

September 27, 2022 Tuesday Evening, Living Awake Class - reviewed

Taming the Ox and Bringing it Home: What is This Ox? What Blocks Us From Seeking It? What Propels Us to Seek It?; Bringing Together the Wisdom and Heart-Centered Practices—What Works? Dancing the Incarnation Together

Barbara: Good evening. I hope these two weeks have been good ones for you.

A few days ago, Aaron, John, and I met and spoke about our plans for tonight. It seems the intention is for me to start things from a human perspective, pass it on to Aaron, then John will come in with the meditation portion, then your small groups.

Aaron told John and me his ideas a few days ago. I was conscious channeling him, not trance, but it was still hard for me to pick it all up. I think I am sharing here what Aaron hoped I would share. He will correct me if not.

I just also want to add, for those of you who have ever been to the Casa, my body has been troublesome and about a month ago Dom Inaço promised he would work on me, but I needed to set aside a time. Well, a month has gone by, and I did not set aside a time.

This morning, waking up, I rolled over under the crystal lamp that's beside my bed, turned it on expecting just a light energy touch, and there was Dom Inaço, saying, "Now it's time for that intervention." So, he worked very deep into my back, pelvis, hips and my neck and shoulders, in the places that are painful. Then I slept for about four hours, woke up about 11am. I have dozed on and off this afternoon and meditated on and off, but I'm not sure how present I am to give the talk Aaron wants me to give. It will do.

This is our human experience. In the ultimate realm we can do anything. Here as humans we're in the realm of human density limitation. It's never going to turn out perfect. It's perfect in its imperfection.

We're looking at the Ox Herding pictures. Seeking the Ox—what draws us to seek the ox? Seeing the Footprints—catching sight of a tail flicking or some bit of the ox through the bushes. Then, Seeing the Whole Ox and Catching the Ox. But it's not tamed at all. We can't bring it home until we tame it. Taming the Ox and Bringing it Home—this is what we'll be looking at through the next number of classes.

We're going to start today with a simple question, what invites us to seek the ox? For some of us, it may be ego. "Me, I'm going to awaken."

In fact, let's start before what invites us. What is the ox? I'm guessing that for many of us, as it was intended in the original pictures it represents awakening, the awakened mind.



To what degree is it the ego that says, "I'm going to awaken."? What other aspects of ourselves lead us to seek awakening?

There's a beautiful Kabir poem I want to read to you.

The small ruby everyone wants has fallen out on the road.
Some think it is east of us, others west of us.

Some say, "among the primitive earth rocks," others, "in the deep waters."

Kabir's instinct told him it was inside, and what it was worth,
and he wrapped it up carefully in his heart cloth.

I love that poem.

Here in Deep Spring Center, we work with different traditions—Buddhist, Jewish, Christian and others. Within the Buddhist tradition there are different places of emphasis. The Theravada tradition, which is very dear to my heart, is often focused on wisdom, or at least the predominant older teachings like Visuddhi Magga and the sutras are focused on wisdom. I feel certain that the heart is a part of it, but it's not what's written so much about in the scriptures. The Mahayana traditions, with the bodhisattva as a centerpiece, the importance of lovingkindness, of service, and yes, wisdom, are also featured. The Vajrayana traditions, which focus more on all of them together.

We're blessed to live in a world where we don't have to grow up in a community, live our lives around a spiritual center near that community with only one tradition. It does not do us service to jump around but we need to find the balance that works best for us.

For me, I am so grateful for the wisdom teachings and for the deep experiences of the Unconditioned that have really brought a lot of freedom. And I'm deeply grateful for the heart-centered practices. I can't put one over the other. It has for a long time seemed to me that it needed to be a mixture of these, and as I look back—which is what Aaron asked me to do—to see what has worked for me. That's why he asked me to open this talk.

What has worked for me? I've had some profound experiences of the Unconditioned through the years, each followed by six to ten years of practice before the next such deep experience. That time was spent integrating the experience into my life.

It's life-changing to move into an experience of ego and body dissolution, everything dissolving until there is just nothing but the Unconditioned, and to rest in that Unconditioned.

What does that mean, to rest in the Unconditioned? To rest in infinite light and love, spaciousness, energy. But no aspect of anything that could be thought of as a separate self. No thought about what was experienced until the experience ended. Just being there. It's life-changing.

But then we come back, back into the human ego, the human body with its discomforts and its mind that jumps from thought to thought. Where is that experience now? In what way has it affected me? How do I go forward with it to live the truth of it in the deepest way? And that's what we keep trying to do.

Talking to Aaron, he points out that we've been given the gift to come into the human incarnation, and once in the incarnation we forget the truth of who we are. That's part of the dance, to come back and forget who and what we are and integrate it into this human experience.

