

LETTING GO

How can letting go take us to a better spiritual place?

What can we gain by the simple but sometimes
difficult act of releasing something that holds us back?

Several of our brothers speak.



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ELDER'S PERCH

Good Day, Brothers

Well it's been more than a month since the Fall Conference and my journey of interpreting those heart experiences continues. The conference was/is my awareness of my personal power. This is a journey that I've been undertaking for many years. Yes, the goal of this journey is to step fully into my Light Being Self but it's been the journey itself that's of the most interest. It's those beliefs and their interconnectedness that make the questions so interesting a puzzle to work on.

My self journey is the story of who I am and what beliefs make me. The path my journey is taking me down is through the teaching of one of the mystery schools. These teachings are spiritually based and, as Michael Sigmann put it at the conference, is to make the ego "a personal assistant." In order to do this, one must understand the ego's point of view. It becomes a journey of self understanding, of what has shaped us, how and why.

Through GSV, I've discovered my personal sense of power. Leading the conference, this organization, I'm continually taught about myself. One of the lessons shown this year was my fear about being accepted and wanted. I freely admit that

leading a group of educated spiritually minded brothers caused me much self doubt. I'm just another man who's trying to find himself and the meaning in his life.

During the talent show, a perfect example of this presented itself during Joe Kiser's diary reading. A fellow brother who was afraid to share his pain, who felt safe enough to express himself, to be vulnerable. Knowing that his brothers understood and supported him in this exploration.

In a lot of ways I felt the same as I stepped up into leading this organization. Showing my vulnerabilities, my self doubts and my fears. Putting myself out in front, speaking with a voice greater than my own and guiding a presence of shared brotherhood. Every time a brother came up to me and expressed his gratitude or concerns, I felt a little more centered in my abilities. I felt accepted, appreciated and supported in my growth. I feel that my self-doubting ego was shown a path that supported my spiritual self in a way that was nurturing, caring and loving.

I'd like to leave you with this final thought: how is your journey speaking to you?

Blessings to you, my brothers.

Michael "Ma'el" Varnum lives in Marietta, GA, with his beloved best friend. He is a massage therapist/lightworker, is looking for his distinguishingly graying papa bear and awaits the romantic cuddly fire-lit winter nights.



BY MICHAEL VARNUM

Gay Spirit Visions

Our Mission Statement

We are committed to creating safe, sacred space that is open to all spiritual paths, wherein loving gay men may explore and strengthen spiritual identity.

We are committed to creating a spiritual community with the intent to heal, nurture our gifts and potential, and live with integrity in the world.

We are committed to supporting others in their spiritual growth by sharing experiences and insights.

To fulfill these goals we facilitate annual retreats and conferences, sponsor social events, publish a newsletter, and maintain Internet-based communications for men who love men.

GSV HEART CIRCLES

Held the second Sunday of every month at 7:30 p.m., hosted by Wendell Johnson and Lem Arnold. For location and more information, contact Wendell at louis8@hotmail.com or Lem at lem1951@mindspring.com

GSV POTLUCKS

GSV Potlucks in Atlanta, are held the fourth Saturday of the month at 7:30 p.m., unless otherwise noted. GSV potlucks are drug- and alcohol-free events.

November 25 – No potluck scheduled.

December 24 – GSV Potluck Hosted by Wendell Johnson, 202 Cascade Park Drive, SW, Atlanta. Contact Wendell at 770-552-4744 or louis8@hotmail.com

January 27 – GSV Potluck Hosted by George Miller, 339 10th St NW, Atlanta, 404-875-1061, aagm888@aol.com.

Gentlemen,

WE NEED MORE VOLUNTEERS TO HOST POTLUCKS.

Hosting a potluck is a simple and effective way to serve GSV. Please let us know if you can host. Contact Bruce Parrish at bhpparrish@earthlink.net.



When John Warner brought his fabulous earring collection to the Fall Conference, I couldn't resist them. John has the wildest earrings I've ever seen. They range from small nickel-sized gems to 4- or 5-inch long spectacular "shoulder dusters" as some in the drag queen world might say. Some of the round ones look like miniature satellite dishes.



BY JENNINGS FORT

by one more over-the-top than the last. It was like a fever.

