In This Issue:

Our Spring 2013 Workshop
SAF President’s Message
by Richard Lowe
Conversation with Ruth Denison
by Stefan Laeng Gilliatt
Buddhism and Sensory Awareness
By Michael M. Topoff
A Rich Past. . . an Inspiring Legacy
On Buddhism and Sensory Awareness:
by Charlotte Selver and Charles Brooks
Sensory Awareness News

Help Support the Future of Sensory Awareness
Your membership begins when your dues are received and continues one year from then. If you have not yet renewed please do so now. Memberships and donations help the SAF continue in its efforts to promote this valuable practice through its publications, website, support of leaders, workshops and more.

www.sensoryawareness.org

OUR SPRING WORKSHOP

Our annual SAF workshop at Vallombrosa Retreat Center in Menlo Park, California was a joyous occasion and a time of renewal with many folks returning from last year plus a few first timers. The weather was pleasantly warm with a few sessions held outside on the beautiful grounds which only seemed to enrich everyone's experience.

As in recent years these weekend workshops are preceded by a Leaders’ Guild Conference in which leaders come to deepen their connection and share in mutual support. This year each leader had an opportunity to lead their colleagues in sensing sessions. Eighteen leaders attended, and all seemed positive and enthusiastic about how the conference went. This success seemed due in part to Lee Klinger Lesser’s skillfulness as group facilitator and by the camaraderie developed by everyone sharing in leading.

In addition to the usual party and dancing on Saturday evening during the weekend workshop there were three special offerings. The first was very moving: a one woman dramatic portrayal of Tony Osornio’s life acted out with great passion and skill by Noellia Haller. Her portrayal focused on the time of Tony’s tragic accident as a female paratrooper in Mexico in which she became paraplegic. As a result of this accident Tony came to be later introduced to Sensory Awareness, and eventually became an approved leader. Since then she has used this work for many years in helping paraplegics in a program in Mexico called Fhadi that she helped create. Noellia is a student of Denise Gabriel (one of our leaders) at the University of North Carolina Greensboro, and it was Denise who helped create this piece.

Next was a compelling video presentation and discussion led by Lee Klinger Lesser about her program (Honoring the Path of the Warrior) which uses...
PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

This edition of our newsletter offers two articles on the relationship between Sensory Awareness and Buddhism. One is an interview with Ruth Dennison, a longtime friend and supporter of this work, and a respected Vipassana teacher. The other, by Michael M. Topoff, a psychotherapist, management trainer and student of this work, who resides in the Netherlands, is a scholarly overview of the similarities and differences between Sensory Awareness and certain aspects of the Buddhist tradition.

It has been ten years since Charlotte Selver’s death. Her passing was a huge loss, for not only was she an inspiring and charismatic teacher and friend, she also helped shape the vision of the Sensory Awareness Foundation, and she helped keep it financially afloat. Not only was she the primary donor, but she inspired others to donate as well.

Her passing challenged the Foundation to define a new path for itself, which over the course of these ten years it has been able to do. This redefined vision focuses on a strategy of support for the leaders of this work so they can continue to bring it forth and carry it into the world. The SAF Board believes that the future of Sensory Awareness lies with those who have been approved to lead others in this study. They understand that people come to appreciate and understand the value of the work when they experience it. Therefore, it is essential that more classes and workshops are offered worldwide.

That is why the Foundation puts on an annual Leader’s Conference where leaders come together to collaborate, present, deepen their connection, inspire, and support each other in offering the work. This is followed by a weekend open to the public where the circle expands to include those both familiar with and new to the work.

The success of this year’s spring workshop and Leader’s Conference, as well as those of previous years, affirms and confirms that we are on the right track. We are grateful to Dorothy Richmond for taking most of the photos from the workshop you see here.

In addition, Continuing Education Credits are now offered for therapists and massage therapists when they participate in classes and workshops with certified leaders. We are working on also getting these for nurses and occupational therapists.

It’s easy to find out what is offered around the world because the SAF now sends out a quarterly e-letter which announces leaders’ upcoming classes and workshops to all those on the email list. How about a class in Switzerland or Japan? The information is here.

I am happy to report that the SAF is sponsoring its third annual Spanish-speaking workshop in Mexico. It is gratifying to know that something has taken root with this, and that the various Spanish-speaking leaders who have participated in this have found it quite positive and effective.

For 2013 the Board has approved a small symbolic donation to Honoring the Path of the Warrior, a program for returning war veterans that uses Sensory Awareness in helping vets recover from the trauma of war. On September 28th the SAF will also (I would take out also) be sponsoring a benefit workshop in San Francisco for this worthy cause. For more information about this one day public workshop please go to our website. We hope to report more on this in our next Newsletter as well as on other important ways Sensory Awareness is being used to benefit others.

Our greatest challenge now is how to increase our fundraising and membership. This year the SAF Board is reaching out even more to those who have donated in the past, as well as to others, to share with them its strategic vision. We are most curious to learn from those who support this work what they see as important priorities. More than ever we need your help in helping us develop a stronger future for this work in the world.

