

Sept. 21, 2022 Wednesday Evening with Aaron, Part 1

Catching and Taming the Ox: Awakening and Living from the Awakened Heart-Mind, in Service to All; Stabilizing in Higher States/Stages of Consciousness

Aaron: My blessings and love to you all. I am Aaron. Are you able to hear me clearly?

I've been talking to Barbara a lot in this past week, giving some indication of what I intended to talk about. It's a bit complex, weaving several strands together. Many of you are in the ongoing class, called "Waking Up and Living Awake." From what are we awakening? What is our impetus for awakening? What does it mean to live awake?

As I wove this together for Barbara, we've been looking at messages from Barbara and my book, *Cosmic Healing*, especially at a chart on consciousness. In that chapter Barbara talks about the states and stages of consciousness. Every human goes through these states and stages. On the chart we name the stages as magical, mythical, rational, vision logic, psychic and subtle, and then moving up to Christ-Buddha consciousness and non-dual consciousness.

You're familiar with these stages. We move through those early stages of magical and mythical consciousness before they reach rational consciousness. "Oh, Mother, I didn't put that marker on the wall. A little elf came and did that. It wasn't me."--- magical consciousness.

Gradually, the growing child learns to take responsibility to acknowledge, "Yes. I did do that. I'm sorry I've messed up the wall. But it's kind of pretty, isn't it? Still, I'll wash it off. I'll take responsibility." So, the child begins to grow in terms of being able to take responsibility for their choice, and to understand that just because they want something does not mean that it will be good for everyone.

People can meditate and have a profound experience of the dissolution of the body and ego, but how they interpret that experience will depend upon their stage of consciousness.

If you and your child, grandchild, or neighbor's child were walking through the woods and suddenly were both overwhelmed by a feeling of connection with the trees, the birds, the wildlife, the earth, were filled with joy and wonder, but you, at a different stage of consciousness, would interpret it, would understand it differently than the child. Some of you probably have memories of such experiences as children. If you look back on that experience, you see that the way you understand it is very different now than the way the child understood it. The child will make it personal. It may create an ego "story." The higher stage of consciousness will understand that as a universal experience.

In our class, as we look at awakening and living awake, we first need to understand what it means to awaken. You can have profound experiences, but you cannot awaken in a way that brings it out into the world beyond the stage of consciousness at which you presently are. These states and stages of consciousness are not like floors of a building where you get off the elevator and you're on that floor, and then you ride up again to the next floor.

In Manhattan, there was a museum Barbara liked to visit, the Guggenheim. It had a circular walkway, going around and up. There was an elevator. You get off the elevator at the fourth level. But there was no set floor level there. There was just the spiral going up and the spiral going down.

The states and stages of consciousness are like this. You may have a profound experience of awakening, an experience of the Unconditioned, an experience of dissolution of the ego, but that doesn't mean you're stable there. You've touched that experience. What you are able to live depends more on where you are stable, not what top level you have touched.

Those in this class are of course stable at a higher state of consciousness than many people, as they have pursued this path. We get into the question of how we can speak to people who are not yet stable on a higher level of consciousness; a level that's capable of connecting with others and deeply caring about the highest good of others.

There is so much violence in your world—not much more than there has always been, just more noticeable because of your television and other communication. But everywhere people are suffering. Those at a lower state of consciousness and lower stage, rational consciousness, for example, can easily become caught in "What is best for me?" They don't mean to be selfish. This is simply the level of consciousness in which they are stable.

In choosing to further awaken you are choosing to invite your stability on a higher level of consciousness. Let us call it the Christ-Buddha consciousness or non-dual consciousness. We have to ask, "Why do I want to do that? Wouldn't it be easier and more convenient to just stay in rational consciousness and get along in the world?" But of course, unless you become aware of the conscious choice – not only to live what is best for yourself but for all sentient beings – we cannot pull this whole Earth up through transition into a higher vibration, into a higher consciousness. The Earth needs *you* to do this.

The Earth is alive, but it is also very dependent upon the sentient beings that live upon her to support the arising of consciousness. So, for each of you it's vital that you look within yourselves and say, "Why am I choosing to do this much harder work of

consecrating my energy, my life, to the highest good of *all* beings rather than just what's good for me? Why am I doing that?"

Well, it's a simplistic answer to say that which may on the surface look good just for you, truly cannot be good for you unless it serves everyone. As long as anyone is put aside, and harm is done to them, it cannot truly result in the long term good for all. But you may only know that intellectually.

It's helpful to come back to looking at your commitment to the good for all beings. I had a simple example here that I ran through with Barbara.

