

transformational places

Many of us have tried different

"products" — from caffeine to alco-

hol to the latest plasma-screen TV

— to ease our troubled minds and

alter our point of view. But the state

of New Hampshire itself is, and

always has been, a place that peo-

ple flock to for renewal and trans-

formation, and to reawaken creativ-

ity. Thoreau paddled down the

Merrimack. The Dublin Art Colony

attracted world-famous artists and

writers a century ago, as the Mac-

Dowell Colony in Peterborough has

for the last hundred years. It turns

out that right in our own back yard,

we can find experiences that will

allow us to cast off our worried

mindsets, loosen the barnacles of

anxiety and concern, and refresh

our minds and spirits.

Meg Cadoux Hirshberg

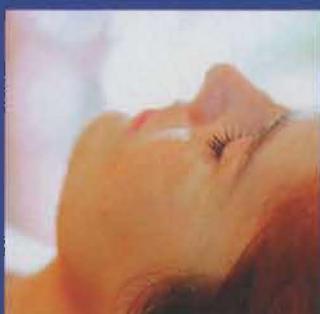


Lynn Connelly of Durham
in the meditation room at Aryaloka.



Human happiness is a work in progress. Once it was enough to survive. Civilization and culture created new standards of success. Philosophy and psychology opened doors to self-realization, but through it all hearts have hungered for ultimate meaning and delved deeply into human potential. Today, those seeking happiness may follow a path of personal reinvention or transformation. This can take the shape of a weekend religious retreat, an encounter with art or a walk in the woods. Whether communing with nature or hav-

ing mind and body adjusted by a skilled spa therapist, the benefits of a transformational experience are deep and long. Our writer visited just a few places where such experiences await.



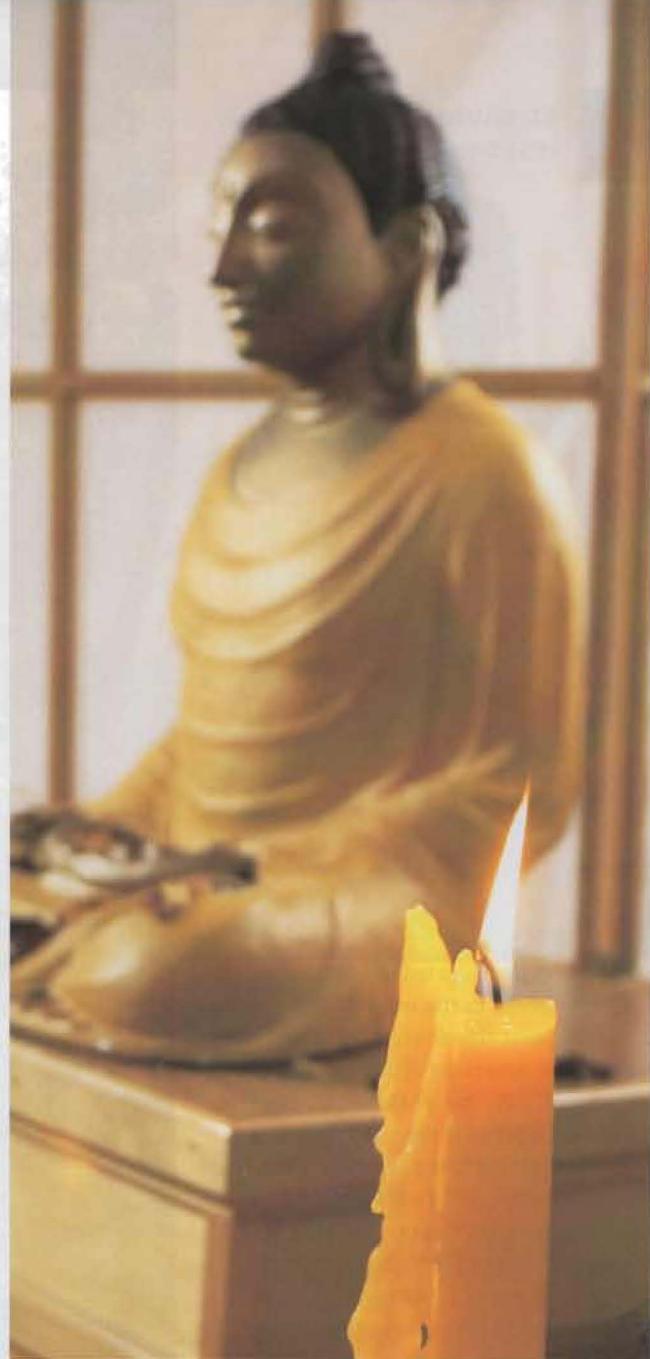
a feeling of peace and community

Founded in 1985, Aryaloka attracts people (including about 130 regulars) from all over New England for evening, day-long and overnight retreats, special events and classes related to Buddhist meditation and tradition. You don't need to know the difference between dharma and karma to get started. Buddhism, I learned, is really about meditation and the study of ethics. Newcomers can get started with an introductory course, and continue learning in the evening series classes and Saturday workshops. Aryaloka has offerings for experienced practitioners as well.