I think of it as being a gardener. The earth wants magnificent trees and flowers, and so we go into an ultimate realm garden and gather seeds. If we stay in the garden, we can't bring the seeds back to earth to plant them. We have to come back from the garden and get to work as a gardener, digging in the earth, planting, and nurturing the seeds. We may garden with aching backs and muddy hands and feet. The fulfillment of the seeds already exists on the unconditioned realm.

We are here as gardeners of the Divine, to help plant those seeds and nurture them, to bring light and love into this heavy density planet. And it's only us, humans, that can really change the earth.

There's a beautiful verse from T. S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*, which, by the way, is one hundred years old this month.

(*Datta* is a Hindu word; it means 'to give')

Datta: what have we given?
My friend, blood shaking my heart
The awful daring of a moment's surrender
Which an age of prudence can never retract
By this, and this only, we have existed
Which is not to be found in our obituaries
Or in memories draped by the beneficent spider
Or under seals broken by the lean solicitor
In our empty rooms.

Thank you, T. S. Eliot. What have we given? What are we giving? This blessing of human incarnation, this huge challenge of human incarnation, we're here to live this.

So for me, as I looked at what blocks me from living the experiences more fully (which was Aaron's question to me)—really seeing that everything that arises on this heavy density realm arises out of conditions and passes away, is impermanent and not self; what that means and how we live it.

Going to the place where it has all dissolved, resting in that place. Coming not just to know but to fully embrace the truth of that space. Understanding that there is the Unconditioned and all the expressions of the Unconditioned, the direct expressions such as love, unconditional love, light, energy, and a few more, and then there are the indirect expressions that grow out of these like kindness and patience. These are more human expressions.

But we start to trust from our practice, from our experience, that the Unconditioned *is* and that we are part of that Unconditioned, bringing it down to this lower density through our lives.

So, what blocks me? Of course, fear and the old stories, the old traps.

Aaron's next question to me is, what helps release you from those old traps? I first said, well, wisdom—knowing it's all conditioned. He said, yes, but that's still cerebral at some level. He said to me that when those experiences occurred, the body and the ego had dissolved. The conditioned persona that I know as Barbara was non-existent at that point. But, coming back after the experience, I am back into Barbara.

Where is that experience? I can only get to it by memory. Within that experience there was no question of dwelling in unconditional love eternally. But back here as Barbara, where is that unconditional love?

The practices like metta and karuna, all the Brahma vihara practices, invite us back into touching on unconditional love. And yet the mundane mind also rejects it—this is an illusion, there can't really be unconditional love. I can only experience that unconditional love if I release the boundaries, the armor.

What is the armor? The old armors that we've erected around fear. How can the human in everyday mind effect such release?

We're asked to be a bit like the snake or lobster, letting go of our skin and standing naked. Opening to unconditional love.

I had the blessing a few weeks ago to speak to Grandmother Anna. She said a number of important things to me, but perhaps the heart of her guidance was my need to open more fully to unconditional love. Fine! I'm happy to. How?

Just in meditation, allowing myself to feel that love, to know that love. You've all experienced it, fleetingly, or for a lengthy incursion into it, unconditional love.

So, a few times this past few weeks I've found myself fully embraced in that love, which I allowed by seeing the block to the love and knowing, "I release this. I choose love." Then looking at the places of fear; present with fear until dissolved.

From the Bhayabherava Sutra, "I resolved to be present with that fear and dread and allow the experience of it until it dissolved itself."

And finally, knowing the simultaneity of fear and love, one arising and passing away, the other eternal. Both are real; only one has ultimate reality but the relative reality cannot just be dismissed but held in the heart. And known as arisen from conditions, impermanent, not self.

For me, the blocks to fully opening to unconditional love have habitually been the old stories of shame and unworthiness, old stories of not being fully lovable. I've really grown past those stories in terms of my daily life. They don't haunt me at all anymore. But an echo of them is still there.

This is what we practiced last year, going into the darkness, the path of sacred darkness. We'll be doing more work with that this year.

But we don't go into the sacred darkness alone and in the dark. We go there with the internal light of the Divine, of our true essence, of our awakened self. We carry that into the darkness. And we discover the darkness was never really dark.

Aaron again challenged me: what is the balance between vipassana and the Brahma vihara practices; between pure awareness practices—any practice that brings you into a place of unconditional love—and the wisdom practices?

He asked me, what helps me?

We need to take it slowly. Remember, I have had a spiritual practice for over 50 years, so I've had time for this to deepen. But it doesn't take that long. It was already deepening 35 years ago when I met Aaron. For all of you, it is deepening.

We can see the stories of shame and unworthiness as arisen from conditions and let go of them. What can ask, what do we gain by holding onto them?