Why my obsession? Of course, it's partly about rebelling against something mostly forbidden during my life, embracing my feminine side and having fun. It's easy to do this at a Fall Conference, a safe place where it's not only tolerated, it's celebrated. But, for me, it's also about letting go, releasing fear and worry for what other people might think, feelings I've had for years. It's about saying, "I feel like shining right now, so here I am world! Get a load of me and these big ass earrings!"

Those who knew me when I started coming to Fall Conferences know that I wasn't always like this. It's taken me years to build up to this major league jewelry. I thank GSV, time and lots of therapy for this. Part of my spiritual journey has been finding and loving the things inside that let me be my highest, truest self and getting rid of things that don't serve me. One of my issues is fear – fear of men, failure, embarrassment, humiliation. I think these earrings are a small, but real manifestation of my work on that.



In this issue of the *Visionary*, several brothers describe their own spiritual experiences with letting go, sometimes with life-changing results.

These earrings touched something deep inside me. Are they sparkling indications that I've successfully let go of all the problems that could weigh down my spiritual development? Yeah, right. I've still got plenty to work on. I'm just glad we have the Fall Conferences to celebrate these small victories. But who knows where this could lead? Maybe next year I can evolve up to a clutch purse and matching eye shadow.

This is my last *Visionary* as editor. It's been a privilege to serve the men of GSV these seven years.

Jennings Fort lives in Atlanta. Reach him at jenman@mindspring.com.



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LETTING GO AND FINDING GOD

Like many children, I had an image of God as an old man sitting up in the clouds on a throne surrounded by angels. As a child I saw this figure as a wise father who watched over his children keeping them safe. My grandmother taught me to sing "Jesus Loves Me,"

and I somehow thought that Jesus and God was the same person. I even remember arguing with my Catholic cousin over this point when she insisted that God and Jesus were distinct identities and

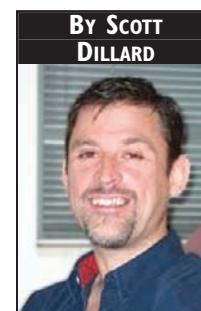
then she threw in the Holy Ghost for good measure. In any case, I saw a unified somewhat distant God who was good in my early years.

As I grew older I became more and more skeptical of any notion on God at all. I could not understand that if God were all-knowing and all-powerful then why God would allow for so many tragedies to befall his own children? I did not understand how a loving God could be so vengeful. If we were all fallen children then why would he not save us all no matter what we did? If he made us the way we are, then why would he punish us for being the way we are? I started to drift away from believing in God at all. I proclaimed myself agnostic and, on bad days, atheist.

Once I came to grips with being a gay man, I moved even further away from any traditional notion of God. I saw how most people in the culture I lived in saw my gayness as incompatible with the wishes of the God that they worshipped. I could not embrace any notion of God being out of my reach simply because of who I loved. Was not the message of Jesus one of love? Did Jesus teach that some love is good and other love is bad? Again, I could not reconcile what I had been told with what I had experienced.

Even with all of this baggage surrounding me about the notion of God, I was nagged by the thought that I was somehow connected to something bigger

Continued on next page



By SCOTT DILLARD

THE SIXTH ANNUAL
Gay Spirit Visions
Winter Meditation
 January 12-14, 2007

At The Mountain Retreat and Learning Center, near Highlands, NC

Come, join your Spirit Brothers on an "Identity Journey."

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Our Identity (Workshop and discussion)
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Tibetan Master Chants
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 — Larry Ackerman, Author of "The Identity Code".

Register by calling The Mountain Retreat & Learning Centers at 828 526-5838 or download a registration form at www.gayspiritvisions.org and mail directly to The Mountain.

See insert in this issue of *Visionary*.

Photo: Lem Arnold

SCOTT DILLARD

Continued from previous page

than me. I struggled with trying to figure out the meaning of life and the meaning of my life in particular. As much as I rejected the popular notions of God in my culture, I was not content with thinking that life was some random encounter. I instinctively knew that there were elements that transcended me that I was somehow a part of.

For most of my adult life, I simply lived with this uneasy dualism of rejecting the notions of God I had been taught and embracing a notion of some sort of larger presence, a God-like presence if you will. I would wrestle with my beliefs from time to time but, for the most part, I simply let them sit unexamined.