Here you are, young and looking for a job. You don't want to work too hard. You're not interested in earning a lot of money but want to be comfortable. What looks like an easy job? You like to be in nature. Here's a job advertisement, a fire ranger, a very small task. You will sit in a fire tower on a small hill outside of town. You'll have living quarters there, too—free living quarters, and it's beautiful. All you are asked to do is watch out the three hundred and sixty-degree windows for any signs of smoke. Hmm, you think, nice job! I love to play games on my computer. I can sit up there and play my computer games, and every few minutes I can just look up around and then go back to my games. And I'm interested in reading books; I can do that up there. Nobody will bother me.

You spend more and more time looking down at your computer, less and less time looking up. One day, maybe after an hour, you're shocked to raise your eyes and see smoke coming up out of a small wooded area near several houses. "Oh!" You set the alarm and make the calls. You don't have to go out and fight the fires; just alert them. You've caught it in time. The fires are put out.

Then you think to yourself, "What if I had not looked up? These people's lives are dependent on me. I choose to pay more attention, because I don't want people to be harmed out of my laziness. So, you've made a commitment.

A year or two goes by and you do a wonderful job on this little hill. You get a message. "We have a bigger job on the next mountain. It's not at the highest point, but you'd be overlooking several valleys. No more money. Would you like the job?" Either you say, "No, I don't want to work harder," or you'll say, "Yes, here's a chance to be of service to more people. I like knowing that I can keep people safe."

So, you welcome this job. Early on you catch a few fires that could have grown quite dangerous. Your name is not even known to these people. No one knows who the ranger is, only people are grateful that the fires were caught. And you start to feel a joy in this work of service.

Then you get an invitation for the highest level ranger. Way up in that tower you can see for close to a hundred miles in every direction. It will take a lot of focus. Are you willing to take on this commitment? It's either yes or no. But you can feel within yourself that place of joy. Not to become famous as the best fire warden; nobody will know you. Simply, "Here is a lovely way that I can serve. I choose this."

And you move into that high mountain peak fire tower. From there you are able to spot and notify, so that numerous fires avoid being major blazes. You know you're saving lives, not just of trees but of fields and animals.

Can you feel the growing joy of service here? There's a real sense, "This is what I choose." And you've long ago put your computer aside for the working hours. You're no longer lost in your computer games. It's gripping to look out, to be watching and to take care. There is joy.

A quote from Rabindranath Tagore, if I can quote it accurately. "I slept and dreamed that life was joy. I woke and saw that life was service. I acted, and behold, service was joy."

What I'm setting the stage for here is, what leads you to choose to wake up or to walk further on the road of awakening?' Now I'm going to take this aside again.

In the Awakening and Living Awake class, which started last week, we looked at the Ox-Herding pictures. These are a series of pictures originated in the Zen tradition.

A man hears that there is such a thing as an ox. He starts to think, "Ah, I'd like to catch one. Is there truly such a thing as an ox?"

He doesn't quite believe in the ox; he only believes in what he can see, and feel, and taste, and touch. But the teacher told him, "Once you find this ox, you will be so happy."

So, he keeps his eyes open as he walks around. And then he sees the footprints. "Are these oxen footprints? Maybe?" Then one day he catches sight of the tail of the ox disappearing around a bush. "Ah, there is an ox!" So, he goes out looking for the ox and, through a series of different movements, he catches the ox.

But the ox is not tame. As soon as he climbs upon the ox, it bucks him off. It runs away again. He wants to bring the ox home, but he learns that first he must tame the ox. Finally, when it's tamed, he can bring it home.

There are several more pictures based on non-duality. The boy disappears; the ox disappears. We'll save that for another talk.

What *is* this ox? In the pictures the metaphor is that the ox refers to the awakened heart-mind, the one who is awake. Now please note: there is no such thing as zero awake or one hundred percent awake. You're always somewhere, like on that inclining slope, becoming more and more awake. And with our young ox herder, we recognize that he must work hard to find the ox, to catch it, and to tame it.

There is an increasing trust that as he connects with the ox, tames it and brings it home, there will be less suffering and more happiness. And, eventually, he finds this to be true, but in the beginning, it's just based on what others have said.

Right now, if you're suffering intensely, and somebody says, "Oh, chocolate will help!", you may go out and get yourself a chocolate bar. Did it help? Does waking up help? The question becomes not, "Why *should* I wake up?", but why *not* wake up?

But waking up is quite a demanding piece of work for you individually and for your planet. We need to start with the reality of the enormity of suffering on this Earth, personal suffering and suffering of others, suffering of the planet, of the oceans, of the forests, of the animals.

At first you are content to sit on your little hill and spend most of your day playing games on your computer. Then something stirs inside, a recognition that, "I have the potential to have an effect on the suffering of Earth." Perhaps a fire started that you didn't see, but you went down to visit the site afterward. You saw the dead animal carcasses and the burned trees, and you thought, "I could have prevented this if I had been more present. I am *going* to be more present!" This is not said with shame to yourself, rather just inviting, "I have the capacity to be more present. I choose this out of love."

