

Enlightenment is a Four-Letter Word

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**Emerald City
Press**

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Emerald City Press
Kingston, NY
ISBN-9781477443286

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Special thanks to transcribers and editors: Camilla Smith, Simonne Caldwell, Ray Kinoshia, and Christel Vone. The primary material in the book was derived from a series of talks given during a six-day retreat at *The Point of Infinity* in upstate New York. The content generally reflects the chronology of the retreat however, to bring about a greater sense of coherency, some of the material was shifted from its original place.

Cover design and interior layout by Stockton Rhode.

*To the love and wonder
that fills every human heart.*

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Introduction

The so-called spiritual path is filled with beauty, inspiration, and wonder yet at the same time with delusion, falsehood, and folly—and that's because most people who diligently follow this path and seek this thing called “enlightenment” have no idea what they're looking for, no idea where to find it, and, when carefully considered, don't really want it at all! And to complicate things, many of the experts who offer enlightenment teachings have not embodied the complete state and, therefore, are not able to guide seekers in an intelligent and comprehensive way. So what to do? Where is a spiritual seeker to find clear and unencumbered teachings about the path of enlightenment and the means by which those teachings can become a living and embodied truth?

A common question asked by many seekers is, “What is enlightenment and how do I attain it?” That's the question people have been asking me for years; and to provide some kind of reply to this question, and many other questions about the spiritual path, I led a six-day retreat at *The Point of Infinity* in upstate New York, in July 2009. Afterwards, a few participants wanted to turn the talks from the retreat into a book. And somewhere, somehow I said “yes.” That's how this thing you have in your hand came into existence.

The version of enlightenment I put forth is one of wholeness and integration. It's a state where our human self embodies the joy and wonderment of Spirit and where our divine self is informed by the virtue and integrity of our human beingness. I call this *divinizing the human and humanizing the divine*. This is not an aloof, transcendent, or “nobody home” enlightenment; it's a full-bodied, human-based enlightenment. Echoing the words of Teilhard de Chardin we could say: “We don't want to be human beings having a spiritual experience, we

want to be spiritual beings having a human experience.”

One problem with the question, “How do I reach enlightenment?” is that the one who seems to exist in a state of separation and lack, the one who supposedly needs enlightenment and is diligently seeking it, the ego-self as it were, is the very thing blocking enlightenment. (Well, nothing is really blocking enlightenment, and enlightenment cannot be reached, because you’re already there, but we’ll get to all of that at another time.) And why is your identification with the ego-self, your unshakable sense of being this separate person, blocking you from the experience of your true self? Because you are *not* this ego-self. You are not merely this separate person you take yourself to be. You are something much greater. You are all of it! Thus, any pursuit based upon the false notion that you are this separate ego-self, in need of this thing called “enlightenment,” is going to be futile and self-defeating. Yet that never stopped anyone from trying. Countless people, in this imagined state of ego-separation, still hold to the hope that their old, reliable efforts can get them to the Promised Land. And so this bootless march toward spiritual enlightenment, toward some future something, continues.

This path is about knowing the truth of your own existence; and to know that truth your heart, your intention, and your basic assumptions must be aligned with that truth. We have to begin from the assumption of unity, not separation; from the felt sense of fullness, not lack; from the conviction that everything we seek is already here, as life itself, and nowhere else. Coming to know the truth of who we are involves making a fundamental shift in our approach to life, in the heart of our existence—from that small, hopeless ego-self to our self as all-embracing consciousness, beingness, and love. Our old, outmoded ego-self has to be dethroned. We don’t want to kill it; we simply want to see it for what it is. We want to put it in its

proper place. We want to see that this sense of ourselves as being a separate, cut-off person is a mental construct, a fabrication, and not, fundamentally, who we are. If we can do this, if we can open our hearts, if we can see beyond our limited conditioning, we'll come upon a greater dimension of our being, we'll come upon a new existence, a new way of being. Enlightenment is not simply the return to some pristine self or a state of primordial innocence it's a new birth, a new creation, a new life of ever-unfolding wholeness and wonder.

∞ ∞ ∞ ∞

**Love Care Soul Ever Full Make
Here Open Such Flow Well Real
Have Free Make Self Good Will
Life Fate True Just Pure Verb**

DAY ONE: *Morning Session*

The Path

This path is about opening to our divine splendor and infusing the whole of our human self with that boundless light; it's about bringing our human beingness into alignment with our spiritual nature. We cannot fit the vastness of our spiritual nature into the limited concept we have of ourselves but neither can we discard the human in hopes of reaching the divine. The essential approach then is to *divinize the human and humanize the divine*; to have our awakened divinity inform our human life and to have our emerging human qualities give expression to our divine essence. This is the approach of wholeness, the way to experience the fullness and joy of life. "Enlightenment" without full realization of our human nature is a partial enlightenment, an incomplete enlightenment and, truly speaking, no enlightenment at all.

The Dharma

Before we begin, I want to open with a brief discussion about *dharma*, about how one should hold him- or herself during the retreat. The primary *dharma* is to focus on your experience and inner state and not pay too much attention to others or what they're doing or how they look (or how you think you

look to them). There is no need to try and impress others with your beads, shawls, scriptural knowledge, or stories about meeting this or that guru. We're not here for any of that. We want to relate to each other in the highest possible way. Stay with the heart, stay with what's true for you; let go of judgment and fault-finding and enjoy the supportive energy of being around fellow embodimenters of the truth. Be no one and everyone at the same time. ...

We're not here to marvel at anyone's spiritual attainment or to try and impress anyone with our stuff; we're here to honor ourselves and discover our true greatness. And please, I'm not "the enlightened guy." Don't project some image of enlightenment onto me or anyone else. That's just a way to displace your power onto someone else and then revere that person for the very thing you imparted to them! We don't want any of that. There are no gurus at this gathering. We don't want any guru projections, wished-for father projections, longed-for mother projections. What we want is to be true to our own self.

I may be doing a lot of the talking but all my words cannot compare to one moment of you dwelling in your own presence and truly being yourself. So the way to be is to be yourself; and if you can't be yourself keep opening up and inclining yourself in that direction. During our time together I'm sure we'll be returning to the same themes again and again. The material we cover will be more cyclical than linear. So if you hear something repeated don't allow your mind to dismiss it; see if you can go a little deeper and discover something new about it.

Sometimes you may agree with what I say and sometimes you may not. In every case, however, I only ask that you consider what I say: examine it, hold it as an hypothesis, and either prove it or disprove it through your own contemplation and experience. All in all, I urge you to listen with care, pro-

ceed with caution, and most of all keep it real; or, in the words of Shakespeare: “This above all—to thine own self be true.”

In terms of the retreat, what is your primary aim or intention?

My aim is to have participants discover their true greatness; to have them align their individual lives with the all of Life; to have them become more human and more divine. And also to accept and “own” themselves just the way they are.

We want to open up to that pure consciousness, that infinite freedom and potential within ourselves but also feel what it’s like to be here, as this person, as this infinite freedom in partial expression. Because, like it or not, so long as you’re here, in this incarnation, you’re always infinite consciousness and this limited, uncomfortable admixture in the form of you as this person. You have to have and be both; you have to wake up to being both. Trying to dismiss your human life in the hopes of reaching some ultimate state of bliss is an approach that’s lopsided and inept. Such an approach will never lead you to wholeness or the truth of your own being. . . .

That’s my primary aim. And what is *your* aim? What’s *your* intention? It would be good to get clear on that as well.

I’m sure people have come here for all kinds of reasons. Some people may want to experience their true nature, some may want to become better spiritual seekers, some may want to groove out with “new age” people, some may want to be entertained with spiritual teachings and stories, and some may want to find ways to improve their life. It’s all good. Let’s honor whatever desire got you here but let’s shift it up a gear; let’s see if we can align your initial desire with something higher, something deeper, something closer to your heart’s true aim.

Spiritually speaking, what should be our primary intention?

To know yourself; to know the whole of who you are; to

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live a true and fulfilled human life. And this invariably requires actuating a shift in your identity, in your fundamental sense of “I.” You want to shift from knowing yourself as this separate ego-self to knowing your self as all-embracing consciousness or awareness. The intention here would be to awaken to—or no longer overlook—your essential unity with Life and to express that unity through your individual self. But, of course, you have to show up, you have to be here, you have to be in a conscious relationship with Life, as it is right now, in order for that shift to take place ... We don’t want to get rid of our human self; we want to shift to an awareness of beingness that contains the source and substance of our human self—and that is our divine self, our self as pure consciousness. This is not about killing the ego, or cutting out our human existence, or reaching some state of spiritual immunity; it’s about freeing and expanding the breadth of “I” so as to encompass the whole of who we are, this imperfect human life included. We want to be integral to our own lives and not exist as an object or a character in our own mental construction of life. We want to embody the fullness of our own nature and behold our wonder, beauty, and aliveness in, and through, our human life.

And what is not your aim?

I am *not* here to give out information. I am *not* here to provide you with a bunch of concepts and spiritual clichés that you can use to avoid entering the fullness of life. I am not here to give you spiritual practices that you can use to deaden or anesthetize yourself to your own human existence. I am not here to make you a better spiritual seeker. And I am not here to fix or improve your personal story. I hope your story is good but I’m not here to fix any of that. I hope your health, finances, and relationships are in order and support your true aspiration. But my primary aim is in helping you gain access to a dimension of

self that is far greater than your personal story. My aim is not to bring worldly success to your human life but neither is it to have you reach some cosmic state where you are aloof to life, where you come to see your human self as a hindrance that must be transcended or an illusion that must be eradicated. I don't want you to gain freedom *from* life but the freedom to be truly alive.

You never mention enlightenment or self-realization. Are you implying that the aim of the spiritual path is not to reach enlightenment, that that should not be our primary aim?

Most seekers would do well to forget about this whole enlightenment thing—this thing that's supposed to take place in some imagined future. This is not about “reaching enlightenment,” it’s about being whole, it’s about knowing who you are as a human being, it’s about being alive and opening to the ever-quickenin influx of Life. Reaching for some grand state of enlightenment when you are not even here, when you don’t even know where you are or who is on the path to begin with is a bit out-of-joint, no? Ninety-nine percent of the so-called seekers are not on any kind of spiritual path; they’re not even present to themselves. They’re wholly occupied with fixing problems or attaining something special for this separate individual. They’re not on the path; their ego-self is on the path. Right now they need to get in touch with their life and become true human beings before they can hope to attain something beyond the human dimension. So you can forget about enlightenment. Put away all your hopes for some grand attainment or some magical way to skip over all your human problems and find out who you are and what is actually true for you in your here-and-now experience. Who is on the path to enlightenment? Do you even know the answer to that simple question?

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Many spiritual seekers believe that there's one awakening, one final state of enlightenment that suddenly emerges like the flicking on of a light switch. Is that a correct understanding?

That's the Hollywood version of enlightenment. In that scenario enlightenment is seen as some kind of win-all spiritual jackpot. Seekers who hold this view also labor under the false hope that the sudden attainment of this "enlightened" state is going to solve all their problems and finally give them some peace. Don't worry, it won't. As mentioned, most seekers are not seeking enlightenment; they're seeking some kind of way to solve or circumvent or spiritualize away their human problems. But it's all good.

On this path there is not a final enlightenment or a single awakening to *the* enlightened state. There can be sudden shifts or awakenings but these are invariably followed by periods of integration and embodiment. In every case, however, one's human body and psyche must catch up to this newly awakened consciousness, this new spiritual order, and that takes time. So forget about all these get-enlightened-quick schemes, these hopes for some sudden end to all your human struggles. It's not going to happen. You have to be in it for the long-haul. You have to want the truth and not some temporary appeasement of your angst-ridden existence. You need more than a lottery ticket and a dream to complete this journey. . . .

Perhaps this romantic concept of sudden enlightenment has been perpetuated by all those Zen stories you heard about. You know, a monk hears a bell, the chirping of a bird, or gets whacked by a stick, and suddenly he's enlightened. We never hear about the years of practice and inquiry that come afterwards, that are required to stabilize and integrate that state. All that long, drawn-out stuff does not make for a good story. So all we get is the sudden enlightenment stuff, the lotto version of enlightenment—half the story.

What about all the spiritual teachers who tell us that we don't need to do anything, we just need to awaken? Are they enlightened? If not, what state are they in?

Many of the spiritual teachers I've come across have reached the first stage of enlightenment—a stage where their sense of “I” has shifted from their person-body self to pure awareness—but few have penetrated the true depth of the inner state and fewer, still, have reached complete maturation as human beings. Most spiritual teachers are very much “works in progress,” both on the human and spiritual levels. And, in accord with their own understanding, many believe that they have reached the one and only “final” state of enlightenment when, in reality, they’ve only taken the first step. Even so, there are many great teachers out there with much to offer; every day I am moved by the sheer grace and generosity offered by many of these spiritual teachers.

Another source of confusion is that when a teacher uses the term “enlightenment,” and talks about *the* enlightened state, he’s usually talking about something quite different from full enlightenment. It’s like someone saying, “I’m a black belt in karate.” Okay, great—what *degree* black belt? Now, if you only know one degree of black belt (which means you only know the *first* degree) you will say, “I’m a black belt in karate.” However, if you have passed beyond the first degree and attained higher degrees then you would talk about first degree black belt, second degree, third degree, and so forth. If someone uses the term “enlightenment” to describe his state without using any qualifier to denote the stage or quality of enlightenment he’s most likely talking about the first stage of enlightenment.

So you reject the approach of, “Hey, you’re already enlightened, there’s nothing to do, just wake up”?

Such an understanding does not acknowledge the essential

role that one's human intelligence, creative intention, and pure will play in the awakening process; nor does it consider the depth of ignorance that beclouds most people.

Truly speaking, yes, you're already free, you're already Consciousness; nothing is blocking you. The problem is that you're not conscious of your own enlightened existence; you think of yourself as this separate person who is bound and in need of liberation. You have thought yourself into being this person; and from that position of intractable ignorance you feel impelled to take some kind of "freeing action." Your bondage is mind-made and the sense that you need to take some kind of freeing action (or non-action) is also mind-made; but still, you have to act with skill within the context of this limited mode in order to stabilize your mind, get in touch with your heart, and develop yourself as a human being. In addition, you may have to do all kinds of spiritual practice and put forth an effort—and get nowhere from all of that—before you're able to recognize the futility of your ego-based efforts, before you're truly able to "let go and let God."

Nothing you can do as this ego-self can liberate you because you are not this ego-self—and, well, as your true self you're not bound and not in need of this ego-style liberation. So, really, there is nothing to do. What needs to happen is that you have to stop doing your false separation, your false creation of self, your unconsciousness existence. Your mistaken belief that you are this ego-self, this mind-body entity, is the very thing upon which your apparent bondage is based.

So, what *can* you do in your present state of separation? You can chant, or meditate, or wash dishes, or take a walk in the park—it does not matter—so long as you do so with precious awareness, with the awareness that you are precious, that life is precious, that you are the essence, the beauty, and the wonder of life itself. ...

Spiritual Greed and Insincerity

You need not perfect your human nature in order to awaken. You need some degree of wholeness, some degree of conscious presence, but human perfection and purity is not required. In fact, believing that something extraordinary is needed, that you as this individual have to be a certain way—either desireless, sublimely content, filled with deep longing, or immune to human feelings and emotions—can thwart your awakening and forestall the animating inflow of Life. . . .

Coming to know the truth of your own nature is the greatest of all human endeavors yet most seekers want some quick and easy path. They want enlightenment on their own terms; and they want it for this separate individual, this “me” self. They want the ocean so long as they can fit it into their small cup. But such an approach is at odds with the natural order of things. It is ill-conceived. It smacks of spiritual greed. It is, we might say, the product of a weak and unseasoned mind.

Somehow this reminds me of a scene from *The Merchant of Venice*. The heroine is Portia; and shortly before her father’s death he devises a plan—or better yet a *scheme*—to find her someone she would truly love. (I guess he didn’t trust her enough to make that decision for herself!) And his plan came in the form of a contest or a riddle involving three chests—one of gold, one of silver, and one of lead. Whoever solved the riddle and chose the right chest would win Portia and all her father’s wealth. Now the first suitor was a prince from Morocco. He read the inscription on the lead chest which said something like: *He who chooses me must risk everything he has. [Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath.]* The prince quickly dismisses this chest, saying—can someone find the quote? . . . Saying, *Men that hazard all, Do it in hope of fair advantages: A golden mind stoops not to shows of dross.* In other words, a person who finds himself in a position where he

has to risk or hazard all is desperate and hopes to gain some kind of quick and undeserved gain. A person with a “golden mind,” a mind attuned to the highest truth, does not get involved with such get-rich-quick schemes. Likewise, a true seeker does not get involved with get-enlightened-quick schemes (or hold to the desperate hope that enlightenment will solve all his problems). He’s looking for the truth of his own existence, and he’s willing to do whatever it takes to discover and become that truth. Of course, there may be sudden awakenings, or openings, or shifts in your being but these should be seen as steps along the way not as a final end.

The irony here is that the poor prince from Morocco is, himself, involved in a get-rich-quick scheme: he hopes to win Portia and all her wealth by the mere solving of a riddle. And, as fate would have it, he does not choose the right chest. He passes over the lead chest, then the silver, and picks the gold chest which says: *Who chooseth me shall gain what many men desire.* When he opens the chest he finds a skull with a scroll in its eye. And I’m sure you know the first-line written on that scroll: “All that glitters is not gold.” He was led by his outer eye and not by his deeper wisdom, and this led to his downfall.

Which chest was the right one?

Lead: Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath.

Spiritually speaking, should we give and hazard all we have?

What do you have to give or risk anyway? On this path the only thing you have to give is what you haven’t got and the only thing you have to renounce is that which is already false—and the only thing you can attain is that which is already yours. So where is the risk in that? The real risk, of course, is in *not* risking all, in being half-hearted, in dilly-dallying your time away and squandering the great opportunity that Life, in each

and every moment, is offering to you.

What does it mean to risk all we have? When we risk something or take a risk we are giving up the safety and security of the known for something unknown—and there's always a risk in that. We have to give up this one-dimensional world we have created and be willing to embrace the whole of our existence. We have to give up this life of ego-safety for the unknowable freedom that lies beyond. We have to give up the very belief in who we are. So, yes, we have to risk and hazard all we have, all we believe we are—which is none but this ill-conceived sense of being a separate person—to become our true self, to become everything that we already are. Again, what do we really have to give up? Nothing but this “me” of confusion, isolation, and inadequacy, as well as the lifeless world it engenders. And what do we have to gain?—everything! The joy, life, and truth of who we really are.

Is there anything else from Shakespeare that is spiritually revealing?

I'm sure there is, and if you look carefully enough you may find something. But the thing that comes to mind is a scene from the movie, *Shakespeare in Love*. It's the scene in a boat where the wide-eyed Shakespeare is telling of his love for Lady Viola to a young boy—who just so happens to be his lady in disguise. While Shakespeare is describing his beloved in somewhat poetic terms the boatman chimes in with something like, “So he's a writer, is he?”—to which Shakespeare angrily yells back, “Row your boat!” As Shakespeare is laboring to tell of his lady's beauty he's looking right at her but does not recognize her. He thinks he's talking to a boy. At one point the “boy” remarks that a wealthy woman could never be happy with a Bankside poet but Shakespeare counters saying that love does not make any such distinctions. Then the “boy” asks,

“What about Lord Wessex?”—which is the man Lady Viola is obligated to marry in a few weeks—and Shakespeare replies, “For one kiss I would defy a thousand Wessexes.” Just then, as the boat is about to land, Lady Viola, in the guise of a boy, leans over, kisses Shakespeare on the lips, and, in her own words, says, “O Will.” Will is a bit confused; and he certainly did not enjoy the boy’s misplaced kiss. The “boy” quickly gets up, gives the boatman a few coins, and runs off. The boatman says, “Thank you my lady.” Shakespeare looks at the boatman in a state of bewilderment and asks, “My lady?”—to which the boatman, replies, “Viola de Lesseps. I’ve known her since she was a child.” With this sudden recognition Shakespeare dashes off and climbs the balcony to her room; they rush toward each other, and, well, you know the rest, carnal bliss and all that.

So was she waiting for him to recognize her?

Yes, but he could not see her through all his concepts and imaginings of her. It was finally the simple boatman, whom Shakespeare bid to shut up, who revealed her true identity.

The pivotal moment of the scene is when she falls out of character and leans over and kisses him. She’s kissing him as her true self. Shakespeare, believing that he’s being kissed by a young boy, puts up a contractive defense and does not enjoy the kiss one bit. Isn’t this the way it is? We are with the beloved, embraced by all her beauty, in the form of this very life, but since we don’t recognize it we contract and struggle against everything (and certainly don’t enjoy it.) We can’t see what is right in front of us. We’re pursuing the grand state of enlightenment while missing the presence, the “kiss” of the beloved, that is right here, right now. It’s only when we become like the simple boatman, when we move beyond our entrenched concepts, and beyond our mental resistance to what is right here, that we’re able to recognize our beloved, the one we have al-

ways been with but never truly recognized.

With enlightenment it's as if your Beloved, who was never missing, suddenly returns; like the universe, which was always yours, becomes yours once again. Ah, the wonder of it all.

*[Man] dressed in a little brief authority,
Most ignorant of what he's most assured,
His glassy essence, like an angry ape,
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven
As make the angels weep.*

~ Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*

The Human Dimension

How would you describe the human dimension as it is experienced by most people? Is it a state of ignorance, a state of forgetfulness, or a limited sense of identity?

All three, yet most people don't experience it that way; they don't feel ignorant, or forgetful, or limited in their identity. They whole-heartedly believe that they are this separate, mind-body person; and they hold their individual existence as a God-given truth. This jumbled and confused admixture of thoughts, feelings, memories, imaginings, and so forth that forms a person's fundamental sense of "me" feels normal even though it's permeated by a deep sense of dis-ease and lack. Everyone complains about their conditions, the things happening to them but few people question their fundamental identity, their sense of me-as-this-separate-person which is the root of all their pain and discomfort; they complain about the size of their prison cell but never about the fact that they're in prison.

This ego-based, human identity offers no solid sense of self, no place to land, no connection with the greater flow of Life. The primary mode of the human dimension is one of being lost in thought, cut off from Life, and enmeshed in the machinations of your ill-conceived existence as this individual "me."

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There's a line from Rumi that says, "Something strange is going on—and what is strange is that your best Friend is a stranger." Your Beloved is a stranger. In other words, *you* are a stranger to yourself. You don't recognize yourself. And so this virtual reality you live in and never really question always feels strange; you feel displaced and out of sorts; you have this nagging sense that nothing will ever be enough or that something fundamental is missing. In this ego-version of life your mind has scripted you out of Life. And you probably feel that this is "normal," how it's supposed to be. Indeed, that's very strange.

To the ordinary man who lives upon his own waking surface, ignorant of the self's depths and vastnesses behind the veil, his psychological existence is fairly simple. A small but clamorous company of desires, some imperative intellectual and aesthetic cravings, some tastes, a few ruling or prominent ideas amid a great current of unconnected or ill-connected and mostly trivial thoughts . . . a scattered and inconsequent succession of joys and griefs, frequent minor disturbances and vicissitudes and rarer strong searchings and upheavals of mind or body, and through it all Nature, partly with the aid of his thought and will, partly without or in spite of it, arranging these things in some rough practical fashion, some tolerable disorderly order—this is the material of his existence. (Aurobindo, *Synthesis of Yoga—I*, p. 28)

So, would a true spiritual seeker feel painfully limited by this human dimension, this separate existence, like someone who's imprisoned or in separation from his or her beloved?

Yes. This kind of pain shows us where we're locked into our egoic version of reality and, at the same time, it indicates a way to get beyond the imprisonment of the ego-self. A seeker must be sensitive to this pain and be willing to feel it. If your life is about avoiding pain rather than moving toward the truth then you're not really a spiritual seeker. You're more of a comfort seeker. Yet this is how most people are programmed to live: they seek pleasure and avoid pain. This is your basic ego-programming. Everyone knows something is wrong; they feel

boxed-in and deficient but they don't know the true cause of their discomfort. Instead of facing this pain—and getting through it by whole-heartedly embracing it—their chief concern is to try and make it go away, to make their prison more tolerable, to appease their condition with endless pursuits and cover-ups but not to understand or eradicate the source of this self-imposed pain.

If someone is born in a prison he may not even know he's in a prison; he may be miserable but never realize that his misery stems from the fact that he's locked up in prison. The idea of escape—escape to what?—may never cross his mind. But a spiritual seeker has some intuition, some inkling of the vast freedom that lies beyond the confines of this separate human existence—and he wants that. He knows that freedom is not found by escaping human life but by accepting it, by embracing it, by living it from that ever-present dimension of unity, wholeness, and love.

Even after enlightenment you're never totally free. This human body and this human life, *while you are here*, are incapable. Yet this human limitation, this seeming bondage, when rightly seen, is not a prison at all. It's your very route to freedom and wholeness. If you truly love the prison you're in, if you accept and choose to be limited in the particular way you are—well, you're already free.

... these sages insist on transcending life by living it. They insist on finding release by engagement, finding nirvana in the midst of samsara, finding total liberation by complete immersion. They enter with awareness of the nine rings of hell, for nowhere else are the nine heavens found.

(Wilber, *One Taste*, p. 279)

Is there ever an escape from the pain of human existence?

From the unnecessary, self-imposed pain—that comes about because you are out of touch with your fundamental

nature—yes; from the discomfort or angst that infinite consciousness must experience when confined to this limited form, no. With the realization of your true nature that self-inflicted pain begins to recede while the necessary and inevitable pain of human existence remains—yet now you’re able to relate to that pain from a place of freedom. Those limitations, when embraced from a state of unity, can be truly liberating!

You know there’s a major difference between trying to get rid of, or appease, or spiritualize away the fundamental disease at the core of your human existence and accepting or “owning” it from a higher dimension of self. When you actually “own” that discomfort you realize that most of your pain had nothing to do with actual pain but more with your continued resistance to it. When you’re ready to “own” your human existence and the discomfort that comes with it, then guess what? You’re already beyond it. That discomfort becomes yet another wondrous expression of your consciousness and light.