This indeed was the hope shared by three special friends and leaders of Sensory Awareness who died within the last year: Seymour Carter, Anneke Hopfner and Virginia Veach, and who are honored in this newsletter. They were all in their way inspired to help promote its survival for future generations.

You can help us keep this work alive and growing by:

Becoming a member if you are not one currently.

Making a yearly donation or having a small monthly sum automatically transferred to the SAF from your bank account.

“Friending” us on Facebook if you use it and sending information about us to your other Facebook friends.

Bringing a friend to Sensory Awareness workshops and classes.

With appreciation for your interest,

Richard Lowe
SAF Executive Director
I visited Ruth Denison on April 29, 1999 at Dhamma Dena Desert Vipassana Center, her Buddhist retreat in the Mojave Desert of Southern California. Some of my interviews with Charlotte Selver had taken place just before and Charlotte had told me stories about Ruth and her husband Henry Denison. It was largely thanks to Alan Watts and Henry Denison that Charlotte's work came to California. Charlotte gave her first workshop on the West Coast at Henry's house in Hollywood. Henry was a lifelong spiritual seeker, he had been a monk in the Advaita Vedanta order for some years before building his house in the Hollywood Hills. In the early sixties the Denisons were hosts to many luminaries of the counterculture: philosophers, psychotherapists, Zen masters. Alan Watts was among them. Watts and Charlotte had been collaborating for some time and he now suggested that Henry invite Charlotte into that circle.

Ruth has kept in touch with the Sensory Awareness community over the years, and in a way renewed her ties after Charlotte's death. She has been a frequent visitor at Sensory Awareness conferences and workshops, be it as a presenter or to be a student again. She has also been a great supporter of the Sensory Awareness Foundation and the Charlotte Selver Oral History and Book project.

The interview took place over lunch and began with Ruth talking about her first meeting with Charlotte:

Ruth: “I dated Henry Denison at that time. Alan Watts told him about this lady who is getting with it. That's how Henry put it. Getting with the process that was going on at that time. And that was almost an underground movement, meeting and speaking about psychology and facing yourself and developing yourself. Charlotte sounded good to him the way Alan Watts described her, providing a practice, a process of becoming aware of your mental and psychic domain.

I remember what Charlotte was wearing. A beautiful pure silk blouse with cuffs, very formal. I came and arrived with two dachshunds and they made a lot of noise. I was a noisy lady when I came in into this peaceful, quiet atmosphere of highest delicacy and sensitivity. I came in with the dogs like dynamite. The silence was gone and the peace went. Charlotte had joy with that. She can – when it is so absorbed and then suddenly topsy turvy – she can enjoy that. She has a great sense of humor.

I had met Henry, and I think maybe just half a year or a year later Charlotte came into the picture. Henry was one of those who were very interested at that time in Aldous Huxley and Christopher Isherwood and all these avant-garde people.

Henry arranged with Charlotte that the house is available and she can make her seminars there, in the large living room with a fabulous terrace all around the house and its wonderful look over the hills and the lake. Our furniture could easily be moved. The big table was pushed against the glass wall, and then there was a space big enough for twenty people to lie down. It was a dream house. And the guest wing was the same. There was a terrace overlooking the lake and they lived there. That's when I got my training. I cooked there, and any minute I had time I would be in the living room.

At that time it was really a great breakthrough for many, Charlotte's work, you know. Psychologists came and yoga teachers came and artists. They got some nice groundedness through her work, Sensory Awareness. The senses are heightened and practiced and developed to more clarity in perception. You don't let the mind interfere in these sense perceptions. You just hear, see, smell, taste.

So, equipped with this awareness of the senses, I came to Vipassana. I had the best practice and preparation. And Charlotte cannot understand! But it is hard to understand that.”

Stefan’s note: Ruth's claim that Charlotte did not understand refers, I believe, to Charlotte's refusal to see Sensory Awareness as a mere vehicle for liberation within a Buddhist context. Charlotte, as did most of Elsa Gindler's students, insisted that hers was a practice in its own right. That it would be used to prepare people for therapy or spiritual practices meant that the depth of their work was not recognized. And, indeed, one could argue that Ruth likewise did not understand either.
To think that Sensory Awareness does not address suffering, that its goals are simply harmony and “greater pleasantness”, is to misunderstand what Charlotte Selver and her teachers were about. But Sensory Awareness lacks a clearly spelled out philosophical framework, for better or for worse, and is therefore easily disregarded as a feel-good practice – a notion that caused Charlotte Selver much grief. That said, it may very well be that Charlotte underestimated Ruth and that she, like many others, did not recognize the depth of her unique approach to teach the Buddha Dharma.

