

A Message from Culadasa

Dear Friends in the Dharma,

I am finally able to break my silence! I sincerely apologize for not being able to respond to all of you following the letter the Board of Dharma Treasure made public on August 19th, 2019. I realize how much my silence may have contributed to the hurt, anger, doubt, disappointment, and even sense of betrayal many of you have felt as a result of those accusations.

Every day that has gone by I've wanted to make a proper response but haven't been able to. I filed for divorce from Nancy after all this happened, and couldn't make any statement until the divorce was final. We chose to enter into to a collaborative divorce process, and it took much longer than expected. My hope and purpose in responding now, almost a year and a half later, is to bring clarity to what happened so that a true healing might begin for all of us.

I'm aware that one unfortunate effect of my silence is that people may have taken that silence as a withdrawal from teaching and an admission of guilt with regard to the accusations in that letter. I want you to know the situation is quite the opposite. *That* is what this message is all about, so please do read it in its entirety, including the document attached to this email.

I also want to be clear, while I respect that some may wish to discuss and speculate on the particulars of what I will be sharing with you, my intention – with, perhaps a very few exceptions – is to put this whole matter behind me. Thoughtfully discuss and even debate as you see fit, but I will be redirecting my energies to teaching and writing. I hope that you understand this boundary I am setting for myself.

Almost six years ago (and almost four and a half years before the Board's letter) both Nancy and I recognized and accepted that we needed to sell our home and business and would not be living together afterwards. From that time forward, we began making choices and taking action based on our mutual decision. It wasn't until weeks after that letter went out that I realized the Dharma Treasure Board didn't seem to know this, and I'd never raised it as an issue when confronted by them. Nor had I communicated it to any of you. The enormous relevance of this simple fact had completely eluded me at the time I was being confronted.

Likewise, the Board's focus, both when confronting me and in their letter to you, was a highly distorted version of events that had happened over a very short period four years earlier, and many months after Nancy and I had made that decision. Nancy had been fully aware of those events (my relationships with other women) at the time they happened, and they weren't a problem for her. Once again, not until after they'd released their letter did it strike me that the long past events the Board had focused on had nothing to do with anything that had happened since, or to the real issues between Nancy and myself. I now seriously question whether the Board was ever made aware of those real issues. More likely, this distorted information was all they ever had to go on. Failing to recognize how much information was missing, I tried to respond to those long past issues without ever asking why they were being raised so many years later. Then, when the letter came out, I saw those events were being misconstrued as having continued throughout the next 4 years. On reflection, I realized this had been the Board's operating assumption all along, but I hadn't recognized that when they were confronting me.

Because I couldn't fully understand what had happened and why, I wasn't able to respond effectively, either to the Board when confronted, or to you after the Board published their letter. Nevertheless, as is often the case in situations like this, my first response on reddit, to "not take this letter as fact. It includes false information, and distortions and misrepresentations of fact," was by far the most accurate thing I said at the time.

My later apology where I said, "I engaged in adultery and wrong speech..." wasn't accurate. The mutually agreed upon status of our marriage, long before any extra-marital encounter, was such that my behavior was not adulterous. Nor should I have ever said I'd engaged in wrong speech. Some of the things I told Nancy years three years later were not true, but the intent was to protect another from harm, not to hide adulterous relationships from her as implied by the letter.

How could I have overlooked such obviously important facts as those described above? Why would I have ever made such an ill-considered apology?

Following those unfortunate events of August 2019, and during the last year and a half of forced silence imposed by the divorce process, I set out to understand what had happened and why. In addition to sorting truth from fiction, I had to go beyond the "red herring" that had been presented by (and perhaps to) the Board, delving into the real issues that led up to this situation. I began with the premise that I am the one who was ultimately responsible for what had happened, regardless of circumstances and any role played by others. I wanted and needed to clearly understand where my responsibility lay, so that I could overcome the causes for my failings, make amends, and hopefully bring about some healing.

During the past year and a half, I've had an opportunity to learn a lot about myself that I didn't know before. Working with a therapist and a life coach, I discovered deeply embedded ***automatic patterns*** of responding in fundamentally unhealthy ways to certain situations. For all my life I've had almost no ability to establish and maintain clear personal boundaries in interpersonal interactions. If someone was upset, angry, hurt, disappointed, afraid or whatever, I took personal responsibility for their mental state, regardless of the cause or whether or not I had anything to do with their being upset. I've also been extremely conflict avoidant. When confronted with anger and/or aggression, I would do almost anything to placate. I tended to avoid conflict by being excessively compliant, acquiescing too quickly, and engaging in various conflict avoidance strategies. I too readily accepted the views of others, or tried to find ways to side-step issues of conflict, to relieve another's anger while disregarding the cost to myself or future consequences. If attempts to placate failed, and full-blown conflict seemed inevitable, I would often disengage, withdraw, surrender, and even take a beating if necessary.

Conflict avoidance and lack of personal boundaries overlapped in their effects on my behavior, such that I would do almost anything to make things OK. It has been difficult for me to say no, so I committed to things I didn't really want or agree with. Until recently, I'd never been conscious of reacting out of these conditioned patterns. Now that I am much more aware of these tendencies, I no longer fall so easily into these conditioned patterns.

During the past year and a half, I've also learned to appreciate and experience certain profound depths to this Dharma that I'd known about, but hadn't fully understood and applied before. For years I'd been living mostly in the present moment, more in the ongoing awareness of suchness and emptiness than narrative and form. As part of this radical shift in perspective, I'd stopped "thinking about myself," creating the "story of me." I now realize that, while freed of the burdens of "if only" and "what if," I'd also lost another kind of perspective those narratives

provide. By embracing the now as I had, I'd let that other world of linear time and narrative fall away. Thus I found myself unable to counter what the Board confronted me with by providing my own perspective, "my story" about what had happened so many years before. Having lost the perspective and context that comes from longer term and larger scale autobiographical narratives, I failed to recognize how out of context those long-ago events were with the present.

While all narratives may ultimately be empty constructs, they are also indispensable to our ability to function effectively in the realm of conventional reality and interpersonal relationships. When trying to respond to the Board, all I had were the pieces from which those narratives are usually constructed. I was hopelessly unsuccessful in my attempts to put them together on the spur of the moment to provide a more accurate counterpart to the unrecognizable narrative I was being confronted with.

And that is how I overlooked such obviously important facts as those described above, and why I apologized so inaccurately.

In sum, at a time when every aspect of my life was shifting, the effects of unhealthy conditioned response patterns, driven by residues of psycho-emotional trauma, and a radical shift in perspective converged in an unfortunate way. As a result, I failed to respond appropriately to the situations I found myself in over a period of four years. This culminated in the events of July and August 2019 that have caused so much pain and disruption for so many. Please don't misunderstand, I'm not offering unskillfulness due to the effects of my conditioning and/or my practice as an excuse for anything. Rather, I'm acknowledging and accepting my unskillfulness as a serious and harmful shortcoming that I have a responsibility to do something about!

Out of all this, there has emerged for me a clear picture, far more complete and consistent with my lived experience than what the Dharma Treasure Board had confronted me with or presented to you. Having done this work, I now have a much clearer understanding of how and why this happened. Indeed I am responsible, and I was at fault – just not for the things that have been alleged and used to undermine my reputation.

Where my chief responsibility lies, and what I feel tremendous regret for is having at first failed to recognize the intensity of Nancy's emotional distress for too long; and then when I did recognize it, my inability to respond appropriately. I understand that, and will always be deeply sorry for the suffering Nancy has experienced. I am likewise deeply sorry for the subsequent suffering that affected first the Board members and then yourselves.

I am sharing in detail what I have learned in the hopes that it may help you to understand and make sense of what was happened as well. To read my perspective of these last years, please open the document attached to this email. There you will find my frank and detailed description of the last 6 years. My perspective is presented in considerable detail, because I know of no other way to counter the misinformation in that letter and in subsequent communications from the Board. I will also share with you what I've learned over the last year and a half about myself; the dharma I practice and teach; and what I see as its implications for all of us as lay practitioners, teachers and students alike.

I have included this email in the attachment so you will have it all in one document.

Love and best wishes,
Culadasa

The Events Leading Up to August 19th 2019

Here is the account I wish I'd had available a year and a half ago, so I could have responded more appropriately to the Board and to all of you at the time. I had to piece together what had happened and why for myself first so that I could understand my contribution to this mess, and begin doing what I can to repair the harm that's been done. Having done so, I'm now able to share my perspective with you as well. I hope this will help you to better understand and make sense of what happened in August of 2019, as well as the larger context in which it all happened.

So let's move on to my perspective on events I feel were grossly misrepresented in the Board's letter of August 19th 2019, as well as the prevailing situation at the time the letter was written. As you will see, the events the letter focused on occurred almost entirely over a short period four years earlier, despite having been misrepresented as extending "to the present day." Indeed, the Board's letter says nothing about what led up to those events, nor what happened over the ensuing four years. Furthermore, once the time frame is corrected and the events in the letter placed in the context of a marriage already in process of dissolution, it ceases to be clear what caused Nancy to go to the Board; or what caused the Board to write such a letter and take the actions they did. In light of the above, the Board's anger and willingness to confront me with forgone conclusions and ultimatums is difficult to understand – *unless they didn't know about the status of our marriage and the actual time frame of those events.*

My original purpose in recalling and reviewing everything I'm about to share with you was to try to understand for myself what led Nancy and the Board to do what they did. Please keep in mind, I've had no opportunity since to discuss any of this with Nancy, so I've had to speculate about what she may have thought and felt along the way. (Nor have I had an opportunity to speak with that Board or with the new Board.)

March through October 2015:

In the late Winter/early Spring of 2015, many months before my extramarital encounters in late summer of 2015, Nancy and I decided we were going to sell our home and business.* At that time, Nancy declared her intention to move to the northwest, where she knew I could not live as even then my lungs couldn't tolerate the damp, cold climate. I wanted to stay in Arizona and so it became clear we wouldn't be living together as a married couple. Nevertheless, Nancy was also clear that she didn't want a divorce, and I did not object.

I should explain that I had been reluctant to marry Nancy. I'd been married twice before, and I've always been too much of a loner and introvert to have ever been good at or comfortable with marriage. However, when I agreed to marry Nancy, I also made a commitment to myself to never be the one to stop trying to make it work. For all my life, once I've made this kind of inner commitment, it's unbreakable. Because of this commitment, I had stayed with Nancy for 30 years through many difficult and challenging times, including her frequent anger and threats to leave. Throughout our marriage, I'd also let Nancy's preferences take priority over mine, avoiding conflict but in a way that came to feel oppressive over time. My seven-year struggle with Lyme disease was particularly challenging in this regard. I really needed and appreciated her help, but as she took over my treatment and care, I felt controlled and dominated in a way

* For over 15 years we had been operating a Bed & Breakfast in the high desert wilderness of Cochise Stronghold Canyon. We called ourselves a "Nature Retreat," both because of the setting, and the kinds of activities that the couples and families who stayed with us engaged in. This is what allowed us to live as comfortably as we did in such a beautiful yet rugged and remote location.

that was painfully reminiscent of my childhood relationship with my mother. Thus, when we began discussing the ways in which our marriage was going to change, I felt an enormous sense of relief. I had no idea what was going to happen, but I had been freed from this commitment.

Since we were also aware that it would likely be several years before we succeeded in selling and were able to move on, we chose not to say anything to other people. This was many months before the publication of TMI, and as I was relatively unknown. It seemed reasonable to treat our plans and the changing status of our relationship as an entirely private matter between ourselves. I can see now that my conditioning was also at play. Keeping it private was a way to avoid upsetting other people, and to have done anything else would have put me in conflict with my wife. Yet by keeping this to ourselves, we also cut ourselves off from our friends and family whose knowing support might have made a difference in the months and years to come.