What about contentment? Should we strive to accept things as they are and be content with whatever we have?

On one level, yes; on another level, no. On one level we want to wholly accept ourselves, and life, as it is miraculously appearing; but on another level we don’t want to accept things as they are now being presented to us, by our conditioned mind. Your higher self never buys into the apparent reality of this flat, mind-made world, so why should you?

Contentment (or rather complacency) can be a kind of spiritual trap; and a seeker may undo himself by falling into the slumber of complacency. You will find ashrams and monasteries filled with complacent seekers who comfortably do the practices—you know, meditate, repeat the mantra, do service and various kinds of worship, whatever—hoping one day that something will happen, that all their spiritual efforts will bring

them some kind of merit or final realization somewhere off in the future, perhaps when they die or maybe in another lifetime. The only thing that troubles this kind of seeker is when he misses his *chai* or when someone makes noise coming into the meditation hall. This kind of complacency is the ego's way of doing spiritual practice. A true seeker will not fall into this kind of trap; he will not get too comfortable with what the ego-self has to offer even if it comes in the form of a peaceful spiritual life. There is certainly beauty and value in this human dimension and in living a spiritual life but none of that can compare to realizing the boundless splendor of your own nature.

What most spiritual seekers need is to be in a state of crisis, a state of desperation; they need to feel a "divine discontentment." They need to uncover the pain of their condition. They need to feel that gnawing sense of being in exile from their own source. All said, most seekers need to have a fire under their butts. Perhaps a more mature seeker may be impelled to know his own nature through sincerity, curiosity, and love. Instead of trying to run from his pain he runs toward the truth as he would run toward a long, lost lover. Being impelled by love is certainly preferable to being impelled by pain but most people are not at that level of maturity. They need the pain, the crisis, the desperation to get unstuck.

Isn't the distinction between the human dimension and the enlightened dimension just another form of dualism?

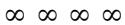
Yes, but at this stage of the game it's a beneficial form of dualism, a precise, necessary, liberating form of dualism. It's not that murky, unconscious dualism that most people are drowning in. There's a Sanskrit term used in the *Vivekachudamani* or *Crest-Jewel of Discrimination* by Shankara. I forgot the term but it means something like "all mixed together." It's pretty much the opposite of clarity and discrimination. It's a

state where everything is jumbled up and a person is not able to discriminate between the true and the false, the real and the unreal, the conscious and the unconscious.

A seeker of the truth needs to cultivate a beneficial approach to this world; he needs to distinguish between what is real and what is not, between who he is and who he is not. You can't mix everything together in one bag and say, "This is me, I am one with everything." That is not non-duality. You need to understand the nature of this Oneness (or "Onlyness") and its multi-faceted expression. It's all one, yes, but at the same time it's also not one. ...

Your basic approach, at this point, can come down to this: the discernment between the permanent and the temporal; the simultaneous embrace of your self as that unchanging Consciousness and that ever-changing experience of being this person. This is the kind of dualism that helps you move you beyond dualism, the kind that allows you to hold the whole of your experience and the whole of your life as one seamless expression of Everythingness.

The key approach or *asana* is not to try and get rid of anything, or merge into an indistinguishable mass of non-duality, but to live and experience your human life from the dimension of pure awareness, from the perspective of wholeness. Feel yourself to be that infinite Consciousness experiencing itself through the limitations of your human life; be the all of Consciousness, the all of Life, while existing as this human being, while experiencing this one life. What would that feel like? That's what enlightenment feels like. So feel that!



DAY ONE: Afternoon Session

What is Enlightenment?

What exactly do you mean by the term “enlightenment”?

It's a state or really a station of wholeness, of unity, where you experience yourself as being “contemporaneous with all instants of life.” It could be seen as a shift in your fundamental sense of “I,” where you no longer live as this separate individual but know yourself, and live, in connection with everything, as the whole panorama, and not just as this lone person. Your fundamental sense of self is recognized as Consciousness, as Spirit, yet inexplicably expressed through you as this human being. We could also say that enlightenment has a certain feel to it. There's a felt sense of intimacy with the all of Life; there's clarity, aliveness, lightness (or ease), and a sense of wholeness and well-being—and no more ego-based, deficiency-based seeking! All in all it's just your natural state; just being who you truly are. You could call it “freedom” but freedom in relationship to what?—some conceptual notion of bondage? Everything is you. Enlightenment is just your natural state of being.

Sometimes the term *enlightenment* gets mixed up with *awakening* or *witness consciousness* as all these terms point to some expanded sense of self beyond the mind. *Awakening* generally refers to a sudden shift or opening into an awareness of one's divine nature. *Enlightenment* generally refers to a state or station where that awakening has been stabilized and integrated with your human self. *Witness consciousness* is a pre-enlightenment state that is marked by a disidentification with the mind and the objects of perception. In this state there's still a felt sense of separation between the witness and that which is witnessed, between the subject and the object. When that witness “collapses” or dissolves, when you come to realize that

Enlightenment is a Four-Letter Word

you are all that you have, heretofore, been witnessing, you reach unity consciousness or basic enlightenment, or what some people call “abidance in nondual awareness.” Enlightenment is not the attainment of some special or far-out state; it’s no more than the clear seeing or knowingness of the state you’re already in; it is the recognition and living of life as it is and not as your ego-self paints it to be.

In unity consciousness the transpersonal witness itself collapses into everything witnessed. . . . you no longer feel that you are on this side of your face looking at the world out there. There is only the world, and you are all of that; you actually feel that you are one with everything that is arising moment to moment. (Wilber, *The Simple Feeling of Being*, 10, 8)

What's it like being in an enlightened state?

It's a lot like being yourself. I once heard a spiritual teacher [Wayne Liquorman] put it this way: when you're unenlightened it's like walking around with a pebble in your shoe, which is pretty uncomfortable; when you're enlightened that pebble is gone. Now if someone were to come up and ask, “Hey, what's it like to walk around without a pebble in your shoe?” You might say, “Well, it's pretty much like just walking around.”

Using another example, we could say that the normal human state is like walking around with a 100-pound weight on your shoulders. Everyone spends a great deal of life-energy defending their state of ego-separation and remaining fearfully locked away from the immensity of who they are. So, what would it be like if you suddenly didn't have to spend all your vital energy in resisting, struggling, or remaining cut off from your own nature, from Life itself? What would it be like if you could just drop that weight? Well, everything would be a lot lighter, a lot freer. Life would be flowing and easy and more naturally expressed. Joy and aliveness, which are inherent to your own nature, would bubble up. You would still be you, as

this person, dealing with the ups and downs of life, but the realization of your true self would open you to a fundamental sense of ease, aliveness, and joy; it would open you up to a whole dimension of life you have heretofore overlooked.

In the enlightened state there's no separation between you and the ever-flow of Life, between you and all that is arising in each moment. True enlightenment does not get you beyond human life it delivers your own life to you; it allows you to enter the very core and essence of who you are and Life itself.

Some people think that being awakened means no longer having human sentiments, but that's not so at all! Dehumanizing the awakening is tantamount to killing it. The awakening is the plenitude of the humane. ... Each and every fiber of your being celebrates and gives witness to that infinite value. Thus, I feel definitely well-centered in it. Yet, that cannot detach me from my humanity, in the ordinary sense, because the heart of that infinite value is nothing other than the human essence.

(Jourdain, *Radical Awakening*, p. 65, 83)

How does someone in the enlightened state view other people?

The objective sense of “other” is gone. You see everyone as yourself, without the imposed ego-boundaries, yet you retain your own unique self. Your sense of “me” includes everyone but still there remains a special-case “me” that refers to you as this body-mind person. This allows you to function in this world and develop as a human being. Waxing more poetic, we might say that you see everyone as an expression of divine light, as bathing in that light yet, at the same time, you see that they are completely ignorant of who they are, totally enmeshed in the struggles of their seemingly real human life. Even so, you see them as divine, as sacred, as yet another expression of your luminous self. ...

Everyone is imagining that they're separate from the heart of creation; and then from within that imagined state, that hal-

lucination they search for their own light, their own wholeness. But no one is separate; the separation and the seeking for unity are all part of the dream. When you see this apparent blunder, along with the pain and confusion it brings, you may feel like whacking a few people on the head, shaking them up, trying to awaken them to their own light and beauty. But the slumber is too deep for most people. You realize that all that sleep-walking is just part of the scene, part of the grand scheme of things. So you just let people do their thing. You walk around like everyone else, living with them as if their imaginary slumber were real—because it's real to them, and you accept that—but all the while you remain awake to a greater reality.

In simple terms we could say that an enlightened being sees the world just like everyone else except that he sees it from the all-embracing perspective of Oneness and not from the imagined perspective of separation (i.e., the ego-self).

The awakening is, in a way, the death of the “other” since the consciousness of another constitutes the very heart of the hallucination. (Jourdain, *Radical Awakening*, p. 64)

Does enlightenment bring about the elimination of the “I”?

I hope not! Enlightenment brings an end to that which you now consider to be *your* “I”—which is but a thought of you, an identity-construct that you believe to be your self—but it does not eliminate the true “I,” which is not a thought or a construct. That “I” is your very essence; and that “I” is not separate from “all of this.” With enlightenment you no longer live as a separate individual but as an individualized expression of Oneness. Rather than being eliminated the “I” is fulfilled; it becomes the true foundation of your life, the “I” of all existence. Right now you’re rooted in *your concept* of “I,” your imagined “I,” not your true or inseparable sense of “I.” That’s the problem.

The true goal of the spiritual path is not at all to negate individuality. The aim, rather, is to re-awaken the state of unity with Existence from the perspective of an individual reality.

(Kristof, *The Human Buddha*, p. 53)

Why then do some teachers tell us that the “I” does not exist?

You know, there can be different qualities to enlightenment. This disappearing act of the “I,” where there remains no sense of self, no individual existence, no one to be enlightened, is an *advaitic* or nondual kind of realization; whereas the fulfillment of the “I,” and the inclusion of one’s personal self as part of an all-inclusive enlightenment, is a *tantric* kind of realization. Throughout this retreat I will, for the most part, be talking about this all-inclusive, embodied kind of enlightenment.

When your sense of “I” does not refer to anything, when you exist but not as a thing, not as personal identity—well, you’re still here but your sense of self is no longer confined to, or defined by, you as this seemingly separate person. You have no *separate* identity, no sense of “I” that exists apart from all that is. Some people are more identified with the universal (or empty) dimension of the Self than with the presence (or personal) dimension; and for people at that stage of realization the “I” may seem to be missing. But when you are sensitized to your human existence and the depth of your heart you begin to sense the living presence of that “I” which, heretofore, seemed to be absent. Perhaps it was just too close. It seemed absent from the perspective of the individual precisely because it is so completely merged with the universal.

Does enlightenment change who you are as a human being?

Yes and no. It does not eliminate your human conditioning or bring about a wholesale transformation on the human level. You’re still pretty much you, with the same personality and

conditioned patterns, but you're no longer confined to or solely identified with that old shell. It's still there, a bit like the ghost of Christmas past, but it's no longer the foundation of your existence or the prime motivating force of your life. And, over time, with the presence of a newly-awakened consciousness, those old and outmoded patterns begin to fall away and the whole of your being becomes more aligned with Life itself.

Many seekers labor under the false idea that enlightenment will transform the whole of their human nature and turn them into some kind of super-being. It won't. Realization does nothing for you. It does not impart you with extraordinary skills or powers but it certainly opens you to greater potentials on every level. It allows you to be, to more fully express your divine and human nature. It allows you to more fully participate in this creation and become a truly embodied expression of that infinite creativity. It is the one foundation that must be established in order to transform and complete your human self.

We could say that with enlightenment a new and higher dimension of your self comes into existence or “online.” When this higher dimension is awakened it can’t help but rush in and transform you. It infuses your life with a sense of stability, clarity, well-being, and joy. It enlivens and empowers your human nature. And in this movement to make you whole it also brings up a lot of the dark stuff, stuff that’s been entombed in your unconscious—because now, with the help of your awakened consciousness, you have the power to face and perhaps dissolve the stuff that you have been, up till now, able to avoid.

Realization of your true self brings about a supreme opportunity—the opportunity to become a true human being. But in order for that to happen, that enlightened consciousness has to be lived; it has to be expressed through you. It can only come to completion through your human beingness.

Enlightenment is the awakening to our identity as boundless awareness but it is incomplete unless our compassion, sensitivity, and love are similarly awakened and actualized in our lives and relationships. ~ Wayne Teasdale

Killing the Ego

How does all this relate to the notion of “killing the ego?” I gather it’s not the “I” that we want to kill but something else.

It's the mind-created "I," the false sense you have of being this separate self that you want to "kill." It's the ego-centricity that you want to kill. Let the ego do its thing but don't let it be the do all and end all of your existence. It's the ego that you mis-take to be your true self—well, it's that mis-taking that you want to kill. Really, you don't want to kill anything, you just want to see the ego-self for what it is—a provisional self, a useful configuration, a survival response but not you.

We might do well to avoid this romantic notion that we're on some quest to slay the false ego like a knight slaying a dragon. We're not slaying anything; we're seeing our ego-self, our present sense of "I" for what it truly is—a mental construction, or more like a mirage. We're seeing through our mistaken assumption about who we are. That's all. Who, after all, is on this great quest to kill the ego? Why, of course, the ego. (It's certainly not your true self, which is wholly unaffected by the ego.) The more your ego-self tries to kill your ego the more real and important that ego and that ego-killing become. So, forget about killing the ego—'twould be better to love it to death.

And what are we talking about when we use the term *ego*? What is it that we are trying so hard to kill or love or ignore or at least get a handle on? You see, a major problem with this whole ego thing is that the term *ego* is not clear—everyone uses the term in a different way to mean a different thing. So what is this *ego*? Is it pride, self-centeredness, and arrogance?

You know, someone with a big ego? Is it our fundamental sense of individuality, the “I” or *das Ich* as Freud originally used the term? Is it a useful mental structure, a congealed pattern of thought, emotion, and sensation that we have and which allows us to exist and develop as an individual? Is it this mistaken sense of self we have, where we believe ourselves to be this separate person? Where we hold the inalienable conviction that our sense of “I” refers solely to us, as this separate individual, and not to This, to Everything, to all of Life? Or is it our inner child, motivated by fear and protectiveness, which is still in the seat of control and which prevents us from maturing into true adulthood? Well, all of the above.

The first ego, the over-inflated human self, is eradicated as we mature and become a more integral human being. The second ego, the “I,” well, we don’t have to tamper with that. That’s the universal function of individuality, the true ego, our essential personhood. The problem comes with the third ego, the “false ego” as it were. This is a case of mistaken identity where our thinking, and feeling, and relationship to life is based upon the premise that we are separate from everything, that our sense of only “I” refers to us as this mind-body person and not to the whole of who we are, which is everything and everyone, the all of existence. That “I”-concept, that sense of being an individual person, is a useful and necessary construction—and integral to our existence as a human being—but that’s not who we truly are. The forth ego, the inner child, well, this is where we need to do a lot of work as well. Even with awakening (when you see through the falsity of the mind-made ego-self) those childish defenses remain. Certainly, with awakening, we’re in a better position to move beyond the sway of that child-self but those deep patterns, those staunch defenses, don’t just disappear.

Remember, this child-self is you; this three-year old self is

still pulling the strings of your life. And this three-year old self is irrational, libidinal, scared, and still seeking its mother. Every attempt to kill it, or deny it, or enlighten it away will only make it more fearful, more defensive, more ready to dig in and protect itself. So, don't go there. Really, all you need do is lovingly accept this child-self. Embrace it; allow it to play out all its stuff, all its fears—without judgment or condemnation—until it feels safe, accepted, and loved. That's all it wants. It wants to dissolve into your embrace. But it can only do so in the context of love and acceptance—so, please, don't try to kill it. There's no quick answer to this one. The totality of yourself cannot be won with a sudden awakening or insight. It requires your total acceptance and loving embrace.

All in all, it might be useful to see the ego (this sense of being a separate entity) as the first stage of our human development, as a necessary step toward true individuation. The problem comes about when we get stuck there, when we continue to identify with, and believe ourselves to be, this concept of self, this conceived-of entity, so much so that we are not able to recognize our self as pure awareness, as the totality. Our task is to break free of this entombing conditioning and open up to the unknowable mystery that we are; to have our very sense of “I” include the whole of existence; to live our lives from that place of unity, that place of freedom.

Spiritual Chicanery

I have my doubts about this whole New Age scene. The spiritual path as it exists today is largely a rouse that people use to spiritualize their egoic selves or deaden themselves to the discomfort of their human existence. Most so-called seekers are really seeking ways to fix their problems, get some kind of peace, ease their pain, become more spiritual, or add some kind of meaning to their seemingly empty lives. They're not

interested in real transformation, in moving beyond their comfortable self-illusion, in knowing the truth of their existence. But it's all good. Some of this spiritual stuff might bring about development and maturation on the human level—all of which is useful and necessary—but little of it is likely to bring about any kind of true or fundamental transformation.

I agree with you in terms of the New Age scene but what about established traditions? I find them to be more serious.

The same shenanigans go on in established traditions, such as those based on yoga or Zen. The nonsense that goes on there is often more entrenched; it's traditional nonsense as opposed to "New Age" nonsense. For instance, I was talking with someone last night who told me that the yoga she follows is part of a lineage that extends back to Lord Shiva himself. However, when I asked her about this lineage she could only trace it back two generations. And the reason for this lack of a traceable lineage—well, the lineage *had been kept secret* for thousands of years and only recently surfaced for the benefit of seekers of today. Come on. Who comes up with this stuff?

Zen traditions seem to be more established. For instance, every lineage they claim is written down and traceable.

Yes, but that does not free the practitioners of Zen from the same old nonsense. So long as there is an entrenched ego, a tradition, a set of rules whose meaning has been largely forgotten, and a bunch of people doing their best to follow those rules, there's going to be a lot of nonsense. Look at every major religion and spiritual path and you're going to find the same old nonsense, Zen included.

I was at a Zen Center a while back. I came with some friends to walk around the grounds and get a feel for the place. Somehow, somewhere, someone opened his or her mouth and

one of the head monks heard I was “enlightened,” whatever that means. During afternoon tea he introduced himself and politely challenged me to a round of dharma combat. I know this sounds like some kind of martial arts contest but rather it’s a war of words. I usually don’t engage in these kinds of things but somewhere between the ‘no’s and ‘not today’s an ‘okay’ slipped its way in there. Besides, I got the feeling that the monk was not really into combat or trying to prove anything but that he just wanted to have some spiritual fun. And who was I to deprive him of that? So, after tea we walked into the main hall where I found some thirty people or so sitting very formally, waiting for the combat to begin. I kept thinking, “It’s such a nice day, with no wind; I would rather be playing badminton than involved with all this Zen nonsense.” When I engage in this kind of combat—which is never—I try to meet the combatant on his terms and give examples relevant to his tradition. I knew a thing or two about Zen. I knew a few koans, a few stories, and the general Zen approach; and so I was going to try and bring in some of this. I don’t think anyone can ever win this kind of battle; it’s more of a ritualistic kind of thing. Still, I kept having the thought that I’d rather be playing badminton and so I decided to use this as a theme. I would say something like, “Yes, a dog has Buddha nature but he just doesn’t have the consciousness to realize it—but I would rather be playing badminton.” I suppose this *non sequitur* was interpreted to have some kind of higher truth. As you know, Zen is filled with retorts that sound like *non sequiturs* but which supposedly point to some deeper meaning. But my remark was not meant to be more than what it was—I really would have rather been playing badminton. And so I continued with this theme, saying something like, “I don’t know the sound of one hand clapping but if I did would such knowledge add to the glory of my infinite nature?—even so, I would rather be playing badminton.”

At some point the monk said something like, “You seem to be more interested in badminton than in the dharma—your mind is not present, it’s off playing badminton.” To which I replied, “I abide as that eternal presence beyond the mind; who cares what my mind is doing? I know a dog named Chester who is more mindful than any Zen monk. So what? He’s still a dog.” I continued: “I’m sure you know the story about the two monks who met a lady trying to cross a river: one monk picked her up, carried her across the river, and put her down on the other side, while the other monk carried her in his mind for hours afterwards. Perhaps you’ve been carrying this image of yourself as a Zen monk for decades. How far can you get with a thousand years of tradition on your back? Anyway, what do I care?—I would rather be playing badminton.”

I’m not sure who was winning the battle at that point but finally the monk countered me and said, “OK, let’s play badminton!” I heard some moans in response to this masterstroke as the monk called my bluff. But rather than calling my bluff he took the bait! I jumped up immediately and said, “OK, let’s play!” (Again, all this jumping up and spontaneous stuff is highly regarded in Zen.) As it just so happened I had a badminton set in my car and a few of “my people” set it up in a matter of minutes. After warming up for a short while we began to play. The monk was good enough. He, like everyone else, played some badminton in his childhood. At some point, around the middle of the game (which was to twenty-one), the score was even. The monk was obviously pleased that he was able to hold his own against me and even get the upper hand on some of the points. After a long rally, which the monk won, he looked over toward his bench, quite self-satisfied, indicating something like, “I can take this guy.” I looked over to my bench, which was my friend Phil and his girlfriend, and they both smiled, knowing what was coming next. Just before the

monk was about to serve the next point I held up my hand, feigned exhaustion, and said, “Wait, wait—do you mind if I play with my right hand?” Without waiting for an answer I slowly and deliberately moved the racquet from my left hand to my right and lithely waived it with my wrist. (Zen types are very mindful. For example, they’re supposed to know the exact position they place their shoes before entering the meditation hall; so I assumed that everyone was mindful enough to notice that I was playing with my left hand). Well, the moment I changed hands that was the end of that; I don’t think the monk managed to win another point. When the game was over I went up to the monk and said, “Now you see why I would rather be playing badminton?—it’s the one thing I can win at.”

What’s the story of the two monks crossing the river?

Can someone tell the story?

Two monks were returning to their monastery when they came to a river and saw a woman who was unable to cross. Seeing her predicament, one monk picked her up, carried her across, put her down on the other side, and they continued on their way. After walking in silence for an hour or so the other monk couldn’t take it anymore and yelled out, “How could you have done that? We’re monks. We’re not allowed to come in contact with women and yet you picked her up and carried her across the river.” To which the first monk replied, “Yes, but I put her down an hour ago, you are still carrying her with you.”

So what was the monk in the monastery still carrying?

The identity of being a Zen monk. (Did you ever notice how stiff most Zen types are? Even when they’re trying to be loose and spontaneous they still look as if they have a piece of cardboard strapped to their back.) The problem with Zen, at some point, is the Zen. The problem with every spiritual seeker, at some point, is the seeking, the identification with being a

seeker. That becomes the impediment. Someone in touch with the fullness of his own nature no longer feels the need to be anyone or seek anything. He's not defined by, or wedded to, any tradition. He's beyond that. He's just himself. He is no longer looking for life or fullness or enlightenment, he's living it.

Seeking Enlightenment

I am seeking enlightenment because I believe it will make me happy and bring me some peace. Is that not a worthwhile reason for entering the path?

Are you seeking happiness, peace, and some way to spiritualize your separate sense of self or are you seeking to know the totality of your being?—what some people might call *enlightenment*? They're not the same thing you know. The pursuit of enlightenment is something fundamentally different from the seeking of peace or happiness for this separate self. The spiritual path is about getting beyond that illusory sense of self, not seeking ways to fulfill it, perpetuate it, or make it more spiritual. To truly walk this path, to bring it to some level of completion, you must be impelled by a calling that is deeper than that of mere happiness. You must be impelled by a higher intention. Supporting and helping a seeker actuate this higher intention is one of the main virtues of a spiritual teacher.

Everyone is inclined to seek happiness because that is their very nature—as is love, peace, fullness, etc.—but getting in touch with your soul's longing for freedom, for true expression, is something different.

So, what are you seeking?—happiness within the confines of your ego identity or freedom from this mistaken sense of self? You know this notion of seeking enlightenment is somewhat schizoid since most people have no idea what they're seeking, why they're seeking, or who is doing the seeking. So

forget about some enlightenment that may or may not come in the future. At this point it comes down to seeing what is, being sensitive to that ever-present awareness, being attuned to who you already are. Everything you seek is present right now. So seeking for the fullness and love that you already are does not make any sense. Seeking is just another thing that keeps you stuck in the dreamland of the separate self and divorced from the totality that is right here, right now.

The first premise of the false ego is that something is missing, something is lacking; that what you have is not enough or not good enough—and if you stick with my spiritual plan I'll be able to fix all of that for you. The first premise of a true seeker is that nothing whatsoever is missing, that everything fully present here and now. If this is so, what is there to seek? Just open up to what is already here, to what is ever-present, which is your very sense of "I." Just be who you already are. ...

Spiritual teachers often say something like: "I don't want to improve your human condition, I don't want to improve your dream of separation; I want to help you wake up from the dream altogether." You know it's okay to dream well, to be happy—in fact, it's very important and often a necessary prelude to awakening—however, we're looking for something beyond this dream of separateness, something far greater than a mere glimpse of human happiness and peace. We're looking to know our divinity, our boundless luminosity, our unity with the all of Life—and then to live all that we are, to express our totality, through and as our unique individual self.

Jed or Alive

In his book, Spiritual Enlightenment, Jed McKenna says that very few paths actually lead to enlightenment; and you can verify this by counting the number of enlightened beings these paths have produced. Would you agree with this statement?

Yes and no, depending on the path. “Jed” also claims that his auto-writing method produces about two enlightened beings a year. And good luck finding those people—they’re as fictitious as the one making the claim!

Are you saying that Jed McKenna is, well, not Jed McKenna but a fictional character?

