

Initiation

We have received many questions about the thirty day retreat conducted by five persons during September. Such a retreat is an intervention in personal self-awareness and life style at the spiritual, emotional and social levels. The response of many is that there is no such time in their lives for withdrawal from routines and obligations. Others say they could not stand the amount of meditation, silence or the routine. There is a ready assumption that those who undertake such an adventure are going to be more spiritually elevated, distinguished in wisdom and compassion, rendered in some way holy or at least very nice and admirable.

Our focusing concept at the beginning was the recognition that we are all in need in matters of spiritual healing, limited creativity, and empowered self-awareness. As a teacher, I am accountable for enhancement of healing, creativity, and awareness to liberate capacity to serve others in these same fundamental, vital concerns of our transpersonal being. But, even as we worked with sound faith and practical consistency we did not expect completed sanctity. We do not come back from such work, for this short and unprecedented time in our complex lives, expecting completed realization of divine union. What we may rightly expect, and what was given to us, is initiation into deep and sometimes painful and confusing self-understanding, release of previously unexplored disciplines of creativity and service, and, at times, a rending realization that typical patterns of cultural and religious identity, acceptability, and destiny vastly obscure the spiritual power and wisdom which is our birthright.

How was the work done? We engaged a series of meditation practices designed, first, to open awareness to the deep templates of human being in the subtle or chakra body. The intention was to integrate the energy flows in that body so that all of its elements could come into expressive integration. Second, we conducted a carefully designed breath practice to bring awareness into the emotional body and to the patterns of self-presentation through which that body lives in the world. Third, a specific meditation practice was provided for each person in accord with their healing needs, spiritual orientation, and limits or confusion with regard to creative service. We meditated five hours each day in a strict schedule, kept silence from 7am until 6pm, devoted time in the afternoons to creative work in writing or painting, and came together in the evening for one to two hours of intensive process work related to the day's experience in meditation. The process work gave reality and context to experience, and sometimes required precise inquiry and even confrontation and challenge to intensify self-awareness, uncover resistance, and nurture faith and self worth in what became an increasingly profound process. And for everyone involved it all came together as an initiation into awareness of fundamental issues of spiritual healing, empowerment for creative service, and continuing vital work to increase and release self-awareness. Such a retreat is a kind of spiritual sling shot propelling us more deeply into reality in which the body which thinks, the mind which desires, and the spirit which suffers and exalts may at last come into harmony and union.

Jerry H.

Retreat Thoughts

Jerry presented the September retreat as “an intervention in personal self-awareness and life style at the spiritual, emotional and social levels,” and I had come to the retreat intending to participate in self-awareness as fully as possible.

Then life circumstances just prior to the retreat brought about personal crisis. My brother-in-law, Terry, in Spokane died suddenly plunging the family into huge and immediate turmoil, and my presence and leadership were important for the family in getting us through the large public memorial services needed because of Terry’s prominent role in city government and higher education in Spokane, and in dealing with looming financial issues.

So I entered the retreat exhausted physically and emotionally with fresh grief that revived old griefs. That was combined with the setting of the retreat just north of Spokane only a few miles from where I grew up. In that state of raw grief and in that setting loaded with associations from the past, I struggled to engage the retreat program as presented. But it was like opening Pandora’s box, and support sufficient for adequately engaging with the core personal issues that were arising was not available in the format of the retreat.

While I was able to take part in the meditation processes during the retreat, it was not a happy time for me. There were no breakthroughs to liberation, but instead sustained awareness of profound suffering. And I did not have much energy for initiating on the social level. Indeed, we were each intensely occupied with our individual personal processes. I could engage the meditation processes we were doing, and appreciated the time which allowed for physical rest and some creative expression. But the retreat did not end well for me, and re-entry was particularly painful. Jerry and I have been looking at this directly. So at this point while there was “an initiation into awareness of fundamental issues,” the retreat process did not “come together into harmony and union.” There is continuing work to increase and release self-awareness, but at this time the healing and reconciliation process is no where near complete.

Beverly H.

30 Day Meditation Retreat

A long drive up a curving road into the trees and I arrive. I am then taken on a gravel road up the hill to my log hut. It will be my home for 30 days. It is more spacious and comfortable than I had expected, a beautiful dreamcatcher on one wall, a woven native wall hanging, a painting of native women sitting wrapped in their blankets and Christian symbols on the other walls. No plumbing, so a water jug and a bucket (with a seat and lid!) were carried up and down the hill to be filled and emptied. As I walked into this natural space I too became filled and emptied.

When we met for our first meal together, Sister Florence and Rita greeted us with the gong and a delicious vegetarian chili and homemade banana cream pie. Since the meals were vegetarian I expected brown rice and flecks of broccoli. Instead we received old fashioned comfort food made with love AND dessert with lunch and dinner. Most involved whipping cream!

Our time of meditation, silence, creativity and group processing began. Structured and disciplined the meditations embarked with chanting and chakra mantras, moved to intense breath practice and then each of us received a mantra to facilitate and enrich our individual practice.

