

## Psycho-Archeology

By Steve Armstrong

I once read about a naturalist in the 1800s who lamented having to ride on horseback across America rather than traveling on foot. He regretted the rapid pace of the journey, which prevented him from exploring the wealth of nature he was speeding by. Without the opportunity for sustained and close-up observation that walking could have offered, he saw objects without any depth of detail, his glances revealing only the silhouettes of the wealth of nature he could have observed. He said that, as a result, he saw little of what was there and understood very little of what he had seen.

So too, when we see our life story as one rapid event after another, or don't look closely enough, a silhouette rather than a self-portrait appears. We understand little of either who we are or how we came to be this way. To explore the richly layered soil out of which life arises requires sustained and close contact, which a quick and cursory glance does not permit.

However, being willing to explore beneath the surface of life requires the confident knowledge that there is value in seeing more deeply. Such an examination must also be fueled by an urgent desire to understand "the way things have come to be." Furthermore, this knowledge will only be achieved through persevering intimacy with whatever emerges from behind the screen of our assumptions about ourselves, which will certainly not be the same movie that we have been viewing in the darkened theater of personal and cultural delusion. We will instead have to look at our lives in the bright light of steady awareness.

We know that any memory, moment or fantasy from any initial perspective is clearly limited. Like the naturalist traversing America on horseback, we know there is always more to be seen if we slow down and get down to earth. There is always more to understand about one's experience than is first apparent. But what can be learned from a "personal history review"? What is the point of exploring the richly imagined fantasy of one's "life-goals plan"? Why do we pay close attention even to this rather mundane moment, for that matter? Especially when, by paying continuous attention to momentary experiences that arise, we excavate the very ground upon which we stand?

On the surface of life, there is the present moment experience, the nature of which is pleasure or pain, gain or loss, praise or blame. When compounded with the joy and sorrow we feel with these inevitable life experiences, we find our memories and plans, our fears and desires, and autonomy and dependence of solitude and intimacy, all resting upon often-unacknowledged assumptions and beliefs, and the opaque conditioning of culture, gender, age, and species.

When we pay increasingly continuous attention, every momentary pixel of mental and physical phenomena appears: the visual and auditory details, the narrative, the emotions, the response or reaction to the emotion, the physical sensations correlated with the emotion, the flooding of additional, similar emotional experiences, similar memories or imaginative details. What is all this pointing to? What can we discover and understand from such experiences?

Years ago I visited a friend who was cooking on an archaeological dig in central Maine. The dig was on the edge of one of dozens of remote, small ponds in an area surrounded by dense forests. There were no signs of human habitation in sight. But at precisely plotted 4' X 4' sites along the shoreline, archeologists were painstakingly excavating, 1 mm layer at a time, the accumulated forest debris, then down through the layer of humus below and finally deeper still into the soil to reach bedrock.

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## ANNUAL MEETING/POTLUCK

**Saturday, April 4th 7:00-9:00 PM**  
**Home of Matthew Buzzard**  
**3128 E 25th St., Minneapolis**  
**Use North Entrance**  
**612-810-7703**

Please join the TCVC board in celebrating another year of offering residential retreats. Bring a dish to share (if you wish) and your ideas for future retreats. And if you'd like to join the group, this is a good time to start a volunteer position on the board.

A big thank you to Kamala Masters, Chas DiCapua, Rebecca Bradshaw and Amma Thanasanti for coming to share the teachings with us.

We also thank our registrars: Nora Murphy, Mimi Jennings, Phil Harper and Steve Burt. And the retreat managers: Joanne Hedrick, Elizabeth Archerd and Mariann Johnson for your generous service.

Thanks to the board and everyone else who contributed your time and effort in supporting the retreats. We especially want to thank those who helped get the word out by distributing newsletters in their local communities and forwarding email announcements to friends.

If you're interested in helping TCVC please contact Nora Murphy at 651-698-4546 or talk to anyone on the board.

We hope to see you on retreat this year!

TCVC Board: Elizabeth Archerd, Naomi Baer, Matthew Buzzard, Joanne Hedrick, Evelyn Kaiser, Nora Murphy, Phil Harper, Todd Stitt and Bob Zeglovitch

*Psycho-Archeology continued*

When the scraping of small trowels exposed an object such as identifiable or irregular pieces of stone, a bone or a piece of charred wood, the small trowels were set aside and paintbrushes were used to gently brush the grains of sand or other debris from around the object so that its location could be carefully mapped. It was then retrieved with tweezers and placed in a plastic bag for future cataloguing and analysis.