“In the beginning I didn’t know what to do with Charlotte. Then I caught up, because actually I lived with it a great deal. I was very earthy and I lived with my body. But then, coming into this so-called higher society with psychologists and with these high goals of enlightenment and spiritual awakening, I had other ideas about that. When I was asked to feel, to notice my feet and my hands and my breath – ‘God,’ I said, ‘what are they doing? I do that all the time. You do that by living.’ You know, sometimes I was puzzled by it. Also, I realized pretty soon that there were many things missing. I took it in the wrong way. I did it just for pleasure, maybe, and for feeling better.

But when you come into Vipassana, then it’s a different story. That can hold up in Sensory Awareness practice – you do it for more harmony, you awaken more to the senses and you have more joy, a greater pleasantness to experience – because dukkha and unpleasantness are not really paid attention to. In the Sensory Awareness practice always the goal is to come to a greater harmony and to better feelings and to more wholeness, sure.

I came now with this kind of attitude to Vipassana and I heard that attention has to be paid also to the unpleasant. The inner peace you get through the awareness of the senses can help you to move in harmony through the unpleasantness, and so on. The development of mindfulness and the development of the awareness is actually the very basis of Vipassana. We use the body and other senses as objects for attention.”

Stefan: “Laying the four foundations of mindfulness”.

Ruth: “Yes. Well, one works actually only with the first and the other three awaken very naturally to. Because feeling, pleasant and unpleasant, states of mind and contents of the mind [depend on] our paying attention to body sensations, to nonverbal levels. [By this] the mind is contained and drawn away from its usual activity and getting caught up in it. Instead of that you begin to understand: this is arising now, the feelings, or that state of mind, or that kind of content of the mind. You notice it and you do not get involved.

So, like the Buddha said: in this fathom long body with its perception, feelings and states of mind, there is the whole world contained, the beginning and the ending. You can also replace these words with dukkha, with suffering. Then you have Buddha’s teaching: I teach only for one reason, for the cessation of suffering and how to recognize it. How to trace it back to our own ignorance, not understanding and emotional [confusion]. How we are creating our own dissatisfaction and so on.

So, when Henry and I came to U Ba Khin, our teacher in Burma, I was very well equipped. Paying attention to my breathing, this was just wonderful, I could continue. The first few days I resisted him because I didn’t trust the situation. I already did it, you see. But then he discovered my resistance and was very firm with me, telling me that he is not talking to me but to my evil spirits of resistance. That was helpful.

And then it comes so gradually together. You know for what purpose you are doing it and you recognize the process rather than just getting an overview. Many beautiful insights arise through the systematic application of mindfulness of the body: The impermanence you can realize on a very microscopic level, the change, the dukkha you do learn to know, how much pain is involved in it always, when you look at the body, so that you don’t get attached just to having it the pleasant way, you see. You learn now to be open for the unpleasant and then it becomes pleasant.” Ruth chuckles.

I think I could never have done it without Charlotte’s preparation, because my time was very short with U Ba Khin. I couldn’t have gone that deep into the kind of letting your mind go into the body level as I could do now with Charlotte’s practice, Sensory Awareness. I could penetrate quite deeply in the short time I was with U Ba Khin, five months or six.

Then, when I started teaching – he gave me the transmission to teach – I wouldn’t have been able to really guide people in the practice of mindfulness, and how to give good instructions, and where it is at, and how to be more constant and start anew again and again, sitting two hours without moving and allowing the mind in a witnessing attitude to penetrate into the level of sensations. That it not how you practice with Charlotte. You do it lightly and you go outside.

I also had some Zen training. From Zen I got a little the way how to order and organize. From Charlotte I had this lovely groundedness: mind being there, and psyche, and mind energies being there where the body is. That means where your life is really occurring, and where you can have direct touch with it. So you bring your mind to a very special calm and undistractedness. And it wakes up to what it is doing. And you begin to understand more and more. It’s called insight. Correct understanding, [one aspect of] the Buddha’s Eightfold Path.

So I would let them stand – I hear myself sometimes saying like Charlotte did: ‘Please come to standing.’ Not to stand but to come to standing. Then I would explore: notice your arms and let the shoulders drop with gravity, and notice the contact with your feet, between your feet and the earth. Just like Charlotte told us. Gently shift your weight to the left foot, and feel the difference, how the other one feels. That is a very beautiful basis for Vipassana.

It also made me a safe guide. I realized always when their minds were off and it was too mental and when they had disconnected themselves from body, that became very clear. But, believe it or not, some Vipassana students who came at that time from Goenka [the best-known disciple of U Ba Khin], thought I...
was playing around. One got up, ran to the door, widely opened it and screamed into the silence of the room of my experiment: “That's enough of hanky-panky!”

I took a lot. Now, in Vipassana circles, they have yoga exercises, they have sensory awareness practice and so on. But Charlotte was a pioneer and I was a pioneer also.

Later I sent Charlotte students. Those who needed a little bit more ground work for sitting still and being without movement, without doing anything, students who needed a little bit more practice in a different way. More through movement. And I would also in my seminars let them lie down on the floor and do things Charlotte did. Like working with touch, working with partners. Or I would let everybody collect a rock and hold the rock and give it into the other hand. Or take a nut, and let them chew and eat it, experience this whole process from hard to soft to mush – and then the swallowing, all of that I did.