Over the weeks and months that followed our decision, we both began exploring options beyond our life as a couple. Nancy spent more time in Canada, took up new pastimes (like line dancing), and developed new friendships in the local area and Tucson. I began spending more time away as well, most often in solitude in the mountains and desert. These long periods of solitude began my process of reimagining my life as my own.

Occasionally I would also spend time in Tucson, or in the town of Bisbee where I lived as a child. It was during those times that I formed new friendships with several men and women from outside the dharma and meditation community. As these friendships were with people who were not part of the sangha, my role in the relationships wasn't defined by that context – I was just another person. This brought about the same delightful sense of freedom as had being freed from my inner commitment regarding my marriage. As I was pulling this timeline of events together and discussing it with my therapist and friends, I realized this sense of relief and freedom had arisen over and over again. It came from being released from obligations that had grown too many and too confining.

I was quite open with Nancy about these new friends, one of whom Nancy met when she came to the Stronghold. For both Nancy and myself, these were friendships, not sexual or intimate connections – although that was not precluded and we openly spoke of it as a possibility as we tried to define together how our relationship would change. Either of us could have engaged in sexual relationships with others, but neither of us had done so at that point.

Our decision to live separate lives and the avenues we were beginning to explore impacted our lives together and necessitated changes. We needed to find ways to keep the B&B running as well as prepare the property for sale, even as we both spent more time away. We also discussed and began working out how the changes in our relationship and pursuit of separate interests would impact our finances.

As Nancy began traveling to Canada more often, those costs increased. In late Spring of 2015, I'd begun helping the person I just mentioned who came to the Stronghold. She was a young woman I'd met in a state of crisis in the parking lot of a hospital after one of my appointments. I helped her with many things, like obtaining a copy of her birth certificate so she could get a driver's license, applying for assistance, and getting a job and an apartment for herself and her daughter. I also helped her buy Christmas presents for her other children living with their father in another state. Nancy was aware of this and agreed to the gifts.

As a direct result of my intention to continue assisting this person, Nancy and I agreed in December of 2015 that any future use of common funds by either of us for personal reasons would be matched by an equal amount for the other. This allowed me to feel more comfortable about giving this woman small amounts of money from time to time over the next year (such as when she needed groceries or fell short on rent). ***I have honored that agreement completely***, always transferring an equal amount of common funds to Nancy's private bank account to do with as she wished. Although I helped this woman with expenses from time to time for a little more than a year, I was never sexually or romantically involved with her. Rather, this was my venture into "compassion in action" in the world, and I have spoken about it often in podcasts, Teacher Training classes, dharma talks on retreats, etc. She is not the only person I've helped in their time of need simply out of care and compassion.

The Dharma Treasure Board's letter claimed that I had "provided significant financial support... a portion of which was given without the prior knowledge or consent of his wife." This was not true. While I have helped people financially over the years, never have I used our joint funds for such purposes without Nancy's full knowledge and according to clear agreements. Prominent among those agreements was that of matching funds described above. This could not be challenged during our divorce because I had records of those deposits.

Over a period of about 2 ½ months in mid to late-summer 2015, my circle of acquaintances expanded. It came to include, among others, a small group of powerful, independent, and financially successful women who were, or had once been, professional escorts. Thus it was that, including other female friends I'd met over those and the preceding months, "multiple women, some of whom were sex workers" came into my life. I didn't meet them in the context of their profession, but rather sequentially and as friends of friends. My entrée to their social circle was via the neighbor of one of them.

One of the things my friends made sure I was aware of was the sinister side of the sex industry, involving degradation and exploitation of women and men by each other, and of themselves by themselves. My friends consider themselves to be an "elite" within the sex industry, providing an important and necessary service. Each has her own story about how she came to be involved in her profession, but all claim to have chosen their careers intentionally, to enjoy their work, and to be proud of their role in society. I consider them to be sensitive and deeply caring people. They also strongly favor and actively work toward legalization, regulation and normalization of the "world's oldest profession," a view which I've come to support as well.

I was and always will be grateful for having met these women and being accepted into their very private social circle. Hearing their unfiltered conversations changed my attitude about so many things. They also had an uncontrived comfort with sex as a professional as well as recreational activity, and I've always been curious and open to new experience. I had the freedom to accept their invitations and absolutely no reason to let the opportunity pass me by. For me, it was a harmless, wholesome, and no-strings-attached opportunity to learn more about sex, something that had always been a mystery to me. Sex had always been an unresolved problem in our marriage, and our attempts to address it with counselling and professional help were unsuccessful. Through my interactions with these women I was able to turn around a lifetime of my own misunderstandings and ignorance. As those who know me can attest, I've always been interested in learning as much as possible about everything, especially from those with expertise and experience I lack. Such was the case here. I was that same person, responding to a new situation and opportunity in the same way I always have, not indulging a hidden dark side. Despite the emphasis on sex in the Board's letter, these sexual interactions were few and, from

my perspective, much less important than their friendship, and what I learned in many long and interesting conversations.

Due to Nancy's and my mutual recognition, acceptance, and agreement several months earlier, I didn't hide these interactions from Nancy. In fact, she was quite curious and I was comfortable sharing my experiences with her. I spoke openly and there was no apparent negative reaction, although there may well have been hidden discomfort that I missed. However, I took Nancy's evident acceptance, interest and curiosity about those events at face value then, and am still inclined to do so now.

Thus my apology on Reddit stating "I engaged in adultery..." was inaccurate, obscuring the truth. It was simply not the case that I was in adulterous relationships, or that I engaged in false speech to hide adultery from my wife.

It was in August of 2015 that I learned a 7 cm spiculated mass (a probable malignancy) was growing in my right lung. I kept this to myself until I had a follow-up appointment with a pulmonologist in September. I had only recovered from chronic Lyme disease less than 2 years earlier, and now I knew I was facing yet another life-threatening challenge to my health. It was not the prospect of failing health or death that was disturbing, because I had accepted those long ago. For seven years with Lyme disease I had allowed Nancy to manage my care. I'd felt powerless and dominated, completely under her control during that period, and had only recently regained control. I couldn't allow that to happen again. Thus I took more control from the outset, not even informing Nancy until shortly before my follow-up appointment with a pulmonologist. Thereafter, I continued to insist on driving myself to and from appointments and scheduled treatments as well, which Nancy accepted but did not take well to. I recognized that I needed to set a boundary here, but without understanding my conditioning, the only method I had was to unskillfully shut her out. This kind of withdrawal from engagement was a coping mechanism I had often used when I needed a boundary but couldn't set and maintain a healthy one.

The Mind Illuminated was self-published through Dharma Treasure in September 2015. The funds for editing, layout, illustrations, and printing had all been paid for by a single benefactor. All of those donations were then paid back to Dharma Treasure from book sales. Thereafter, I continued to share half of the net income after costs with Dharma Treasure (until Simon & Schuster took over publication in 2017). This began a process that brought my work and teachings to a much wider audience.

October 2015 through May 2016:

Shortly after a biopsy in October, metastasis to a lymph node was revealed by mediastinoscopy, and the surgeon told me the cancer was possibly still Stage 3, but more likely stage 4. He was blunt about the 5-year survival rate for this type of cancer, from date of first diagnosis (x-ray, August 2015), being about 7%. For me, the prognosis was disappointing, but I'd been living in the present with a profound acceptance of the unfolding of suchness for so long, it was just another "it is what it is" moment.

For Nancy, my prognosis made the sale of our property and her move to Canada an even more urgent priority. Cochise Stronghold Nature Retreat (despite the name, it was actually a nature-oriented B&B) had already become tiresome and a burden for her. We also had two elderly

people, my father and Allegra Ahlquist, living onsite.* If I died, it was certainly more than one person could manage on her own.

Sadly, my father died in my arms on January 16th 2016, my mother's birthday. We buried him next to my mother behind the house they'd built on our land (My mother had died on July 4th 2012.) I was glad to have reconciled with them and been able to be close to them in the last three decades of their lives. They had lived with us since December of 2008.

Throughout the next 4 years, the duration and frequency of Nancy's time spent in Canada increased steadily as she moved forward with her plans to return to Canada. Her goal was to reach the "6-months-plus-a-day-during-12-months" standard for re-establishing Canadian residency (which she achieved after the sale of our property).

Daily radiation treatments began in November, soon after the mediastinoscopy. Radiation was followed by chemotherapy through December and January, all in preparation for a thoracotomy and lobectomy in February 2016. Beginning in November I spent about half of my time in Tucson, often staying at the Tucson Community Meditation Center rather than making the 180-mile round trip from the Stronghold every day.

From the time of biopsy in October, except for a few friendships that have continued, socialization with anyone other than students and family soon came to an end. However, because I was spending a lot of time in Tucson during treatment, Nancy kept asking me if I was seeing what she referred to as my "girlfriends," and I truthfully said no. Because I'd been so open with her previously, I wonder if she might have begun thinking I was hiding things from her?

During the period of November through January, a woman I'll call W, who I'd met a few months earlier and stayed in touch with, took an interest in my cancer treatment and personal well-being. She began to meet with me after my radiation treatments and would come to the cancer clinic to sit and talk with me during my chemotherapy infusions. We were remarkably similar in many ways, quite comfortable with each other, and developed a nice, relaxed friendship. She'd planned to come see me in the hospital after the thoracotomy, but they sent me home before she had a chance.

Many weeks of recovery followed the thoracotomy in February. Then, as soon as I was strong enough again, I received more chemotherapy in April and May. I had been spending so much of my time in Tucson since my treatment began in November that, in the spring of 2016, Nancy and I bought a small unit in a housing co-operative in Tucson for me to stay in. I was put on oxygen immediately after the thoracotomy, and it was much easier for me to breathe in Tucson than at the Stronghold, which is at a higher elevation. Thereafter, for the next 3 years, I lived in the co-op for about half the time, returning to the Stronghold for several days each week to do meditation interviews and take care of things that could not be handled from a distance.

*In 2008, following my ALS diagnosis (which later turned out to be Lyme disease), my parents built the main house on our land and came to live with us. I'd been traveling regularly to their home 5 hours away to help look after them but could no longer do so. This allowed them to be with me and to continue receiving the assistance they needed then and would need more of in the future. Allegra contributed to the construction costs so she could live out her final years in the small apartment created for her. (Nancy and I had been living in the large yurt for 12 years and using the straw bale house as B&B accommodations.)

During the period following my surgery, W's and my friendship deepened. As time passed, our relationship became more than a friendship, but very tentatively so until we finally had a conversation about our feelings at the end of May, 2016. This happened as friendship and companionship very naturally became romantic and sexual, surprising us both in the process. Nancy had long been aware of our friendship and frequent meetings, and inquired at one point if we'd had sex. We hadn't at the time she asked, but did subsequently, and when Nancy asked again, I told her we had. There was no reason not to, any more than there had been the previous summer.

June 2016 through December 2016:

A CT scan in June, following completion of post-surgical chemotherapy, showed a nodule still present in my remaining lung. The original prognosis was unchanged and I was now almost a year out from diagnosis, so statistically I had a 7% chance of lasting 4 more years.

Nancy had accepted W's and my relationship with full knowledge and evident consent. She prepared a list of all my doctors, medications, health history and treatments for W so she could take care of me once Nancy had moved to Canada. Nancy wanted to meet W, and Nancy and I discussed an ongoing familial relationship that would include all of us, which W also found agreeable.