The objects the archeologists found were eventually recognized to be turtle bones in old fire pits and pieces of chert, the stone chipped into arrowheads and other stone tools by the Clovis people and their descendant Native Americans. With additional information, eg. radiocarbon dating of a core sample of the layers of pollen in the bottom of the pond confirming the age of the various depths of the dig, the observing archeologists realized that the Clovis people were hunting the last of the mastodon and other, now extinct, large animals by following the receding edge of the last glacier to leave central Maine 10-12,000 years ago.

The thorough, minute exploration through excavation of the historical record of nature was necessary for a more nuanced comprehension of “the way things have come to be” in the unfolding story of humanity. So too, in seeking to understand the nature of our own hearts and minds, greater intimacy with the details of the experiences our unique life provides offers the data we use to realize “the way things have come to be” for me.

The value of what can be discovered and understood from such exploration is much more than we yet know and could ever imagine is possible.

A memory, moment or fantasy from any initial, cursory perspective is clearly limited: there is always more to understand about the nature of one’s experience than first appears. The story and its emotional impact upon our felt-sense of self may be compelling and familiar. But the deeply buried family of origin conditioning and cultural beliefs and assumptions that are the durable foundation upon which the narrative of our personal lives are built are not immediately accessible. Instead, it is only through ceaseless exploration with persevering patience that we come to understand how and why we are seduced by the pleasant and entangled by the unpleasant experiences of this moment.

This psycho-archeological excavation of our personal identity can be seen as a kaleidoscopic review of the layers of accretion in our personal evolution. Exposing the multiple layers of conditioning is akin to watching a high-speed, time-lapse video of the accumulation of the forest debris over the past 12,000 years—played in reverse!

The “gathering of the archeological artifacts” is the research that enables the mind to understand how it all fits together. By stepping back from the collected minutia, we gain a panoramic perspective of the nature of the whole process unfolding over time. We see the infinitely intricate intimacy of all conditions giving rise to this moment as it is. The realization of the impersonal nature of this process is achieved only by this “stepping back to observe” and through unflinching observation of all that occurs.

By realizing that the nature of mind is observing awareness itself, we arrive where we have been all along. Bedrock: simply being. Here. Now. Always.

T.S. Eliot says this most eloquently in “Little Gidding,” the last of his *Four Quartets*:

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.  
...  
Quick now, here, now, always—  
A condition of complete simplicity  
(Costing not less than everything)  
And all shall be well and  
All manner of thing shall be well...

## VANCE PRYOR



Vance Pryor, Psy. D., began practicing insight meditation in 1998. He spent time as a monk with Sayadaw U Tejaniya and continues to make regular practice trips to Myanmar. He is currently being trained as a teacher by Steve Armstrong and Kamala Masters.

## TREASURY REPORT

<b>Retreat Fund</b>	<b>\$2,652</b>
<b>Retreat Deposits</b>	<b>4,500</b>
<b>Scholarship Fund</b>	<b>2,578</b>
<b>Balance</b>	<b>\$9,730</b>

Thanks to everyone who has donated to TCVC. With your support, many people have been able to undertake intensive retreat practice here in the Midwest. In 2013, TCVC funded scholarships of \$3,885.

TCVC is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization; your donations are tax-deductible. To make a donation, send a check to TCVC, PO Box 14683, Minneapolis, MN 55414, or donate online at [www.givemn.org](http://www.givemn.org)

You may designate your donation to either the Scholarship fund or the Retreat Fund.

For more information, contact TCVC’s treasurer, Todd Stitt, at 612-729-1715.

## REGISTRATION JUNE 12–21 STEVE ARMSTRONG with VANCE PRYOR

Registration is due by May 15. There is a \$25 late fee after May 15.  
Mail your registration to Patrice Koelsch, 2633 34th Ave. So., Minneapolis, MN 55406

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Male/Female (circle one)  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

- Email confirmation is sufficient  Please send a confirmation via postal mail
- This is my first retreat  I can help set up or clean up  I need a ride  I can give a ride
- I have special accessibility, dietary or other needs. (Please enclose a description or email the registrar.)
- I use a CPAP or other medical device. (Please specify or email the registrar.)
- Enclosed is a scholarship request for \$\_\_\_\_\_ Maximum scholarship is \$310
- \$\_\_\_\_\_ Retreat Fee\* Shared  \$620 Single  \$750
- \$\_\_\_\_\_ Add \$25 late fee if mailing after May 15
- \$\_\_\_\_\_ Optional tax-deductible donation to TCVC
- \$\_\_\_\_\_ **Total Enclosed** (Make check payable to TCVC)

\* The teachers that we ask to lead our retreats do not request or receive any compensation from us for their teaching. At the end of the retreat, students are encouraged to practice *dana* (generosity) by offering a donation to the teachers.

