

LEARNING TO *news*

Occasional Reflections on Living

Fall 2009



Spiritual teachings are never free. Though I sometimes hear suggestions to the contrary, in truth such teachings are never simply given away; some sort of exchange always takes place.

When monasteries were central to the practice and propagation of spiritual wisdom, donations and benefactors played an important role in allowing these institutions to fulfill their purpose. Retreatants, too, received required necessities through the generosity of others. Students were often involved in similar transactions, presenting goods and services in appreciation for the instruction being given. In our time, this tradition continues - sometimes as described above, sometimes through the more familiar form of registration fees.

All this, of course, only acknowledges material offerings extended the teachings. Throughout the millenia, those moved to seek instruction in deeper living have been required to give in at least three other ways. First, many have had to endure tremendous hardship in order to even be near the teachings. Marpa, an important figure in the lineage of Chogyam Trungpa, journeyed from Tibet to India three times in search of his teacher - and all this before the invention of airplanes and automobiles!

Milarepa, another lineage figure, shows us the enormous amounts of determination and perseverance that must sometimes be evidenced before teachings are given. The previously mentioned Marpa required Milarepa build and dismantle a series of towers before instruction began in earnest. Only when the latter reached a point of despair over this were the desired teachings at last presented.

Finally, even receiving instruction does not liberate us from the need to give. I have heard Shirley Daventry-French, a Victoria-area yoga teacher, express this situation in the following way: "Once we have received the

teachings, it is our duty to make them our own and, then, pass them on." In other words, once instruction is given, a student is expected to practice. This raises a form of giving modern people often struggle with: the giving of time.

Time is precisely what a dozen individuals recently offered over two days in July. Gathered at Queenswood, they took a weekend out of inevitably busy schedules in order to engage the teachings we have been exploring over the last years. The hours were sometimes long. The room sometimes prickly. Many reported feeling their conventional lives pull at them during those days - pull in the form of lists needing completion, problems needing solved, calls that had to be made. Confronted with this, many observed how difficult it was to keep going - yet, this is what they did.

At the end of our time together, a few blinked at what had been completed. "I can't believe we meditated all weekend," one gasped. In the days since, a number have contacted me through phone, email, and direct interaction. All have confirmed something I myself have sensed about the price we must pay in order to access spiritual knowing.

Though the teachings are never free, once we give in whatever way we can, in whatever way is asked of us, life gives back far more than we could ever imagine. "I've been wanting to write you a note about how much I benefited from the retreat," one person said. "However, I haven't yet been able to find the right words to describe these benefits."

This is how it goes: we give and we get. And, curiously, what is received affects not only ourselves, but those around us as well. We are rarely - if ever - the only ones who benefit from the kind of exchanges described here. A sense of inspiration and possibility also touches the others in our lives. Consider the email I received days after the Queenswood retreat ended: "I hear you have another planned for October," a non-participant wrote. "I'd like to sign up right now!"

Finding Our Lives: An All-Level Weekend Retreat

Sat Oct 24 & Sun Oct 25
9:00 am - 4:30 pm
Queenswood Centre 2495 Arbutus Road
\$150 off-site \$250 on-site

Following the success of July's weekend retreat, several similar events have been scheduled through the next year. The 'Finding Our Lives' retreat series will allow us rare opportunities to immerse in the transformative power of meditation. I am hoping it will become a foundational aspect of our work together.

Alternating guided instruction with walking, silence, and discussion, these all-level retreats will explore the practice of embodied meditation as means to engage the human journey. The cost off-site is \$150 (including GST and lunches). The on-site cost of \$250 includes Saturday accommodation and required meals. Space is limited and registration is open - please sign up soon!

August Intensives

Monterey Centre and Goward House are both offering week-long intensives at the end of August. Suitable for meditators of all levels, these feature guided practice, walking meditation, and daily talks. The Goward event takes place in the evening; Monterey will again take place in the morning.

<i>Mon Aug 24 - Fri Aug 28</i>	<i>Mon Aug 31 - Fri Sept 4</i>
<i>7:00 - 9:00 pm</i>	<i>9 am - Noon</i>
<i>Goward House 475 7100</i>	<i>Monterey Centre 370 7300</i>

Fall Events:

Including Westshore & Saanich Peninsula

Fall classes for Beginning and Continuing meditators start during the week of Sept 14. Please check the appropriate 'Meditation' page for a full list - and note the new events in the Westshore and Saanich Peninsula:

<i>Thurs Oct 1 - Nov 5</i>	<i>Sat Oct 17</i>
<i>6:45-7:45 pm (Begin.)</i>	<i>1:30-4:30 pm (Begin.)</i>
<i>7:45-9:00 pm (Cont.)</i>	<i>Greenglade Com. Ctr.</i>
<i>Juan de Fuca Rec</i>	<i>656 7271</i>
<i>478 8384</i>	

Dharma Ocean Events

In coming months, Dharma Ocean - Reggie Ray's umbrella organization - will be offering several programs relevant to us. Check DharmaOcean.org for more info.

Winter Dathun (with Reggie Ray)
Dec 13 - Jan 9 @ Crestone, CO

Spirituality of the Body (with Reggie Ray)
Jan 15 - 17 @ Vancouver, BC

Meditating with the Body (with Tami Simon)
Apr & Sept @ Crestone, CO

Sutrayana Study Course
TBA @ Colorado or Vancouver

The Sutrayana course presents foundational Buddhist teachings in the lineage of Chogyam Trungpa. The course can be taken as a means of personal deepening or preparation for further Dharma Ocean training. The program offers two routes to completion: home study with written exams, and home study with two study/practice weekends. Though these weekends typically take place in Colorado, Dharma Ocean may offer them in Vancouver this year if sufficient numbers wish to attend. If you are interested in any aspect of this course - especially the Vancouver weekends - please be in touch.

What Can I Do?

Our goal in Victoria is to recycle 60% of our waste. We are nowhere near it and our annual rate is falling. San Francisco's goal is simple: Zero Waste by 2020. They have achieved 72%; their goal for 2010 is 75%.

Zero waste matters. When it comes to the gases that fuel global warming, eliminating waste sent to landfills and incinerators in the US would be like closing 21% of America's coal-fired power plants.

- From Guy Dauncey's *EcoNews* (www.earthfuture.com)

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