

## **November 8, 2022 Tuesday Night, Living Awake Class**

(This talk not yet fully reviewed by Barbara and Aaron)

The Ox Herding Pictures: What Does it Mean to Tame the Ox?

**Barbara:** Good evening... Here are many faces I've been seeing all last week. Many of you were in the retreat. We had a really powerful week. For those of you who were with the retreat, I've gotten a lot of feedback from you. I'm glad it was a good week for all for you, as it was for me.

This is the first class where John, Aaron, and I have not talked extensively before the class. It's been busy. And then Sunday and Monday flashed by, and here we are.

So, I said to Aaron this morning we haven't talked about the class, and he said, that's okay, I know what I'm teaching. Let go.

Before we start the class, I want to ask you all a question. We have a planned full day, December 10, probably 11am to 5pm. The plan for this day was to review what we've done this semester, just take it a little deeper. I've heard from some of you saying it's hard, getting into December and close to Christmas. Some people saying, "I don't think I can come"; some people saying, "I'm excited about it." I would like a show of hands here—if we hold this day as planned on December 10, how many of you feel you would not participate? Alright, only about four of you.

If we hold the class on December 10 as planned, how many of you who would participate wish we were not having a class and are participating because you kind of think you should? How many of you are really eager for us to have this day?

Okay, I'm going to make this decision with Aaron and John within the next couple of days and we'll let you know. When we were planning back in the beginning, it seemed like a good idea. But I do hear from people... I think what happened was that at the end of the retreat people were just feeling exhausted. High on the energy of the retreat, but also tired, and looking at that as the idea of a whole day. But I think there's much to be gained from that, also.

So we've been looking at the Ox Herding Pictures and the progression of them. Understanding the ox has numerous meanings, but that one meaning is the awakened mind. Seeking that ox, seeking that awakened mind. Not really believing it exists. Wishing it did. And then seeing the evidence of its existence.

Finally catching sight of the ox—those moments in everyday life or in meditation when suddenly there's a profound insight. Just presence, everything laid bare.

And so, as happened to a number of you on retreat, you grabbed hold of the ox. What do we do with this animal? A little challenge from the ox—he's not sure he wants to be held onto. Catching the ox.

We can't bring him home until we tame him. You really don't want a wild ox in your house. We really don't want a... I don't know how best to say it... those profound moments of insight, of awakened, "Ah! I've got it!" But mind doesn't want to be tamed, the mind that's filled with chaos and anger and serenity and filled with everything. What does it mean to "tame the ox"? Or to tend to the ox?

Aaron and I were talking about some of this this morning. He's asked me to give a few examples from my experience before he comes in to talk. He said ideally, I would be giving these examples in the middle of the class, but it's very hard for me to have him talk, then me to come in, then him to talk again.

So, a couple of examples. Sunday night I got to sleep for me at a reasonable hour, just a little before midnight. I was looking forward to Monday, yesterday, which was my 80th birthday, and feeling peaceful and joyful about it. I had a good long soak in the hot tub with a beautiful moon and many stars. Mind was calm and peaceful, serene and loving, heart open.

I slept for maybe an hour, when—I have an alarm for Hal. It's a disk that goes under my pillow and vibrates if he pushes the button on his bed, and a strobe light that goes off, a bright light. It makes it pretty certain if he needs me, he'll be able to get me.

1:15am. Shaker shaking, strobe light flashing. I pulled myself out of a sound sleep, went into his room, and he looked at me. It makes a noise, too, so it woke him. He looked at me, and I said, "What's wrong? Does something hurt?" He said no. Did you buzz me? No. Do you need me? No. Do you want to go back to sleep? Yes.

I figured it was just a malfunction. It happens sometimes. I kissed him goodnight. He went right back to sleep. It took me half an hour. Probably by quarter of two or so I was asleep.