When I first started teaching I felt uncomfortable sitting in front of them and watching their nervousness, their fidgeting and their inner unrest. I could immediately bring rest in by just allowing one hand to rise and then putting it on the other hand. Or on the shoulder of somebody. But I encountered terrible criticism in the beginning.

I'd let students face each other and just see what is there. How they can perceive the other person without losing contact to their feet and to their standing and to the wholeness of their being. It's a practice in not being distracted and so much over there in the experience, but rather staying with the fullness of your own being in awareness. And then to take the other person in. Or how to pick a flower, or how to smell the ground.

Through sensory awareness, I took them into the mountains, let them look into that sight before them, let them realize: seeing takes place [when the eye meets] the object. It goes a little further than Charlotte, sometimes, you know, because it is more a calculation of the mind and not just noticing your stillness in perceiving. Becoming very clear in perceiving. In the process of perception there are the eyes (physical base), the object, and mind. These objects – it's not really true that we see this container, “Ruth knocks on an object, “we see color and shape. And then realizing that the whole thing is mind, hmm?

Seeing, visual consciousness: so what we become aware of is realizing that this is only a function which takes place now, the mental function of seeing. And that it has three components: a physical base, an object, and mind. And that puts you into the position where you cannot help but seeing: it is empty of I, it is a process. And it's through that, through Charlotte's work – I mean, as a base – that I could bring them into such graphic and tangible ways to see the truth of what Buddha points to: no self, emptiness. From the beginning [I taught] through these lovely experiences – the smell of the earth. I let them crawl as worms and as snakes without hands on the floor – basic things from Charlotte.

I am always grateful to her and to Henry, to both of them, because I would have never met her [if not for Henry]. From Charlotte I received a great basis for the Vipassana practice.
Sensory Awareness to help returning war veterans. In this video both male and female vets speak of how this program has changed their lives.

Finally there was a gathering led by Lars Kallman, a student of Seymour Carter, to honor and share Seymour’s life and memory. A few of Seymour’s friends and students were there and told stories about how he had touched them.

Overall the workshop was a great success and we already have a great many signed up for May of 2014. Start planning now to reserve your space before it fills.

Our title this time is Sensory Awareness: Waking up Right Here and Right Now. It will be held at Vallombrosa Retreat Center in Menlo Park, California from May 2nd to May 4th.

Many thanks are due Dorothy Richmond who took most of the photos on these pages and elsewhere in this newsletter.

Pictures from Our Spring Workshop
It's good to wake up all over

Experiment in Patting

More workshop pictures on page 13
THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Within the Eastern tradition, one could say that Sensory Awareness is about The Four Dignities of Man (Selver & Brooks, 1966: 495; Brooks, 1974: 26), which are: walking, standing, sitting and lying. In Buddhist literature these activities are described as ‘The four respect-inspiring forms of behavior’. According to Yampolsky (1971: p. 36), dignity when walking, standing, sitting and reclining is often associated with a bhodhisattva. It is precisely these ordinary day-to-day ordinary activities on which Sensory Awareness, as a training in mindfulness, focuses.

Training in Sensory Awareness is experiential in nature, not shunning the activities of the intellect, but rather offering the foreground to the immediacy of the individual, personal experience, very much in the tradition of Chan Buddhism. Within the immediacy of the experience, discoveries become possible - not to find the ‘ultimate truth’ eventually, but rather to become aware of how moment follows moment and how we construct our world.

As I present Sensory Awareness as a training method of mindfulness, a question about the teacher of this method seems valid. Teaching Sensory Awareness is paradoxical. On the one hand, Selver affirms the reality of a teacher of Sensory Awareness whose task she describes as sensing how much time is needed for exploration, and when to stimulate or indicate directions that may bear fruit (Selver & Brooks, 1966: p. 495). On the other hand, Sensory Awareness is a personal quest, that may lead to discovery, if one attends patiently to the process. As such it is a personal path which no one else can show. There is no right or wrong in breathing, moving or posturing the body. The ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ has constantly to be re-discovered in its momentary, experiential state, by the radical and personal confrontation with what is.

In this paradox, of course, the parallel with early and Chan Buddhism is quite apparent. Already in the Diamond Sutra (Price, tr., 1969: p. 32) the Buddha has tackled this point when he asks: “Subhuti, what do you think? Has the Tathagata a teaching to enunciate?” To which question Subhuti replies: “World-honored One, the Tathagata (the name the Buddha used in speaking of himself) has no formulated teaching to enunciate.”