Eventually I started to awaken to a kind of spiritual belief. This occurred when I watched my partner, Darrell, die from complications due to AIDS. When he passed, I was out of the room. I know the precise moment when he went. I felt him leave in my own body. My spirit was connected to his. I also felt a melting of all boundaries. Nothing was distinctly its own entity but all was connected. It was a powerful moment that shook me to my core.

Gradually I became active in the Unitarian Universalist church and attended The New Seminary to train as an interfaith minister. During that training we were taken on a guided meditation. As we came back from the meditation we were asked to write a letter to God. As I took my pen in hand the following words appeared on the page before me, "Forgive me, God, for believing what others have said about you." It was a release, a letting go, of both my own ill-conceived notions of God and those of other people. I wrote nothing more that day as I simply sat and wept over the words.

This moment of letting go allowed me to move toward my own understandings of God, of transcendence, and of my own place in it all.



The Rev. Dr. Scott Dillard is an associate professor of rhetoric at Georgia College and State University, Milledgeville, and an interfaith minister.

GIFTS OF LETTING GO

Attending my first Body Electric workshop, *Celebrating the Body Erotic*, back in spring 1990 was a watershed moment for me spiritually – and has ultimately been the catalyst directly or indirectly for everything I have learned and experienced about "letting go" since then.



BY DAVE CABLE

I went into that weekend with no expectations at all – I just knew it was a chance to be in a room full of naked men for two days – and I was all for that! I walked away Sunday evening completely changed in my perceptions of what it means to be a gay man and a spiritual being on this planet. So immediately, I found myself having *let go*, almost without realizing it, of everything I thought I knew about what it meant to be "religious" and having a spiritual dimension to my own life. CBE wasn't anything like the Southern Baptist services I was raised in, to put it mildly. That process of letting go was painless, even ecstatic.

Another lesson in letting go has been afforded me every time I have attended GSV or Body Electric events where there is a gift exchange. I am always in deep awe of how Spirit gives each man what he needs in the small group gift exchanges at the September GSV conference. And the reason, for me, that it works so perfectly is that I have *let go*. I have, first, let go of some object in my own space and released it to make its way into someone else's life. I sometimes have found this to be really challenging and sometimes almost immediately apparent. But either way I am aware of the conscious act of selecting and releasing something. Once in circle with my small group companions, I also *let go* of expectations. I consciously try to *not* focus on which package looks most intriguing, or which wrapping is prettiest, or the object that I know was put in the circle by the guy I have a crush on that weekend. And in that process of letting go of expectations, Spirit responds by providing. Sometimes it is obvious.

Sometimes it becomes apparent much, much later, and usually it has nothing to do with the thing itself but, rather, with the connection that is reinforced between myself and someone else in the circle. These gift exchanges have always been amazing lessons for me in letting go of things I may have sentimental/emotional ties with – and letting go of expectations and allowing Spirit to do its own work in its own way.

These lessons of letting go of manifestations of the physical world – and of expectations – have, over time, grown solidly into a key aspect of my own spiritual practice. I make a specific point, every day, of *letting go* of my own life. I meditate, perhaps only for a few moments, on the state of my life and resolve myself to my mortality if it comes during that day. Many individuals in Western culture find this to be morbid or even pathological. But it is a core concept in many Eastern practices and the only reasonable way I know to make sure I am always at peace and ready for the next stage of my journey. During both the *Healing The Wounded Healer* and sacred intimacy intensives that I have experienced with Body Electric, there have been exercises revolving around this concept of meditating on mortality. One of the most deeply moving experiences I have ever had was leaning over the body of a dear friend and sacred brother two years ago at Wildwood and whispering words of good-bye into his ear. This was an exercise to assume that these words we spoke to others in that space could be the last communication we have with them. It is incredibly powerful – and affirming – when you can reach that point of peace, knowing that the important things are not unresolved and that you have let go of the future.

Dave Cable lives in Atlanta with his companion of 24 years (25 in November!), John Hilinski. He completed training as a Body Electric Sacred Intimate in August. A primary goal for the coming year or two is to develop a Sacred Intimacy practice with a special focus on coaching self-pleasure and developing rituals and safe space for gay men to explore their own relationships between sexuality and spirituality.