2:15am. The whole thing went off again. Now, technically there's no reason why I shouldn't go back to sleep. All that happened was the alarm malfunctioned. I was awakened out of a sound sleep. The one who is awake within can just say, "Alarm malfunctioning—no problem." The part of me that's not awake said, "What if it happens again? How do I fix it?"

A little additional fact, here. The shaker had been broken. We had gotten a new shaker, and somebody who helps me in the house each month helped me install it and test it. So, it was clear to me she had not set it correctly. But I don't know how to set it. What if it goes off again? The tension of waiting for the other shoe to drop! What if it goes off again? I don't want to be awakened by that strobe light again.

I stayed up about an hour, to make sure it wasn't going off again. And I still couldn't sleep so I went back out to the hot tub, meditated under the stars and moon for a while, came back in. It was probably close to 4am. But I figured if I sleep from 4am to 9am, when Hal often gets up, I can get a good five hours of sleep there.

Sound asleep. Gremlins in my house! The strobe light of my smoke alarm, fire detector went off right above my head in the bedroom. So at 5:15am, strobe lights were flashing! And this makes a loud sound. I went in to Hal. He smiled at me. I said, "There's no fire." He gave me a thumbs up and he went back to sleep. He's much better at this than I am. Tension, tension. Don't want this. Went back to sleep again. I was exhausted. It was 5:15am.

6:15am. Smoke alarm, strobe light! The caregiver, who lives downstairs and leaves for work at 6:15am, was up in my kitchen. He heard it and came in. He pressed some buttons. He said, "I don't know if I have it fixed. It may keep going off. I'll fix it when I come home from work." He had to leave for work. Tension, tension.

So I just sat in bed and meditated for a while. What is this untamed mind? This mind that wants it to be this way, not that way. Mind that is agitated, that is grasping at not having this or that. I thought, well, I could put a blindfold over my eyes, and if it goes off it won't wake me. But it will wake Hal and he'll be upset. I have to be able to get up with it.

Can I just allow myself to be awakened? The ox is definitely not tame. The ox wants to sleep. The ox doesn't want strobe lights going off in the bedroom. Grasping, grasping.

So I'm very sure that there is an ox. I spent a week with a lot of meditation hanging out with that ox. Watching him be pretty tame and loving and present. But then, here comes a strobe light—AAAH! Agitation.

It's not the agitation that's the issue, it's the aversion to the agitation. It's the aversion to the strobe light, wanting it to be different. What does it mean to tame the ox? How do we take care of the ox?

I sat for about an hour after, from 6:15am to maybe 7:30am. It did not go off again. What the caregiver had pressed hopefully did it. Could I go back to sleep? Just watching agitation, watching grasping.

What is there in this mind that is so attached to its being the way I want it to be? Even so attached to getting a certain number of hours of sleep. And it's not fair, it's my birthday!

So what? The strobe light gremlin didn't care that it was my birthday. Or maybe it wanted me to have more birthday time and not sleep my birthday away.

What does it mean to tame the ox? The mind that wants it a certain way does not want it to be another way.

We have these profound experiences of the still mind, the spacious, awake mind that has space for everything, and then we think, "Ah, I've got it. I can really rest there." And then there's a strobe light and it throws us off.

So, wanting to come back to the space. Grasping at that awakened mind. Grasping at stillness. How do we tend to the ox?

Another example. As with all of you, lots of election news. Probably agitation about the election. This side is getting ahead, that side is getting ahead. Turning my back on it, but then I still know I'm turning my back on it. Even if I don't listen to the news, it's going on behind me. Grasping. Wanting it to be this way or that way.

Those of you in class who are a little bit older, like me, will remember a song from the 1960's. I will not try to sing it but will say the words, the amount I remember.