In the same paradoxical, albeit anarchistic way Linji Yixuan admonishes his Zen students: “Followers of the Way, do you want to know the Patriarch-Buddha? He is none other than you who stand before me listening to my discourse. Since you students lack faith in yourself, you run around, seeking something outside” (Sazaki, tr.1975: p. 7). Further on he teaches: “Virtuous monks, time is precious. (...)Yet you try to study the Way (...) to seek a good teacher. (...) Try turning your own light inward upon yourselves!” (Sazaki, tr. 1975: p. 10).

Selver conceives of the nature of teaching not in a directive but rather in an invitational way. She expresses this succinctly: “So when I come to you with an invitation to allow more ease here and there, I do not mean that you simply let go, but that you enter a way, a path which you can only take step by step. In this work of transformation, when you follow anything at all, you follow only your sensations, the natural tendencies of the organism.” (Selver, 1984: p. 21. my italics.) Those proprioceptive sensations are differentiated from emotions, concepts and thought-constructions, and are sorted out towards more clarity, structure and form.

Sensory Awareness is seemingly focusing almost entirely on autonomy and self-support. In fact, this is not true. The concept of autonomy seems to set apart the autonomous individual from the surrounding world, creating an artificial dichotomy. As the observer always is part of that which is observed, the individual coexists with the context. By endorsing the notion that the outer world is as much the focus of attention as the inner world, in the Sensory Awareness seminar our response-able ways of relating to these worlds are explored. In a highly systemic and recursive way, Sensory Awareness deals complementarily, with autonomy and self-support, on one hand, and with that what supports us, on the other hand. Physically, it is the earth that supports us. Wherever we walk, sit, stand or recline, something is always beneath us, to support us by carrying us.

Support may also be psychological, originating in another person. Many experiments in Sensory Awareness are carried out in conjunction with one or several persons. In the process of relating to someone, human support...
may be deeply experienced, not as a reduction of one’s autonomy, but as a vital sign of one’s connectedness with others. When external support is experienced as nourishment, in the Daoist sense, it is an essential antidote to feelings of isolation and stress.

We can allow this process of relating to happen, or we can produce this relationship. We can help it or we can prevent it from happening. The questions to be examined pertain to how we do this and in what way our organism is involved. How much liveliness or excitement is felt? The point is not to ask what we demand from our organism, but rather to become sensitive to experience what our organism asks of us. By (re-)learning to become aware of these needs, to listen to them, and eventually to allow changes to happen, trust - inherent to honshin, our True Nature - may be reinstalled in the ecosystemic, self-regulating qualities of the organism.

In the dynamic recursivity of autonomy and support, nothing is exercised, rehearsed or prepared beforehand. The work in Sensory Awareness typically consists not of exercises, but rather of a series of here and now experiments in sitting, walking, standing and lying. These experiments do not have a correct way to be carried out. In his explorations the student gradually finds out 'how - to borrow one of Selver’s expressions - it wants to be' within his organism, in the structure of the musculature, in breathing, in standing, etc. In the same vein he learns to pay attention to the continuing process of change in the organism and to how these changes may be hindered or may be allowed.

The difference with classes in Budo (lit. ‘The Way of Combat’) is obvious. In Budo, the traditional sensei (‘teacher’) is an authority figure, teaching the different katas (‘forms in combat’) in exactly the way they should be performed, encouraging endless repetitions until the moment of perfection, of complete mastering, has been achieved as judged by the teacher. In Budo, we exercise; in Sensory Awareness, we experiment.

Next to the concepts of autonomy, support and connectedness, another theme to be explored in Sensory Awareness is readiness. Readiness refers to timing, to the very moment that the nerve cells are ready to fire. That special moment is monitored by what we earlier called ‘the inner traffic light’, i.e., the awareness of the momentary state internal as well as external to our organism. Timing is a core concept in Bushido. Musashi states (1974: p. 49): “There is timing in everything. There is also timing in the Void. There is timing in the whole life of the warrior, in his timing and declining, in his harmony and discord.”

To become aware of the right moment, liveliness as well as attunement with impermanence are necessary conditions. Liveliness pertains to an awake and alert state of the organism within its given context. Attunement with impermanence refers not only to the awareness of perpetual change, but also to being patient in allowing that change to happen instead of fighting it. Acting when the organism has come to a full readiness means being in accord with our Original Nature. The inner state that is needed for readiness, is called zanshin in kendo and refers to the mind that remains still, alert and watchful, unattached to anything. Charlotte Selver (Selver & Brooks, 1966: p. 492) tackles the same point when she writes: “The sensations from within are like stars, which only appear when the artificial lights are turned off. When there is quiet enough, they can be very precise.” Zanshin is not to be identified with physical stillness. Selver’s ‘artificial lights’ don’t necessarily connote external stimuli. In zanshin, readiness manifests itself in clinging neither to silence nor to turmoil; it can be present, so to speak, in the midst of the battle. It is a prerequisite for timing, and thus, in The Way of the Samurai, for winning.

