, right lung. Smiling into the body. Experiencing it ... Establishing mindfulness in the present moment; mindfulness of body ... Smiling into the heart center, in the area of the physical heart. Touching the heart with awareness.

Smiling into the abdomen. Take a deep breath into the chest or the abdomen. Take a deep breath, hold it momentarily, and then slowly exhale. As you do, feel the chest and stomach relax. Do that two or three times: silent deep breaths; each exhale with awareness. Relaxing into your body.

As you smile into the abdomen, let it be soft. Soft belly; Buddha belly. No holding of any tension in the stomach. Letting go of fear. Relaxing the abdomen.

As you breath, you may notice a slight lifting in your sternum, as though there is a string tied to your sternum and it's being lifted up on an angle.

Right now, each of us is breathing, a natural function of our body. Being mindful of breathing, we simply turn attention to this process happening already. Our body is

breathing in, and it's breathing out. *Anapanasati* is mindfulness of breathing—simply to be aware when we're breathing in; aware, mindful when we're breathing out. It's taking one breath at a time. Know when you're breathing in, and know when you're breathing out. Breathing in, be aware of the whole body. Breathing out, be aware of the whole body.

(Some time of practice.)

Breathing

Allow a smile in the corners of your eyes and mouth, an inner smile; it doesn't have to be outer, just an inner feeling of lightness in the corners of your eyes and mouth. Call it Buddha smile. It's a radiance, a lightness.

We focus on the breath as the primary object. Be aware of the breath at the nostrils or wherever it's clearest to you. If your normal breathing is through the mouth, be aware of the breath coming and going through the mouth.

Notice the physical sensation of the breath touching at mouth or nostrils, the coolness of the in breath, the warm softness of the out breath.

Know when you're breathing in; know when you're breathing out. Allow the breath to find its own rhythm and flow; we are not controlling it, just observing it, trusting in the body and the breath. Knowing when you're breathing in, and knowing when you're breathing out, your breath becomes the primary object.

Know when you are breathing in. Know when you are breathing out. Know when you are breathing in a long breath. Know when you are breathing out a long breath. Know when you are breathing in a short breath. Know when you are breathing out a short breath.

Sometimes it can be helpful to extend and lengthen the breath at the beginning of a sitting, so that you begin to focus on the entirety of the inhalation and the exhalation, and on the pauses or apertures between the inhalation and the exhalation and between the exhalation and the inhalation.

This pause between the breaths is the "now," just this very moment. Noticing this aperture helps to bring us more deeply into the present moment and concentrates the mind: awareness also brings us deep into the heart center.

Experience your breath as a circle. There is a beginning portion of the inhalation, a middle of the inhalation, and then the latter part of the inhalation, a slight pause in the breath, and then the beginning of the exhalation, the middle portion of the exhalation, and the end of the exhalation. A slight pause, and, again, the beginning of the inhalation, and the whole cycle begins once again.

As you allow the breath to become more subtle and natural, you may not sense the entire length of the inhalation or the exhalation. That's okay. Become aware of as much of the breath as possible.

Know when you're breathing in and know when you're breathing out, when you're breathing in a long breath and when you're breathing in a short breath. Breathing in,

allow the whole body to be calm and at peace. Breathing out, allow the whole body to be calm and at peace.

As the mind begins to slow down, become more calm and focused, awareness penetrates more deeply and the full length and duration of the breath and the pauses between the exhalation and the inhalation become more noticeable.

(Some time of practice.)

Natural concentration

The breath is the primary object but this is not a forced concentration. With natural concentration, we focus attention on what is dominant in our experience. If physical sensation, thought, image or emotion pulls attention away from the breath, know that your attention has moved from the breath. Know when your attention has moved to physical sensation, thinking, image or emotion.

People often think that because a strong sensation, thought, image or emotion draws their attention and they're not with the breath, they're not meditating, that they're being distracted, or that they're not concentrating. Actually, focusing upon that strong sensation develops deeper concentration, because the mind is holding to an object. That's very powerful focus. It's a fine opportunity to develop concentration and mindfulness.

Remember, it's not better to be with one object than another, not better to be with the breath than with a physical sensation, image, thought or emotion. Be with whatever is the predominant experience in the moment.

If you find that an intense sensation keeps pulling your attention away from the breathing towards that sensation, turn your attention to it. Lightly note it, creating some space for the experience, placing awareness on the sensation.

If the sensation is unpleasant, watch the tendency to want to push the sensation away, to not want it. No judgment of aversion, just noticing it arise. Move deeply into the sensation and see how it may change, how it may not be one block of pain, one strong sensation, but little sensations that are arising, ceasing and changing with varying levels of intensity.

If the sensation is pleasant, watch the tendency to want to hold on to it. No judgment of attachment, just noticing it arise. How does sensation change as you touch it with merciful, non-judgmental awareness? What about the attachment to that pleasant sensation?

Are some sensations neutral, calling up neither like nor dislike?

Creating room for the experience, you may find that it moves to another part of the body, from the shoulders down to the back, to a different part of the back, or to the legs. Stay with the experience as long as you are able without doing violence to your body, to yourself. We learn how to work skillfully with meditation and strong bodily sensations.

Tightness in the legs or back, or itching, tingling, pain, any physical sensation, turn your attention to the sensation and note it three times: sensation, sensation, sensation.

Appendix B

If you prefer, note it more specifically as “pain, pain, pain,” “tightness, tightness, tightness,” or as “itching, itching, itching.” Not, “I have pain in my right knee,” which snares us into the story of the pain. Just observing the sensation and noting it as sensation or as pain.

As you turn your awareness to the sensation, notice what happens to it. Does it disappear immediately? Does it fade gradually? Does it intensify? Lessen in intensity? Move about? Does it change into another sensation?

When you find a sensation changing in any way, mentally bring the attention back to the breath as the primary object. Know you have returned to the breath. Know when you’re breathing in; know when you’re breathing out.

As you’re aware of your breathing, if thoughts arise of the past or future, and if the thoughts become predominant, if you find yourself more with the thoughts than with the breath, bring your attention to the thought.

A thought of the past, noting it as “remembering, remembering, remembering.” Watch what happens as you note it. Does it disappear immediately? Does it fade gradually? Does it persist or turn into another thought? What’s the nature of it?

A planning thought, a future oriented thought? Note it as “planning, planning, planning,” or as “fantasizing, fantasizing, fantasizing.” Watch and see how it changes as you note it, as you watch it.

When the thought is no longer predominant, or changes in some way, gently bring the attention back to the breath as being the primary object. Know when you’re breathing in; know when you’re breathing out.

You may have an image that arises in your mind. Some people experience their mind more in images than in thoughts. Treat it the same way as any other mental formation. If, for example, an image arises of yourself seeing and talking to someone else, and if that experience is strong enough to bring the attention away from the breath, turn your attention to that image. Note it as “seeing, seeing, seeing.”

What happens to the image when you touch it with awareness? What is the nature of this object? Does it change when you focus your attention upon it? When the image no longer predominates, bring your attention back to the breath as primary object.

If emotion arises and predominates, know that you are experiencing that emotion. Note it as “anger, anger, anger,” or perhaps as “fear, fear, fear,” or bliss, joy, jealousy, restlessness, boredom, whatever it may be. Again, we note “anger, anger, anger,” not “I’m feeling angry about what he said ...” so as not to become entangled in the story, only to know that this mind/body is experiencing anger.

What happens as you note it? Does it strengthen? Fade? Change? Dissolve? When it is no longer predominant, move awareness back to the breath.

