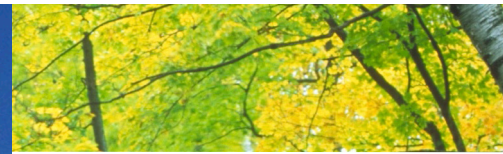




guesthouse

NEWSLETTER



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Five Years and Counting!

This year, Guest House celebrates its fifth anniversary! To commemorate this momentous occasion, our executive director, Steve Kennedy, had the sublime idea of constructing a labyrinth. For centuries, labyrinths have played various symbolic roles in many civilizations, cultures and spiritual paths. They appeared on seals and amulets in ancient Egypt, on the currency of Knossos at Crete, as graffiti in Pompeii and in Christian churches (notably the cathedral at Chartres). Their significance has been manifold and complex, but they were often believed to conceal and protect a divine secret or being. The winding path to the heart of the labyrinth frequently represented a personal journey that brought one closer to self-knowledge and to God.



“Nature is a labyrinth in which the very haste you move with will make you lose your way,” said the English philosopher Francis Bacon (1561-1626). In this spirit, our labyrinth—spiraling outward in a clearing in the property’s north woods—is meant to be a vehicle for contemplation and meditation.

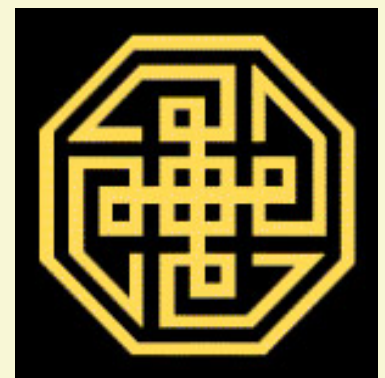
At their April retreat, Emerald Mountain (EM)—the New York-based Diamond Approach student group that was among the retreat center’s initial group of funders (and remains its core)—also rang in the occasion with several activities. Students gathered written thoughts, feelings, prayers and good wishes for Guest House and placed them in a handmade paper bowl.

(Continued on page 6)

Answering a Call

An introduction to the lead teachers of a new Diamond Heart Retreats group at Guest House

We are excited to announce a new international Diamond Heart Retreats group that will begin meeting at Guest House in 2014. These retreats are long-term Diamond Approach groups that meet twice a year in a residential setting for eight days each (the first is scheduled for March 2 through 9). This format serves those who don’t have access to a local group or whose life circumstances need such a format. Our experience with the previous four Diamond Heart Retreats groups is that this format provides a rich and powerful path to self-discovery.



(Continued on page 7)



Photo Credit: Steve Kennedy

My Guest House

By Susan Weiley

Three snapshots fell across my computer screen as I was upgrading some digital photo software recently. From different times and places, these particular three escaped from my Lightroom catalog and lined up like a spread of Tarot cards. Or a toss of I-Ching coins. Taken together they move from personal memory to a deeper point about Guest House.

Snapshot One, summer of 1998, Kirkridge, Pennsylvania. I was trying out a new film camera at our 10-day summer retreat. There was little time for photographs that summer as our teacher, Alia Johnson, declared that in every free moment we were to do “clearings” with one another. Clearings took a minimum of half an hour, and even though there were around 85 of us, Alia wanted them completed by the end of the retreat. We pulled all-nighters at least twice that week to get through them.

The photograph shows two wooden lawn chairs facing each other on the edge of the lawn just where it drops off precipitously. A thick mist softens the chairs just after dawn. The chairs still hold the energy of the last pair of students who’d faced each other and intensely inquired into the truth of their relationship. But they were open to the vast spaces across the valley below and whatever feelings of sadness or love or hurt that would dissolve by the time two other students brought over their coffee from the dining room to begin a new process. This snapshot brings back the constellations we moved through that summer and the emotional depletion that eventually engulfed us.