For many of us, I think they're just part of an almost existential armor that the human has developed because it's so hard to come down to this plane and be a human.

And yet we chose this. We chose to be the gardeners of the Divine, bringing light into this heavy density planet. Exchanging light and love with each other and all sentient beings and the planet itself. And it is only through us and this work that this planet can transition into a higher density. And it is only through the planet's transition that we transition, that we , and all beings, awaken to our true nature.

A song that I have loved. I learned this many, many decades ago. This inserts the name of Yeshua, but you can put any divine figure into it. I cannot sing it for you, of course.

Lord of the Dance

I danced in the morning when the world was begun
And I danced in the moon, and the stars, and the sun.
And I came down from heaven and I danced on the earth.
At Bethlehem I had my birth.

Dance, then, wherever you may be.
I am the Lord of the Dance, said he.
And I'll lead you all, wherever you may be,
I'll lead you all in the dance, said he.

That's just one verse.

(singing)

Dance, dance, wherever you may be!
I am the Lord of the Dance, said he...

We're really all invited to dance. We look at this incarnation and say it's such hard work. It's a dance! Can we dance it together?

There's a beautiful chant we used to do when we had live retreats. Many of you know this. If so, I know we can't hear each other, but you can use your hands.

May the blessings of God rest upon you.
May God's peace abide with you.
May God's presence illuminate your heart
Now and forevermore.

May the blessings of God rest upon you.
May God's peace abide with you.
May God's presence illuminate your heart
Now and forevermore.

Can we remember that this is a dance? We were offered an invitation. We could have declined it. Something within us eons ago said yes.

We can bring that light and love and energy to this earth experience, or we can keep moaning it's too hard. It IS hard, no doubt about it.

But we are here, and we've been here over and over again to get this done, to plant these seeds. We are the planters; we are the growers.

And this whole transition to which we look forward, whether we think of it as the transition of awakening, the transition into a higher density, however we think of it—this is the commitment we made. Can we remember that at some level it was meant to be a dance? Dancing can be hard work, takes a lot of energy; sometimes the body gets fatigued. But still, we dance!

Aaron, is there anything else you would like me to add here? He says just a little more of my experience.

There are these deep wisdom experiences that lead me not just to trust but to know that everything in the conditioned realm is simply arising from conditions and passing away when the conditions cease, all impermanent. All of the suffering, the rage and the fear, and also the beautiful experiences, it's all arising and passing away. I know that.

But with some of it there's so much suffering. Then I pull armor on over me to try to get away from it, and I forget that one immense gift of incarnation is love. On earth, not experienced so much as unconditional love, but that's part of it.

In order to experience unconditional love, I have to put myself out there naked, the armor gone. I can't receive love through the armor. I can't love others through the armor—it would be only an imitation of love. And I know I have, and we all have, the ability to move past that imitation and into the real thing.

What would it mean to truly rest in a field of unconditional love?

So, I've been blessed these last couple of weeks as I've meditated, to deeply experience myself in a circle of beings just holding unconditional love. Holding me in



that field, holding everyone in that field. There's no contraction, just spaciousness in which that love can expand and be available.

And then the repeated question: If I'm not experiencing that, what's blocking me? Am I willing to look at whatever fear or anger or discomfort of the moment I'm holding as some kind of armor, keeping myself out of that field of love?

I'm not there yet; none of us are. We're always growing into, not finished. But we don't have to be finished to plant the seeds we came to plant.

As the earth grows and we grow with each other and we grow ourselves, the whole earth blossoms.

Twenty-five or thirty years ago I was meditating in my living room. I had cut some early spring lilacs and put them in a vase. They were there where I was meditating, and I had a very deep meditation experience, really an experience of the Unconditioned. Not the deepest one but a more fleeting one.

Then I opened my eyes, and there were these lilacs blooming. I realized how much courage these flowers had to come into incarnation, how short a life they had, one lilac blossom. And yet they come year after year to bring their light and fragrance and beauty to the earth. Can we do less?

So these practices are life-changing for me, and I think they are for you or you wouldn't be here in the class. And we will continue to guide you, John and Aaron and I, and other entities, too, and you to each other, to bringing it all together so we can become more ready to dance....

Dance, dance, wherever you may be!
I am the Lord of the Dance, said he.
And I'll lead you all, wherever you may be,
And I'll lead you all in the dance, said he.

If we were all here live, now would be the time to dance.

Okay, Aaron, have I said enough? Anything more? He says, thank you.

Aaron: I am Aaron. My blessings and love to you. Can you feel the shift from Barbara's energy to mine? I'm sure some of you can.

I have danced in that garden of love and delight. You all have danced there too. And I have cowered in the places of pain, of agony, of loneliness, of bewilderment, of anger and feelings of shame.