Album: kingston trio

they're rioting in africa  
they're starving in spain  
there's hurricanes in florida  
and texas needs rain

the whole world is festering with unhappy souls  
the french hate the germans the germans hate the poles  
Italians hate Yugoslavs, South Africans hate the Dutch  
And i don't like anybody very much  
But we can be thankful and tranquil and proud  
That Man's been endowed with the mushroom shaped cloud  
And we know for certain that some lovely day  
Someone will set the spark off and we will all be blown away

They're rioting in Africa  
There's strife in Iran  
What nature doesn't do to us  
Will be done by our fellow man!

You can look this up and listen. ... It's a great song.

This is back in the 1960's, 60 years ago. Of course, 60 years before that the same thing was going on, just not about nuclear weapons. But it's a constant. Will they use tactical nuclear weapons in Ukraine? It terrifies me, terrifies all of us. Back 150 years ago, there may have been a different issue, but no less concern. Will this happen? Will that happen?

The mind that is constantly worrying about it is not part of the solution. The mind that can be calm and hold space is part of the solution. That doesn't mean we say it doesn't matter. So, we get out and work for our candidates of choice and work for the resolution

of issues that concern us. But how do we do that without fear, without grasping, holding space, holding love?

I was thinking about that song as I was watching some of the election news. You're all probably going to be watching election returns after class, or some of you are. I'm not. Tomorrow will be soon enough to hear the news. But many of you may choose to watch those election returns.

We watch the grasping. The mind that is not yet tame, really attached to its being this way rather than that way, despite how many times in our lives—if you're older like me—we've watched this party control, then that party control. And you might say, well, the issues were not as severe. But they were. I'm 80 years old now, I know! The issues were just as severe 60 years ago. How will we handle this or that war? What are our positions on foreign policy, nuclear policy, environment? These are not new issues today.

The only way we can resolve any of this is to resolve it in ourselves. And that doesn't mean just saying it doesn't matter—it matters. But how can it matter, and we also hold space? Not hating the opposition; trying to really hear the opposition. To hear our own view and the opposing view.

Aaron, have I said enough, here? He says yes, thank you. He will come in and talk.

[Reviewed to here](#)

**Aaron:** I am Aaron. My blessings and love to you. So, how do we tame this ox? We don't want to bring him home until he's tame, otherwise he'll set his feet and kick apart the house.

This mind is a powerful thing. When I say 'tame', you don't want it to be placid and falling asleep; you want it to be alive, vital. But not filled with fear. Not filled with "this is right and this is wrong" kind of judgment, but open, able to truly hear. Able to hold positive space for that which feels supportive of the highest good. Not to be caught up in judgment and negativity.

Of course, your meditation practice is the path to this, both vipassana and pure awareness. When an object like a strobe light going off in the dark room through the night keeps going off, you want to sleep and it's waking you. Or maybe it's the neighbor's lawnmower, or your car that won't start, or your roof that's leaking. As long as you are in these physical bodies there are going to be unpleasant catalysts. That which you do not want. That which leads to discomfort or pain, fear.

We spent a lot of time at the retreat looking at states like access concentration and pure awareness. These are states that are natural to your mind, able to arise and be stable in the mind. But you cannot hold onto them.

The question then is, what blocks you from a state of presence with whatever arises? A peaceful, curious presence. What creates this wild ox?

Right there with the wild ox is the tame ox. The tame ox has always been present. The wild ox arises out of conditions and passes away. When the conditions for the wild ox pass away, you come back to the tame ox, to the awakened heart-mind. You cannot hold onto it. You can begin to discern what separates you from it and come to more ease and comfort with those objects that separate you from it.

So I said to Barbara somewhere in the middle of that night, “If you’re going to keep begin agitated by these strobe lights and you can’t turn off the smoke alarm, just go out to the hot tub and meditate. Move yourself out of the place where the agitation is centered, temporarily, and then come back.”

And it worked—for a while. She came back from an hour of meditation out there under the stars feeling very spacious and peaceful. Got into bed, fell asleep until the smoke alarm went off. Another strobe light.