FINDING SUMMER

This year my son turned 20, recently I turned 50 and in a couple of weeks my father turns 80. I am the mid-point of 60 years between my father's birth and my son's. From this vantage point I see my future in my aging father and my past in my vital, energetic son. I realize that I am so tired of my old patterns.



BY MARK MEDLIN

One pattern I notice is my relationship to lovers. I must let go of my desire, my longing, my hope. Letting go of hope, moving into holding hopefulness without expectation, being hopeful even when there is no hope, this is challenging. Not attaching to my yearning for a lover, not attaching to hopeful fulfillment of my desire and longing, these things are quite challenging.

When I think of letting go, I immediately think of the idea of trusting Spirit. Trusting that things will work out, that I won't have to work hard, that I won't have to struggle, or strive through huge effort to make the best happen for me – that is very challenging indeed. Although I understand why I have difficulty trusting – because I didn't get certain kinds of comfort and security during childhood – even so, understanding does not seem to give me permission to live each day, take each step feeling confident that the best is happening and will continue to happen.

At the Fall Conference, in his "Mind" workshop, I heard Michael Sigmund saying "focus on the flowers." It makes sense to me. The future is not happening, the past is not happening. All that is happening is right now, this present moment. So, letting go means breathing into this moment, and now this one, and now this one. In some ways letting go is so elegantly simple, a perfect combination of body breathing, mind quieting and spirit connecting to greater Spirit. Understanding by itself, even understanding childhood pain, is helpful and necessary but not sufficient to take me into this reverent, quiet place of simple presence in the here and now.

So at this strange mid-life point of being a 50-year-old gay man who loves romance and passion and the excitement of love but who also experiences the reality of baggage and frustration and fear, I think of something by Albert Camus I read when I was 20: "In the midst of winter I found within me an invincible summer." Now I think I know a little more about this; I understand my winter is not about my age but rather about my attachments and that letting go of attachments does not take me directly to source but rather to an experience of loss and emptiness and perhaps in some moments to calm. Trust Spirit is the mantra.

Detachment is not necessarily about quitting my job or my lover or my daily life. I think it's more about being aware that, in each moment, I am not my job or my lover. I am a being capable of being in

this moment, and now this moment, and now this one. The miracle is in the connection from moment to moment to moment making memory and experience. The miracle is that spirit takes me from moment to moment, that it leads me on even when I think it's not.

I don't want to be distracted from this awareness, to lose myself in my attachments including the memories. Rather, I want to hold my attachments and hold my present separateness at the same time. I want to hold the memories and a focus on just what is now. I am not my attachments. I am not alone. I am this present moment, a breathing presence of light and dark and everything in between, and now again, and now again. When I come back to the rhythm of presence, I feel much better, much more comforted.

When I come back to myself, in the midst of people, work, worries, life, I feel calmer and more whole. The summer of being is always present even when I think the weather is cold, the people austere and the life holding back and waiting for spring. I have only to hold the people and things of my life as separate from me but to hold them to realize that I am a living, breathing being who can always be present and always be whole no matter what. I say to myself again, "trust Spirit."



Mark Medlin is a 50-year-old gay man grateful for the challenge of letting go.

THE VISIONARY IS GOING ELECTRONIC

The *Visionary* will become a solely electronic publication in 2007. You'll be able to download it from the GSV Web site.

In the meantime, please register on our online mailing list at <http://www.gayspiritvisions.org/subscription.html>. We'll send you an e-mail when the newsletter is ready for you to download.

If you don't have internet access, please send your mailing address to:
GSV • P.O. Box 339 • Decatur, GA 30031

Note: *Visionary* is already available for viewing, download and printing in a full color PDF file on the GSV site.

BEING GRATEFUL AND LETTING GO

Letting go. How many times have you heard that phrase in your own lifetime? Let go of the past. Let go of your anger. Let go of the fear. Let go of the person you used to be. Let go and let God. Let go or be dragged. Whether it is forced upon us by circumstances or chosen, letting go is a natural part of life. The jargon is common, but the question remains: How does one let go? To quote Nike, "Just do it!" If only it were that easy....