In working with the experiments in Sensory Awareness, one may be confronted psychologically with conditioned avoidance responses such as anxieties and fears, with the recurrence of memories of a troublesome or traumatic nature, or with catastrophic fantasies. In the work of Sensory Awareness we gradually and patiently sort out what is perception and what is image. We build upon sensations, and particularly on our proprioceptive sensations (Selver & Brooks, 1966: p. 492). As an example, Selver & Brooks (1966: p. 493) mention an experiment where one person puts a hand on the shoulder of another: “Sometimes we see a person protect himself from a friendly touch (as) a dog recoils from a friendly greeting. This is a reaction, not to the actual sensation, but to the memory of a cruel experience in the past. So in our work the mere invitation to quiet is often not enough, and we must devise simple means of inviting sensations in a context of peace and security where the actual perception may be recognized.” The result of this process may well be a new and mindful way of re-learning to trust the information coming in from our senses as the essential ingredient of inner mastership. In Daoist terms, it is a process of returning to the Source, to the Uncarved Block, to True Nature.
BREATHING

As in Buddhist meditation practice, breathing plays a focal role in Sensory Awareness. Let us first look at breathing from the physiological point of view. Austin (1998: p. 93) describes very clearly what is happening in breathing-in and in breathing-out. When oxygen is low and carbon dioxide is high, these chemical signs are recognized in the medulla, oblongata and trigger the breathing-in response. From the medulla impulses activate the peripheral nervous system so that the muscles of the ribcage and diaphragm contract. The chest expands and the diaphragm descends. As the lungs expand their stretch receptors tighten. They send signals up to the nervus vagus and the brain stem. There they generate a flurry of inhibition, so that inhalation is turned off. As we start to breathe out, much of our exhalation proceeds passively - driven by the elastic recoil from chest and abdomen.

Engineered by neurophysiological and neurochemical processes, breathing reflects the connectedness with the world in its very functioning. “Breathing is what one is,” states Brooks (1974: p. 51). According to Selver (1984 b: no page nr.), breathing is the clearest index of what is happening in the person.

The phenomenon of breathing is surrounded by paradoxes. Usually, breathing is taken for granted. It seems to be an automatism, quite outside our personal functioning. In sudden instants of crisis, however, be they somatic or psychological, breathing may become the primary focus of our very existence.

In the West, since the beginning of the 20th century, so-called correct ways of breathing have been designed. How breathing should be performed is currently taught in numerous courses and seminars. It is interesting to note how, almost one-half a century ago, a scientist like Reich already opposed these formal criteria of correct breathing. In discussing the orgasm reflex, Reich (1969: p. 251) describes a breathing technique which is, essentially, not a technique at all. He describes how his patients hinder the natural, vegetative rhythm of breathing as a neurotic defense against orgasmic excitement. Thus Reich teaches what he calls ‘natural breathing’, which means not to perform breathing exercises.

As is apparent from Austin’s (1998: p. 93) description, breathing occurs according to our nature; it occurs ‘passively’. Neurophysiologically there is no need explicitly and consciously to do something about it: breathing happens in us – if we allow it, as Selver states (Selver, 1984b, ibid.). Selver refers to respecting the integrity of the natural flow of breathing without hindering the process. Many of us are conditioned to a certain, habitual way of breathing. Staying with breathing in awareness, allowing it to happen by itself, is a less than easy task. Most people, according to Selver (1984b, no page nr.), do not make a distinction between spontaneous and habitual breathing. They have the notion that when they are just as they always are, this is being spontaneous, “just as people who are very pushy, or very lazy, say, ‘This is my nature; it’s the way I am,’” while it is only a habit - a deviation from their True Nature. In Sensory Awareness the work consists of an exploration into what is happening during an experiment, i.e., what is routine, repetition, or new. According to Selver (1984b, np page nr.), as soon as more readiness, more openness for what is happening develops, we find that the first thing in which we can recognize this increased openness is our breathing. She continues: “When the heart is touched, when the inner is touched, when we really allow something to - as we say so nicely - touch us, then something in ourselves opens, becomes awake and interested, and simply makes us breathe. We don’t make ourselves do it. It makes itself felt.”

Note: The author may be contacted at michael@topoff.nl

REFERENCES:


A RICH PAST...AN INSPIRING LEGACY
A Testimonial for Seymour Carter,
Virginia Veach and Anneke Hopfner
by Richard Lowe

Within the last year we have lost three dedicated and influential leaders of this work: Seymour Carter, Virginia Veach and Anneke Hopfner. All three passed away within a few months of each other, which was a great shock to our community of friends. The impact of these sad losses coming so soon together can only remind us of how precious life is, as, indeed, is our connection with each other.

Anneke, a psychotherapist and long time leader in Germany, had been working with Seymour Carter to help spread this work in Europe. Together they co-led many workshops there. Anneke with assistance from her daughter, Cristine Hopfner, and with support from the SAF, helped create a central European website that leaders there could use to promote their classes. Anneke hoped that leaders in Europe would someday come to more actively collaborate with each other so that the work could continue to expand and develop in that region.