Know when you are breathing in. Know when you are breathing out. Know when you are breathing in a long breath. Know when you are breathing out a long breath. Know when you are breathing in a short breath. Know when you are breathing out a short breath. Breathing in and breathing out, be aware of the whole body and mind.

(Some time of practice.)

Deepening

If the physical sensation, thought, image or emotion returns and is predominant, again move awareness to it—gentle, non-judgmental awareness. Choiceless awareness that moves to whatever is predominant in the mind and body.

If the sensation, thought or emotion has returned and called awareness to it, there is something there that needs to be investigated, not by a probing mind that theorizes but by observing, being fully present with that sensation, thought or feeling and allowing it to be present within the mind/body.

Choiceless awareness. No preference of the breath, the thought, the sensation. Being fully with whatever is. No judgment. Observing.

When sensation, thought or emotion changes or is no longer predominant, move awareness back to the breath.

Know when you are breathing in. Know when you are breathing out. Know when you are breathing in a long breath. Know when you are breathing out a long breath. Know when you are breathing in a short breath. Know when you are breathing out a short breath.

See how you relate to sensation, thought, or emotion when it arises. Is there a desire to push it away, to not want it because it's unpleasant? Is there a desire to hold onto it when it is pleasant?

Mindfulness of physical sensations can teach us a lot about our relationship with our body, and about our patterns of attachment and aversion. If a pleasant sensation, tingling, moving of energy, or feeling of lightness in the body becomes predominant, turn your attention to it and note it as: "tingling, tingling, tingling," or "lightness, lightness, lightness." What happens to it as you touch it with awareness? Does it disappear immediately? Does it fade gradually? Does it intensify? Does it change into another sensation?

How do you relate to the situation? Is there a tendency to want to hold onto the sensation because it's pleasant? Is there attachment to continuation of the sensation in the body? Or can you just experience the bodily sensation with equanimity, noting it, seeing what happens to it?

What if it is an unpleasant sensation, pain, tightness, burning? What happens to it when you touch it with awareness? Does it fade, move, intensify, change? Is there a desire to push it away, to get rid of it? Can you just experience the unpleasant sensation with equanimity, noting it and watching to see what happens to it?

Notice the same process with the arising of thought, image or emotion. Is there a desire to hold onto the pleasant, to get rid of the unpleasant. Can you watch that liking, followed by the next primary object, desire or attachment—wanting to hold on to? Can you watch aversion, followed by wanting to get rid of? What happens to the attachment or aversion when you watch it?

If fear arises about what is observed, and if the fear becomes predominant, allow that to become the focus. "Fear, fear, fear." What happens to the fear as it is watched? Can

Appendix B

we watch fear without fear? Can there be equanimity even with fear? When it changes or loses its intensity, return again to the breath as primary object.

Know when you are breathing in. Know when you are breathing out. Know when you are breathing in a long breath. Know when you are breathing out a long breath. Know when you are breathing in a short breath. Know when you are breathing out a short breath. Breathing in, be aware of the activities of the mind. Breathing out, be aware of the activities of the mind.

No judgment of what you're experiencing. If judgment arises note, "judgment, judgment, judgment." Judgment is just a mental formation. As you note it, see what happens to it; see its impermanence, its emptiness. Can we watch with equanimity as judgment arises, without judgment of that experience? When judgment is no longer predominant, bring the attention back to the breath as the primary object. Breathing in, breathing out. Breathing in, and breathing out.

If you find that it's very difficult to bring your attention back to the primary object because the physical sensation is so strong, and it no longer feels helpful to stay with the strong sensation, you can move.

Before you move, see the intention to move. The body doesn't move automatically. The mind must give the impulse for the body to move. If pain leads to intention to move the position of the legs, for instance, be aware of that intention, and then mindfully shift position to ease the discomfort. Be aware of the sensations, aware of the intention, aware of the movement. Meditation continues; there's no break in the continuity of the awareness.

When you feel ready, you can come back to the primary awareness: breathing in and breathing out, breathing in, pause, breathing out. As thoughts arise, if they're strong enough to draw the attention away from the breath, treat them the same way as bodily sensations.

We cannot shift positions to escape the pain of thoughts or emotions. Can you watch them and make space for them? What happens to the mental formation as you note it? Does it disappear, fade, intensify, lessen in intensity, turn into another memory or thought pattern? See its impermanent, empty nature. It changes, dissolves in time. When you see a change in some way, and thought or emotion is no longer predominant, bring your attention back to the breath as the primary object.

Know when you are breathing in. Know when you are breathing out. Know when you are breathing in a long breath. Know when you are breathing out a long breath. Know when you are breathing in a short breath. Know when you are breathing out a short breath. Breathing in and out, be aware of the activities of mind.

(Some period of practice.)

Insight

In insight meditation, we want to see the nature of body and mind, and of all of the five aggregates—form, feeling, perception, mental formation and consciousness. Watch them arise and pass away. Watch them change. Notice the interrelationships between

Appendix B

them, not thinking about these interrelationships, just noticing, observing the constant movement.

You may have a deeper insight into the impermanence of these aggregates and the emptiness of self therein. Observing body and mind, sensations, thoughts, feelings, perception, consciousness.

You may begin to notice that all phenomena, empty of self, arise when conditions are present to lead to their arising. When those conditions cease, the phenomena fade.

Arising, dissolving. Always in motion. Impermanent. Empty of self.

Consider the lines from the Heart Sutra:

... All dharmas are empty.

They are not born nor annihilated.

They are not defiled nor immaculate.

They do not increase, nor decrease.

So in emptiness, no form, no feeling, no perception, no mental formation, no consciousness.

... No knowledge, no attainment, no realization,

For there is nothing to attain ...

The illusion of permanent self dissolving as awareness penetrates and knows the illusion. Moving deeper, beyond the small self, beyond aversion and attachment, beyond ignorance.

Finding space for all experience to float in that Heart we all share.

The vehicle of choiceless awareness. No judgment of what is seen, no preference for the place awareness shines. Being fully with what is, observing.

If preference or judgment is seen, notice that—"preferring, preferring, preferring," or "judging, judging, judging." No judgment about the preferring or judging. Space for it all to float in choiceless awareness.

When sensation, thought, image or emotion changes or is no longer predominant, move awareness back to the breath.

Know when you are breathing in. Know when you are breathing out. Know when you are breathing in a long breath. Know when you are breathing out a long breath. Know when you are breathing in a short breath. Know when you are breathing out a short breath. Breathing in and out, observing the impermanent nature of all dharmas. Breathing in and out, observing the fading of all dharmas. Breathing in and out and contemplating letting go.

Grasp at nothing. Cling to nothing. Push away nothing in your experience. Be present. Be mindful. Be aware.

It is a gentle, timeless process. Just watching it all unfold. Choiceless awareness. All experience floating in the open heart.

Appendix C

Karma and Liberation

(Compiled from transcripts and dharma talks from Barbara and Aaron.)

Aaron: The title of this talk may seem grandiose, but understanding of karma is essential to our dharma practice, central to liberation. We frequently hear the phrase “It’s my karma,” from someone in either a painful or pleasant situation. We toss the word around easily, yet few of us really understand karma in its many complexities. What exactly is karma and what does it have to do with us, with our daily life, our practice, with liberation?