**Vipassana (insight) meditation** is a simple and direct practice: the moment-to-moment investigation of the mind/body process through calm, open and precise awareness. Learning to observe experience from a place of spacious stillness enables one to relate to life with a balance of wisdom and compassion.

**Held in noble silence**, the retreat includes sitting and walking meditation, instructions, Dharma talks, and group and individual meetings with the teachers.

**As the teachings of the Buddha** are considered priceless, they have traditionally been offered freely. The teachers do not receive payment from TCVC for teaching. The registration fee covers room and board, travel expenses for the teachers and other expenses.

At the end of the retreat, students are encouraged to offer a donation to the teachers to support their living expenses so they may continue to practice and teach.

**To apply for a scholarship**, include a letter with your registration giving the background of your need. Scholarship requests must be received by the due date and are limited to one retreat per person per calendar year.

Those who wish may help others by donating to the TCVC Scholarship Fund or Retreat Fund.

**Registration** Send a check for the full amount to secure your registration. If you are applying for a scholarship, subtract the scholarship amount requested from the registration fee.

**Cancellations** Notify the registrar if you need to cancel. TCVC retains a \$50 fee for cancellations received before the due date, \$75 after the due date.

### Schedule

Fri 6/12	Registration	3:00–6:00 PM
	Evening meal	6:00 PM
	Retreat opens	7:30 PM
Sun 6/21	Retreat ends	After 10:30 AM brunch

**Attendance** Yogis are expected to arrive by 6:00 PM on opening day and to stay for the duration. Exceptions must be approved by the teachers. Priority is given to people who commit to the full retreat.

**Yogi jobs** are included in the schedule for all participants. These mindful work periods are assigned on a first come, first served basis at check-in time.

**Meals** Vegetarian meals begin with an evening meal from 6:00–7:00 PM on Friday night and end with brunch on the last day of the retreat.

**Accommodations** at the Koinonia Retreat Center have modern plumbing. Handicap accessible and single rooms are available on a first-come basis.

**Detailed information** about the retreat is mailed upon registration. Contact the registrar, Patrice Koelsch 612-722-3813 or [retreats@tcvc.info](mailto:retreats@tcvc.info)

### Directions to Koinonia from Minneapolis

394 West to 169

North on 169 for 1/4 mile

West on Highway 55 2.5 miles past Annandale

South (Left) on County Road 3 for 4/10 of a mile

West (Right) on 80th Street for one mile

South (Left) on Pilger Avenue for 2/10 of a mile

Allow two hours travel time from Minneapolis.

See also [KoinoniaRetreatCenter.org](http://KoinoniaRetreatCenter.org).

You may leave Koinonia's phone number, 888-801-7746, with family for emergency contact only.

**Twin Cities Vipassana Collective**  
**P.O. Box 14683**  
**Minneapolis, MN 55414**

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## **Twin Cities Vipassana Collective Calendar Visit us at [www.tcvc.info](http://www.tcvc.info)**

**Retreats are held at Koinonia Retreat Center near Annandale, MN [www.KoinoniaRetreatCenter.com](http://www.KoinoniaRetreatCenter.com)**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Teachers / Event</b>	<b>Contact</b>
June 12–21, 2015	Steve Armstrong with Vance Pryor	Patrice Koelsch 612-722-3813 <a href="mailto:retreats@tcvc.info">retreats@tcvc.info</a>
February 12–19, 2016	Chas DiCapua and Rebecca Bradshaw	Naomi Baer 651-698-1458
June 17–26, 2016	Kamala Masters	Joanne Hedrick 612-724-9357

TCVC is a community of people interested in developing and deepening their meditation practice. We provide opportunities to hear and practice the teachings of *vipassana* (insight) and *metta* (lovingkindness) meditation, with an emphasis on residential retreats led by senior teachers in the Theravada Buddhist tradition.

TCVC publishes *GrassRoots Dhamma* about twice a year. To receive an electronic copy of this newsletter, follow the link on our homepage at [www.tcvc.info](http://www.tcvc.info). If you include your address when you sign up, we'll put you on our postal mailing list also. To remove yourself from our postal mailing list, send us an email at [mailings@tcvc.info](mailto:mailings@tcvc.info).

Practice opportunities for *vipassana* meditation are blossoming in the Midwest. In addition to Common Ground Meditation Center, which offers non-residential and residential retreats in and near the Twin Cities, look for other practice opportunities on the "Links" tab at [www.tcvc.info](http://www.tcvc.info).