Anneke's history with this work goes all the way back to her childhood in Germany where as a young girl she was taken by her mother to classes given by Hede Kallmeyer who was the teacher to Elsa Gindler. Gindler was Charlotte Selver's teacher, and it was Charlotte who brought this study to America and developed her own way of offering it, which came to be known as Sensory Awareness.

Virginia, also a psychotherapist, was the president of the Sensory Awareness Leaders’ Guild up until her death late last year. She served in this position valiantly for many
years in spite of many difficult health problems. Her persistent desire as president was to help create more of an ongoing dialogue between leaders and to find ways for the Guild to be more supportive of its members.

In addition being a psychotherapist Virginia was an accomplished artist and was an involved and loving mother, grandmother and community activist. She also had worked for many years as a physical therapist, was the founder of the Ting-sha Institute, a residential treatment center that incorporated Sensory Awareness in helping those with emotional problems and difficult life changes, established and headed up a medical center at a Cambodian refugee camp, and was deeply involved with the Commonweal Cancer Help Program.

As Guild President Virginia selflessly gave of her time and energy. She did this, in part because that is who she was, but also because she strongly believed in the value of this work in helping to heal the human family.

Seymour Carter was a well-known charismatic leader of Sensory Awareness and Gestalt therapist who, in addition to his original home base at Esalen Institute in California, offered workshops throughout Western and Eastern Europe. His expertise in Gestalt Therapy and Sensory Awareness was highly respected, particularly in Europe. Seymour combined Gestalt practice, Sensory Awareness work and Family Systems theory with Buddhism and other Mind/Body oriented practices. He was one of the original leaders of the Esalen Residential program as well as one of the original members of the Esalen Massage Crew, which incorporated Sensory Awareness into what has become known as Esalen Style Massage.

After suffering a death-defying heart attack about four years ago Seymour appeared to gain a new lease on life. In his later years he gravitated more into the role of teacher, which seemed to inspire him. During his last few months he was particularly enthusiastic about the possibilities for him doing more teaching in Europe as well as in the growing interest of students in the San Francisco Bay Area for his ongoing weekly classes at Fort Mason Center sponsored by the SAF.

In the last few years Seymour became increasingly appreciative and supportive of both the Guild and the SAF, feeling they were both essential in helping to spread the development of Sensory Awareness throughout the world. Out of his appreciation for the Guild he agreed to serve as its Vice-president and did so until Virginia’s untimely death at which point he became president. In this position he served for a short while until he too was taken from us. He also had recently offered to help the Foundation in any way he could with its fund raising efforts.

These three inspiring individuals shared a common vision: that the study and practice of Sensory Awareness will continue to grow throughout the world and become better known. For this and more we thank them. They will be truly missed.

If you’d like more information about these remarkable people go to: www.charlotteselverbook.org
THE LEGACY CONTINUES

The SAF would like to welcome two new leaders who have become members of the Sensory Awareness Leaders’ Guild: Frances Kahana from Canada and Enric Bruguera from Spain. They join the other recent leaders who were accepted into the Guild last year: Michael Atkinson, Eugene Tashima, Denise Gabriel, Sara Bragin and Fanny Morell.
“Our study of sensing is simply a study of consciousness. One can come to feel when consciousness is occupied with thoughts, and when these thoughts arise organically from our perceptions, or are disconnected and distracting trains of association. We can tell when we are open to the reality of the moment and when, in anxiety or in our efforts at control, we close ourselves. We can sense when consciousness flows freely, and when it meets obstacles and stops or wavers.

In our study, we come to realize that it is through consciousness that we can allow a meaningful connection with what we approach and what we do, as distinguished from the “blind” or “insensate” or mechanical ways in which we so often interact with our environment. We recognize that clarity of perception underlies all understanding and all intelligent behavior. The saying “Buddha is in everyone” can be understood as referring not to any separate divinity, but to the potential of full consciousness in every organism according to its nature. This would restore to the organs of consciousness, our senses, the dignity which is due them. It would permit us to live securely in our real perceptions, shallow or deep as the case might be, but free of our never-ending speculations”. Charles Brooks, Pages 15-16.

“Like Zen meditation, Sensory Awareness is not a teaching but a practice. Though we act on the recognition that there is a natural tendency to order in the functioning and growth of the human organism, we have no real theoretical framework, and our experiments are entirely empirical. Our aim is not the acquisition of skills, but the freedom to explore sensitively and to learn from exploration. We propose experiments and ask questions directed toward the possibility of experiencing.

In our classes, new recognitions and new attitudes come about as a result of the student's own explorations, which he must go into for himself, at his own pace, even though working as a member of a group. We neither instruct verbally nor offer an example to imitate. We merely work with practical means toward an adult version of the quiet, open, curious attitude which healthy children have to the world they are born into, a world they never tire of investigating. The child does not separate himself from his world but is just as curious about his own processes as about any others. Similarly, the attitude we seek is neither extroverted nor introverted, but one of openness and consciousness generally. We try to allow whatever becomes conscious in our present state the time it needs to become clearer to us.” Charles Brooks, Page 18.

