



**THE MYSTICAL SYMBOLISM OF THE
GREEN PHOENIX:
HEALING, SELF-CULTIVATION, & AWAKENING**

A Talk for the Center for Sacred Sciences

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The original idea for the Green Phoenix Institute came to me in an inspiration that I had when my wife Hiromi and I were watching a documentary about Dorothy Day, the great humanitarian and radical Catholic nun who founded the Catholic Worker movement during the Great Depression (available at the CSS library). This inspiration occurred about six months before I discovered the property that we renovated to create this space, and about three months before I had a breakthrough in my spiritual practice that led to me being asked to teach for the Center. The name has many meanings for me and together they sum up what I hope to offer to the world. Fundamentally, my hope is that the Green Phoenix Institute will be a sacred space for healing, self-cultivation, and awakening. In my case, each of these elements – all fundamental aspects of our sacred human heritage – has been essential to my life. And each of these requires a time and place for us as human beings to experience – to connect to them. When I took on the job of remodeling this building, I felt – and still feel – that our community is in need of, and ready for, a temple, and traditionally a temple is a facility in which these three – healing, self-cultivation, and awakening – can transpire. A temple is the iconic and archetypal place to hold space and time for these practices, these elements of sacred life. I suppose it is due to our idealistic leanings that it came down to my family and me to manifest this space. But ultimately, that is just part of the dance of the one and the many. There is no separate me here to do anything, and in the course of events most of the work was and is done by others. This body-mind held the intention, however, and so I felt – when Joel asked me to begin giving talks for the Center – that I should first speak about the motivation and intention behind the Green Phoenix Institute.

My healing practice is my occupation, my livelihood, but also an important part of my spiritual practice. However, equally essential to my path are the practices of life cultivation and physical-

energetic training that culminated in my study and teaching of the Hunyuan Taiji system. And finally, the teachings of Joel and the Center for Sacred Sciences were what ultimately resolved for me the great matter of life and death, and are the most direct teachings that I hope to sustain for the world. In my life, each of these elements – these teachings and practices – played and still play an essential role. The symbol of the Green Phoenix speaks to each of these three, and to beyond them to the mystery at the source of all life.

Historically at the Center, the first two of these three elements – healing, self-cultivation, and awakening – are not an emphasized part of the curriculum. However, I think they are important and in actuality, derive from the teachings of the mystics as studied and taught at the Center. The goal, then, of this talk is to describe how this is so and in so doing to establish the underlying unity that I feel is at the heart of what you can call the mission or intention of the Green Phoenix Institute. And furthermore, I will establish that these disparate elements actually form aspects of the path that culminates in awakening – nondual realization – and the universal goal of eternal peace and happiness.

This demonstration, that healing and self-cultivation are or can be an important part of the spiritual path for many people, is actually not at all new. These disciplines have roots as old as humanity itself. As for healing, the intention to heal is in essence the compassionate response to suffering, to *dis-ease*, to imbalance. All spiritual traditions teach us about the importance of compassionate action. Perhaps the most famous example of this is the Buddhist Bodhisattva vow. Doctor Wolff, our spiritual great-grandfather, worded it this way:

“Never will I seek nor receive private individual salvation.

Never will I enter into the final peace alone;

but forever and everywhere will I live and strive
for the redemption of every creature throughout the world.”

This vow is at the heart of Mahayana Buddhism. And the compassionate intention it describes is at the heart of all spiritual traditions. In reality, compassion is the foundation of the manifest universe and therefore, of human life as well. Truly, the art of healing is as old as child-rearing! As Joel likes to say, compassion and wisdom or Love and Truth are the two wings of the bird of Ultimate Reality of Selflessness.

In the context of the spiritual path, there are two sides to the equation created by the movement of compassion through healing or loving service. These are the “I” and the “thou”, or the lover and the loved. We will be looking into both these sides of the healing relationship. First, how providing healing or loving service to others can be a vehicle for one’s own spiritual practice, specifically the practice of compassion, and how this movement to help others is actually the natural manifestation of the love that comprises the core of our being. And second, how from the perspective of the patient or recipient in a healing or service relationship, through healing or receiving loving service we come into contact with previously hidden dimensions of ourselves – primarily stored emotional and somatic resistances – and by accepting and integrating these aspects we begin to transform our lives. Undergoing healing, in other words, can expose us to hidden dimensions of our being that ultimately need to be integrated in order for further spiritual progress to be attained, and this process too, is motivated and facilitated by love or wisdom-in-action.