By DAVID SALYER

Over the years I've gotten pretty good at some kinds of letting go. For instance, getting rid of accumulated material items—my *stuff*—that aren't needed any more. I make a couple of drop offs to Goodwill annually now and it feels as good as an orgasm. I also let go of the need to be "well-informed." Now, this one was a bit more difficult since I worked at CNN for 14 years and was expected to know everything that was going on in the world. When I left that career, I made a conscious choice to limit my exposure to the news. The first to go was local television news – easy enough once I accepted the fact that little of what's reported locally makes me feel better about myself or enlightens me. Fires, bank robberies and murders are going to happen whether I watch TV or not. National news? I read it online now at my convenience.

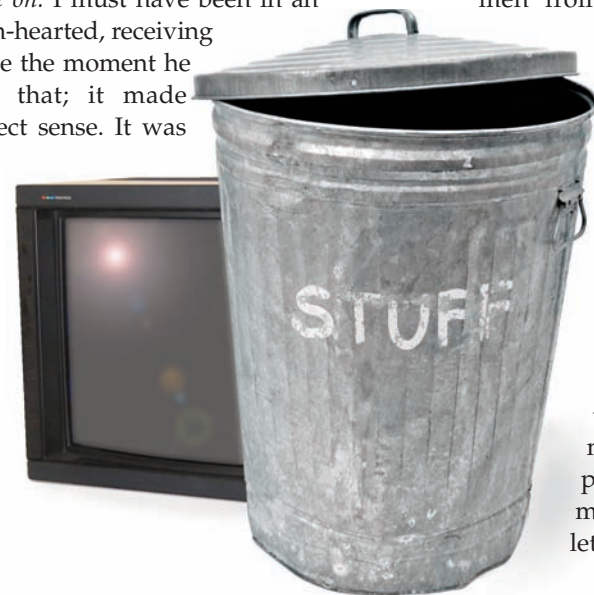
I'm not always so successful at letting go, however. One of my biggest pet peeves is the way people plant trees in that narrow strip of grass between the street and sidewalk, directly under power lines. I'm all for planting trees in the big city, but there's a complete absence of common sense involved here. The trees will grow larger, roots breaking up the sidewalks and limbs climbing skyward into the power lines...destined to be mangled by indifferent city workers. I drive by this kind of thing all the time in Atlanta and every time I share my frustration with a passenger, it's met with the instruction to "let it go." Not freakin' likely. And I may never let go of

my sincere belief that Jennifer Lopez ruined Ben Affleck's career.

Admittedly, those are pretty small things. Then there are the bigger acts of letting go. For those, we sometimes need some external help because we may not feel we have the tools to let go, surrender or move on. This external help – hopefully, *not* unwelcome pressure – can come from family, friends, co-workers and even the random comments of strangers. Or it may come from a professional, such as a therapist, counselor or psychologist. I'm currently working with a skilled counselor who has ably assisted me in navigating everything from the residual effects of sexual assault to my withdrawal from a toxic professional environment. Fortunately, I have also been blessed with friends who've never been shy about identifying something I might want to consider letting go.

Yes, even a stranger can facilitate your process. I recall sitting through a presentation years ago in which the speaker was tackling the issue of parental resentment.

You know the stuff I'm talking about. *Mom and dad didn't love me or understand me. They abused me physically, abandoned me emotionally. My sister was their favorite.* The speaker, a man I'd never met before, offered an alternative. *How long are you going to hold onto this stuff? Your parents didn't know what they were doing. The fact that couples can procreate offers no assurance whatsoever that they can parent. Let it go and move on.* I must have been in an open-hearted, receiving space the moment he said that; it made perfect sense. It was



as if I had been given permission to forgive my own father once and for all for his emotional indifference *and* acknowledge his considerable skills as a provider – not only was I clothed and fed, but there was always a comfortable, air-conditioned middle-class roof over my head. Now, I choose to be grateful for that and let the rest go.


Honestly, I believe that letting go is a matter of making choices. When I no longer felt that mainstream religion made sense for me, I let go. I chose to create a new relationship with my higher power and embark on a different spiritual path of my own. When I found myself dating a man who needed a financial benefactor more than a partner, I let go. I chose to redefine a personal relationship in a way that did not make me feel like an ATM. When I recently concluded that the two Georgia gubernatorial candidates, Democrat and Republican, were both equally repellent and loathsome, I let go of the compulsion to cast a vote in that race. For the first time since I turned 18 and earned the right to vote, I am choosing *not* to make myself choose between two evils.

