

- Comments on the Transactors Improv Company:
- Comments on the "Library-Warming" Readings:
- Comments on the Writing Workshop:
- Comments on the Evening with Bob Cergol:
- Comments on the film, *Fearless*, and on the "Frommers" singing?
- What aspect of the retreat did you like most?
- What aspect of the retreat did you like least?
- If you could have added one thing to the retreat, what would it have been?
- Any other comments to help us plan future SKS retreats? Be candid! What sorts of speakers or activities would you like to see? What themes/questions would you like us to explore?

Evaluation - "The Still Point in the Turning World"

Help us plan for the next retreat! Please circle the response that best describes your reaction to each of the statements below, and add comments where desired. Feel free to write candid comments, using the back if necessary.

- **The accommodations were comfortable and conducive to the retreat.**

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
5	4	3	2	1

Comment:

- **Fall is the best time for a retreat.**

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
5	4	3	2	1

Comment:

- **The theme of the retreat was interesting and thought-provoking.**

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
5	4	3	2	1

Comment:

- **The activities explored the theme well, and were well-organized.**

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
5	4	3	2	1

Comment:

- **The flow of the retreat included a good balance of activity and time to reflect.**

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
5	4	3	2	1

Comment:

- **The meals were nutritious and portions adequate.**

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
5	4	3	2	1

Comment:

- **The length of the retreat was:** too short just right too long

- **The cost of the retreat was fair: not too expensive.**

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
5	4	3	2	1

Comment:

What past SKS retreatants have to say...

At the Avila retreat I found myself profoundly moved by the depth of respect manifested by the leaders and the members of the group for diverse paths of spiritual seeking in a context of genuine caring and support for each person. I left with a renewed sense of hope that the emerging world of the future may be directed by leaders who not only are highly qualified in terms of technical knowledge, but also are compassionate and wise.

-Dr. William Richards, Psychotherapist

I have never experienced a vacation or any other retreat where I have left and felt so completely relaxed and yet also energized. It is a wonderful group of individuals.

-Steve Grubbs, Executive Vice-President, BBD&O, New York

The SKS Avila retreat sparked new changes in my life. I feel like I found out more about myself after that weekend than I ever have in any weekend of my life.

-Evan Harrison, UNC-Chapel Hill

I believe that when we take the time to break ourselves away from the humdrum ordinary existence, even regular sights and sounds can become magical. For example, I took a walk with several other SKS-ers through the woods one night during the annual Avila retreat. It was a cool evening with lively conversation. But then, almost as though following the orchestrations of an unknown director, we stopped to stare. The moon. Wow. How many nights have I walked home or around campus and never looked up? That night we did look up, and it was beyond breathtaking to become awe-inspiring. To me Avila is rejoining that state of wonder, a state that all too often gets brushed aside and forgotten. Spending the weekend on an Avila retreat is an excellent means of remembering that you are not a sum of obligations and to-do lists, even though it feels that way a lot through the hustle of everyday life.

-Emily Roach, UNC-Chapel Hill

I'm scared to talk about Avila, just a little over a week since it happened. I'm scared to touch it, or to try to explain it. I know I'm not there anymore. I know I have a lot, A LOT, of work to do to begin to do it justice. Not that I can ever earn what happened at Avila, how free and safe I felt, but that I need to begin to live like someone who knows there is nothing more important than that sort of freedom and like someone who won't settle for any security short of trusting myself. I'm scared I'm not up to the challenge. But I know I can't ever feel totally sorry for myself, because I got Avila, even if I didn't keep it. And I know I can't ever be completely ashamed of who I am, because somewhere in me is the girl I was at Avila. I'm starting to forget what it felt like to be her, but I'll remember that she was alright. She was really alright. That's what I keep being grateful for when I remember Avila. That's the change. I can no longer con myself into thinking I just don't have it in me. I can't deny there's worth in being myself anymore than I can deny those few days at Avila happened. That's a little bit of what Avila's left for me. Thank God for everyone who made it happen and for everyone whose eyes I can look into to remember it really did.

-Anna Skorupa, Duke University

Avila was a wonderful experience. It began to make me realize how much farther I have to go. The first attempt at rapport [which] focused on gratitude showed me how much I take for granted. I am now working on being appreciative of all that I have. The SKS is not...a selfish endeavor for introspection; it is a means by which to build character so that you will be strong enough to be weak enough to open your heart to what you really are and to what other people really are.