So she lay there, saying, “Oh no!” At first she thought it was Hal’s alarm again, and then she realized it wasn’t come from her night table, it was coming from the ceiling. The smoke alarm—oh no! And the first thought was, how do I fix it?

My dear ones, sometimes you cannot fix it. Sometimes you are simply living your life with one strobe light after another going off.

Barbara has a book on the bookshelf there, behind her, that was written by a student’s mother. She was at that time living in Germany, I guess, at the time of the Holocaust. She and her family were Jewish. She relates so beautifully in the book the terror, the grief of seeing loved ones torn away, knowing they were probably going to be tortured and die, and nothing she could do about it. How she escaped into the countryside, into these partisan camps that were doing what they could to fight the Nazis.

She relates so beautifully the terrible pain of knowing she could not control the outcome, and deeply seeing that she could control what happened in her own heart and whether she was a peaceful person or not. She could control whether hate arose within her by watching what triggered hate, what triggered fear, what triggered separation, and come back into her heart with the strong commitment not to keep resuming those triggers. Not to keep shooting them out. How to become centered. How to work for what she believed in, which was love.

I don’t remember the name of the book, and I don’t know if it’s available these days. But I’ll ask Barbara to find the book and the name of the book in case you can read it. For those of you who remember Doron W, it’s his mother’s book.

How do we do this? There are always going to be these very frightening and painful catalysts. Those who you love who are sick, wars around the world, someone whose home burns down or is destroyed by a tornado or a flood. Everything in the conditioned realm is impermanent.

If there is true peace—and I know there is—it does not come from clinging to anything but by settling the turmoil in one's self by knowing, "Whatever arises in this conditioned realm *will* pass away. There is nothing in the conditioned realm I can hold onto. The only answer is the peace within my own heart."

I want to read something to you. This is Song 1 of *Flight of the Garuda*. I'm just going to read it. You can reread it yourself.

Emaho! (It's a phrase of wonder, "Oh!")

I, the untroubled and carefree renunciant,  
Will now sing this song about the view,  
Entitled The Flight of the Garuda.  
It enables one to swiftly traverse all the levels and paths.  
Listen carefully, fortunate children of my heart!

(And you are that. You are fortunate children of my heart.)

In both samsara and nirvana the renown of the enlightened state  
Is widely heard like thunder throughout the sky.  
As this always remains within the minds of beings of the six realms  
How amazing that one is never separate from it even for an instant!

Not knowing that this state is within oneself,  
How amazing that one searches for it elsewhere.  
Although it is clearly manifest like the radiant disc of the sun  
How amazing that so few see it.

Having no father and mother, one's mind is the true Buddha,  
How amazing that it knows neither birth nor death!  
No matter how much happiness and sorrow is experienced,  
How amazing that it is never impaired or improved even in the slightest!

How amazing that without being fabricated,  
This mind, which is unborn and primordially pure,  
Is spontaneously present from the very beginning! (Here is the tame ox.)  
This self awareness is naturally free from the very first,  
How amazing that it is liberated by just resting --  
At ease in whatever happens!

That is Song 1. I know you've all read it.

Now, when it says, "How amazing it is liberated by just resting at ease in whatever happens!" that really is the work of this class, to remember how to rest at ease in whatever happens. How do we do that?

Every moment of agitation adds agitation to the universe. Every moment of stillness invites stillness.

If you are sincere in your intention to help bring this whole universe into a higher level of awakening, to bring this Earth into a place where there is freedom from suffering, your work is to use yourself as the model and to honor your commitment. Those beautiful words, “If it were not possible, I would not ask you to do it.”

I know it’s possible, because certainly as a human I doubted that it was possible and then I had the amazement and the joy to wake up. I am no longer caught in those places where the mind goes when it gets lost in the small self. All of you have had glimpses of that freedom.

