

# A Letter from Barbara Brodsky ~

## The founding teacher of Deep Spring Center updates us on the healing work she has been doing at the “John of God” community in Brazil

*(Barbara Brodsky is a teacher of Vipassana meditation, an author, a channel, an ordained Interfaith Minister, and the spiritual leader of the local Deep Spring community. She has been practicing meditation since 1960 and teaching since 1989. Her teaching draws from dual roots in the Buddhist and Quaker traditions. She became totally deaf in 1972; living with silence has greatly influenced her life and teaching. She last wrote about her adventures with the John of God community in the Fall 2007 edition (Issue #37) of the Crazy Wisdom Community Journal, which is available online at crazywisdom.net. The link is: <http://www.crazywisdom.net/interviewpdf/brodsky07.pdf>)*

Last year, I wrote about my trips to Casa de Dom Inácio<sup>1</sup> in Brazil, the Healing Center headed by João Teixeira de Faria, affectionately called John of God. João serves as a channel for approximately 31 different entities that incorporate into his body, one at a time, to do what often seems to be miraculous healing.

This spring I returned to the Casa for 5 weeks. Many people have asked me to tell about this latest trip. To begin, I also need to talk about my spiritual practice, which speaks to me of opening my heart to things just as they are. This understanding begins with awareness of both the conditioned realm in which we live our outer lives, and the Unconditioned or Divine realm that is the core of everything. By “conditioned,” I mean the everyday world where plants grow when seeds, soil, rain and sun are present, and where emotions come also as prompted by outer conditioning. By “Unconditioned,” I mean that which exists beyond everyday conditions, the eternal aspect of being.

These realms are not dual but exist simultaneously. Open your hand and look at the fingers waving in front of your eyes. Each finger is there; no doubt about it. Now look through the fingers at the vast spaciousness beyond. When you look in this way, the fingers don’t disappear, but they are no longer the center of awareness. In the same way, when we open to a greater awareness of what we are beyond this mind, body and emotions, those aspects of being don’t dissolve. We just see more deeply into the truth of what we are.

I learn about this through meditation. For me, the center of meditation is presence in each moment with kind, spacious awareness. My meditation practice asks me to open the heart to whatever is predominant in the moment’s experience, and to watch the movements of mind and body as they relate to that object. Are the heart and body open or clenched tight? Is there ease and joy or fear and need

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to control? We can’t choose what will arise in the next moment; sometimes it’s pleasant, sometimes not. Sometimes there is great pain of body or emotion. Only through full presence and kindness can we invite the heart to stay with such pain, and only in that presence is freedom to be found. This is the freedom not to react from old conditioning, not to invoke old patterns, but to allow the heart and deepest wisdom to join together in each moment with love.

Many strengths come together to support that moment of open-hearted clarity. We can train toward full presence, but may not be able to open the heart and trust enough to touch the most painful moments. We can never force it. There must be full intimacy and kindness as we attend to these impermanent, yet sometimes very painful, objects. The natural tendency of so many years, of lifetimes even, is to flee. What allows the fullest presence? When



“John of God” with Barbara Brodsky, in Brazil.

strong fear and negative thought come, what sustains us?

Returning to the fingers and the space between, the experience of that spaciousness supports opening. With each object that arises, I see the immense space that surrounds and accompanies the object. My teacher Aaron uses a metaphor here; he asks us to imagine sitting in a tiny box while he approaches with a tarantula, and points out how quickly we would leap out of the box. But imagine a much bigger box and we see the capacity to stay and observe the tarantula, even to befriend it. Eventually we come to know the infiniteness of that box, which is the Unconditioned or Divine itself, and learn to rest in the spaciousness of the Unconditioned with full intimacy with the conditioned objects that challenge us. The balance of heart and mind allow both full presence and non-self-identification. We attend not to fix but just to witness and hold the space until they dissolve. With fear, for example, that which is aware of fear is not afraid. We rest in fearlessness yet are able to be lovingly intimate with the everyday mind and body experience of fear.

It’s with this background and practice that I first came to the Casa de Dom Inácio in Brazil in January, 2004, with the hope that I might hear after 32 years of deafness, and with the invitation of whatever healing might be found in other areas of body, mind and spirit. My trips there have challenged me in many ways, and the spiritual practice has been there to support the work with these challenges. For that practice I am immensely grateful. On the first trip, Dr. Augusto, who is one of the Casa Entities speaking through João, said, “Possibly we can help.” The second trip he told me, “Probably.” Was there grasping? Yes, and letting go, again and again. The third trip another Entity who has been worked with me regularly, Dr. Valdivino, also said (speaking through João), “You will hear,” but this brought up new grasping and a quandary. If I will hear, what delays that hearing? Why is it not “Now”?