The word karma means action—simply that. Every action, word, thought carries karma. Only that Arahat, a fully enlightened being who does not need to take rebirth, has the wisdom and complete freedom from attachment and aversion to act, speak or think totally without creating adhering karma. Some of it is what we tend to think of as “good” karma, some “bad.” I prefer not to use the terms good and bad. If you take a class in school and fail the exam, and the teacher invites you to come after class and discuss the work to find and clarify your misunderstanding, is that invitation good or bad? The work it leads to may be fun, or difficult, the invitation itself may be convenient or inconvenient, but it is NOT inherently good or bad.

Karma that draws us back is not punishment but opportunity to learn. So first we need to stop thinking of it as bad. Heavy perhaps, painful, unpleasant in some aspects, but not bad. Just opportunity to learn.

All acts, words, and thoughts create karma. We see the effects of this karma in the fruit of the seed we planted, as it appears in the next moment and the next lifetimes. If I’m kind to another, in the next moment I may feel open and loving and may experience that person’s lovingkindness. I strengthen the habit for kindness in myself and others. In future lives I also reap the fruit of that seed. Think of it as an orchard. You plant the first seeds and in time, in this lifetime, fruit trees grow and bear; we enjoy that sweet fruit. The falling fruit seeds itself so in future generations the orchard remains, heir of that first orchard, bearing fruit for our ancestors.

While we won’t use the words “good” and “bad” to define karma, we can categorize it in certain ways. There is wholesome and unwholesome karma. These words, “wholesome” and “unwholesome” have strong emotional connotations. We might instead say karma that leads to a pleasant, peaceful, joyful next moment or rebirth or karma that leads to a painful, sad, joyless next moment or rebirth. That is a mouthful. Wholesome and unwholesome are the traditional terms. They will do, but use them with awareness.

When a word, act, or thought is based on delusion and fear, selfishness, greed—basically fear and its manifestations—unwholesome adhering karma is created, karma which leads to a new moment or a new birth with an unpleasant fruit. If you act in anger, you reap anger which leads to the creation of the next moment and the next life, in both of which the fruits of that anger will be experienced. When you act in ways

prompted by love but still with the delusion of self—"I am a good person, I will act lovingly"—there is still an "I" performing these acts. "I do this for you"; here are self and other. There is wholesome adhering karma.

Note that they are both adhering karma that lead to rebirth. They are adhering karma, whether wholesome or unwholesome, because they grow out of that delusion of "I"—self and other.

For most humans, no act is entirely pure. You help another from a space of love, but there is also that small bit of self. Where the self seeks attention, compliment, reward and thus there is need and a self that needs—when you say, "I need this," implying another from which to receive it—there is unwholesome karma. The aspects of the act that are loving and in service to others breed wholesome karma. Nevertheless, as long as there is a self doing and controlling, every act, word, or thought based on that delusion of a solid, continuing self results in adhering karma.

This does not mean that you never act without adhering karma. Each of you has moments, sometimes many moments, of offering acts and words unlinked to self. These acts, words, and thoughts grow out of clear seeing that there is no self or other. The results of these volitional formations free of delusion, free of ignorance, is non-adhering karma. However, only the Arahant, that being who is fully enlightened and free of this cycle of birth and death yet still presently on the earth plane, only that being's every thought, word, and act is free of adhering karma. Movement from non-delusion is a process, a learning into which you enter. With mindfulness, courage, and open heart, that which flows through you becomes purer and purer ...

Barbara: ... Let's look at characteristics of karma. I'll list them and then we'll talk about them. 1) Karma is specific. Every word, act, and thought has a result. 2) Karma is habitual and fast growing. 3) You never experience someone else's karma. The one who plants the seed gets the fruit. 4) When you have planted the seed you get the result. 5) Karma grows from intention.

What do these mean? Let's start with #1. Karma is specific. We sometimes talk about karma as planting seeds. If you want sweet apples, you have to plant sweet apple seeds. If you plant sour apple seeds and then pour on lots and lots of honey, pour it into the ground around the seeds, you'll still get sour apples.

There's a story in Buddhist literature about a singer, a woman with a magnificent voice. But she was so terrible to look at that when she sang, she had to be behind a wall or curtain. People asked the Buddha why she was so ugly and her voice so lovely. He said in a past life this woman had been a workman building a temple. He worked on this day after day, but he hated his work. He cursed at the building, told people how ugly it was. Finally it was almost finished and then the workman began to see it in a different way. He felt sorry for all his cursing and complaining. So when it was done, he went out and used his own money to buy a beautiful bell, wonderful clear tone, and he hung it at the temple. Here she is, in this lifetime; the ugliness of the cursing and complaints have manifested into the ugly body. The repentance and generosity produced the lovely voice.

Appendix C

Now I don't know if this really happened. The stories say it did. But the point is, EVERYTHING we do, every word, every act every thought, has a result. Karma is specific. You can't eradicate it. That's the first characteristic.

You might also observe that both the beauty and the ugliness were adhering karma. There was a very solid self that bought the bell and gave it. It is wholesome and leads to pleasant fruits. Nevertheless, it is adhering karma.

The second characteristic, karma grows quickly. The Buddhist scriptures say it multiplies every 24 hours. I don't know how they measure that. The math details don't really matter. Karma is fast growing. It has what is called a conditioning quality. Let me explain what I mean by that.

Much of our action is habitual. We establish patterns for ourselves and get very comfortable in those patterns. If we look at our behavior at all, at the small things, we may say "Oh, it doesn't matter." But it always matters. Let me give you an example my teacher once offered.

None of us here would kill someone, walk into a store with a gun and shoot it if they didn't turn over the money. That feels wrong to us. Most of us would try not to run over an animal on the road. But what do you do when an insect lands on your arm, a mosquito maybe? Swat! Or at least you brush it off without much thought. Do you do that? I do sometimes. It tickles and my brain says "mosquito" and I brush it away. I don't swat them anymore, I've gotten that far in mindfulness, but I still brush them away and sometimes I'm not very careful with whether I hurt them or not.

Are you saying, "Aw, come on. It's only a mosquito"?

What's really happening with that mosquito? First there's sense consciousness of skin sensation. Perception labels it as tickling, a mosquito on my arm. It's unpleasant. Neutral stance moves to dislike and desire to get rid of it. Then the mental formation "irritation" arises. Finally I move to rid myself of the irritation.

The whole of Buddhist philosophy is in that brushing away. Aversion to discomfort, lack of awareness of how each moment rises out of conditions, reactivity. I, I, I, I—a solidifying self that perceives, dislikes, moves to get rid of. Me against the mosquito.

I'm not suggesting it's wrong to move away from discomfort. If I touch a hot stove, the skillful response is to notice the pain and move away. But I don't need to hate the stove. I still appreciate the fine job it does of cooking my meals or warming my house.

What about the mosquito? As I move through discomfort and getting rid of, do I ever recognize that this is a living being? I don't have to allow it to eat me. That's my choice. I can if I want to. But I can also strive to treat it with reverence as a living creature.

Here's where we return to the characteristic "karma grows." Every time I mindlessly brush off that mosquito, I move deeper into a pattern of non-awareness of the sacredness of life. Maybe next week I find a groundhog eating the beans in my garden. He's burrowing under the fence and he's really destroying the plants that are my food. When I haven't paid attention with the mosquito, it's easier to take action to kill the groundhog. Can you see that? What about my neighbor's dog who runs loose and snarls at my kids when they play in my yard. My neighbor won't confine the animal. When do I decide it's okay to poison it?