That’s what I’m saying. And again, it doesn’t take much to see that. We’ve been having a lot of fun with this Jed guy, especially since I *almost* met him on my way up here. “Almost?” you ask. Well, some people have been asking me about this encounter, so, for the record, here’s the story: I was driving up from Virginia and stopped at a gas station just outside of Scranton to “use their facilities.” Behind the front counter was a sign that read, “Please ask for the bathroom key,” and so I did. I was expecting to receive a key attached to some large, un-losable section of PVC pipe but the cashier told me that the door was open. So I made my way around the corner and, yes, the door was open, propped open. In the bathroom I saw a middle-aged man happily washing his face in the sink. I said I would wait till he was done. He said he was done. We exchanged a few words; he came out and I went in; and the next thing I knew, I was outside, at a table, under a tree, talking about the deeper truths of life and enlightenment with some guy named “Jed.” As we were sitting there a few people, who seemed to be regulars, came and sat down with us. Apparently this guy had been there for a few days and had built up a small following. The guy definitely had some kind of charm. He may have been an enlightened guy, he may have been a sociopath. Who knows? Either way, he talked a pretty smooth game. But after an hour or so of this non-dual dribble I reached my fill and found a good opening to take my leave. I threw a few bucks into the can and was on my way. When I arrived here

later that evening I mentioned my meeting with “Jed” and a few people immediately concluded that I had spent a good part of the afternoon with Jed McKenna. They seemed to be more excited about my meeting with “Jed” than with my arrival. Obviously I wanted to know a little more about this Jed-guy, so I found a copy of his book and began reading through it. Very soon in I concluded that Jed was a fictional character and that I did not meet Jed but a Jed wannabe. So for all of you with high hopes, I’m sorry to burst your bubble; Jed is dead—well, he was never really alive to be dead. I did a search on the Internet and others have come to this same conclusion as well.

I don’t know if Jed is dead or alive but does it really matter if what he has to say about enlightenment rings true?

Well, little or nothing of what “Jed” has to say about enlightenment rings true. Even an average seeker, making his best guess at enlightenment, could cut-and-paste a few descriptions of the enlightened state and come up with something as good as or better than what comes out of Jed’s mouth.

Are you saying that the book has little or no value for a seeker?

Well, it’s mildly entertaining. It’s a good effort by someone to portray a kind of no-nonsense, straight-talking, “enlightened guy.” It sheds light on some of the mistaken assumptions held by your average spiritual seeker; and the description of basic enlightenment, or “abidance in non-dual awareness,” is also somewhat correct. However, things go awry after that. “Jed” holds that the first level of enlightenment is *total* enlightenment, implying that there’s only one state of enlightenment. He also says that enlightenment is wholly impersonal. Not so. The early stages of enlightenment may be dominated by a universal or non-personal quality but the later stages of enlightenment are deeply and profoundly personal. Also, you’d do well to ignore

everything the author says about *reaching* the enlightened state. For instance—can someone get the book? ... He says, “I know that no spiritual teaching leads to enlightenment because there is no leading to enlightenment. There is no teaching of enlightenment.” [p. 135] Then, on the next page, he offers his teaching on enlightenment. He says, “Listen! Here’s all you need to know to become enlightened: Sit down, shut up, and ask yourself what’s true until you know. That’s it. That’s the whole deal: a complete teaching of enlightenment, a complete practice.” First there’s no teaching, no leading to enlightenment, then there’s a complete teaching. So which one is it? And this notion of asking yourself what’s true until you know—or until the mind comes up with a satisfactory answer—may not be that useful. What’s wrong with not knowing? With just being with what is? This notion of questioning until you know may have some usefulness, especially if you are confused about something. I have even used this method myself. This can be a useful psychological practice, a form of self-inquiry, but hardly a complete practice of enlightenment.

No Self and Nothing to Do

Talking about non-existence, I’ve heard some teachers say, “You don’t exist” or “Everything is universal functioning,” or something to the effect of, “All your actions are the actions of ego and only bind you further.” Could you comment on this?

In the latter scenario, where every action is useless and equally binding, a stupid or unconscious ego-action is of equal value, and has the same effect, as an intelligent, soul-aligned action. So why do anything at all? Let’s just party and let it happen in accord with some master plan.

We do not exist as this individual self in separation from everything else but, even so, we do exist. The teaching that says we cannot do anything to benefit ourselves provides a

great excuse to avoid being responsible for our own growth. It's a partial and crippled understanding of the central role that we as human beings play in the creative process and in our own evolution. Yes we have this representational ego-self, yes we have a personality whose actions are largely conditioned, yes we have a three-year old running the show (and locking us into this fearful relationship with life) but we also have a divine individuality. And the extent to which we can align our consciousness with that higher dimension of our being, the extent to which we can actuate a true intention and intelligently direct our awareness and beingness toward our true self, and the extent to which we can refrain from all our unconscious doing and accept what is already here, to that extent we can positively influence our own growth and evolution.

Nothing is going to happen without you, without your conscious intervention. Grace can open you up, teachers can support your development, and the whole universe can rush in to help you, but ultimately you are responsible for your own growth. However, if you *feel* there's nothing to do, that all your actions are useless, then go with that and see what happens. Maybe that's what you need to do or not do right now.

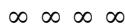
The problem, of course, is that you are in a constant state of doing, unconscious doing. You are doing your sense of limitation, you are doing your old patterns; you are doing your ego-existence, your resistance, your exile from life. So, if you consciously do nothing all you really do is give the reigns of your life to your ego-self; all you do is perpetuate your unconscious doing. Without your conscious intervention, without you becoming aware of and breaking free from your unconscious patterns, nothing is gonna happen. You'll just be stuck in the same old, same old life of the ego-self.

But maybe these "do-nothing" teachers are onto something. Maybe we should go with that and forget about all this

spiritual stuff. But rather than trying the “do nothing” let’s just let things be. Let’s just hang out and let things be. We’re here with a bunch of cool people. We’re surrounded by nature. There’s a waterfall nearby. Let’s just be; let’s enjoy ourselves. Isn’t that the point? If we can’t enjoy ourselves, and each other, if we can’t find delight in our own life, as it is right now, then what do we really have? Alright, that’s it; we’re done for the day. No more spiritual stuff. Just be yourself. Just enjoy life.

End of Day One

I’m not sure if everyone is happy with the “assignment.” It seems that most people don’t know how to enjoy themselves or to simply be who they are. They’re much more comfortable seeking happiness or going through the motions of seeking it, than actually being happy. And our culture doesn’t provide much support in the way of shared human expression either. So, what can we, as a group, do for enjoyment? Tribal dancing or drumming is good. Singing is good. Hunting wild boar or cooking is good. So what to do? Some people decide to take a walk; others pick up a few bikes and take a ride; some give and receive body-work; others chat over tea, some gaze through the bookshelves. Others go off and meditate. So, the late afternoon passes with everyone trying their best to simply enjoy themselves—and this is not so easy to do when one’s true self, the very foundation of one’s happiness, is seemingly missing.



**Love Care Soul Ever Full Make
Here Open Such Bull Well Real
Make Done Free Self Good Flow
Life Fate To-Be Just I-I Am True**

DAY TWO

Enlightenment is a Four-Letter Word

I saw a line on the board this morning that said, “Enlightenment is a four-letter word.” (As you know, a “four-letter word” refers to a curse word or something profane.) Under this a few people wrote out four-letter words such as *love*, *life*, *self*, etc. Someone wrote out a few four-letter names such as *Jill*, *John*, *Mary*, *Jane*, etc. I suppose the idea behind these names is that an integral part of enlightenment is the embrace of our personal self, our “Mary-ness,” our “John-ness,” as an expression of our infinite nature. So I thought we could go over some of these four-letter words this morning.

Here’s one: *know*. We could say enlightenment involves a knowing or knowingness. But is it knowable? Who knows it? Can we be enlightened and not know it?

I don’t think so. Knowingness or the recognition of your own nature is synonymous with the state. I mean, if you don’t know you’re enlightened, well, you’re not enlightened.

You can be in a state of wonder, of knowingness, of total intimacy with life and not know it as anything other than what it is. You could be aware of the state you’re in but not know it as *enlightenment*. It’s just your natural state.

Enlightenment is a Four-Letter Word

But, for the sake of discussion, we could say that the state of enlightenment is self-evident; the recognition or knowingness of your own nature is what we generally refer to as enlightenment, while the unknowingness or ignorance of your own nature is “unenlightenment” or your typical human state. In the enlightened state you know yourself as Consciousness, as the All, even though you are still limited to this partial, singular expression. But there’s definitely a knowingness, a recognition, or what we could call an “encounter.” When Consciousness is displaced or projected onto something other than itself, such as this body-mind person, then it can get lost and not know itself. You’re already that Consciousness but if you’re not aware of yourself as such, if you can’t enjoy or partake in the wonder of your own nature, what good is it? If you have a priceless gem but cannot find it or don’t know what you have then what good is it?

All said, enlightenment is not something you attain; it’s the clear recognition and knowingness of who you already are. You are already That; it’s just a matter of knowing it with the fullness of your being.

That indivisible unity which is the awakening has, despite everything, several names: Me, Being, Consciousness, Infinite Value. But, to cap that indivisible unity, there is something more important and that relates to knowledge. Not only I am but I know. In a sense, “I know” precedes “I am.” Knowledge is the strongest piece on the chessboard of the absolute and it’s irreversible. (*Jourdain, Radical Awakening*, p. 52)

Free

What about *free*? Is enlightenment free? How does freedom or free will relate to the enlightened state?

In Kashmiri Shaivism they say that the one, essential quality of Shiva is supreme freedom. So, in the enlightened state, when you realize your own nature, you, too, experience that free-

dom. ... When you reach the state of enlightenment you're free of all limitations. You're free from the pain of this world.

I wish! When you're dead and gone and no longer a human being you'll be free from the pain of this world. (Of course, it may be possible to be free from human pain in some disembodied state of absorption or *samadhi* but that's another story. With enlightenment you still experience the inevitable pain of life but in a luminous and expansive way; moreover, you're free from the self-imposed, resistive pain of the ego-self. But you're not free from the pain of human existence, the pain that helps you develop and become whole as a human being.

If you think that being aloof to your own humanity and living in a transcendent, pain-free, emotion-free state is a sign of enlightenment or the ultimate attainment then you're missing the point. You're out of sync with the whole arch of evolution. Your view of life and enlightenment is partial toward the transcendent, toward escapism, toward "getting off the wheel." It lacks the full texture that can only come about through the total embrace of yourself as a human being.

Enlightenment is rightly seen in the context of an evolutionary process. It's not about reaching some final state of bliss or finding a spiritual short-cut that allows you to skip over your human nature. The human dimension is not a big mistake; it's not some cosmic dumping ground, or a "tight squeeze," or some obstacle we have to get past on our way to freedom. It's not some kind of cosmic joke. It's an opportunity, a divine invitation. This dimension is here for our transformation; it's here to make us whole; it's here to fulfill our existence and show us the true value of life. Being here is exactly where we need to be. And, how do I know this? Well, because we're here.

Being in relationship to the Creative Power cannot be compared to any other freedom. ... This freedom grows as we discover the qualities of the Friend within ourselves: generosity, patience, acceptance, truthfulness, and courage. We can be-

Enlightenment is a Four-Letter Word

come emancipated from the ego and come to know the invulnerability of the Essence we are. We were made to know the freedom of a timeless, eternal soul fully engaged in this Life.

(Helminski, *Living Presence*, p. 134-5)

This / That

What about *this*? What about *that*? What about *this and that*?

I once heard someone explain enlightenment as the experience of being “everything, nothing, and this.” So, it seems that this and that are both part of the experience.

It's important to understand that enlightenment is not an experience; it's not even a state. It's knowing and being the very root of existence, the consciousness that holds and allows all experience. With this comes a felt sense of unity with all creation. But it's not an experience in and of itself.

With regards to “everything, nothing, and this,” yes, you are *everything* (or *that*)—the All of Life, the All of creation, Infinite Consciousness; that you are *nothing*, the Source, the mysterious Absolute or Emptiness from which everything arises; and that you are also *this*, this person, this unique individual expression, this irreplaceable human beingness. Everything, nothing, and this—yes, that's the basic formula.

Will

Here are some more—*will, make, open*. What about *will*?

In the enlightened state our individual will becomes an expression of the Supreme Will. ... We no longer operate on the level of unconscious and rote responses to life; thus we're able to express our individual will more freely, more fully.

With enlightenment we're aligned with the infinite Will and this renders us choiceless; but it's a conscious, embraced choicelessness as opposed to the unconscious robotic “choice”

that most people mis-take for freedom. Instead of being wholly concerned about expressing our ego-directed will—which we once believed was the key to our happiness—we come to see the Divine will as our own. And in this we are choiceless, unable to express an individual will that is not in harmony with the Divine Will. And therein lays our supreme freedom.

Personal or ego-driven will, as expressed by most people, is nothing but an attempt to change the present moment; it's an attempt to replace the fullness of what Life is offering us with our concept or idea about how things should be. This kind of small will always amounts to a struggle; it always goes against nature; it always amounts to a rejection of your totality and the greater flow of Life. True will, divinely-inspired will is always founded upon an acceptance and an embrace of the present moment, of the All of Life as it is showing up right now. ...

What we're talking about is an open will, a transparent will, a will-less will that is a pure expression of the Divine. But how do you get to that kind of transparency when you're stuck in this opaqueness, when your current will is solely ego-driven? Well, you have to become soft, you have to become still, you have to loosen the grip of your ego-conditioning; you have to be light, not take things so seriously; you have to go with the flow. All said, you have to deflate or decentralize your created sense of "me" and open up to that Higher Will that is already operating in and through you.

When you're open to the Divine, when you're no longer a puppet of the ego-self, and no longer defending the illusion of your own separateness, a dynamic, co-creative flow becomes your *modus operandi*. There's no pressing need to exert your human will, as such, because, supported by the Infinite Will, everything you do is an effortless and natural expression of your own being. Exerting your human will in a way that aligns you with the Divine may be necessary at the beginning but this

same kind of will, employed at a later stage, will put you at odds with the greater flow of Life. Let's say you want to get your boat to a river. That requires effort and determination. So you need that. But once your boat's in the water and flowing downstream that same kind of effort (so necessary at the beginning of the journey) will only get you into trouble.

So long as contact with the Divine is not in some considerable degree established, so long as there is not some measure of sustained identity, *sayujga*, the element of personal effort must normally predominate. But in proportion as this contact establishes itself, the *sadhaka* [spiritual seeker] must become conscious that a force other than his own, a force transcending his egoistic endeavour and capacity, is at work in him and to this Power he learns progressively to submit himself and delivers up to it the charge of his Yoga. In the end his own will and force become one with the higher Power; he merges them in the divine Will and its transcendent and universal Force.

(Aurobindo, *Synthesis of Yoga—I*, p. 8)

Could you talk more about how we can use our soul-aligned will to get beyond our gross human will? Is it a matter of somehow surrendering our human will to something higher?

The ego-driven will is incapable of surrendering to anything other than itself. So, you have to weaken or deflate that will by being conscious and not robotically following it. At the same time you have to open up to or attune to a greater will, a divine will that is already present and operating through you. This involves “letting go” into the moment, an opening to your soul’s true expression.

Somewhere along the line you have to realize that this is not about becoming nothing or losing something. It's about becoming who you truly are. It's about aligning with the ultimate power. It's about becoming a co-creator in the evolving process of your own transformation. Ultimately, *that* is the Will of the Divine, the Passion of the Divine. It wants you to become a true individual, a luminous center of creation, a being

who can express more and more of the glory of the infinitude of Life through your human self. You must discover the operation of that divine and dynamic Will in your life. Your will, your thoughts, and your heart must be *en rapport* with *that* Will. And that Will is always moving you toward fulfillment, freedom, and illumination. That Will plays out in your life as a constant invitation, as an ever-given opportunity for you to become the whole of who you are.

The truest reason why we must seek perfection, a supreme status, purity, knowledge, strength, love, capacity, is not that personally we may enjoy the divine Nature or be even as the gods, though that enjoyment too will be ours, but because this liberation and perfection are the divine Will in us, the highest truth of our self in Nature, the always intended goal of a progressive manifestation in the universe.

(Aurobindo, *Synthesis of Yoga—I*, p. 282)

Life

Here's a good one—*life*. Yes, enlightenment is life, the wondrous unity with the all or essence of life, the complete living of life as a human being. Life is the one good thing we can never get too much of because life is our very nature. However, relating to life through a flat, static, cut-off, conceptualized self is not living, it's not being truly alive. It's a “so-called” life.

My friend, Stephen Jourdain, often talked about how his awakening produced an immense surge of livingness and how it opened him to an intimacy with all of creation, which he de-scribed as being “contemporaneous with all instants of life.”

Being one with life not only indicates a state of being one with the All of Life but being one with your own life—owning your human life, truly living your life, finding the glory of Life in and through your individual existence. You can't find it anywhere else. Enlightenment is not some far-off state—well, from the perspective of our “little self” it certainly seems that way;

rather, it's showing up right here, right now, as your own aliveness, as your very life. Your life and Life itself are inseparable. What we want, then, is to live our individual lives from the perspective of the all-embracing oneness of Life itself. Can you do that? What would that be like? That would be enlightenment. That would be the total non-resistance to Life, the complete abandonment to every moment. That would make for a true and noble life.

This path is about attuning to Life, opening to Life, living Life as a unique human being. And to do this you must “see through” and dissolve that false center, that phantom self, and all those egoic superimpositions that put you at odds with your existence. See how all this stuff “added unto you,” which is not really you, blocks you from the simplicity of the “now” and cuts you off from Life itself. Open up to the wellspring of Life that lies at the center of your being and, for the first time, feel what it is to be truly alive.

Here

Here’s a good one: *here*. Enlightenment is here—and now. It’s the realization that we are that ever-present “hereness,” that all-embracing “nowness,” that indivisible “isness.”

As we live and come to embody our true nature we become more and more here, more and more now, more and more who we already are. So, everything is fully here yet ever-evolving. This is a paradox: we are complete just as we are yet we can become more complete. Every moment is complete, with nothing missing, yet there’s always something more. It’s like a circle that’s whole and perfect: we cannot make the circle any more perfect but we can make it larger, more inclusive.

Most people’s lives constellate around some vague ego-idea, some far-off, hoped-for convergence of conditions that they believe will finally bring them the satisfaction and fulfill-

ment they desire. You know—the perfect relationship, the family, the group of friends, financial abundance, a nice house, whatever. Spiritual seekers are also seeking some future something but they have another set of ideas: they're trying to get back to Eden, or get off the Wheel, or find some kind of enlightenment. But all that seeking is nothing more than an egoic rejection of what is here and now (and already complete); all that that seeking does is supplant the immediacy of one's present experience with some hoped-for something in the future. Whatever you're hoping to get in the future, when all your stuff is in its perfect place, when you reach some exalted state—well, you need to get that right now. You need to embrace that totality here and now. I know the ego doesn't like this kind of talk because the ego depends upon helping you fix or improve the here and now; it's wholly based upon the past and upon the promise that it can bring you something of value in the future. It never wants to be here. Everything the ego-self does is designed to get you away from the totality of life that is here and now and to keep you wrapped up in the conceptual you that can only exist in the past or the future.

It's okay to have future goals but the total embrace of the present moment (and the subtle attunement with your soul's true expression) should be happening right here, right now. No divine convergence of circumstances will ever be better than the one that is before you right now. . . .

One day you may look up and see a tea cup or a chair and suddenly realize that everything you've been seeking for all these years is right here. You've been looking at it the whole time. So what was this seeking all about? Who was seeking what and to what end? The recognition of the totality that's always here puts an end to your seeking. Looking back on your life, you'll realize that all your seeking was a rouse, a subterfuge; one big avoidance of yourself and the truth of the present moment.

Bull (*Shit*)

Here's another one: *bull*. That pretty much sums it up. When we say *enlightenment* is a four-letter word it generally means that it's all bull-shit; the whole quest for enlightenment is bull-shit. And when you reach enlightenment, and there's no choir of angels singing, and you're not delivered into a state of uninterrupted bliss, you're likely to say this is a bunch of shit—that you got absolutely nothing from total enlightenment. . . .

This whole idea of pursuing enlightenment when you're not present to yourself, when you don't know who you are, when you're lost in some kind of mental la-la land, is BS to the max. And then there are all these bullshit scenarios: You want to reach the state of enlightenment—whatever that means—so you go to a teacher and he says, "Sit and face this wall for ten years and something is bound to happen." Or, "Sign up for this special awakening and the spiritual energy will do everything for you—and someday, if you just keep doing the practices, something will happen." Or, "Stand under this waterfall and repeat the sacred mantra and some day it will happen." (You won't have any hair left but at least you'll be enlightened—or will you?) Why do spiritual seekers put up with all this bullshit?

For the most part, if you're an average spiritual seeker, everything you're doing is bull; it's false, it's totally ego-driven. Your pursuit of enlightenment is bull. Your spiritual practices are bull. Your concepts are bull. Your view of your own human life is bull. And it gets piled higher and deeper every day. Forget about enlightenment—get yourself a shovel!

Well, it's not all bull. Most of us have attained something from doing spiritual practice.

Like what? You've been practicing yoga and meditation for twenty years—so, tell me, what have you got? Are you living in a state where you know yourself as pure consciousness, unified

with the ever-flow of Life, or are you still pretty much living as this separate person—perhaps a more spiritual person—still hoping to win the enlightenment jackpot? You know, one definition of insanity is when a person does the same thing over and over again yet expects a different result. Accordingly, most spiritual seekers are insane. They do the same practices day after day, year after year, with no transformation, no realization—nothing but surface changes—yet they believe that one day the Bid “E” will happen. That’s insane!

But, for the sake of discussion, let’s assume it’s not *all* bull. Let’s assume you’ve attained *something* of worth from your twenty years of hard labor. Well what is it? Maybe you have a little more clarity about where you fit in with the universe. Okay, that’s good. Maybe you have a better self-image, that of being a spiritual person. Okay. Maybe you have more stability and the support of a group or community. Okay. Maybe you’ve matured emotionally and stilled your mind a bit, which now makes it easier to deal with the challenges of life. Okay. All of that is good but none of it has anything to do with enlightenment; none of that has gotten you beyond your person-self, or your seeking, or your fundamental identity as this separate individual. So accordingly, it’s all bull. You’re still the same little “me” but now a more spiritual “me.” It’s like someone who’s been practicing the violin for twenty years, learning all there is to know about how to play yet, after all that, cannot even play one song. So what good is that?

If a seeker’s been on the path of enlightenment for ten or twenty years without having realized any kind of enlightenment, without there being a fundamental shift in his or her identity, we can only conclude one thing: both the seeker and the path are bull. How do I know this? Well, if the seeker was true and the path was true, he would have realized his own nature by now. If the seeker was true and the path was false,

he would have been impelled to leave that path a long time ago. If the seeker was false—false in the sense of not really wanting to know his true self—and the path was true, he would have dropped away by now, not being able to do what was required. If the seeker was false and the path was false—well, then we have twenty years of hard labor with nothing to show for it. So, again, the only thing we can conclude from all these long years of unenlightened *sadhana* is that the seeker and the path are false; both are lacking, both are bull.

The case could also be that the seeker and the path are both true but not in resonance; if this were so, a true seeker would recognize this to be the case and would have moved on to another path or teacher long ago.

Ease / Easy

“No one ever said it was supposed to be easy.”

~ Charles Murphy III

Another word that might be used to describe the enlightened state is *ease*. Enlightenment is marked by simplicity, naturalness, and ease. There’s no struggle against anything. However, when you’re not yourself, when you’re in exile from your own nature, when you wholly occupy and live your life through this mind-made version of yourself, in separation from Life, then there’s *always* a struggle, *always* a sense of disease—and that’s not easy. It’s painful, it’s a burden, it’s unnatural. All you get at the end of the day is fatigue and frustration.

Being who you are, being “enlightened,” is easy. I mean, what could be easier than being yourself? That doesn’t mean everything in life is going to be easy—and some things may be rather difficult—yet there’s always an underlying sense of ease, and flow, and well-being. And that’s because your life and your livingness are never separate from the luminous, ever-giving, and all-accomplishing Source.

What about “easy to attain”? Is enlightenment easy to attain?

Yes and no. If you’re on the right path, if you have true desire, if something in you has opened up to Source—and if you have access to an enlightened teacher—then it’s not *that* difficult. Still, it requires effort and commitment but at least it’s a real possibility. How many years and lifetimes have you been living in this wretched state of the ego-self, going through the motions of life but not truly living it? This has been going on for a very long time. So if it takes a few years to reverse all of that, I would call that easy. Of course, if you’re on the wrong path, with a faulty understanding, with no earnestness—or just doing the practices like a kind of spiritual journeyman—hoping that enlightenment will miraculously descend upon you one day—then it’s not only not easy to realize, it’s rather impossible. A lukewarm seeker, not clear about what he wants, not impelled by real interest or love—looking for some kind of way out of here—should pretty much forget about enlightenment. His first goal should be to get in touch with his human self, figure things out, get clear on what he wants. If you don’t really want enlightenment then why bother with all of this? So, ask yourself: do you really want to know the truth of your own nature, above everything else, or do you want something else?

No matter what anyone says, grace can enter the picture and do what it will. You can awaken to the truth of your higher self even if you’re not consciously looking for it, even if you have not done a lot of groundwork. Anyone can stumble upon enlightenment. Even so, grace cannot do the work for you; if you want to stabilize and integrate that awakening, and become a true human being, you will have to do the work.

It seems that many seekers nowadays are looking for a quick and easy path to enlightenment. Do you find this to be so?

There’s a Sufi quote that goes something like, “The short-

cut to the king's house is the long way home." Perhaps you have some sense of what this means. All these seekers who are looking for instant enlightenment, some kind of special awakening, some secret method—in a word, some kind of shortcut—usually get one, but that shortcut does not get them anywhere. The ego-self is the one looking for that shortcut; the ego-self is the one who takes that short-cut. And, so, the ego-self may get somewhere but not you. So we don't want to go that route. That "easy" route usually ends up being way too difficult. Of course there are things you can do to make the journey easier, and it would behoove you to avail yourself to every manner of help you can get, but a sincere seeker is looking for the truth of his own existence not some quick and easy route to enlightenment.