Photo Credit: Susan Weiley

The reason we had to complete the clearings was because we didn’t have a permanent home. Lacking a continuity of Place, we moved to almost 30 locations throughout the Hudson Valley in the early years, like a band of gypsies, alighting anywhere from Rye to Woodstock. Sometimes we met in Manhattan, but Alia disliked “police siren meditations” and had a strong preference for residential weekends outside the city. Since we were a movable feast, it was unlikely we’d find either space or time in the next place to continue clearings. Kirkridge was the closest we came to having a regular retreat center, and we grew fond of it in spite of its damp and mold.

(Continued on page 3)

Essential Contemplations

In each issue, we look at different views from various paths regarding a single subject. In this issue, we focus on integrity...

*Are you breathing just a little
And calling it a life?*

—Mary Oliver

.....

As far as I know, we can’t become real, can’t become truthful embodiments of reality unless we take the risks to live that way. We must make the necessary sacrifices to be and to live that reality. It’s not likely to happen that you sit there meditating, have wonderful experiences, and then suddenly you’re a real human being. Living according to the truth requires sacrifices and risks. The Work is a self-confrontation, an attempt to be more and more truthful and sincere with yourself. We gain integrity and value by living according to the truth.

—A.H. Almaas,
*Diamond Heart Book IV,
Indestructible Innocence*

.....

My actions are my only true belongings. I cannot escape the consequences of my actions. My actions are the ground upon which I stand.

—Thich Nhat Hanh

.....

Integrity has no need of rules.

—Albert Camus

.....

One of the truest tests of integrity is its blunt refusal to be compromised.

—Chinua Achebe, Nigerian poet,
novelist and critic

My Guest House

(Continued from page 2)

Snapshot Two, a quick iPhone grab I took at Guest House in 2010. Eighteen years after Alia convened her first Diamond Heart meeting in a small dark conference facility in Westchester, three folding chairs arranged in monologue position now face each other in the otherwise empty meeting space we now call the Longhouse Room. We finally had our own home. There is poignancy to those three chairs bathed in light streaming through the back window.

Because we were wandering in the wilderness for so long in search of our own space; because our hopes were raised then dashed over two previous properties; because the community came together to support the purchase and learn to govern it, this beautiful Guest House now belonged to our hearts. Compared to the early days, this was the Land-of-Milk-and-Honey time.

Snapshot Three, Luxor, Egypt, February 2010. It took me a moment to “read” this photo’s message. My tour group is in the famous Karnak Temple. Fellow student Russ Hudson had led us into a small chamber, dating from around 2,000 BC, that contained the sacred altar stone of what was the inner sanctum of the temple, a place only priests were allowed to enter. We stand in a circle, hands atop the altar, which sends forth its very strong vibration even today, 4,000 years later. It’s a sacred vibration, one that aligns the chakras.

The connection is this: Once we enter Guest House, we are in a sacred space. We can feel it, and complete strangers notice it too. It is composed of many elements; not only our practices and the spiritual work of our guests, but also the care of the whole staff, the generosity of each of the Board members, and the alignment and consciousness and presence and love for the truth each student and teacher brings with them. All of this adds to the alchemical process of transforming our souls.

When the group was wandering and had no center to hold it together, the teacher of necessity became that center—not an ideal situation for anyone. Now there is a physical space that holds and contains, that represents home, and center, in every sense of the word. As a result, our spiritual path can now become our sole focus. The group field can grow in strength and vibrancy, with all of the essential qualities and dimensions of Being weaving into it.

Perhaps it’s a way every church, temple, cathedral and ashram has always functioned, as a physical container for the spiritual energy of the teachings. As in the photo at the Karnak Temple, those who enter Guest House’s doors are also in a circle, our hands in touch with the sacred altar stone of our spiritual path. ■

Our Gang

Celebrating the great variety of our regular guest groups



Formally established in 2007, Cultivating Our Sisterhood International Association (COSIA) is a worldwide women’s organization that develops supportive networks not limited by age, ethnicity, sexual orientation or religion. It utilizes these networks as resources to produce affordable events and programs that promote team-building and the pursuit of personal and professional goals and objectives; and supports, through fundraising and volunteer activities, socially conscious initiatives and programs that benefit girls and women from underserved communities.