As for self-cultivation, in a broader sense all mystical paths speak about the journey of the self back to God or the ultimate reality, and this is the most essential meaning of the term “Self-

cultivation” – with a capital “S,” so-to-speak. However, we can draw a distinction between *awakening* to ultimate reality itself – which only occurs to nobody, outside of space and time – and self-cultivation, which consists of practices done by a person in space and time. Self-cultivation in this personal sense entails the deeper integration of hidden elements of our lives as conscious beings, again including un-examined somatic and emotional patterns, but also thought patterns that feed these denser patterns and in turn feed off them. And more specifically, we will examine the universality of the physical-energetic practices like those here at the Green Phoenix Taiji Academy, by discussing the similarity between Taoist and Hindu theories of spiritual development. We will see that both have very established systems for integrated development of the physical, emotional, and mental bodies as precursors to the higher practices that culminate in awakening. And furthermore, that these gradated systems are right in line with the Center’s teachings.

Thirdly, is the element or theme of awakening that the Center for Sacred Sciences so elegantly emphasizes in its curriculum, thanks to Joel’s 25 years of work. It has already been established by the Center that awakening or *gnosis* is both a universal concept in humanity’s heritage, and more importantly, a universal experience of those mystics of the human race who have gone beyond the apparent limitations of separate existence. And just as universal, we will see, is the theme of death and rebirth, which is allegorically exemplified by the myth of the phoenix. We all know what a phoenix is, but let’s remember that, as Wikipedia says:

“A phoenix is a mythical bird that is a fire spirit with a colorful plumage and a tail of gold and scarlet (or purple, blue, and green according to some legends). It has a 500 to 1000 year life-cycle, near the end of which it builds itself a nest of twigs that then

ignites; both nest and bird burn fiercely and are reduced to ashes, from which a new, young phoenix or phoenix egg arises, reborn anew to live again.”

The phoenix represents both the cyclical nature of time and the permanence of what we could call spirit or consciousness – the nature of ultimate reality. However, in order for this permanence to be displayed, death must be thorough: the Phoenix is completely reduced to ashes before it rises again. So the Phoenix represents the immortality or absolute freedom attainable through the process death and rebirth. In the *Dao De Jing* it is written:

“He who stays where he is endures.

To die but not to perish is to be eternally present.” (TTC ch. 33)

Interestingly, the Phoenix is a cross-cultural symbol and can be found in the mythologies of the ancient cultures of the Persians, Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, Chinese, Korean, Japanese and – of course – the Phoenicians. In the Hindu and Buddhist traditions of India and Tibet the Garuda is a similar symbol. In Buddhist Dzogchen, the natural state of enlightened mind is likened to a Garuda soaring through the sky – a universal metaphor for Heaven – without leaving a trace behind. Many indigenous cultures also have myths about birds that communicate something of the divine to humanity. In short, what we could call a *spirit bird* is an ancient and universal symbol of freedom. I believe that this is the reason for the universal appeal of the phoenix as a symbol, and this is why I feel it is an appropriate representation for Ultimate Reality.

I would like to mention one other correspondence before we begin our deeper examination of these themes today. Both terms *green* and *phoenix* speak to the concept of renewal. And the theme of renewal in a societal context alludes to the final aspect of my vision of the Green Phoenix Institute: as a place that will help foster a contemporary cultural renewal of mystical

spiritual practice and attainment. My greatest desire is that this place will serve as a space for authentic spiritual practice that rests upon both the gradual work of self-cultivation and compassionate service, and most importantly upon the direct realization of inner peace beyond duality and change.

This vision of a contemporary cultural movement also expresses the Center's goal of fostering a new worldview in which scientific observations and spiritual truths can be seen as complementary modes of expressing a single underlying nondual reality. For without an understanding of the sacred core of life penetrating to the wider social and cultural levels, this discussion will remain in the realm of academic elaboration and meditative retreat. In the realm of compassionate action, self-cultivation, and ultimately the awakening to mystical understanding, all of us have the opportunity to co-create the manifestation of this new worldview as a contemporary renewal of the ancient sacred societies. In this sense, the Green Phoenix is us all, being reborn collectively and co-consciously from amongst those unwilling to tolerate either the prejudice of scientific reductionism or the blind views of fundamentalist religious observation. Our culture is on the verge of birthing this new worldview, and I feel that it will be in modern temples such as the Green Phoenix Institute and through organizations such as the Center for Sacred Sciences that this child of the future sacred culture will be incubated and delivered.

