

*Note: the following ARC proposal evolved over the last two years. It is one model of our future. Whether it will ever see the light of day in this form is an open question. It will depend on many people being inspired to get on board and contribute to the necessary networking and development. It might end up looking very different. But the legal, historical, and inspirational foundation for it exists at The Whole Health Center.*

*We offer it here in part to document a dream and our latest thinking. And in part to inspire yours. And to inspire dialogue.*

## **ARC Acadia Retreat Center and Institute for Conscious Human Development**

### **History**

The ARC grows out of the 38 year history of The Whole Health Center on Mount Desert Island. Founded as a non-profit in 1981, the WHC was a pioneer of holistic therapies and teachings in the wider Maine community, based on understandings that have become increasingly mainstream. The cultural landscape is continually evolving with new sources and new technologies of information sharing, and two new generations of practitioners since founder Paul Weiss first began offering an integrative approach to mind/body/spiritual health.

The Whole Health Center is also evolving. We wish to have the capacity to reach a much broader circle of interest, while retaining the focus and intimacy of our programs. And in our thirty-eight years we have evolved a deepening coherence of spiritual outlook and understanding that offers an integrative and transformational vision – based on our personal experience and on the confirmation of all of the wisdom traditions – regarding the evolutionary journey and developmental needs of the species, and of each human being, growing in harmony with the web of life.

Thus it is now our intention to begin our second incarnation as a retreat center that can welcome people from near and far to explore the deepest issues of human health and transformation; while remaining mindful and ever more creative in the possibilities of service to the local community. Not least, we wish to take better advantage of our location on the coast of Maine and of the unspeakable treasure of Acadia National Park – not only to tempt more distant people to our programs, but also to draw on the healing energies and consciousness of the natural world for personal development and for a deepening experience of our mutuality with it.

In our beginnings, we offered teachings and services in the areas of naturopathic and holistic health care, nutrition and herbs, therapeutic bodywork, psychological counseling, meditation and tai chi. We offered support groups that ranged from recovery from incest and sexual abuse to healing from catastrophic illness. At the turn of the century we articulated our several broad areas of focus – both in our teaching and in our counseling work – as those of psychological and emotional integration, energetic integration, spiritual integration, and authentic communication. These, in turn, began to further assemble themselves into several program and curricula with which we are still working, and which are reflected in the program areas discussed below.

## Mission

We live, perhaps, in a new axial age; at the crossroads -- on a world scale -- of the best and the worst of human history. We have never had such universal access to the collective wisdom traditions of the planet, complemented by the leading edge of modern scientific and psychological inquiry. Together, they highlight the path of our continued spiritual evolution as individuals and as a humanity, positively integrating our psycho-emotional functioning, open to the cosmos, and in harmony with other species and the living cycles of the earth. This is the optimum heritage of our conscious human development.

Consciousness and love are always expressing through us. Yet we live in a world and in a mentality largely governed by the forces of unconsciousness and unlove. The earlier evolutionary mechanisms of fear, aggression, emotional reactivity, and even our higher cognitive processes -- judgment, analysis, computation, projection, etc. -- are kept largely in the service of instinctive, automatic, and separative perceptions and responses to reality. Whereas our emerging higher faculties of consciousness and love can only be awakened through awakened acts of consciousness and love! This is the purpose and teaching of our spiritual wisdom traditions.

The visionary edge of our physical, biological and neurosciences confirms the ancient recognition that our highest brain centers -- working in resonance with the intelligence of the heart and the harmony of the breath -- are designed to enable a greater integration of our experience. This greater integration enables, and is enabled by, the growing faculties of attuned attention and mindful awareness, insight, empathy and compassion, physical and emotional regulation and balance, and a presence of being that is free of the negative or separative projections of the mind. And this, in turn, enables our deeper relational capacities for intimacy, communication, cooperation, creativity, and mutual problem-solving. And for choosing a wise, mutual and sustainable relationship to to all the living systems of our planet.

The need for centers of integrated understanding and support for our evolutionary work in this day and age is great. Certainly a renewed understanding and a renewed prioritizing of our own *conscious* role -- and the technical skills of *conscious* practice -- in the flowering of the full dimensions of our humanity is essential.

A school and a retreat center to promote and transmit this critical work here in what our first peoples call the "dawnland" of our nation -- or of Turtle Island -- is to be welcomed. Paul Weiss has spent the last thirty-six years at The Whole Health Center designing and delivering programs in whole health and spirituality; integrating his own spiritual journey -- and study in India and China -- with his training in counseling, communication, emotional process work, meditation, and the transformational practices and psychologies of the East. These programs have always put a premium on cohesive intellectual structure; practical and experiential immersion; a deeper sense of contact and community among participants; and transformational intent and results. These programs have become the originating core of the teaching and training curriculum of the Institute for Conscious Human Development, and the welcoming spirit of the Acadia Retreat Center.