Going to the polls, campaigning for your candidate, this is important. Resting in the spacious, awakened and loving heart-mind, how much more this does to bring peace, freedom, love, and transition into higher consciousness. How can the world transition into higher consciousness when you are stuck in lower consciousness? Are you going to be one of those stuck, or are you going to be one of those walking ahead, saying, “Yes, there is awakens. Yes, there is love. Yes, we *can* do this.”?

This is what Barbara finally settled into on Sunday night. She got back in bed after the first smoke alarm strobe light. She was lying there like this, and I said, “Do you want to remain in that state of shock? Where is peace in this moment?”

I invited her to just breathe and to know there are always going to be literal or figurative strobe lights flashing, alarms sounding—always. How am I going to hold those in my consciousness?

When it went off the first time, after the two Hal alarm strobe lights and then the smoke alarm, she was frazzled. So she meditated in the hot tub for an hour. She came back inside. She got in bed, kind of eyed it with, “Don’t you dare!” Just breathing. It will do what it will do.

She fell asleep. And within a few minutes of falling asleep, there it was again. There was a vast difference in her presence with it this second time, the fourth strobe light of the evening. Ahh, light, light...

So she watched it flashing. She called in to Hal, “It’s the smoke alarm malfunctioning, Hal. There is no fire, no problem. Go back to sleep.” And then she just laid there, watching it flashing. Is there anything unpleasant about it? Well, it’s a bright light. It wasn’t wanted. But at the same time, if there had been a fire, it would be very welcome as a warning.

She was able after a few minutes to just say, “Thank you, alarm. Thank you. Thank you.” So, she laid there, meditating with it, really honoring that it has important work to do in her home, and that everything at times malfunctions. It’s okay.



Then after about ten minutes of this going on and off, stopping for a minute or two, going off again, the caregiver came upstairs, getting ready to go to work, and he said, "I can't figure out what's wrong, but I'll reset it." He did that. That seemed to do it, for the time being.

It could have kept flashing. It would have been very annoying. She can't stand on a stepladder to reset it. Ahh, just let it be. Sometimes there are going to be flashing strobe lights and loud alarms. Let it be. Can you say thank you?

Peace is up to you, not what's happening in the world. It's up to you. If we are going to have world peace, we're going to know that there are going to be flashing strobe lights and loud alarms. There is going to be a world full of people who are able to look at this noise and light and just say, "I hear you. Thank you." And then hold the intention to, not disarm the light so it can't function if there's a fire, but to create the world so there is no fire. To commit not to no alarm, sounds, and lights, but no need for them. I hold that as sacred commitment. I think you do, too. No need for alarms. A world that knows out of <>, with respect for every being and for the earth.

This, then, becomes the ground intention for your practice—not your own peace and comfort but the well-being of every sentient being in the world. You can't be everywhere in the world, taking care of everything, but you can hold this basic and vital commitment.

This brings us back to those wonderful imaginal cells. Unless you can imagine a world at peace and with a wholesome environment for all, how can that happen?

What do you get out of the agitation? I've talked about this before. Some of you want to feel in control, and there has to be something in your life that feels out of control, that feels like a problem, so you can fix the problem, so you can feel in control.

What if instead of viewing what arises as problem, you view it as an opportunity for learning? An opportunity for awakening further into the innate peacefulness and love that is the ground of everything. "Thank you, teacher. Thank you, teacher." Sound—"Thank you, teacher." Light—"Thank you, teacher." Anger here, floods there—"Thank you, teacher."

We do not say "Thank you, teacher" and let the floods wash away people, kill people. We say "Thank you, teacher" and build up the sandbag dikes. Help create changes in the law so people cannot live right on the shore that is constantly flooding. We participate in what is needed so that people who are filled with hate—this group against that group—can learn to hear each other. We don't turn our backs on <need>, but who is listening for that <need>—the awakened essence of you or the alarmed 3D human, filled with reactivity? Who is listening? This is where you have control: to find that place of peace, presence, and love in yourself and bring it there.