The term Green Phoenix is a good one because the symbolism speaks to us on many deep levels and stands for principles that are worth aspiring to. It is my hope that after examining these deeper meanings of the symbol of the Green Phoenix, you will all find it to be an agreeable and pertinent representation of some of our higher aspirations as spiritual practitioners.

In order to examine these themes in the traditional literature more closely, let's start with the first half of symbol of the "Green Phoenix". The term *green* has several important connotations associated with what we're speaking about here. Green means vigorous, it is the color of growth and new life, and is associated with sustainability. It is esoterically associated with healing and the aspect of self-cultivation that nurtures the energy of life, or the body's subtle energy. But it also has a more noble association. In the Hindu chakra system, green is the color of the Heart chakra, which is the center of love, the essence of embodied spirituality. According to Anodea Judith, in her "Wheels of Life: A User's Guide to the Chakra System," the heart chakra is:

"...our spiritual center, our core, the place that unites forces from above and below, within and without. The task of chakra four is to integrate and balance the various aspects of our being. In so doing, it brings a radiant sense of wholeness to the entire organism, an acceptance of the exquisite interpenetration of both spirit and matter. Within this sense of wholeness lie the seeds of inner peace. The heart chakra is the center of love." (Judith, Anodea; *Wheels of Life*; p. 192)

The Chinese name for the Green Phoenix Institute is *qīng fèng xué yuàn* (青鳳學院) and "*qīng*" means green-blue, which represents the color of nature (forests, rivers, and the ocean are all considered *qīng*). From the perspective of traditional Chinese Medicine, health is defined as *balanced movement* and the color green is associated with the Liver whose job is not only to store blood but also to promote the smooth and balanced movement of subtle energy – the life force – throughout the body.

From the perspective of ecological sustainability, human society must move towards balance if we are to survive on this planet. Green building, green agriculture, and green living all derive from this concept. And from the perspective of spiritual practice, we must find balance and love within ourselves to manifest the eternal light of our divine nature. The color green, therefore, represents the movement towards balance through love. *This* is the essence of the healer's intention and motivation as well as the necessary precedent for both global harmony and individual enlightenment.

Green is the merger of the heavenly color of blue and the earthly color of yellow. It is the meeting point – the intersection – between the worldly and the spiritual. It is the common core of all human hearts and of all life. It represents both the intention to heal, to nurture, to teach, and the inherent balance within us all. It is the manifestation of our True Being as Love. As we mentioned, Love is one of the two wings of the great bird of Reality, the other being Truth. Truth is the eternity of our real nature; love is the infinite interconnectedness that arises from that eternity:

Rumi writes: "The creatures are set in motion by Love, Love by Eternity-without-beginning; the wind dances because of the spheres, the trees because of the wind."

So clearly Love is the aspect of creation that moves. In our spiritual cultivation we need to align ourselves with this love, this compassion in movement, in action. As an acupuncturist, my primary intention is to find the core of love and balance within myself and to – as skillfully as I know how – attempt to bring my clients into that same balance. This is distinct from conventional pharmaceutical medicine, in which illness is not seen within the context of a holistic system that is in disharmony but rather as a foreign substance or enemy symptom to be

eradicated or veiled through chemical intervention. It is also distinct from surgical approaches which emphasize the changes possible through artificially cutting and splicing. Rather, in healing we are working with the breath of life itself, that underlying current of love that is the intersection between spirit and matter, and attempting to remove subtle blockages to the inherently healing force of our source as embodied spiritual beings. Once the core movement of love is summoned, it does all the work. The real role of the healer is to hold the space of compassionate balance. This is only possible if the healer has found balance within him or herself, and this brings us to our second theme, that of self-cultivation.