Having no background in Buddhism, I decided to try one of the center's "Sangha nights," which are weekly gatherings open to everyone. (There is a suggested donation of \$7 for the evening, but all are welcome regardless of ability to pay.) Aryaloka is situated on 13 acres of beautiful New Hampshire woods. Pulling up into the driveway I came face to face with twin geodesic domes. Entering the main building, I removed my shoes at the door and was promptly greeted by several other easygoing visitors. The exposed wood, overstuffed couches, warmly colored throw rugs and numerous statues of the meditating Buddha all lent an air of comfort, calm and warmth.

We first gather for conversation in one of the living rooms. About two dozen people, men and women in equal numbers, and of all ages, converse lightly. People are friendly and there is much laughter. I introduce myself to Steven, in his early 50s, who works in real estate development. He's been a regular at the center for about a year now, and says that "When I first started coming here, I realized that I'd been a Buddhist for a long time — Buddhist teachings confirmed what I already knew."

After sipping tea and conversing for 15 minutes, the group files through a small room where everyone selects pillows and blankets for comfort during the meditation, and we climb the stairs to the meditation room. The room is pleasingly round, and contains a simple altar with candles and a meditating Buddha. The trees rustle outside and bird-song reaches us through open skylights. We sit through an unguided meditation for 45 minutes. Not a practiced mediator, I find my brain to be noisy — cluttered with worries



and to-dos — but the session was strangely relaxing nonetheless. There is a feeling of peace and community in a roomful of people sitting quietly.

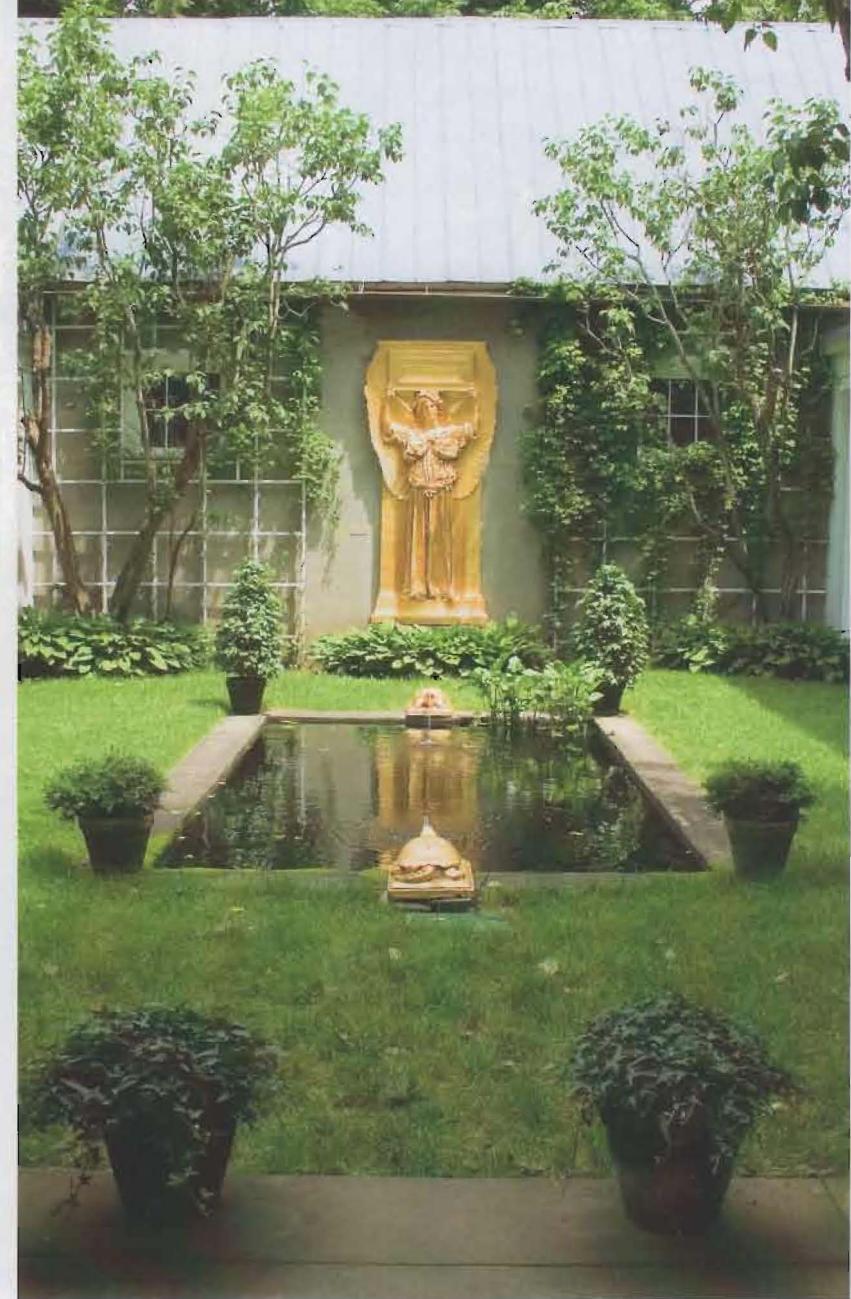
After the meditation session, we file back downstairs to join one of two teacher-facilitated conversations. I join a session about ethics in speech. Amala, the center director, says, "Our approach is always, how do Buddhist teachings fit into our lives? We emphasize the practical." Over snacking cake and tea, we introduce ourselves, and discuss the power of words and the value of controlling our speech. The session is helpful and thought provoking. Later, Amala says that Aryaloka attracts people "who've begun asking questions. Some decide to pursue Buddhism, others not, but either way they benefit from the experience." For more information, visit www.aryaloka.org or call (603) 659-5456.

