

Best Wishes to you. May this note find you in good spirits, full of joy, love and wonder!



In August 2006, The Lucid Mind Retreat, a 3 to 5 month retreat commenced at the Dharma Centre of Canada in Kinmount, Ontario. It was a wonderful coming together of 20 + people, all keen, committed and unfolding their being into lucid loving experience.



For most of us, the retreat began with the Karma Kagyu Foundation Practices. I always felt deeply blessed to have personal guidance from Lama Mark on a day to day basis, and prayed that this would be the case for many others. In this retreat it occurred, through all the hours of teaching coupled with personal interviews on a daily

basis. There is no doubt for many of us, that everyday was full and ripe with lucid teaching; some of us were assisted in unfolding through the cutting of gemstones on a lapidary machine, while others explored generosity through lots of work in the kitchen and all of us explored their experience through moving slowly, quietly looking at their experience; at their mind.



November Rain

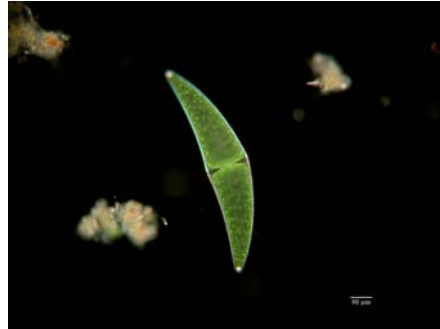
There was that one little glitch: NOVEMBER! It rained, it was dark, and it was, well, a tough month for most. We have actually considered renaming November for the next retreat☺, or spending the month in the Bahamas.

Microscopic dharma

Another type of contemplation occurred at the Dharma Centre. While many beings were unfolding traditional Kagyu teachings, Lama Mark was examining creatures found in the properties' fresh water lakes.

Shelane and Dhani collected water samples regularly using a plankton net from the canoe on Union Lake. Lama Mark spent hours, days, weeks and months fully engaged in this rich exploration of life on the property.

He has two 30 year-old, very powerful microscopes that were given to him for his birthday last year, and a camera with which he photographs the plankton algae. These mysterious life-forms are then identified using textbooks from his collection and the local University libraries. Intriguing questions arise from this study: what is their life cycle, how do they live together, how are they affected by the pH of the water, the temperature... Lama Mark even attempted to culture some forms of algae, with some success.



The Food, the feast!

The food was phenomenal. We actually had a couple of people (who shall not be named) complain about the food being too good! The selection was excellent. Most mornings started with a feast of French toast, fried bananas, and bacon smothered in maple syrup

(from Quebec). Lunch then ensued with a delicious ensemble of Asian delicacies; ahh...☺ those glass noodle dishes and fried rice, whoa! And, at the best of times we moved away from the classic Dharma Centre fair for the evening meal, moving away from recycled leftovers to fresh soups, breads, salads and hearty meals. Our bellies were very happy!



Renovations

Besides all the excellent meditative/contemplative work that was done, we also had some very good renovations unfold for the Dharma Centre. The Mahakala shrine was finished with black paint applied to the unpainted drywall and the ceiling was finished with painted black strips

of wood. Mould that was on the wood was cleaned. The floor was patched as much as possible, so that the mice have more difficulty getting in. The exterior door closes now, and has been painted. Overall it looks and feels great, in my opinion!

Another renovation that occurred was the Tara Cabin kitchen. The walls were freshly painted, it has a new gas range, refrigerator, counters and a sink that drains away from the building, all financially supported by two kind beings - thankyou!

The 5th month

It was my experience, practicing Vipassana and Mahamudra was both easeful and accessible, following 4 months of slowing down and integrating meditation and Foundation Practices into my life. The 5th month of the retreat, through the teachings on the Progressive Stages of Emptiness, was filled with just that: questions about what constitute our experience; what is it we experience; what do we imagine; what is enlightenment and does it have qualities?



During the teaching of The Progressive Stages of Emptiness, Lama Mark asked us to come together, without him, in between classes to

review/debate what we understood. I loved this experience and found it a lovely way to bring the teachings in...

Feldenkrais dharma



It's a funny experience to write this letter and not to speak about Feldenkrais. Interestingly one of the activities that I gain great joy and benefit from seemed to be a very quiet regular event for me, so much so that I almost forgot to mention it.

I had originally planned to be in full, deep retreat for the 5 months; no talking, moving slowly - everything I have hoped for since our last long retreat in New Zealand at the Wangapeka Retreat and Study Centre, approximately 3 years ago. Because of the busy-ness and the on-goings of the Dharma Centre, along with having so many people in retreat, it was apparent that I could assist Lama Mark in the ongoing day to day events to give him some more space for teaching and meditation interviews. So, with his request and my excitement, I began what I thought would be only 2 weeks of Feldenkrais classes ("until things quieted down at the Centre") that turned into the whole 5 months 😊



At the very least I can say this was hugely transforming for me physically and mentally. As well, I have a deeper appreciation for Moshe Feldenkrais; his brilliance in bringing together anatomy, function and learning. I am grateful to all those people who came to the classes and shared with me their enthusiasm for these movement explorations. I learned a lot from their enthusiasm! As well, I appreciated their patience while I discovered how to share Feldenkrais with them. Thankfully some people experienced relief from pain and meditation stiffness as well as a deepening of mindfulness.



Thankyou

I want to thank the board of the Dharma Centre, for their support and kindness! I hope the future of the Dharma Centre is full of abundance in retreats and meditation: that many people continue to utilize this great resource, that has not been stamped rigidly by a culture or tradition, but fully engaged and open to all traditions of contemplation and meditation!

And, I want to personally thank Lama Mark for all 5 months, for bringing together all these beings and sharing with us his mind. As well, thankyou for his kindness, love and support towards me and others who have felt that.

Epilogue

Often people refer to the problems of the Dharma Centre as "I wish they would take care of this problem" when in fact "they" is us; the people reading this letter, the people in retreat at the Dharma Centre are "they"-



the responsible beings, the ones who have inherited the Dharma Centre, as it is. We could love it, as it is, with all its quirks and quarks, its beauty and good meditative unfoldment, from the long 40 + years of history and step-up and support it financially, physically and meditatively.

Let's spend less time talking and gossiping about the Dharma Centre, teachers and Dharma jargon. Let's begin to live it, breathe it, without all the Dharma sayings and cliques --in's and out's-- , which separate people from what liberation is... I ask you what is liberation? Can you honestly answer that in one quick sentence or do you have to take a moment and reflect on what liberation is? Or look it up in a book? Or quote a Dharma Teacher? Pull out your notes? All through the

retreat Lama Mark called on us to come to definitive realization by full and deep explorations of experience and mind. Is liberation in the palm of your hand, in your breath or something done for 10 days here and there? I am calling you, all of you, come to the Dharma Centre and engage in long retreats, many of them. But, also explore and integrate the clear lucid mind into every activity of thought and non thought, action and non- action.

All the best wishes and thank you,

Jamie van Dam

*all images were taken at
the Dharma Centre of
Canada by Lama Mark
Webber and Jamie van Dam