Self-cultivation is work that is done to improve our character – our virtue – and to make ourselves receptive to insight into ultimate reality and awaken to our true nature. This need for cultivation applies across the spectrum of our experience as human beings – in the physical, emotional, and mental fields. Essentially, we strive to reduce and eliminate negative and harmful tendencies and to produce and strengthen positive ones. In Truth the manifestation of the cosmos is always in perfect balance, and what spiritual self-cultivation requires is that we cultivate an interior balance to correspond with universal law. By interior balance we mean here a steadfast and even quality of mental, emotional, and physical habits. Only in being internally calm and balanced can we hope to align with the deepest level of reality. And since the universe is at base selfless, devoid of separate, individual existence, this also means that we must cultivate selfless love and compassion as the root of this balance we seek to express. Compassion towards others is absolutely essential for this process, but so is a compassionate and nurturing attitude towards ourselves. We must strive for internal balance, be just and kind

to others *and* to our own bodies and minds, and treat ourselves and the entire manifest universe with the stewardship deserved by aspects of the Divine.

In the context of Daoist practice, which is the source for the energetic practices of the Hunyuan Taiji system that I teach here at our Green Phoenix Taiji Academy, this path of self-cultivation is metaphorically compared to alchemy: the process of refining a gross and temporal substance into a finer and immortal one. The classical description of this is: “Refine the sexual essence into subtle energy, and subtle energy into consciousness; then consciousness returns to emptiness and emptiness returns to the Dao – the mysterious source of All *and* the All itself.” (Matt’s interpretation) The Daoist tradition stresses that only through temperate living and a balanced emotional and mental life can this process of refining and returning be undertaken. Of course the definition of temperance is a personal one, and the essential point is that we strive for balance in order to recognize the balance that is always here, but how can we hope to manifest the purity of Truth if we don’t strive for goodness!

There are a lot of important points and teachings contained within this concept of refining and returning. However, there are two primary contrasting aspects that deserve our attention in this discussion. The concept of returning to the source on the surface seems very linear: “this then this then this and then you’re home.” But contained within it is the truth that at the end you arrive at the beginning again. The very Dao that is reached through this process of refining, through self-cultivation, is the source of *all*, including the journey itself. The linear or temporal and the circular or eternal are two aspects of the same mystery. In the Dao De Jing it says:

The movement of the Dao is to return. (DDJ)

It doesn't stop at emptiness: it continues to the Dao which is beyond both form and emptiness, and contains both. So ultimately this process of refining returns us to a source that is outside of time yet is simultaneously the seed of time. We will talk about this more later, but it is important to understand where we are going before we talk about how to get there.

Despite the reality that perfection is always present, in the context of self-cultivation you can't just sit on your hands and say, "I know that I'm already there so why bother." Because as Joel says, if you are not practicing selflessness then you are practicing delusion. So you're stuck, you have to do something! What to do is the question.

So let's look at two other systems of doing, of linear cultivation: the Hindu model as espoused by Patanjali's 8-limbed (ashtanga) Yoga system and Joel's model of the Seven Stages of the Spiritual Path.

In the first, the 8-limbs of yoga (which, by the way, means "Union with the Divine") are:

- 1) Five Moral Vows
- 2) Five Spiritual Observances
- 3) Asanas – physical disciplines to strengthen the body's health
- 4) Pranayama – breath control
- 5) Renunciation of external sense objects
- 6) One-pointed concentration
- 7) Steady Meditation
- 8) Samadhi or union with the object of meditation.

This last culminates in awakening, though there are still arguments between dualists and non-dualists in India about exactly what this means. For our purposes at the Center we side with the

non-dualists, especially as espoused by the great Hindu sage Ramana Maharshi. He explains that the highest samadhi is called “sahaja nirvikalpa samadhi.” We could define this highest stage of spiritual cultivation as natural effortless abiding in the ultimate reality of selflessness or nonduality. He says:

“Those that are in the kevala nirvikalpa state are not realized, they are still seekers. Those who are in the sahaja nirvikalpa state are like a light in a windless place, or the ocean without waves; that is, there is no movement in them. They cannot find anything which is different from themselves. For those who do not reach that state, everything appears to be different from themselves.” (Goldman, David. *Be As You Are*.)

In any case, these 8 limbs can be viewed similarly to the Daoist model, as a progressive unfoldment of an aspirant’s path that culminates in merging with the Dao, also known as attaining enlightenment, which as we have mentioned is recognition of the timeless and non-dual nature of reality that precedes any activity, even the activity of spiritual seeking. More on this later but let’s now continue our examination of these gradated paths of self-cultivation.