It was at this point that I finally began to investigate my beliefs in limitations and how I was living my life

in subservience to such beliefs. To believe I am limited, less than whole, unworthy, or otherwise incomplete leads me to enact such beliefs, to keep the scenario repeating. We stay in the rut, giving ever-increasing energy to holding things the way they are rather than glimpsing the reality of freedom from the situation. That which is aware of the rut is not caught in the rut, but when there is no awareness, all we see is the rut, from which we desperately try to escape. Yet we keep recreating the rut out of the belief that it has some ultimate reality. We can’t escape precisely because we can’t see that there never was a rut, except in our closed-minded belief. We become attached to the rut. It’s uncomfortable but familiar; true space may look even more uncomfortable.

When I hold a belief of myself as unworthy, for example, I begin to use my energy to prove myself worthy. I keep inviting situations in which I actually feel unworthy, and then repeat the impulse to prove I am

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worthy. I can’t prove I’m worthy without a situation that says I’m unworthy, so I keep the cycle going. I believe

I need the feeling of unworthiness in order to somehow, finally, prove I'm worthy. In some ways I'm attached to that feeling of unworthiness, painful though it is, and to the fight to overcome it. Similarly, if I have a belief that anger is bad and I must conquer it, I continually invite situations that provoke anger so I can try to destroy it. But here I am merely giving my energy to the anger. I never see and nurture the non-anger, but stay focused on trying to defeat the familiar enemy of anger.

Now I was faced with what seemed to be a reality, not just a belief, that I am deaf. These ears have not heard for 35 years. The nerves in the middle ear and those that conduct sound to the brain, have been medically declared dead. There is no response to any kind of impulse. Yet the Casa entities have said, "You will hear." My experience with them has led me to profound trust. If they say it, it will be so. I found myself believing the "You will hear," but that "will" means in the future; thus I cannot hear now. Here was a belief that it needs to happen in linear time,

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slowly. But if I will hear, I already do, as nothing can happen that is not already present. Just as non-anger is right there with anger, hearing is right there with non-hearing.

In confusion, I began to grasp at the healing I sought. I asked inwardly if I was unworthy of that healing, doing something wrong, or simply being rejected. I even went to João with Dr. Valdivino incorporated and asked if I was doing something to block healing. He said no, I was doing exactly what they asked, and doing it perfectly. Then why does it not happen?

I went through a very painful few hours, mind doing gymnastics, seeking a way out. But I am profoundly deaf, and mostly blind in one eye, and in this moment, that's how it is, no matter how much I want it to be different. Meditation gives me the tool to see the grasping without self-identification to the endless stories of, "Poor me" or "How can I fix it?" It is through infinite hours and days of this practice that one finally realizes the capacity to just stay present with pain and not try to get away. But that day I realized I wasn't fully present, but was still insulating myself with the concept of deafness and the work to heal.

No matter how many years I had lived with deafness, I had refused to let it touch me completely. Now I let myself fully experience deafness, and the sorrow I felt at how lack of ear-hearing cut out so much of the world for me. I cried for a few days, as I watched branches sway in the wind, saw bird mouths open and close in unheard voice, watched the soundless rain on my roof, and saw humans speaking, laughing and crying. As that experience deepened, some profound wisdom finally said, "That which is aware of deafness is not deaf. Instead of being deaf in that moment, can I simultaneously allow and invite that which hears?" In the days I asked this, two things happened.

Since I lost my hearing in 1972 I've had a visual balance. The delicate middle ear nerves that support balance were oxygen starved and destroyed. The past 3 years since I lost my right eye vision, lost binocular vision, my balance has been precarious. I could no longer walk at night without the support of 2 walking sticks. Even in daytime I frequently used the walking sticks, and found them necessary on an uneven surface. When I came to the Casa in January of this year, I walked from my pousada (inn) to the Casa with the walking sticks for support. In the second week, the Entity said to me, "Put them aside and walk without them." I feared I would fall. I was requested to walk and allow them to energetically support me. I would not fall. I walked and did feel their momentary support when balance went, holding me until I felt centered again. It felt like an energetic force field under the arms, just there enough that I had a moment of support to re-center myself and feel the true balance of the body. As I began to believe I could balance without the walking sticks, I started to trust my body's intuitive balance, which I have not relied on for 35 years. Within a week I was

doing something I have not done for over three decades, taking long, easy strides and walking in a sure-footed way.