Nancy was, however, still insistent that she didn't want us to divorce. Since I had no intention of marrying again, and W and I weren't planning to live together, I allowed her preferences to take precedence. Between Nancy spending as much time away as she could while we were still operating a B&B, and my spending at least half of each week in Tucson, we were in each other's presence for only about a quarter of the time.

With her spending more time in Canada, and my being much busier after publication of TMI, Nancy was beginning to struggle with the workload associated with running the B&B. So, as the B&B business began to pick up in Fall of 2016, after the summer off-season, we decided to experiment with hosting solo retreatants instead of and even while B&B guests were present.

For many years we had hosted long-term solo retreatants who either provided their own accommodations or stayed in our trailer. Then in 2014 we began hosting solo retreatants in the B&B accommodations, but only on dates when there were no B&B guests on site, during the summer off season and between Thanksgiving and the New Year holiday. These solo retreatants did all their own cooking and cleaning and stayed much longer than B&B guests, so required much less time and attention from Nancy. When we tried hosting retreatants at the same time as B&B guests for the first time that Fall, we found it was a financially viable way to reduce Nancy's workload. However, while I was still recovering from the cancer treatment and surgery, I also found myself adding meditation interviews to my weekly schedule.

January 2017 through June 2017:

Simon & Schuster had contracted to take over publishing *The Mind Illuminated*, and the re-launch was in January with many promotional events scheduled in New York and elsewhere, so it was a busy time.

As for the cancer, we remained in "wait and see" mode until March of 2017, when a CT scan showed something unusual on one of my ribs. It was described as an apparent "healing fracture," though I'd had no fracture, and it hadn't been seen on earlier scans. There was, however, no sign

of recurrence of the cancer on a PET scan immediately after, so “wait and see” continued, but now there were strong suspicions that things might change quite soon. (A lesion may be cancerous, but still too small to light up on a PET scan).

I also experienced a complete rupture of the supraspinatus tendon in my right shoulder, and was treated with physical therapy for three months from March to July. This was a significant event for me, since the injury was crippling as well as painful, and temporarily interfered with many of my ongoing activities.

Other things were going well. We were making progress on preparing our property and home in Cochise Stronghold for sale, although it was not yet ready to put on the market.

We had a major forest fire in June that came very close to the canyon we lived in. We had to evacuate, but fortunately the fire never reached us. Nancy continued moving forward with her planned move to Canada, including buying a trailer to have her own place to stay on her extended visits there. She left for Canada with it in July as soon as the forest fire was under control.

My relationship with W continued, as did Nancy’s acceptance of it. W had developed a pattern of periodic severe flu-like illness that mysteriously came and went over the summer and fall of 2016. These episodes got progressively worse and more frequent until she was finally diagnosed with chronic Lyme disease in early 2017. Nancy responded by providing W with books and information she had accumulated during my own 7-year struggle with Lyme, and we gathered up all my leftover medications and supplements for her to use. W began treatment for Lyme, but rapidly became sicker and sicker. She eventually became too ill to continue working even part-time, gave up her house, and began living on her savings. Nevertheless, she completely refused to accept financial assistance from me.

At Nancy’s request, we also had a series of visits with a relationship therapist about where our relationship was headed. Our therapist’s conclusion was that we lacked individual “differentiation” in our relationship, and recommended that Nancy “let go” of the marriage. Despite that recommendation, Nancy was still adamant about no divorce, and began pushing to have us put all of our assets into a trust. This was the first time it became clear to me how concerned Nancy was about the implications of my relationship with W in regard to the disposition of our joint property upon my death. And, with the rib lesion, my prognosis was not looking very good.

July 2017 through December 2017:

I was hospitalized with two back-to-back life-threatening infections in July. I was scheduled to leave for Colorado to lead a retreat when the second infection occurred. Once they succeeded in identifying and treating the infection, I went from the hospital to the airport and made it to Shambhala Mountain Center in time for the 2nd day of the retreat.

In August 2017 I started a Patreon to raise money to: expand Teacher Training, publish the book I was writing on contemporary dharma, organize retreats, be able to respond to requests for speaking engagements and interviews, hire an assistant and build a support team, and get healthy again. I funneled Patreon contributions through Dharma Treasure so donors could get a tax

deduction, but these funds were accounted for separately and were only used for their designated purposes while I was Spiritual Director.*

W was not responding well to the Lyme treatment, and ended up selling everything she owned to take care of herself and her son. Only when she had absolutely no resources left, was living with relatives, and her son had gone to live with his father, would she let me start helping with her medical bills. I started doing online consultations to pay for her treatment. Nancy and I had agreed before I took on this extra work that the purpose was to help W *without* diminishing our joint assets.** W was, and still is to this day, couch-hopping between the homes of various relatives.

A follow-up CT scan, also in July of 2017, now identified the rib lesion as a “suspected malignancy,” confirmed by a PET scan a week later, and identified via needle biopsy 2 weeks after as a metastasis of the original lung cancer. As expected, the cancer had returned, and resumption of chemotherapy was being discussed. We were now two years out from diagnosis and counting.

I wasn’t satisfied with the idea of going on chemo until the side effects got so bad I couldn’t continue, which was the “standard of care” approach. Instead, with some help from a dear friend, I went to Dana Farber in Boston in September to see one of the top oncologists in the country. I found I qualified for a clinical trial to treat the bone metastasis with radiation surgery. When I returned to Boston in October to enter the trial, however, they found I had developed multiple metastases in my lungs, and one in my brain as well. Suddenly things were looking much worse.

Instead of the clinical trial, I was put on a new drug that had just been approved. The date I started was October 13th 2017. With stage 4 cancer that had already spread to both bone and brain, and multiple metastases throughout my remaining lungs, this drug was my only hope. The downside was the median period before the drug would begin to fail was only 18 months. There was, however, the other half of the statistical distribution where the drug continued to work beyond 18 months, and I intended to be in that half.

Despite all this, we continued with our plans to sell and Nancy with her plans to relocate to Canada. In October of 2017, at Nancy’s instigation and insistence, we got another co-op unit very near the one where I was and am living. This was so she would have a place to stay when she visited from Canada after the sale of the property. There was no other reason we needed another co-op unit, but this made sense to me. She also spoke of being able to visit W and me in the co-op unit where I lived, so I had to remind her that W and I had no intention of living together.

My first Patreon Q&A was held in October of 2017 and the second in December. In November we used Patreon funds to hire a personal assistant to help me cope with some of the many tasks I was engaged in, which had become more than I could handle in my still debilitated state.

* I have also used Patreon contributions for only those purposes since the contributions ceased to pass through Dharma Treasure and began coming to me directly.

** We had agreed at the time not to treat this as joint income, but because that agreement wasn’t in writing, I had to compensate Nancy for this income as part of the divorce settlement.

An MRI on December 28th indicated no sign of the brain metastasis. It seemed to have completely disappeared, and a CT scan showed the lung nodules were beginning to shrink as well. Fortunately, the drug was working quite well in controlling the cancer.

The status of the relationship between Nancy, W and me continued pretty well unchanged through the end of 2017. There were a few times toward the end of the year when Nancy was less accepting of and even quite unfriendly toward W, but they hadn't lasted long, and we talked through them. However, it's worth noting that Nancy and W had still never succeeded in really meeting and getting to know each other.

2018 – Changing minds and hearts:

This was to be a pivotal year in many ways!

Sold! – Less than a month into 2018, suddenly and quite unexpectedly, the opportunity to sell the Cochise Stronghold property to Dharma Treasure arose. We had always assumed that it would sell to some wealthy person or family and become a vacation home. That it might become a retreat center seemed like a dream come true. It is important to note that the primary intention of the person who made this sale possible was to free Nancy and me from the having to run the Cochise Stronghold Nature Retreat, and allow us to finally get on with our lives. This would allow us to finally complete the transition we had initiated almost three years before. That it could become a full-time meditation retreat center that we, or at least I, would continue to be involved with but that we no longer had to run, was icing on the cake.

As it turned out, rather than being immediately freed following the sale in June 2018, we found ourselves having to continue running the new retreat center for another year. That it was now a retreat center rather than a B&B was a plus, but didn't make the difference we'd hoped for in our personal lives. Instead, we continued to work closely together right up until Nancy's final departure from the Stronghold, which was two days before I was confronted by the Dharma Treasure Board.

What I also never foresaw, was that accepting the donation and allowing my non-profit church to be the entity through which the Cochise Stronghold property was turned into a retreat center would result in my losing Dharma Treasure, and in the subversion of its purpose for existence. We had expanded the size of the Board of Dharma Treasure from three, including Nancy and myself, to six to avoid a conflict of interest due to our being the sellers as well as representing the buyer. This was intended to be a temporary measure only. From the outset, we had implemented a plan to keep the accounts of the future retreat center separate from those of Dharma Treasure. This was so we could spin the retreat center off as a separate entity as soon as it became self-sustaining.* Dharma Treasure could then return to having a 3-person Board and continue in its original purpose as a vehicle for my writing and teaching. Although the new Board members were aware of the plan to spin-off the retreat center, they didn't know of our

* Providing accommodations for retreatants for a fee had never been the purpose or Mission of Dharma Treasure. The "Character of Affairs" in the Articles of Incorporation that were the basis of Dharma Treasure being accorded 501(c)(3) status as a church includes "conducting... religious meditation retreats...", but does not include providing accommodations for retreatants for a fee. Although a religious 501(c)(3) like Dharma Treasure can legally provide such services for a fee, it can only do so if they are mission related, and do not constitute its primary activity. Therefore Dharma Treasure could legally create a retreat center on the newly purchase property, but operating a retreat center could not become its mission. This had been discussed in detail with the new Board during strategic planning sessions prior to completion of the sale of the property to Dharma Treasure.

plans to live separately or that Nancy would be moving back to Canada (and wouldn't, therefore, be involved in the retreat center long term). They should definitely have been informed of these things, and it was a serious failing on my part not to have recognized this and done so. Had I, I'm sure they would have taken my plan to spin off the retreat center much more seriously than they did.

Our experiment with hosting solo retreatants alongside B&B guests to reduce Nancy's workload, begun in late 2016 and continued through 2017, had been successful. Thus, we began to think about switching over completely from B&B guests to retreatants even before the sale was complete. The person we'd hired as my assistant had experience with the Forest Refuge and embraced the idea very aggressively. We also began to experiment with having some of my Teacher Training students serve as resident teachers to help me with meditation interviews for solo retreatants. Both of these experiments were successful, and became the operating plan for the new retreat center once the sale was completed.

My relationship with Nancy – By early 2018, it was also obvious that I was responding very well to the new cancer medication. The metastases in my lungs began to shrink and disappear. The brain metastasis was already gone, and the rib metastasis completely healed over. This steady regression of the cancer continued throughout that year, and I began to recover more strength and vitality at the same time. It was not, however, a time without serious medical issues for me. In February I had my fourth abdominal surgery since 2012 and a fifth segment of my small intestine was removed due to blockage. Unfortunately, the cancer medication also impaired wound healing. As a result, I had a gaping hole in the middle of my belly until early July, when it finally healed following weekly visits to the Tucson Medical Center wound clinic and a series of stem cell implants.

As my cancer prognosis continued to improve and as the conclusion of the sale of our property approached, Nancy seemed to become progressively more resentful of W and of my relationship with her. For the last 32 years, frequent outbursts of anger directed at me by Nancy and accompanied by threats, most commonly to leave, had been a regular part of our life together. So much so that I had become somewhat desensitized to them. With increasing frequency now, these expressions of anger involved my relationship with W and my absence from the Stronghold (which were unrelated). When the threats started to be directed at W, I found it necessary to engage in false speech with Nancy to protect W. Despite the change in their focus, I failed to recognize these outbursts were now coming from a different place. Being conflict avoidant and living in the moment, it was all too easy to let those episodes pass. Especially since between those episodes we continued to share the same love we'd always felt for each other.