Organizations COSIA has helped include: Things of My Very Own (which provides impoverished child victims of abuse and/or neglect, and those in “at-risk” situations with basic necessities to ensure a successful retreat to safety); Lola Louis’ Creative and Performing Arts (a Bronx-based group that expands horizons of experience and opportunity for children and adults in the community through the arts); and more well known organizations such as Save the Children and American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. The Volunteer Consulting Group—a non-profit that works regionally and nationally to strengthen the governing and management capability of nonprofit boards—honored COSIA’s effectiveness in 2010 by selecting it as one of five finalists (out of 100 nonprofits) for the first annual Brooke W. Mahoney Award for Outstanding Board Leadership.

“Hosting the annual COSIA retreat at Guest House”, says COSIA vice president Cassandra Williams, “has enabled our organization to offer a variety of activities, from yoga to small group workshops and breakout sessions for guests. The technology available in conference rooms makes facilitation easy, and our guests rave about the meals each year. We look forward to another great year in Chester!” For information and to get involved: www.cultivatingoursisterhood.net. ■

Behind the Scenes

Meet two people who do the hard work of keeping Guest House functioning and moving forward, yet are seldom seen by guests: Sally Rothenhaus, GH administrative staff, and Jeff Charno, GH board member. If you spot them, please remember to thank them for their efforts on our behalf!

Sally Rothenhaus

Q: What do you do here at GH?

A: Bookkeeping, mailing lists and preparing the emails that go out through Constant Contact. I also help with the phones and front desk.

Q: What impels you to devote time and energy to the GH enterprise?

A: Guest House is a place for healing. My friend Robyn, who works in the dining room, suggested I apply. She knew my life circumstances and that I was looking for work. She felt it would be a good place for me, and that I'd be good for the place. I think she was right!

Q: What background/aptitudes do you bring to GH?

A: I've done bookkeeping and tax preparation for 21 years. I'm also a photographer with experience creating marketing collateral and visual products. So I've worn many hats. At the time I was interviewed, I'm not sure we knew which of those skills (beyond bookkeeping) would be put to use, but it seems they all have!

Q: What about your personal life?

A: I live with my daughters Matty & Molly, who are 19 and 21. They and my boyfriend Scotty are my constant human companions. Then we have Mick the dog; River, Nipper and Dante, the cats; Benjamin Franklin the corn snake; and 13 chickens.

Q: What's something you do in your free time?



A: Molly, Scotty and I all play the fife. Matty plays the drums. Fife-and-drum music is alive and well in this area. Scott plays with the Ancient Mariners. They look (and sometimes act) like pirates, but are actually Colonial Navy. My daughters and I play with Connecticut Valley Field Music: we dress as Union soldiers from the Civil War. I'm an active photographer for corporate & personal events, products, pet and people portraits, and scenic photography. Have a look: <http://cShoresal.com>. I hope you see a reflection of Guest House's spirit in some of my images.

Q: What's something no one at GH knows about you yet?

A: My daughter Matty is my hero. Her loving and bright spirit while facing a difficult disease (Type 1/Juvenile Diabetes) has been inspiring. Her sister Molly also lives life from well outside "the box," with Autism spectrum and other neurological differences. Honestly, being a mom to these two exceptional young people probably saves me.

Jeff Charno

Q: What kinds of things do you work on for GH?

A: I seem to be naturally moving toward streamlining the marketing processes for programs, looking at new business models Guest House may want to explore, brainstorming about our capacity and how to realize it. The thing I'm most excited about is the possibility of creating Guest House online courses from Diamond Approach (DA) teachers as well as others whose work can enrich the DA community worldwide.

Q: Why did you join the board?

A: I see Guest House as part of the DA school and it has just flowed organically for me to say 'yes.'

Q: What's your personal contribution to the board?

