

My Experience of Darshan with Thomas Berry

Julie Purcell

Julie Purcell, Th.M., works part-time as a psychotherapist and spiritual director in Durham, NC. She was ordained in the United Methodist Church in 1977, and recently was ordained a Sufi Cherag in the Ruhaniat Sufi Order. She is active in interfaith ministry, is a Mentor and Dance Leader in the Dances of Universal Peace, and communes as often as possible with the natural world, seeing all this as part of the Great Work.

Several years ago I experienced three different experiences of Darshan,¹ a transmission of blessing from a spiritual teacher to a student or devotee. My first experience was with Mother Meera, an Indian woman whom many believe to be an incarnation of the Divine Mother, in Raleigh, North Carolina; my second was with a visiting Sufi teacher, Wali Ali, in my Sufi Order. After these first two experiences I began to think about Thomas and how much I wanted to experience his giving me this “darshan” experience. I have felt connected to Thomas as a spiritual teacher for a number of years, especially after hearing him speak for the first time at Duke in 1997. I had never heard anyone speak who had his broad vision. I also appreciated how he spoke a hard truth with neither fear nor anger. I knew he had a deep faith that sustained him no matter what outer reality held.

One weekend my husband Ted and I made arrangements to see Thomas at his apartment in his retirement community. He was very glad to see us, and he was doing quite well at that time. Towards the end of our visit I asked him if he would honor me with darshan. He never missed a beat, but offered for me to kneel at his feet and I put my head on his knees. He put his hands on my head and we sat in silence for quite awhile until it was over. I received a great blessing and transmission from him. It was quiet but profound, intimate and transpersonal. It showed me once again what a giving man he is, a man who has served others in so many ways. I trust that blessing and transmission of his wisdom without words. I feel that he blessed me and the work I am doing for the Great Work, which sometimes can feel small. As I raised my head he held my glance just for a moment. One of those precious moments I am so happy to share and will never forget. Through darshan for me, through his rich life of service to many, he has given so much that only the heart can know.

“In Hindu worship, the beholding of a deity, revered person, or sacred object. the experience is often conceived to be reciprocal and results in the human viewer receiving a blessing.”

¹ “In Hindu worship, the beholding of a deity, revered person, or sacred object. the experience is often conceived to be reciprocal and results in the human viewer receiving a blessing.” *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/151828/darshan> (accessed March 24, 2009)