Toward the end of 2018 into early 2019, the threats directed at me began to include the threat to destroy me. She never said why or what she meant by that and it was always said in anger, so we never discussed what it was about. Was it just anger arising out of pain? I always assumed so. But might it have involved her own concerns that the life we were leading was so different from what people believed? I don't know. I do know that, from the time we decided to sell and move on in early 2015, Nancy had managed other peoples' perceptions of our relationship. I was always just being myself and responding to what was happening in the moment, but Nancy made comments in private that indicated for her it involved some pretence.

Clearly, had we been more open about what was happening in our relationship and private life, I would have been much less vulnerable to the sort of accusations that were made later. However,

I could never have foreseen anything like what happened, so was oblivious to that possibility. The last thing on my mind at that time was how our marital situation might eventually impact others, or that in not sharing the actual status of our marriage we were fostering impressions of a false harmony. For my part, I was happy that we continued to get along pretty well, and accepted the situation at face value and without question. I've always preferred to keep personal matters private, which dovetailed nicely with Nancy's wish to maintain the status quo and not formalize or reveal the changes in our marriage.

I noticed the frequency of Nancy's expressions of concern about the disposition of our assets going forward had also increased. All we had of value in the world was our land and buildings. Over the last few years, both of us had been uncertain whether they would sell for enough to provide for two of us living separately. Nancy is 11 years younger than I am, and is in good health, but how long I would live was a complete unknown. That I would require intensive and expensive care toward the end of my life was very likely. Now all that had changed. We knew we would have enough for both of us, and after I died Nancy would have more than enough to be quite comfortable. We discussed the future often and took actions to assure that her future was as secure as possible. We used the money from the sale of our home to Dharma Treasure to buy a house and land for Nancy in Canada. We also took out a mortgage on that house to make improvements so that there would be space on that property for both her and a rental unit. Our aim was to assure that she had a home with a potential for rental income, and would thus be well provided for.

Nevertheless, Nancy started to express the fear, as it began to look like I might live longer than expected, that I might spend, or should we divorce, give to W, money that Nancy might otherwise have after I was gone. In retrospect, I believe that could explain her insistence from the beginning that we not divorce, and later that we put all of our joint assets into a trust.

Another part of the shift in Nancy's attitude during this time was to start blaming W for the change in our own relationship. This seemed so bizarre to me, coming three years after our original decision, instigated by her but welcomed by me, that we would be leading separate lives more than a thousand miles apart. We had come to that decision many months before I ever met W, and well over a year before W became more than a friend. I wanted and needed to live in Arizona, much preferred living alone, and the more time I spent by myself, the more I enjoyed being by myself. Nancy had been taking action on similar premises for years, and was even then dramatically accelerating the pace of her plans and preparations to live in Canada where she could be closer to our son and granddaughter. None of this had anything to do with W.

With the withdrawal of Nancy's continued acceptance of my relationship with W, my situation became increasingly painful and more challenging. As has been my lifelong tendency in every relationship, I wanted to take personal responsibility for and do anything I could to somehow remove Nancy's pain and anger. More than that, I still cared about Nancy and wanted her to be happy. At the same time, I also wanted to relieve the extreme anxiety W was experiencing because of Nancy's shift in attitude. I had also taken responsibility for W's medical care and emotional well-being, and wanted just as much for her to be happy. I'd created a situation where I was caught in co-dependent relationships and could see no way out.

In the meantime, there was no course of action or even non-action I could conceive of that would not cause significant suffering for both of them. W agonized over her own helplessness, and the mix of guilt and anxiety she now felt. Nancy was obviously quite miserable as well. It was painful for me because I felt responsible for both of them, but had no solution. Instead, I found

myself trying, over and over, to say or do whatever I could to cause the least suffering for either of them in the moment. This went on for the rest 2018. It has since become so obvious what a mistake that was. I unskillfully focused on minimizing trauma in the moment, as it arose. This was driven by what I now recognize as an automatic behavioral response arising out of conflict avoidance and lack of personal boundaries – one that I was unaware of at the time. I kept hoping the situation would somehow resolve itself, perhaps through Nancy returning to her previous state of acceptance of the changes that were taking place.

In retrospect, I can see ever so clearly that a far more skillful course of action would have been to formalize our separation much earlier. If not when it first became clear in the spring of 2015 that Nancy and I wouldn't be continuing to live together, then certainly as soon as I realized that W was becoming more than a friend in summer of 2016. I should at the very least have done so immediately when Nancy's shift in attitude became apparent in early 2018. Although it might have caused Nancy more immediate pain, it would have more accurately reflected the reality of our situation, causing her much less pain in the long run, and allowed healing to begin.

Rather, in my misguided attempts to minimize Nancy's immediate suffering, I ultimately but unintentionally created and prolonged much, much more unnecessary and avoidable suffering for her. I also think I seriously underestimated her fears and concerns about money – largely because I knew there was no solution to them, other than my death and her retaining my share of our common assets. Instead of my acquiescing to her continued insistence on not divorcing and perpetuating this impossible situation, it would have been far better for both of us to just “bite the bullet” and get on with it. Being who I was, though, and not able to see and understand how unskillful it was not to, I didn't make it happen, and Nancy wouldn't do it either.

To have done so much sooner would also have spared much pain and suffering for my once dear friends who we had asked to join the Dharma Treasure Board, for the Teachers-in-Training, and for uncountable students and followers of TMI and my other teachings. The last thing on my mind at that time though, was how our marital situation might eventually impact others. Hindsight is always 20/20, but I was totally lacking in foresight or implications beyond the moment I was living in.

My relationship with W – Nancy's increased blaming of W for the change in our relationship had increased W's level of anxiety to an intolerable degree. Due to the severity of W's illness and living with different relatives, who often lived hours away from Tucson, it had not been uncommon for us to see each other only once a month or even less often. This had already strained our relationship. By the spring of 2018, with the added stress of Nancy's acceptance having turned into antagonism, things reached a point where W and I were no longer spending time together at all.

Tensions with the Board – Tensions began to develop between the new Board members and myself long before Nancy went to them with her accusations. In 2018 three members of the newly expanded Dharma Treasure Board created and taught a Dedicated Practitioners Course as a Dharma Treasure offering. They compensated themselves with 80% of the income produced from the course. This came as a surprise because it was not a decision that had been made in a meeting where policy was formally discussed and voted on. I became concerned about the situation I'd created by allowing the tuition paid for my Teacher Training classes (which were never a Dharma Treasure activity) to remain in the Dharma Treasure bank account. I was getting strong inklings of this new vulnerability of DT resources to influences other than myself. I

decided that I would ultimately allow no more than 10% of the Teacher Training tuition to remain with Dharma Treasure regardless of what I eventually did with the rest. Unfortunately, I didn't act on that decision as swiftly as I should have.

Then later in 2018, after completion of the sale, two of the same Board members conducted a group retreat at the new retreat center, collecting dana for themselves from the participants. Once again, this was a radical departure from anything I'd ever done, and was not the result of formal policy making. From the time I'd created Dharma Treasure, I had directed the dana given to me at all retreats and teaching events I conducted anywhere to Dharma Treasure.* Dharma Treasure was my "baby" and the vehicle for my teaching, so I had always wanted to nurture it as much as possible. While I understood their felt need to be compensated for their time and effort, it marked another significant change. Another disturbing aspect was the number of retreatants they and Nancy decided to host, and that accommodating that larger number of people necessitated using space in new ways that ignored the specifics of our building permit. The larger numbers were also in complete disregard of decisions we had collectively made as part of a strategic planning process. The way they dove in and started running with things without discussing it with me was especially disturbing. I can now see that their not knowing of our plans to separate, and that Nancy would be much less involved once she moved, gave us very different perspectives; they were basing their decisions about the future on incomplete information and false assumptions.

In retrospect, I can see this was a missed opportunity that might have changed everything. Had I not allowed myself to become so overloaded with commitments, this would have been the right time to insist we discuss these issues. Perhaps we would have decided to do the "spin-off" at that time, and they could have done what they wanted with the retreat center. But then, being too busy to deal appropriately with issues at the time they arise is just another way of deferring or avoiding conflict.

By the end of 2018, I was conducting four Teacher Training classes, each meeting two hours every second week, scheduling a fifth class to begin in the new year, conducting meditation interviews, overseeing the resident teachers and working on two books. Things had not worked out with the assistant we had hired, so after he left, I engaged someone to help with research for the two books I was then writing. In the fall of 2018, Dharma Treasure hired someone to manage the retreat center, but she refused to work with me, and Nancy was away in Canada. I never understood her refusal to work with me, but it contributed significantly to the increasing tensions within Dharma Treasure. In all of these tension-producing situations, I resorted to passive withdrawal because I was unable to set firm boundaries and engage in healthy conflict.

Moving into 2019 – In the process of putting this timeline of events together, I began to recognize how so many different things – Nancy's sense of loss, emotional pain, financial fears, and diminished ability to accept my relationship with W – were linked to my improving prognosis. At the time though, I was just letting the events of each day unfold as they would. That, unfortunately, was a predominant feature of how I lived throughout those years. I now realize how much my lack of "narrative" and the corresponding inability to see things from a larger perspective had blinded me to the causes of Nancy's growing emotional distress for far too

* Organizing retreats had never been a significant Dharma Treasure activity, or its purpose. Until that time, Dharma Treasure had only organized a single retreat, held at El Rancho Robles over New Year of 2014. All other retreats I led over the years had been organized by other people and organizations. Those held twice a year at the Stronghold (over the Christmas/New Year period and in early July) involved only about ten or so people, and were, of course, organized by Cochise Stronghold Consulting, through which we operated our B&B. When we needed extra space we rented it from our neighbors or the Forest Service.

long. I've always been quite sensitive to the suffering of others (a legacy of my childhood, and a fruit of my practice), but I've never understood the language of emotion well enough to contextualize it properly. Due to lack of boundaries and conflict avoidance, I've also often failed to respond appropriately. With the busyness of our lives and how much time we spent apart, it is only in reflecting on all this that I've realized how great her suffering must have been.

Although I couldn't then, I can see now how the events of the previous two years must have been more emotionally difficult than Nancy had let show. Cancer is a stressor that can break a marriage. Coming so soon after our decision to live separately, it complicated and added stress and intensity to everything that happened and every decision we made. It's not unusual for new relationships to form when couples separate. But to have it happen while we were still working together, and be a part of it as well? (Nancy was not only aware of my relationship with W but had provided her with my medical information, as well as giving W books and medications to assist with her Lyme disease. We had also talked of an ongoing inclusive familial relationship.) And all of this coming on top of the fears Nancy already had about her financial future? That had to have been painful. Nancy deserves a lot of credit for the bravery she showed, not only in trying to be accepting for so long, but for continuing to be supportive in so many other ways. Furthermore, as my prominence in the dharma world had grown following publication of TMI, so had hers. She was my visible support at many public events and retreats. She was also very involved in supporting the many retreatants that had come to the B&B as more people read TMI and came on solo retreats. This seemed to have become an important part of her identity, as she frequently described herself as "Culadasa's wife" in conversation. I am only speculating, but depending on how long I lived, and what might happen in my relationship with W, not only was there uncertainty about her financial future, but perhaps she risked losing that part of her identity as well. That, too, might have contributed to her insistence that we stay married. I feel deep regret and remorse for the suffering all of this caused her. If it were ever possible to redo the past, I would most surely not let this situation go on for so long.

