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2001

Center Voice

The Newsletter of the Center for Sacred Sciences

Special Focus:

FEAR ON THE PATH

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In This Issue . . .

If we've been paying attention to their accounts, we've noticed descriptions of fear encountered by mystics along their journeys of awakening. Indeed, we may have experienced it ourselves. We begin to realize that it might arise at any turn on the path and could manifest in varying degrees of intensity—a little warning tap on the shoulder, a jolt out of bed on a dark night, or an ocean of terror threatening to swallow us whole. How do we respond to such an episode? Do we hide under the covers and hope it will go away? Or do we determine to make its acquaintance and see what it may offer?

In this issue, we are fortunate to have this topic addressed by two realized mystics. In “**Facing Fear on the Path**,” Joel discusses the objects of fear encountered in spiritual life, showing them all to be caused by ego-attachment, and then describes ways to face them, perhaps riding them all the way to gnosis. Following this, in “**There’s Nothing to Fear but Fear**,” we offer an interview with Center member Tom Kurzka, who entered intentional spiritual life due to fear, danced with it for three decades and, finally, with the help of his newest teachers—Joel and Andrea—did, indeed, ride it to Gnostic Awakening this past spring (2000). To supplement, in “**Center Voices**” three Center members describe their own experiences with fear on the path and how they have learned to work with it.

In “**Center News**,” we update you on recent events including a costume-clad surprise for Joel and highlights from Joel’s and Jennifer’s trip. As this is the Winter issue, we finish with the most recent “**Financial Report**” and our most sincere “**Thank You**” for financial and volunteer contributions. We hope you find this issue rich and rewarding.

*The whole world have
taken the wrong way, for
they fear nonexistence,
while it is their refuge.*

—Rumi

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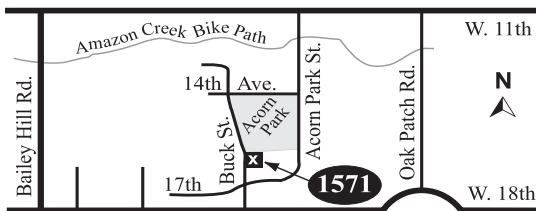
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The Center for Sacred Sciences is a non-profit, tax exempt church dedicated to the creation and dissemination of a new worldview based on the wisdom of humanity's great spiritual teachers, but presented in forms appropriate to our present scientific culture. Our programs draw on the teachings of the mystics of all traditions, informed by the Enlightenment or Gnosis of Joel, our Spiritual Director. Among the Center's current offerings are Sunday programs with meditation and talks by Joel, once-a-month Sunday video presentations, twice-yearly meditation retreats, and weekly Practitioners Groups for committed spiritual seekers. The Center also maintains an extensive lending library of books, tapes and periodicals covering a broad spectrum of spiritual, psychological, and scientific subjects. Joel's teachings are offered freely as a labor of love, and he receives no financial support from the Center. We rely chiefly on volunteer labor to conduct our programs, and on donations and membership dues to meet our operating expenses.



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CENTER NEWS

Enlightenment Day Celebration

This year's annual Enlightenment Day potluck celebration was held on August 16, again at the delightful home of Mike and Sheila Craven. Mike played host from his bed where he lay unseen and imprisoned by a fever of 104. Sheila graciously covered very well for them both in spite of making frequent visits to check on the patient.

Following the consumption of our remarkable feast by all the healthy party-goers (sorry, Mike), there were two events to celebrate. Therese Englemann was presented with an award for meritorious service (see separate article) and the members of the second Foundation Studies group graduated. Although this sounds like business as usual (or more than usual in the case of Therese), the F. S. group had a special trick up their sleeves—er—flaps. They all graduated wearing ponchos as a surprise for Joel—Mr. Poncho, himself—who was quite startled when he finally noticed. Joel, we think maybe you'd better watch out with this bunch!

Completing the evening, we had another raucous musical event. Accompanied throughout by Lou Principe on guitar and Vinnie Principe on keyboard, Gene Gibbs and Wayne Leeds on guitars, Steve Zorba Frankel on violin, and a bunch of us on rhythm instruments, we sang and danced through a wide range of rockin' songs punctuated by "The Girl from Ipanema" and, as always, "Amazing Grace." As a grand finale, Gene sang and played his most recent comical spiritual song accompanied on kazoo by Fred and Jo Chambers with their son, Chris, and friend, Thomas Heritage, who had obviously even *practiced!* As loud as we were, Mike later said he hardly heard a thing. Thanks, again, Mike and Sheila and all.



Enlightenment Day Celebration Party

Fall Retreat

When asked the secret of his enlightenment, Joel's and Andrea's teacher, Dr. Franklin Merrill-Wolff, answered: "a tendency to drive to the root." At Cloud Mountain Retreat Center in Castle Rock, Washington, twenty-nine of us filled the house to experience a taste of that focus on the fall retreat, inevitably entitled "Driving to the Root." With Joel and Andrea leading the way, from October 6 to 15, we followed a continuum of awareness practices. These began with concentration on the breath, continued through openness to the phenomena and thoughts that seem to objectify our world, and gradually focused on the root, or source, awareness in which they all arise and dissolve. Demonstrating the bewilderment that accompanies the recognition of paradox, it was a powerful experience for participants who returned home with new levels of awareness and, certainly, more respect for beginner's mind.



RETREATANTS: (Bottom row from left) Wesley Lachman, Dawn Kurzka, Tom McFarlane, Clivonne Corbett, Vip Short, Niraja Lorenz, Carol Mizera, Robin Retherford, Mike Craven, (middle row) Gene Gibbs, Hanna Offenbacher, Jim Zajac, Shan Ambika, Joel, Andrea Pucci, Jim Patterson, Erica Eden, Todd Corbett, (top row) Rich Marlatt, Merry Song Caston, Andrew Cox, Ann Everitt, David Cunningham, Sherrill Bower, Fred Chambers, Sharry Lachman, Damien Pierce, and Beth MacKenzie.

Foundation Studies Group Annual Rollover

The second annual Foundation Studies program graduated twelve members in August 2000. The group was taught by Fred Chambers and Ani Tsering who must have excelled as teachers, as their students even requested some full-day meditations on weekends to practice together with guidance. They then gifted their teachers with restaurant gift certificates in appreciation. Tom Kurzka is teaching the third Foundation Studies program from October 2000 to August 2001. We wish teacher and students a successful and rewarding year.

A Hard Act to Follow

Therese Engelmann was presented in August 2000 with a card signed by *many* Center-goers and a bookstore gift certificate in honor and appreciation of ten years of continuous service as a volunteer in the Center library. That's a lot of hours, and we all benefit from it. Thank you, Therese!





FACING FEAR ON THE PATH

by Joel

Almost everyone who walks a spiritual path will experience some form of fear. Initially, we may be afraid of what family and friends will think of our spiritual interests. We may be afraid of our teacher, or the teachings, or of certain practices, or going on retreat. Later, we may develop a fear of losing all interest in worldly affairs, going insane, or finding out something about ourselves we don't want to know. We may also become afraid of such things as impermanence, death, or even God. But all these different kinds of fear are actually rooted in a single fear, which is the fear of Enlightenment itself.

The reason we are afraid of Enlightenment is because we know in our heart of hearts that before we can Awaken to our True Self, our ego-self must die. Nor are we deceived, for this is confirmed by the mystics of all traditions. Here, for example, is how Master Haikun describes a person who has arrived at the last stage of Zen practice.

Like a man hanging over a precipice he is completely at a loss what to do next. Except for occasional feelings of uneasiness and despair, it is like death itself. All of a sudden he finds his mind and body wiped out of existence.¹

The Christian mystic, St. Teresa of Avila, compares what happens on a spiritual path to a silkworm turning into a butterfly. But she warns:

Note very carefully, daughters, the silkworm has of necessity to die, and it is this which will cost you most.²

Why? Because, as the great Sufi poet, Rumi, says:

No one will find his way to the Court of Magnificence until he is annihilated³

From the beginning, then, our attitude towards Enlightenment is fraught with deep-seated ambivalence. On the one hand, we yearn to Awaken, and yet, at the same time, we are terrified of the "spiritual death" which we must undergo in order to attain it. What's worse, the closer we get to our goal, the stronger our fear

is apt to become.