“What this work means to me is that the person comes to his own nature. And what has been so fascinating to me is the discovery of the magnificent wisdom of the organism: that there is something in us which can teach us constantly how to go about things; that we are able to feel when something is not functioning, and how it wants to be when it would be functioning; and that we can learn to follow it. In other words, what has interested me in this work is the discovery of the creative forces in us, of the possibility of being informed from within how it wants to be, and becoming gradually able to follow that.

In Zen they say, ‘Buddha is in everybody.’ That is not a shallow statement. It means something. Buddha is in everybody. Buddha is in you and (looking at various students) in you and in you and in you and in you. Buddha is in all of us. That means something in us knows. Something in us can teach us. Something in us can inform us how it wants to be.” Charlotte Selver, page 118.
Many thanks to the following generous friends who have recently donated $100 or more to help the SAF to help build the future of Sensory Awareness:

Ruth Denison
Ray Fowler
Ed Deci
Gladys Thacher
Markell Brooks
Natalie Ednie
Michael Atkinson

Helen and Eugene Tashima
Margaret Crawford
Thomas Niering
Cathy Edget
Len and Anna Shemin
Lee Klinger Lesser
Pat Meyer-Peterson

Edward Dwelle
Frances Kahana
Victoria Harris
Enric Bruguera
Alice La Prelle
Leona Shahani
Paul and Marlene Zweig

Leader and psychotherapist Ginger Clark has written a new book about psychotherapy, self-care and Sensory Awareness called Tuck Yourself In: Using Your Senses to Soothe Yourself, Softening Resistance to Self-Care (Balboa Press, 2013). If your bookseller doesn’t carry it you can get a copy by contacting Ginger or going to www.balboapress.com.

Pat Baxter and Dorothy Richmond in Arizona are working on producing DVDs about Charlotte Selver and Sensory Awareness based on good quality DVD recordings made of Charlotte working in 2001 and 2002. The SAF is quite excited about this project and expects that it will provide a good introduction for those unfamiliar with the work. Dorothy and Pat believe that they have enough material to be able to produce a few DVDs that will be appropriate for experienced students as well.

Leaders on the US East coast will be holding a leaders’ conference and public workshop in Madison, Virginia this November. The public workshop is on November 10th. For more information contact Pat Meyer-Peterson at pmeyer@bnsi.net.

One of our newest leaders, Enric Brugera, will be offering a workshop in India this year. To our knowledge this will be the first ever Sensory Awareness workshop offered there by an authorized leader. See the insert in the newsletter to learn more.

Our third annual Spanish-speaking workshop in Mexico will be held at San Juan Del Rio, Queretaro from October 18 to 20. Among the leaders will be Pat Baxter, Mercedes Lopez, Fanny Morell and Tony Osornio. For more information contact Mariela Valdes at marielavo73@hotmail.com.

Connie Smith Siegel has completed her third book on art and Sensory Awareness The Healing Spirit of Drawing and Color, which builds on the first two books—Spirit of Drawing and Spirit of Color. This book extends the focus beyond art traditions into the primal beginnings of art— the shamanistic traditions that invoke elemental forces to restore health and well being. Grounded in Sensory Awareness it addresses specific life issues, using the power of drawing and color, along with moving, sounding, and writing to help balance elemental forces within us. The book emphasizes self-discovery for its own sake both for those not experienced in art and for working artists as well.

The vision of a center for ongoing classes in the San Francisco Bay Area is still moving ahead. Originally spearheaded by classes taught by Seymour Carter at Fort Mason Center classes have continued there after his unfortunate passing with classes led by Jill Harris and Richard Lowe. This September the 28th Lee Klinger Lesser, Connie Smith Siegel and Richard will offer a one day workshop there as a benefit for Honoring the Path of the Warrior, a program for veterans already mentioned in this newsletter. You can find out more about this by going to the SAF website or calling Sara Gorgon at 415-507-0996.

If you have any brief news items you feel would be appropriate for this part of the newsletter please submit them by emailing richlowemft@yahoo.com.
IN THIS ISSUE:
- Spring 2013 Workshop
- President’s Message
- Conversation with Ruth Denison
- On Buddhism and Sensory Awareness
  by Michael Topoff
- A Rich Past . . . an Inspiring Legacy
- On Buddhism and Sensory Awareness:
  by Charles Brooks and Charlotte Selver

Join us for our Annual Workshop

Sensory Awareness:
Waking up to Right here and Right Now

May 2nd to 4th, Vallombrosa Retreat Center
Menlo Park, California

Be sure to save the date.

Feedback from our 2013 workshop:

“I am so grateful for this path that leads so deeply and clearly in and out at the same time. It has been the well of my own healing, growth and joy...”

“This work has changed my life on every level and has been at the core of teaching my clients how to weave and cultivate awareness into their daily life” – Psychotherapist

www.sensoryawareness.org