January 2019 through June 2019:

By early 2019, Nancy *seemed* to have returned to a full acceptance of the reality we had both recognized years earlier, and that for me had remained a given – living separately at a great distance implied an even greater degree of separation than just living very separate lives. She did, however, continue to maintain she didn't want us to divorce.

After W and I had stopped seeing each other, however, I began spending time with someone else who was also not a part of the Dharma world. When Nancy learned of this in about February of 2019, any illusion that W was somehow the problem had been completely dispelled. Unfortunately, this realization and the cumulative effect of all the fear and pain Nancy had been experiencing for the last year resulted in a much greater degree of emotional withdrawal and reactivity than I expected. As best I can determine, it wasn't long afterward that Nancy began her series of meetings with the rest of the Dharma Treasure Board, culminating in their confronting me in July and their letter in August. Nancy completely concealed those meetings from me and gave no indication in her behavior and attitude that anything at all had changed, continuing her preparations to move to Canada to live and return only to visit.

We were also having personnel problems with the retreat center. We had to let the retreat manager go, and Nancy took over that job after she returned from Canada. I continued maintaining the books and overseeing retreatants and resident teachers. We had also hired someone to maintain the property and buildings in the fall of 2018, and that was not working out

either. Strong differences of opinion developed among the Board members about the future direction of the retreat center, despite our having collectively defined that direction in a lengthy process in the spring of 2018, prior to completion of the sale and transfer of ownership to Dharma Treasure. Worst of all from my point of view, the other Board members were making the retreat center the primary focus of Dharma Treasure, which had never been intended. Because the retreat center provided accommodations in exchange for a “fee for service,” the original plan was for the retreat center to be eventually spun off as a sister not-for-profit organization (rather than a non-profit 501(c)(3)).* Strong leadership seemed to be needed which I was unable to provide. Instead, I withdrew even more when I should have been setting boundaries and engaging in healthy discussion to resolve our differences.

By now I was teaching five Teacher Training groups as well as working on the two books and doing Patreon Q&A’s, all in addition to trying to keep both Dharma Treasure and the retreat center on track. That final year and a half – from January 2018, when my prognosis had dramatically improved and the sale had become a reality, until July 2019, when Nancy was able to leave – was the most difficult time for Nancy and me since we’d made our decision in Spring of 2015.

July 9th through August 19th 2019:

When relationships change, it is never easy. When that change gets stretched out over a long time, the potential for pain, suffering, anger and resentment increases and healing is delayed. Given enough time, hurt and exposure, even the most amicable of relationships can suffer. In our case, it was a complex situation that led to our continuing to work closely together for more than four years. That’s when Nancy was finally able to make her departure from Arizona, moving back to Canada as she’d been planning for more than four years. We were finally free to go our separate ways. Nancy had repeatedly threatened to destroy me in the last few months leading up to our final parting, but I thought that was anger, not that she really intended to do anything. Nevertheless, timed to coincide with her permanent departure for Canada, those threats blossomed into fruition. I could never have guessed the form it would take, nor that it would involve the Dharma Treasure Board and ultimately blow out into the community.

On July 9 of 2019, I was confronted by the Dharma Treasure Board, completely by surprise, with Nancy as a sitting member. I had scheduled this long overdue meeting of the Board to deal with staffing and maintenance issues and numerous problems at the retreat center that had been neglected over the last several months. (And I was soon to find out why.) The agenda was forcefully changed as soon as the meeting came to order. Taken off guard, I was shocked as one of the Board members read out what sounded like a prosecutor’s opening statement, full of accusations and allegations. I was also confused, because although the accusations themselves corresponded to nothing in my experience, there was still some overlap with actual events.

I was further dismayed by the intensity of the anger and antagonism displayed. Even more disconcerting was who was doing this – my wife and some of my closest students and friends – and how it was being done. I would come to learn they had spent months meeting with Nancy in secret, yet neither individually as friends, nor collectively as a Board, had anyone reached out to

* The way this had worked before, Cochise Stronghold B&B served as a retreat center, receiving fees from retreatants for meals and accommodations, and I conducted the retreats. After it was all over, I donated the dana I had received to Dharma Treasure. The same arrangement applied to solo retreatants who paid the B&B for their accommodations and gave dana to me for conducting meditation interviews.

ask for my side of the story she told. Why, when she went to them, had they not suggested we sort things out privately, or even offered to help us do so? I asked them onto the Board of my non-profit church, * and entrusted them with the fruit of decades of my work because of their intelligence, integrity, and responsibility. Instead, my friends and students had entered into collusion with my wife in our failed marriage, taken on her anger, and become an instrument for its expression. I felt completely betrayed by the people I trusted most. This was compounded by shock when I discovered after that first meeting that Nancy had withdrawn funds from our joint savings account; and the Board had withdrawn all funds from the Dharma Treasure bank accounts and changed the passwords to my personal online accounts.

In that *initial* confrontation I was presented with their demands and ultimatums. They had already made up their minds before it began. One of their demands involved my agreeing to a scripted apology. That's what the four increasingly hostile confrontations that followed were about, during which they became even more aggressive, insulting and disrespectful. In shock and dismay, I did my best to correct the misinformation and misinterpretations of the "apology" they were demanding. That was a mistake. Every correction I tried to make to their script only moved us farther apart. Any new information I added for clarification got twisted to fit their pre-conceived views. We never even came close to anything I could agree to and stand behind, and instead just got farther apart.

There were no "weeks of negotiations" as the Board claimed in their letter to you. Rather, from the start I was battered with demands, ultimatums, and an unrecognizable mixture of total fabrications and distortions of events from 4 years earlier. That letter was misleading from its first words, "It was recently brought to the attention..." What constitutes "recent" is relative, of course. However, as I was to learn, those meetings between Nancy and the Board had gone on for months before they confronted me with foregone conclusions and prepared ultimatums. I believe the Board realized that, were it known how long this had gone on before I was informed, questions would have been raised about their process. Using the word "recently" helped create the impression that these few confrontations involving their ultimatums were actually the more appropriate process of "weeks of negotiations."

Unfortunately, I also failed to recognize in the course of those difficult confrontations just how much important information they were missing. I never thought to say anything about the state of our marriage and the problems we were having. I also didn't realize how, in the absence of that information, Nancy's accusations must have been deeply disturbing and shocking. Instead, I tried to respond to those long past issues they were raising without ever asking why they were being raised so many years later. Then, when the letter came out, I saw those events were being misconstrued as having continued throughout the next 4 years "to the present day". On reflection, I realized this had been the Board's operating assumption all along, but I hadn't recognized that when they were confronting me.

The *final* confrontation occurred almost six weeks later – not because of time spent in negotiation, but because I was so busy. Some of this was practical. I was sorting out my severely depleted finances and trying to recover my email and other online accounts. I was also

* Dharma Treasure Inc is legally designated as a church by the IRS, which puts it in a different legal category from other 501(c)(3) non-profits. The organizational structure is different as well, granting considerable authority to the Pastor or Spiritual Director over how the mission is fulfilled. This also contributed to tensions with the newly expanded Board.

continuing my teaching commitments, conducting five Teacher Training classes, each meeting for two hours twice a month, and was away for 10 of those days leading a retreat at Barre Center. I was also subject to extreme fatigue because of my overall health and the cancer therapy. That final session lasted only a few minutes. By then it was clear I wasn't going to be heard, so I implored the Board to engage in a mediated discussion. They, instead, forcefully demanded I sign their letter. When I declined and asked again for mediation, they ended the session, publishing their letter immediately.

During the entire period of those confrontations and then the letter, I was completely out of my element, feeling both betrayed and unequipped to deal with the challenges I was facing. I found myself in a situation so far outside my experience that I was unable to deal with it effectively. Much of what I said in the days after the Board's publication of their letter lacked both skill and any understanding of the motivations of the people I was dealing with. All I knew for certain was there was a great personal and interpersonal mess to untangle, realizations to come to and new skills to recognize and acquire.

This souring of relationships was devastating in the context of serious ongoing health problems that I knew were eventually going to severely limit my ability to teach and write. The accusations I was confronted with (and that you would eventually read about) seemed designed to generate as much horror and doubt in the community as possible for someone in my position – dharma teacher and founder of a church. The nature of those accusations was also such that they led to my situation being inappropriately conflated with other recent scandals in Western Buddhism communities that had involved sex.

This entire situation had clearly originated with Nancy, yet the accusations being made were irrelevant to anything she and I had ever struggled with. The Board's focus was a highly distorted version of events that happened over a very short period four years earlier that were not a problem for Nancy at the time. Only later did it strike me that it was because those particular events lent themselves so much more readily to lurid distortions and misrepresentation than the real issues between us. I seriously question whether the Board was ever made aware of the real issues. More likely, this distorted information was all they ever had to go on.

I couldn't respond effectively when the Board published their letter because I was still unable to fully understand what had happened and why. Nevertheless, as is often the case in situations like this, my first response on reddit, to "not take this letter as fact. It includes false information, and distortions and misrepresentations of fact," was by far the most accurate thing I said at the time.

My later statement of apology, also on reddit and driven by a felt need to take responsibility, did far more harm than good. I said, "I engaged in adultery and wrong speech, and failed to honor my commitment to my marriage." My lack of skill was perhaps most publicly evident here, because that statement further obscured rather than clarifying matters and wasn't accurate. The mutually agreed upon status of our marriage, long before any extra-marital encounter, was such that my behavior was not adulterous. Except, of course, in the most purely technical sense that we were still legally married, which is precisely why I foolishly said what I did. Nor should I have ever said I'd engaged in wrong speech. Some of my speech with Nancy had been false, but the intent was to protect another from harm, not to hide adulterous relationships from my wife.

In my prevailing state of confusion, nothing I might have said would have been helpful. Fortunately, people close to me recognized this and encouraged me to wait before saying more. Had I tried to communicate with the community at large too soon after the Board's letter was

made public, it would not have gone well. Even the meetings I had with my Teacher Training groups about the letter are something I now regret and believe did more harm than good. (When I spoke to them, not only was I still unclear myself about what had happened and why, I was also unaware of what they had been and would be told by the Board in closed sessions.)

How could I speak my truth until I had a truth to speak? Just distinguishing what really happened from distortions and falsehoods was challenging and took time. I had to recollect events from four years earlier and review those events in light of the distorted versions that had been played back to me by the Board and in their letter to you. I had to be sure I didn't miss anything. It kept getting more complicated as many more distortions and fabrications continued to emerge over the ensuing weeks and months. (That happened in closed sessions the Board held with my Teacher Training students, and in private conversations with people who had previously been especially supportive and had assisted me in my work.)

August 20th 2019 – present:

Untangling this mess was going to be challenging and time consuming. If my closest students had misunderstood me and how to live the dharma I taught, I wondered if all the time and energy I'd put into teaching had been a waste? I confess, there were times over the next few months that resuming teaching seemed pointless, and I was tempted to just let it go and get on with what was left of my life. But then, as I began to hear from some of you, I realized just how many people really had understood what this dharma is about, and that it was worth making the effort to be able to continue to share what I've learned.

Ultimately, my making this response public is not about me. It is about all of you, my students and those who have found guidance and utility in *The Mind Illuminated*. I taught and wrote because I cared about you. I couldn't just leave you confused and feeling betrayed. You deserved to have me deal with this matter properly, and I owed it to you to do so. So it is that I undertook this challenging process. Over the next year and a half, I benefited greatly by talking through these things with friends, a life coach and my therapist. I've had to look into my relational habits, deepest conditioning and ego structures in profound ways not provided by meditation. It hasn't been an easy journey and I'm thankful for all the support and guidance I've had on it. I wish it could have happened in a different way, but in a sense I am grateful for what happened because it provided me with a reason and the time and opportunity for this deep introspective journey.