Catching the ox is part of what we do in our meditation practice. Actually, I don't think Barbara mentioned, and she meant to, that there is a retreat beginning on the last few days of October through the first few days of November, and together we shall be learning to catch the ox. So, come and join us. Find that on the Deep Spring Center website.

Once you catch the ox—he doesn't want to be caught, he's wild; he kicks, even bites—how do you tame the ox?

Really there's only one word for this: love. On top of love comes presence and patience, but love is the prime ingredient.

You have to ask yourself, "Why do I want to do this? It is not so that others will love me more or put me on a pedestal. Why do I truly seek to further awaken?" And the answer has to be out of love.

Why take the job on that highest mountain peak with more responsibility and no more pay, but longer hours? Can you feel the sense of joy at the possibility of greater service to others, of truly helping to prevent suffering? Who wouldn't choose that?

It can never come from a place of shame. "I *should* do this. I'm selfish if I don't." No, it has to come from a place of deep commitment. "When I look around me, I see the enormity of suffering on this Earth and I choose to attend to that suffering in whatever ways are given to me. I choose to be one who brings more peace and joy, and love into the world, rather than fear, hatred, and greed."

And from that highest peak, the view is magnificent!

I know that this is the choice for all of you here. The next question is, how do we manifest it?

Now I'm going to go back to the beginning of my talk, weaving several strands together. You can sit in meditation and experience many things. You may fall asleep. That's alright. You may feel very restless; that's possible. A lot of body pain might arise or strong emotions. As you meditate, you gain confidence that everything that is arising is arising out of conditions, is impermanent and is not of the nature of a separate self. There will be physical sensations, feelings, thoughts, impulses; even consciousness itself will arise. They arise out of conditions, and they pass away.

This room was quite hot an hour ago. Barbara plugged in the air-conditioner. Now the air is cooler. The coolness arose out of the fact that the air-conditioner is running. If she unplugs the air-conditioner the room will be hot again. When the room is hot her body feels hot. When the room is cooler her body feels cooler. It's all arising out of conditions. If the room is too hot it will feel unpleasant. Aversion will arise. If the room is too cold, it will feel unpleasant and aversion will arise. There is a desire for it to be just right.

Now, unfortunately, Barbara's air-conditioner hangs way up high on the ceiling. So, she has two choices, on or off. She must go back and forth. When the room starts to feel too cold, she unplugs the air-conditioner. When it starts to feel too hot, she plugs it in again. If it's not working, she hires someone to climb up a ladder, take off the cover and clean the filter. That's about it.

This is no different than so many things in your life. The source of happiness and evenness seems to be out of reach. Objects come to you. They either create a grasping or the reverse. The issue is not in the air-conditioner or any other object.

This is quite old, over fifteen years. It was put up there because the wall below it is brick and it was quite expensive to break through the brick wall, so they put it up high in the eaves, where it was much cheaper to install. Then Barbara said, "Oh, I should have put

it down low. I don't like this." She had joined Deep Spring Center Board (The AC was installed when the garage was converted into the DSC meditation hall) in making the decision. Could she just learn to live with this decision? So, when she's cool, she wraps herself in a shawl and says thank you to the air conditioner. Other times she leaves it unplugged and opens the sliding door, and the fan. It's very manageable, but not when there's a lot of emotion behind it. Then she will be suffering.

Whatever arises, arises out of conditions, is impermanent and not of the nature of a separate self.

The levels of consciousness, states of consciousness and stages, are simple. You are *not* your level of consciousness. They arise out of conditions. They stabilize. Then a different level may arise. If you are suffering, it's not about what's out there but how you are relating to it.

Most of you have heard my story of my final lifetime and that profound awakening experience. The monk that I was, was ready for that experience. But, in very brief, there I was on the muddy ground, in a pouring rainstorm, with a tree with giant thorns atop of me in such a way that the thorns were not piercing my skin, but if I moved even a little bit, they would pierce my skin. And then there was a tiger growling at my feet, smelling the blood. A dark night, no one was expected.

In those first moments, my consciousness was --- I was really back at that magical, mythical consciousness of the children, saying, "How can I fix this? I need a good fairy." That's not what I asked for, but a Buddha deva to come along and lift the tree away and scare the tiger. Nothing outside of me was going to come and help. I had no choice about being there, pinned in the mud in the pouring rain under a thorn tree with a tiger snarling close by. I had a choice in how I would relate to it. Knowing that, a more stable high level of consciousness reopened.

So, we may have the same experience, and if we're ready to relate to it from a place of non-dual consciousness, we may experience the non-dual, as I was blessed to do that night. Me, mud, rain, tree, tiger, all blending together, no separation. Just love for it all, and then moving deeper into that awakening experience.