Full

Here's a good one: *full*. Yes, enlightenment is full—full of light, full of wonder, full of life. It's awakening to the totality that is always right here, always right now. It's not about attaining some state of cosmic bliss, it's about being whole and integral to life itself. It's not about rising above who you are or becoming free of your human nature, it's about allowing every dimension of yourself into your own life. It's about realizing your own fullness, your own completeness; and seeing that nothing whatsoever is missing from this moment.

Again, this is a hard pill for the ego-self to swallow because it wants you to believe that something is missing, that you're incomplete, that something is lacking or wrong with you and your life—and, of course, if you stick with its plan it can help you fix all of that. Right. Next!

'I-I Am'

Here's one, *I-I am*. I don't think that's a four-letter word but we'll go with it anything. What does that mean?

I put that one on the board. It indicates a merging of the individual "I" with the universal "I." It's the realization of your-self as "I am That" which is everything.

"I am That" may be everything but it's only half the story. What about "I am this"? I can only be *That* from the perspective of *this*. Perhaps we could revise "*I-I am*" to mean, "I am *That and I am this*" or "I am *That as this*," or, more precisely, "I am *That now being this*."

A clear understanding of "I" or "I am," and what it actually refers to—and how it gets corrupted, boxed in, and usurped by the ego-self—should be central to our contemplation. It's really the heart of the matter.

Could you offer any insights on this contemplation?

Let's say you wake up one morning and you're upset. You have the feeling, "I am upset." Okay, but what is the unquestioned assumption that's giving shape to that feeling? It's the assumption that you are this separate entity, this "me"-person who is upset." First you sense yourself as this separate person and then *have* the feeling of being upset. But what if you're not this person you believe yourself to be? What if that so-called person is just a useful grouping of thought, feeling, and sensation? What then? Let's dismantle this a little further: The statement, "I am upset," is made up of three parts: "I am" ... "this person" ... who is "upset." First there is "I am," which is the pure sense of your own existence, that which is prior to any thought, feeling, or even the sense of being this person. This, we might say, is your true self, your foundational self. But

this “I am” is immediately hijacked by the ego-self now refers exclusively to this me-person who is upset; so you say, “I (as this person) am upset.” It’s okay to be that person who is upset but don’t forget in your upsetness that you are, fundamentally, Consciousness, that pure “I.” So, first, be that “I am” then be upset, or happy, or whatever.

Now I’m not saying, don’t be upset (or happy, or whatever); I’m saying be conscious of the pure “I am” that you are *and* be upset (if you must). Don’t try to get rid of being upset; just embrace everything you feel, and think, and are from the wholeness that you are, from that immovable “I am” that is the true foundation of your being.

Enlightenment can be seen as the conscious abidance in your true nature, in that which is always presence—in Being, Presence, or “I am”—*and* living your human life from that all-embracing sense of self.

Our usual attitude is of ‘I am this.’ Separate consistently and perseveringly the ‘I am’ from ‘this’ or ‘that,’ and try to feel what it means to be, just to be, without being ‘this’ or ‘that.’

(Nisargadatta, *I Am That*, p. 59)

Pain

Here’s one that was not on the board—*pain*. Enlightenment is pain. Enlightenment is love. Enlightenment, true enlightenment, includes it all. So, yes, we could say that enlightenment is pain.

The whole of the human state is based on an egoic division where you run from pain and toward pleasure. But what if I told you that the pain you’re running from is you? That in running from the pain (of your existence) you are running from yourself, from your wholeness, from your realization?

Seeking for something (that is always here) and trying to

avoid something (that is always here) are both must-miss approaches for a spiritual aspirant. Accepting the all of what is here, the all of who you are is the only true approach.

Spiritual teachers who emphasize embodied enlightenment (such as Saniel Bonder and all those teachers who follow in his transmission line) direct their students to wholly embrace the inherent pain of their own existence, holding that this embrace is the key to full-bodied awakening. Bliss, yes, but also pain—true enlightenment includes it all.

Until you awaken through your Second Birth the *pain of unity* is the most important aspect of your being waiting to be realized. This is because your entire being, and indeed the entire universe, both revolve around this central point of crucifixion and derive all their power from the fact of it. ... One of the characteristics of the Second Birth that distinguishes it from realizations of disembodied consciousness is the willingness to include pain.

Pain is the secret trapdoor to ultimate realization. It is the last place anyone would ever look. It is the very place where we *don't* want to find ourselves. It is the very place where we don't want to *realize* ourselves. If true realization includes pain, we would rather not be realized. We do not want the realization of pain.

The pain of unity is alive in you as the *core wound* [as the inherent pain of your human existence]. If you dare to fall out of the world of denial of that pain and if you dare to fall into that pain most directly you'll awaken as the pain of unity. You'll learn to stand in your full glory with that pain as the atomic fuel at the Heart of your existence. You'll radiate from there and live the life of eternal compassion for all beings from the core of that pain.

Here you are crucified and here you are truly alive. It is both endlessly sad and boundlessly delicious and you would not have it any other way. (Ted Strauss, unpublished manuscript)

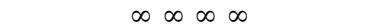
Even though staying present with our discomfort is counter-intuitive—that is, it goes against our natural instinct for comfort and safety—it is ultimately the only path that offers true freedom. ... Only by opening directly to our experience itself will we ever tap into the sense of connectedness that is the essence of who we are.

(Bayda, *Zen Heart*, p. 28)

Love

And the final word for today is *love*. Love is not an emotion. It may be experienced in an emotional way but it is not an emotion, *per se*. Love is deeper, more penetrating than a mere emotion. So, what is love? Love is everything. Love is the very impulse of Life, the *raison d'être* of creation. But in essence, in its pure expression, it's self-sacrifice. It's the giving yourself with the totality of your being. It's the unconditional embrace. It's a giving so complete that you're totally lost in the giving. And this love goes beyond the human realm. As mentioned, it's the very nature of the universe, the heart of all creation. We've been talking about this bland, nondescript, unnoticed presence or stillness that embraces everything, that allows everything, that affords everything its very existence. Well, is that not love? Does that presence not hold and embrace everything with the totality of its being—and so deeply that it becomes that very thing it embraces? Is that not the very nature of love? Right now you're bathing in that love. The whole universe exists because of that love. With enlightenment you recognize yourself as that love, as that presence, as that all-embracing consciousness that gives itself in such a way that everything can be exactly as it is—including your own human self. You may not recognize this as love but that's exactly what it is. I mean, what else could it be?

End of Day Two



**Love Care Soul Ever Full Make
Here Open Such Bull Well Real
Make Done Free Self Good Flow
Life Fate Pure Just Will True Path**

DAY THREE: Morning Session

Who Are You?

Today our question is, “Who are you?” Or, more to the point, “Who or what is living your life?” I know the one who is *pretending* to live your life; I know the one you *believe* is living your life, the one seeking this thing called *enlightenment*, but is that really you? I think not. That little “me” has usurped your consciousness and your existence and is now masquerading as you—and doing so with your unwitting permission and support. That ego-“me” is always doing—seeking, resisting, struggling, possessing, manipulating, etc. It’s doing your separation, your resistance, your limitation and leaving you with the resulting pain of that. All in all, it’s doing “you.” It’s doing the false creation of “you.” And, all the while the real “you,” the consciousness-you is completely missing from the scene.

Now it’s time to stop. Stop affording that ego-me the power to be you. Stop living as this flat, separate, cut-off-from-life person-self and know what it means to be truly alive. Stop *thinking* life and start *living* life. And rather than trying to run away from the challenges of life—hoping to attain some kind of ethereal bliss—in the future, as a result of all your lifeless spiritual practices—dare to be who you are as this human being, right here and now. Is that asking too much? The risk, my friends, is never in asking for too much but always in being too little. . . .

This whole thing, as Eckhart Tolle said, is like being possessed by some entity and then coming to believe that you are that possessing entity. We don't want that. ...

You have to open up to the perfection and potential that you already are and live from that truth. Even the higher power you pray to cannot open you to the truth of your own self. Only you can do that. And one reason why nothing outside of yourself can awaken you, as such, is because you're not really asleep, you're only *pretending* to be asleep (or imagining yourself to be asleep). And as the sages have said, you can awaken someone who's asleep but you cannot awaken someone who's pretending to be asleep. (And it gets more complicated when a person doesn't even know that he's pretending to be asleep). So what to do? How to awaken these earth-dwellers, these sleep-walkers who go about their business in the deep and impenetrable slumber of an imaginary sleep?

Do you recommend that, as an inquiry, we seek to answer the questions “Where am I?” or “Who am I?”

Use whatever question naturally arises, whatever question grabs you. One question you may consider is: “What in my changing experience never changes?” Or, “What is actually here?” Let's explore this one: what is here? Is there a body here, a body-sense here? Yes. Is there a mind here, thoughts here? Yes. Is there the concept of being a person (or the belief that you exist as this person) here? Yes. But is there an independently-existing person here? If there is, show me that person. Where is that person? Is that person the body? No. Is that person the mind? No. Is that person inside the trillions of cells? No. So where is this person other than in your mind? When you get to the bottom of this confusion you'll see that this person you believe yourself to be is not a person, as such, but a mental construct. It's a useful construct that allows you, as con-

sciousness, to be here, to experience human life, but it's a construct nonetheless. This person-self, this rock-solid identity upon which your whole life is built, is imagined. You exist, sure, but do you exist solely as this person? What is actually here and how is this different from what you think or imagine is here? Take a look. You have to know the difference between who you are (the true, feeling sense of you) and who you imagine yourself to be.

In addition to knowing what is here you really need to *be* here, to land here, to be in your own body; only then will you be in a position to discover what is truly here. People live in this disembodied, out-of-touch-with-life, mentalized state of the ego-self and, of course, they want some solace, some relief from that, so they enter the spiritual path—and then they strive to attain some kind of disembodied, out-of-touch-with-life (transcendental) spiritual state. That's the ego's plan: it involves trading in one cut-off, fragmented self for another on your way to enlightenment. That plan makes for a lot of spiritualized egos but no fully awakened human beings.

Recognizing Presence

If, as they say, presence or consciousness is already present why can't we recognize it? What's blocking us?

When you say something is blocking you, or that presence seems to be missing, what you're really saying is that you're not fully conscious of yourself. So, what's causing that? Well, pretty much everything: your thoughts, your past conditioning, your innate human ignorance, your concepts (of how things are supposed to be), your lack of true desire, your laziness—and not so much these things, *per se*, because none of that can actually block presence, but your insistent *belief in and identification with* these things. The primary culprit, however, is the intractable belief that you are this separate person. Your belief

is an actual creation. It creates a false sense of self, a partial view of reality; and you end up living as that false self in your own mind-made creation. Your mistaken sense of being this separate entity, and your assertion and defense of this false position—along with the habitual overlooking of your true self—is the primary thing blocking you from being aware of the infinitude that you are.

On another level, it's simpler than that. What is blocking you? Nothing. And why can't you recognize your own nature? Because you're not here to recognize it. Instead of seeing what is here, you're imagining what is here, or conceptualizing a reality that is not here. Either way, your true self is here, your presence is here, *you are here*, yet you (living wholly as this person) are somewhere else, imagining that something is blocking you or off looking for some kind of way out of here.

Too Obvious

Many teachers say that presence is just too obvious. Is that another reason why most people keep missing it?

That's part of it. A person's mind is conditioned to look for something special, something of value for this individual. If you happen to stray upon presence, or catch a glimpse of it, it will not register with your mind because it has no particular value, it does not fit in with your expectations. So you just overlook it; you keep searching for something special, like a dog looking for a bone. If you go with what the conditioned mind is looking for you're going to miss it every time. The mind is always directing you to find some *thing*—some thing that it believes is missing. But what you truly seek is not a thing and it's not missing. It's always here. Amidst all these apparent changes you have to discover that which is always present, that which never changes—and that is beingness, existence, consciousness, your knowing awareness. That's you. It's like the white

canvas of a painting: you never really notice the canvas; all you see are the colorful forms painted upon it. The canvas is your beingness or awareness; it's that dimension of self you never notice but the very part that allows you to be this person, to experience your life. So, every experience, every moment of your life, has two sides: there is you as consciousness, as beingness, as the unchanging capacity of experience (the canvas); and you as this person, having this particular experience, living your unique and ever-changing life (the painting).

No wonder then that seeing It (which is not other than consciously being It) is such a bare and austere and even somber experience. The fact that it comes across as “non-religious” and “devoid of emotion,” as “cold scientific evidence or matter-of-factness,” as “prosaic and non-glorious,” is evidence of its authenticity. (Harding, *On Having No Head*, p. 76)

When it dawns upon you, as you, you won't be jumping for joy, weeping with the all-obliterating Beauty of it all. Much more likely, you'll simply notice a sudden shift in your Being that you immediately sense will be irrevocable. And you'll think, or at any rate I did, “Oh, *right*. This is what I was seeking all those years, all those lifetimes! How incredibly simple. How blithering obvious. Of course!” (Bonder, *Waking Down*, p. 107)

I once read somewhere that, in our ordinary awareness, we go in and out of enlightenment all the time but we don't recognize it. Do you find this to be the case?

Yes, all of the time. In every moment the true self is present, and apparent, but with the same constancy your mind refuses to recognize or register it. Between every thought that reality shines through but with every arising “me”-thought that reality is dismissed, over-ridden, and rendered irrelevant. Your mind is continually creating this world of bondage and separation where your true self is missing. People fail to see what is right in front of them. They have what we might call, Reality Deficit Disorder, or RDD—and it's highly contagious! However,

Enlightenment is a Four-Letter Word

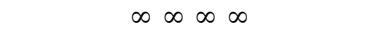
the moment your mind pauses, the moment you're able to dis-identify from thought the immediacy of your true self has a chance to shine through. You just have to slow things down and truly see what is here; move from that which is ever-changing to that which is ever-present and ever-allowing of all of these changes.

Having your true self emerge every now and again, recognized or unrecognized, is of little value. The infinite value is realized only when the awareness of your true self is stabilized, when it's recognized as your fundamental self, when you live your life from that divine and all-embracing presence. ...

The total and unconditional embrace of the ordinary, of your life just as it is right now, is what makes every moment of your seemingly ordinary life quite extraordinary.

The state of liberation ... is very ordinary. Nothing specific happens, no huge realization or mind-shattering experience. It is the most natural state. It is so ordinary and so natural that when we have it, we don't know we have it. It is so uneventful that almost everyone goes in and out of it frequently. There are no flashing lights or brilliant suns. ... and because it is so uneventful, it usually escapes us. Its subtlety prevents us from recognizing it or even from being aware that it is happening.

(Almaas, *Diamond Heart II*, p. 2)



DAY THREE: Afternoon Session

Impersonal Enlightenment

What about impersonal enlightenment? Is this just a denial of our individuality and the uniqueness of our human self?

The impersonal or universal is only half the story. The self as an impersonal emptiness or absolute is emphasized in many Eastern traditions; but now we see the personal embodiment of

this mysterious absolute as an integral part of an emerging Western paradigm.

In the early stages of enlightenment there can be more identification with the universal or impersonal dimension of the self than with the personal. So, a rudimentary and partial experience of the enlightened state can have the flavor of being impersonal, like a disinterested witness. But something is missing in that. The full immersion in life is missing. The fullness of your human beingness is missing. That which ever-fills the emptiness—the overflowing delight of the heart, the *raison d'être* of creation—is missing.

The personal can be seen as the fulfillment or dénouement of the non-personal. Jesus captured this when he said, “I do not come to destroy the law (the notion of the one God) but to fulfill it.” I come to make it complete, to bring alive that universal dimension of self in and as the individual person.

I keep hearing something to the effect of, “you’re not this person you believe yourself to be.” Okay, if I am not this person I believe myself to be then who am I?

Well, you *are* this person you believe yourself to be—yet you’re something much greater as well. If you own a mansion, you cannot say that the broom closet is not part of the mansion; but if you live your whole life in the broom closet—being afraid to leave that small, dark room—you’ll never experience the fullness of your mansion. So, what do you have? What is the totality of your experience?—nothing but a broom closet.

Looked at from another angle we could say that you are pure Consciousness living as this person you now believe yourself to be. This person could be seen as the provisional you, the now-expressed you, but not the real you. To get some sense of this, imagine that you’re talking with a friend. Now, in your imagination, say something to your friend, give him or her a

compliment or say a kind word. Now, see how they respond. Do they smile or say something positive in return? Okay, and how do you respond to their response? Okay—now stop. Don't get further involved in that imaginary scene where neither you nor your friend actually exist. Don't mis-take that imagined version of your friend to be your actual friend or that imagined version of yourself to be the real you. That would be insane. Yet, right now, that's exactly what's happening: you *are* mistaking an imagined self, a mental version of self, to be your real self—and you don't even know you're doing it! It's so difficult to catch or see this error because you've been doing it all your life. When you imagine your friend you're conscious enough to know the difference between the imagined version of your friend and your real friend; but when it comes to your life right now you cannot see that you, this person you take yourself to be is but an imagined version of you. You truly believe that this imagined version of self is the real you. That's the error. The imagination is not the error; the mis-taking of that imagined you for the real you is the error. So, yes, you exist but not as this separate person you imagine yourself to be. That self is not the real you just as your imagined friend is not your real friend or a picture of a sunset is not a real sunset. That picture is indeed a real picture of the sunset but it's only a picture, not the sunset. If you mis-take that picture to be the sunset then all you get is a lifeless representation, an ersatz reality, and what you miss is the glory of a true sunset.

Spiritual Intention and Practice

Earlier you spoke about three approaches: the practice of presence, focusing on our individual or feeling nature, and dismantling the false ego. Could you talk a little more about these?

As a foundation of any spiritual practice it's always good to get in touch with your human self, to solidify your human ex-

istence so that your higher self has a place to land. If your life is in shambles, if your mind is scattered, if you're living in a state of fear and dis-ease there will be no foundation to support your higher self. So, first off, get your shit together. Discover who you are as a person and what you really want; become totally responsible and true to your word; and clear out old patterns—people, places, and things—that do not support you.

The practice of presence involves becoming aware of that Supreme Presence; it's about knowing yourself as Consciousness, as that boundless "I" or "I am." Tuning into your individual or feeling nature is about being here, as this human form, in this body. Most people *think about* their body or *think about* their feelings but we want to actually feel what it means to be alive, in this body, in direct connection with the all of Life. Then there is the self we want to dismantle or see through, the ego-self or phantom "I" as it were. We don't want to destroy this self we simply want to see it for what it is—a useful concept or representation of self. Certainly we don't want to mis-take this concept of self to be our true or authentic self.

What about mindfulness methods? Are they helpful?

If your mind is dominated by unconscious tendencies the first thing you need to do is get clear of that brain fog, establish some kind of center, and get into the here and now. You want to be in your experience and not lost in thoughts about your experience. Only when you are conscious and present to your own experience can you open up to greater dimensions of your total self. Being mindful can help with that. Any focus method can help with that. Mindfulness, however, is still a practice of the mind; it cannot get you beyond the mind, it cannot reveal that which exists prior to thought. For that, you must "let go" of your mindfulness and relax into the silence of your own being. Too much mindfulness can become another

block, another practice that keeps you locked into the mind.

People have a tendency to confuse the practice with the goal of the practice. The goal of the practice is not to maintain a constant awareness with the mind, it's to get beyond the mind, to abide in and as pure consciousness, in that space that exists prior to thought.

What about the practice of watching your thoughts?

Watching your thoughts is a good first step. It's a way to unhinge your compulsive involvement with the mind and help you dis-identify with thoughts and thinking. But this is not enough. Concurrently you must apperceive the one who is aware of thought, the true subject, yourself as pure awareness.

What about chanting or repeating a mantra?

The outer form of the mantra or the conscious repetition of any kind of phrase can help bring focus and stillness to the mind which, again, can be helpful if your mind is scattered or dominated by unconscious tendencies. However, the real practice of mantra repetition is not to repeat some kind of word or phrase but to repeat or continuously apperceive yourself as consciousness, as pure, unchanging awareness.

Some people hold that only a mantra received from a master who has realized the potency of the mantra is alive and capable of transforming the one who repeats it, while all other mantras are dead, lifeless, or impotent as it were. If you believe this to be true then, well, maybe, *because you believe it*, it might be true for you. Rather, I would say that any mantra repeated as a continual invocation of your presence or one that keeps you aligned with a transmission stream of a living teacher is alive, whereas any mantra repeated as mere words—even a mantra repeated with feeling or a sense of devotion to the guru who gave you the mantra—is incapable of true transfor-

mation. Anything done with feeling and devotion is better than something done without it but, still, that does not necessarily impart a practice with true potency.

What about the practice of following the breath or focusing on the gap between the breaths?

Being conscious of the breath can help still the mind and bring in more *prana* (or life-energy) and it can also ground you in the presence of your body, but it alone cannot bring you beyond the mind. Breathing into the lower belly area, or *hara*, is generally the most stabilizing kind of breath, while breathing into the solar plexus region is generally the most empowering. Breathing into the heart area (the seat of the emotional body) is generally the most dissolving or “surrendering” kind of breath. Even when you are abiding in presence or pure awareness, which is generally located in the area of the head, breathing into the *hara* can help ground and stabilize that state.

Focusing on the space between the breaths may direct your consciousness toward presence more precisely than focusing on the breath alone. In this practice you focus on nothing, which means you are not focused on any *thing*. As such, the mind has nothing to grab hold of. It will keep trying to turn the gap into some kind of object that it can grasp but it will never get anywhere. After a while the mind may realize its own uselessness and slow down or give up. Then the very source of the mind, pure consciousness itself, may shine forth. Then the gap or space between the breaths is no longer experienced as a gap in time but as the unbroken expanse of primordial consciousness that underlies the breath and everything else. The breath still goes in and out, and you are aware of its movement, but your awareness remains stationed in that singular consciousness that exists prior to the breath or even your awareness of it.

What about self-inquiry?

For self-inquiry to be truly beneficial you have to be motivated by a deep interest or curiosity in discovering the truth of your own existence and passionate enough to persist at all cost. “Negative” self-inquiry involves getting to the root of, and exposing the falsity of, your current sense of self; it’s about questioning your assumptions, dismantling false concepts, and becoming conscious of all the unconscious layers of conditioning. “Positive” self-inquiry involves understanding who you truly are, discerning the unchanging dimension of self amidst the ever-changing experiences of life.

Right now you exist as a thought-construction, a mental representation, an internal object to yourself. How did that come about? How did that happen to you? It would be good to expose this error in your identity, to clear up this confusion, and to discover the difference between who you really are (consciousness, that pure “I am”) and who you *think* you are (this person, this separate ego-self.)

Ramana Maharshi put great emphasis on self-inquiry. He made it pretty clear that this inquiry was not about one “I” seeking another “I” (such as the small “I” seeking the big “I”) but about seeing through the false ego or phantom “I.” When the ego is seen through or exposed—and then “dissolves”—you, your sense of “I,” doesn’t disappear. What happens is that you experience that “I” (i.e., yourself) as the form and the formless, as matter and spirit, as the All, which includes you as this person but is not confined or exclusive to that singular expression. You continue to live in and as your human self but no longer view yourself as being separate from, or existing independently of, the Supreme “I,” the totality of Life.

It’s okay to have an I-thought, to provisionally live as this imagined self, but it’s not so good when you believe yourself to be that self and unwittingly overlook your greater self.

You are never reducible to an object, to an identity, to something graspable by the mind. Your nature is that of Consciousness, of “I am-ness,” before it becomes something other than itself, before it becomes you as this body, this person, this little “me.” You are the constant, unchanging principle of Life—of your life, of your experience. All you need to do is *be* who you truly are, to *live* as you truly are.

Self-inquiry is the one infallible means, the only direct one, to realize the unconditioned, absolute Being that you really are.
(Ramana, *The Teachings of*, p. 123)

What about meditation? In the context of our discussion, I'm not clear about what that actually is.

Meditation, as the term is used today, points to two different modes or practices. First there's a kind of ego-efforting or “doing meditation” which involves the focus or concentration of the mind on such things as the breath, a flame, a mantra, a sacred object, etc. These types of meditation are primarily aimed at getting you out of the subconscious fog and into the present moment. These practices might rightly be called “meditation” because they involve the mind—stilling the mind, empowering the mind, spiritualizing the mind, whatever. They can be seen as a prelude to “true meditation” which has nothing to do with the mind, or methods, or doing anything; and we might better call this second mode of meditation “being” or “abidance.” This is the real meditation so to speak. This is not about doing anything, or getting somewhere, or focusing, or even being present, it's about *being presence*; it's about abiding in and as presence; it's about being that all-embracing, unchanging awareness. It's not about trying to arrive at or attain who you are by use of some concentration method, it's about being who you are, the whole of who you are, in this moment.

True meditation or “being” is founded upon the direct

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knowingness that everything is already here, already complete, as you. It's not about stopping the mind or controlling your thoughts; it's about being or "dropping into" who you already are—that luminous presence, that all-embracing consciousness that is ever-beyond thought or doing or methods.

At this stage, what is the essential or foundational approach?

The first thing is to *get here*, to get yourself out of your mental and unconscious relationship to life. The second thing is to *be here*, to *feel* what it is to be here; to accept life as it is, and to ease up on your involvement with your fabricated sense of self which imposes a false center upon your boundless nature. The third thing is to *be all that is here*, to open up to your life, your beauty, your glory as that all-embracing consciousness. This involves realizing the difference between you (who you truly are) and the concept you have of yourself, the self you believe yourself to be. It's about discerning the difference between that ever-present, unchanging principle (you as Consciousness) and its temporal expression in time and space (you as this person); and then knowing and living as Consciousness, as the all of Life, in and as your individual, human self. ...

So who are you, really, and who do you think you are? Well, who you are, really, is all of it—every perception, every sensation, every thought, even this self-concept you hold yourself to be. You are all of it. And who do you think you are? This separate person, this "me"-based grouping of thoughts, images, and sensations. But that is not who you are. That's a particular construct that allows you to exist, and partake in, and enjoy this dimension of time and space. It's a representation of you, a mental construct of you, a very useful image of you, but not you, not the real you.