Joel’s model of the seven stages of the spiritual path goes thusly:

1. Awakening of faith
2. Investigation of teachings
3. Unification of self
4. Purification of mind
5. Illumination of heart
6. Exhaustion of will (Kenosis)
7. Sacrifice of Ignorance (Gnosis)

As we can see, his description of the path also ends with awakening or enlightenment which at the Center we call *gnosis*. However, for our current purposes let's examine some other similarities. In the Daoist model the sexual energy is refined into subtle energy, or the energy of life. This is accomplished through the practice of special breathing methods, physical postures and movements, and the power of attention. This is well known within the tradition to be the method for healing disease, prolonging life, and forming the foundation for meditative stability. In the Hindu model in the third level of practice we have the asanas or physical practices and in the fourth level we have breath control. And the purpose is essentially the same as in Daoist practice: In both traditions these practices heal the body, eliminate negative emotional and mental tendencies – essentially reducing bad habits and promoting good habits – and in this way form the foundation for higher meditative practices. Clearly the Hindu and Taoist traditions are very similar in this respect. However, in similar strata of Joel's developmental scheme – at the third and fourth place – we have what he calls Unification of Self and Purification of Mind.

I take Unification of Self to mean that before we can purify ourselves we must cease our scattered behavior and focus upon our chief purpose, namely spiritual practice and ultimately liberation. This can mean different things for different people but at the base it requires discipline and focus. Only through ceasing behavior that scatters our vital energy and attention can we hope to acquire the degree of intensity needed to pursue and succeed at the supreme goal of spiritual liberation.

St. Augustine writes:

“They strive to comprehend things eternal, whilst their heart fluttereth between the motions of things past and to come, and is still unstable. Who shall hold it, and fix it, that it be settled awhile, and awhile catch the glory of that ever-fixed eternity.”

In order to cultivate a stable heart to behold eternity we need to first cultivate the virtues such as discipline, patience, and fortitude. How otherwise can we possibly hope to find the inner resolve to face reality with all of our attention! And these are exactly the types of qualities that are engendered through the practice of physical disciplines such as the Daoist internal cultivation methods or the Hindu hatha yoga (postures) and pranayama (breath control).

With regard to Joel’s fourth stage of Purification of Mind, we must take it in a broader sense to completely understand this aspect of the spiritual path. The mind and body are not separate. Thoughts always pertain to the experience of embodied life or its abstractions, and emotions themselves are rooted in the sensations of embodiment. The total experience of being a human being is that of possession of a body-mind and all its qualities: intellectual, emotional, tactile, and so on. So if I were to rewrite Joel’s stages I would call stage four the Purification of the Body-Mind or what philosopher Ken Wilber calls the Centaur level of consciousness. In that light, it is easy to see how Daoist practices and Patanjali’s yoga are in line with Joel’s stages, and vice-versa. Because this is exactly what happens when we practice qigong or pranayama: gradually over time, the thinking mind slows down, emotions are moderated, health is recovered, and the qi or subtle energy is harnessed. The body and mind thus become *purified*. And as we can see this is recognized in the traditions as a *prerequisite* for higher contemplation: concentration, meditation, and Samadhi; or, as the Daoists put it: refining subtle energy to consciousness (qi into spirit) and returning consciousness to the void (or spirit to emptiness).

Only then can we attain Gnosis, return to the Dao, and penetrate to the highest yogic cognition of Sahaja Nirvikalpa Samadhi.

So from the graduated or linear perspective of the spiritual path of self-cultivation, two things have become clear. First, although we realize that our goal is transcendence of the sense of a separate body and mind, before we can accomplish this the mind must become balanced and harmonious. And second, this goal can be supported by the promotion of health through physical and breathing practices which tend to heal the body and promote a calm and settled emotional life.

The result of self-cultivation at this level then is a healthy body, stable emotions, and a balanced mind that is capable of sustaining higher levels of cognition through more advanced practices, namely those of concentration and insight – or choiceless awareness as we call it at the Center. Moreover, it is from the experience of emotional balance that we can be of service to others. In respect to the qualities of healing as expressed in the term *green* of the Green Phoenix, we have seen that crucial to the spiritual path is not only compassionate support of others, but also of ourselves – our own body and mind. For, as I mentioned, both aspects are essential: in supporting others, in acts of compassion, I align with the Reality of Love, *and* in supporting myself – in self-cultivation – I form the foundation of internal balance that stabilizes me enough to be of support to others!