Appendix C

If I act each time, without reverence for life and awareness of my connection with that life, acting to suit my own needs, to ease my own pain, am I more likely to start to keep a gun under my pillow to protect myself from an intruder? Will I use that gun when an intruder enters, not intent on harming me but on stealing my TV, perhaps?

Each time I practice non-awareness, non-respect for the sacredness and oneness of all life, it makes that pattern of disrespect and solidified self a little firmer.

What if I notice the mosquito, notice the irritation and desire to be rid of it, and then gently brush the mosquito away, taking care not to harm it. If it keeps coming back, I can use repellent or put on long sleeves. Here I'm planting that sweet seed. Each time I'm thus aware and respectful of life, move with mindful intention both to notice my own discomfort and also not to harm another, I nurture that seed. Harm of another starts to become unthinkable. New, skillful patterns develop.

Where I only saw trapping the groundhog or poisoning the dog as alternatives, when they are no longer thinkable alternatives, new ideas arise. Yes, they may lead to some inconvenience, cost or discomfort. How do you decide if it's worth it? Look carefully. It's far less expensive to build a stronger fence than kill the animal—not just out-of-wallet expense but karmic expense.

Karma grows. Skillful patterns become established, or unskillful patterns. Are you planting sour apples, or sweet?

Lets take the third and fourth characteristics together. 3) If you don't plant the seed, you don't reap the fruit, sweet or sour. 4) If you plant the seed, you always reap the fruit, sweet or sour. This gets into who's responsible for what. Let's use children as an example. A has a toy B wants. B grabs it. A gets angry and hits B. B's nose is bleeding. He yells and Mom rushes in, sees B crying, nose bloody, and punishes A. Is it fair? Whose fault was it. Is A getting punished for something B started? He was just sitting quietly, playing.

No matter what the provocation, we are ALWAYS karmically responsible for our own choices. B gave a pretty strong provocation. Instant karma, he reaped a bloody nose. A was provoked; still it was his choice, to hit or not to hit. He hit, he's punished. Again, instant karma.

This was a pretty simple example. Sometimes it's much more subtle. In the sixties I spent a lot of time in the south, working with non-violent direct action for human rights. Once I was on a freedom ride. People forced the bus off the road and it half turned over in a ditch. People were thrown around, injured. As they climbed out, there were these people with pipes, wood clubs, other weapons. So people were getting heads bashed in. Then the national guard came along and started after the bashers until they fled.

I wasn't hurt. I just sat there watching all this mayhem around me and asking "Am I responsible?" Clearly I was being non-violent but I was there, on the bus. Was that in itself a form of violence? If we hadn't been there, this brutality wouldn't have happened. That was the last time I participated in that kind of action, because I couldn't answer the question, am I responsible? I couldn't answer until I came to understand karma and how it works.

My intention was not to force my agenda on another, only to ask him or her to consider my viewpoint. I was there to say that I had a right to sit next to a brother or sister of any

Appendix C

skin color, not to say that someone else had to. He was free to stand if he didn't want to sit down. But he had to respect my right to choose for myself and to sit. Can you see the difference? To force my viewpoint on another is a form of violence to that person. To ask him to consider my viewpoint and allow me to act in my own way as long as I don't harm another is not violence.

Yes, he might say I am harming him by sitting. Am I harming him or just asking him to confront his own fear? There's a huge difference.

I don't want to get into a long moral discussion here, only to use this to illustrate. If I am clear that I'm not trying to force another to do it my way, only asking him to consider my way and allow me to do that, then I have no intention to harm. I'm not karmically responsible if he reacts to my movement with violence. It does get subtle. I knew it would provoke him. I knew he might react with violence. If I'm willing to be the object of that violence, to accept and forgive his reaction, in order to make my statement, then I have no intention of doing harm.

So is there any unwholesome, adhering karma for me. That depends on ego. Again, it's subtle. If I'm attached to a result, trying to make something happen or in a sense, to manipulate, then there's some violence in that, and I'm responsible for my own attachment, my own ego. But I'm not responsible for his violence.

There's a lot more we could discuss about these characteristics. I want to go on, to make sure there's ample time to talk about what this means, in terms of our own work in this incarnation, and in terms of liberation.

First we need to define liberation; I understand two uses of this word. One is total liberation, freedom from this samsaric cycle of birth and death. Second is increasing freedom from reactivity and lessening of suffering in this moment, as we bring deeper awareness to the attachment, aversion and delusion that lead to suffering. Such awareness may not instantly lead to total liberation but it does allow our present lives to be more joyful and peaceful and our relationships with others to be more skillful and compassionate. Happily the same process that leads us to this partial freedom from reactivity will also eventually lead to total liberation.

Most of you have heard of this spiral we often talk about of *sila*, *panna*, and *samadhi*. These are Pali words. *Sila* translates moral purity or moral awareness. That's a little narrow. Actually, I find it means moral action that grows out of awareness of interbeing. Harm to another becomes unthinkable when there is no self or other. That level of knowing our deepest connection leads to *sila*. *Panna* is wisdom; it's not knowing, not intellect, but wisdom, insight. *Samadhi* is concentration.

To realize final liberation, to become free of this samsaric cycle, we have to work with all the portions of this spiral. Grasping at wisdom, trying to attain wisdom, doesn't work. We already have the seed of that wisdom within us. We allow it to develop. It's like a rose bud. All the wishing in the world can't make it open; you can't pry it open. Yet within the bud is the full flower. There's nothing more that it needs. The flower is already there. Nutrients like sunshine and water allow it to open. The enlightened being is already there; the Buddha nature is already there. Two of the nutrients we can offer are *samadhi* and *sila*.

Appendix C

Here's where we come back to karma. We can't just make a decision to always act without harm to others, to always practice *sila*. What does that mean, to act with non-harm? I said before that intention was important. The same act can lead to drawing back or liberating karma. Here in a hospital a surgeon works with all his skill, cutting open a heart in effort to save a life, but the patient dies. On the street outside, a thief cuts his knife into a man's heart because that man protests the stealing of his wallet. Same act, knife into heart. Two different karmic results.

We can't even know what we're doing all the time. We don't have enough perspective. We just have to trust our intention to do no harm and follow our own inner wisdom. Effort and letting go. That's another talk.

So what can we do? How do we offer these nutrients of *sila* and *samadhi*? A friend wrote recently and said he saw he needed to clean up his life, to move deeper into the practice of *sila*. That's fine; we all can stand to clean up a bit. But can you hear the judgment in that? "I'm going to fix myself; get it all cleaned up; put myself on this super clean-up project; change it all ..."

Sila is an expression of love. It can't be nurtured by force nor by self contempt.

I've heard others say the same thing about mindfulness, "Now I'm going to do it, be this much more aware ..."

You can offer effort and energy out of aspiration to live more skillfully, but you can't create a program out of a place of "I should," berate yourself when you fall short, and expect to develop anything except a more solid ego.

We begin to practice awareness, not from a place of "I should" but from a real place of love and aspiration we allow our true nature to express itself.

We start with awareness. Just that. Seeing the careless brushing off of the mosquito. No self hatred there that we've done that, just clear awareness, here is an unskillful pattern. If I pay attention, I can create a new and more skillful one to replace it.

Awareness, awareness and awareness. As mindfulness grows, we make more skillful choices. We begin to see the constant arising of fear and how that fear solidifies self. We begin to see that all this arising is truly empty of self. Wisdom deepens. With deeper wisdom our faith in the process grows and we give even more energy to being aware. And around it goes.

It will take time, even many lifetimes, but eventually we're no longer creating so much unwholesome, adhering karma.