Sometimes you hear someone talk about their awakening experience, and it goes something like this: "I was walking in

the park and suddenly I did not exist. All there was were the trees, the birds, the walking, and the grass but no me.” In other words, there was no imposition of any limited concept of “me” upon the totality of who I am. I still exist, but not as this small “me,” not as this idea or construct I have of myself. I realize myself to be the totality—the trees, the birds, the grass, and this person walking in the park. I am all of it.

So who you are, really, is the totality but you have been hoodwinked into believing that you are this separate person, this single entity. Then, buying into that assumption—hook, line, and sinker—you put all your energy into accepting one part of your experience (the part you like) while doing all you can to reject another part (the part don’t like). But this approach only perpetuates your false belief that you are this separate entity. You’re not an entity; you’re all of it. And you can only be or become all of it by the whole-hearted embrace of who you really are, by the total acceptance of yourself as *all of it*. Can you ever become the whole of who you are by accepting one part of your total self and rejecting another part? I don’t think so. But this is the ego’s approach to life and enlightenment—and it’s an approach that never in the whole of human history has ever led to freedom.

Twenty Years on the Path (to the Path)

I’ve been practicing yoga and meditation for over twenty years yet have not broken through to the other side. Somehow I feel as if there is something lacking in me or maybe I am missing the intense longing for liberation that seems to be required.

Maybe you’ve been on “the spiritual path” for twenty years but not really on it at all. Maybe all this searching has not been about self-realization but really about trying to improve or spiritualize your ego-self and its flawed relationship to life. Such a “spiritual” approach is just another rouse, another way to vali-

date your egoic sense of separateness. Maybe it's time to drop all that spiritual stuff and find out who you are as a human being; get in touch with your feelings, discover what it means to live a true human life. All in all, you've got to take a ruthless look at yourself and find out what's working for you and what's not. Don't keep trying to skip over yourself. God won't allow it.

Being on the scene for twenty years doesn't mean much. Feeling that you're owed some kind of spiritual return for all the years of effort or service you put in doesn't mean much. The beads, the stories about the guru, the knowledge of sacred texts, the years of dedicated service, the sandals blessed with sacred ash—who cares about any of that? It's all a rouse. It has no value. The only thing of value is your connection to presence, to your heart, to your beingness, to the truth of your own existence; and how integral, loving, and alive you are as a human being. All the rest, as they say, is foo-foo dust.

Spiritual Enlightenment: The Damnedest Thing

Wanted: Jed or Alive

I want to come back to the book Spiritual Enlightenment: The Damnedest Thing. So, in your opinion, the book does not present a true description of the enlightened state?

Yes, that is my opinion; rather, I feel it presents a partial and hopelessly inept description. For example, the author mentions two states: the state of being asleep and the state of being awake, enlightened, or “done.” That’s the whole of the terrain. It’s way too simplistic. This is in line with the mistaken notion that enlightenment is a single, all-encompassing event; that a person’s in a dream and suddenly he wakes up and is “enlightened.” I don’t think so. What about the period of integration and embodiment that invariably follows one’s initial awakening? The author makes no mention of that. You’re unenlightened and then, suddenly, *pff*, you’re “done.” “Jed” also claims

that he's fully enlightened, one among fifty or so people in the world—and so enlightened that he's surpassed all his teachers. What teachers? Where? Show me the beef.

Another shortcoming with “Jed’s” version of enlightenment is that it’s that of an aloof, impersonal observer. From this description we can see that the author has not yet realized the profoundly personal dimension of the enlightened state. So, the “enlightened guy” is far from being “done.” And what path to enlightenment does the author put forth? Well, there is none. He says that it’s not a matter of choice or effort on the part of the individual; it’s some kind of random event, like getting hit by a bus. Who gets hit by a bus?

Ego death, as a means to no-self—abiding nondual awareness—is what this journey is all about. . . . In the simplest terms, enlightenment is impersonal, whereas what is commonly peddled as enlightenment is personal to the extreme.

(McKenna, *Spiritual Enlightenment*, p. 255, 41)

What about all the teachers who reviewed the book? For instance, Satyam Nadeen said, “Jed McKenna’s description of life after enlightenment is so good that 99% of his readers might not understand how truly profound it really is.”

Well, you can count me in with that 99 percent. In this day and age any clever person can parse together a few descriptions of the enlightened state and have them delivered through some imaginary enlightened guy; then the publisher (who, in this case, is probably the author as well) can send this stuff out to a bunch of reviewers and he or she is likely to get back some positive reviews. This is just more of the same nonsense that is entertaining to some but altogether useless to a true seeker.

Now don’t get me wrong, I don’t mean to come off sounding harsh or arrogant or place myself above “the enlightened guy.” And who am I to throw Jed under a bus? But since there is no Jed, and no bus, what does it matter?

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When you're enlightened, when you're “done” so to speak, what are you actually done with?

You're done with seeking from a state of lack. You're done with the confusion, isolation, and the pain that comes when you're fully identified with being this “me” self. You're done with your dull, resistant, and half-dead relationship to life; you're done with the fear, dis-ease, and inadequacy that come with this false, separate-self existence you cling to. No more clinging. You're done with being wholly defined by conditions, thoughts, feelings, self-images and all the stuff that makes up your “story.” You're done with all of that but you're not done with growth and development on the human level. You're not done with your human stuff and the inevitable ups and downs of human life. When you awaken to your own nature most of that stuff is still there yet now those once-loud and desperate cries are more like whispers. They no longer define your existence or wholly determine who you are or how you live.

All said, there is no finish line. You're never done. Rather than an end, enlightenment is just the beginning—the beginning of an endless journey toward infinity, or perhaps to the *Point of Infinity* . . . to where we are right now!

End of Day Three

After a few days of spiritual blathering I'm not sure who is getting what. Some people tell me that they've gained a new sense of clarity and direction, others a renewed interest in the spiritual path, while others share with me the realization that they're not really spiritual seekers but human seekers: that they have to “get a life,” mature and develop as human beings, and not try to skip over or spiritualize away their human challenges.

Quiet time begins at 11:00 pm. There's no more talking in public spaces after that. You can talk all night in your room (or in your tent) and generally do whatever you want so long as

you don't make too much noise doing it. As usual, a few people are sitting around the kitchen table sharing the excitement of the day. I sit around till 10:50 pm and then head up to my room. At 11:05 pm there's a tentative knock on my door. I open the door and find Tara standing there with some colorful Indian thing wrapped around her yoga-toned body. She's the perfect New Age seeker—beautiful, present, and truly interested in your every word. There's usually one or two of these goddesses at every gathering—but not one at my door. I figure she didn't come up to my room at 11:05 pm for spiritual instruction. Okay, let's see where this goes. She opens with an obligatory apology: "I'm sorry to bother you. I hope it's not too late." To which I counter, "O no, it's no bother at all." She waits for something else and I bid her to come in and take a seat. She comes in and sits on my bed in a cross-legged position and I sit across from her. After chatting for a few minutes she gets to the point: "Earlier today you talked about the fulfillment of the human dimension"—I know where this is going—"well isn't being close with another person part of that fulfillment?" I reply with a hesitant, "Yes, it could be." I forget what she said after that but it was something like, "I like you and you seem to like me and here we are so let's ..." Now enlightened or not, I am not so aloof to my own human nature as to ignore this wave of love and beauty rushing toward me but at the same time I do not find some quick rubbing of bodies all that fulfilling. (Perhaps this relates to Saturn's position in my natal chart rather than some great spiritual attainment.) And then there are all those stories about spiritual teachers sleeping with their students. Even though I am not a spiritual teacher and do not have students—and have no power over anyone—the mere association with these things is distracting. And since I am well-aware that spiritual followers are often star-struck and ready to trust (or thrust themselves upon) anyone who seems

to be in an advanced spiritual state—feeling, somehow, that that is being “spiritual”—I have made it my policy to stay away from all of that bullshit. Thus, no physical intimacy with anyone during the retreat; and no intimacy with anyone attending the retreat unless it’s part of something real, something supportive, and something mutually beneficial. ... The next thing I know Tara is lying down beside me with her head placed on my shoulder. We chat a little, close our eyes a little, and then fall into that warm silence. ... It is then that I drift back to a time when I first began to transcend body-consciousness; I had just been with a loving woman and afterwards, during pillow talk, I said something like, “When we’re together it’s as if I’m making love with the goddess.” But this comment didn’t sit well with her. “What about me?” she said. “I want you to be with me, with who I am, not some goddess.” She was not identified with that divine dimension of herself and so she wanted me to connect with her human self, the “me” who she believed herself to be. But why would I want to do that? I wanted to be with the goddess not a mere earth-girl and all her petty concerns. It was only years later that I realized my error. You have to love the person as she is, which includes the full embrace of her human self as well as her goddess self. Being with the goddess, in some fantasyland, divorced from a person and her humanity, is incomplete. It’s too transcendent. ... and then the silence is over. The moment has passed and I begin to stir. Offering her something, I say, “The retreat ends on Sunday; if you’re around after that we could”—to which she replies, “I would love that.” I don’t know what her “love” means but love is always good. We make it to our feet, then to the door, then off she goes. ... Sunday’s supposed to be clear, with pleasant skies—but sometimes, you know, the weatherman lies.

Love Care Soul Ever Full Make Here Open Such Flow Well Real Pure Free Make Self Good Will Life Fate True Just Rest Verb Ever

DAY FOUR: Morning Session

Where Are You?

Yesterday we opened with the question, “Who are you?” Today our question is, “Where are you?” Where is your consciousness, your center of gravity? From where do you live your life? What sense of self or identity do you occupy? That’s what we want to discover. You can forget about all your grand schemes for enlightenment—none of that can help you if you don’t know where you are, if you don’t know who you are, if you’re not conscious of your own life and experience. In fact, all this striving for a vague and uncertain goal, somewhere off in the future, cuts you off from the immediacy of life and the wonder that is being offered to you right here, right now. So be here. Be in your own life. Maybe what you’re able to access right now is not the “whole enchilada” but only a shred of your total self, only a hint of your infinite value. But that’s where the journey begins. That’s what you have to work with. So begin where you are. Begin with what is here, what is true for you.

As a general principle we might say: Wherever your consciousness is, wherever your sense of “I” is, that is where you are. If your consciousness is with you as this ego-self, this separate entity trying to make it in this world, then that is where you are. If your consciousness is with you as consciousness, as that all-embracing awareness—even while you are existing as this person—then that is where you are at. The choice is yours. And where you chose to be determines your experience of life

and yourself. So where are you? Are you consciously here or unconsciously somewhere else? If you're like most people, you're in the wrong place. Most likely you're living in an imaginary world of separation, in the world of the little "me." And though on one level it feels natural to be there—and you're supposed to be there, for now—on a deeper level you feel out-of-sorts, disjointed, and besieged by a gnawing sense of lack and dis-ease. On the surface things may seem okay; and so long as you remain on the surface of life you may feel okay. But, if you dig a little deeper you'll discover a different story. You'll discover the pain and futility of your situation. You'll discover the isolation and inadequacy of being this separate person you have conceived yourself to be. You'll discover the falsity and ineptitude of your so-called life. You'll discover that your whole life has been one, big resistance to who you truly are and to the boundlessness of Life.

So who are you? Where are you? Rather than trying to come up with some answer that would be acceptable to your mind, simply *feel* who you are, *feel* your own presence, *feel* your ineffable connection with Life. What does it feel like to be yourself, to exist as you? Get out of the mind and into your heart; get out of the past or the future and into the here and now; get out of the thoughts about your body and get into the feel of your body. Dare to be that all-embracing consciousness, the source of all existence, the wonder of all Life, even while limited to this body, this mind, this life. Be here now.

Look Within

I've often heard it said that we should look within. What does it actually mean to look within?

In most cases it means to imagine that you are this body-mind person, this separate self—that you are "out"—and then from that outer position to look "inward." Some people refer to

this as “digging a hole to install a ladder so you can wash the basement windows.” And when you do all of this and finally look within, what are you looking at? And more importantly, *who* is doing the looking? And from *where* is the looking taking place? Maybe you’re looking at your thoughts or emotions, or perhaps the mind is reflecting back on its own operation. But all these things are external to you—you as pure awareness, you as the one who is aware of all these things. Looking at your internal process is not “looking within.” We might better call that self-examination. Looking within is about getting in touch with the one who is looking. It really means *being* within, being the subject, the eternal knower, the beholder of all experience. Looking at your internal functioning may be a valuable process and part of becoming more in tune with yourself as a person but that’s not “looking within” as we are using the term. The primary thing to understand is that it’s not about looking; it’s about being or abiding as your true self. It’s about being who you are, not about looking for who you are.

Who is Seeking Enlightenment?

Liberation is never *of* the person, it is always *from* the person.
(Nisargadatta, *I Am That*, p. 343)

The one who begins the quest for enlightenment is not the one who actually “becomes” enlightened. So this, in some way, is a disappearing act. This does not mean that at the end of the journey you discover that you don’t exist; it means that the seeker of enlightenment, the one who was prompted to seek by virtue of his inherent sense of lack no longer exists, as such. You realize that this seeker was only a conceptual self, a “virtual reality” self, masquerading as you—and falsely seeking for something you already possessed. With enlightenment, that virtual self is still there yet it no longer defines you, it is no

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longer the sole determiner of your actions. That “small” self allows you to participate in the wonder of Life through your unique personhood but you no longer identify with that single point or believe that that useful constellation of thought is you.

I recall a story about two seekers who come across a sage and ask him, “How long will it be before we reach liberation?” The sage points to a nearby tree and says, “As many leaves as are on that tree, that’s how many lifetimes it will take you to become liberated.” The first seeker is depressed at the prospect of liberation being so painfully far away. The other seeker is delighted, knowing that no matter what, even if it takes a thousand lifetimes, he will be liberated.

I don’t know the point of this story. Perhaps it has something to do with being patient or having faith. But the story might be more interesting if the sage said, “You will never reach liberation.” In other words, the person you believe yourself to be—this virtual self that is seeking liberation—will never reach it because you are not that conceived-of entity. The belief that you are this separate person, who will one day be enlightened, is your fatal error. Liberation is gaining freedom from that concept of self, from that sense of being a separate self. Liberation from what?—from the seeker of liberation!

Now, again, the person you feel yourself to be is not going to disappear. That person will remain pretty much the same but you will suddenly realize that you, essentially, are not that person. That person, with all its aversions and attachments still intact, will be like a thin film over a vast body of water yet none of that stuff will define you as it did before.

Take a mug shot—a police station snapshot of an arrested person—of your body-mind exactly as it is. This is the one who is going to awaken. Welcome to that wonderfully relieving and terribly distressing reality. Right, you don’t have to change all the parts of yourself in order to be able to awaken. ... So that’s the good news. The bad news is, guess who awakens? You, essen-

tially as you have always known yourself to be! Not some squeaky clean, saintly, superhuman version of yourself to be! No—just you, as you are and have been.

(Bonder, *Waking Down*, p. 82)

The yogi, recognizing his true nature to be the supreme subject, is astonished to suddenly discover that the individual he thought he was, caught up in the trammels of thoughts and living in a world enmeshed in the web of time and space, does not really exist at all. (Dyczkowski, *The Doctrine of Vibration*, p. 161)

I'm not sure how long (or how many lifetimes) it will take but is there some way, some sign, some quality by which we can tell how close or far we are to enlightenment?

It's not so much a matter of knowing how close or far you are it's more a matter of knowing *who* you are and *where* you are and *what* you're willing to do in terms of your own growth and evolution. People often wonder about how near or far they are from enlightenment but do they really want this thing they're purportedly seeking? Is their life about trying to find some fulfillment through a variety of spiritual pursuits—about feeling good, or keeping the pain of life at bay—or is it about knowing the truth of their own life, of their own existence? In the scheme of things, near or far is not that important; being open to your heart's true desire, daring to look at yourself with sincerity and earnestness, and having the right kind of enlightened support and guidance are the critical factors.

The Zen Ox-Herding Pictures

Knowing where you are and getting clear on your present state of enlightenment or unenlightenment is not essential but it can be useful; yet trying to map this out can be tricky since everyone is different, every path is unique, and everyone is evolving on multiple dimensions at the same time. We can see this in terms of two concurrent, evolutionary thrusts: that of the

soul, of “waking up” to your true nature; and that of human integration, maturation, and embodiment, of “waking down” or “waking into” who you are as a unique person.

That said, it might be useful to look at the Zen Ox-herding pictures this morning. That’s a pretty famous map, one that most seekers are familiar with or at least have heard about. Can someone find the pictures? If you look through some of the bookshelves you might find something there. . . . Okay, we have the pictures from *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*. . . . And also from *The Three Pillars of Zen*.

The Ox or Bull is often understood to represent our true nature but more precisely it represents *the awareness dimension of our true nature*, or presence not the whole of our true nature. (And to make things simple I’m going to use Ox instead of Bull because there’s already enough bull around here.)

One quality of the Ox is that it’s stable and grounded and doesn’t come and go like our thoughts. This is the same with presence or pure awareness. However, the symbolism of the Ox doesn’t capture the pristine, non-interfering nature of presence. The Ox is too gross, too lumbering, too imposing; it’s not translucent or sheer; it’s not perfectly allowing or unobtrusive. So it’s an imperfect symbol: it captures the stable and constant quality of presence but misses its more subtle aspects.

The Zen pictures don’t offer a scene *prior* to the path because, I guess, it was assumed that everyone in the monastery had already completed that initial stage. But most seekers nowadays begin before the beginning, at picture zero so to speak. If there was a picture zero it might be termed, “No Ox to Seek” or “Not Knowing there’s an Ox to Seek” or “Not Knowing Who You Are or What You are Seeking (but Still Feeling the Need to Seek Something).” At this stage the seeker is besieged by a deep sense of confusion, dis-ease, and deficiency; he has an urge for something but he doesn’t know what it is or

where to seek it. He has an itch so to speak but doesn't know where to scratch. The Ox (his conscious presence) is missing, and he doesn't even know there's an Ox to be missing; so, it never occurs to him to seek the Ox directly. This confusion is indicated in the first picture where the boy is "ass backwards"—his feet are forward but his head is facing backwards. He has a spiritual impulse that is impelling him forward while, at the same time, his mind, his concepts, and his ego-conditioning are keeping him bound to the past, facing backwards.



At some point, after a period of growth and maturation, there's an opening. A ray of light penetrates into your opaque human dimension and offers you some kind of direction, some seeming way out. You may find a useful book, or meet someone who tells you about your higher nature.

You have no idea what this really means but, even so, you want it. So you set out in search of this thing called *enlightenment*, *liberation*, *awakening*, the realization of your Buddha nature, or whatever. It all sounds good but, again, these are just meaningless words. The Zen picture says you are "Seeking the Ox" but you don't know what you're seeking and you don't know where to look but still you search on. (I guess we're still talking about picture zero but hopefully we'll get to picture one.) At this point your whole pursuit is ego-driven, and so the folly begins. You get involved with all kinds of teachers; you do all kinds of spiritual practices. Perhaps you become a devout Christian, or Muslim, or Jew, or dedicate yourself to some such Father- or Guy-in-the-sky religion. And none of this is likely to get you anywhere. It may help stabilize your human life, and give you some sense of meaning or purpose, but the ego is still leading you by the nose, running you around in circles.

At some point you understand that what you're seeking is your own nature, your own presence. You don't need anything outside yourself to give you what is already yours. Now you're "Seeking the Ox." Now the path begins.



Then you see footprints. You never saw an Ox, you wouldn't know what an Ox was even if it were staring you in the face—and before this you didn't even know that there was an Ox—but now you're aware of the Ox and discover clear, discernable traces of it. You have a glimpse, an intuitive recognition of your own presence. You're certain of its existence even though you haven't yet realized it.

The Ox is the one thing that's always present, the one thing that's never missing. It's that fundamental awareness, that unchanging field or scaffold of your every human experience. It's your very nature, the "you" of you. How could it ever be missing? In every moment, you're not only looking right at it; it's the very thing that's doing the looking!



With a deepening investigation of presence you catch a "Glimpse of the Ox." For the first time you experience your own presence in a solid way, as a dimension of self that's independent of thought and emotion, as a part of you. The picture shows the butt of the Ox, not the whole Ox. You don't have it yet but this glimpse gives you an assurance, a knowingness, and perhaps a clear direction. Now you know what you're looking for—but you don't yet realize that what you're looking for is you!

The Ox will likely run away and you may not catch a glimpse of it for days or weeks at a time. There are powerful subconscious forces working against you and the gravity of your old self and its old habits keeps pulling you back into the dreamworld of separation. So you have it but you don't have it. At this point you need to put forth a determined effort to overcome the inertia that is constantly pulling you back into the false safety of your old ego-self.

Another obstacle at this point is the conditioning of your cognitive mind. For instance, whenever you do catch a glimpse of the Ox your mind will immediately dismiss it and move on to something else, something more interesting or useful. Or your mind may try to grab hold of presence and claim it as its own. This, again, will cause you to miss it. You see, part of catching the Ox involves letting go of trying to catch it! Just allowing it to be. Just relaxing into what is. You have to catch it without catching it. You have to catch it by realizing that the Ox, your presence, is already yours. It's you. You don't have to catch yourself; moreover you *cannot* catch yourself. You just have to realize what you already have and who you already are. The realization of who and what you already are—and the being of it—is the catching.

The State of Presence does not exist unless recognized, for recognition and awareness are the same. The State of Presence is the recognition of it! This very concept, that there exists, somewhere objectively, the State of Presence, independently from our recognition, is a misconception and a contradiction in terms. (Kristof, *The Human Buddha*, p. 374)

There's another picture that might fit in here, after picture three. It's the rather painful and disillusioning stage where you reach the end of your rope; where you realize that none of your old ego-strategies work anymore; where your spiritual efforts and seeking have hit a wall; where you feel that the whole

search is hopeless and ineffectual, and where you finally give up. In sum, it's where everything you thought you knew turns to crap. I don't think this is "the dark night of the soul," it's more like the dark night of the ego. Your faith in the ego and its enlightenment plan has been discarded. This is the first form of ego death; it's the death of your old way of doing things, your old strategies for enlightenment, your old spiritual practices and the premise upon which they were based. (But don't get me wrong: the ego is still in control and running the show but total faith in the ego and its "spiritual" plan have come to an end.) And, again, this can be pretty painful and disorienting. There's no way to sugar-coat this difficult falling away, this "rotting out," this slow death. But, hey, it's all good.



At some point you let go of your striving, your efforts to try and catch the Ox, and you relax into what is already present. And there you are. You catch hold of the Ox. (The Ox was always yours so all this effort to catch the Ox is now seen as bullshit, as the very thing that was keeping you from the Ox.) This "catching" is not a result of your ego-based effort but of relaxing into what is already here and who you already are. It's a state of allowance where your openness opens you to the influx of grace. Catching hold of the Ox does not mean you have it; it just means you have some felt connection to it. It means you're able to catch hold of presence when you are conscious enough to do so. At this point you still sense yourself as being separate from presence such that you can hold it or catch it. So you have it but you don't have it. At this stage the practice is to keep bringing your attention back to presence, to that "isness," until you realize that it's not something you can catch hold of—it's you, it's your own nature.

Here we see another problem with the Ox as a symbol for presence: catching and training of an actual Ox requires force. This exertion may be useful in the early stages of the journey when you have to overcome the mind and the tenacious grip of your lower self but at this stage that same kind of exertion is the obstacle. Presence cannot be captured or tamed through any kind of direct force or will. What you have to do, or not do, is be open to the Source; ease up on your exertion, your seeking, your struggling and relax into what you already are.

For a long time you have to try to be present, because the tendency is to not be present. You have to use your will to counteract that tendency. But there comes a time when trying to be present becomes a barrier, because it has to happen naturally. And at that point, the more you try to be present, the more you separate yourself from your presence. Presence itself doesn't try to be present. (Almaas, *Diamond Heart III*, p. 208)



The next picture, picture five, is “Taming the Ox.” This stage is about consciously being presence; holding your fundamental identity as presence, as consciousness. It involves being aware of yourself as presence, again and again, until presence becomes your default setting, your lived-from self. There’s another kind of taming, which we might call the “taming of enlightenment.” This is a period of integration and embodiment that takes place after basic enlightenment. But, we’re not there yet.



Picture six is “Riding the Ox Home.” Here you are no longer holding onto presence but abiding *in* presence or, perhaps, abiding *as* presence. In familiar language this picture could represent the state of “witness consciousness.” Here you’ve taken

the first step beyond your exclusive identification with the body-mind self and now recognize your essential identity as pure awareness, as that witnessing consciousness. Your state is no longer determined by your conditioning or your rote reactions to circumstances. You're "above it all," so to speak but you're still in a state of duality. Here the boy is *riding upon* the Ox, above the ground, untouched by his surroundings. While riding the Ox the boy happily plays the flute but he is not the flute; he hears the music but he is not the music. He's riding the Ox Home but has not yet reached Home; he stills lives in separation from his own nature and the world around him.



Next is picture seven. Here the boy is not *riding* the Ox home, here he is Home. He has "Gone Beyond the Ox" or "Transcended the Ox"; or we could say he has "Become the Ox." The seeker realizes that the Ox is his own nature. The subtle duality of witness consciousness has collapsed into a seamless unity; the seeker's identity is established as the all-embracing presence, the pure awareness that is co-extensive with all existence. This is the station of unity consciousness where nothing is other than you. Here you do not abide *in* consciousness or stand apart from that which you experience, here you know yourself as consciousness, as everything.

This could be seen as the first stage of enlightenment; it's the fundamental and irreversible shift of your identity from me-as-this-person to me-as-all-embracing-consciousness.

The full moon represents a sense of completion, a sense of fullness and well-being. This inherent sense of fullness, where nothing is felt to be missing, comes with every stage of enlightenment, this being the first.