And lastly, In Joel's Seven Stages model, after unification and purification we have stage five: Illumination of Heart. Being of compassionate service to others is one way to directly promote this illumination, this opening to love, but before I can love others I must overcome the

obstacles to love within myself. This is because in Truth I am not separate from others. We are the same.

So this, then, is the essence of the Greenness of the Phoenix: in healing and self-cultivation I come into accord with the love that is the essence of creation by being of service to others and by finding internal balance. This balanced compassion has its root in the acceptance of physicality, of the embodied state, as we realize that love is actually the meeting point between the heavenly and physical dimensions of life – the center, the heart. It is our eternal being incarnate.

Yet we can become stuck there, and fail to realize the perfect bliss that is our true nature, if we do not recognize the eternity behind and beyond all finite experiences of self and world. If we do not go beyond ourselves in self-cultivation and actually attain the highest goal of gnosis itself, then our service, our loving work and our work on ourselves will *never* lead to abiding happiness. Actually, it is in *failing* to find abiding happiness through our efforts at cultivation and loving others that we arrive at the precipice of eternity. But if we haven't fully committed ourselves then we will have a way out. We will continue – however subtly – to believe in the separation between ourselves as healers, as lovers, and others as those we help, as those we love. In fully committed ourselves to cultivation in service of others we come to the realization that it is our own sense of self that prevents us from truly actualizing our intention to be of service. Because, as the mystics all testify, *we are not separate*. There truly is no difference between us and them. Yet holding onto the heart as center inevitably evokes the concept of periphery – the sense of self denotes an external other, and *this brings with it the fear of death*. In the ancient Zen text, *The Ceasing of Notions*, the student asks his teacher:

“What is called the heart? And how is the heart pacified?’ *The master answered: ‘You should not assume a heart. Then there is no need to pacify it. That is called pacifying the heart.’* (p. 4.)

Our ultimate problem is that we all assume a heart. We assume a center, a self, an identity. It is our most closely guarded and dearly held delusion. It is the root of all of our suffering. And only if we face our own nonexistence, our very own death, will we be free of this root misunderstanding about Reality. So this brings us to the third and core element of the Green Phoenix – to the heart of the heart, so to speak – and to the Phoenix itself.

As we have discussed, the Phoenix dies and is reborn anew in an endless cycle. Because of this, it is immortal. Death and immortality are themes running throughout mystical literature. In order to awaken to our inherent immortality as consciousness-itself, we must die to our sense of self, of separateness. The Sufis famously say, “Die before you die” and Rumi writes:

“The mystery of “Die before death” is this: After dying come the spoils.
Other than dying no other skill avails with God, oh worker of deception!”
(*Sufi Path of Love*, p. 183)

Similarly, the *Yuan Dao* (which translates as “Original Way”), an ancient Daoist classic, says this about the sage:

“There is nothing one finds enjoyment in; there is nothing one finds hardship in.
The myriad things merge in mysterious unity: without right or wrong.
In a bedazzling transformation, life is like death.” (p. 125)

And finally the Hindu sage Sri Muraganar, a disciple of Ramana Maharshi, in *The Garland of Guru's Sayings*, writes poetically:

Mortals with forgetful minds
Are born to die and die to be
Reborn. But those who minds have died
Into true Being Supreme abide
There high above both birth and death (stz. 1122, p. 114)

So clearly the mystery of death is at the heart of mysticism. This is because as long as we feel existentially separate from the universe and other living beings, we are subject to the miseries of relative existence, in time and space. This is why healing, why health, and why self-cultivation, as long as there is a sense of self, will never lead to lasting happiness. These are merely methods to expose ourselves to reality, to open us up to the opportunity for liberation. By gradually integrating aspects of our character and the hidden somatic, emotional, and mental patterns that underlie our experience of being a separate self we till the soil in preparation for the ultimate integration – the integration of self and world. However, this integration is not a change from one substance to another, nor is it an improvement or distillation of some inherently existent quality of being. Rather, this ultimate integration is a discovery or recognition of the One Substance that underlies all experience of self and other, of unity and multiplicity. It is the recognition of our true existence as consciousness, itself. It is also why there is no one path of healing or self-cultivation that is suitable to all seekers. Each must reach their spiritual demise in their own way.