What about old karma? I've said karma is definite. If we create it, we will definitely experience the results. This is sometimes taken to mean every result. How many bugs have you killed? How many eons would it take to move past that?

Here is where non-adhering karma becomes important. When we see our past unskillful acts and really do clean that up, move past that fear or attachment, we start to do acts instead that offer wholesome karma. We see the bug on the floor and put it outside. Maybe it stings us too, and we still put it outside. Yes, we keep getting tests like that to see if we really learned. "Okay, I'll put this little brother outside. Ouch; it stung

me, darn ***; but it's still a little brother." I can feel the pain, and still choose not to act to take revenge, but put it outside.

You can't do this with a sense of hatred and decision to balance the account. Remember it's intention. If the intention is self-serving, to create a balance of wholesome karma for yourself, that won't do it. There has to be a genuine desire to serve another, to love.

Out of the practice of such acts, we find the solidity of self naturally begins to dissolve. We move into a sense of connection; we begin to see through the fear that solidifies self. We move more and more from the clear wisdom of our fearless hearts, from a place of emptiness of ego, from a place of love, from that heart we all share. As these patterns deepen, we act and speak increasingly with wholesome, non-adhering karma.

So we can offer skillful acts. We can be mindful of everything. Forgiveness wipes out karma too. Some people practice certain kinds of purifications. They're less common in Theravadin practice. People do prostrations, or say mantras. It's not the DOING or SAYING. Where is your heart? Is there real regret? Do you really ask for and give forgiveness?

I want to share with you a small bit of past lives I've seen. Let me precede this by saying that I happen to have seen a lot of my past lives clearly. That doesn't mean you should, or that there's anything special there, just that I see it this way and I can learn from it.

I've seen the beings I was in past lives kill animals, and even people. I've seen the beings I was be killed.

I can ask forgiveness of those people that were killed, but I also have to forgive each time that was done to my karmic ancestors. If there's any resentment left, it's not complete. All of it needs to go. Total forgiveness, no matter how horrible or unfair a death was. No judgment. When I can do that, something new happens.

I said that karma is definite, that you must always experience the result. Let's take it a step further. You must always experience the result when the conditions are ripe for that result to be experienced.

With constant awareness, energy, faith, concentration and wisdom (called the spiritual faculties), the conditions cease to be ripe for the expression of that karma. With forgiveness, the conditions cease to be ripe. The karma is still there, but it becomes transformed by the power of love, of wisdom, of forgiveness.

As long as there is still self, the conditions may again become ripe. If by this point your practice has taken you past all delusion, then the conditions don't become ripe. Yes, self still does arise, over and over, but our relationship to it changes. We stop moving into protective stance and just notice, "Here's ego," watch it arise and then dissolve. There's no longer need to act out of that ego.

So we are always practicing, every moment. We're not trying to do away with karma, or even to transform it, but to allow ourselves to learn from it so we don't have to repeat those patterns. Wisdom deepens; the illusion of self dissolves; skillful actions become habitual; we feel deeper peace that allows deeper concentration, penetrating delusion still more.

Appendix C

As a self that we seek to defend at all costs dissolves, at some point karma becomes a friend. We begin to recognize that it isn't there to punish but to draw attention to, so we may continue on our path. Experiencing it deepens our faith in the rest of the dharma. Experiencing it reminds us to open, let go, and learn.

Be as aware as you can be through the rest of this week. Notice everything that arises in your experience, and notice your relationship to that which has arisen as a new arising. Here is the smell of lunch; here is desire; here is judgment of that arising of desire; here is compassion to that being I am and through whom all of this flows. Feel the expansiveness of that, the shift from moving from a center of self to moving from a center that is true center, empty of self. We watch the constant interplay of phenomena, no self, just emotions, thoughts, sensations coming and going. Strengthening a new growth, the sweet fruit of a loving and open heart.

Appendix D

The Universe According to Aaron

(Taken from the book Aaron.)

Greetings to you all. I am Aaron. There are two general areas of frequently asked questions. One is the "Who are we?" and "Why are we here?" genre. The other and larger covers the area of how we may do the work we came to do. Tonight I'd like to address the "Who are we" as fully and clearly as possible. Hopefully those with that question in the future can read this transcript so we can get on to the work of learning and growth.

You are energy and light, what I have called a spark of God. This energy has chosen to incarnate into this wonderful schoolroom we call earth because here is given the opportunity for that small spark to evolve, to learn and grow and blossom into a brilliant sun.

Let us start at the beginning. First there was self-awareness, with which came the first delusion of separation from all-that-is, the infinite perceiving itself! That minute bit of energy, experiencing itself as separate from God and the Universe, began the long journey back to full understanding of non-separation. In the course of the journey, it will come to know its true nature as part of all things, and to realize that it is both spark of the whole, and also a brilliant sun in its own right. It will not become these things; it will learn that this is what it has always been. It is a voyage of discovery of truth, not creation of truth.

This bit of energy had many choices as to how it would evolve. One possibility offered it was to move to material form on a place such as earth. Of course there are other ways to experience material form, and other paths to evolution beside the one of material form. But you are here on earth so we will speak now of this one path.

This energy that you are first materialized as gas, as mineral, as what you consider non-organic matter. Then it moved to plant life of one type or another, from simple to more complex. Next it experienced itself as animal, and finally human.

In each of these manifestations the materialization had a certain proportion of shadow to light, a certain density to its energy. I do not use density as related to the physical body, in the sense that you consider a rock to be physically denser than a butterfly, but use the term as descriptive of the density of the light body. Those of lower density possess a light body which contains more shadow. Thus, the density of the light itself is less. The lower the density of the light body and the more shadow therein, the lower is the frequency of the energy vibration of that life form; thus, it resonates to, and emits, a lower vibrational frequency. That does not mean it is inferior, only that the vibration differs. The frequency is that which is appropriate to that form into which the energy manifests.

In your manifestations you follow the law of karma which draws you back to new form, again and again, until that energy which you are expresses itself with enough clarity

Appendix D

that it has no need to return to this schoolroom. Not all the lessons have been learned, but those demanding incarnation have been sufficiently mastered for the being to move on to the next step on its path, that is, learning beyond the earth plane.

It is important to note that karma is never punishment. Rather, it is the opportunity to repeat the needed lessons until you learn what you need to learn. In this most perfect schoolroom everyone eventually passes. There is no failure, just the need to review lessons until they are mastered. The courses are ungraded and you may take each class as many times as you wish. When you think it's understood, the universe offers a quiz so you may verify the depth of that understanding. At times the final exams may seem rather tough, but ultimately, the material will be perfectly clear and the hardest exam will be passed with flying colors! After a brief rest, you resume classes. What is the next thing to be learned?

The word karma means action. All actions, words, thoughts lead to karma. Some of it adheres and some is non-adhering. The difference lies in both the act itself and the intention behind the act. Karma may be thought of as the planting of a seed. Simply put, if you want sweet fruit, you must plant the seed for sweet fruit. If you plant the seed for sour fruit, all the nurturing and wishing you can give it will not induce that tree to produce sweet fruit. Only sour fruit will grow there.

If you wish peace, harmony, joy, and love, those are the seeds that must be planted. When you plant hatred, fear and discord, that is what you reap. Essentially, your incarnations are the opportunity to learn how to plant the seeds of compassion, of acceptance and lovingkindness so that you reap those fruits. It's not as easy as it sounds, because even when there is a desire to plant a seed of generosity, for example, fear may arise and distort that intention, so that greed rather than generosity is planted.

