

## **A Final Update**

One Saturday night not too long ago, I meditated. While this may not seem a radical gesture, in many respects it was. I sat down with no specific practice in mind, no intended duration. I sat down not in order to meet my daily practice commitment, which I had completed hours earlier. I sat down simply because I wanted to, because I happen to like the practice. And this - sitting down with no reason beyond personal enjoyment - is something I'd not done in a long while.

I was motivated to do this after having an email forwarded my way. I was moved in this direction after reading the words of an old friend who, like me, is now coming to terms with being a former student of Reggie Ray and past member of the Dharma Ocean community.

While the overt content of this message largely expressed my friend's feelings and insights as she moved through this process of 'coming to terms with', it was the covert content that encouraged me toward the cushion. What struck me about this level of her writing was her abiding love of practice. "I treasure meditation," she reported. And truly, her understanding of its importance in her life, her motivation to return to this work in times of difficulty, and her capacity to actually sit down and practice every morning "on the rocks by the river...as the sun rises" was affectingly evident.

So affectingly evident that I ended up following her lead that night. Inspired by her passion and devotion - by her obvious affection for this work - I put all other matters aside for a moment and sat down. In doing so, I was afforded an unexpected opportunity to reconnect with some of my own appreciation of these ancient practices.

The timing of this is interesting to me. It has now been one year since the series of events that lead me to reconsider my relationship with the spiritual community I long

considered home. Throughout the intervening months, I have hosted numerous Zoom calls, taken part in countless meetings, replied to hundreds of emails, and, of course, shared several personal updates here. The inspiration behind all this activity has been twofold: (1) to provide you some sense of what might have lead to the dissolution of Dharma Ocean and (2) to share my own personal experience of this dissolve and it's immediate aftermath.

Sitting in the dark that Saturday evening, following the breath as it moved in and out, slowly sinking a little more fully into the immediacy of this body, it occurred to me each of these inspirations has been appropriately met. This insight came without fanfare or any sense of declaration. It was much less adorned than this, much more matter of fact. After one year of ongoing effort, I have provided what needed to be provided, shared what needed to be shared. I am, as a result, ready to move on.

This does not mean I will no longer answer questions about what happened and/or about my own experience of this. Far from it. I remain willing to do this whenever it might arise. More, I remain certain such willingness is important for me - will, in fact, be important for all of us - as we move toward whatever comes next. This also does not mean I will stop looking back on my experience in Dharma Ocean in an effort to discern what was helpful from what was not. What this does mean, however, is that, baring a change of circumstance (which, as we all know, has been known to happen), this will be the sixth and final update I offer here.

You see, I really do like the practice of meditation. And the training I've received in this regard - received during a period of tutelage that spans twenty years - has been profoundly affecting. The end of lengthy relationships and fragmentation of a longstanding community, patterns of questionable behaviour and institutional dysfunction cannot alter this fact: much of the guidance I've been given these past two decades has been pretty darn good. It has opened up practice and opened up life in

ways I had never imagined. One of the things I long for now is the opportunity to immerse in and explore this vast body of instruction.

As I've said before, my apprenticeship with Reggie Ray was appropriately forward-looking in character. There was so much to discover and develop, ingest and incorporate that one eye was always on the horizon scanning for the next practice, the next program, the next step. With all of this now dissolved, I want to pause from moving forward and instead settle in for a while. I want to drop down into this work. I want to descend into the depths and mysteries of somatic practice, and see what lay waiting.

Many thanks to everyone for the role you've played in the extraordinary unfolding of this past year. Your presence and your inquiries, your suggestions and encouragements, and, yes, your confusion and frustration and pain have been a potent and essential part of what I've been through in this span. I hope my willingness to share some of this with you has been helpful in some way. I hope these updates and everything else have been of some sort of benefit.

What happens next, beyond the broadest of outlines sketched above, I really don't know. But then again, maybe I do. It's lunchtime here, so I'm going to fix some crackers and cheese. Afterward, I might sit for a moment before returning to work. There are emails to answer and a newsletter to ready. Dinner looms in the distance. So I guess this is what happens next, actually. As always, this...

With love and gratitude,

Neil W. McKinlay

Victoria, British Columbia

Unceded territory of the Lekwungen people

Monday October 5, 2020