Shankara, in his *Crest-Jewel of Discrimination*, writes:

“Selfless work and charitable acts help to purify the mind but they do not, by themselves, contribute to the perception of Reality. The discovery of the Self (capital “S”) is brought about only by discriminative analysis and never by any number of actions.”

(Talks on Sankara’s Vivekachoodamani, p. 19)

By “discriminative analysis”, Shankara is referring to insight into reality based upon direct examination of experience. Only through such direct insight is truth accessible to us, not through any activity. Because no matter how compassionate our intentions, actions in the plane of relativity *always* only yield relative results, and these are *by their very nature* impermanent! For what has a cause always has an effect and in this way passes away so that the new may arise. Only change follows change within the realm of parts and partialities. Actually, in truth, all of these changes we perceive are only apparent and have no real existence; they themselves are selfless, empty. So if we are attached to the results of our roles as teachers or healers, students or patients, or to the effects of our efforts at unification of self or purification of mind and body, we will become stuck in dualism and we will fail to attain to the permanent peace outside of all circumstances. This is why the Buddha, in *The Diamond Sutra*, says this about what in Sanskrit are called “samskritis”, or things composed of causes and conditions:

“All composite things are like a dream, a phantasm, a bubble, and a shadow, are like a dew-drop and a flash of lightening; they are thus to be regarded.”

(Suzuki, D.T., Manual of Zen Buddhism, p. 50)

And so only in relinquishing attachment to all experience and dying to ourselves can we achieve supreme happiness and lasting peace. This peace is immovable and eternal – it is beyond all created things. We die and are reborn immortal. Literally we realize that in truth we are

incapable of undergoing any harm. As Sri Muraganar says, we have gone beyond life and death.

This is why in the Dzogchen tradition Jigme Lingpa writes:

“Here the all-penetrating essence of gnosis, an immovable steadiness that is free from the cognitive obscuration of conceptual analysis, is itself the very heart of meditation, or innate mindful awareness. Although the dynamic energy of thoughts and emotions moves as usual, analytical perception is purified. Because of this, in the state of relaxed, non-intellectual, naked gnosis without a place or agent of arising, [the yogin (the spiritual practitioner)] holds the secure place of the king, the unchanging dharmakaya (the absolute Reality). This is the meaning behind the words, ‘thoughts and emotions not causing any harm.’” (Schaik, Sam Van, *Approaching the Great Perfection*, p.215, being a translation of the Longchen Nyingtig text entitled: *The Secret Discourse of the Happy Awareness Holder and Dakinis – A Hammer for the Worldly Systems of Speculation – The Instructions That Place the Essentials in the Palm of Your Hand – The Revelation Song of Joyful Vajrapani – A Sprinkling of the Nectar-like Words of the Omniscient One* by Jigme Lingpa)

And this is why in the Zen Tradition, in Yoka Daishi’s “Song of Enlightenment,” he states:

“I know that birth-and-death is not the thing I have to be concerned with.

For walking is Zen, sitting is Zen,

Whether talking or remaining silent, whether moving or standing quiet,
the Essence itself is ever at ease;

Even when greeted with swords and spears it never loses its quiet way,

So with poisonous drugs, they fail to perturb its serenity.” (Suzuki, D.T., *Manual of Zen Buddhism*, pp. 93-94)

Yet despite the discovery of the inherent stillness and serenity of ultimate reality, we do not become catatonic. Movement continues to arise. Simultaneous with the immovable equanimity of liberation, the natural responsiveness of awakened consciousness continues to promote happiness and the alleviation of sorrow. The nature of ultimate reality is that it forever pours forth out of itself. Despite having died and been reborn immortal, the Phoenix is still Green! In the human world, this is called love. In the *Ceasing of Notions*, the master says:

“The transformation body responds fully and without thinking to the true voidness. Benevolence towards beings is free of any intention and springs from an empty heart. If forced to give it a name, it is called compassion.” (p. 132)

And, similarly, in the Tao Te Ching it is written about the Tao:

The myriad creatures rise from it yet it claims no authority;

It gives them life yet claims no possessions;

It benefits them yet exacts no gratitude;

It accomplishes its tasks yet lays claim to no merit.