-Sarah Barden, Duke University

August Turak

Vice President of Sales, MuTek Solutions, Ltd., SKSF Chairman of the Board

"New York is full of businessmen who know everything about money and nothing about life. But when I want advice about anything really important, I turn to Augie Turak."

- Steve Grubbs, Executive Vice President, BBD&O Advertising, Hotchkiss 1970

"Turak is a modern-day Socrates, and his revolution, the Self Knowledge Symposium, is the hottest thing happening in higher education today. I feel like I should be following behind him writing down the things he says."

- Dr. William Willimon, Dean of Duke University Chapel, author of *The Search for Meaning*, and one of *Newsweek's* top ten preachers of the English-speaking world

In 1973, while attending the University of Pittsburgh, Turak's college career was interrupted when he met an extraordinary man from West Virginia, American Zen Master Richard Rose. Turak spent five years studying under Rose while laying carpet for a living. The amazing experiences of that time period have become the subject of many of Turak's riveting talks.

In 1977, Turak returned to the University of Pittsburgh to complete his degree in History, and in 1978 moved to Washington, DC, to work as the protégé of recently retired IBM Executive School Founder & Director, Lou Mobley (also author of the best-selling book, *Beyond IBM*). Turak moved into Mobley's home, lived with his family, and spent every morning studying management and leadership, and every afternoon helping Mobley build his consulting business.

In 1981, Turak began working with a small, little known cable television programming venture known as MTV: Music Television. He achieved success as Vice President or key consultant to many international corporations, including UPI, Bell Atlantic, Virtus, and Adelphia Communications.

In 1985, Turak began lecturing extensively on his experiences with Richard Rose and Lou Mobley and the lessons he had learned from a life of fast-paced business and a passionate pursuit of spirituality. In 1989, several students at North Carolina State University approached him after a lecture and asked him to teach on a regular basis. Thus the first chapter of the Self Knowledge Symposium was born, which has since expanded to the University of North Carolina and Duke University, as well as recently gaining federal non-profit foundation status.

In 1993, Turak began Raleigh Group International software company, which was named the 49th fastest growing independent software vendor out of 10,000 companies surveyed by Microsoft, and the 8th fastest growing privately held business in the Research Triangle Park area of North Carolina by KPMG Peat Marwick and *The Triangle Business Journal*. In the spring of 2000, RGI was acquired by MuTek Solutions, Ltd. of Israel, and Turak became Vice President of Sales of the U.S. division. He has been featured in national publications such as *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *The San Francisco Examiner*, Universal Press' syndicated column *WorkWise*, *Fast Company*, *Entrepreneur Magazine*, *Success*, *Selling*, and *VAR Business*.

When not running one of the most successful software companies in the area, Turak spends his time teaching university students involved in the Self Knowledge Symposium (SKS). Since founding the SKS in 1989, Turak has worked with over one thousand university students on a strictly volunteer basis. Teaching students how to integrate spiritual values into their everyday lives based on his own experiences, Turak's students have gone on to successful careers in such varied professions as law, business, medicine, engineering, teaching, the armed forces, non-profit work, research science, and countless others. Thanks to Turak, graduates of the SKS are better grounded than most young professionals in their personal, moral, and spiritual values.

Dave Gold

Why would a young, ambitious, big-city lawyer set up his practice in the backwoods of West Virginia, considered professional suicide by most of his peers? After building this practice to multi-million dollar success, the kind of firm featured on *USA Today* and *The Today Show*, why would he leave? And why would he move all the way to Raleigh, NC, start a software business, and then spend year after year of his "free time" working with college students—for nothing? The answer is that Dave Gold is a determined and selfless spiritual seeker of the rarest sort. He has consistently made his life's decisions based on his spiritual priorities, and he has generously devoted himself to helping others find their own spiritual path as well.