Now, from a teacher's perspective, the appearance of fear on the path is usually a good sign, for it indicates the student is at last starting to glimpse the Truth. Sometimes, however, the fear may become so overwhelming that all further progress is blocked. So the question is, are there any steps you can take when this happens? And the answer, of course, is, yes, there are.

First, when fear arises, *practice detachment*. Detachment from fear means not grasping at it, or trying to push it away.

"Grasping at fear" happens when we identify it as something belonging to our essential nature. This is a product of the way we have been conditioned to think about ourselves—as, for instance, when we say, "I am afraid." The way to break this conditioning is to ignore whatever thoughts you may be having *about* the fear, and directly observe that it is just another impermanent phenomenon arising and passing in Consciousness. Then, realize that, precisely because the fear *is* impermanent, it cannot be part of who you truly are, because *you*—the observer—do not arise or pass away with the fear.

"Pushing fear away" happens whenever we try to deny or resist it. Not only will this tactic not work, but trying to resist fear actually strengthens the sense of ego-self by creating the impression that there is some 'one' doing the resisting.

"Pushing fear away" happens whenever we try to deny or resist it. Not only will this tactic not work, but trying to resist fear actually strengthens the sense of ego-self by creating the impression that there is some 'one' doing the resisting.

In practicing nonresistance, however, we must be careful, because resistance itself is a conditioned response which cannot be gotten rid of through will power alone. So do not fall into the trap of trying to resist the resistance. Instead, focus your attention on your breath. Then, each time you exhale, let your attention expand outward, until it completely fills the space of awareness which surrounds and permeates your body and mind. Now relax and allow both the fear *and* the resistance to it to effortlessly arise and pass away in this space.

The second thing you can do is *transform fear into compassion*. Once you have learned to allow fear to be present without being overwhelmed, you can actually use it to arouse compassion. Remember that compassion literally means to “suffer with.” So, whenever fear arises, consider that everyone suffers from fear at some time in their lives. Therefore, the fear you are currently feeling is not strictly personal. In fact, it is something you share with all sentient beings. So, open your heart to this fear and be grateful for the opportunity to experience deeply what others also experience. Then, just as you, yourself, want to be free of fear, recognize that all beings want this, as well. Make a strong wish or prayer that they, too, may be released from this form of suffering.

The more you can open your heart to fear and the suffering it causes, the more you will find that something remarkable happens. The very same energy which manifested as fear becomes transformed into a profound feeling of love and sympathy for all beings throughout the entire cosmos.

The third and most powerful thing you can do is *embrace fear as your ally*. We are so conditioned to think of fear as an enemy that this may sound rather strange. How could fear be an ally? Actually, if you have ever faced a life-threatening crisis—a medical emergency, natural disaster, or military combat—you have already had some experience of this.

At first, your reaction is one of sheer panic. Adrenaline pumps through your veins. Your heart rate goes into high gear. You feel momentarily immobilized. Then something shifts and, suddenly, you find yourself in an altered state. The body is infused with incredible energy. The mind becomes exceptionally alert and clear. All extraneous thoughts vanish, and attention is able to focus fully on the tasks at hand. Time slows down and you find you can do whatever needs to be done with great calmness and efficiency. It almost seems as if some Divine Force has taken over your life and is guiding all your actions.

Notice that what has produced this extraordinary state is that the intensity of the fear has temporarily “killed” all sense of your ego-self. Now this, in fact, is very close to what happens during spiritual death. The only real difference is that, in spiritual death, there is no external crisis to distract your attention. When attention is completely undistracted, it naturally returns to its Source in and as Consciousness, Itself. At this point, all that is required for you to Awaken is to Recognize that this Consciousness is who you truly are.

So if, instead of detaching from fear—or even trying to transform it into something else—you can completely and totally *surrender* to it, then the fear itself will obliterate your ego-self and, in so doing, carry you straight to Enlightenment’s doorstep.

It is important, however, to add a word of caution. Surrendering to fear is not something you can or should try to force. It must occur spontaneously or, in theological terms, by way of

grace. The worst thing you can do is get into a battle with yourself, trying to surrender to fear, and end up feeling weak or guilty because you failed. When the time comes, surrender will happen . . . one way or another. Meanwhile, the next time fear arises just try to remember that behind its wrathful veneer lies a potential friend.

Practicing detachment, transforming fear into compassion, and embracing it as an ally, are all ways of meeting fear head-on. In the long run, however, the most effective way to deal with fear is to make a systematic inquiry into its true cause. According to the mystics, the true cause of all suffering is the experience of being some limited ego-self, which requires constant enhancement and protection. But this is something you must become convinced of through your own direct insights. So, for example, whenever you suffer from disappointment, you might notice that this suffering only arises because there is some self which expected to get something it desired. When you suffer from sorrow, you might notice that this suffering only arises because there is some self which is attached to something it has lost. When you suffer from fear, you might notice that this suffering only arises because there is some self which is anxious about losing something in the future.

“Then, far from fearing ego death, you will actually long for it. When this happens, you will be like a tree-ripened plum, ready to fall at the merest whisper of a breeze.”

The more you conduct this kind of inquiry, the more you will directly see that your own sense of self is, indeed, the basis of all your suffering. Consequently, instead of cherishing this self as your most prized possession, you will come to regard it as a painful burden. Then, far from fearing ego death, you will actually long for it. When this happens, you will be like a tree-ripened plum, ready to fall at the merest whisper of a breeze.

Finally, keep in mind that the mystics’ teachings about spiritual death reflect only a relative truth. They describe the experiences of a seeker still veiled by ignorance. From the point of view of Enlightenment, however, no ‘self’ ever dies. This is because, in Reality, as the Hindu sage, Shankara, says:

*There is neither birth nor death, neither bound nor aspiring soul, neither liberated soul nor seeker after liberation—this is the ultimate and absolute truth.*⁴

Likewise, the Buddha tells his disciple Subhuti:

*If the full truth is realized, one would know . . . that there are no sentient beings to be delivered and there is no selfhood that can begin the practice of seeking to attain Noble Wisdom.*⁵

For this reason, too, the great Sufi shaykh, Ibn ‘Arabi, writes:

Most of ‘those who know God’ make a ceasing of existence...a condition of attaining the knowledge of God, and that is an error and a clear oversight. For the knowledge of God does not presuppose the ceasing of existence . . . For things have no existence, and what does not exist cannot cease to exist . . . Then if thou know thyself without existence or ceasing to be, then thou knowest God; and if not, then not.⁶

In other words, your supposed ‘self’ is nothing but a delusion, an imaginary construct, a mere mirage. It has never truly existed, and what has never truly existed cannot cease to exist. So, ultimately, all your fears are unfounded. This is the great Cosmic Joke which Enlightenment reveals. Once you see it, you will laugh at death, and your laughter will shake the very stars.

❖ Joel, Fall 2000

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3. William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1983) p. 179.
4. *Shankara’s Crest-Jewel of Discrimination*, trans. Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood, 3rd ed. (Hollywood: Vedanta Press, 1978) p. 127.
5. *A Buddhist Bible*, ed. Dwight Goddard (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970) p. 97-98.
6. Ibn ‘Arabi, “*Whoso Knoweth Himself...*”, trans. T. H. Weir (Gloucestershire: Beshara Publications, 1976) p. 5.

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The Center’s web site includes:

- General information about the purpose, activities, and philosophy of the Center.
- Details about Joel’s books and other Center publications.
- Previous newsletters.

THANK YOU ❖ THANK YOU ❖ THANK YOU

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

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Finally, for coordinating the entire project of mailing each newsletter—including delivering the addressed stacks to the post office in his bike trailer—for three years with no public acknowledgment (oops), we are especially grateful to **Wayne Leeds.** For much of this time he has been unable to attend Center teaching events due to his job. This is *truly* selfless service. Thank you, Wayne.

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





Nothing to Fear but Fear

by Tom Kurzka

Tom Kurzka is a 46-year-old communication manager at a Catholic health organization. He lives in Eugene with his wife, Dawn. Both are members of CSS's Practitioners Group. They have a twenty-year-old daughter. On May 4, 2000, Tom had a Gnostic Awakening. Tom was interviewed by the Center Voice on August 12, 2000.