Thus, your incarnations are a time to learn awareness of what is planted, to learn to live with increasing skill, to learn to offer love rather than anger or greed as a response to the stimulus of fear. The learning comes slowly, and painfully at times. Remember that you are not expected to be perfect. If you were already perfect, you'd have no need to be here incarnate in a body and learning on the earth plane. Your mistakes are part of the lessons. Allow them to teach you kindness and compassion for the being who errs, rather than contempt.

Those of you who have evolved fully through earth plane have reincarnated over and over, in one form or another. Your first lives on the earth plane were first density, in the form of mineral which includes water. The lesson on that plane is awareness. That spark moved into awareness at the moment of experiencing the illusion of separation. With this first incarnation there is the beginning of the experience of a pull to the light, not yet with self awareness, but always reaching for the light.

When the lessons of first density are sufficiently mastered, the being moves into second density. The forms that density takes on earth are plant and then animal. Yes, all of you who have evolved fully through the earth plane have been mineral, plant and animal in some of your many past lives. The main lesson of second density is growth into self-awareness. The rock begins to have awareness and then is ready to move into the simplest forms of plant life. Increasingly aware through many incarnations, there is first group self-awareness, and finally individual self awareness. The ant or bee is aware on

Appendix D

a group level. The pet dog or cat moves into personal self awareness. Those animals who are your pets are often in the final stages of second density.

The third density is human. Your primary lessons on this plane are faith and love. These are NOT the only lessons, but the primary ones.

When you move beyond the need to incarnate in human form, you are still learning. There is simply no longer need for materialization as an aid to that learning. The fourth density lesson is compassion and the fifth is wisdom. Again, this does not mean you learn no wisdom and compassion as a human, but in higher densities you further develop those qualities.

There is an overlap between these lessons of wisdom and compassion. One cannot be learned entirely without the other. The focus in fourth is on compassion and the focus in fifth is on wisdom. To aid this learning, fourth density beings dwell in groups where sharing is at a much more intimate level, then move out from there in fifth density to find deeper wisdom.

I've spoken about group entities at length and will not elaborate on this now. Suffice it to say that when you first fully enter fourth density, you find yourself capable of full telepathic sharing and beyond the dictates of the emotional body that would lead you to feel shame or pride. Thus, all sharing is honest and you no longer need to live the experience yourself to fully understand and learn. As you share in this way with your peers, your beloved companions, you enter loosely into a group entity structure. By "loose" I mean that beings are free to come and go as feels appropriate. You always have free will. When the time is right, an entity will begin to move away from that group to better understand and find deep wisdom in its own being. When useful for its own learning or to teach others, it will return to a group, moving back and forth.

The sixth density ... I find it hard to put a label on this. A friend (*The group entity or "social-memory complex" Ra, in The Ra Material, channeled by Elkins, McCarty and Rueckert.*) describes it as learning of love and light. I understand what Ra means but I'm afraid that's not clear to you. I lack the words to define it more accurately. Essentially, the end of sixth density is a movement to total knowledge and acceptance that you have never been separate, a moving back into such total unity with the One that, by the end of sixth density, you are ready to allow the dissolution of all memory and individual identity. This does not mean that you cannot put on a cloak of consciousness, cannot regasp those memories if need be, as I do. In order to teach, I need personality and memory, so I resume these past attributes. The difference is that there is no attachment to them, nor any delusion that this "Aaron" is who I am.

The seventh density has been described as a gateway. It is beyond my experience. I would assume the experience of that gateway to be similar to the gateway of enlightenment experience in third density, but far more profound. It is a gateway to the eighth density, and this I cannot describe to you at all. Let us simply label it as Mystery. It is God.

There is a wide range within each density. They do not have fixed borders; movement from one to another is a process of gradual transition. It is also important to remember that you are not forced into these densities. This is an open classroom school. But as the third grader will feel a bit bewildered when he sits down and listens to the teaching

Appendix D

in a sixth grade classroom, and will eventually choose to return to a more appropriate class, so you tend to stay in the appropriate class because that is where learning occurs. Remember there is no competition to move faster than another or to outdo another. You are most content to be where you learn.

Some of you disagree with that statement, feeling a pull to graduate from this density. Yes, and that is appropriate for your present level of learning. Does the able student about to finish her grade in the spring not look forward eagerly to the next grade? You know that movement beyond the veil of third density will give you fuller exposure to the Light for which you so yearn.

You do move around a bit, then, and may even choose to move to a lower density for some reason. We spoke of this once when watching a caterpillar. One of you asked me and I said a small bit of the soul energy could choose to incarnate as a caterpillar if it felt that was the best way of learning. You might choose to incarnate as a tree, for example, if patience was an issue you were having trouble resolving in third density.

You would not then have a self-aware tree or caterpillar. That bit of light and energy accepts the density into which it moves. Thus, that highly evolved being you call Jesus, accepting incarnation into human form, became a third density being for the time of that incarnation.

There is no formal graduation from one plane to the next, with examinations to be passed. Rather, graduation must be seen as a readiness to master the lessons of the next level, so that one knows that is where one wants and needs to be. One chooses the ideal spot to learn the lessons that one must learn, without concern for density.

I believe that is enough background information about densities. I call some of this "the furniture of heaven." There is curiosity and interest to have some understanding of the whole plan of which you are a part. But you are in third density now. You don't need to know the furniture arrangement in heaven; you are not there. There is a story told about the Buddha where he was asked if he taught all that he knew. The Buddha pointed to the surrounding forest, held out a handful of leaves, and said, "What I know is as the leaves of the forest; what I teach is only as this handful of leaves, but this is all you need to know to find liberation." Well, all you NEED to know is about this life and this density. So let us concentrate our inquiry there.

As a third density human you are made up of four bodies, the physical, emotional, mental, and spirit bodies. The physical is obviously the present manifestation. When you are no longer in this body, what remains are the other three, together in what we call the astral body. You continue to move in and out of material form, all the while working to clarify the shadow in the emotional body.

You are not working to become perfect, nor can you ever be entirely free of emotion while in human form or within third density. Rather, you are working toward what we would call equanimity with emotions, where the rising of an emotion no longer leads to reactivity.

I've just talked briefly about group entities and the totally honest and unselfconscious sharing of such entities. On the astral plane between lifetimes, you communicate telepathically, yet there is still emotion that is broadcast. Thus, third density beings feel some discomfort being with higher densities because they are aware that the

Appendix D

broadcast emotions create some discomfort. You are like the young child who is aware the elders smile at his antics in loving tolerance; he soon returns to his friends where he can more fully be himself. He will have the opportunity to be an adult in later years; there is no need for him to perfect adult skills as a child.

So you keep returning to the physical plane, practicing faith and love, learning to move beyond reactivity to the emotional body. When you accept the arising of emotions non-judgmentally, make friends with yourself let us say, then and only then are you ready to learn lessons of non-judgment to others. This readiness is the gateway to fourth density.

Let us speak briefly of what lies beyond that gateway. The fourth density being still has an emotional body but has no need to broadcast it. Through fourth and fifth densities the emotional body dissolves completely, as the lessons of compassion and wisdom are mastered. The being ready to enter sixth density is only of mental and spirit bodies. This is often referred to as the higher self.

Yes, you all have this aspect as part of you, now in material form. Time is simultaneous, not linear. You are always all that you are; you are not becoming something new, only learning to know the fullness of what you are.