It's likely that some of the candidates you hoped would win will not win. It's possible that the Congress, the Senate, the House, may not be run by the party that you hoped it would be run by. Are you going to react with alarm and fear?

If the opposition party wins, all is not lost; then it's time to start using those imaginal cells to imagine a world at peace, and to demonstrate that peace by hearing each other without judgment—as much as possible, without fear. And instead of getting caught up in this, and this, and this, to begin to ask, what is our goal? In what are we in mutual agreement? How can we invite that which is for the highest good of all, without hating each other? How can we build policies that are grounded in loving kindness and awareness rather than fear?

This is the world into which you have come because you chose to be here at this time, chose to help yourselves and the world awaken. To tame the ox and bring him home.

This is what we'll be focusing on these last classes of this semester. And next semester we'll be moving on to dissolution of the self and the ox and what that's about.

This semester, just, where in me is the ox still wild and angry and crazy? And how do I not tame the ox so much as find the already tame ox in myself and in my neighbor, who is part of the other party, and who makes me so angry? How do I find that already-tame ox and invite him to be present with us? How do I bring that freedom and love home?

Thank you. I am Aaron.

In your small groups, you may want to discuss this. I'm not going to give a specific area of focus; whatever comes up in the group is fine. But some of the things that may be helpful are to share: What are the areas of anxiety within you? And when there is that anxiety, what really helps, as opposed to what increases the anxiety? In other words, how do you live from this heart of love?

I love you all and I know that you're going to get this worked out, because you did not come to the Earth to see it destroy itself, to see humans upon it destroy themselves. You came to support the transition, the waking up of the Earth and of all the beings here into happiness and love.

I am Aaron. I'll return the body to Barbara. I love you.

**Barbara:** Thank you, Aaron. I'm going to turn this over to John in just a few minutes. Aaron has asked me to share with you a few thoughts, that I've shared with a few people yesterday and today.

So many of you emailed me, sent cards, just in one way or another said, "Happy Birthday!" And I have felt myself so surrounded with love this past 24, 36 hours. I want to thank you.

People have thanked me for being a clear and loving teacher and devoting my life to the dharma. Well, unless there are people who want to hear the dharma, there's no use to devote my life to sharing the dharma. So thank you for your desire to open to this.

I'm so inspired by all of you, so inspired by what happened at the retreat. It was just a beautiful retreat. People went to places that they didn't think they would be able to get to and soared. Just so beautiful. So thank you, all of you who came to the retreat, all of you who wished me a happy birthday.

I'm feeling very joyful. I think this next decade, instead of feeling old and hopeless in any way, I feel filled with hope and with joy, personal and for the earth. We're gonna do this!

My mom lived a healthy life until 98, was very active in the world until she was 95 and broke her ankle, and then had to be in assisted living. But before that she lived in her own condo and shopped for her groceries. She was a painter all her life and painted beautiful paintings even into her 90's.

So, people ask me, am I going to keep teaching? What else would I do? I love it, just as she loved painting. Thank you, Mom. I expect to be with you through this decade and into the next one. There's nothing I can see that holds my love and attention more than sharing the dharma. Maybe getting a little more sleep, or a little less sleep. We'll see how it goes. But I'm excited about this decade of my life.

Last night I thought I was going to be Zooming with my three sons and their wives and kids, but it turned out to have about 20 people, all in all. One of my sons invited all of my nieces and nephews and my cousins. We were not all on the screen at the same time, but for two hours people were coming on and getting off. It was such a joyful reunion. Because of Covid, none of us have been traveling. We haven't seen each other. I felt so embraced with love. And other than my sister-in-law, who's my age—actually, she's three months older than me—everybody was a younger generation, some in their 40s and 50s, some in their 20s. They're all so filled with light, and so inspiring. We have an amazing world, amazing people up to carry this world. We can do it.

So, thank you. I'm going to pass this to John, who I assume is going to suggest a short break. And then we'll do the meditation part of the class.