A: I started a record company of sorts when I was about 20 that specialized in healing, meditation and global music. (I sold it a few years ago.) I learned a lot. I had never taken a business class, and the only jobs I had were in the bike shop and washing dishes at the natural foods restaurant, so I sort of got used to looking at things freshly and figuring them out. Working now with committees and board members is a new kind of collaborative process. I'm learning more.

Q: Tell us about your personal life.

A: It's summer now and my daughter Emma is home from Oberlin for a few months. She'll spend a lot of time with me in Brooklyn and that's a profound joy. My girlfriend Aileen and I fell into deep silence over sushi on our first date last autumn and we've been in open, sweet exploration ever since.

Q: What's something you like to do in your free time?

A: I have an odd obsession with Scrabble. I often go to sleep laying down a few words on my iPad, or I play a round on my phone during subway rides. I think the focus of a verbal puzzle takes over the talking part of my mind and it has a meditative quality. ■

Ya Gotta Have Friends

Last year we inaugurated our Friends of Guest House annual membership program. The response was wonderful. A total of 82 people signed up at various donation levels. Because of the enthusiasm of this group, we concluded that it wasn't just about getting the T-shirt (though we think those are pretty nice, if we do say so). We interpreted their desire as a commitment to the future of Guest House and a show of appreciation for the many memorable things this lovely center has given us.

This year, our goal is to enroll 100 Friends of Guest House. That means 82 who signed up last year will RENEW and 18 NEW Friends will join. If you enrolled in the program last year, please renew and consider doing so at a higher level. We've got lovely notecards, journals and other gifts to show our appreciation. Our Donate Now page lists the gifts that correspond to different levels of giving. If you have not signed up, please do so today! This very important program helps create a consistent holding environment of like-minded people who love Guest House and want to see it flourish well into the future. Visit www.guesthousecenter.org and click on "Donate Now" in the menu at the left side of the page. And please be as generous as you can.

Many thanks, The Guest House Board

Giving Corner

"Age is an issue of mind over matter. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter." —Mark Twain

Forgive us, Mr. Twain, but the thing is we do mind, and it does matter. At least where the beauty and comfort of Guest House is concerned. We want to keep it in a state of lovingly ageless youth. As we enter our sixth year, we are busier than ever. We are grateful for furniture donations that have helped us keep our facility looking inviting, clean and cozy. But the constant wear and tear of increased guest traffic requires perpetual upkeep on everything from furniture upholstery to wall paint to pumps, which can be very expensive.

We hope you'll consider a generous contribution to Guest House that will help us preserve the loveliness of its décor and surroundings, which will in turn make you feel even more welcome and at ease. Below are some of the items that need attention throughout the year.

\$100 - One bed frame (8 needed yearly, \$800)

\$350 - Upholstery for one chair (4 needed this year, \$1,400)

\$600 - Queen-size mattress (about 4 needed annually, \$2,400)

\$1,000 - Light bulb supply for one year

\$2,500 - Benches and landscaping for our new labyrinth

\$3,500 - New labyrinth (we saved about \$10,000 by building it ourselves)

\$5,000 - Interior painting (annually)

Our Thanks...