Upon graduation from law school, Gold founded Gold, Khourey, and Turak in Moundsville, WV, so as to study with American Zen Master Richard Rose, whom Gold had met at The University of Pittsburgh. The fascinating story of the next fifteen years with Rose are chronicled in Gold's book, *After the Absolute*. Joseph Chilton Pearce, world-renowned author of *Crack in the Cosmic Egg* and *Magical Child*, writes in his introduction to *Absolute*: "[Gold is] an exceptional human, mature, kind, intelligent, responsible, the kind of citizen our society and earth need so badly."

In 1993 Gold moved to Raleigh, NC to help his longtime friend and fellow "Rosian," August Turak, launch what has become one of the fastest-growing software companies in the nation, Raleigh Group International. But Gold's real mission was to continue his spiritual quest by working with Turak and the Self Knowledge Symposium (SKS). Gold has taught hundreds of university students within the SKS for over five years, ranging from discussion groups to hatha yoga workshops, a discipline that he has studied for twenty-five years. He has lectured extensively at venues such as the Florida Bar Association, the Indiana and West Virginia Trial Lawyers Associations, and has hosted a weekly radio and television shows. Gold also created a documentary film, *Prison Sutras*, a PBS feature on Fleet Maull, prison inmate and founder of The Prison Dharma Network and The National Prison Hospice Society.

"I've learned more from Dave Gold than I have from any class or professor I've had at NC State. He is much more than a teacher—he is a mentor. Teachers teach you about books and famous people and math. Mentors teach you how to live. Dave makes me a better person."

- Roop Mundi, North Carolina State University '99

Bob Cergol

Vice President of Development for Graphic Arts IT

"Entrepreneur" and "mystic" aren't two words you'd ordinarily put together. Throw in "humble" and you must have a rare person indeed. Bob Cergol is just such a person. A lifelong spiritual seeker, in 1999 he had a profound experience that answered all the questions that first propelled his search. With his perspective and motivation permanently changed from this experience, he hopes he can help others along their own paths. Cergol makes no claims to be anything more than an ordinary man with an intense desire to know who he truly was, and his example inspires others that they too can find some answers.

Like August Turak and Dave Gold, Bob Cergol considered his meeting West Virginian Zen master Richard Rose a life-altering event. In 1972, at the age of 19, Cergol was frustrated with the religious dogma in which he'd been raised. Rose offered the possibility of finding an ultimate purpose and meaning for life that didn't require such blind faith. For the next 15 years, Cergol studied with Rose as his spiritual teacher, and practiced celibacy and meditation. He also started a spiritual group in Columbus, Ohio, and helped publish Rose's books.

Following that period, Cergol went through a difficult time of stagnation and confusion on his path. He moved to the Baltimore/Washington area where he worked in the private printing industry, then for the national trade association for the industry, Printing Industries of America, as Director of their Computer Technologies department. Later he started his own software development business for management information systems for the graphic arts industry. He remains in the same business eighteen years later, as part owner and Vice President of Development for Graphic Arts IT, headquartered in Englewood, Colorado.

However, in 1983, this business success was none too certain. Worried his business was failing and wondering what he should do with his life, Cergol decided to take time for reflection, and so built a cabin in the woods where he could live alone. After a year, he concluded he'd been kidding himself about his spiritual path and had been disengaged from real life. As he left his cabin, he determined to put aside spiritual seeking and pursue a more "ordinary" life, including marriage if that was his destiny. He married in 1994, moved to Raleigh, North Carolina, bought a house and started a family. His wife Carol and he have two girls, Laura and Katie, ages 7 and 5.

Paradoxically, the mundane life of marriage and family acted as a catalyst on his spiritual path. After some intense experiences wherein he witnessed life as an illusion, but could not comprehend his relationship to it, prompted him to become actively engaged in spiritual seeking with others once again. From 1998-1999 Cergol participated in a study group that explored the correspondence from Zen master Alfred Pulyan to Richard Rose. The Pulyan letters triggered a profound realization that neutralized all of his previous existential angst, and answered all his questions. He now makes himself available to others seeking help along their own spiritual paths, glad to offer any guidance that he can.

Georg Buehler

Georg Buehler will lead one of his famous "Zen of Writing" workshops as part of our retreat this weekend. Buehler has been giving writing workshops at universities in the Triangle area for the past several years. He was recently selected as one of the authors of a new book *Radical Spirit*, edited by Steve Dinan, Director of the Esalen's Center for Theory and Research. The book's introduction is written by Ken Wilber, author of the best-selling book, *Spectrum of Consciousness*.