peaceful in the valley

This 150-acre gem located in Cornish is a living monument to the work and life of Augustus Saint-Gaudens, the famous 19th-century American sculptor. Owned and beautifully maintained by the National Park Service, the site features a visitors' center, exhibits, stunning outdoor sculptures, nature trails and gardens. The trails offer many views of Mt. Ascutney in Vermont, which is similar in height and dramatic feel to our Mt. Monadnock. About 30,000 people stroll these grounds each year.

In addition to its serene beauty and sculptures, Saint-Gaudens offers a summer concert series and reasonably priced afternoon sculpture workshops for beginning and advanced sculptors alike. These are taught by the sculptor-in-residence, who is also available in his studio on the grounds to answer any visitor questions. Open from Memorial Day until the end of October, the park charges adults a \$5 entrance fee and children enter free.

Wandering the grounds, I was most struck by the Civil War monuments sculpted by Saint-Gaudens. His bust of William Tecumseh Sherman is so lifelike that you expect the general to start speaking to you at any moment. With the



scent of peonies in the air, I came upon the moving and impressive Shaw Memorial. Eleven by 14 feet, it is dedicated to Robert Gould Shaw, a white man who led the first African-American regiment. The sculpture depicts Shaw on horseback and his soldiers trudging beside him, four deep. Shaw and many of his men were killed in an assault on Fort Wagner in South Carolina. He was buried by Confederate soldiers in a mass grave along with his soldiers. A bronze cast of this work can be seen across from the Statehouse in Boston.

There are frequent tours of the grounds, open from Memorial Day

through the end of October. Come with a picnic lunch and enjoy the surroundings, before you roll up your sleeves in a workshop and discover that budding sculptor within. Find more information at www.sgnhs.org or call (603) 675-2175.



know mother nature's *healing heart*

Completely volunteer-run, this amazing organization offers more than 300 guided hikes (and paddles) a year all over the state — for free. Though the AMC strongly encourages membership (\$50 per individual; \$75 per family) — which will enable you to receive the magazine listing all the hikes — there is no fee for the hikes themselves. Approximately 120 highly trained leaders lead trips in the White Mountains, the Monadnock region, Kearsarge, the Seacoast and almost any other place you could imagine in New Hampshire, 12 months a year.

Most trips are single day hikes, though some are multi-day trips, including an annual spectacular nine-day trip across New Hampshire's White Mountains. Trip leaders are trained in mountain safety, equipment, trip planning, nutrition, use of a map and compass, accident scene management and so forth.

I signed up for a hike up Mt. Moosilauke by calling the trip leader (using

information provided in the AMC magazine) and leaving a message. He promptly returned my call and asked me extensive questions about my hiking experience, fitness and gear. He told me what to wear and type of food to bring. I was very impressed by the individual attention that is given to each hiker by the volunteer trip leader.

The AMC offers hikes for all ages and fitness levels. There are hikes for families with children of all ages, and an "Over-55" group — open to those of any age — for those who prefer a more leisurely pace. Usually hikes are limited to a dozen people. The AMC also offers hiking safety courses for beginners and classes for the more experienced.

My Moosilauke trip got rained out (remember last spring?) but I look forward to signing up again for a different

hike. I'm told that the trips are a lot of fun and a great way to meet new people. They provide a chance to completely and safely escape into a stimulating and refreshing natural adventure. As one writer said about "the good of going to the mountains" — "Like the poets, painters and millions of trampers before me, I'd come to the White Mountains of New Hampshire to rid myself of commercial chatter and pollution, and to know mother nature's healing heart." Come join the millions of trampers, and let AMC New Hampshire be your guide.