At the end of one week of walking, I had a new invitation. "Rent a bicycle and ride it," the Entity suggested. With some trepidation I rented the bike, and promptly fell over trying to mount it. "That which is aware of imbalance is not unbalanced," Aaron reminded me. Find the balance right there with the lack of it. "Don't think, 'I will become balanced' but rather know, 'I am balanced.' Know the innate balance and trust it." I got up from the ground, swung my leg over the bike seat while allowing myself to feel the real balance, and rode off. For the remaining two weeks that bike went with me everywhere. I felt like an eight year old discovering the freedom of wheels again!

I was also rediscovering vision. The first day at the Casa this year I was sent to surgery. A week of recuperation flowed. My right eye vision deteriorated after surgery, which has been the case in the past two years also. There was only dark and light to be seen. Then the vision began to return and I was urged to work hard with the eye exercises I had been given last year and had done through the year. Again I was reminded, "Know that which can see and cherish it. Do not think yourself blind, but know the vision that is there." By the end of my stay, there was fair vision, blurred but without any blind spot, what I have thought of as a black hole. I was urged to close the good eye and walk, to depend on the right eye for seeing and to express gratitude to the eye for the real vision it was offering.

Looking back, I see that these two areas of healing were offered, not just to heal balance and vision though that was real, but also because I needed these demonstrations in order to trust the reality of hearing. In 2007 at the Casa I heard thunder for the first time in 35 years, yet I still believed that was all I could hear. This year as I sat in the current room, with my heart opened to the pain of the deafness yet with the real knowing, "That which is aware of deafness is not deaf," one of the entities asked me to relax and listen. "Your body has become an ear," they said. "You must learn how to hear with it." They play many different kinds of loud music in the current room. As I sat there that day, I began to hear tones and rhythm. It felt like music. I listened with this body-ear for about half an hour. When the meditation session ended, I asked someone sitting near me, was there music with this kind of rhythm and melody, humming what I had heard? "Yes; yes."

Through the weeks, I found myself turning repeatedly to face what seemed like loud sounds. Frequently they were confirmed as a truck rolled by, or I saw a person who had just set an object on a table. One day I was talking to a woman when the friend seated behind me laughed loud. She says I turned instantly and smiled at her. Did I hear it? It seems so. So finally I am beginning to intimately know the "deaf" of so many years relative reality, but also the "I hear," which is a greater reality. Not, "I will hear" but "I do hear, right now." No this is not yet hearing voices, yet it is real, and helps me move into this new reality. I am not a deaf person. I hear.

Aaron has repeated so often through the years, "That which is aware... is not self-identified with the experience of the moment, but can see it clearly with spaciousness, and still with intimacy with the relative experience of the human. The heart is open, yet not creating a self around that experience." For so many years I understood this conceptually, but had never truly gotten the full meaning. Now I see it! I could not have allowed what happened at the Casa this

year without this background, not the balance or the seeing or the hearing.

There is no duality. I rest in completion, in perfection, and yet with compassion for the human who does experience the limitations and distortions. When they arise, I know they are not the full reality.

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We can learn to rest in innate perfection, with the heart open to the experiences of this moment, and let them pass away. We release limits, and the belief in limits, and live the ultimate reality. We are here to express our divinity and perfection. There is no need to continue to express the illusions of limits, brokenness and fear. Rest in love and allow it ever more fully to express.

When distortion remains, we don't need to believe we're doing something wrong. That distortion may be the perfect place for us in this moment. So this isn't about some concept that says hearing is better or more right than not hearing. The body may not heal. Moving beyond limitations doesn't just mean moving past deafness; it may mean moving past the idea that hearing is needed. Both the hearing and deafness are part of this non-dual reality. However, I am no longer holding the distortion through fear. It will remain as long as it serves some good. My prayer is not to hear, but to serve, for the highest good. But the ever-healed that is already present will show itself. Fear no longer holds onto limits.

For more information see <http://www.friendsofthecasa.org/> and my own web site, <http://www.vipassana-healing.com/>

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