## Model and Development

As indicated by our full name: Acadia Retreat Center and Institute for Conscious Human Development, we expect to serve two complementary functions. Our integrating vision will be at the heart our core workshop programs and classes in human development. These will regularly include more intensive retreats -- like True Heart/True Mind -- or meditative retreat, practice and learning sessions that are entirely focused on the deep retreat process, and will be held in isolation for committed students. Many other programs will have the same deep learning focus, but will offer a more relaxed daily schedule, with time to enjoy the park as well -- especially with programs for youth, and programs that are specifically designed to make use of the park in deepening our contemplative sensitivity or learning relationship to the natural world. And we anticipate that some of each month will be kept available for people seeking to pursue their own contemplation, or even Acadia vacation, in a residence that offers spiritual focus and support; and with an available schedule, as appropriate, of meditation, yoga, qigong, etc. This might also include mixed functions with other community groups, all of which, we believe, will expand organically.

There will generally be only one kind of program happening at a time. Our projections suggest we can be economically viable at a smaller, more relaxed and organic scale and schedule, without having to be all consumed with profits, "packing them in," or running the schedule ragged. We do not wish to be too big. We envision a full house capacity of twenty to thirty guests, when desirable, but the number would be kept more limited for most programs.

While owning a property would be ideal, we do not anticipate that capacity in the near future. Our first priority is to attract the donation of the long-term lease of a property, in which the donor would retain ownership, but would receive a tax deduction for both the property maintenance and the fair market value of the rental to a non-profit.

Our other immediate goal is the broadening and strengthening of our Board of Directors to include wider representation from the community of individuals who share equal commitment to our vision, who are committed to putting in work, and who bring with them new skills or funding resources. This would also include the board member expertise, or the hiring of a business professional, to draw up a sound, professional business plan. Followed by a professional marketing plan. We are mindful that this project could grow organically in unpredicted ways as we allow room for the talents, the creativity, and the insights of a growing community team of players.

Necessary staff functions (in full, part-time, or multiple roles, as the case may prove) would include an executive program director, a business and marketing director, a logistics director for programs and guests, as well as office, housekeeping and kitchen staff as needed. Paul Weiss will serve initially as program director to help establish programs that are integrated and consistent with the founding vision of the program. He will also deliver many of the programs. But we will quickly bring in other teachers and presenters who enhance the goals and spirit of the Institute. We will build staff to assure an enduring non-profit mission, enabling Paul himself to back off as Director after the first couple of years.

**Program Areas** (note: These programs define our core curriculum of conscious evolution and human maturity. We will soon articulate our complementary curriculum of planetary service.

- 1. Evolution's Edge**
- 2. Compassion, Integration and Healing**
- 3. Foundations of Authentic Communication**
- 4. Sacred Wisdom**
- 5. QiGong: cultivating transparent coherence of body, mind, and spirit**
- 6. Remembering Earth**
- 7. True Heart/True mind**

The above program areas, described below, are sourced by our extensive personal experience, the findings of modern psychological and neuro-biological science, and the practical and transformational legacy of all our classical and planetary wisdom traditions, east and west. (Our sixth program area, *Remembering Earth*, especially honors the profound consciousness of our *indigenous* wisdom traditions regarding our mutuality with the living earth and its creative spirit.) All of these sources -- experience, science, wisdom tradition -- must be honored today to help us on a path of harmony and healing. Much healing vision and many good resources are arising at this time. But at The Whole Health Center we've had decades of experience in integrating all of these sources and program areas into a truly holistic and prophetic vision of the multilevel integrity of natural healing, personal and spiritual growth, and human development -- along with a broad and deep integration of practical therapeutic tools. Thus we believe we have a significant contribution to make at this time.

These program areas could be approached and described in different ways, for they are all inclusive of each other. That is, they are simply different doorways into the same concern for integrative human development and healing.

**1. *Evolution's Edge.*** These programs teach and affirm the essential role of the conscious evolution of the individual in contributing to the conscious evolution of the species. In these programs we explore the many dimensions of our personal work with the body, mind and heart in the context of our overall evolutionary development; the nature of the heart, the brain, and the emotions; epigenetics; and the evolution of consciousness in the cosmos. It is only the work that we do consciously that can contribute to our conscious evolution; and it is only through enlightened and conscious choices, while facing into the paradox of our separateness, that we can evolve through limited self-consciousness to a more inclusive and awakened consciousness.