CV: Before we get to your Awakening last spring, tell us something about your spiritual background.

TOM: My parents were both Lutheran. In my early childhood, we lived in Chicago and I went to a Lutheran grade school. We also went to church on a regular basis. Then, around twelve or thirteen, I started questioning all that. The picture of God I had received was that he was a little old man who lived in the sky. It didn't make a whole lot of sense anymore, so I started doing my own research.

I read a book on Buddhism, which made more sense to me. This was based on some earlier inward experiences I had as a child. When I was about five or six, I would get into this place where I would be looking into a mirror, and I would go into this kind of altered state. It was like, there was the known—my house, my parents, who I thought I was—and then all of sudden that would shift. I would blank out, and then there was no more me. Instead, there was just this vast Space, and I would go, "Whoa, what's *that*?" That had quite an effect on me, even as a kid. So, when I became a teenager, I thought, if religion is based on anything, it's gotta relate to that experience, because that was pretty profound.

The most important experience I had was when I was fifteen. That was my sophomore year at high school and I began experimenting with drugs. My first LSD trip was very

nice. My second was about two and a half months later. That one was really scary, but nothing spiritual happened. Then, about a week later, I smoked some pot with a friend. It was a summer night in mid-August, very warm. We went to the park, and my friend said, "Let's look up at the stars." I laid on my back and looked at the stars. I can remember my mind saying, "Forget that you exist! Forget that you exist!" So I did, and immediately there was this profound sense of Oneness, because I had lost all sense of my self. But all of a sudden it was like, "Wait a minute! What's going on here?"

"... the whole foundation of what I thought reality was blew away. I could see in a flash it was all transparent. It was all a fake construct, like a dream. I was coming out of the Oneness experience with the stars, but when I got back to what I thought was my real world, I found it didn't exist. There was no place to come back to!"

Then, when my body awareness came back, there seemed to be no substance in it. My concept that there's this physical world out there, and that my body is separate from it, had dissipated. It was all caving in, and I panicked. That was extremely frightening. So, I tried to sit up, and it was like the whole foundation of what I thought reality was blew away. I could see in a flash it was all transparent. It was all a fake construct, like a dream. I was coming out of the Oneness experience with the stars, but when I got back to what I thought was my real world, I found it didn't exist. There was no place to come back to!

By the time I got home that night, I was totally paranoid. It was like I was still high and couldn't come down. I stayed awake that whole night. The paranoia kept building. There

was no one to talk with about this experience. I couldn't tell my parents without them finding out I was doing drugs. I think I was up for maybe three straight days. Every time I would doze off to sleep, these intense, vivid dreams would start happening, and it was frightening. So, I would just jolt back out of them.

Eventually, I did tell my mother what was going on, because I thought I was losing my mind. She took me to a psychiatric hospital, where they gave me some sort of drug that finally brought me down, and I was able to get some sleep.

That experience was the true beginning of my spiritual path, because I had seen that even the 'reality' you live in when you're straight isn't fundamentally real. That was the Truth, and once you glimpse the Truth, you can never again ignore it completely. But, at the same time, I was still attached to my illusion of reality, so there was also this, "No, I don't want to go there, because it's scary, and I'm going to die as a result of it."

CV: Did you continue taking LSD?

TOM: No. After that I never did LSD again.

CV: What happened next? How did your spiritual path evolve from there?

TOM: I began to explore a lot of things. I took up Transcendental Meditation, went to psychic awareness classes, read Ram Das. But I was also trying to lead a normal life. I married Dawn. We had a daughter. So, I'd go back and forth. Finally, when I was twenty-eight, I landed in Self Realization Fellowship (SRF), which is founded on the teachings of Paramahansa Yogananda. I decided that was my path, and so I began to focus on that.

When I got into SRF, I started doing very serious meditation, sometimes for hours at a time. That was important in laying the foundations for my whole future path. But the trouble was, I couldn't find anyone who knew about fear. They all talked about how God is beautiful, God is bliss, give yourself to God. But they couldn't address this recurring fear I had. It was like on that night, looking at the stars, I had found a window that every so often would open up. I'd be sitting on a chair and, all of a sudden I couldn't tell the difference between my body and the chair. It was just all One, and I'd realize there is no *body*! Then the paranoia would start to build. I was afraid I would totally disappear.

CV: So really what prompted your quest was this fear. Was that the incentive to be on the spiritual path?

TOM: Yes. When I read the Eastern religions they reflected almost word for word much of what I was experiencing—

only they said it was supposed to be FUN. But for me it was more like hell. Once I attended an SRF convocation in Los Angeles. There were thousands of people there. I started to get disoriented and the fear came on. So I went to a novice monk and tried to share with him what was happening. I said, "I feel like this is God, but God's not blissful. God is kind of scary." He said, "I think you've got psychological problems, because if you're having a true spiritual experience, it's peaceful. You're not peaceful, so you must have a problem. You need to see a psychiatrist." I was pretty upset by that. Later, I talked to a senior monk. He was a little more sympathetic, but still he couldn't offer any really useful advice.

CV: Do you feel that if you had met somebody like Joel at that time, he might have pointed you to it more quickly?

TOM: If Joel had been there when I was fifteen—or somebody like Joel, who knew what was happening—I might have saved 30 years of searching. That's one of the problems with our society. No one understands the nature of mystical experiences. You go to your parents, and there's shame. They say, "What's the matter with you? Don't think about things like that! It's the drugs. Drugs are bad. You're bad." Even the psychiatrists don't understand, because they're also living in delusion. So there's no support at all.

CV: So what happened after your experience in Los Angeles?

TOM: I started having these experiences of no-body, no-self more and more often. It got so I couldn't avoid them, or the fear they caused. One of the big things that would precipitate this was motion—like riding in a car, or plane. There was something about motion that would always bring about the sensation that there's no difference between my body and what's around me—especially riding on a plane. On a plane, you get a g-force, and then there's a feeling of weightlessness. What made it worse was I always felt, if I could just stand up, the experience would stop. But on a plane, you're all packed in like cattle. So I became paranoid about being in any place where I'd be stuck in a sitting position. Finally, it got to the point where the fear was really incapacitating me. I couldn't drive. I couldn't get on a plane. I'd even get paranoid in movie theaters. "You gotta face it," I thought, "You've come to an end." That's when I started coming to the Center.

CV: What year was that?

TOM: I met Joel in the Fall of '97. He was really the first person who was actually able to understand what was happening. "Oh yes," he said, "You're experiencing fear."

"Finally, it got to the point where the fear was really incapacitating me... 'You gotta face it,' I thought, 'You've come to an end.' "

That's perfectly normal." I thought, how refreshing. He also said fear was a good sign. Even though it isn't any fun, it means you're getting close. That's why it's so valuable to have an enlightened teacher. They know where the path is going and how to guide you to get there. So, I decided I had to get serious about this. When I joined the Foundation Studies group, I told Joel I was ready to make a total commitment. To tell the truth, I was scared shitless of Joel. I wasn't scared of him, but of being around him—of what was going to happen.

CV: So, in this process—particularly after meeting Joel—enlightenment became the conscious goal of your path. You wanted to be enlightened because you thought things would be different?

TOM: It was more like knowing deep down that I was living a lie, and that the Truth needed to be uncovered. It wasn't as if I was going to figure it all out and life would be rosy after that. In one sense, it is! But it's different from the way the mind conceives of it. Anyway, that wasn't the motivating factor anymore. It was just that deep down I knew I was seeing things the wrong way. And also realizing that the fact I was living this lie was hurting other people. It was messing things up. It's not a right way to live.

CV: Were there any particular practices which you feel were important leading up to your gnosis?

TOM: In the spring of '99 I went on my first Center retreat. Joel was giving these Buddhist teachings on the five sense fields and thought. We were supposed to experience sights, sounds, sensations, smells, and tastes in their nakedness, without any mental concepts *about* them—like, sound is just sound, sights are just sight, sensations are just sensation, thought is just thought.

Sound was pretty easy for me. I'd listen to this train whistle at night, and then all these thoughts would come, like, "That's a train," and "I'm Tom sitting on the bed listening to it." Then I started to really see that these were just thoughts. They were not the whistle. That was just pure sound, no concepts attached. You can talk about this intellectually, but when you actually experience it, you go "Ahhh!"