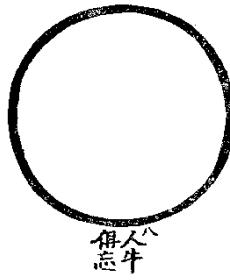
Once you realize your essential identity as presence then you have to be it, you have to live it, you have to integrate it with your human life. This awakened presence has to be “tamed,” which entails a process of embodiment, integration, and “catching up.” There’s no Zen picture representing this stage, which we might call “Taming Enlightenment” or better yet “Bull in a China Shop.” Here the old and outmoded patterns of your human life are brought up to speed and aligned with your awakened self. This is the time when you have to grow up and become a true human being—and this process can be difficult, tumultuous, and disorienting. This is when the bliss of awakening meets the shit of existence. (And so, finally we have it—enlightenment is shit, enlightenment is a four-letter word.) This is a time when we experience some serious “growing pains.” That three-year old ego-self does not want to evolve beyond its old survival patterns; it does not want you to mature. Really, it does not want to let go of its toy—and that toy is you! The ego-self and its unconscious inertia do not vanish with awakening. But you’re not here to play whack-a-mole where you beat down the ego each time it raises its ugly head; here your response must be the loving embrace of it all, ego included. And this requires a deep level of inner and outer support. But don’t worry, now that your true self has come “online” it will be there to support you every step of the way.

Some people call this period “the crucifixion.” Saniel Bonder, who formed the spiritual path of *Waking Down*, calls it “the wakedown shakedown.”

It is the beginning of a descent from the bliss of union to embodiment as an individual human being; it is a descent that can be characterized by phases of shattering bewilderment. This is the stage in which both crucifixion and resurrection are experienced. After the blissful melting in God ... the self must face

great tests in order to recognize that it lives for nothing but God, that it wants nothing else but Truth. The individuality is returned to the one who comes to this station, but this individuality no longer thinks it owns itself. True awe of God is only possible after one has returned from unity to individuality.

(Helminski, *The Knowing Heart*, p. 112)



Picture eight is an empty circle representing emptiness (or absence) and also fullness (or perfection). This is the classic symbol of enlightenment. In this picture “The Ox and the Self are Transcended,” which means you have gone beyond your fundamental identity as pure consciousness and have become one with absence, with the absolute, with the vast, edgeless emptiness from which all things arise. Here you realize that all existence is the creative outpouring of the unborn Absolute. Being so identified with the Absolute you may feel as if you don’t exist; yet, even so, even if you are not aware of yourself, you still exist.

In the previous picture you were one with everything—on *this side* of creation. Here you are one with the Absolute, with the uncreated Source—on the *other side* of creation.

The empty circle depicts the old idea of enlightenment—a state (or a station) of perfection, of pure transcendence, where you are far beyond the world and the messiness of human life. It’s a state that’s universal and impersonal, one where your own existence as the very holder of the state is missing.

As mentioned, one thing about enlightenment is that each stage has an inherent fullness to it and you can’t imagine anything beyond the state you’re in. But your soul feels incomplete; it knows there’s more, it knows that something’s still missing—and what’s missing is you, the totality of your being.

Picture eight used to be the final picture in the series. Then some wise Zen master added two more pictures to depict a

fuller and more integrated representation of enlightenment.

Once you find your formless identity as Buddha-mind, as pure Spirit ... you will not remain merely Formless and Empty. You will Empty yourself of Emptiness: you will pour yourself out into the mind and world, and particularly that specific mind and body that is called you; this lesser self will become a vehicle of the Spirit that you are. (Wilber, *Simple Feeling of Being*, p. 56)



The next picture, picture nine, is “Reaching the Source.” This picture may confuse people since the empty circle represents the traditional understanding of enlightenment. So what is this? What’s up with the tree and the flowing water? I thought we realized the Source in the last picture. (Well, yes, we realized the Source, the Emptiness but we did not realize the loving fullness of that emptiness.)

In picture seven we realize our unity with Consciousness (and all existence) on *this* side of creation; in picture eight we realize our unity with the Absolute (with emptiness or non-existence) on *the other* side of creation. Here we find ourselves on both sides of creation and on neither side. What side? Here we realize ourselves as that original impulse, that primordial value, that overflowing and ever-filling love. Here we find that miraculous and paradoxical co-existence of presence and absence, emptiness and fullness, the unborn source of being and the ever-born expression of love.

Shortly before his death, I met with Philip Kapleau in Rochester, New York. In one of our conversations he mentioned that he wished his Zen had had more heart. In other words, he felt that his version of Zen was incomplete; it did not go beyond picture eight. For that emptiness to be completed or fulfilled it must be filled with overflowing delight, with an outpouring of the heart, with aliveness, beauty, and joy. Otherwise

it's nothing. It's like having a blank canvas with no picture on it. What's the point of that? A clean slate is certainly preferable to one that is all mucked-up but it cannot compare to one upon which a masterpiece has been painted.

If all of creation is an outpouring of Divine delight then we are not complete or in unity with the Divine unless we, too, embody, express, and become that same delight. This picture is a nature scene. Nature is a pure, yet impersonal, embodiment of the Divine. It's filled with beauty, harmony, fullness, and delight yet it does not know it. We want to experience our own nature in the same way yet know it; we want to be a knowing, conscious, creative expression of Divine Delight.



Now we come to picture ten, the last stage of this journey, where the inner dimensions are unified, where one's human self is seamlessly integrated with the wholeness of our divine nature. Here you become one with the eternal wellspring of Life, the effervescent Source of All. You are now a true co-creator in the joyful and boundless expression of Life. Here the personal and the universal are inseparable; here your life and Life Itself create a single contemporaneous expression of wonder. But this is not the final end; your life is ever-deepening, ever-evolving, evermore embodying that unimaginable Everythingness.

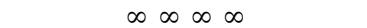
The journey of awakening is not just the journey of waking up, being free of self, and realizing that life as we knew it was a dream. It is also reentering, coming back down from the summit of the mountain, as it were. So long as we're staying at the summit of awakening, in the transcendental place of the absolute, where we are forever unborn and forever untouched and forever undying, there is an incompleteness to our realization.

(Adyashanti, *The End of Your World*, p. 168)

Pictures seven through ten can be seen as representing different stages of enlightenment. (In his earlier teachings, Anadi used to talk about these very stages.) Picture seven represents *enlightenment to Consciousness* where you feel yourself in co-extensive unity with all existence; where everything is experienced as your own self, as your own consciousness. Picture eight represents *enlightenment to the Absolute*, where you realize yourself as the unborn Source of all, as the ground of existence and non-existence. Picture nine represents *enlightenment of the Heart*, where you realize yourself as the wondrous outpouring of all creation, as fullness, as *ananda*, as overflowing delight, and, indeed, as the creative impulse of all existence. And picture ten represents *enlightenment to Me*, to the pure "I" of existence, to the one-with-Spirit self in whom all these dimensions of enlightenment are unified and embodied.

In pictures one through seven the seeker is a boy; here, in picture ten, he's a man, a full and complete human being. This final picture shows the man *with* a boy who, like himself before, is a seeker on the path. This indicates that the fully enlightened being is naturally inclined to serve others and, if called to do so, to help guide seekers on the path. The man is pot-bellied; he enjoys the fullness of life. He does not have to be a Zen guy or an enlightened guy; he is free to enjoy the boundlessness of his inner nature and also his human activities, seeing no difference between the two. He can drink, smoke, play golf, have sex, whatever. Okay, sex—I think we'll end with that. There's still hope for Ken.

Now where are those nachos?



DAY FOUR: Afternoon Session

Enlightenment and Transformation

When a person reaches enlightenment what effect does this have on his human life? Does he suddenly gain power, knowledge, a saintly demeanor, or move beyond all suffering? This is the kind of transformation we most often hear about.

Well, yes, wishful seekers often hold to the notion that awakening will suddenly transform the whole of their human nature and put an end to all of their problems. Not so. Nor does enlightenment magically impart you with intelligence and wisdom, but it gives you insight into your own nature and a new way of living in this world. Enlightenment does not turn you into a flawless human being. It does not change the blueprint or “design” of your life. It does not solve your human problems. There may be a softening, an insight into your human nature, and the emergence of a new, unimaginable potential, but not a wholesale transformation on the human level. Enlightenment will not turn you into a master poet or musician. These are aspects of the human dimension that must be developed independently of the enlightened state. The realization of your own nature, however, has a profound and far-reaching affect on your human self. It illuminates your life and affords you with a true foundation from which to do inner work but it doesn’t do anything for you. You still have to do what it takes to become a whole and integral human being.

Enlightenment is great—but now what? You still have to get a life. It’s like this: a young man says to his mother, “Hey mom, you see, all those years of meditation and chanting have paid off—I finally reached the state of supreme enlightenment!” And the mother says, “Okay, great, now could you please clean your room and get a job.”

And instead of being delivered into unending bliss, life after

awakening can be quite challenging. All your old ways of doing things lose their efficacy and charm. You can't stick your head in the sand and refuse to take responsibility as you did in the past. Your seemingly "blissful ignorance" is no longer an option. You're more open to life, the whole of life, and so it can pack a bigger wallop. At some point you may also have a sense of being trapped or "held down." By way of example, my first car was an old Mercedes Benz diesel which had a top speed of about 60 miles per hour. I was happy just getting from point A to point B. If I got stuck behind a slow driver it did not matter that much because I had no power to go fast anyway. But what if I had a new Lamborghini? How then would I feel being stuck behind a slow driver? Pretty frustrated. I would have all this power under my hood yet could not use any of it. Likewise, when you realize your infinite nature and still find yourself stuck in this human body, in this human life, with all of its limitations, it can be pretty frustrating. However, once you're able to embrace those limitations and "get in the game" so to speak, things change: you're able to tap into the vast freedom that exists within the context of those limitations. But don't expect this to happen overnight. ...

With awakening you enter a dual mode of evolution: a new, evolutionary course begins for your spiritual self—which was not possible before because you did not have conscious access to your spiritual self—and, also, you continue to evolve as a human being, only now with the whole of your human dimension guided and empowered by the presence of your higher self. These two evolutionary movements take place concurrently; they inform and support each other. Access to your own nature must be present to bring about a deeper transformation of your mind and human life; and the wholeness and integrity of your human life is needed to support and fuel your movement into deeper levels of realization. ...

But your participation is still required. Evolution is not given to you. Becoming a whole and integrated human being requires work. Your ability to actuate your own transformation, through a pure intention and the artful use of your own consciousness is a great gift of human life. Don't waste it.

I don't understand how an enlightened being can get angry or sad. I thought that once you realized yourself as pure consciousness (or the witness) that you were beyond all of that.

Well, as the witness you may be aloof to all of that—and you may also be aloof in some state of *samadhi* or nothingness—but when you embrace yourself as consciousness, as the totality, then you're not aloof to all of that, you are all of that!

Earlier we talked about three selves or three foundational identities, or what could be understood as three existences of “I am.” The first is *the conceptual self* or the ego-self as it were. This self is founded upon our self-image, or self-concept, and its mainstay is the belief that we are this separate individual. Then there is *the pure, sensual self*. We could also call this the one-with-life self. This is the pure self you occupied as a child; it's a self that is innocent, vulnerable, and without self-consciousness; it's a self in direct communion with the flowing joy of life. Then there is the *true self*, or the *spiritual self*, which is you as infinite consciousness, pure awareness; you as the absolute mystery from which everything comes into existence.

With enlightenment you see through the illusion of the ego-self (and the world of separation it creates); you see that self as a useful representation but not who you truly are. You also get more in touch with your feeling, one-with life self; and, over time, become a more sensitive, present human being. And you realize your fundamental self as Consciousness, as contiguous with all of Life. All three selves are activated and alive in you. That's the good news and the bad news.

With enlightenment your actions are no longer determined or plotted out in accord with your defensive ego-self or with how you think others see you but with how you feel and how life moves you in the moment. You no longer live in that safe, conceptualized ego-world where you are buffered from the infinitude of your joy and the depth of your sorrow. As such, you are more exposed, more vulnerable, more alive. And things can get pretty raw, pretty primal. In this state of direct communion with Life you are open to all of your laughter and all of your tears, much like you were as a child. So, when old hurts and emotions rise up you are not impelled to suppress, or deaden, or spiritualize away all of that messy stuff. Anger or sadness may flare up. Long-suppressed tears may well up.

Anger is largely the result of unfulfilled desire and it's often a remnant of one's undeveloped child-self. If someone is intent on transformation, on becoming a mature human being, he will not simply indulge in that anger, like a child; he'll get to the bottom of it and work through it. An enlightened being who is still reactive and still at the mercy of his anger is what we might call a not-yet-matured enlightened being, someone who still has more work to do on the human level. ... People tend to idolize or even dehumanize an enlightened being, feeling somehow that they should be in some kind of ethereal state beyond human beingness. This is a hopeful projection. Someone in an enlightened state can get angry, be sad, enjoy sex, and experience a full range of human emotions.

It seems that awakening can sometimes corrupt the human self and empower the ego. We sometimes see this with spiritual teachers. Do you find this to be the case?

Whenever there's spiritual power mixed in with an undeveloped ego, and a lot of devotees trying to be egoless, look out! There's going to be trouble.

One's true self, if not correctly understood, or if lived in a way that is out of sync with human integrity, or if hijacked by a not-yet-matured ego, can thwart or derail one's human development and growth. And, yes, sadly, we sometimes see this with spiritual teachers.

The thing a seeker should watch out for are his own projections and assumptions. Even though a spiritual teacher may have had some kind of awakening, which affords him spiritual insight and power, he's likely to remain the same flawed human being as he was before awakening, unless he does the inner work that is required. But all the adoration and expectations of his followers may force the teacher to assume a persona of perfection and keep up a spiritual façade. He's more likely to spend time and energy on maintaining that outer show—or running some important, world-changing organization—than on becoming a true human being. Or, it could be, that he has been seduced by his own power and appeal and acts like a rock star; he's finally in a position to get all those beautiful girls which, as an awkward child, he was never able to get.

And then, of course, we have the patently false gurus; these people have a certain charisma and sway over others, mixed in with some spiritual knowledge and perhaps the ability to channel some form of collective energy (by which they can activate “far out” spiritual states in others) but not the true state of enlightenment. They have, as it were, the presence of power but not the power of presence. This is where a lot of power-mongers, sociopaths, charlatans, and rogue spiritual teachers come onto the scene. So, let the buyer beware.

Switching from the false to the true, can you tell us about some of the enlightened beings you have met?

Most of the enlightened beings I know appear as ordinary human beings. Some are even rough around the edges. And

this can be rather disheartening to someone who wants to equate enlightenment with some kind of human perfection or saintliness. That beatific smile, that “look” of enlightenment, is nothing but hype. There’s no enlightened look. When someone awakens to his own nature, and realizes his unity with the all of Life, he becomes more authentic, more himself, and oftentimes more quirky—and not free from the problems, concerns, and the stuff of human life. Sorry.

One of my closest “enlightened” friends was Stephen Jourdain. When we were together he would tell people that I was like a son to him. He smoked all the time and ate whatever he liked. He loved to play golf. Looking back on his life he wished he had become a golf pro instead of a real estate agent. (When I first heard about this profoundly enlightened guy, who was a real estate agent and not some spiritual teacher somewhere I was kind of surprised. This did not fit in with my concept of what an enlightened guy should look like.) I once mentioned to him that he should come to America to live, and he was fine with that. He said he had had enough of France. So I was going to set him up with a house near a golf course, right here in the Catskills. Unfortunately, he never made it out here; he passed away earlier this year. That was a very sad day. . . .

Then there’s Kabir Helminski and his wife Camille. They are real, they are present; they have a life. Many awakened beings I know abide in a deep inner state but are imbalanced as human beings; we could say they have two loaves of bread in the oven where one is baked and the other half-backed. But Kabir and his wife are the full package. They are true Sufis.

Then there’s Saniel Bonder. He’s one of the most personable enlightened beings I know. His humanity is disarming and even disturbing to some. I call him “irreplaceable.”

Another person I have to mention is Metta Zetty. She’s the sweetest woman you’re ever going to meet; she’s very much in

Enlightenment is a Four-Letter Word

touch with her human, emotional side and she exudes a beautiful kind of empathy, and warmth, and delight. She does some kind of business-consulting work down in Texas. I recall her telling me about having a severe mold problem in her house; and I would say to people, “You see, even an enlightened being can have a mold problem.”

I never met Almaas but his earlier talks—captured in the five books of the *Diamond Heart* series—is among the most sublime and penetrating spiritual expressions I have yet to come across. If you were banished to an island, and could only take one set of spiritual books, this is the set you should take.

The awakening created a reverence toward existence itself. My love for life was multiplied by ten thousand. I recognized something absolutely sacred in it. Thus, the awakening does not alienate one from life, it reintroduces one to it. . . . Life becomes stupendously interesting. That fundamental quality fitting to all life is quite simply divine. . . . The story of awakening isn’t that of a fusion into a great, anonymous mass, but that of the birth of a new person. (Jourdain, *Radical Awakening*, 82, 98, 121)

Any authentic spirituality, whether it is Sufi or something else, any spirituality that has not degenerated into a device that serves our egoism or separation, teaches that our humanness is a treasure. . . . So what we are trying to develop is our humanness, our sacred humanness. This work is about the integration of humanness with transcendence—making them completely one.

(Helminski, *The Knowing Heart*, p. 248)

I was also delightfully surprised to discover, in this moment of exquisite euphoria, that “I”—the little identity I recognize as “me”—did not disappear or get extinguished! I was astonished that “I” didn’t have to die in order to “experience” this magnificent Wholeness! The Realization of this incredible integration occurred and yet “I” still remained conscious and aware. The personality remained intact: “I” was still “me,” and “I” was still here, but “I” was now contained within, and not separate from, the Presence and Essence of a vast and integrated Wholeness.

(Zetty, www.awakening.net)

Enlightenment and the Human

Could you talk a little more about the fundamental differences between the human state and the enlightened state?

The primary difference relates to one's identity, one's fundamental sense of self. Someone in the typical human state is wholly identified with his mental "me"; he is fully convinced that he is this person in separation from others, from the world, from Life; while someone in the enlightened state lives from the felt sense and certainty that his essential self is Consciousness, that his singular life is inseparable from the all of Life. This does not mean that there's no person here (or that there's only a perfected person.) I'm not saying that you don't have a body or a mind. What I'm saying is that you *have* a body, you *have* a mind, you *have* an individual identity. These are things you *have*, things you can use and enjoy, things that allow you to exist as this individual expression of Consciousness, but they are not you, not the whole of who you are.

Living as this ego-self, as this so-called normal human being is not normal. It's not natural. It's at odds with your own nature and the pressing truth that you are contemporaneous with all of Life. How can you be separate and cut off from everything when you *are everything*?! Living as this mental "me" renders you incapable of truly feeling or truly being you. How can you be truly alive when you are living through an imagined self, a mentally-fabricated self? And, so, most spiritual seekers are in a bit of a bind: every moment they're imagining themselves to be this bound, separate, unenlightened person, while every other moment they're seeking unity and freedom from this imaginary bondage. So which one is it?

When a person lives as this separate self it engenders a deep sense of confusion and dis-ease. If he were to ask himself the question "Who am I?" he would not be able to get a solid

answer. What his mind would come up with is a vague and confused mass of concepts, thoughts, identities, feelings, body descriptions, job descriptions—but nothing real about who he truly is. As such, most people go through life having no clue as to who they are. They have no solid sense of self, no foundation upon which to base their lives. All they have to go on is the concept they have of themselves, of the world, of life. And, of course, they spend most of their time and energy defending this hopeless and inept concept of self—trying to make it work, trying to obtain some kind of happiness, peace, or fulfillment through it. Good luck with that, right?

When you live life as this fabricated self it engenders a deep and intractable sense that something is missing, that nothing is quite right. Beneath all of your apparent gains there's always a gnawing sense that nothing is ever going to do it or be enough. And so life becomes one protracted search to fill that emptiness, to find some kind of fulfillment or meaning. And this nagging sense of lack or inadequacy is not pleasant; people do everything they can to gloss it over, ignore it, or keep it at arm's length. They gain all kinds of possessions, stuff themselves with food, stay busy, do spiritual practices, or whatever, but none of that does any good. Beneath it all, they still feel cut off, confused, and empty. And that's because someone who lives as this mental “me,” in this hallucinatory separation from Life, is incapable of being truly alive.

So that's your basic human condition, the world of the mental “me”—a world of confusion, dis-ease, separation, struggle, lifelessness, and inadequacy—and it ain't pretty.

With enlightenment this unnecessary, self-imposed human pain disappears and all the energy and life-force that was heretofore expended in the maintenance of that unnatural state of resistance and separation comes rushing back. For the first time you know what it means to be truly alive. There's no struggle

against anything. You're one with Life. As such, life takes on a tone of clarity, openness, spontaneity, and wonder. You have an unshakable confidence in the natural goodness of things and your life becomes permeated by an abiding sense of contentment and well-being. You still experience the challenges of human life and the limitations of human beingness but always in the context of an abiding unity, joy, and well-being.

Upon entering our Second Life, all these fundamental qualities of how we suffer life in our Spirit/Matter split do indeed disappear, never to return. . . . Fundamental separateness yields to fundamental unity, non-separateness, oneness, Onlyness. Fundamental confusion about who you are gives way to fundamental confidence in Being. You deeply accept your simultaneously finite and non-finite nature. And fundamental incompleteness fades away, forgotten in fundamental sufficiency and wholeness in and with all that exists.

(Bonder, *Healing the Spirit/Matter Split*, p. 90-91)

The surprise is that this is what you have been all the time. It's never been otherwise. You've always been the supreme person, all the time, in your very substance, including the substance of your personality light. (Almaas, *Diamond Heart IV*, p. 14)

Spiritual and Psychological Pain

As I understand it, one aim of Buddhism is the elimination of suffering. What kind of suffering does this refer to?

Human beings suffer in many ways, some of which can be eliminated and some of which cannot. The pain that can be eliminated is the self-imposed, psychological pain that comes about when you live as this ego-self, as this image of self, as this imaginary entity cut off from life and your own nature. There's also the secondary pain that results from the ego's defense of this false position of separation. So there's pain and there's the egoic resistance to pain. I'm not sure which one is worse. Both these types of pain are self-imposed, unnecessary,

burdensome, and dissipate with awakening.

But there's also the "growing pains" of human life, which can come in the form of frustration, sadness, despair, or whatever. This pain enables us to develop and become more integral as human beings. This pain does not go away upon awakening; and often times it gets worse. With awakening, there's a deeper empathy toward all beings, a greater intimacy with life, and this can make you more vulnerable, more susceptible.

There's also another kind of pain that we might call *existential pain* or friction, or simply the core pain of human existence. This pain is not conditioned; it does not come and go like psychological pain. It cannot be eliminated. It comes with the territory of being a human being. It's the discomfort or dis-ease you feel when you, as infinite consciousness find yourself limited by this human form. (Saniel Bonder calls this the "core wound"; others call it the "core condition.") It would be very good for your spiritual well-being to become aware of and *feel* this core discomfort, this core condition of human life; because, in doing so you accept and welcome yourself, as infinite consciousness, into this incarnation, into this embodiment. ...

If, as they say, your fundamental nature is infinite Consciousness then *any* limitation, even a necessary limitation—such as being a human being, an angel, or the overlord of a galaxy—is going to limit your infinite nature and create some kind of discomfort. So feel that. Become conscious of that. Don't run from that. That's what it feels like to be you; that's how infinite Consciousness feels when limited to a human form. If you run from the pain of your own existence what then are you running from?—from the totality of yourself from your own awakening. Part of what it takes to be here—in a beneficial and liberating way—is to not only be the All of Life but to accept and grow within the context of your human limitations.

How do we recognize and attune ourselves to this existential pain, this primary discomfort? What does it feel like?

You attune to it by slowing down, by relaxing; by not being so occupied with all your busy-ness; by opening up to what is here. Stop doing and *feel*. Get out of your head and into your heart. Be in your body and not in your *thoughts about* your body. Be still. This discomfort is often experienced as a sense of being stuck or out-of-sorts; or as a general kind of dis-ease, restlessness, or low-level anxiety. Or as just plain *yuk*. It's the *yuk* of human existence. Nothing is causing it; nothing is wrong with it. It's there all the time like the background noise of the universe. And when you're able to feel that *yuk*, that discomfort, feel it! Instead of doing everything you can to avoid it or spiritualize it away, just feel it, embrace it, own it—and not as yet another strategy to try and get rid of it. Just feel it. That pain is you; it's how it feels to be you—you as Consciousness existing as a human being.

The core wound of confusion and separateness. ... is the preliminary, makeshift, inevitable result of the appearance of a life-form on Earth that is as finite as a stone and as infinite as God. ... by allowing and relaxing into your finite, local, human self, with all its limits, frailties, and failings, you avail yourself of the opportunity for the fullest possible realization and expression of your divine nature. (Bonder, *Waking Down*, p. 29-30)

Regarding the unnecessary human pain, how do I get rid of it? This seems to be one of the primary aims of spiritual practice.

You can get rid of all this unnecessary pain by, well, not imposing it upon yourself, by not living as this mental “me” in separation from Life—and by not trying to avoid it.

I don't care if you're a spiritual seeker or a bum on the street, so long as you live as this ego-self, so long as you pour the whole of your existence into this tiny idea you have of yourself, you're going to feel the pain of that. As Alan Watts

once said, “The ego is an illusion married to a futility.” Why then do we hold onto it? Fear, ignorance, force of habit, unconsciousness—you name it. If you live as the ego, if you “buy into” its version of you, well then, yes, your whole life will be an illusion married to a futility, and a painful one at that.

The ego isn’t a complete futility—I mean it’s a necessary part of who we are, isn’t it?