In third density, the emotional body is still experienced strongly in the conscious self, and is often in control. As the conscious mind relaxes the need to control, it may learn to communicate with the superconscious, or higher self. When you do so, you have access to far higher inner wisdom that the conscious, rational aspect of self usually shuts out.

The mental body is retained through sixth density. Within the mental body is the function of memory, and there is still some level of identification as self. Just as at the threshold of fourth density there is readiness to let go of the emotional body and no longer have it dictate action or thought, so at the threshold of the seventh density there is readiness to release the mental body.

As one moves into seventh density, the mental body begins to dissolve. What remains then is the spirit body. This is the pure soul, moving back to awareness of total non-separation with all that is. It is that aspect of you that is the original spark of God, that bit of perfect energy and light. There is no self there, indeed no mental body capable of generating the concept of self. There is only that pure energy of Love, shining on for eternity.

So here you are, in this beautiful body and this perfect classroom. How do you learn? Where do you go from here? On the spirit plane between lifetimes, all I have shared above is clearly known. With each incarnation you agree to a forgetting. It is as if a veil dropped into place, separating you from the spirit plane. You frequently ask me why. My dear ones, you are here to learn faith. How could you learn that if all was clearly seen? Your growth would be a matter of will power and determination, like a mountain climber with an altimeter that measures how many feet yet to climb. You are NOT here to practice will, but love and faith. The veil gives you the constant opportunity for such practice.

At some times you have glimpses through the veil. A momentary, deep clarity is given as you peer through this fabric that has thinned in places. That glimpse is enough for

Appendix D

experience to confirm belief so that faith is not blind faith but is built on a foundation of inner knowing.

Beings at all levels of evolution are on earth. None is better than another. Is the wise adult better than the child or only more mature and experienced? The lessons being learned are varied. Some are learning about materialism, about grasping and generosity. Their concerns may be largely physical. Some of you are older souls and are moving to the lessons of non-judgment, of acceptance of all within the human experience. By acceptance, I do NOT mean a condoning of reactivity and the suffering it may cause, but acceptance that within the human there is both love and fear. They are not opposites but a part of each other. Unconditional love accepts all of that without need to deny anything in the realm of human experience.

Those of you who are drawn to read this have reached that level in your growth where you are more aware of the spirit plane, where the veil is thinner. Your increasing experience with spirit helps provide a foundation of deeper trust from which you may do your work.

I say that none is better than another. Then what of good and evil, as you phrase them. These terms are laden with emotional connotations. Let us instead use "light" and "absence of light." Yes, there are those who act in ways to harm others, who make that choice with free will. These beings are responsible for their choices, derived from fear and deep misunderstanding. Their words, acts or thoughts may result in much suffering for themselves, other beings, and the earth itself. Nevertheless, the soul of such is not evil. All souls are pure and brilliant light. But the soul of such a one is connected to an emotional and mental body that are mired in misunderstanding. It may be young or very old. Regardless, it has far to go in learning the lessons of love for which it took birth.

It is not necessary to condone the acts and thoughts of such a one in order to move to compassion for it and for the suffering in which it dwells. You can not learn for another. You cannot truly teach another, except through the example of your own love. Your challenge is to move past your fear and judgment and allow the opening of the heart of compassion. You might even wish to thank it, for its misunderstandings provide a catalyst for your practice. How can you learn non-judgment and compassion when there is nothing that you might tend to judge?

The same is true of the situations of your life. Everything is meant to teach you. You are always exactly where you need to be to learn what you came to learn. At times that learning is painful, yet learning does not need to be painful. It is not pain that teaches you, but awareness. Your pain screams "Pay attention!" and that attention teaches. As you become increasingly attentive, as you open the heart's door without judgment to all that moves through and past you, you will find that you learn with less pain.

Pain and suffering are also not synonymous. Pain is pain, unpleasant to be sure. Suffering grows out of resistance to what is, from wanting things to be different than they are. As you come to understand this, you will find the infinite space in your heart that allows the experience of pain, not your pain or my pain but pain, the world's pain, without hatred of that pain and resistance to it. Pain flows through you; joy flows through you. As you move beyond attachment and aversion and to what we call choiceless awareness, you will find that suffering does end.

Appendix D

We have moved on here from “Who are we?” to “Why are we here?” As for the third question, “How do we do the work we came to do?” let us save that for other talks. It is a vast subject and we’ll approach it a little at a time. Only remember and trust that you are here to heal that which cries to be healed, within yourselves and within the whole earth. Trust this gift of incarnation, this life experience. Work with love, courage and faith. Practice awareness and mercy, for yourselves and all beings. Be gentle to all things, including yourselves. Know that you are loved beyond your capacity to comprehend that word. There is nothing more precious in the universe than each spark of the Eternal.

Appendix E

Dream Interpretation

(Written by Barbara, as taught to me by Aaron.)

Introduction

There are two different kinds of dreams. Aaron delineates them as Symbolic dreams and Teaching dreams. Symbolic dreams are the more common, the dreams of most nights. Teaching dreams may employ some symbols, but within the core of them is the experience of sitting and learning with a wise teacher. In teaching dreams we are usually literally out of body, have traveled to the astral plane, and what we are experiencing in the dream is quite real. We are hearing a wise teacher. Our ability to benefit from that teaching, to retain it, relates to how well we have learned to remember dreams. If we've never practiced remembering and interpreting symbolic dreams, we'll often not remember the teaching dream's content, just a vague memory of having been somewhere and hearing something important.

When I first met Aaron, after a few weeks I was experiencing many teaching dreams. I could hear more accurately in the dream state at that point. But remembering was hard. I awoke one night after a vivid dream of sitting before a great teacher and hearing profound truths to hear Aaron say "You must assimilate this transmission of the Dharma." With that statement, all the content evaporated! What transmission of the Dharma? My mind was a blank, only knowing there had been something important. That was the night I became inspired to start regularly recording dreams.

When you've learned to remember dreams, the teaching dreams need absolutely no explanation. We'll talk here about symbolic dreams. I'm going to list the most common dream symbols on a separate page. Below are some basics.

Dream Interpretation

To begin, symbolic dreams exist on many levels. On one level they deal with the current situations in our lives. For example, there are many ways to symbolize helplessness. If you just injured your leg and are on crutches, those crutches may enter the dream. Why that symbol? Because it's "on top of" the mind, so to speak. Accessible. Given a dream in which you are a child and on crutches, feeling deep anger that others can run and play and you can't, let's look at the levels.

On one level the dream is about the current anger at the injury. But there are many current things to dream about. Why this one? On another level, the child represents a new or emerging aspect of the self; the crutches indicate helplessness. The dream is also about the fear you may be experiencing as a newer, more loving and trusting self emerges and lets go of some of the need to control that the old self maintained, but feels frightened and helpless.

Perhaps in the dream, an older person, teacher or respected figure comes to help the child. On one level it may be a wish for immediate help with the pain and

inconvenience of the injury. On another level, that older person is a wise aspect of the self; the dream states a level of trust in the presence of that wise aspect to guide the emerging, more loving new aspect. Do you see how it works?

In dream interpretation there are two basic rules. At this deeper level, every person in the dream is an aspect of yourself. There are specifics listed on the symbols page. Every dream is about the dreamer.