I also tried to pay attention to thoughts, but there would be this, "Oh my God, if the thinking is only thinking, then the ego is only thoughts! But that means basically, it's nothing!" At that point, I stopped because—"No! No! I don't want to go there!" So I didn't get to fully experience thinking as thinking. Still, I was catching on.

In subsequent meditations back home, I really got into that practice. Not only in formal meditation, but even doing daily tasks. A sound would arise, and it would be just sound. Sometimes I could go through a whole day experiencing everything this way—sound is just sound, sight is just sight, taste is just taste. I could even start to see thought is just thought. Fear would still arise, because the fixation on ego

would get threatened, but it wasn't such a big deal anymore.

CV: It sounds like that first retreat was a turning point—like the shift began back then, and the process just continued.

"...it was like God was baking me. I wasn't doing anything anymore. I was being baked. Throughout the day things would just unfold. Now, if fear arose, I could deal with the fear."

TOM: Yes. First you get an intellectual understanding, but then at some point you get an experiential understanding—you see it *directly*. There's a big difference. Then, in January, 2000, there was another shift. The meditations got to where I'd just sit down and there'd be this beautiful unfolding. I could experience everything in its nakedness, without effort. From that point on, it was like God was baking me. I wasn't doing anything anymore. I was being baked. Throughout the day things would just unfold. Now, if fear arose, I could deal with the fear. There wasn't such an aversion to it.

CV: What practices were you doing just before your Awakening?

TOM: Andrea was leading the Practitioner's Group. We were working with Pema Chodron's book, *Start Where You Are*, and doing Tibetan practices—mainly shi-ne' [emptiness meditation] and tonglen [taking and sending]. My primary meditation was the shi-ne'. In shi-ne', you basically just relax into emptiness. That really worked for me. I also did a little tonglen, which involves taking on the suffering of others, and sending them love and compassion. But that only worked when some major emotions were coming up.

CV: So that was just before the Spring, 2000, retreat. Why don't you tell us what actually happened when you got there?

TOM: Before going on the retreat, there was a knowing that something major was going to happen. Mentally, I thought, "If it happens, it happens," but there was this inner sense that I was going to Pop. Along with that, though, there was also a lot of resistance. The first night, I remember sitting in the meditation hall, feeling like I was spreading out, expanding. But I was also thinking, "I don't like this! I don't like this!" Then, there was this feeling of just having to let go, followed by a profound sense that my heart was opening. Still, things didn't really start to happen until the next to the last day.

That was Tuesday morning, and I'm lying in bed at about 4:00 AM—wide awake, meditating. Birds are beginning to

chirp. I'm listening to the naked sound of the birds. It's just "sound is sound," and it's quite exquisite. Then, the mind kicks in and has some old thought—I don't know what it was. Then, the next thought comes, and the next, and I notice that I'm distracted. "Oh, you stupid idiot. You blew it! You're not listening to the birds anymore. You're thinking again." But then I go, "Well, wait a minute. Why are you dumping on yourself so much?" In practicing tonglen, we always talk about how we don't need to be so hard on ourselves, so self-critical. That's just another form of aversion, and we're supposed to be getting beyond *all* grasping and aversion. So, I think, "You're having aversion to thought, but thought is just phenomena. It's no big deal. Even the thought that's judging thoughts is just another thought." Then I suddenly see that the thoughts, and the thought that is judging these thoughts, are just like the birds! There's no difference!—"thinking is just thinking." That broke everything loose—all significance or attachment to ego—because, in that moment, I saw right through the whole game. It's like Andrea says, "You can have thoughts, but don't let thoughts have you."

CV: Is that when you "Popped"?

TOM: No, not yet. It was more like, there's this window and I'm still on the outside looking in, but there are major cracks beginning to form. When someone gets to that point, everything really starts to get fragile. You can still stop the glass from shattering, but you're going to have to work awfully hard to keep all the pieces together.

"... instead of trying to escape the fear, I started to watch it, and I saw it was just fear... very intense fear, but nothing more."

CV: So, then what happened?

TOM: Later that morning, Joel led the last meditation before we were supposed to go off on our own for solo day. He was having us shift focus from whatever phenomena appear in the foreground of awareness, to the background—which is the Groundless Being of Consciousness, Itself. In my loosened state, I really started to sense this Groundless Being. So, again, there was this feeling of just spreading out more and more into that Groundless Being. Then, suddenly, I went into major fear. But then, instead of trying to escape the fear, I started to watch it, and I saw it was just fear. There was still a little attachment going on, but I could stay there with the feeling. It was just fear—very intense fear, but nothing more. Eventually the fear settled down, the heart settled down. There wasn't a sense of Groundless Being anymore, but I felt like I was on the edge of something.

Afterwards, I was walking to the dining hall for lunch. Andrea buzzed up and said, "What's going on?" I think I had caught her eye at the end of that meditation. She said we needed to talk. I hadn't talked to her or anyone up until then, because it seemed pointless. There were no more questions to ask. But now we did talk a little, and it was a great conversation. I was telling her about the fear of getting lost, disappearing. She said, "You still got bones. There're still bones in your body." I said, "Yeah, I guess there are still bones here." She said, "You're still going to be a husband and a father when you leave here." So, that was very reassuring. She was saying, everything isn't going to explode if you let go. But at another level it didn't make sense. How is it that there's nothing here, yet there's still something here? The mind tries to grapple with this, but the poor mind, bless it's little heart, can never figure it out. That's half the problem. On the path, you're always trying to figure it out. "If I could only figure it out, then I'd get enlightened." But you can't figure it. Your trying to figure it out is what prevents you from seeing it. That's where surrender comes in. You have to let go of wanting to figure it out.

Anyway, that evening, about five o'clock or so, I'm lying in bed, and the sensation that there is no difference between my body and the bed starts happening again. At first, it's the same old, "No no no, I don't want to go there!" Then, the thought comes, "Let's explore this." So, it's like I'm taking baby steps, just letting it out, letting it out, letting it out—the spreading thing. Now, there's nothing there, and yet nothing explodes, nothing disappears! Then, suddenly, there was this incredible sense of well-being, because it was all IT.

Going down to dinner that night, IT was still just there. I knew I was still Tom, and Tom knows this, and Tom remembers that, but there's just IT. And IT was wonderful! Whatever happened was just perfect. The right thing always happened at the right time. There was no trying to think my way through anything, or worry about what I should be doing. Everything just sort of happened. And there was still this incredible sense of well-being. I remember looking over at Andrea in the dining room while we were eating, and my eyes met her's and it was, "Yeah, I see you. Awareness sees Awareness," because everything is just IT.

That evening IT continued and I was feeling what Dr. Wolf called the "Current." Again, I let go of the body, and I just spread out across the room, and the sensation of well-being—this Current—pervaded everything. That's when I thought, "I really ought to check in with somebody, because something major is happening here." So I decided to go see Joel in the teacher's cottage.

I walk in and Joel looks up, and says, "What's going on?" I start to describe what happened with the birds and thoughts, and sensing everything is IT, and my feeling of well-being. His eyes sort of light up a little bit over that. Then, I say something like, "I think I'm getting enlightened." Suddenly, his face

changes, and he starts yelling at me: “WHO gets enlightened? WHO? You go out there, and don’t you dare go to sleep, until you have the answer to that question!”

So, this is where the shit hits the fan. I’m supposed to find out who gets enlightened. I’ve got to know this by morning, because tomorrow is the last day of the retreat, and it’s like I’ve got to get enlightened before the retreat is over. That’s basically the assignment.

By the time I leave there I don’t feel very enlightened at all. But I’ve got to finish the term paper before morning, ‘cause that’s when it’s due. So I go to the meditation hall, and there’s all this pressure on, but nothing’s happening. I’m stuck in all these thoughts of inadequacy. “Gosh, I’m so stupid, I can’t get it.” I am trying to do shi-ne` practice, just watching these thoughts and saying, “That’s just thinking. Let that go.” I stayed up pretty much the whole night trying to do that, but nothing happened.

The next morning, we’re eating breakfast. In an hour we’re supposed to go to the main meditation hall for our final retreat sharing. Joel comes over, points to a clock on the wall, and yells, “You don’t have much time left! You better hustle!” Suddenly, the whole situation becomes very amusing. “What am I going to do? I’m supposed to be getting enlightened! How do you get enlightened?” (laughs). So, I leave the dining hall and make a show of running up to the little meditation room they call Mist Haven on top of the hill.