After the letter first came out, my life was focused on dealing with the many practical matters of making it through those first weeks. Next came finding and working with a therapist to help me understand and work with what had happened. I withdrew from public dialogue, temporarily suspended all of my teacher training classes and my Q&A sessions for Patreon. I also paused the work on my books. I had little contact with most of the sangha though a few sangha and broader dharma as well as non-sangha-non-dharma friends did stay in contact and helped me rebuild a support network.

Much of my initial energy was focused on my family, formalizing first my separation from Nancy, then filing for divorce and working through that process. I also brought in the 2019 New Year by talking with my sons and other family members about what had happened.

In August of 2019 I was still living part time in the apartment at the retreat center which had once been Allegra's. Nancy and I had moved there after Allegra's death so that our portion of the house could be used by the resident teachers or a future Retreat Manager. Even though Nancy

had gone to Canada, many of her things and some furniture she wanted to move to Canada remained. I still had many things there as well and I visited from time to time, often after I had my tri-weekly infusions in nearby Benson rather than drive back to Tucson. Although I knew this couldn't continue long term, moving didn't seem to be a pressing issue. Also, I was distracted by so much else that had to be dealt with and was at a loss as to how to manage the move on my own. In December of 2019 Dharma Treasure asked me to move out by the end of the year so their newly hired Executive Director could move in. This seemed like an impossible task but with the assistance of a friend and some of the center volunteers I was able to move everything from the stronghold apartment to Tucson or to my trailer on the adjacent land.

There has been almost no communication with Dharma Treasure. This was unfortunate in so many ways. They had taken over the retreat center but Nancy and I had been providing much of the day to day management and all of the historical knowledge about so much: all of the permaculture and forestry management we had done over the decades to live and operate a B&B in a beautiful but harsh and demanding wilderness environment.

Financially, being severed from Dharma Treasure was quite a blow to me, and likely to Nancy as well. In 2013, a Core Support fund had been established and set aside in a designated savings account with the specific purpose of assuring Dharma Treasure could continue to pay my Spiritual Director salary even after I was no longer able to bring in money through my own efforts. That fund was also to have continued providing support to Nancy after my death. The intended purpose of those Core Support funds had been clearly and formally identified in the minutes of Board meetings in 2013. I had lost not only my vehicle for spreading my personal teachings on meditation and Buddhadharma, but my and Nancy's retirement as well.

Unfortunately, I had also funneled all of my income from both my Teacher Training courses and Patreon through Dharma Treasure. Also, and even more unfortunately, there were no formal agreements regarding the handling of the Teacher Training tuition and Patreon funds. I never imagined that they would be needed because neither one of these was ever a Dharma Treasure activity.

Dharma Treasure has since claimed to have returned all of Teacher Training tuition to the students, which, since that course wasn't a Dharma Treasure activity, they had no authority to do. Nor had I discontinued the classes, and so their action created obstacles to resuming them.

Dharma Treasure has also retained the majority* of Patreon contributions received since I first launched the Patreon page in 2017 through August 2019. They have ignored all requests to release that money to me, including the contributions for 2019 that I paid personal income taxes on.** I had hoped to use the Patreon money to publish the two books I was working on.

In November 2019, I resumed the two teacher training classes that were almost complete as well as the Patreon Q&A's. Those two groups had almost completed their course of training and I couldn't leave them hanging any longer. I had never terminated any of the Teacher Training

* A portion of the Patreon funds had already been used prior to August 2019 to pay for things like my assistant, then my research assistant, and for some of my uncompensated travel for retreats.

** Patreon reported all 2019 contributions to the IRS as income to me, including what had been paid to Dharma Treasure from January through the end of August. The monthly contributions from January through August were also much larger than those from September until the present day.

classes, nor had I quit teaching. Rather, I had called a hiatus (def.: a small gap in a sequence, series, or process) because my life was in chaos and I needed a break to get grounded again. By November, the most immediate crises had been sorted out, I had my feet under me again and had a support network and a therapist. I had previously been putting much more time into Teacher Training than was healthy for me. Those two classes, Vulture's Peak and Bodhgaya, have since finished and transitioned into a combined and ongoing Kalyāṇa-Mitta group. This freed some of my time and energy so that in August of 2020 I was able to resume meeting regularly with the Metta and Karuna groups as a combined class.

2020 brought Covid19 and even more isolation. A friend helped me arrange for grocery deliveries so my trips outside the Tucson Co-ops have been largely focused on doctor's appointments and excursions to pick up prescriptions at the pharmacy window. I am very fortunate that I still have the trailer and land in the stronghold, and have been gradually fixing it up so that I can spend a night or two there after my infusions in Benson.

In June 2020 a CT scan showed that my cancer had developed resistance to the EGFR inhibitor I'd been on since October 2017. It had recurred in the form of numerous new metastases and significant growth of a single, previously <4mm nodule, we had been monitoring for years. I've treated this aggressively with both conventional and non-conventional approaches, upping the dose of the EGFR inhibitor in hopes that it might still be somewhat effective, and researching and taking additional supplements that might also help.

The August CT scan showed continued growth but still no biopsy-able target, but in October I underwent radiation therapy for the largest lung tumor. My health and stamina were challenged this summer and fall as the increased dose of my medication reduced my ability to eat. I also injured my right shoulder which has made almost everything more difficult. Fortunately, reducing the dose of the medication seems to be mitigating my problem with eating, and physical therapy is improving my shoulder. As of the latest PET scan in December 2020, the cancer continues to progress, but slowly. While there is no clear next treatment for my cancer, I remain optimistic that a path forward will open, just as it has so many times in this journey.

The collaborative divorce was agonizingly slow and expensive but is now complete, and I've also completed the process of placing my assets into a trust. I hope all of this will ensure that my family is taken care of and that TMI continues to be available.

The Responsibility and Actions of the Dharma Treasure Board of Directors

I am disappointed by the actions of the friends and students I had asked to join the Dharma Treasure Board. They said in their letter they "sought confidential counsel from senior Western dharma teachers," and I'm also aware the Board was involved with an organization called An Olive Branch. While I don't know who those senior Western dharma teachers are, my disappointment extends to them, and to An Olive Branch as well.

I feel the Board failed in their responsibility to engage in an appropriate process after Nancy presented her claims to them. I feel their advisors similarly failed in not encouraging them to do so when the Board turned to them for advice. All of the information the Dharma Treasure Board possessed had originated with my wife. No serious attempt was ever made to corroborate, determine the context, or verify and validate that information with anyone other than Nancy prior

to taking action. Had they entered into discussion with me before coming to conclusions and formulating accusations and ultimatums, much of this mess might have been avoided – to everyone’s benefit. My lack of narrative would likely still have been an issue but working together, perhaps with the help of a mediator, that might have been overcome. They would then have had my information as well as Nancy’s to evaluate and consider.

I believe their sympathy for Nancy, their lack of information about the status of our marriage, and their own reactions to her accusations may well have kept them from recognizing these were only allegations and needed to be investigated before taking action. In light of other recent dharma scandals, they might have assumed out of hand this was a similar situation they were responsible for resolving – rather than the sign of a troubled and dissolving marriage between two fellow members of their community, both of whom needed their help and support.

From my perspective, the allegations made regarding my conduct on August 19th 2019 grossly misrepresented facts, and so are false. As you have seen, the events focused on were taken out of context, grossly misinterpreted, and misconstrued as having occurred both more recently and over a longer period than they had. Granted, the Board may have been misled themselves. Nevertheless, I feel they should have more critically examined the information they received and evaluated it based on their own knowledge and experience of that period.

For example, the idea that I was having sex with a group of ten women over 4 years, as implied in that letter, would be amusing in its absurdity were it not for the consequences. I’ve wondered how the Board members reconciled this supposed multi-year sex marathon with their personal knowledge of my age (I am now 75), cancer treatment and the debilitated state of my health in general over those years? They were students, not Board members during that time, but each of them had seen me frequently enough to be very aware of these things. They also knew about my schedule of first four, then eventually ten, two-hour Teacher Training classes each month (including some conducted from a hospital bed). They knew about my doing several days of meditation interviews most weeks, and about my traveling to lead retreats (because I often visited them when I did so). Could they truly have believed I was doing all this and having “extended relationships with a group of about ten women” at the same time? Is it another case of attributing superhuman powers to a teacher? Should I be flattered? As medically and physically improbable as this all is, it makes a good story if you want a dharma teacher to look bad.

The events of the summer of 2015, which served as their focus, were never really about sex, regardless of my having become friends with a small group of escorts. The real issues between Nancy and myself were likewise not about sex, adultery, or any of the events of the summer of 2015. They were about a difficult, protracted, and painful ending to a marriage, and about one particular long-term relationship that the Board never mentioned and may not even have known about. None of those other, long-ago relationships were relevant to the problems Nancy and I struggled with, or the hurt and anger she experienced. However, making reference to them out of context and evading the real issues has encouraged unwarranted prurient interpretations. I regret that I couldn’t provide them with the additional information that might have made a difference.

The primary responsibility of the Board of Dharma Treasure, as with any other non-profit Board, is the well-being of the organization and the fulfillment of that organization’s Mission and Vision. How could they have believed that sending a very misleading letter about my personal life to thousands of people would contribute to the well-being or Mission and Vision of Dharma Treasure? Nor has removing me from the organization served in the fulfillment of the organization’s Mission. A year and a half later, the status of Dharma Treasure as an organization

is more dismal than it has been since the day it came into existence. The Mission and Vision is still not being fulfilled (and their rewriting the Mission hasn't changed that). In my opinion, acting in the manner they did and have continued to up to the present day, the Board of Dharma Treasure *as an entity* has completely failed in its fiduciary responsibility as the board of a non-profit church since August of 2019.

My Responsibility

I want you all to know, I take full personal responsibility for, and deeply regret all of the suffering Nancy has experienced through my unskillfulness and failure to insist that we do what we should have done.

As I said early on, I am at fault more for not doing what I should have, when I should have, rather than for anything I actually did. In retrospect, I can see how unskillful I was not to have formalized and made known to the entire dharma community that Nancy and I were no longer in a traditional married relationship almost six years ago, once we had recognized and accepted that fact ourselves. I had a responsibility to tell people of the situation, and I should have recognized that and done so. It is now quite clear to me how not doing so increased the shock of the allegations, first to the Board and then to my students and the community. Had I been more skillful and proactive at any point during the years culminating in this tragic state of affairs, the pain and suffering of 2018 and the terribly destructive events of 2019 could never have happened. Also, had I just been more skillful when confronted by the Board, they probably would have been more skillful as well.

I fully accept that I, and my unskillfulness, contributed greatly to this entire mess of pain, disruption, and harm leading to and resulting from the letter of August 19, 2019 and events that followed. I most sincerely regret my role in all of this and deeply apologize to all who have been impacted.

Having shared my perspective and done my best to provide clarification, I hope you will find it in your hearts to forgive my part in this. In the meantime, I have fully embraced the necessity and importance of, and make a commitment to you to overcome the causes of my unskillfulness.

As you have seen, I was unskillful in my interactions with Nancy, then later with the Board, and finally with my students. What had given rise to such unskillfulness? Not only was I unskillful in my interactions, but my failure to recognize the harm and suffering I was causing someone I cared very deeply about was a failure of catastrophic proportions. How could someone, with so much meditation and dharma practice experience, and supposed mindfulness, have been so blind to what was happening in front of him as I was? What are the implications of all this for the practice of the Buddhadharma, and what can we learn from it?

What I Have Learned

Over the past year and a half, I've had an opportunity to learn a lot about myself that I didn't know before. I've also learned to appreciate certain profound depths to this dharma that I knew about, but hadn't fully understood and applied before.