This is all part of the earth human experience. How would you know the experiences of light if you never experienced darkness?

You are not asked to just finish it all and then go away somewhere, be done with it. You are asked in a sense to stick it out; to keep going into fields that are filled with burrs and thistles, carrying out the flower seeds and bringing them to the earth to plant them.

You are asked to keep the garden nourished and fertile and nurture the seeds, and then, to dance in the garden. But when you turn around, there are going to be more thistles in the next field.

If helping this earth and all the beings upon the earth through transition were easy, none of you would need to be here.

Barbara mentioned the courage of the lilac. You have the same, and much more, courage. You have come through endless births, endless experiences, which challenged you, always intent on holding and bringing down the light, on perpetuating the dance, the dance of love. And you are so deeply loved and respected for that.

We'll be looking at the various meditation practices that help you more firmly to walk this earth, to dance this earth, and to allow your laughter to light up the earth and your tears to water the earth.

I just want to remind you of the Buddha's beautiful words: "If it were not possible, I would not ask you to do it."

In the times out of incarnation, you know it's possible. And you so lovingly step back into the dance again. And then it becomes burdensome, heavy.

So, coming back to the question: what is this ox we are seeking?

For me, it's that balance of the deep wisdom that knows things as they are and the love that only the sentient being can bring forth in this powerful way. The love that meets and dances with the wisdom.

It's often spoken of as two wings of the bird, wisdom and compassion, wisdom and loving kindness. We seek that awakened mind wherein wisdom and unconditional love can dwell together.

At first, we do not believe it is possible. Then you meet some people who seem to be living that beautiful balance—maybe not perfectly, but living it. So you catch a glimpse—there's a footprint, maybe it's possible.

You get a little closer and have your own experience of that balance, seeing the ox.

The inspiration to go further must come from a balanced place. It cannot come from fear. It cannot come from hatred of the human existence and wanting to get out of it, with a belief that the only way out is to become enlightened.

Rather, it needs to come from a place of deep compassion. But the deep wisdom teachings support that compassion. Unconditional love helps—if this were a birth canal, I would say lubricate the birth canal, to allow you to glide into a higher level of being without so much struggle. Because indeed you are going through a birth canal from third density to higher density. And it is a long, convoluted passage, sometimes seeming blocked. So you need a lot of lubricants there, and unconditional love is one.

I find it important not to separate the practices too much—vipassana and the Brahma viharas, for example—but to find the place of each in the others. Each supports the other.

There is a beautiful bodhisattva vow in the Mahayana tradition. The one we've used at Deep Spring comes from Barbara's dear friend who is a Zen priest, and what they use at their temple. I've changed a few words.

All beings, one body, I vow to liberate.
Endless blind passions, I vow to uproot.
Dharma gates without number, I vow to penetrate.
The Great Way of Awakening, I vow to attain.

Many of you have spoken those words with me not so much as a vow but as a statement of intention.

It's important at the beginning to ask yourself, what is the ground for this intention?

I know that there is enormous suffering for yourselves and for the earth. But if the intention is simply to move beyond suffering, it skews the energy because it forgets the radiance and love that need to be part of the moving forward.

The intention really needs to come from the willingness—the *joy*—to join in. Whoever is your personal Lord of the Dance—Yeshua, the Buddha, any great figure, to join that Lord of the Dance or Lady of the Dance and open your heart completely to the dance. And you can do it.

I'm going to ask you, in your small groups, what set you off seeking the ox? The groups will not get to all these questions, so please choose the questions that resonate for you.

What set you off seeking the ox?
What is your inspiration, seeking the ox?
And what blocks such movement?

Ultimately, it comes around to the question, where is unconditional love to be found?

All the stories of unworthiness—or the places of anger where you feel unable to be unconditionally loving; not just to accept but to open to unconditional love—what is the nature of these stories? Can you see through them with the wisdom practices? And can the deep intention to dance the dance help you let go of the old stories?

Learning to give and receive unconditional love on this earth plane, because we are the instrument through which unconditional love and the unconditional essence, the divine essence, comes through and touches everything.

Again, what blocks you? What supports you?

So, I think the most valuable use of the group time is simply this: What is this ox for you? Not just this little bit or that, but what is the totality of it? What blocks me from seeking it? What propels me to seek it?

I thank you, and I will end here. My blessings and love to you all.

May we all dance in the sunshine, or the rain—both beautiful.

Barbara: Just one note. Last Wednesday in his talk Aaron spoke a lot about these Ox Herding Pictures and this path, and I don't think we have a transcript of this yet. But any of you who subscribe will have gotten an audio. It's worth listening to. That's all. Much love.