When I get to Mist Haven there’s no one else there. Now I’m really up against a brick wall. You can’t make enlightenment happen. How do you make that happen? At that point, all the feelings of inadequacy of the night before came rushing back. I felt I just couldn’t do it. That was the breaking of the heart. It was like my life became transparent. I talked before about living a lie, and knowing that there was a Truth that I wasn’t seeing because I was living this lie. All of a sudden it was, “Oh, I can’t do this anymore! How do I get enlightened? How do I do this?” I’m thinking, there’s this little self inside here that’s trying to control things, and do things to please people, and always trying to do the right thing, and sometimes it does the right thing, but sometimes it does the wrong thing, and it never knows for sure what the right thing is, and now it realizes it can’t play the game anymore. The game is over. Going back to the so-called ‘world’, and trying to operate under this lie—it just couldn’t be done anymore.

“... I knew the game was over, and there was this incredible grief going on—grief just pouring out, pouring out, pouring out.”

So, I knew the game was over, and there was this incredible grief going on—grief just pouring out, pouring out, pouring out. I’m just crying, and crying. At some point, I just lie down on the floor, and say, “Take me, just take me! I don’t care if I explode! I can’t do this any more. I give up.” But God didn’t take me (laughs).

CV: So was this what Joel calls “kenosis,” the exhaustion of will?

TOM: Yes. It was the exhaustion of will *and* the breaking of the heart, all in one fell swoop. Then, after about 45 minutes of intense sobbing, and rolling on the floor, pounding my fist on the floor like a little baby, crying “Just take me, take me. I can’t do it anymore,” I hear the gong ring, meaning the sharing is about to begin in the main meditation hall. I think, “To hell with them. I’m not going down there. I can’t go down there like this.” I didn’t have the will to go down there. I was just stuck on the floor, and there was no place else to go. Finally, Joel sent someone up to get me. It was like I couldn’t move on my own. Someone had to come up and say, Okay, let’s go. Time to move. Life goes on. Come back to the world.

So, I went down to the main meditation hall, and every time someone shared something that happened to them on the retreat, I would feel so much love and compassion. If they had had a hard time, I was ready to cry. It was like something I’d never experienced before—being so open to the pain and suffering of other people.

At one point David was talking about what he called the “Dave Tapes”—meaning, those thoughts about yourself that constantly play in your head. I could relate to that, so when my turn to share came, I say, “I can’t get rid of the Tom Tape.” Andrea looks right at me and says, “You’re resisting the Tom Tape. Why are you doing that? Stop trying to push it away.” When she said that, I thought, “Ooooh, we’re coming back to *that* one.” It was like when I realized I was resisting thoughts in order to hear the birds sing—how that was an aversion. So here I was doing the same thing again, and Andrea was pointing it out. Not wanting the Tom Tape was just another form of aversion! That’s what I mean about being baked. You don’t have to do anything, but God keeps showing you things—subtle little graspings and aversions—and you just look.

Driving home, I experienced some fear in the car. The whole drama of feeling like I was gonna disappear came back. We stopped for a pee break at the rest area south of Salem. Some other Center people also stopped there. I remember standing around talking with them, and there was this fear that I’m the only one in the world—that I’m creating this whole reality, and when I wake up, it’s all going to explode. Then, I look into Clivonne’s eyes, and I see Divine Mother in her eyes, and I realize, “Of course, it’s not this little self that’s creating everything. It’s Divine Mother! And Divine Mother is in Clivonne.” Then, I could see Her in

everything! It was like we were all just Divine Mother talking to Divine Mother. That was comforting.

CV: So you still hadn't Popped when you left the retreat?

TOM: No, that happened when I got home that night. I woke up at 2 in the morning. As I'm surfacing from sleep there was this experience of Pure Awareness, before any thoughts have arisen. I've had this before, quite often. There's no sense of body. You don't know who, or where you are. So, the mind begins to panic, and says, "What's going on? What's going on?" Then, the world starts to come into focus. "Oh yes, there's the body here, everything's okay." But there's always an instant before the panic hits, where it's just Pure Awareness, just Consciousness, Itself. Joel's talked about this, "If you didn't panic, you'd see, That's IT!" But then the thoughts come, and they start to cover IT up.

Actually, that Awareness is always present. You just don't recognize it, because there are millions of thoughts, coming and going. It's like a strobe light. In every instant your mind is creating all these thoughts, flashing on, flashing off. It's all happening so fast, and your mind starts connecting these thoughts, making them seem solid—like you're a solid person, in a solid world. But if you really look, you see it's all flashing, and it's just your mind that's filling in those gaps, making it seem real.

This is why meditation is so important, because it allows you to slow that down. When you practice watching your thought—seeing that thought is just thought—then you can start to see the space between the thoughts. It's the thoughts that really put us in a pickle—not that thoughts are bad, but that we're totally sucked in by them, like a vacuum cleaner. We can't get any distance from our thoughts to see what's really going on, and so we come to believe that we *are* the thoughts, when we are *not*.

Anyway, I was waking up, slowly, through this space of Awareness, only this time I didn't panic. Then, thoughts arose. The Tom tape came on, the ego tape, and there was this recognition that it was just like the birds. Now there was no grabbing onto the thoughts, but there was no pushing them away, either, because, instead of going "Yuck, I don't want you," I was giving them love. I saw, this ego construct is God, too.

Then, the ego-thoughts started to go, and so there was an impulse to grab them, like "Can I really let this go?" So, there I was, up against that brick wall again. But the experience of the last few days was showing me this kind of struggle doesn't work. It's totally dysfunctional and causes great pain. So, there was also this sense of, "Here's the opportunity. Take advantage of it."

I got up to go to the bathroom, and it felt like this collection of thoughts that was 'Tom' was coming apart, like the knot was unraveling. I watched it and thought, "Oh yes, I can let go of that"—like throwing away the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle,

because I no longer felt they all had to be connected. So, it was like letting them go, piece by piece—"Let go of that one. That didn't hurt. Nothing exploded. Nothing disappeared. Okay, let's let go of this one. Oh, this is kind of interesting!" Then, I thought, "What should I do now—go back to bed?" But I knew I couldn't sleep. I could go upstairs to meditate. "No," I thought, "I don't want to meditate (laughs). After thirty years, I don't need that anymore! I'll just make myself a cup of tea and sit down in this chair here." So, I started making the tea, and the thoughts continued to drop away. Then, the fear came back that the little 'self' was all there was. But I remembered the Divine Mother, and it was obvious SHE was in everything. Right after that I POPPED.

"I looked around, and I saw what had been in front of me the whole time. It was God. It was all God! ... There was no more sense of a little 'self' inside. The last piece dropped away, and with that the veil was removed."

I can't describe the actual moment. I was just standing there when something shifted. There was like a break, then the spreading out-sensation. I looked around, and I saw what had been in front of me the whole time. It was God. It was all God! The counter was God. This hand was God. There was no difference. It all happened immediately. There was no more sense of a little 'self' inside. The last piece dropped away, and with that the veil was removed. It wasn't like something new happened. It was just Recognizing what had always been there, all the time. It's what I was seeing when I was a little kid of five years old, looking into that mirror—only I never knew it before, because I was too busy being fixated in all these concepts of who I thought I was. But in that moment seeing the counter, I was free of being a slave to concepts. I could have the concepts but they couldn't have me. And so there was the space to see that God, or Divine Mother, or Groundless Being—whatever you want to call IT—encompassed everything. Everything arose in IT and also WAS IT. There was no difference.

CV: So that was the final shift, the Awakening. Has the old Tom ever come back?

TOM: That's an interesting question. Initially, I'd get ego-thoughts coming back, and it was like, "Oh God! What's the matter? We've got self here. We're not enlightened." But when I'd look around, there'd be Divine Mother the whole

time. So at first, it was a little confusing. Joel gave me *The Flight of the Garuda* to read—a kind of post-enlightenment, Tibetan text. The idea is basically you just continue watching everything that arises—including ego thoughts—and just continue to Recognize what they are. That was very helpful. So was Dr. Wolff's *The Philosophy of Consciousness Without an Object*, which I also read.