In the process, I've also come to understand how certain "plateaus" in the progress of Awakening can create problems. These problems are of a sort that seem far less likely to arise in

a monastic or reclusive setting, but can be potential pitfalls for a lay practitioner. In my case, a confluence of *uniquely personal* psychological predispositions with one such “developmental plateau” on the Path created just such a problem. I emphasize the “uniquely personal” aspect, because it holds the key to understanding the situation I found myself in. Extrapolating from this, the larger truth seems to be that *each of us* has our own unique, deeply embedded personality characteristics that are potentially problematic in certain circumstances. The effects of the practice are not at all primary in causing these problems, but can play a significant role in compounding them.

Psycho-emotional Conditioning:

There is a tendency to hold unrealistic expectations regarding “spiritual” leaders and teachers, and likewise for what spiritual practice might eventually do for ourselves. One is that mindfulness and Insight can somehow magically transcend the causes and conditions that shaped our lives and personalities. To paraphrase the Buddha, what arises in dependence on causes and conditions *only* ceases due to causes and conditions! Meditation and dharma practice create the specific causes and conditions for certain things to arise and others to pass away – but *not everything we might wish for*.

I have discovered deeply embedded *automatic patterns* of responding in fundamentally unhealthy ways to certain situations. These automatic response patterns are the product of an extreme emotionally, psychologically, and physically traumatic childhood, compounded by coping methods I developed in the decade or so after leaving home at 15. From being a homeless adolescent living on the streets, never attending much less graduating high school, I obtained a PhD and have led a successful and rewarding professional and spiritual life. However, those conditioned response patterns and coping strategies that had served me well in a life with such difficult beginnings were ultimately disastrous – in my interactions with my wife, then when confronted by the Board of Dharma Treasure. Within them lies the root of much of my unskillfulness. The personal work and therapy I’m doing now continues to clarify these. Becoming aware of them has allowed me to make progress in overcoming them.

What I realized through working with my therapist and a life coach was that, for all my life, I’ve had almost no ability to establish and maintain clear personal boundaries in interpersonal interactions. If someone was upset, angry, hurt, disappointed, afraid or whatever, I tended to take personal responsibility for their mental state. Regardless of the cause, or whether or not I had anything to do with their being upset. Or even the reasonableness or unreasonableness of their reactions! I would become inappropriately over-committed to relieving their distress, and likewise inappropriately over-committed in every other part of my life as well.

I have also been extremely conflict avoidant. When confronted with anger and/or aggression, I would do almost anything to placate. I tended to avoid conflict by being excessively compliant, acquiescing too quickly, and engaging in various conflict avoidance strategies. I too readily accepted the views of others, or tried to find ways to side-step issues of conflict, to relieve another’s pain and anger while disregarding the cost to myself or future consequences. If attempts to placate failed, and full-blown conflict seemed inevitable, I would often disengage, withdraw, surrender, and even take a beating if necessary.

Please notice how conflict avoidance and lack of personal boundaries overlapped in their effects on my behavior. They are not unrelated. In either case, I would do almost anything I can to try to make things OK again – take on other’s responsibilities, support their position, reassure them,

agree with them, reason with them, accept blame, make concessions, apologize, make promises. It has also been very difficult for me to say no. I've committed to things I didn't really want or agree with. That's how I've come so often to be trapped in situations and relationships, often of a co-dependent nature, that I didn't choose and didn't want to be in. That's also one of the reasons I am chronically overloaded and overwhelmed with commitments. This is all directly relevant to my unskillfulness in both my marriage, and in my interactions with the Dharma Treasure Board.

Both my first marriage and my marriage to Nancy were a direct result of these tendencies. I always knew these were commitments I really hadn't wanted to enter into. In the first case, I felt at the time I had no choice, and later attributed that mistake to a combination of Catholic guilt and naivety. In the latter case, there were numerous rationalizations for my acquiescence, which always seemed rather contrived, but I was never able to see beyond them until now. (My second marriage arose out of the "traditional" thinking that I needed my son to be born of married parents. I regret that marriage didn't work out better, but it was fully intentional and not due to any conditioned tendencies.)

Until recently, I'd never been conscious of reacting out of these conditioned patterns. How, you might ask, could these "personality flaws", these frankly abnormal behaviors, have continued to go unrecognized for so long? Why had I never been conscious of them until recently? A large part of the answer lies in how deeply embedded this conditioning was. Conflict avoidance and lack of personal boundaries has always been a "natural" part of "who I am," and I can't recall ever being any other way. I don't believe I ever was any other way, because these characteristics were imprinted in infancy and early childhood. What came later were the coping mechanisms developed on this foundation. Another obvious answer seems to be the resemblance these characteristics and the coping mechanisms have to the virtues of patience and understanding. After all, they had led me to help a lot of upset people, and not to get into, or at least not to continue with, arguments of any kind. Nor did it help that those around me have so often reflected back these boundaryless and conflict avoidant behaviors as admirable qualities. (I now understand more than ever why the Buddha put so much emphasis on the importance of *kalyāṇamittas* – wise spiritual friends who can accurately mirror back to us what we can't see ourselves!)

My various charitable endeavours are good examples of where what I did was both generous and appropriate to the circumstances. The many instances like these over the years obscured the fact that, in more intimate relationships, the actions I took typically went far beyond what was appropriate. My point here is that these positive examples kept me from questioning too closely those instances where I did go too far.

Nonetheless, I not infrequently regretted the lengths I'd gone to in resolving certain situations, especially those involving conflict. But then I also felt I'd done the right thing, regardless of the cost, so I never felt a need to examine those regrets, or to question my behavior. After all, aren't we supposed to see anger as unwholesome and overcome it? To see conflict as a pointless clinging to empty views? To "turn the other cheek"? That's how I'd lived my life – at least until those very tendencies resulted in disaster!

Now I am much more aware of these tendencies and no longer so easily fall into these conditioned patterns. I understand that people sometimes need to work through what has upset them, not be comforted out of it. Sometimes taking away the pain of the moment only leads to much greater pain later.

Sometimes it's better to work through conflict rather than avoid it. As I've learned the hard way with both Nancy and the Dharma Treasure Board, sometimes attempting to defuse anger only makes it worse, and is not at all the same as resolving the anger at its source. In doing so, I've too often failed even to understand what the source of that anger really was, so I was unable to respond more appropriately – or to understand why it kept coming back.

Sometimes giving way, is unwholesome and harmful, because it can open the way for others to be harmed, leading to much unnecessary suffering. This was exactly what happened in my interactions with Nancy when, in 2018, she was no longer as accepting of the changes in our life. Had I established firm boundaries and done what was necessary and appropriate at the time, it's possible that much of this suffering could have been avoided. First Nancy, then W, and then the Board members experienced considerable unnecessary suffering as a result of my acquiescence, compromise, and attempts to placate. People I cared about suffered due to my unskillful failures.

This same pattern recurred again when I was confronted by the Dharma Treasure Board. Once again, I resorted to acquiescence, compromise, and placation in a failed attempt to defuse anger and avoid conflict. This time around, not only did the Board members experience more suffering as a result, it overflowed to affect my Teacher Training Students, the Dharma Treasure organization, the new retreat center, and all of you.

This was the dark side of conflict avoidance and inability to set and maintain appropriate boundaries. In the latter case, it was enormously compounded by the effects of my practice, in that I couldn't even provide the Board with a coherent response, "my side of the story".

The significance of my psycho-emotional conditioning is far greater and runs much deeper than the interactions with the Board described above. These unhealthy predispositions played a significant role in my interactions with Nancy beginning well before we were married. I can see clearly now how I had responded for decades to our evolving relationship in ways conditioned by conflict avoidance and inability to establish firm personal boundaries. By always attempting to defuse rather than resolve her anger, I failed to ever understand what the source of that anger really was. For 30 years I kept asking her to explain her anger to me so I could change, but anger just doesn't work that way.

To me at least, that explains why our many arguments and discussions never led to true resolution, and kept repeating themselves for decades. Giving way can never lead to resolution. Resolution would have required *both* of us to stand our ground, rather than my acquiescence and attempts to placate. It would have required *both* of us to be willing and able to push when we needed to, and to push back when pushed, until we both became clear where we each stood, and why. That would have allowed us to come to a place of mutually acceptable compromise, acceptance of our differences, and a healthy loving relationship between two well-differentiated individuals. Instead, our great love for each other, compounded by living and working together 24/7, led to a progressively more unsatisfactory loss of individual differentiation – and to what I've come to perceive as a persistent co-dependence in our relationship. That co-dependence took many different forms over time, and our respective roles changed, but was always a factor. Nancy may see things differently, but this is the understanding I've come to. Unsurprisingly, the discomfort of the larger situation eventually outweighed the temporary comfort of avoidance.

There is something else I think may contributed to the events of spring and summer of 2019. As part of the work I did to get in touch with and integrate dysfunctional parts of my psyche that I felt had contributed so much for so long to my physical illnesses (cf. interview with Michael

Taft, <https://deconstructingyourself.com/culadasa-on-meditation-and-therapy.html>), I began allowing anger to arise when triggered so I could just “be with it”. This would typically manifest as momentary but intense “flare-ups” that would quickly evaporate as though nothing had ever happened. That happened a few times during the confrontation with the Board as well, which I’m sure caused additional distress.

I did the same exercises of opening up to sadness, which followed a similar pattern of intentionally experiencing brief episodes of intense sadness. I can excuse those like Nancy who were close to me for not being able to understand, even though I did try to explain. What has happened to Mister Mellow? He’s not himself anymore, is he losing his mind? I’m aware that sudden bursts of anger or sadness are characteristic of some forms of dementia, so perhaps that was a factor in some of the things that were said about me later. I am most certainly not developing dementia, and I believe I do know exactly what was going on in my own mind.

The Effects of My Practice:

I realized I had a serious problem shortly after the initial confrontation with Nancy and the Dharma Treasure Board. They were claiming I’d done things that had never happened, and imagining a story out of actual events and their own ideas that was alien to anything in my personal experience. I knew, and could say with certainty, “That’s not true, that’s not what happened...” What I couldn’t do, though, was tell them what *did* happen. They would say “Did you...?” and I could only answer, “Yes, but it wasn’t like that...” What I couldn’t do successfully was continue with, “...and this is the way it really was.” It is one thing to know what “was not,” but something else altogether to be able to describe what “was”.

The same thing was true when I attempted to tell them about when I was establishing friendships with people that were not part of the sangha, where I was just another person. I tried to describe that sense of freedom and relief to the Board, but failed to frame it in the context of the events that had given rise to it. I let them define the focus, and they responded by demanding to know if the sense of relief I was enjoying was due to craving. Although they were ignorant of the context, and had their own undisclosed agenda for asking such a question, I was surprised and unsure of the answer at the time. Having had time to recall and reflect, I know it was not, certainly not in the sense of the compulsion called *tanha*.

My inability to respond appropriately when confronted by the Dharma Treasure Board made me acutely aware of my lack of personal narrative. I was being presented by my accusers with a biographical narrative of my life that they had created. I knew it was wrong, not even vaguely consistent with my lived experience, but I had no autobiographical narrative of my own to counter it with.

While such narratives may ultimately be mere empty fabrications, they are also indispensable to our ability to function effectively in the realm of conventional reality and interpersonal relationships. All I had were the pieces from which those narratives are usually constructed. I was hopelessly unsuccessful in my attempts to put them together on the spur of the moment to provide a more accurate counterpart to the distorted narrative I was being confronted with.