For more information, visit www.amc-nh.org, or send and e-mail to Wes Tucker at wtucker@gseinet.net.

Day Spa Dreams

We are lucky to have many fine, affordable, small day spas in New Hampshire. The Common Man Inn and Spa is located in an old mill building in Plymouth, and much of the old brickwork and beams have been restored. The setting is not pastoral, but the inn is conveniently located right off I-93, and close to the mountains for skiing and hiking. You can enjoy the spa without staying at the inn. After donning slippers and a robe, I had a facial, which I thoroughly enjoyed, and almost fell asleep, lulled by the relaxing music. The spa's waiting, locker and treatment rooms are all redolent of "rustic elegance;" a sweeping lace-draped birch branch serves as a curtain rod in one sitting room. The spa is clean, soothing and calm, with tea and fresh fruit available.

Ilene Stern of Canterbury has been to the Common Man spa often, sometimes alone and other times with friends. "I once went with around 10 women — they accommodate groups well," she says. "They offered us a spa lunch and we ate in our bathrobes by the fireplace. I've been in all seasons — it's a warming experience any time of year." The spa offers the usual array of massages, facials, pedicures, manicures, as well as classes in Pilates and yoga. Step out of your life for a relaxing afternoon. Call ahead for reservations, at (603) 238-2845, and check spa class schedules and other information at www.theCmaninn.com.

See page 57 of this issue for an advertiser guide to New Hampshire spas.

touching the earth

Founded in Conway in 1941, this 300-acre retreat center is dedicated to the "renewal of mind, body and spirit through educational programs, recreational opportunities and informal sharing of progressive values." At the core of their course offerings is the belief that education breeds inspiration and the desire to create a better world.

WFC summer course offerings are mind-boggling in their diversity: listen to an expert describe sustainable development in India; hear DJ Wiz discourse on the history of hip-hop; swing to Afro-Latin songs and rhythms; explore the history of chocolate in Mexico with a professor from Amherst College; learn how to pit-fire the clay pots you've just thrown. The center is family-friendly and has fun programs for kids.

Spectacular scenery and recreational opportunities abound: enjoy beautiful views of Mt. Chocorua from the grounds; kayak on the Saco River; swim in nearby White Lake State Park. The center has 52 reasonably priced rooms and 16 campsites. Though no courses are offered in the off-season, the center is available year-round for retreats and reunions. They have many visitors from New York and Boston — "This is their place to touch the earth," says center Director Andrea Walsh. "It feels good to be here. People feel protected, safe. They enjoy the education and dialogue and discussion of issues outside the mainstream. We get a lot of families — there's something here for everyone." For more information, see www.worldfellowship.org or call Andrea or her husband Andy at (603) 447-2280.

MORE TRANSFORMATIONAL PLACES

Tree of Life Interfaith Fellowship

Yoga classes, Bhagavad Gita certificate program, Sacred Path mentoring and more.

18 Middle St.

Milford

(603) 672-3406

www.tolinterfaithfellowship.org

Monadnock Mindfulness Practice Center

A non-denominational center that promotes mindfulness, a practice that can involve silence, reflection, meditation, reading and discussion.

103 Roxbury St.

Suite 301, Keene

(603) 357-5557

www.mindfulness.us

Cathedral of the Pines

Tall pines surround this serene spiritual destination that also serves as a national war memorial.

10 Hale Hill Rd., Rindge
www.cathedralpines.com

Outdoor Escapes New Hampshire LLC

Mountain Bike tours, walking tours, guided hikes, paddling.

(603) 528-0136

www.outdoorescapes-newhampshire.com

Chocorua Island Chapel

Sunday services and private services are held at this religious sanctuary on Squam Lake, often called Church Island.

(603) 968-7931

www.churchisland.org

Lubberland Creek Preserve

This 120-acre habitat is home to many wild animals, birds, amphibians and plants. Explore the preserve on its 1.1-mile trail network.

Bay Road, Newmarket

Star Island Conference Center

Located off the coast of Rye, Star Island hosts conferences on various themes, including art, music, natural history, world affairs and spirituality.

(603) 430-6272

www.starisland.org

Geneva Point

An ecumenical center for conferencing, camping, and retreats.

108 Geneva Point Rd.

Moultonboro

(603) 253-4366

www.genevapoint.org

Little Sisters of St. Francis

A Catholic Franciscan contemplative community accepts small groups for retreats and offers days of private prayer to individuals.

Danville

(603) 382-7490

littlesistersofstfrancis.org

Wisdom Conservancy at Merriam Hill Educ. Center

A private nonprofit organization established for the study of wisdom and community.

Greenville

(603) 878-1818

www.cop.com/info/wisdomconservancy.html