The magnificent pine tree outside my window reminded me that I was not alone when I experienced powerful demands of disintegration. Each chakra engagement revealed something new. When I reached the 6th chakra, tears of intense longing flowed and flowed. Five hours of sobbing cries. Unexpected for sure.

In the weeks to come animals emerged on the land, in meditation and through me. Archetypes appeared and sacred graphic ecstatic lovemaking surged in currents through my body. It was a time of surprise and wonder. The purification and healing *kriyas* intensified. For the last week I meditated alone in my hut so the chants and songs that came could be sung aloud and the yogic movements could be.

Time was spent with my hands in primary color finger paint sensuously moving on large paper to a CD of shamanic drumming, sitting under the trees writing poetry, reading the *Arabian Nights*, Tony Hillerman, Alice Walker's *Now is the Time to Open Your Heart*, Wolf-Dieter Storl's *Shiva: The Wild God of Power and Ecstasy*, Swami Muktananda's *Play of Consciousness* and walking on the land.

Although not always easy, the month was a transforming, empowering gift of grace. Surrounded by natural beauty and space, a community with each member deeply dedicated to their own path, guided by Jerry's tender, challenging, wise knowing, the Kundalini ecstatically flowed. It was an initiation, an emerging and awe.

The meditation continues.

Diane K.

Truth and Love

I have found it difficult to sit and write something about my experience of the month long retreat. Part of the reason is that it feels too big to try and encapsulate. So much happened in so many areas; how can one possibly hope to convey it all? Also, because the experience felt so profound, I have wanted to somehow express that depth and at the same time I have had this knowing that my words are not adequate to that task. And, as Jerry points out in his "Initiation" article, this was not an ending. So there is resistance to concretizing what occurred into written words, when my picture of what occurred is fluid and still evolving.

For me, the healing focus was related to my desire to find a venue for ministering to persons who are dying. Since 1995 I have been aware of my interest in death. As a part of my work in hospice, I have often explored my personal experiences with death – especially attempting to look back and find my earliest experience. Over the years I have uncovered earlier and earlier experiences. On this retreat we uncovered an even earlier experience that I had forgotten. As we began the fourth week, the thought came that now I felt ready to **begin** a month long retreat. Shortly after that, the realization came that although it felt like I was just now getting to the real work (and thus ready to start the retreat), it also was important to take the work back out into the world and that the time for that was nearing. The suggestion was to continue trying to uncover past memories upon my return and thus gain a greater understanding of what death means to me and what I have to offer others in this area. I have made a commitment to this process and to seeing where it leads.

In reviewing my experience toward the end of the retreat I discovered that what I was taking away seemed to distill down to two words – *truth and love*. Jerry had posed several questions for our consideration. I worked with these over the days and weeks and had many answers come up during that time. But in the end, my answer to most of the questions condensed down to *truth and love*. I had read 12 random books and Jerry suggested that we explore our response to what we had read – again it came down to *truth and love*. It seems that much of my life has been devoted to a greater understanding of these two important aspects of life and to embracing them in my daily interactions.

So did this retreat provide me with answers and future direction? Yes. Were these final answers? No, and it also brought many new questions. I am grateful to Danny, Danielle and Daryl for encouraging me to go on retreat and for picking up my responsibilities at home so that it was possible. I feel very blessed to have been able to take this time for more intense and focused meditation and for Jerry's wise leadership. It is now important to me to continue to follow through on what has been begun so that this does not become just another interesting experience.

Clarice R.

A Spiritual Sling Shot

Jerry described our recent 30-day meditation retreat as a “spiritual sling shot propelling us more deeply into reality in which the body which thinks, the mind which desires, and the spirit which suffers and exalts may at last come into harmony and union.” He also wrote that “We do not come back from such work, for this short and unprecedented time in our complex lives expecting completed realization of divine union.”

To put it more succinctly, there’s still a long way to go! And yet, I think we all feel more grounded, a little more awake, a little clearer about how we’ve been defining ourselves in limited ways, and how we can stop doing that. (Among other things, keep meditating!)

The completely unexpected and startling thing that happened for me at the retreat was that I began writing stories. It was a kind of second chakra blowout or something. Whatever it was, I wrote for several hours a day, and ended up with four short stories. It was such fun, and so fascinating! I’m still writing, and it’s still fascinating. I wrote a story in October, and another is in the works.

Where do these plot lines and themes come from, where does this dialogue come from, where do these characters come from? It’s not like I sit there and say to myself, “This character is going to say this, and that character is going to say that, and this or that will happen next.” It just appears in my head and/or on the paper! So we decided that all this stuff comes out of “the field.” It’s consciousness manifesting in story form.

The characters have become real people to me. I like them, and I wish I could know them in waking consciousness, instead of just in imaginative consciousness. I don’t think of them as my creation.

Another fascinating aspect of these stories is that they teach me lessons, or give me insights. I learn something about myself that I needed to know as I think about the stories.

I’ve got quite a bit of editing to do, and when I get comfortable with them, I’ll share them with others. Meanwhile, I sling shot myself out into “the field” as often as I can to see what’s out there.

Diann S.