FRIENDS OF GUEST HOUSE HONOR ROLL

Karen Anderson	Adam Fuller	Isabelle Lorans	Barbara Rosen
Roseanne Annoni	Ilka Giges	Lena Mandelis	Michael Rosetta
Jorge Arango	Jordan Goodman	& Mark Curelop	Richard Rowley
Jill Berman	Amy Graybeal	Elizabeth Martinson	Elizabeth Russell
Bing Bush	Michael Graetzer	Tim Marvin	Terry Saracino
Peggy Braun	Therese & Scott Griffiths	Stephan Martin	Josie Sentner
Jane Bronson	Kristina Grondahl	Meg Miller	Catherine Seo
Tabor Butler	Frances Helmstadter	Bonalyn Mosteller	Don Shaw
Sydney Cash	Margaret Hixon	Neil Moylan	David Shultz
Elizabeth Cassady	Jill Herman	Helen Newman	Patricia Simko
Denise Catuogno	Tsuguo Hirata	Suzanne Noble	Sandra Jean Simmons
Jeff Charno	Grace Holland	The Nutmeg Fund at	Anne Singer
Leah Chyten	Diane Ingram	the Community	Elizabeth Slayton
Nancy Closs	Waltraud Ireland	Foundation of	Jesse Stoner
Vince Drady	Carol Irving	Middlesex County	Sarah Tremaine
Cory Greenberg	Colleen James	Jerry O'Halloran	Ann Viviano
& Parvati Gras	Nancy Joly	Richard Onken	Michael Ward
Daphne Cruze-Zug	Stephanie Kenen	Hadley Perry	Laura Wells
Ralph Curcuru	Steve Kennedy	Ken Porter	Susan Weiley
Julia Dengel	Carrie Lamson	Bernadette Prue	Malcolm Winkley
Joyce Dowdall	Dorothy Landry	Marlene Reisman	Sara Zwart
Sara Ellison	Laurie Leonard	Lisa Ricci	Anonymous (3)

Five Years and Counting!

(Continued from page 1)

At an outdoor evening ceremony held in a light drizzle, the bowl was set ablaze, thus sending these auspicious musings and messages into the universe. Another group of students blessed a crystal and offered Guest House as the permanent resting place for its powerful energy. The group's life practices were dedicated to Guest House during the weekend, and a meditation in the White Barn helped everyone reflect on the realization of founder Alia Johnson's vision, the ways in which Guest House has grown, and our hopes and intentions for its future.

Finally, an entertaining and occasionally boisterous talent show in the Sun Room added song and laughter to the festivities.



Photo Credit: Steve Kennedy

The Guest House board takes an inaugural walk on the new labyrinth.

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Then and Now

Guest House was the dream of Alia Johnson, a long-time teacher of the Diamond Approach, a spiritual path based on the writings of A.H. Almaas (Hameed Ali) that emphasizes the unity of humankind while also recognizing the absolute uniqueness of each individual. Her wish that it become a home for established New York Diamond Approach groups has come to pass. In addition to EM groups, Guest House today also hosts the Northeast Diamond Approach seminary, the Boston group and a younger Diamond Approach New York group. Next year, a new international retreat group taught by John Davis and Roseanne Annoni will begin meeting at Guest House twice yearly (see page 1).

In 2008, the old Inn at Chester was renamed "Guest House" Retreat & Conference Center after a poem by Rumi, the 13th century mystic, and in 2008 it opened its doors, welcoming Diamond Approach groups as well as an ever-growing number of guest groups. That first year, we hosted eight retreats for EM groups and seven for guest groups, and we produced our first program. Guest House has steadily evolved, through a gut renovation of the White Barn; a transformation of the old tavern into the bright, airy Sun Room; the creation of another large meeting room on the third floor; the upgrading of the original 18th-century farmhouse (often used as an independent annex); the creation of a new field and a fire pit; and countless infrastructural improvements.



Photo Credit: Vernell Ludwig

The bowl aflame, sending well wishes for Guest House into the Universe.

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Today, Guest House is a living, flourishing nexus for thought, exploration and experience, a place where everyone is inspired to be in contact with her or his deepest truth. We also contribute to the local economy through our employment of more than 20 part-time and full-time retreat center staff. And we host upwards of 3,000 guests annually, many of whom shop at stores and galleries in Chester and dine at its wonderful restaurants. The EM group, in conjunction with a local social worker, also collects food and money for area citizens in need.

"This being human is a guest house," begins the poem by Rumi. "Every morning a new arrival." His words epitomize the sense of openness and welcome Guest House creates for the diversity of knowledge and experience that is fostered here. The staff and board look forward to continuing to strengthen Guest House's presence as one of the most beautiful, supportive and nurturing retreat centers in the country. ■

Answering a Call

(Continued from page 1)



It allows for an immersion in the Teaching free from life distractions. As participants work with their personal life experiences within this setting, a mature sense of community develops over time. Here, lead teachers Rosanne Annoni and John Davis talk about how they found the Diamond Approach. Annoni and Davis will be assisted by teachers Jane Bronson, Leah Chyten, Anne Singer and Susan Weiley.