Nowadays, what happens is, all the same stuff still comes up. The only difference is that I'm not fixated on it anymore. Now, it's like, "So what? When there's ego, there's ego. When there's no ego, there's no ego." There's this collection of memories, and there are old tendencies—I'm a vegetarian and I still prefer vegetarian food over meat. 'Tom' is a useful concept to describe that, to provide a reference point. But then 'Tom' shifts. 'Tom' doesn't have to be a certain way all the time. The concept of 'Tom' comes and goes as it pleases, and it doesn't matter. Tom is a rainbow.

CV: Could you describe how your perspective on life has changed since the breakthrough?

TOM: There's immense compassion. I used to care about other people, and I was always trying to fix things for them. The most profound thing now is, in each moment I'm no longer making an effort to have something happen. Things just sort of happen on their own. There's no attachment to the results, because I know we're not going anywhere. We never went anywhere. There's just this Awareness that's always ever-present, and doesn't change. It keeps creating phenomena that make it look like it's changing, but it's not. It's just a beautiful play. So, it's like the Divine is playing through me—like this body is a flute, and Divine Mother is the air. Before there was an obstruction in the flute. Now, the obstruction is gone and the air just flows through.

CV: In your daily life, what has changed and what has stayed the same?

TOM: I still get up in the morning, I still go to work. In one sense, nothing has changed at all. And, yet, in another sense, everything has changed—dramatically. It's like being in meditation all the time. You see something arise and then it dissipates. There's this global sense of Consciousness pervading everything. So you just go through your daily life, and it happens. Nothing is happening, yet something is happening.

CV: Have your family and friends reacted differently to you since your Awakening?

TOM: Dawn, my wife, is more friendly (laughs). I also think my relationship with my daughter has improved. As a parent, there's not much you can do with someone who's nineteen. When it comes to things like values and discipline, you've either blown it, or you've succeeded. But she seems to be opening up more. The few times I've tried to get a point across, she's said, "Okay," whereas, previously she would have said, "I'm not going to do that."

CV: Has anybody reacted to you differently where you work?

TOM: It's difficult to pinpoint a major difference. It wasn't like, bang!—one minute Tom's like this, and the next, he's totally changed. But there was a gradual transformation. It seems like they're more drawn to me. At one point, I actually tried to quit. But they said, "No, you can't go!" So, they made me a manager. When you're a manager you have to tell people what to do, but they still come to me with their personal problems, and I am open to that. Sometimes I think I've become sort of an unofficial spiritual counselor. For now, it seems obvious that this is where I'm supposed to be. Maybe in six months something will change, and it will be clear that it's time to leave. Either way, it doesn't matter, 'cause it's all grace.

CV: Do you feel any need or desire to continue doing spiritual practices?

TOM: From one point of view, everyday activity itself is meditation—like breathing or eating. But I still do formal practice, too. Especially in my circumstance it's very helpful, because of the intensity of my job. It's not absolutely necessary, but there's a pull towards doing it. It's almost like, it's time to praise God. Meditation is when you're praising God. I've also been playing the harmonium and chanting.

CV: What would you call what's happened to you? Realization? Awakening? Enlightenment?

TOM: Recognition. None of these words do it justice, but I like Recognition best of all, because IT's been in front of you the whole time. You just weren't seeing IT. Then, all of a sudden, you recognize that IT's there.

"The key is to realize that most of delusion comes from your attachment to concepts"

CV: What's your advice for other seekers?

TOM: The key is to realize that most of delusion comes from your attachment to concepts. The ego is built from concepts. To get beyond attachment to ego, you have to get to the point where you give up on all your goals, and just do what's in front of you. Whatever comes up, you do it with love and service. You see yourself as being a servant of God. When aversion for something arises, you look at the aversion, let it go, and continue doing service. Just give loving kindness to every situation and person that comes across your path.

CV: Closing statement?

TOM: Life is too serious to take seriously.

What Does Spiritual Fear Mean to You?

In late summer, 2000, we spoke with three members of the Center. During these interviews, we asked them to describe their spiritual backgrounds, their specific experiences of spiritual fear, any practices or teachings that they'd worked with related to the fear, and how they see it now. What do you see in their statements that speaks to you?



Rich Marlatt lives with his wife and dog in Creswell and works as a physical therapist at McKenzie Willamette Hospital in Springfield. He's been coming to the Center for over two years and reports there is no turning back.

I'd been practicing fairly loosely a Vipassana kind of practice. I pretty much did it on my own. Over the years I felt I wanted to go deeper—there was something missing—and then I went to the Center, and the first day I just knew this was my spiritual home. Since I've started at the Center it's really quickened—my practice. I feel like I'm much more spacious. I'm much more dedicated and, since I've gone to the retreats, I guess you could say it's really taken over my life in a way. It feels like there's no turning back.

On the retreats that I've been to through the Center, I've had some very strong experiences with fear. The first retreat I was on I had this—encounter, I guess you would say—with an experience of standing on the edge of an abyss and feeling like a fall was almost imminent and that I was going to be totally destroyed—it was that kind of fear—and very quickly I was out of there. I felt like I was almost yanked out of that experience. Joel said that to deal with this fear, it's kind of like dealing with a gun-shy horse: you would shoot a gun until the horse is no longer fearful of it.

The next retreat it did come back in a very similar way, and this time I was able to kind of stay with it, probably twenty seconds or something. It felt like an eternity but I stayed with it and felt like I was going to totally dissolve if I hung in there too long. So I was kind of dancing with it, somewhat in and out, where my thoughts would come in and I would kind of surrender to that energy of fear and it would feel like it was dissolving me a little bit more. I was in so much fear that I couldn't dance any longer and spontaneously I was out of there and it just stopped.

During that day, I had what felt like very deep insights around the fear. One of the main ones was that the fear that I encountered was an energy, and it could totally destroy the small self in some way—that this fear had the power to essentially take me, if I fully surrender to it, all the way to some kind of gnosis or enlightenment or something well beyond the state that I was in. And I also had a knowing that that fear—which felt like a primal or very, very root fear—all my other fears were manifestations of that root fear in some way. When I went back to Joel, he said to just kind of ride it like a horse, do your best to steer it, but just stay on it and stay with it and I thought that was good.

On the third retreat, I had what felt like a very expansive state during the retreat and, then, probably a few hours later, a very fearful contraction period where my body felt like I was cramping, I had a fearful response, my heart was beating really fast. But, I felt like by then with the practices I'd done—one was spacious awareness and the other was the breath practice—I had a little more spaciousness. I was able to not put much story on it; and also I had the tool of tonglen to use, and it seemed to be very helpful.

Somehow I feel like that will be encountered again and that, ultimately, I have to fully surrender to it. That's how I see it and it could be a very important . . . let's say portal, or energy, for me to utilize on my path. If I really think about it, there's both fear about it, but some deep willingness to proceed . . . proceed wherever my path may take me.



Erica Eden works as a bookkeeper for a nonprofit organization and enjoys a variety of activities, including gardening and time spent with her daughter and grandson who live nearby.

I started my spiritual path in the eighties—I taught myself yoga, I read a lot about meditation and

spiritual teachings. Somehow I felt like I wanted to do something else. One day in 1991 on the radio program, *New Dimensions*, I heard Shinzen Young talking about Vipassana meditation. I knew on a deep level it was something that I needed to check out. Shinzen was scheduled to lead two retreats at Cloud Mountain. I went and it was wonderful.

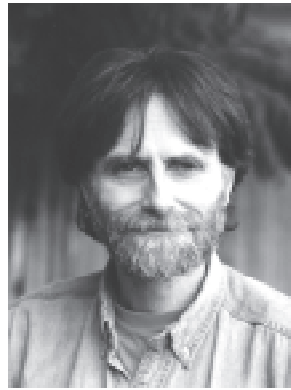
I loved the practice, so I practiced a lot on my own. I got very skilled at watching my body sensations, and over a period of time I started noticing stuff happening that I couldn't explain. I would get really scared, but it didn't seem to help to try and stop it. In the meantime, I just kept meditating and I started trying to find answers to what was going on with me. Shinzen told me not to get stuck in the experiences because where I wanted to go was far beyond that. Well, I could understand that, but how do I stop it?