When you work with the symbol page and your dreams, I would suggest the following method:

- 1) List the components of the dream—people, objects, buildings, places, and the suggested symbolic meaning. Remember that these are *suggested* symbols and not absolute. If it doesn't fit, discard it. Trust your intuition.
- 2) After the list is complete, just sit and meditate. Let go of concept of what you intellectually think the dream means. Be with the **feeling** of the dream. Allow space for understanding to arise; it can't if you're trying to be logical. Dreams are NOT logical!
- 3) Write down a short summary of the dream and your final explanation. Keep a dream book. Start your own list of personal symbols, especially where they seem to vary from the more universal ones. We are each unique and dream in our own ways. These symbols are meant only to get you started.

Dream Symbols

People

All people in dreams are aspects of yourself. Below are the usual presentations.

- a being of the same sex is an aspect of conscious mind.
- a being of the opposite sex is an aspect of subconscious mind.
- a teacher, older and respected parent or other adult, or loving authority figure is an aspect of superconscious mind (higher self).
- a child is an emerging, new aspect of self.
- an adolescent is an emerged but not fully grounded aspect of self.
- specific people; what are the first characteristics you think of when you see that person—generous, greedy, kind, needy, angry, gentle? They may represent that aspect of yourself, the desire to become that, or the dislike of that in yourself. You'll have to decide by the rest of the content of the dream.

Vehicles

- small, personal vehicle (car, small boat, plane) = the physical body.
- large vehicle (bus, plane, train) = an organization, such as church, club.
- bike, cycle, skates equate with balance.

Buildings and furnishings

- bank = storage for valuables, storehouse of the sub or superconscious mind.
- furniture = tools of the mind; broken furniture = mind not grasping something; might equate with feeling inadequate to do or understand.
- garage = universal mind.
- house = the dreamer's mind. Different rooms = different parts of mind.
 - basement = unconscious or subconscious mind.
 - main floors = conscious mind.
 - upper floor, attic = superconscious mind.
- hospital = place for healing.
- school = place for learning.
- stairways lead to higher (or lower) levels of consciousness.
- window, looking into another level of consciousness.

Food

- food is knowledge. A restaurant is a place to find knowledge. Water = consciousness.

Body

- feet = spiritual foundation.
- face = identity. If no face, identity is confused. Appearance as another race than what you are in this body may also be confused identity.
- clothing = outward presentation, how you present yourself.
- naked in dream = either becoming more open and honest or helplessness. You'll have to decide by context.
- hands relate to purpose.

Miscellaneous

- storm = confusion.
- blood = life energy.
- killing someone in a dream; may be rage at first level. At symbolic level, anger at SELF! Wanting to change aspects of self.
- snake may be wisdom or kundalini energy.
- animals may represent habits.
- birds = thoughts. Dead birds are unused thoughts. Can't fly!
- trees, vegetation equate with subconscious mind.
- keys = key to resolution of issue or conflict within the self.

Appendix E

- telephone relates to communication.
- the sound of a helicopter in a dream often relates to moving back into the body from the astral plane. Any loud, whirring sound indicates body reentry.

Deep Spring Publications

NEWSLETTER

Deep Spring Center for Meditation and Spiritual Inquiry Newsletter: 8 ½ x 11, stapled, 20 pages

The newsletter, published three times a year, is offered on a donation basis. Our cost to print and mail this to you is \$7/year (\$10 Canadian).

BOOKS

We offer books at our cost, including mailing. All our books are 8 ½ x 11 and Cerlox bound.

Aaron: 1995 expanded edition, 123 pages. Includes many new chapters and a new format. \$10 (\$14 Canadian)

This is a basic book of Aaron's teachings, with selections taken from the most frequently asked questions: Who are we? Why are we incarnate? How can we best do the work we came to do? How can we live our lives with more wisdom and love?

Christmas Stories, A Collection of Memories from Aaron: Newly updated, 97 pages. \$6 (\$8 Canadian)

Aaron's inspiring memories from the past life in which he was a "simple shepherd" who knew and loved that teacher we call Jesus. Each year at Christmas Aaron has shared memories with us as "teaching stories."

No Chain at All: 150 pages. \$12 (\$15 Canadian)

This is very much the heart of what Aaron's been teaching. While you can just read through it, the book is really a workbook which invites your participation. To quote Aaron, *"I find the expression of this law of dependent origination to be one of Buddhism's most valuable contributions to the planet. It is called 'The Chain of Becoming.' Teachings speak of the way we have each become caught in this chain, moving blindly from one incarnation to another, never able to find freedom from suffering. This is real, on one plane. Yet on another level, there is no **chain at all**, nor has there ever been. You are free. You have always been free. In the coming months we will explore these truths and come to see that they are not contradictory ..."*

The Path of Natural Light, Parts 1 and 2: Part 1, 224 pages. Part 2, 230 pages. \$14 each part (\$20 Canadian)

These are **complete** transcripts of the 1993-1994 Wednesday night classes on relative versus ultimate reality, and light/energy work. From the book: *"I see our work then as finding that balance between relative and ultimate—the horizontal plane of healing and the vertical plane of knowing there was never anybody that needed to heal. With wisdom and pure awareness, that sense of self dissolves ... the whole notion of fragmentation was an illusion, but it is the illusion of the relative reality, and the suffering*

within that illusion must be attended. The human manifestation needs healing ... In past months we have been discussing the light body, the perfect, unwrinkled sheet of paper, the illusory wrinkles and how the physical, emotional and mental bodies reflect those wrinkles ... We move ahead with this caution: what I teach is not escape from your humanness, but deeper embracing of that humanness, wrinkles and all ... again, I remind you, you are not getting rid of. There was nothing there to get rid of. Rather, you are freeing yourself of the delusion that there was something that needed to be gotten rid of."

Seven Days: A Journey Into Awareness, Days One to Three, Part One: 105 pages. \$9 (\$12 Canadian)

There have been many requests for a book from Aaron about meditation. This book offers in-depth material on meditation practice with specific "how to" instruction. In November 1996, Barbara and Aaron offered a three day workshop/retreat in Mexico City. In April 1997 they returned to lead a four day silent residential meditation retreat. This book contains the transcripts of all of the talks and instruction, offered by both Aaron and Barbara, during the first three of those seven days. The first days deal more with spiritual inquiry and basic instruction in vipassana or insight meditation. There is a progressive deepening of instruction. There is also considerable discussion of working with heavy emotions and the various painful catalysts of our lives, with specific instruction offered for meditation with heavy mind states, resistance, restlessness, physical pain and other difficult states of mind and body. "Days One to Three" is the November workshop. "Days Three to Seven," the April retreat, will be available later.

The Awakened Heart: 147 pages. \$12 (\$15 Canadian)

Approximately 1300 years ago, the Buddhist Indian monk/poet Shantideva wrote "The Way of the Bodhisattva," elucidating an important part of the Buddhist path. "The Awakened Heart" is not commentary on the poem, but uses it as background. In Aaron's words: *"For many years you have heard me talk about making space for the heavy emotions. A primary emphasis of my teaching has been that it is not bad to feel emotions, that when certain conditions are present, certain emotions will arise ... I teach people to make more space around the emotion ... If you don't want those emotions to arise you must begin to look deeply at the conditions out of which they arise, primarily the conditions of fear, of the illusion of separation—separation from other beings, separation from the divine ... Through a series of practices and exercises, one could more deeply open to that highest aspect of the self which does not choose to invite in the conditions which give rise to such painful emotion. This is not a 'getting rid of' anything, rather we note that side by side there is the tense and frightened human and there is the innately loving, open-hearted human. You have a choice: you can enact your fear or you can choose to note your fear, to observe that the loving Awakened Heart is always present, to nurture it, and to enact that loving heart. You always have a choice."*