If you're reading this, you've probably been to a Gay Spirit Visions Fall Conference. I've been to a dozen. I hear them described as a transformative experience; an event that can literally change your life. If I were writing the copy for a brochure about this annual gathering of men from all over the country, I might even use that kind of language to describe it myself. But truthfully, while the conference itself may be a catalyst for personal growth or change, *you* are the one who returns home and chooses to let go of a bad job, a bad relationship or a bad habit. Gay Spirit Visions – this tribe of men who love men – might give you a push, but never underestimate your own potential to let go and move on!

Is there something you want to let go? Is there something you would like to surrender? What keeps you from moving on in your life? Are there old feelings of bitterness or anger simmering below the surface, undermining your disposition and affecting the daily face you offer the world? I've wrestled with all those questions before – *and will again!* Several things have helped me in the past. Like journaling. Who knew that furiously scribbling random thoughts about your life, relationships and obsessions on page after blank page could be so exhilarating and revelatory! Pay attention to what

comes up. Not into journaling? Seek external help from a professional, or identify that one person in your life who knows you best and ask them for some genuine feedback about what's got you stuck. Sometimes just hearing someone you love and trust validate what you already know will get the process rolling.

Letting go is a process. A complex process, though ironically the goal or end result is ultimately simplification. It takes a mindful effort...gradual, gentle and almost passive or more aggressive and intentional, like a purge. It may involve everything from anxiety and fear to tears

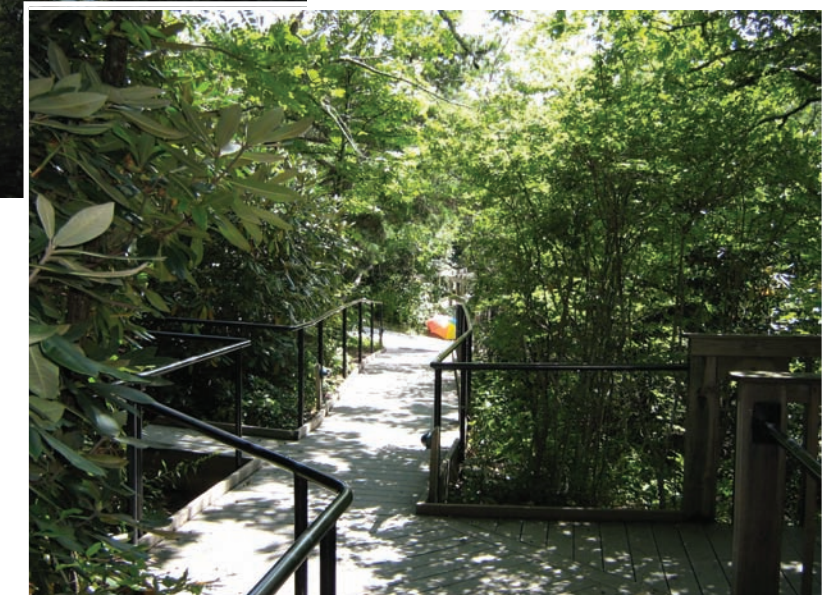
and mourning. There's the physical – choosing to let go of extra weight, a bad habit, addiction or indiscriminate consumerism. Or the psychological – choosing to let go of unpleasant emotions like anger, jealousy and hate. My belief is that that when we choose to let go or purge at the physical and psychological level, spiritual progress follows. 

David Salyer is a retired journalist living in Atlanta. Contact him at cubscout@mindspring.com.



Scenes from The Mountain, GSV Fall Conference, 2006

Photos courtesy of Lem Arnold



A scrapbook from the 17th Annual

GSV FALL CONFERENCE

September 14-17, 2006



The Fall Conference makes me feel proud to a part of a GAY nation that pushes the boundaries of our culture.

Harold Cole



The Fall Conference has become my yearly family reunion. This yearly experience cannot be explained. It's one of those events that has to be experienced. How does one describe magic?

Arnie Vargas (left)



Photos courtesy of Lem Arnold

The Fall Conference is smiles, sweet faces, warm hugs, the moon, the fire, cycadas, nightly song, drumming, dancing, contemplating life goals on Meditation Rock.

..... Ken "Fire Bear" Berman



VISIONARY

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