**2. *Compassion, Integration and Healing.*** As we learn to cultivate a resonance circuit between the heart and the higher brain centers (as our evolution intends), we deepen our capacity for compassionate presence, and for a growing empathy and attunement to ourselves and to others. This compassionate presence allows for a greater degree of integration and healing within our own personal dynamics, and in the dynamics of our interpersonal relationships. Our programs in the area of *compassion, integration and healing* build systematic capacity and skills in harmonizing and integrating every area of our thinking, feeling and doing.

Much of our work has creatively evolved from the template offered by the ancient Buddhist practice of *tonglen*, a meditative practice of compassion and reciprocity that is at the heart of both Buddhist and Christian spirituality. We have applied the integrative dynamics of *tonglen* to a fundamental understanding of how the heart and nervous system flinches, protects, shuts down, and goes unconscious in the face of our own pain or the pain of others; or in the face of perceived threat, overwhelm, otherness or negative projection. And, conversely, to our conscious human capacity to override fear or negativity, stay present, open the heart, extend ourselves, and embrace all experience in a compassionate and empathetic way.

This is clearly the singularly essential task of our humanity and of this historical moment; and it calls for a consciously supported re-education of the heart and nervous system. And it is this evolving therapeutic and teaching program of compassionate self-integration -- applied to our emotional life, our developmental roots, and our availability to others -- that has pretty much defined our healing work at The Whole Health Center and continues on in our new ARC programs.

**3. Foundations of Authentic Communication.** We define authentic communication as that communication that is able to arise between people to the extent that each is able to remain in a state of presence. The state of presence is characterized by a sense of "wholeness" of self, and an availability to our own feelings and perceptions, *simultaneously* with a simple receptivity and availability to the presence of others, and a capacity to appreciate and support their wholeness and integrity. "Presence" is our inherent and organic boundary system; and also the foundation for truly authentic and functional communication.

What we are learning from the emerging fields of *neurocardiology* and *heart energetics* is that the electromagnetic field of the heart has a naturally harmonizing function, and that its natural or undistorted energy is experienced as love and "appreciation." What we are learning from our developing *brain science* is that the prefrontal cortex is the part of the brain that mediates nonjudgmental or attuned awareness, as well as the part of the brain capable of attuning with the energy field of the heart. This mutual function is experienced as the faculty of "presence," an integrated heart-brain faculty which has the characteristics of self-integration, receptive or non-projective awareness, and heart-interest, or appreciation. Its foundation is in the earliest developmental attunement between mother and child, and it may be more consciously developed in maturity as a spiritual faculty.

Presence can be learned, practiced, and taught; and there are easy and systematic ways of helping to awaken, or tease out, our natural capacity for presence from the less conscious domain of reactivity and conditioned response. As we learn to open and attune to the present moment, and relax our mental and emotional reactivity, the cognitive and the affective domains are able to join together in a state of unity that makes possible our optimum healthy functioning in the present, including a authentic mutual communication between people. We teach the foundations and guidelines of attuned and authentic communication as an extension of the practice of presence. Conversely, the practice of authentic communication contributes to the growth of presence. It is the ideal win-win of human relationships.

**4. Sacred Wisdom.** Our many planetary spiritual traditions are repositories of transformational wisdom, and extensive curricula for practice, that ultimately address in great depth all of our contemporary concerns -- psychological, emotional, physical, and developmental. They are all interces-

sions, at one level or another, of our *true heart* and *true mind*; though they are often reduced to many smaller-minded interpretations by the prevailing ego-consciousness. We offer a cross-cultural and integrative appreciation of the practical and inspirational wealth of these traditions, looking to them and through them to the deepest levels of universal messaging and application..

**5. *Qi Gong: Cultivating Transparent Coherence of Body, Mind and Spirit.*** Taoism is a naturalistic wisdom tradition in which the profound science of cultivating a healthy body is not separate from the cultivation of the spirit. We have long put great emphasis on the teaching of the Taoist arts of *qigong* and *taiji* for, aside from their pleurability, they address the nature of health and illness at the deepest level of energetic rejuvenation, relaxed fluency of movement, balancing of all physiological systems, and harmonizing mind and body.

In our understanding, the processes of mind and ego create many sticking points and obscurations in our awareness; and these in turn, encountering the stresses of life, contribute to fixations and incoherence in our bodily function. We accumulate many negative or separative stories about the nature of our experience,; and these stories, in turn, frequently prejudice and restrict the body's (and the heart's) natural processes of balance, cleansing, reintegration, relaxation, and resolution. Consequently, the body acquires fixations and imbalances in function which cause it to lose coherence with the fluid and transparent energetic, or etheric, grid out of which it arises. This also contributes to the construction of a non-body-friendly or heart-friendly world.