"I used to write a lot when I was younger, but the demands of college ended that practice pretty quickly," said Elan Dassani, UNC '02 of the writing workshop presented at UNC-CH in the spring of 1998. "Attending the writing workshop helped me remember the importance of writing in my life. The writing I do now is more directed and more honest. Rather than adding another burden to my day, it actually makes the day go more smoothly."

Sean Ryan, NC State '01, says of Buehler's workshop, "The best thing about the writing workshop that Mr. Buehler presented was that it was accessible to me. I have never considered myself a writer but have always wanted to write. The advice that he gave was easy to implement in beginning my writing practice."

Buehler begins his workshop by assuring participants they don't have to be great writers before they can use writing to access the spiritual within themselves. "Even if you don't aspire to be a great novelist or poet, the practice of writing can open you up to a whole new way of perceiving the world. Paradoxically, with a ball-point pen and a spiral notebook you can make the ineffable accessible for yourself."

Transactors Improv Co.

How would you like to be in a state of consciousness where you're perfectly, spontaneously genuine? In the moment, alive and aware, without strain or fear, doing things you never dreamed you could do? Sounds like a magical, mystical state, right?

It's what the Transactors Improv Company does on a daily basis, and they can teach you how. The Self Knowledge Symposium (SKS) has invited The Transactors to be part of our annual retreat, "The Still Point of the Turning World," Nov. 2-4 at Avila Center, Durham, NC.

So what does this incredible company of improv artists have to do with a spiritual retreat? For ages, saints and poets have urged us to set our fears and desires aside and just pay attention to THIS moment. "This moment contains all moments," as C.S. Lewis wrote. Get out of your own way, and you catch a glimpse of the Real.

Speaking of getting out of the way, I think I'll let Transactors director Greg Hohn speak himself on this...following is an essay he wrote about spirituality in improv, as well as some information about the company itself.

Bring a reading for Friday Night...

In 1999, SKS members Eric Clark and James Todd decided to have a "library warming" party to welcome the SKS library into its new home, their own apartment. They asked that everyone bring a favorite reading that would inaugurate the new library. Who could have expected the magic that descended upon the crowd gathered there, as people began to read the words most meaningful to their lives. It was so incredibly moving that many wrote of it afterwards....

"How do you explain twenty-five people sitting in a circle completely silent yet communicating? We call it rapport, and it is virtually impossible to explain to most people. Organized church has periods of silent prayer, and our secular society has moments of silence. But a half-hour of silence in our hectic world of consuming America in 1999? How is this possible among a group of high-achieving intellectuals who all have opinions they express unhesitantly? The room is silent. And it's a comfortable silence. Rapport is a nonverbal mental connection, a silent emotional link to others and to God. Rapport is like a velvet blanket settling over the room, comforting but not stifling, dampening the sounds of the everyday word so you can tune into the music of a different place. Rapport links quiet minds to each other, to God, to the deeper self. It comes rarely, and when it comes, it is a blessing."

So we're doing it again. Although we're not inaugurating a library at this retreat, we are welcoming the magic that just might occur. We are opening to the possibility that we might sense the "still point of the turning world," even if but for a moment.

Bring a reading that you think relates to the theme of paying attention to the present moment, the "still point of the turning world." It can be a poem, story, fiction, non-fiction, something you wrote, whatever you like. In the interest of hearing as many people read as possible, please keep your selection short.

And Saturday night, be "Fearless"...



A middle-aged architect with conventional views finds his perspective on life dramatically shifted when he is one of few survivors of a disastrous plane crash. Based on the novel by Rafael Yglesias. Academy Award Nominations: Best Supporting Actress--Rosie Perez.

San Francisco architect and family man Max Klein survives the plane crash that kills his best friend and undergoes a mystical transformation. Having overcome not only his fear of flying, but his fear of death, Max emerges from the crash in a blissed, beatific state -- and finds himself no longer able to engage in normal life. Convinced of his own messianic powers, Max pours all his energies into helping a young Hispanic mother who lost her baby in the crash overcome her grief and crippling guilt. In the process he grows further and further away from his devoted wife and young son until he risks losing them -- and himself -- all together.