Yes it is, when rightly utilized. Bear in mind that the ego is not a thing, it’s a kind of survival-defense programming; and the way it works is to limit and then defend your conceptual sense of “me.” When you come into this world you have no sense of “me.” Basically, when you’re born you’re “one with everything.” As you develop the mental capacity to form an identity you gain a sense of “me” which, initially, has no boundaries but which, over time, eventually comes to refer exclusively to your body-mind self. Anything that gets or becomes part of this “me” gets defended. A psychological threat—such as a threat to your self-image, identity, or “ego”—gets defended with the same voracity as a physical threat. Early on we need this kind of ego-protection, not only to protect our physical body but to protect our fragile and newly-forming identity. The ego protects us in the same way that an eggshell protects a chicken embryo. That’s good at the beginning, and essential for our early development, but in order for the chicken to mature and become a chicken it must break free of its shell. Likewise, in order to mature and become a true human being we need to break free of this ego-shell, this mental “me.”

And how does this simple, ego-protection plan work? Well, whatever experience the ego stamps or codes into memory with a “me” becomes part of my “me”-self; and whatever it does not stamp with a “me” becomes something other than who I am. It’s that simple. I bump my head—that pain (which

relates to the protection of my body) gets a “me.” Someone says something bad about the way I act—my hurt feelings (which relate to my self-image) get encoded in the memory with a “me.” That tree over there does not get assigned with a “me.” Someone may chop it down without having any effect on “me.” Whatever gets coded with a “me” becomes part of my identity and gets defended. But what are we actually defending in the end?—nothing but a concept we have of ourselves, a conglomeration of ego-created “me”s.

But who is to say that I am not that tree “over there,” or the world, or the all of Life? How come the greater part of who I am, that which is embraced by my own consciousness, does not get tagged with an ego-“me”? *I* see that tree. *I* experience it. Is that not a clear indication of “me”?

What if your sense of “me” included everything you experienced, everything you are conscious of, the whole of who you are. What would that be like? That would be freedom.

Transmission of Mind to Mind

What about spiritual initiation or the awakening of one’s spiritual energy? How important is that for a spiritual seeker?

I was thinking about this the other day after reading something from Aurobindo’s book, *The Synthesis of Yoga—Part I*. The first time I read that book I took out my pencil and underlined every significant passage; by the time I was done the whole book was underlined! Very early on Aurobindo describes the absolute dedication or “consecration” that’s needed to make any progress on the spiritual path; and such dedication is rather impossible for the vast majority of seekers. How is anyone able to take even one step on the path without this absolute commitment? They can’t—well, they can’t without the help of grace, without the help of an enlightened teacher who

naturally transmits his or her awakened state. This transmission is one of the most palpable forms of grace; it's an absolute boon to every seeker and, in most cases, an absolute necessity. This transmission shifts your energy; it templates your human existence with a higher order and potential. Without this kind of "outside help" very few seekers can make any kind of real progress or bring this journey to completion.

All the help in the world will not help you if you're not open to it. So it's up to you; you need to keep opening yourself to this higher resonance, keep honoring this precious gift.

And I'm not talking about some kind of "initiation" or a single, cataclysmic awakening of one's spiritual energy; I'm talking about an ongoing transmission that takes place between a seeker and an awakened teacher. This is referred to in Zen as a "transmission of mind to mind." But the Chinese character for "mind" is also that for "heart" so this could also be understood as a "transmission of heart to heart." More precisely, however, it's a transmission of one's whole being to that of another. It takes place on a level beyond the mind, beyond the cognitive intelligence. This transmission potentiates every spiritual practice and aspiration. And the more "heart to heart" it is, the more personal it is the more power it has. Without this kind of grace your spiritual efforts are likely to be lifeless and without effect. So, yes, a direct and ongoing relationship with an awakened teacher is often crucial. It's also possible to have a direct opening to the Source itself but this is quite rare.

Is there any value in trying to mirror or emulate the outer actions of a spiritual teacher? Would this put someone in resonance with the enlivening power of grace?

Some kind of transmission usually takes place when you're in the direct company of a realized being but it usually takes place on a level that is deeper than that of your ego-self or

your mind. Your heart, your soul, and your subconscious mind naturally harmonize with the silent energy of such a person; it's nothing you can do. All you can "do" is stop doing, be still, be open, and get out of your own way. Instead of trying to mirror or emulate a spiritual teacher it would be better to be your natural self, to live what is true for you.

This reminds me of a story from the Jewish tradition: Zusya was a great servant of the Lord but he never reached a state of true realization. When he died and appeared before God, he said, "O how I wished I had been more like Moses," to which God replied, "O how I wish you had been more like Zusya."

Your Me is already present. . . . you are not looking for something outside of what you are. You are looking for that which is present in the heart of your very existence.

(Kristof, *The Human Buddha*, p. 48)

Just so you know, I don't lead workshops or give courses on meditation. I agreed to be part of this retreat because Ken asked me to—about a dozen times. And so, here we are. I'm not the "enlightened guy." I'm not the special person. We're all equal expressions of the Divine. If you look at me in some way different from how you look at yourself, or the person sitting next to you, then you're missing the point.

All this stuff about needing a teacher—I've been there, I've done that. I think it may be time for me to go it on my own.

So you've been there and done that but if you look closely you may find that you've never really been there and never really done that and, as such, never really gotten anywhere.

Most followers of the guru don't really have a guru nor do they want one. They're looking for a strong father figure, or a loving mother figure, or someone who can bless them and tell them that everything is alright; or perhaps they want someone

with spiritual power who can ignite within them some kind of far-out, blissful state. That's what many seekers want and that's what they get. All that stuff is good for the ego and perhaps it helps fulfill with some basic human needs but a true seeker wants something more. He wants someone who can help deliver him from the tyranny of the false ego; someone who can help empower his heart and mind, and open him to the infinite expanse of his own nature.

The function of a true teacher is not to control you, or get anything from you, or have you become a devotee or a loyal foot soldier in their great, world-changing movement. It's to inspire within you a true spiritual longing and intention; it's to open up a channel between you and the quickening power of grace. It's this power that leads to ultimate transformation. Neither you, nor your ego, nor your efforts, nor a teacher can bring about this kind of radical transformation; only That which created you in the first place can bring you to completion.

The ego person in us cannot transform itself by its own force or will or knowledge or by any virtue of its own into the nature of the Divine; all it can do is to fit itself for the transformation and make more and more its surrender to that which it seeks to become. ... If a spiritual transformation, not a mere illuminating modification of our nature, is to be done at all, we must call in the Divine Shakti to effect that miraculous work in the individual; for she alone has the needed force, is decisive, all-wise and illimitable. (Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga—I*, p.43)

A Journey Through the Solar System

Last night you mentioned a correspondence between the stages of the spiritual path and the planets of the solar system. Could you talk a little more about that?

I think we covered the stages this morning but since this schema is somewhat different we'll give it a quick go through. If you have some understanding of astrology I think you'll be in a

better position to appreciate this explanation.

First off, this whole journey begins with you, with where you are, here on planet Earth. You have to be here, grounded, in your body, as your human self; you can't be, as they say, a "space cadet." Now, before you're able to journey out to the far reaches of the solar system you have to "go back" and consolidate the energies of Mercury and Venus. Mercury is about gaining intelligence, discrimination, and spiritual knowledge, and coming into the right relationship with your mind. Venus is about getting in touch with your feeling nature, your heart.

Mercury and Venus are the personal planets, integral to the human dimension; so you have to cultivate these fundamental energies and reach some level of maturation on the human level before you can begin this journey in earnest.

In this journey beyond Earth the first planet we encounter is Mars. This is the planet of action, of doing; and here you get involved with all kinds of practices and ego-based pursuits. Mars, being the god of war, might also prompt you to try some "hyper-masculine" approach such as killing the ego or trying to get rid of your human preferences and tendencies. So you do all this seeking, all this action-based stuff for a while, perhaps years or lifetimes; and maybe you make some progress and become a very spiritual person but you're still fundamentally the same; you're still living your life as this separate ego-self. Perhaps after years of bootless practice you realize that all of this spiritual efforting is not working and has never really worked; and maybe at this point you're tired, and hopeless, and beaten down enough to finally let go, throw in the towel, give up the ghost. If you're able to do that, if you're able to let go of your will-based approach to spirituality and just open up to who you are you'll begin to move beyond the gravitational pull of Mars. ... But then you hit the asteroid belt! All that ego resistance; it's a massive whirl of jagged rocks. If you can get

past all of that, in one piece, you'll reach Jupiter.

Jupiter is the giant of the solar system; it represents the initial expanse and euphoria of awakening, where your primary identity shifts from me-as-this-person to me-as-infinite-consciousness. But Jupiter is nowhere near the end. You see, even though you realize your fundamental nature as infinite consciousness, and feel the expansion of that, you still exist as this person. All your entrenched habits are still intact. After this initial expansion, when the euphoria wears off, you may come to feel more and more boxed in or trapped by the inescapable limits of your human existence. The crucifying pain that comes about when your infinite nature hits those human limits is represented by the next planet, Saturn. The purpose of Saturn—which is part of every hero's journey—is to make you strong; to serve as a catalyst to heal the deep splits within your psyche; to complete and give shape to your human existence and your lived enlightenment. Saturn is the planet of limitation, of embodiment, of being here, in this body, as this human being. And this process can be a painful, crucifyingly painful. (And, as you may know, the symbol for Saturn contains a cross.)

Beyond Saturn are the planets of Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto. Uranus represents the quickened course of life that often comes after awakening, where old patterns and conditions, at odds with your newly awakened state, may abruptly shift or fall away. Neptune represents the mystery and depth of the ocean of consciousness (the void) you have just plunged into and which you cannot possibly fathom or hold of with your mind. Pluto represents the ruthless destruction of your separate ego and the final emergence of yourself as a true human being.

Once you've completed this journey, and have reached a higher octave of your being, the journey continues in yet another form. Human birth is the beginning of the human journey; enlightenment is the beginning of the spiritual journey;

and complete God-realization is, I surmise, the beginning of a whole new journey beyond the human realm. We never know what will come next only that *something* will come next. As I said before, there's no end to it. You're never "done."

Any chance you can offer a super-simplified version?

If you want to get clear on where you're at just ask yourself: "What is motivating me on my spiritual quest?" And secondly, "What do I really want?" The answers to these two questions should help you figure out where you're at.

A simplified version could be reduced to two paths: the lower path and the higher path, or what Paul Brunton calls the "long path" and the "short path." The long path is the path of self-effort and self-improvement. This is where you seek and do all kinds of spiritual practices in order to reach some pay-off for yourself in the future. Then there is the short path. This is the path of allowance, of openness, of grace, where your orientation is toward Presence, toward abandonment to God.

The long path is about seeking, putting forth effort, trying to improve yourself, becoming a more spiritual person. All of these actions are ego-driven. On this path you do all kinds of spiritual practices, even "selfless service," but the real motivation is to try and improve yourself, or get something for yourself, or be happy, whatever—and, hopefully, reach this enlightenment thing and get all of the heavenly bliss that goes with it.

The practices of the long path can be seen as preparation for the short path. You need to be on the long path and put forth this kind of effort to get your mind in order, to develop as a human being, to undo your false conditioning, to get in touch with your heart, and to remove deep-seated psychological blocks. All of this frees up your life-force and empowers your spiritual work—and you need to build up your mental and spir-

itual power because without this not much is gonna happen on the so-called spiritual path.

Then there is the short path. This is the path of surrender, the path of embracing the present moment. The short path has two phases: The first phase requires self-effort, as the personal self is still directing the action. The effort here is to keep coming back to the present moment, to keep remembering presence, to keep surrendering to your higher self. After repeated application of your will, the higher self (or super-conscious mind) takes over and this remembrance becomes effortless. Now it is grace that carries you forward.

One might see the twelve-step program as sharing some elements with the short path. Step one and step two state, “we admitted that we were powerless ... came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.” In reaching the short path one comes to believe that he is powerless to achieve true transformation, that this enlightenment thing is not going to happen by way of his self-effort but through the grace of a higher power ... and, to the extent that he can open up to and allow that power to enter his life to that extent the all-transforming power of grace will enter. Of course, the only way to truly open up to that higher power is to become unified with that power. If that higher power is outside or other than you, not much is gonna happen. You’re still ensconced in ego land. So, there’s a world of difference between the twelve steps and the short path.

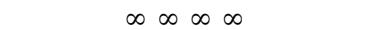
You can be on the long path or the short path, or between paths, in that disorienting place where the long path is ending and the short path is beginning. ...

It is here that we come upon the “dark night,” the “grand disillusionment.” This is where you realize that all your ego-efforts can only get you so far, that after a certain point the total reliance on your own efforts becomes futile. All that ego-

effort—which was so helpful in getting you to wake up every morning at 4:00am to do your practices—is now found to be utterly useless and, more so, an obstacle. Your heart is no longer into it. Your focus begins to shift from you and improving yourself to God. Your efforts are no longer about doing your practices; they’re about the constant invocation of Presence, the total abandonment to God. *

So, where are you at? Steeped in the practices of the long path? Guided by grace in the short path? Or somewhere in between? Regardless of where you’re at, be there. Give yourself to the perfection of the moment. Maybe you need to do more work on the long path—so do more work on the long path. That work is absolutely necessary, and it still goes on even while you’re on the short path. The seeking aspect is gone, the ego-drive is gone, but there’s always work to be done on the human level both pre- and post-enlightenment. As I said before, you’re never “done.” Or, stated another way, your glory is endless.

End of Day Four



* Another schema—which has nothing to do with Zen—can be found in Ezra Bayda’s book *Zen Heart*. He outlines three phases on the path: the Me Phase, Being Awareness, and Being Kindness. Most seekers would benefit, and get a clear handle on where they’re at, by consulting this book.

**Love Care Soul Ever Full Make
Here Open Such Flow Well Real
Have Free Make Self Good Will
Life Fate True Just Rest Joke Ever**

DAY FIVE

The Point of Infinity

There are a few things of note about *The Point of Infinity*. First of all there's Ken. It's his place. It's his vision. In his emails he calls himself Zen. I suppose he thinks Zen is more spiritual than Ken; however, I think Kensho might be even better than Zen. Ken's open and welcoming spirit is one of the highlights of this place. On the front shelf you can find a copy of his book, *Confessions of an Ex-Jesuit*. I'm not sure if he ever got beyond his Jesuit roots and is an ex-Jesuit but you never know with Ken. If a person refers to himself as an "ex-something" it usually implies that he still defines himself in terms of that something. This is the case with many spiritual seekers: they have left their old tradition but still, unwittingly, define themselves through a negation of that tradition. So have they really left? It's like someone saying, "I've been sober for ten years." Someone who is truly sober and not identified with his old, self—nor constantly keeping watch to insure that he doesn't regress—would never say, "I've been sober" or "I am a recovering alcoholic." They would have gone beyond that self and come up with a whole new identity, one that is not related to, or contingent upon, the old one. ...

So here we are at *The Point*. *The Point* has been a way-station or spiritual half-way house for seekers throughout the

years. When someone is between paths, between gurus, or between dimensions they sometimes end up here. And they bring all their stuff, which may include a few boxes of books; and when they leave, a box or two sometimes remains. So we have plenty of spiritual books around here. These kinds of books can be a double-edged sword: they can orient you and keep you on track but they can also be a hindrance, especially if they're relied upon too heavily. So, you might want to follow the 90-10 rule, which means for every hour you spend reading about spirituality you should spend nine hours plus in practice, or contemplation, or abiding in your own presence.

The Path to the Spiritual Path

What's the primary difference between the spiritual path and "the path to the spiritual path" as you have referred to it?

In common parlance, anyone who's spiritually inclined—who meditates, chants, reads spiritual books, eats tofu, or whatever—is considered to be on the spiritual path. However, this is not the case. Most so-called seekers are on the human path, a kind of spiritualized human path, not on the path of spirit or enlightenment. Trouble can begin when someone enters the “spiritual path” in an attempt to appease or somehow skip over his or her human life. This kind of approach invariably leads to a state of imbalance, immaturity, and stagnation. And so what we get and what ends up clogging the spiritual scene are lots of people who are “spiritual” but wrecks as human beings. (Of course, in with the mix, you'll find a few people who have reached some kind of spiritual illumination and maturity but these are few and far between.)

In truth, the spiritual path *begins* with awakening, with the recognition of your self as pure consciousness, with a shift in your fundamental identity, with the end of your ego-based sense of separation. Some people call this shift or awakening

“enlightenment” or “second birth.” Everything leading up to that point—done with sincerity, earnestness, and true spiritual desire—could be seen as the path to the path. All the spiritual nonsense that people do to appease their pain, or spiritualize their ego-self, or deaden themselves to the immediacy of life is not part of the path to the path. That’s the path of ego, the path of avoidance; that’s what people do to get by or make their human lives more tolerable.

As mentioned, we might see the path to the path as the human phase of the journey. This is a necessary part of the journey that cannot be skipped over or chanted away. At first, it involves becoming more conscious and developing yourself as a human being. Here you might become involved in various rituals, spiritual practices, adopt a spiritual lifestyle, etc. Here your actions are primarily ego-driven and based on your individual effort. Later, after years of bootless practices there’s a giving up, a letting-go of the ego-effort which then allows the higher self to enter the game. Both the “lower” and the “higher” phases of the path to the path are necessary. Both are needed to awaken, to reach the path of Spirit.

Prison

Using a familiar metaphor, it seems that we’re in prison and we want to escape but all our efforts don’t lead us to freedom. What’s the problem? What’s keeping us bound?

Well, do you really want to escape or do you just want to improve the condition of your imprisonment? Is this “wanting to escape” just another ploy of the ego? Are you fully resolved, or determined, or willing to do what it takes to escape? I don’t know. Maybe, maybe not. Perhaps you don’t really believe that you’re in a prison; you’re just not convinced. You may understand this notion of being bound but you don’t feel it so you’re not impelled to take any decisive action. Maybe you’re

content just doing the practices hoping that someday something will happen. Or maybe you're happy talking about ways to escape or about great escapes made in the past rather than trying to escape yourself. Or maybe you want to escape but don't have the right plans; so, even if you put in a great effort it will not get you anywhere. The ten years you spend digging that tunnel with a spoon will not lead you beyond the prison walls but only into another prison cell. Or maybe you don't have the right kind of "outside" help. It could be that you're too afraid or just unable to put in the singular, wholehearted effort that is required. So why even bother? Or maybe you have the key in your hand and a sure way to escape but don't know the value of what you have. There's a Sufi story that illustrates this point:

By some error, a devout Muslim—perhaps it was Sheik Nasrudin himself—gets thrown in jail to serve a life sentence. So what does he do? He decides to pray to Muhammad for some miracle that will get him out. He prays all day and all night. After a month or so Muhammad shows up at the prison cell, smiles at his devoted servant, and throws him a key. The seeker is overwhelmed with gratitude for this precious gift received from the Prophet himself. And what does he do? He sets up an altar and places the key on it. Now, with a renewed sense of hope and a sacred item touched by the Prophet himself he prays even more fervently for his freedom.

So what's keeping you in this prison? What's keeping you locked into your belief that you are this separate ego-self? Are you afraid? Are things are "good enough"? Are you convinced that if you just stay with the program, and keep doing what you're doing, that that will lead you to freedom? Who knows what's keeping you stuck or what's thwarting your heart's longing to be free? 'Twould be good to find out.

Your Consciousness is Creative

We hear a lot of talk these days about us as human beings having the power to create our own reality. You know, “you can do anything you set your mind to.” Well, yes and no but more no than yes. Sure, as an individualized expression of Spirit we have vast creative power but in our normal human state, which curtails and obfuscates our true potential (and the power of our creative imagination) under layer upon layer of conditioning, we have little or no access to that power. Worse yet, the creative power afforded to human beings at this stage in evolution is more of a curse than a blessing: most people unwittingly use their power to create a life of bondage and limitation rather than one of freedom and fulfillment. ...

Your consciousness is Spirit, not only one with Spirit but Spirit Itself. As such, you possess every quality of Spirit—creativity, freedom, aliveness, intelligence, awareness, lovingness, etc.—yet this wall of conditioning that now entombs you only allows a glimmer of those qualities to penetrate through. So, yes, you have it, always, but you don’t have it. You don’t have access to it.

Lately there’s been a lot of talk about the law of attraction, The Secret, affirmations, and positive intentions yet, as mentioned, so few people seem to be able to create what they want. What’s the problem? What is the secret to all of this?

The so-called secret is that your every thought and belief is a creative process; they possess the same creative power (or consciousness) that brings this whole universe into existence. And so, by the artful direction of your thoughts, you can help shape your reality. Now try as you may, you may not be able to attract what you want but you will always, effortlessly, attract who you are. That’s the law. So, then, the path of least resistance is to want what you already are. In other words, to

whole-heartedly embrace who you are right now, and Life as it is now appearing. That's the secret—to be “*all in*” with who you already are (*and with what already is*). Being who you are and realizing your unity with the All-Creative Power is far more valuable than using that Power to get all kinds of stuff for yourself. All this stuff you are trying to attract—who is it for, anyway? What will it do for you? (But, don't get me wrong: working with that Power to get what you want may be an important first step because it puts you in direct relationship with that Power.) ... Okay, so let's say you're able to work with that Power and get everything you want. What does that feel like? Just imagine and *enter the feeling* that you, right now, have everything you want. You have wealth, fame, fulfillment, peace, the perfect relationship, etc. There's nothing more for you to do or accomplish or get. Now what? Now who are you? Without all this doing and getting, what is the truth of your life? What gives it purpose and meaning?

So, the secret is to be “*all in*,” to be the whole of who you already are and to embrace every moment of Life as it is now appearing. It's not much of a secret but it's all I got. That's how Spirit creates this whole universe—it's “*all in*.” It's *always* all in. It can never *not* be “*all in*.” It gives itself to everything, so completely that it becomes the very thing it creates. It's never divided, separate, uncertain, or at odds with its creation. So in order to create as Spirit creates, in order to direct your creative power in the most positive and beneficial way, you have to be “*all in*.” And you cannot be “*all in*” unless you realize your unity with Spirit, unless your intention is aligned with the very force that impels Spirit, which is the sheer outpouring of love. You cannot be “*all in*” if you're not yourself, if you're living as this mental “*me*,” this hypothesized version of self; you can't be “*all in*” if you're at odds with your own creation, if you doubt your own power, if you consciously want one thing but subcon-

sciously want something else. Spirit never creates out of fear, or selfishness, or from a sense of lack (feeling that it needs something in order to be whole). So if your actions are motivated by these lesser forces, by a sense of lack, then your creation will be attenuated; it will be at odds with the fullness of Spirit and simply produce more lack. ...

If you're interested in this path, in developing your creative power, you might do well to look at some books by Thomas Troward or Neville Goddard; and also the creative "magic" of the ancient Hawaiians, called *Huna*, might be helpful.

When you've mastered your creative power and are aligned with Spirit, when you're at the very heart of creation, you'll find that everything is showing up exactly as you wish but in a way that's even more magical and wondrous than you could have ever wished-for or imagined. In this state of pure creativity, this state of effortless grace, you get all of yourself and all of Life as well. Now what could be greater than that?

Surrender and Integration

This notion of surrender or dedicating my life to the path brings up a lot of fear. I feel as if I'm going to lose something or that I'll have to give up those things that are most meaningful to me.

Someone completely identified with the ego-self, and holding fast to that fake identity, will surely feel as if he's going to lose something. But you are not that ego-self. You should aspire to come from a higher place, a place of truth, a place of freedom, a place where you fear the tyranny the ego-self and not you prospect of freedom. In this ego-ridden existence there's always going to be fear and more fear. Fear is what the ego uses to control you, to keep you in your place. Fear is integral to the ego's survival strategy; it uses this primal emotion to protect your separate sense of self. The only problem is that

the ego is protecting the *concept* of you—and not even a true concept but one that you formed when you were three years old. It's protecting your existence as a three-year old! And this kind of defense does not allow you to mature into true adulthood; it's suffocating who you are now and who you aspire to be. The ego's fear can do that. It can sap the life out of you; it can keep you walled-in and separate from your own heart. ...

Perhaps you're fearful because the ego-self has you convinced that if you give up this familiar sense of individuality that your life will lose its meaning. What life? What meaning? You're not going to lose anything other than your own delusion and this feeling of being dead even while you're alive. You're not going to lose anything other than your confusion, your out-of-sorts-ness, and your fearful relationship to the world around you. And what you'll gain is your life, the All of Life, your joy, your value, your inexhaustible wonder.

Perhaps the ego-self has you convinced that if you give up this familiar sense of individuality that your life will lose its meaning. What life? What meaning? You're not going to lose anything other than your own delusion and this feeling of being dead even while you're alive. You're not going to lose anything other than your confusion, your out-of-sorts-ness, and your fearful relationship to the world around you. And what you'll gain is your life, the All of Life—your joy, your value, your inexhaustible wonder.

The caterpillar may not want to surrender or give itself to the butterfly; it may want to stay as a fat blob, eating leaves all day. It might get very attached to that blob-form, that initial manifestation of itself, and be deathly afraid to give that up. But from the side of the butterfly, which cannot become this beautiful expression of freedom until the caterpillar surrenders itself, there is no fear. There is, however, an existential disease: the butterfly needs the caterpillar to surrender, to give up

its caterpillar-ness in order for it to come into existence. Likewise, your true self cannot emerge until you, your little “me,” your ego-self gives up and allows you, the real you, the totality that you are, to emerge.

You’re the butterfly. That’s your true self. You need to let go of that leaf-eating blob you to become the love, beauty, and freedom that you already are.

When we talk about sacrifice or surrender, what are we actually talking about? We’re not talking about some ego-version of surrender, some grand gesture, or vow, or lifetime commitment to some guru. We’re talking about a moment to moment sacrifice, one where you let go of your deep involvement with your small “me”—and all its concerns, fears, and routes into forgetfulness—and stay conscious and centered in your own presence, your own “I-ness.”

We want to give up the mind’s inept version of life, move beyond this fear-ridden existence, and live in our own fullness and freedom. In each moment we want to give up our caterpillar consciousness and abide in our butterfly consciousness. Now tell me, what’s so scary about that?

The Sum Total of My Teachings

There’s a quote on the board by Nisargadatta which says something like, “You know that you are. How do you know it and with what do you know it? This is the sum total of my teachings.” Could you offer some insights on this?