But if that had happened to me even five years earlier, I would have spent a lot more time pounding my hands on the ground and yelling, "Why me? Unfair!"

Why not me? I am every man. Whatever befalls me befalls all sentient beings. I am born, I move through the incarnation, and I pass away, no different than any sentient being. I have the amazing capacity, as you do, to take what has come to me as teacher to say, "Thank you, Teacher. How can I build upon this for the highest good of all beings?" When I am able to do that, ready to do that, that awakened state of

consciousness becomes more stable, and I see that it pervades everything in my life from there on.

So, the work is not to have some amazing awakening experience and then come back and say, "Oh, I'm all done." That's just a doorway that perhaps opened. You caught the ox, but the ox is not yet tamed. And to tame the ox means to be present with all the passions, all the fears, all the sadness and joy, all the anger and love, and see how it really comes together. To be willing to be here as a human and live with these human experiences, with the deep commitment, "I choose this human incarnation for my own growth and that of all beings. I choose it because it gives me the platform from which I may work to transform this whole Earth into a higher consciousness, as I move into a higher consciousness. And repeatedly, you will stumble and fall in the mud again and hear the tiger snarl, over and over and over.

In one of my favorite lines from any Buddhist sutra, he is speaking about the wholesome and unwholesome. He's speaking to a group of monks, "Cultivate the wholesome. You can cultivate the wholesome. If it were not possible, I would not ask you to do it." (I'm shortening it quite a bit.) "Cultivate the wholesome. Abandon the unwholesome. You can abandon the unwholesome. If it were not possible, I would not ask you to do it."

You do not cultivate the wholesome through grasping. You do not abandon the unwholesome through aversion but by deep seeing of how you respond to pleasant and unpleasant circumstances and catalyst. What are the old habit energies that drive you so deeply into terror, rage, and separation? What are the habit energies that bring you so deep into the loving heart, into true compassion and the activation of wisdom?

So, it's been a long winter on your fire tower—a long summer, fall and winter. You come down for a month of vacation in the spring and go off perhaps to a lovely tropical place and sit on the beach for a while. Ahh... After a month or two, you start to think, "This is so lovely, but it doesn't have much meaning for me. What next?"

There's this email on your laptop and it says, "We're ready to hire for next summer. Are you coming back?" Are you willing to go back up into the mountains again to sit in that tower; to look out for a hundred miles and know that *you* can save many sentient beings, if you are present, and with love? Are you willing?

It's not too much different than what you have done. You have come back into this new incarnation. You are doing it with joy. Gradually, you are abandoning the unwholesome, letting go of those habitual tendencies that drag you down into the muck. Gradually, you are cultivating the wholesome, cultivating joy, compassion, generosity and peacefulness.

As you do this and look deeper into why you are doing it, begin to understand the nature of your choice and the power behind that choice. You are consciously or unconsciously moving into a higher level of non-dual and high consciousness.

It's not a one step up; it winds around and sometimes slips down a bit, winds up again and slips down. Increasingly, there is stability where you are and a recognition of the blessing of where you are. There is the increasing acknowledgment of the intention to support this whole Earth in its transition to higher consciousness. And as you support the Earth, you support the whole universe in moving to a higher consciousness.

Suddenly, one day you wake up to a situation that two or three years earlier would have rocked you completely. You would have been beside yourself with fear and worry, trying to fix and control. And you wake up and see the big picture and say, "Oh, I know what to do here. I can hold space for this. I can respond in a way that is loving and present, is kind."

You evolve into this higher level of consciousness. And as it becomes stable, then the different states of consciousness that you find coming and going, you find that your presence with it is all more stable.

I don't want to go into the distinctions between state and stage of consciousness today, only to say that as we evolve, we do evolve from that magical consciousness of the young child all the way through to non-dual consciousness.

Whatever your present level of stable consciousness, when different objects come to you that are terrifying you, you will handle them from within that present stage of consciousness. Your meditation allows you to climb up this circular path to move into the higher level of consciousness and stabilize it.

The ox is being tamed. And then you are ready to bring the ox home, to climb on that ox and ride him through the thousands of people you meet who are crying, "Poor me! Look what happened. This isn't fair! I'm so angry. I'm so afraid." And sitting there on the back of your ox, you can smile at them and say, "I understand." You can climb off and plant the crop, and put out the fire, feed the children, hug. Because this loving consciousness within you has become more stable and the fear-based consciousness has declined.

And off you go on your ox or on your feet, up a steep mountain for another summer of sitting in your fire tower, alerting people to where the fires are that can put them out. So loving.

All of you have this capacity. It starts with knowing your intention, and your readiness to commit yourself to the fulfillment of that intention. Seeing fear as fear, seeing hesitation



as hesitation, and knowing, "I am a divine being, an expression of love, and I *can* do what I came here to do."

Let's take a 10 minute break and then come back for questions. Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you.