



## Introduction to Barbara Brodsky

**Barbara:** I'm Barbara Brodsky, the founding and guiding teacher of Deep Spring Center for Meditation and Spiritual Inquiry. I founded Deep Spring back in 1989, so we've been going for a long time, thirty-five years.

At the time when I started Deep Spring, I was struggling in my life. I had lost my hearing totally, from normal hearing to totally deaf, and it was a huge challenge. I was suffering. I was struggling. I was angry. I was asking questions, why did this happen? How can I make it go away? Now I'm used to my deafness. Sometimes I even enjoy it when I'm in a noisy place.

Through the years we've had thousands of students come through who have benefitted from these practices, and I hope you will also.

As in our name, we have spiritual inquiry and meditation. Spiritual inquiry involves all those eternal questions: Who am I? Why am I here? How do I live with more love, with less fear? How do I be less reactive in the world? And perhaps of most importance to many people, why am I here in this incarnation, in this life? What is life about? So this is spiritual inquiry.

Well, we can guess at the answers to these questions, but the route to knowing the answers to the questions is meditation, so we're going to start there.

At Deep Spring we teach a blend, a weaving together of three different kinds of practice. One is sometimes called mindfulness meditation, otherwise known as vipassana meditation. This comes from Thailand and Burma, that area of the world. The Pali language word 'passana' means seeing, to see, and 'vipassana' is a deeper, clearer seeing.

We add to vipassana Pure Awareness practice, in which we rest present in this moment and learn how to be fully in our bodies and in our minds in this moment, resting in spaciousness.

The third part of the weaving is the practices of the heart—loving kindness meditation, compassion meditation, joy, equanimity.

The way that we teach these is not as three separate practices but pulling it all together, because when I'm present, breathing, present in my body, suddenly spaciousness develops. When spaciousness develops, suddenly there will be something that triggers my attention and my mind and body get busy again, and I come back to vipassana. It flows.

These practices come from the Buddhist tradition, but you don't have to be Buddhist or have any religion to practice them. I find this a beautiful path.

In the Buddha's words, there is suffering. We all know that. There is freedom from suffering. There is a path out of suffering. And then he delineates the path. That path will be somewhat different for each of us; we're each unique. So what we teach here is not a one-size-fits-all practice but offering out what we think may be helpful and asking you to choose what fits your need.

Along the way, as I was struggling with my deafness—you better believe I was angry! I was really stuck. Suddenly completely deaf, and I had a newborn infant. How do I deal with this? My husband was angry. We loved each other, but it was hard. When I say we loved each other, this week we're celebrating our 50-something anniversary. So it's been a long haul together, and the practices have helped us both.

But back then, I was stuck, and I prayed for help. I don't know what kind of help I was expecting. I had the habit to meditate in my living room every morning before my children got up for school, before the baby awoke. I came into the living room and I could see—literally see—the essence, energy, of someone sitting there. No hard edges, no form. But there was definitely someone there. And I was surprised. What is this?

I could feel his energy the way you can feel the energy of someone who walks into the room quietly behind you; you feel their energy in the room. I could feel his energy.

I walked out. I went to the kitchen and got a cup of tea. I said, "Either I'm hallucinating or it's real, and I don't know which one is scarier!" So I had my tea and I went back, and this figure was still there, just sitting quietly.

"Who are you and why are you here?" I asked.

I perceived it as a male figure, but we know it's neither male nor female. All of us are both to some degree.

He said to me, "You're suffering. You asked for help. I'm here to help."

"How are you going to help?" I asked him.

"Let's look at the nature of the suffering and see where freedom is."

I couldn't argue with this—I was suffering!—so I just sat in my meditation, and gradually he began to teach me vipassana meditation. It was the meditation I had been doing all of my life, for thirty-five years of my life, but much deeper and more precise. So, before I had just been present with my breath but didn't really know how to meditate. Now he was fine-tuning this. These are the instructions we'll be giving you. In the instructions you will learn about mindfulness, presence, and the loving heart.

It made an enormous difference. I began to see that my deafness was not my problem, my relationship with my deafness was my problem. I was so angry.

And he was right, when he said to me, “You’re not upset at feeling deaf when you’re walking in the woods.” True. But when other people were around and talking, there was so much grasping, “I have to hear this!” Even if I knew it was not deep conversation. Grasping.

It changed everything. He began to teach me and then my husband. When he started to talk with my husband, he said, “Just say what you hear me saying to you. Just say it out loud.” And when I told a friend about this, they said, “Oh, you’re channeling.” What is channeling? I had no idea.

So this was all new to me, and I know it may be new to you. We all channel. When you have a bunch of vegetables on your kitchen counter, and maybe a chicken cut up, and you’re about to make chicken soup—how much water? How much of this vegetable or that vegetable? How much seasoning? If you’re a good chef, you’re getting in touch with the vegetables and the soup itself and asking, how much of this is needed? Because of course plants talk to us all the time. Have you ever hugged a tree? It will hug you back.

So I dropped my discomfort with channeling, as I learned to simply let this entity—Teacher, I called him at that point—this teacher speak through me and help me and Hal. He led us through the feelings of anger we were having at each other, at my deafness. My husband was saying, “Poor me; I have a deaf wife.” And I was saying, “What do you mean, ‘poor you’—I’m deaf!” We couldn’t hear each other. He helped us learn to hear each other.

Gradually, I began to see that the deafness truly was not the problem. My fear of the deafness and my anger were the problem. When those dropped away, I was very comfortable. And so we learned to live with this.

This teacher eventually gave me the name “Aaron”—the name of the being he was in a long ago past life who was a loving teacher. There are thousands of people around the world who have come to love Aaron and I hope you come to love him too.

We’ll progress through different lessons on vipassana practice, mindfulness, resting in pure awareness, practices of the heart, and how these weave together. But more important, we’ll look at how we deal with the places of fear and pain in our lives, because that’s a given—there’s going to be pain, discomfort.

We can’t hold onto what we love—it goes. You get that wonderful dish of ice cream. You start to eat it, and it’s melting, it’s melting, it’s gone. We can’t hold on to loved ones; they eventually may get sick and die. This is life.



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Every conditioned thing is impermanent. We come to know through meditation that which is called the Unconditioned. So we have the conditioned; everything arises out of the Unconditioned; and we begin to experience the relationship of conditioned and Unconditioned. We begin to understand the roots of our suffering and that we do have a choice.

Pain is a given, in these human bodies, but suffering is optional, it's often said. And this is true.

So, welcome aboard. I hope to lead you on a journey that will help you find your way to a happier, more fulfilling life. Thank you.