I didn't know how to deal with the fear and the extraordinary experiences. I felt that it was connected to the meditation but in my search to find the answers, I just got more scared, because there were no answers. Then Jack Kornfield came out with a new book—*A Path to the Heart*—and in it he talked about problems that can arise. So I began to think that it was definitely the meditation practice.

I also had developed panic attacks. I'd wake up and my heart would be pounding, sometimes I couldn't breathe, and I was transported to the hospital by ambulance one time and twice by car. One time I was walking and everything just went white. So then I talked to the teacher and he told me that I was meditating too long and I ought to just cut it down to very short periods of time. This didn't seem to help. So I finally stopped yoga, I stopped meditation, and I just went through a long time of feeling a huge loss. I thought I'll sure never be able to meditate again (laughing).

Over a long period of time, gradually, things started getting better. Then Karen Fierman came to work where I work and she talked about the Center and said to come some Sunday. When I did, I picked up Pema Chodron's book in the library, *Start Where You are*, and she talked about how meditation can create a feeling of groundlessness. She described it as pulling the rug right out from under you and it just hit me like a ton of bricks that that was more than likely what had happened to me. And I thought, gee, if that's all it is, I can deal with the fear (laughing).

It's so simple. The practice had become very dear to me and I just overdid it. So, now I am back. I don't meditate as intensely as I did before and the [spring] retreat was just what I needed. When I came away, I felt a renewed devotion to practicing. I think I did the right thing by letting go of it for awhile.



Todd Corbett divides his time between Umpqua and Eugene, is a father, and works part-time as a nurse at a hospital in Roseburg. He has been coming to the Center for around eight years.

The whole thing with fear seems to be we misunderstand what it is. And I think that misunderstanding is very strongly conditioned. The word "fear" is a loaded term. It connotes a negativity that really isn't there, but the stories always seem to feed into this energy. That kind of misunderstanding has arisen in life experiences for me over the years in a series of situations in which loved ones died, kind of in regular intervals, for a long time. And what that would always bring up was a sense of the meaninglessness of everything that I thought was real in my life. So I would be kind of thrown into this abyss of stories about what had happened, and this fear was really not seen clearly.

But through doing practices and attempting to stay present with these things over the years, it's become more and more apparent that what I was experiencing was the energy and a lot of stories about it, and the energy became more prominent and seemed to be, actually, not a problem. We had some Tibetan practices that we were doing with the book *Cutting through Spiritual Materialism* where you bring your attention to the spaciousness and then you notice what's arising. Then the book following it . . . *The Spectrum of Ecstasy* went into much more detail. When you do these practices they bring up fear; but if you stay with the practice and you just let the stories be what they are, rather than feeding them—then you're simply very, very alert. It's kind of an ease of being able to see what's going on because you have this powerful energy called fear. It's actually helpful. The big problem has always been the stories which render one unable to see what's really going on. Once this energy is recognized, it's an asset rather than a problem. Actually being able to look at these stories in a more real way is part of the gift of the fear because the energy itself is kind of a clarity—a penetrating clarity which makes it easier to see.

And what I saw was that my life just seemed to be unraveling. There didn't seem to be any kind of thing stable in my life at all, and as I would do these practices it became apparent that there really *was* nothing stable in my life at all and probably *never* was. It's kind of a loss, when you lose your story, your sense of self goes with it—it's all sort of a package deal. It's not complicated. It seems very simple now.

❖ All interviews conducted Spring, 2000

In the Words of the Mystics

Buddhism

O bhikkhus, this idea that I may not be, I may not have, is frightening to the uninstructed worldlings.

— The Buddha

[Fear] may arise particularly when we come near to seeing impermanence in ourselves very strongly. Then there is great fear, even panic, that we may find a truth we don't want to know, namely that this identity, this personality, is a myth. Fear is the first and foremost hindrance to going deeper...The remedy is perseverance.

— Ayya Khema

[The Absolute] is neither subject nor object, has no specific location, is formless, and cannot vanish. Those who hasten towards it dare not enter, fearing to hurtle down through the void with nothing to cling to or to stay their fall. So they look to the brink and retreat.

— Huang Po

For someone who has preceded his meditation on voidness with much study and training and has thus developed a strong predisposition towards this view, the actual realization that the self is devoid of inherent existence will come as a very joyful experience, like a poor man's discovery of a lot of money. But for those of us who have not acquired such a disposition through previous inquiry, the realization that the I is merely imputed can be a very frightening experience. When we talk of "fear of voidness," it is precisely this experience we are referring to.

— Geshe Rabten

Hinduism

The shock of the fear of death drove my mind inwards and I said to myself mentally, without actually framing the words: 'Now death has come; what does it mean? What is it that is dying? This body dies.' And I at once dramatized the occurrence of death. I lay with my limbs stretched out stiff as though rigor mortis had set in and imitated a corpse so as to give greater reality to the enquiry. I held my breath and kept my lips tightly closed so that no sound could escape, so that neither the word 'I' nor any other word could be uttered. 'Well then,' I said to myself, 'this body is dead. It will be carried stiff to the burning ground and there burnt and reduced to ashes. But with the death of this body am I dead? Is the body I? It is silent and inert but I feel the full force of my personality and even the voice of the 'I' within me, apart from it. So I am Spirit transcending the body. The body dies but the Spirit that transcends it cannot be touched by death. That means I am the deathless Spirit.' All this was not dull thought; it flashed through me vividly as living truth which I perceived directly, almost without thought-process. 'I' was something very real, the only real thing about my present state, and all the conscious activity connected with my body was centered on that 'I'. From that moment onwards the 'I' or Self focused attention on itself by a powerful fascination. Fear of death had vanished once and for all. Absorption in the Self continued unbroken from that time on. Other thoughts might come and go like the various notes of music, but the 'I' continued like the fundamental sruti note that underlies and blends with all the other notes. Whether the body was engaged in talking, reading, or anything else, I was still centered on 'I'.

— Ramana Maharshi

As for the others, who remain attached to the letter of the Veda . . . on account of the crude conditioning of their minds they will always feel afraid of the unborn principle of Reality, thinking it means their own destruction.

— Shankara

Look, in order to pluck a rose one has to put one's hand in the midst of thorns. But if the rose is a person's aim and he has a keen desire to pluck it, he will not refrain from doing so for fear of being pricked.

— Anandamayi Ma

Judaism

In its sublimest manifestations, pure fear of God is identical with love and devotion for Him, not from a need for protection against the demons, or from fear of temptation, but because in this mystical state a flood of joy enters the soul and sweeps away every trace of mundane and egotistical feeling.

— Gershom Scholem

All your body will begin to tremble, and your limbs will begin to shake, and you will fear a tremendous fear, and the fear of God shall cover you...And the body will tremble, like the rider who races the horse, who is glad and joyful, while the horse trembles beneath him.

— Abraham Abulafia

My heart is in anguish within me, the terrors of death have fallen upon me. Fear and trembling come down upon me, and horror overwhelms me.

— Book of Psalms

Christianity

Through the action of fear the soul is purified and, as it were, made malleable and so it becomes awakened to the action of love.

— St. Diadochos of Photiki

Islam

When the star of the Real rises and enters into the servant's heart, the heart is illuminated and irradiated. Then bewilderment and fear disappear from the possessor of the heart, and he gives news of his Lord explicitly through hints, and by means of various modes of reporting.

— Ibn 'Arabi

The fear of the privileged is awe and veneration towards His Majesty and not fearing His chastisement. Because fearing chastisement is to strive for the self in order to protect it, while awe and veneration toward His Majesty is to glorify God and to forget self.

— Abdullah Ansari of Herat

Severity is truly awesome, but once you begin to tremble, the awesomeness becomes soft and smooth; for the awesome shape is aimed at the denier—once you become helpless, it turns into Gentleness and Kindness.

— Rumi



Letters to the Editor

Joel Morwood & Jennifer Knight
1571 Buck Street
Eugene, OR 97402

October 23, 2000

Dear Editor:

Last September, Jennifer and I spent the “Joel Fund” on a fabulous eight-day trip to the East Coast. For Jennifer (having never been east of the Rockies) it was a first! For Joel (who was raised in New York City) it was a lesson in impermanence.

