

Dear Friends,

Over the past several months, we've been in touch numerous times. Through online gatherings, in-person meetings, newsletter updates, and email exchanges, I have tried to share my understanding and experience of what has transpired within Dharma Ocean lately.

Our most recent group communication [linked with a letter](#) composed at the foundation's final Winter Meditation Intensive in Crestone, Colorado. Addressing all who were in attendance, this letter - among other things - affirmed my continued commitment to the work of somatic meditation. It offered some insight into my personal response to the dissolution of the organization that has held many of us for a long while.

With this present note, I hope to give you a sense of how this response has evolved since then. I hope to give you a sense of where I am today. To do this, I want to share a small amount of history.

My relationship with somatic meditation started in December 1999, when I took part in my first program with Reggie Ray. The roughly ten year span that followed this introduction was a whirl of exhilaration and discovery. The embodied teachings evolved quickly through these years. With our heads spinning in all directions, many of us asked with some frequency, 'What is this? What are we doing? Where is this all going?'

One could say my first decade with this work was characterized by coming to terms with these questions. These first years were marked by my beginning to understand that this was the lineage of somatic meditation. It was grounded in the teachings of Tibetan Buddhism and Chogyam Trungpa, certainly. At the same time, however, what I was taking part in articulated our human journey in a somewhat unique way.

The following decade was characterized by my deepening immersion in this uniqueness. Through this span, I stepped into the training infrastructure that had taken

shape in what was now known as Dharma Ocean. In doing so, I tried to become familiar with - tried to ingest, digest, and incorporate - all this lineage is. This was a conscious decision on my part. Again and again, I chose to surround myself ever more fully with the educational scaffolding that was on offer.

While these two stages of engagement differed from one another, they were also similar in numerous regards. The potency of the work has been transformative throughout. The developmental appropriateness of each stage has - in retrospect - proven stunningly apt. And my gratitude for these two facts truly runs deep.

As Dharma Ocean moves through its present process of dissolution, I've been reflecting on all this with some frequency. One of the more common questions that arises with these backward glances is, 'What's next?' What is the developmental stage that awaits? Where do these teachings and practices, where does my own path and unfolding want and need to go?

This contemplation has required I engage much of the training I've received these past twenty years. I have been challenged to stay close to the body through this process. Resting here, I've had to resist the temptation to judge and conclude. I have found myself needing to remain open within the soma, needing to allow experience to arise not as I hope and want, but on its own terms. And now I find myself asked to trust what is arising in this openness. I am being invited to let the inherent expressiveness of the body offer and be the answer to that inquiry.

So, what's next?

After spending ten years recognizing the container Reggie and Dharma Ocean offer, after ten years of immersing myself in this, it now seems time to step away. To be clear, I am not stepping away from the practice, study, and teaching of somatic meditation. What I am stepping away from is the specific training container - and the particular type of training container - that has supported me for so long.

Rather than recognizing and stepping into, I am now recognizing and stepping away from the teacher-centred, organizationally-framed approach that has so fruitfully guided me to this juncture. Perhaps more pointedly, I am stepping away from any such entity that might arise out of the Colorado-based Dharma Ocean Foundation's ashes. While I do not know if specific plans exist, should something like this appear I don't intend to take part.

This really seems the task - the developmental task - that most pressingly awaits at the moment, that is asking me to step in its direction. I have recognized and integrated the somatic teachings to the best of my ability, and will likely continue to do so for the rest of my life. I now add to this the challenge of personal exploration and responsibility. I now intend to let this work to fully collide with the realities of my own life, to discern what sparks ignite from this dynamic, and follow these wherever they lead.

What this will look like, I do not know. I do suspect a few things, however. First, this phase of exploration will continue to unfold the practitioner agency many of us have considered recently. Second, this phase will give attention to the inherent clarity, sensitivity, and communicativeness of the body - and to our willingness to trust how these qualities appear in our lives. Third, this phase of exploration will be something we, in many ways, undergo together. Through practice and study, classes, workshops, and retreats, emails and in-person exchanges, this 'what next' will take shape between us.

These past twenty years have offered a range of human experience I could never have imagined. The richness. The revelation. The sense of intimacy and connection. The difficulties and the delight. I look forward to allowing this third decade the opportunity to do something that is simultaneously similar and different. And I look forward to enjoying these next years with my peers and companions on the path, with all of you. I trust and hope you feel something similar.

With a humble bow,

Neil W. McKinlay

Victoria, British Columbia

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