The more limited short-term narratives necessary for day to day functioning came easily and were unavoidable. So, the change that had taken place wasn’t particularly obvious to others, although I think my wife noticed and was troubled by it. It certainly affected the quality of our communication. I had become completely comfortable with uncertainty and allowing things just

to unfold as they would. Nancy kept asking for exactly the kind of certainty I so clearly understood could never be possible. I'm sure it was both difficult and exhausting for her to keep up with the continuously shifting process that was me amid the constantly changing circumstances of my life (travel and teaching activities, cancer prognosis and other health issues, etc.). She was trying to make plans for the future, but the situation kept changing around her. I, on the other hand, was just riding the waves of change. This was one more thing at play with Nancy, and may well have been for W, the Board members and others who were around and involved in everything that happened from 2015 through 2020.

Dharma practice produces major shifts in perception. That is its purpose. Shifts in perception affect how we process complex and interconnected life events as they unfold. In particular, we come to live much more in the present. Living in the present means not dwelling on the past or future. To not be constantly telling ourselves stories about what might and should have been but wasn't, or what might or should be in the future. In the words of Ram Das, "Be here now."

For years I'd lived mostly in the present moment, more in the ongoing awareness of suchness and emptiness than narrative and form. I'd stopped "thinking about myself," creating the "story of me." I now realize that, while freed of the enormous burdens of "if only" and "what if," I'd also lost a certain kind of perspective that comes with those narratives. In consequence, I found myself unable to counter what Nancy and the Board confronted me with by providing my own perspective, "my story" regarding events that had happened so many years before! I'd completely lost the perspective and context that comes out of those longer term and larger scale autobiographical narratives. I was also unable to appropriately contextualize Nancy's increasing pain and frustration, so I simply dealt with it in the moment, as it arose.

Months after the last of those painful and frustrating confrontations it struck me that I'd been doing the same thing even during those confrontations. I'd still been so much in the present, simply meeting events as they unfolded in front of and around me, that it never occurred to me to ask, "Why are we talking about things that happened so many years ago?" "Why are we talking about things that have so little to do with anything that has happened since or is happening now?" Instead, lacking an appropriate chronological perspective, I totally failed to recognize that we were focusing on long past events and missing the very real problems and difficulties that Nancy and I were experiencing in this new present. It didn't occur to me that they believed these to be recent or even current events, and most especially that they knew nothing of the larger context - the state of our marriage, our decision to live separately, and everything else that had happened since. Thus I failed to understand the underlying motivations for these accusations.

I had basically been living in two different worlds for years, but more in the now and only stepping into the world of linear time and narrative when and as needed. Never fully in – just enough to deal with something then gone again. The narratives I did generate were minimal and incomplete, enough for the moment or the hour, and for series of related events that might span days, weeks, or even months. But not sufficient for anything like personal autobiography. By embracing the now in the way I had, I can now see how I'd also lost sight of not only the value, but the practical necessity of that other world of linear time and narrative.

Since then, I've discovered this "back and forth" pattern reflects a certain developmental stage in the Path that had been recognized and discussed long ago. I first encountered this in a blog reference to "the five ranks" in Dogan's Genjōkōan, attributed to the Chinese master Dongshan Liangjie in his *Song of the Precious Mirror Samadhi*. The more mature level beyond this one is described even earlier in the beautiful poem, *Sandokai*, by Shitou Xiqian. Knowing about the

five ranks has helped me understand my lack of perspective, and learn to move beyond this stage of shifting back and forth to an integration of the relative and the absolute. It is what I now think of as “learning to function effectively in the temporal and individual while living in the infinite.” All of this has made the next step in the Path clear. The two Ultimate realities, what the Yogacara call the Apparent Nature and the Ultimate Nature, must be fully integrated into one concurrent reality. The penultimate nonduality is that of duality and nonduality. This has become the primary focus of my practice on the cushion and off. It’s realization has been of tremendous benefit to me, and will be in my ability to guide others along this path as well.

For now, I’ll just say the five ranks of Dogan can be regarded as five perspectives, or modes of experiencing, that describe a developmental trajectory, but they also serve well as instructions for practice. Please note that, whether as description or practice, they form a cyclic recursive spiral, rather than a linear series. The Five Ranks are:

1. The Relative within the Ultimate.
2. The Ultimate within the Relative.
3. Arriving within the Ultimate.
4. Approaching from the Relative.
5. Arriving at Concurrence

The first four perspectives all view the Relative and the Ultimate as distinct. The first pair as mutually inclusive, the second pair as mutually exclusive. From the fifth perspective, however, they are indivisible and simultaneous.

With my stepping back and forth, I was “stuck” cycling through the first four ranks, and mostly in the second pair where the relative and the ultimate, appearances and suchness, are seen as mutually exclusive. I was only in the world of appearances enough to do my work and perform the necessary tasks of a lay person in the world. My mind had simply fallen out of the habit of generating “stories” about “my” life and the people and events around me. Instead, I simply experienced them as the greater unfolding of suchness, in light of which, those stories seemed unimportant and unnecessary beyond their immediate functional utility. I couldn’t respond effectively to the distortions and misrepresentations I was being presented with, because I had only the fragmented episodic memories that had never been woven into a more comprehensive narrative. That is also why I didn’t notice, until much too late, that the basis of Nancy and the Board’s narrative involved events that were completely out of context. They had absolutely nothing at all to do with the current situation, or the motivations behind Nancy’s instigating this.

When the burdensome nature of our lifestyle became so unbearable that we were forced to make massive changes, neither of us was prepared for the impact on our relationship. It forced both of us to directly confront differences and choices we’d long been avoiding. To my regret, the accelerated changes in our relationship and the increased intensity of our interactions occurred in the context of a strong tendency on my part to respond from an “in the moment” perspective. I lost sight more and more of the “big picture.” This all happened to coincide with the discovery I had a 7 cm cancer growing in my lung, and with my sudden launch from being rather obscure and unknown to becoming a relatively widely known dharma and meditation teacher with much greater demands on my time and energy. I had gone from being a very private person to something of a public figure. One of the “big picture” aspects to all of this that eluded me was the one linking my personal and private choices and actions with my new public role.

In sum, unhealthy conditioned response patterns driven by residues of psycho-emotional trauma happened to converge in an unfortunate way with a radical shift in perspective, just when every aspect of my life was changing, including having stage IV lung cancer. As a result, over the

ensuing four years I made some unskillful choices that culminated in the events of July and August of 2019 that led to so much pain and disruption for so many.

Please don't misunderstand me. I am not offering unskillfulness due the effects of my conditioning and/or my practice as an excuse for anything. Rather, I am acknowledging and accepting my unskillfulness as a serious and harmful shortcoming that I have a responsibility to do something about!

I failed to recognize the appropriateness of both making public, and formalizing the change in Nancy's and my relationship for different reasons at different times. In the beginning, it was simply because it was a private matter between two private individuals, and it was clear that, in the most obvious ways, the status quo wasn't going to change for quite a long time.

Even when I became involved with someone else, we were still a long way from any overt changes. Nancy was also very accepting of the situation and definitely didn't want a divorce, so it was quite easy to acquiesce to her request. And although I had, by that time, become something of a public figure, that meant little to me, and I certainly didn't see it as relevant to our evolving situation. I had neither the time nor any particular reason to ask myself how this might fit into some "bigger picture." It wasn't a perspective I had ready access too, so I was genuinely blind to possible downstream consequences for Nancy and my students.

When Nancy's attitude began to shift in 2018, the tendencies to avoid conflict and the boundaryless, co-dependent impulse to both take responsibility for and to relieve her discomfort kicked in. I wanted to make things OK again, not precipitate an emotional catastrophe for her by saying, "Perhaps we should just formalize our separation now. The sale will happen soon, we can both move on. Let's not prolong this any further, and let the healing begin." It never, ever, for a single passing moment, occurred to me to say such a thing. But it should have.

Likewise, as I'd gone from being a private person to more of a public figure, my continued acquiescence to Nancy's wish to keep things private had become quite inappropriate. My work with my therapist is helping me to put the private portions of my life into context with the bigger picture of my life as an object of public scrutiny. Hopefully this will prevent my private life ever precipitating a crisis again. I am learning to be more discerning about what needs to be openly shared. I think it should be obvious that, had the nature of Nancy's and my relationship been more widely known, none of this could have ever happened.

Lack of personal boundaries and conflict avoidance, compounded by the lack of any appropriate personal narrative, and still being so locked into the present moment, led to my totally unskillful interactions with the Board. My instantaneous and automatic response was to try to make things OK again, to alleviate their anger. When my fumbling attempts to explain failed, I was too ready to placate, and acquiesce to their demands and ultimatums. But when they began to present their ultimatums, I felt like someone trying to hold their ground while standing on slippery ice. I was unable to respond effectively to false views underlying their anger, blind to the irrelevance of it all, ignorant of what was driving it, and reacting unconsciously through lifelong conditioning. As a result of this multifaceted unskillfulness, things went progressively downhill from the first time I opened my mouth in that initial confrontation until the moment they abruptly terminated the final confrontation. I regret that I was unable to respond more skillfully, and indeed, that inability to respond and unskillfulness likely intensified their feelings and concerns.

Obviously, wisdom alone is not enough, especially since I wasn't leading the life of a recluse or cloistered in monastery. Human beings are far too complex and multilayered to escape the universality of causes, conditions and consequences so easily.

I did not fully appreciate that our minds are embodied, and Awakening is never going to alter that fact, or that these bodies are subject to sickness, injury, aging and death. More importantly, because it may be less obvious, even the most Awakened of embodied minds still possess a primal reflexive component, a hardwired instinctive reptilian component, and an emotional layer that extends into and interacts with every other layer of the mind/brain above and below. There is also a massive accumulation of *automatic, conditioned response patterns* tailored to adaptively fit a huge variety of possible circumstances. All of *these deeper layers operate independently of conscious intention*, Awakened or otherwise. Therefore, as lay practitioners in the world, we must consciously acknowledge, explore, understand and work with all of these layers.

My Priorities Going Forward

My cancer has recurred. That and its treatment have again impacted my energy and stamina. Still, a priority for whatever time and energy I may yet have is to help bring about a healing in the sangha. I hope what I have offered here will serve that end by helping you to understand at least some of my perspective, and perhaps get to know me a bit more. I also hope that my faults and unskillfulness will not prevent you from benefiting from the dharma and meditation instructions presented in *The Mind Illuminated*, and my future writing and teaching.

That said, I also want and need to move on with my life. I felt obligated to give you my perspective on what happened, but I don't feel any need or desire to defend it further. Frankly, I just don't have the time, energy or stamina to get into protracted and contentious discussions. Everyone I've mentioned in this document will have their own perspective, and their interpretations may well differ from mine, even with the additional information I've provided. Even so, it was my intention to represent everyone as faithfully as I could, from my perspective.

Also, I don't know what expectations any of you may have had, or may still have of me, and you may or may not be satisfied by what I've presented to you here. It's taken me a long time to sort all of this out, so take your time in thinking it through for yourself – and please be kind to others as they do the same. If I haven't met someone's expectations, I still wish them well, but neither do I feel any need to meet the expectations of others. My goal is to live as long as I can and as well as I can – by my own standards.

While I do live, I hope to be able to share with the dharma community and world at large much more of what I've learned and continue to learn about meditation and Awakening. I have at least two books I want to finish. I am engaged in a fascinating series of discussions with both the completed and continuing teacher training students about TMI and systems theory, and various ways the material in TMI can be supported and expanded. I very much want to continue to craft the new life for myself that I began to imagine on those solitary times in the desert in the late spring and early summer of 2015. The form it will take is still a mysterious work in progress, but I know it includes both solitude and the companionship of my family and friends, within as well as beyond the sangha.

With love and best wishes,
Culadasa