We began our journey with a two-day visit to Joel’s brother, Jean, and his partner, Barbara, on Nantucket Island. Two-hundred years ago, Nantucket was the whaling center of New England. Many of the old Quaker-style houses have been preserved and/or restored, giving the island a unique colonial charm unmatched anywhere else.

From Nantucket we traveled by rent-a-car through southern New England, arriving in the “Big Apple” just in time for evening rush-hour. Jennifer got her first look at Times Square (ablaze with lights), while Joel managed to cross six lanes of traffic (using the horn-method of driving!) to reach the rental garage.

Thanks to your generosity, we were able to stay in a midtown hotel which (even at a bargain rate) was quite a luxury! On the other hand, this allowed us to save on local transportation costs by hiking up and down Fifth Avenue, visiting MOMA, St. Patrick’s Cathedral, the diamond district, and the Carnegie Deli, where they still serve the best pastrami in the world!

We also spent a morning at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (primarily looking at the Impressionists), and another afternoon in Greenwich Village where Joel spent his youth. St. Luke’s (his old grade school) is still there. So is the brownstone where Joel grew up, as well as John’s Pizzeria. Aside from these landmarks, however, there’s not much left of what used to be a very Italian neighborhood. Even “Little Italy” (a few blocks away), once the heart of Godfather country, is in the process of being taken over by a wave of immigrants from Japan! (In fact, New York is awash with new arrivals from places like the Middle East, India, Pakistan, and France—all since Joel’s time.) Nevertheless, we managed to find a couple of great Italian restaurants to dine in. (The gnocchi with marinara at Roc’s is to die for!)

Our final day began with Jennifer receiving her subway initiation (mandatory for any true New Yorker) with a ride to Battery Park where we viewed the Statue of Liberty—if, alas, only from afar. This was followed by a walk up to Trinity Church (the oldest in Manhattan) and a stroll down Wall Street. From there we continued uptown to spend several hours at Sufi Books, located in the Tribeca Area (completely new to Joel), finishing the day off with a whirlwind tour of the SoHo art galleries.

All in all we had a wonderful time in a wonderful town! From the bottom of our hearts, thanks again to all of you who made it possible!

Love, Joel & Jennifer

Joel & Jennifer near Statue of Liberty



CSS Library Hours:

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

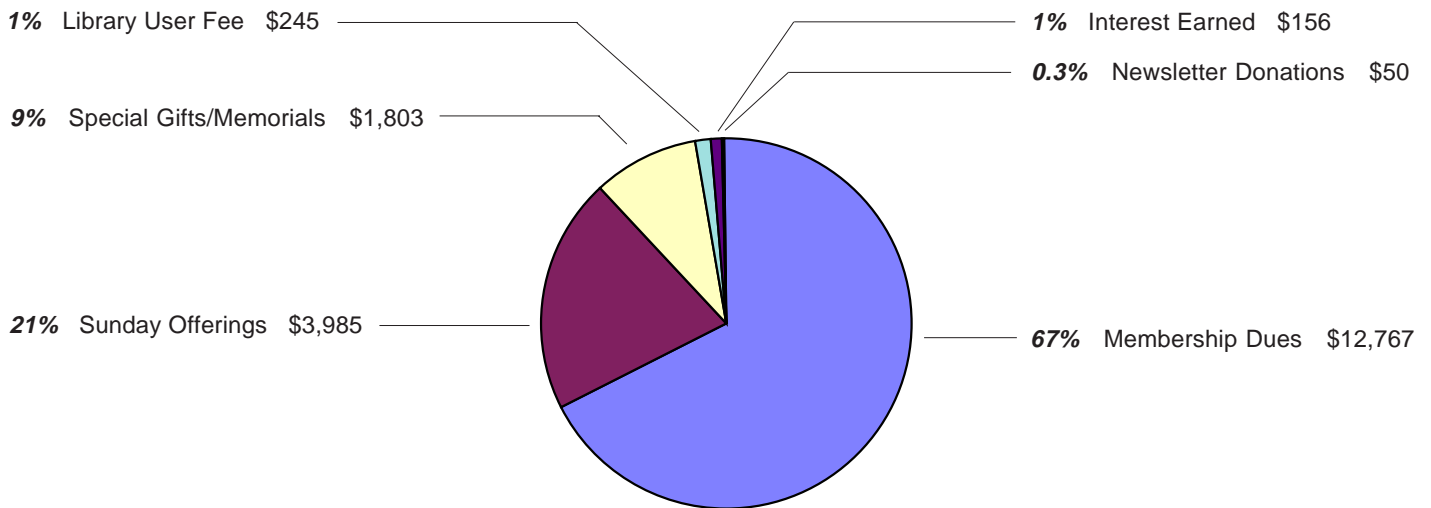
In lieu of a **Library Corner** in this issue, we wish to direct your attention to the following mystical biographies in which fear plays a key role: *Collision with the Infinite*, by Suzanne Segal, Blue Dove Press, 1998, and *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge: the Biography*, by Arthur Osborne, Rider Book, c1970.



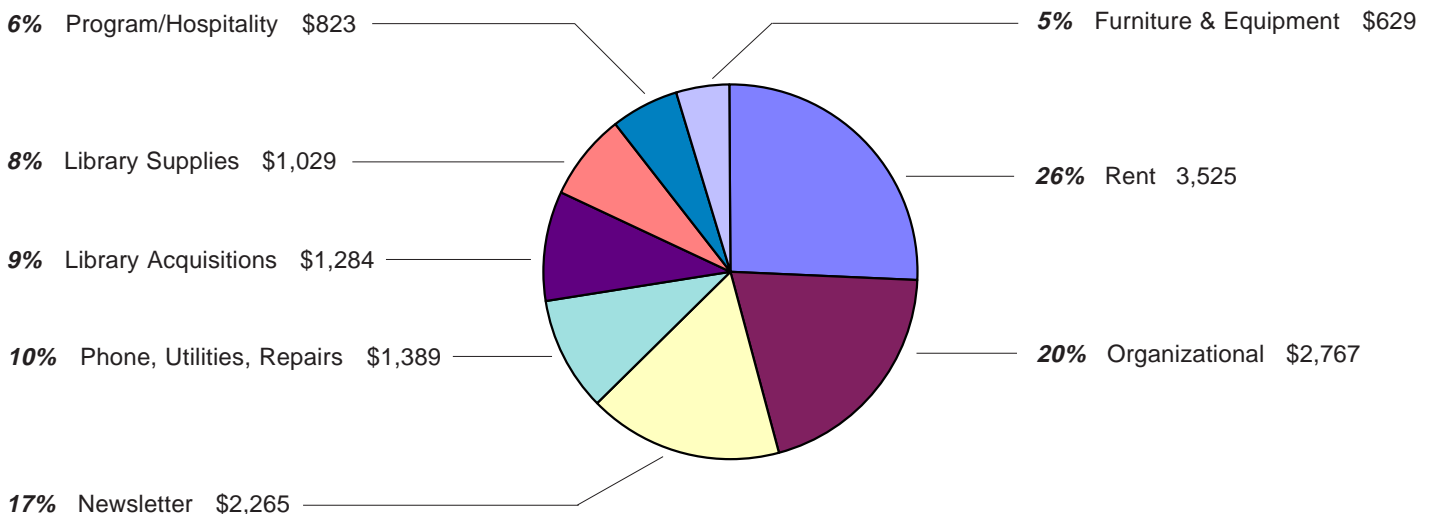
FINANCIAL REPORT: Fiscal Year ending 8/31/00

From its inception, the Center has been run as a labor of love by all those who work to bring you the teachings. Joel receives no compensation and, aside from three small stipends, the Center has no paid staff. This past year, due to fiscal conservatism by the Board and continuing generous donations by members and friends, a surplus has been accumulating. This will offset the dip into savings for capitol expenditures the previous year (see the Winter/Spring 2000 issue); and it will be of great benefit as we look toward publishing Joel's upcoming book and the development of a high-quality expanded web site dealing with mysticism in all its forms. We look forward to your continuing support as we continue expanding services and inspiration for increasing numbers of seekers.

REVENUE \$19,006



EXPENSES \$13,710



Note: Dollar amounts are rounded to the nearest dollar

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— St. Diadochos of Photiki (Christian)



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