As we experience, the movements of the *body* lose their natural harmony and coherence and become rigid and fragmented. Toxicity and imbalances accumulate in our physiology. The *heart* loses its natural openness to, and coherence with, the congruent wave fields of being – which would otherwise be experienced as harmony, affirmation, and well-being – and become subject to negative emotional messages. This negative messaging creates an incoherence in the rhythmic frequency of the heart's own wave field, compromising the heart's function of promoting the harmony of the whole body -- and the social body -- and seriously compromising its own health as well. (This is recognized by both traditional Chinese medicine and the modern research field of heart energetics.) And finally, our *awareness* is distracted from its own transparent quality as it becomes occupied and identified with the mind's continual thinking and imaging.

These are the inharmonious patterns of our mind, heart, and body that contribute to illness, and that we are likely to bring to qi gong. *Qi gong is the very holistic path of practice by which we address the totality of this disharmony and this dysfunction through an integrated approach that engages the body, mind, heart, breath, and movement in a way that reverses and rehabilitates the tendency to disharmony and separation, and restores our expressive being of coherence, flow and transparency.*

First, we cultivate and restore the *coherent* functioning of body, mind, breath, and heart within our dynamic energetic field. (This eliminates most of the mental and emotional noise in the system, which is a product of disharmony and lack of flow.) Then this entire coherent system becomes naturally *transparent* to the awake, joyful, and infinite nature of being. This is the profound and embodied spiritual nature of qi gong.

**6. Remembering Earth.** As we ourselves are evolving life-forms within the realm of the earth, the messages reflected back to us by the forms and processes of the natural world are deep aspects of our own consciousness; our shared consciousness. Tree, rock, river, and deer are not just objects for our exploitation, but are windows of revelation; part of a living mutuality; the other half of our own souls. This is a reciprocal relationship that was instinctively recognized by our indigenous cultures, but from which our civilization is now largely divorced, and which would hardly find footing in our rational science (never mind our economics). But we are alienated and we are ill. Why do we crush our indigenous roots, and seek to destroy the indigenous roots of others? Why is the direction of our intellectual culture, our technology and our economics so apparently soulless? Is it because, for starts, we have left one half of our soul behind? Our growing alienation from the life of the planet contributes to ecological disaster, to psychological depression, to moral confusion, and to a ghetto of the imagination. Hence the essential inclusion in our program of tools for re-awakening our communion and reciprocity with the natural world -- for spiritual integration with the other conscious and living half of our own self. Our individual health, our planetary health, our souls, our compassion, and our happiness require it.

**7. True Heart/True Mind.** True Heart/True Mind has been our “flagship” retreat for thirty-four years. It is a laboratory for the "real-time" implementation and practice of so many of the principles and practices that we have long taught. It is an otherwise silent retreat in which communication, as well as contemplation, becomes the vehicle for taking us deeply into the mysteries of self-realization. We learn to sit with the timeless question “Who Am I?,” not to be answered intellectually, but to be opened to with deepening contemplative awareness. The True Heart/ True Mind retreat is a highly structured, safe, and supportive setting in which everything you are becomes the object of your simple contemplative investigation into the nature of self and reality, without judgments, comparison or rejection. We learn to be fully present for our experience while becoming newly aware of the one who *is* present, with deepening integration, insight, and sometimes a mind-liberating breakthrough. And this learning occurs in the context of a two-person communication process that fosters trust, reciprocity, receptivity, non-judgmental attention, a deepening bonding, and surrender to a truth that lies outside our own mental constructs and projections. This demanding and gratifying Intensive process is integrating, revelatory, and often life-changing. It offers a practical introduction to non-dual spirituality and is also a great tonic for anyone’s current spiritual practice. With its equal emphasis on contemplation and communication, it helps us take responsibility for both our inner life and our outer life. With its emphasis on deepening our intention, our openness, and our honest accountability, it is the foundation of all spiritual growth work. It has never been more vital or more relevant -- to our current times, or to the needs of each of us to be true to ourselves and true to each other. We hope to keep this program vital, both in its four-day format, and in an extended format.

**Note:** These programs constitute our core curriculum of *Conscious Evolution and Human Maturity*. If we are able to grow to our fullest vision, we will offer a second, complementary curriculum entitled *Planetary Citizenship and the Earth Charter*. Referencing the brilliant UN connected document of *The Earth Charter*, we explore the foundations of a sustainable

and just human community on planet earth. The Earth Charter addresses four broad areas of concern in great detail, including 1) Respect and care for the community of life; 2) Ecological integrity and sustainable development; 3) Economic and social justice; 4) Democracy, non-violence and peace. The development of permaculture on the property is also intended.

Most importantly, we will explore all these issues in the light of compassion, ethics, and the intersection of planetary consciousness and spiritual consciousness.

*Start a huge, foolish project,  
like Noah.  
It makes absolutely no difference  
what people think of you.*

*Rumi*