- cduniverse.com

The Still Point of the Turning World

The annual retreat of the Self Knowledge Symposium Foundation
Avila Retreat Center, November 2-4, 2001

Events take place in the Main Meeting Room unless otherwise specified. All meals are served in the Dining Room.

Friday, November 2

7:30 AM	Check-in and registration Breakfast available
8:30 AM	Welcome to Avila (Janet Buehler, Mary Alice Scott)
9-9:30 AM	Introductory remarks by August Turak
10 - 12 noon	Transactors Improv Workshop
Noon	Lunch and individual time
1-2 PM	Transactors continue
2:30-4 PM	Rapport Meeting I Group 1: Main Meeting Room Group 2: Small Meeting Room Group 3: Chapel
4-5 PM	Individual time/Frummer rehearsal
5 PM	Dinner
7 PM	"A Library-Warming" (shared readings)
9 PM	Snack The Frummers: a cappella performance

Saturday, November 3

8 AM	Breakfast
9-11 AM	Rapport Meeting II Group 1: Main Meeting Room Group 2: Small Meeting Room Group 3: Chapel
Noon	Lunch and individual time
2-4 PM	Writing Workshop with Georg Buehler Group 1: Main Meeting Room, with Georg Buehler Group 2: Small Meeting Room, with Eric Clark Group 3: Chapel, with Leila Plummer
5 PM	Dinner
7 PM	An Evening with Bob Cergol
9 PM	Snack Movie: <i>Fearless</i> (optional)

Sunday, November 4

8 AM	Snacks available in main meeting room
9-11 AM	Rapport Meeting II Group 1: Main Meeting Room Group 2: Small Meeting Room Group 3: Chapel
11 AM	Brunch
Noon	Group photo. Be checked out of your room by this time.
1 PM	Depart

The fact is, as saints and poets have tried to tell us, there IS no future, no past, only NOW. As Eliot wrote in "Burnt Norton":

*Except for the point, the still point,
there would be no dance, and there is only the dance.*

We in the Self Knowledge Symposium are glad you are joining us in our annual retreat, as we search for the still point that is so easily lost.

DATE: 10/29/01

FROM: August F. Turak, Chairman of the Board, Self Knowledge Symposium Foundation

Welcome!

The annual Self Knowledge Symposium Foundation (SKSF) retreat will soon be here. This year's retreat, "The Still Point of the Turning World," will include time for both personal and collective contemplation, including improvisational theatre workshops, group discussions, rapport sittings, and writing workshops. The retreat will be held at the Avila Retreat Center, a former Catholic convent in the country, just north of Durham, NC. Here we will focus on this year's retreat theme of paying attention to the present moment.

Some logistics

Enclosed are some readings on our theme to start you thinking; please read these selections *before* you come to the retreat. Also enclosed are directions to Avila, the retreat schedule, and biographies of our presenters. The Sisters at Avila Center prepare wonderful meals, according to the preference you indicated earlier in the registration process (i.e. whether you eat chicken, beef, fish, eggs, or cheese). Please adhere to the preference you expressed upon registration; last-minute changes are difficult for the kitchen staff to accommodate.

You will also want to bring the following items with you:

- this packet
- flashlight
- rain gear
- camera
- comfortable walking shoes
- a short selection to read aloud on Friday night (see details on following pages)

Please contact Janet Buehler at (919) 875-4307 (9 AM-9 PM), janet@selfknowledge.org if you have any questions.

A note about our theme

So where does this theme come from, "The Still Point in the Turning World"? The title itself comes from "Burnt Norton," part of T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* (included in this packet). It suggests the need to see what is before us, just as it is, right now, despite all the worries and concerns of an ever-changing world.

If you're like most people, the to-do list you kept before September 11 might look a little less important now. It's from a different world. The future that we're always living for, which seemed inevitably to be better than what we have right now, is no longer so bright nor so certain.

But in fact, this future we've always rushed towards has never really existed.

We rush around to our jobs, classes, family activities, etc., always thinking in the back of our minds that it will get better soon. We'll finally "get organized," we'll spend more time with our loved ones, we'll get rid of that old clunker that's been driving us crazy and get a nice new car. THEN we'll be happy. Not now, but then. And we suspend our lives waiting for that time when everything will at last be "OK."