Rosanne Annoni

Twenty-three years ago a friend encouraged me to consider joining a spiritual group that Hameed Ali (who uses the pen-name A. H. Almaas) was forming for therapists. Questions were arising about the deeper meaning of life for both my clients and myself, and I wanted answers. After reading the “Theory of Holes” chapter in one of Hameed’s early books, I decided to join the group.



I still remember Hameed’s first talk on love of truth for its own sake. My eyes welled up with tears, and I knew I was “home,” that I had found my people, even though I did not know anyone in the group.

My life has taken many unexpected turns since then, including becoming a teacher of this work. It took many years to understand what loving truth for its own sake meant, and the path has at times been quite challenging. Rather than simply seeking answers, I’ve discovered reality is a mystery, an ongoing question wanting to be known. What keeps me engaged after all these years is curiosity and a growing contentment with life as it is.

John Davis

When I discovered the Diamond Approach, I was sampling many personal growth and psychospiritual practices. Each was valuable in its own way, and I am grateful. On a friend’s recommendation, and because of a layer of emotional pain I could neither plumb nor avoid, I signed up for a three-month process led by Hameed Ali. Described as “emotional housecleaning,” it turned out to be much, much more. As helpful as it was, I figured I would continue my pattern and move on to another practice after that. However, there was something about Hameed that drew me. He was kind when I was in painful places but firm in continuing to point out my

blind spots and turning me back toward my own inner being. He was relentlessly on the side of reality and truth, which deeply moved me.



It was several years before I really settled into being his student and even longer before I felt the Diamond Approach was my path, but what kept me coming back was a longing to discover those qualities of unwavering presence in myself.

Some of us hear a call to inner work. When we respond to that call, each of us finds different doorways into exploring the nature of our being and deepening our work toward spiritual maturity. Rarely, if ever, is this process linear or predictable.

If it feels like the Diamond Approach, and particularly this retreat group, calls you, we invite you to get more information about it at <http://www.ridhwan.org/event/diamond-heart-retreat-group-5-new-retreat-group>. ■

Coming Up

Guest House Programs

(Visit www.guesthousecenter.org and click on "Programs" for more information)

Slain by Beauty: Freeing the Heart through Sufi Dance, Music and Inquiry
with Gayan Macher and Maitreya Jon Stevens
October 18-20



Exploring the Heart: A Video Retreat
with A.H. Almaas (Hameed Ali), Jane Bronson and Anne Singer
Open only to Diamond Approach students
November 1-3



Meditation in the World
Alternating, with Jane Bronson and Nancy Joly
Free, every Wednesday evening at 7:30

Other Programs Open to the Public

Male Survivor Weekend of Recovery (male survivors of sexual abuse, tmassa@malesurvivor.org)
July 12-14

Forever Family Foundation Retreat (foreverfamilyfoundation.org)
July 26-28

This newsletter is published by:

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Gestalt Center Retreat (gestalt@gestaltnyc.org)
July 26-29

Write Yourself Free Retreat (writeyourselffree.com, tishpatrick@gmail.com)
July 28-31

Anne Marie Santoro Writers Retreats (yesams@aol.com, 888.937.2536)
July 28-August 3 and August 11-17

COSIA Women's Leadership Retreat (cosiare-treat2013@eventbrite.com)
August 2-4

Open Center's BTB Feng Shui Masters (opencenter.org/btb-feng-shui-masters-program)
August 15-19

Hoffman Process groups (hoffmaninstitute.org)
August 23-30, October 11-13
September 27-28 (Inner Work for Leaders)

Art & Soul Metal Clay Mojo Conference (metalclaymojo.com)
September 5-8

Cirque du Sophia (women's senior leadership forum, cirquedusophia.com)
September 24-26

Roberta Isleib Seascape Writers Retreat (mystery writers, robertaisleib.com/seascape.html)
September 27-29