It is because it lays claim to no merit

That its merit never deserts it. (Tao II:7-7a p 58)

Because, as we saw earlier, the essence of the green heart chakra is that it is the merger between the earth below and heaven above. This is the intersection of the absolute reality of intrinsic emptiness with the relative experience of a body and mind within a world. So naturally, after delusion has ended, the Heart shines with the non-conceptual knowledge of unity, and love and compassion arise naturally in response to suffering. The only difference is that before delusion ended the motivation – if the person was on a mystical spiritual path – was the

attainment of the goal of liberation or abiding peace. After liberation there is no motivation, just natural responsiveness. As the master in the *Ceasing of Notions* states: *“The transformation body responds fully and without thinking... Benevolence towards beings is free of any intention and springs from an empty heart.”*

Because only if the heart is completely emptied of attachment to all notions, all emotions, and all sense of self and world, can it truly be filled with the wisdom of the Infinite and the peace of the Eternal. Only in the complete dying of the self, of the holding to a center, can Absolute Balance be attained. Self-cultivation in its truest sense, as we have mentioned, is the cultivation of the capital “S” self, which is identical with the Self in all beings, the foundation and essence of the entire exterior and interior universe. And the culmination of compassionate intention is the attainment of the transcendent Love that sees no separation, no intrinsic difference between myself and all others. Because in Truth, all forms, all identities, rest upon the changeless ground of unmanifest voidness. In the Tibetan Buddhist Dzogchen tradition this nonduality of form and emptiness – of Love and Truth – is known as the Primordial State. The great Tibetan mystic Longchenpa writes:

“The true nature of all phenomena in their entirety – the universe of appearances and possibilities, whether of samsara or nirvana – is the primordial state. Since it does not stray from naturally occurring timeless awareness itself, understand it to be enlightened intent, with everything at rest in the ground of being.” (*Basic Space of Phenomena*, p. 97)

So the Phoenix is green because compassionate responsiveness – Love – is the manifest nature of the ultimate reality – the Truth – of nonduality. Love and Truth are the two wings of the bird of Selflessness.

In conclusion, I would like to summarize what I discussed today. My view for the Green Phoenix Institute from the beginning was for it to be a temple, a sacred space, in which the practices and teachings of healing, self-cultivation, and awakening could be transmitted. The symbolism of the Green Phoenix came as an inspiration, and carries many significant and perennial meanings.

As we discovered, green is the color of new life, of healing, and of the Heart Chakra which manifests love and compassion. Furthermore, healing is fostered by aligning ourselves through internal balance with the love that is at the core of our being. Self-cultivation is the process of refining our body and mind in preparation for nondual realization, and is also necessary to achieve the expression of inherent balance needed to be of compassionate assistance to others.

The Phoenix is an archetypal symbol of death, rebirth and immortality. Awakening to the Truth of our immortal nature requires, as with the myth of the phoenix, a dying to our separate sense of self. This death is then the final dying that takes us beyond the cycle of birth and death altogether and into the realm of Truth and the unchanging reality of the Primordial State. From this realm of Reality, the Heart manifests love without any inclination, motivation or intention, but simply as the natural responsiveness of reality-to-itself, free of any contrivance or resistance. Compassion is thus the natural expression of Truth. Form and Emptiness are not other than the single sphere of reality. Love and death are two sides of the same coin. And this direct understanding is the goal of the great path of return to the eternal mystery and the deepest meaning of life. For as Rumi writes:

“You died, and your vision turned to the world of the spirit.

When you came alive again, then you knew how to live.

Whoever dies and returns – like the prophet Idris –

gives instruction to the angels

and has knowledge of unseen things.

Come, tell me: By which road did you leave the world?

And from that side – by which road did you come?

For indeed, that road is hidden.

(*The Sufi Path of Love*, p. 184)

And this hidden road, this *Dao that cannot be spoken*, takes us both beyond ourselves altogether and simultaneously right back to ourselves, to where we began, to where all things begin, to the Beginning. And in living this truth we find the “peace that passeth all understanding” to be our very own natural state. (St. Paul speaking; Philippians 4:7.) The venerable Longchenpa says:

“No matter what arises, even if heaven and earth change places, there is a bare state of relaxed openness, without any basis.

Without any reference point – nebulous, ephemeral, and evanescent – this is the mode of a lunatic, free of the duality of hope and fear.

With unbiased view and meditation, ordinary consciousness that is caught up in reification collapses.

Without the entanglements of wishful thinking, there is no ‘thing’ to strive for or achieve.”

May everyone attain to this carefree lunacy, free from all striving.

Thank you for your attention. Are there any questions?