This is like a koan that’s not meant to be answered by the mind; it’s meant to direct your attention back to yourself as that pure knowingness, that “I am,” that exists prior to the mind. So *you know that you are*; you know that you exist. No mystery there. You may not know who you are or what you are but you certainly know *that you are*. The first thing, then, is to sense that, to intuit that, to hold to the pure sense of your own

existence, which is your sense of “I.” This is the Source of all you other “I’s.

So you know that you are, that you exist—and *how do you know it?* Well, you just do. How do you know how to move your arm? How do you know how to see that tree over there? You just do. You know it because your nature is pure Consciousness, pure Knowingness. That’s how you know it.

And *with what do you know it?* You know it with your own beingness; you know it by virtue of being that Consciousness, that self-knowing Awareness—not by being you as this imagined ego-self and then, from there, figuring it out with your cognitive mind. We are talking about a non-conditioned knowingness, a heart knowingness. Like I said, if you try to figure it out with your mind you’re going to miss it every time. So, ignore what I just said and feel it.

Focus only on your knowing that “you are.” How do you know you are? Just be there. You have been shadow-boxing with the many concepts you have collected from the world—you are fighting with all that. What is the use of it? You know you are. How do you know it? And with what do you know it? This is the sum total of my teachings needed to put you on the right track, its very quintessence.

(Nisargadatta, *The Ultimate Medicine*, p. 75)

Nisargadatta often spoke about tracing the “I” back to its source. I never quite understood what he meant by that. Could you offer some explanation?

Well, first off, the Supreme “I” and the individual “I” are one and the same. If you don’t get that, on an experiential level, nothing else is gonna make any sense. That realization is what it means to trace the “I” (your individual sense of “I”) back to its Source (which is the Supreme “I.”) Part of this process involves the deconstructing or “divesting” of your individual “I-sense.” You have to realize that this individual “I” is a

superimposition upon your true, universal nature. It's merely a thought-construct of you; and not even that, but more like a thought-construct of who you were as a child or who you think you are in the mind of others.

Right now you're convinced that your individual sense of "I" is somehow different from the Universal "I," that it's yours, that it belongs to you as this individual. This mistake is the very essence of the ego and its binding power.

When I am divested of I, only I remains. ~Ramana Maharshi

When Being Awareness is activated, the sense of "I" does not necessarily disappear, nor does it have to. But it transforms from "I" as "me" to "I" as "Awareness." The I-as-Awareness is not the little or self-centered "I," but rather something quite different. And although it can't be described, it is more real than anything. (Bayda, *Zen Heart*, p. 11)

In his talks Nisargadatta would often say that he was talking to our true self not our ego self. Who are you talking to?

I am talking to myself. I am trying to liberate myself. And I hope that you, as myself, are listening! But, really, most of this is directed toward your human self, toward your conditioned intelligence, toward some speck of sanity that may be available to your evolved ego-self or "me." And not so it can get smarter, or become more spiritual, or help you get enlightened but so it can realize its own futility; so it can "step down" from having to be you; so it can feel safe and relax.

Thank you ego-self; you've done a great job in keeping me safe and looking out for my basic needs when I was unable to do so for myself. You enabled me to develop into this somewhat sane, human individual. And you will always protect me when my physical body is in danger. Thank you for all of that. But now I'm ready to move beyond those old patterns and infantile structures that were once so necessary. I'm ready to

come into my own as a true and mature adult. You no longer have to hold that three-year old identity structure in place. You no longer have to live in constant fear. It's time to step down and be free from all of that. Thank you once again for all your service. I could not have done it without you.

All-Embracing Consciousness

The main strategy of a typical person is to try and maximize the parts of life he likes while rejecting or avoiding the parts he dislikes. He believes that the more he can maximize the pleasant or agreeable experiences and the more he can minimize or reject the disagreeable experiences the happier he will be. That's the must-miss formula of the ego-self. Your true self, as Consciousness, has no such formula. It wholly and unconditionally embraces *everything*; and it really has no choice because it is *everything*. How can Consciousness reject what it is? It can't. But human beings certainly can, and do.

Consciousness not only allows or accepts everything without condition or judgment but embraces everything with the totality of its being—so much so that it becomes everything. In this total embrace Consciousness gives *itself* to everything; it gives itself to you, to your existence, by becoming you. That is the purest expression of love. To the extent you can do the same, to that extent will you open yourself up to and become the all-fulfilling wonder of Life. You want enlightenment? Dare to embrace it, the all of it, now.

Always Already Present

What you have to get, on a very deep level, before you go off in search of this thing called *enlightenment*, before you do all this spiritual stuff, before you endeavor to perceive your own nature as pure awareness or consciousness is that what

you are looking for, what you hope to attain in the future, is already yours—it's already present, right here, right now. (So, technically speaking, it can't be attained because you can't attain what you already have and who you already are.) It is, as Ken Wilber said, "not hard to reach but impossible to avoid." But it seems that the ego-self does the impossible—it causes you to miss it every time. So you have to start from the end, from the conviction that you are already whole, that your own nature is already present; that everything is already here. I don't know who you're going to be when you're enlightened; all I know is that who you are must be present now. That's your starting-point; and that is also your ending-point. Without sounding like Lewis Carroll we could say that the only way to reach your end-point is by beginning there.

I'm not asking you to pierce through the veil of duality in a single, shattering moment or just "wake up." I'm asking you to begin with the certainty that what you're seeking is already here, already present, already you. It can be nowhere else.

Now, if everything is already here then all this seeking for something that is supposedly not here, something that is supposedly going to be found in the future displaces you from the totality that is here. (You know, your seeking sends a message to your subconscious mind—that what you're looking for is missing. If it weren't missing why else would you be seeking it? And then your subconscious mind, trying to support your fundamental sense of self, arranges things so that whatever you believe is missing does, indeed, *appear* to be missing.) ...

How can you get to where you already are? By being conscious of where you already are. By allowing your life, and life itself, to be what it already is. By not allowing your ego-self to project your consciousness into the future or trap it in the past.

Our conditioned tendency as a human is to resist Life, to try and manage or manipulate Life rather than accept it as it

is. (Even your effort to become a better person or be more spiritual is a subtle rejection of who you are right now and Life as it is now appearing.) For the most part, this ego-driven life is nothing but one big resistance to Life, one big “*f you*” to Life, to God, to everything.

Seeking is the very thing that moves you away from ever-present abidance. Trying is the opposite of effortless being. Doing is but an egoic resistance to your natural state of being. So, what to do or *not* to do? Just be here. Just be the totality that you already are. How difficult it that? The real difficulty is in not being who you are and then doing everything you can to try and make that false and untenable position more tolerable.

If you want to do spiritual practices then do them from the unshakable sense of wholeness, as an expression of your nature, your love, and not as some means to attain some far-out state in some “engineered future.” Doing so would be like cutting off your own head so you can then go out and search for it. It would be a lot better to just keep your head on your shoulders in the first place. Perhaps Douglas Harding [who wrote the book, *On Having No Head*] would disagree with me on this one, but I don’t think so—in the end he finally admitted that he, too, had a head. All that time he was overlooking his own head just as the ego-self overlooks that which is never missing. So, according to Douglas Harding, “the practice is ceasing to overlook the Looker.”

You have a choice in the matter: you can focus on your separate person-self—and its endless doing, seeking, improving, etc.—or on your self as pure, ever-present awareness. This is about being conscious, being open to the all of Life, and not whole-heartedly buying into the ego-self which always misses or overlooks that which is never missing. Or, as Douglas Harding said, “the practice is ceasing to overlook the Looker.”

So, if my own nature is always present, what's keeping me from experiencing it? Why do I keep overlooking it?

Your identification with this false “me” is keeping you from experiencing it. Your curtailed and misappropriated sense of “I” is what causes you to keep overlooking it.

As things are set up now, according to your ego-conditioning, you focus on things—and, particularly, you focus only on *things*—while overlooking everything that is not a thing. You see yourself as a separate entity, as a thing; but you are not a thing, you are the pure awareness that allows all things to be. So, abiding in your normal, thing-based awareness you always miss it. That’s the story.

Once your internal guidance system is righted, once your intention is aligned with your highest good, once your heart’s totality supplants your mind’s thingy-ness then your awareness will naturally gravitate toward the Looker. Then you will cease overlooking the Looker, which is your ever-present nature.

Enlightened Existence

I know we already touched on this, but could you talk a little more about the primary difference between the state of enlightenment and the normal human state?

In the “normal” human state—which is really an hallucination—you believe yourself to be this separate person, this thing, this object that exists in the field of your awareness. So, you exist as a concept, an idea of you, and then you do everything you can to try and make Life fit into your concept. In the enlightened state you recognize your fundamental identity as Pure Consciousness in which you, as this conceived-of person, also exist. So, we might say that the primary difference relates to where you—your sense of self, your consciousness—are stationed: either you’re stationed in the true “I-ness” of your na-

ture, unified with all creation, or you're stationed in some fabricated notion of self, where you exist as a thing, a separate person who is in a constant state of doing, seeking, fixing, improving, etc. So where are you?

What is the difference between unity consciousness and witness consciousness?

Witness consciousness can be seen as an interim or transitional state between our usual mind-based awareness and unity consciousness. With witness consciousness you sense a clear difference between you, the subject, and that which you are witnessing, the object. In this state you're still identified with being the witness; you still have a sense of me "in here" while that which you are witnessing is "out there." As such, this is a kind of aloof, disembodied state. It's a state where you don't really show up in your own life. As the witness you are one step beyond the mind and its conditioning yet still one step away from unity consciousness, where subject and object are one, where me-as-this-person and me-as-all-embracing-consciousness are one, where you are no longer *the witness* of everything, you *are everything!*

I am that Witness—a vast, spacious, empty, clear, pure, transparent Openness that impartially notices all that arises, as a mirror spontaneously reflects all its objects. ... With this discovery ... you are halfway home. You have dis-identified from any and all finite objects; you rest as infinite Consciousness. ... And then the strangest thing happens. Resting in the pure Self, abiding as the timeless Witness, noticing the clouds float by in the vast expanse of Emptiness that is my own ever-present awareness, the Witness itself suddenly cannot be found. The Seer vanishes into everything that is seen and never again returns to haunt the universe as a separate and separating force. Subject and object vanish into One Taste. ... I no longer witness the clouds, I am the clouds. I no longer hear the rain, I am the rain. I no longer touch the earth, for I am the earth.

(Wilber, *The Simple Feeling of Being*, p. 7, 8, 5)

Locating Pure Awareness

Is there some practical way to get a better sense of pure awareness or of ourselves as consciousness?

Well, we can try a short exercise that may be helpful. Alright, get comfortable in your body; take your mind out of gear; relax, breath, and get ready to be completely overwhelmed. Let's start with a few simple questions: What are you aware of right now? Maybe you're aware of this room and all these people sitting around. Okay, what else? Do you hear any sounds other than my voice? What do you sense through your body? Your feet on the floor? A stiff back? Okay, that's all good. You're aware of all that. Now how difficult is it for you to be aware of all that? Does it require any kind of effort? Do you need any kind of special knowledge or spiritual training? Okay, so there it is, there you are. You're effortlessly aware of, and totally accepting of, everything you're experiencing through your senses, right now. How amazing! Now *what* is that which is effortlessly aware of everything, including your own sense of "me" as this person? Pure awareness—you as pure awareness, you as consciousness. It's always there, effortlessly taking in the whole panorama of your life experience. It never complains, it never imposes itself on anything, it never changes anything—it just allows every experience in your life to show up, right now. What could that awareness, that knowingness of *your own experience* be if not you? You may not recognize it as such; you may take it for granted or simply overlook it, but it's you. Now how difficult is it to be what you already are? How difficult is it for you to see what you are already seeing, to hear what you are already hearing? So, just know yourself as that, as that which is "contemporaneous with every instant of life."

Looking back on every experience of your life, tell me what was always there? You. That which was always there is always

here. And what is that? You. Amidst all those changes, all those joys and sorrows, all those ups and downs, what was the one constant that was always there to experience it, to be it, to live it? You—you as awareness, you as knowingness, you as pure subjectivity or being. I'm not asking you to attain anything, or reach some supreme state; all I'm asking is that you become aware of that which is already here, that which you have always been. Now is that asking too much?

Your own present awareness, precisely as it is, without changing it or altering it in any way, is perfectly and completely permeated by Spirit ... And this means, as regards your own awareness, that you cannot *become enlightened*. You cannot attain enlightenment ... rather, Spirit, and enlightenment, has to be something that you are fully aware of right now. *Something you are already looking at right now.*

(Wilber, *The Simple Feeling of Being*, p. 135)

The Triune of the Inner Dimension

I'm not clear about the difference between our true nature and presence, consciousness, or awareness? Do all these terms refer to the same inner state?

The term *presence*, along with *awareness* and *consciousness*, generally indicate the *conscious dimension of our true nature* not the totality of our true nature.

The classic description of our true nature is *Sat-Chit-Ananda*. *Chit* refers to consciousness or pure awareness. This can be seen as the first dimension of the inner state, the gateway that opens to the deeper dimensions of our nature. *Sat* is the ground of being, the Absolute, the source, the presence and absence of all. *Ananda* is the joy and wonder that fills all of creation. It is love, fullness, beauty, creativity, and overflowing delight. *Ananda* is often translated as *bliss* but it refers to the whole spectrum of the heart, bliss being but one of its qualities.

These three dimensions of self—consciousness, being, and

the heart—form the foundation of our spiritual self and our psychological make-up as well. This is an ancient Indian concept but we see traces of it in modern expressions as well. I'm sure you've all seen *The Wizard of Oz*. Well, the Scarecrow represents our human intelligence (or consciousness); the Tin Man, the heart, the emotions, and the capacity to feel; and the Lion, our will, resolve, and purpose. Head, heart, belly. These are the three foundational qualities of our human nature. As we develop these qualities they bring about maturity and a greater resonance with our inner self. For instance, the development of human intelligence opens us to spiritual insight and wisdom. Sensitivity, love, and feelings—all qualities of the human heart—connect us with Universal Love. Courage, fearlessness and resolve help carry us beyond the ego-self and connect us with the ground of being. . . .

I suppose *The Wizard of Oz* could be interpreted as a story about enlightenment, about returning to the Home from which you never left. But the metaphor more closely resembles the human journey toward completion and integration. And this does not happen somewhere far off, over the rainbow, but right here in the nitty-grittiness of human life.

*You're out of the woods, You're out of the dark,
You're out of the night.
Step into the sun, Step into the light.
Keep straight ahead for the most glorious place
On the Face of the Earth or the sky.
Hold onto your breath, Hold onto your heart,
Hold onto your hope.
March up to the gate and bid it open.*
—from *The Wizard of Oz, Optimistic Voices*

The Fourth Dimensional You

Earlier you said that we are all fourth-dimensional beings living in a three-dimensional reality. If that is so, how do we attain or move toward our fourth-dimensional self?

You can't attain or move toward the fourth dimension because you're already there; what you can do is keep lessening the grip of your ego-self and your belief in yourself as a three-dimensional entity. Quite literally, you are a fourth-dimensional beingness; and using your creative power you have imagined yourself into this limited third-dimensional existence.

Some people say that enlightenment is the destruction of your world—yes, of the world as you currently *imagine* it to be. But it is the emergence of a whole new world, a world of truth, and beauty, and life. When you take your eyes off the picture of the sunset and finally see the real sunset it does not destroy the picture, it only destroys your belief that that picture is a real sunset. The flat picture is still there only now it's seen from the perspective of a three-dimensional reality. Likewise, when you shift the nexus of your awareness out of this chopped-up 3D reality, to the all-inclusive fourth dimension, this 3D world is not destroyed; you as this person—this seemingly discrete, body-mind entity—are not destroyed. Everything exists, as such, only now it's seen from the perspective of a higher dimension; now everything is seen as a real and essential mental creation. You as this three-dimensional self cannot be transformed or fulfilled by destroying this mental construction of you; you can only be transformed by consciously living as your three-dimensional self from your fourth-dimensional beingness.

Now here's something to consider: when you're looking at a two-dimensional picture—well, you're only able to do that because you're stationed in a higher dimension. You cannot see or experience a two-dimensional picture if you're looking at it

from the second dimension. If that were the case you would be *in* the picture or on the surface of the picture and the only thing you could see would be a single line. You can only see a 2D picture if you're looking at it from the third dimension, from a higher dimension. Likewise, you can only experience this three-dimensional world—and yourself as a distinct person or character in it—from the fourth dimension. Quite literally, your consciousness has to be stationed in the fourth dimension to experience (and creatively imagine) yourself as existing in the third dimension. All the changes, all the movements of time you experience in the third dimension can only be comprehended, as such, because you're perceiving everything from the fourth dimension, from the position of that which is unchanging, unmoving, and beyond time.

You are not actually born into this three-dimensional scene, you are imagined into it. You didn't even know you were here until you had the ability to imagine that you were here.

The way to realize your forth-dimensional self, your pure subjectivity is by attuning to that which, in your experience, never changes. This could be the pure sense of "I," or pure awareness. You know that you are. With what do you know it?—with that which is always present, always aware, always you. And how do you know it?—by consciously being that which you already are.

End of Day Five

It was a good day at *The Point*. Things have settled in and there's a nice bon fire going on in the back. I go up there to do some fire-gazing for a few minutes—so I thought. The next thing I know a few people are coming up from the Temple with a bunch of blankets. Apparently there's going to be one of those feely-meely, everyone-lie-on-each-other, Sixties kind of thing. I don't do a lot of feely-meely but going with the flow I

lie down with everyone else. As I am lying on my back, looking at the stars, a young woman nestles her head on my other shoulder. Then there's someone by my hip and my chest. I lift up my head to look around and see that it's not everyone haphazardly lying on each other, it's everyone lying on me! I'm right in the middle and everyone, as they say, has a piece of me. I guess they all want some of that "enlightenment vibration" stuff. I'm sorry to disappoint but they're not likely to get any of that from me. What they're likely to get is their own belief that they're getting some of that enlightenment stuff. Someone who's sensitive to presence or a person's vibration may feel something when they're around me (rather than just imagining it) but I can't say for sure. If someone saw me on the street they might notice the way I hold myself, my physical demeanor, which I gained from mastering *chi kung* and other martial arts forms, not from any kind of enlightenment stuff.

I'm in the middle of the group, looking up at the stars. Someone decides to tell a story. Then others follow, telling how they came to the spiritual path. So we hear a bunch of stories. There's lots of laughter. Every story is unique but at the same time each one seems to follow the same basic story-line. I throw in my story, at least the short version of it. The stories go on for a little while longer and then the group descends into a warm silence. Nothing but the stars and the crackling sound of the fire. ... As the flame dwindles I make my way to a sitting position. Some people sit up with me while others just lie around. Not much talking at this point. I get up and slowly make my way back to the main house, marveling at the beauty of it all ... nothing like a warm summer night in the Catskills.

End of Day Five



**Love Care Soul Ever Full Make
Here Open Such Flow Well Real
Have Free Make Self Good Will
Life Fate True Just Rest Mich Ever**

DAY SIX: Morning Session

Back to Presence

In your present experience there are things that are always changing, always in flux—your body, your perceptions, your reactions, feelings, thoughts, etc.—and some dimension of self that never changes. A primary practice, then, is to be more conscious of that ever-present, unchanging dimension of your experience. And what is that? It's you—you as that all-embracing consciousness; you as the subject of experience, you as that pure “I am,” and also you as this divine individual. What is there before any experience, perception, or thought arises? What is that ever-present foundation and support of *your* every experience but not an experience itself? Is that not you, the real you, the essential you? I mean, what else could it be? So, the basic practice or mode is to keep attuning to and intuiting that dimension of self that is always here and now, and always you. Keep shifting your awareness out of the fabricated world of the ego-self to the timeless “here-and-now,” which is your true foundation.

Some people say that “shift happens.” Well, it’s more likely to happen with your conscious and sincere participation. And what is this shift all about? Does it mean shifting yourself out of here, ascending up to some state of transcendental bliss? Not quite. It means shifting your sense of self, shifting the place

from which you live, shifting the nexus of your awareness (and your sense of self) from me-as-this-person to me-as-consciousness, to me-as-ever-present-awareness, me-as-Me.

Presence is inherently constant. When you recognize this presence, this all-allowing consciousness as your essential identity it becomes the immovable foundation of your existence. Only when presence becomes your foundational identity can its true potency and value be realized. Only then can it serve as a means of transformation, a means to “enlighten” your human existence, a gateway to the deeper and fuller expression of the inner state. Presence contacted now and again or accessed on a regular basis through meditation is of marginal value, whereas presence—when it becomes who you are, the foundation of your existence—has value beyond measure. It becomes the pearl beyond price.

The transformation began with my discovery of Essence as presence, and my learning to stay anchored in this presence. ... This recognition and realization of my essential nature as an ontological presence had a volcanic effect on my life and my process. It became the center and meaning of my life from then on.
(Almaas, *Luminous Night's Journey*, xii)

What are some of the primary qualities of consciousness (or presence)? I know that you already mentioned this but I feel a recap would be helpful.

First of all, consciousness—which, don’t forget, is the ground of your being, your very sense of “I”—is never missing because it’s contemporaneous with your own existence, with every instant of your life. It’s the one thing you have never been without because it’s you, the very “you” of who you are.

One way to get a sense of yourself as consciousness (or presence) is to take away everything that you hold to be you—your body, your thoughts, your perceptions, your personality, even your sense of me-as-this-person. Just erase all of that with

a magic eraser. When you erase all of that “me”-stuff, what remains? You’re still here. You’re still conscious. Everything you’ve identified with is gone, everything your ego-self has generated as “you” is gone, yet you still sense yourself, your existence. Something remains. What remains is you, your ever-present nature as presence, as Consciousness, as that pure “I.” So, you want to station your awareness and your sense of self there, even as all this little “me”-stuff comes and goes.

If you do not realize Consciousness as your own self, as your fundamental identity, as the “you” of you then you’ll remain in exile from your own being. Who you truly are will be relegated to something you experience now and again or something you seek. Who you truly are will never truly be you.

Some of you are confused because you do not experience the State of Presence as yourself, you do not experience the State of Presence as “I Am.” You experience it just as an energy. Why is that? It is because your sense of me, your sense of identity, is still identified with the checker, the observer, the one who is remembering the State of Presence. The State of Presence is like an objective experience that you are having.

Another reason for this inability to recognize the State of Presence as “I Am” is the confusion based on the assumption that “I Am” should have a similar characteristic as your past “I Am,” which is the ego. From the viewpoint of the mind, “I Am,” or the State of Presence, is impersonal because it does not link itself with any features of the personal self. However, if you investigate the State of Presence deeper you’ll discover that it is the nature of who you are. It is the most intimate, the most profound experience of Pure Subjectivity.

(Kristof, Ireland Retreat, 2003)

You mentioned the practice of remembrance, of noticing presence. But from where I am, involved with daily concerns, this is rather difficult. Could you offer some advice in this regard?

Well, first you have to get out of that confusion, that unconsciousness; you have to get centered in the physical sensations of your body, in your feelings, in your direct experience

of life—and then, from there, open up to presence.

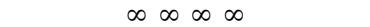
As discussed earlier, human beings exist in or occupy three dimensions of self. The first and most problematic is the *ego-self*; this is the concept you have of yourself as being a separate body-mind entity. When you take yourself to be this concept and filter all the experiences of life through that conceptualized self you have an unconscious, energy-draining, disembodied existence where you are besieged by endless concerns, and have a life of seeking, resistance, defense, etc. Then there is the *child-self*, the one-with-life self, the here-and-now self. This self is in immediate connection with your body, your feelings, and life itself. There is no intermediary, no barrier or filter; there's no self-consciousness which comes about when you project your consciousness outwardly and see yourself as if through the eyes of some imaginary "other." The experience of livingness and life is pure and uncorrupted. This is the self you occupied as a child before your conceptual self took center stage. Then there is the spirit-self, the *consciousness-self*. This is the self of pure consciousness, of knowingness, of unity with Spirit and all of Life.

Many seekers adopt "the practice of presence," and that is good. But, as mentioned, it's difficult to open up to presence if you're not really here, if you're living as this ego-self and lost in your usual fabrications. (And if you look closely you'll realize how rarely you are here, how rarely you are actually in touch with life itself.) So, it's not so easy to shift from your unconscious, resistive, mentalized sense of "me" to presence. You have to take it step by step, going from the ego-self, to the here-and-now self, and then to the spirit-self. The initial step is to withdraw your energy and attention from the ego-self and its world and to shift your attention to the here and now. A good way to do this is to simply be aware of what you are seeing and hearing without judging, or resisting, or imposing some

kind of mental overlay. Also, it's good to become more aware of your body—how it actually feels, not how you think it feels—and also your breath, your life-force. Conscious breathing might be helpful in this regard.

How do we get in touch with our here-and-now-self?

Well, by being present, by being here and now. You have to be with life, not your thoughts *about* life, not with the constant commentary that overlays reality. You have to be here and feel what is here, and not unconsciously buy into the ego-self and its flatland version of reality. It's not that difficult. It's just a matter of attention, of being more conscious, of having a sincere intention. You're sitting on the floor. Feel your body, feel your butt against the floor. You're breathing; feel your breath, feel your belly expand, feel the air entering your lungs (and perhaps the subtle life-force animating your body). You hear various sounds, you see various sights. Okay, just experience that. Just hear. Just see. Don't replace that direct perception with some commentary or some reaction to what you see or hear, or with thoughts about what you would rather be doing; just see what is in front of you, hear what you are hearing. ... Keep coming back to who you are, to life as it is and not how you imagine it to be. Tell me, how difficult is it to be who and what you already are?



DAY SIX: Afternoon Session

Doing versus Being

If you take a look at your life, at the way you live, the way you react to conditions, you'll find that you are very rarely here; you are rarely *being* yourself and almost always *doing*

yourself or *thinking about* yourself. You're never really in your body, in your feelings, in yourself as pure awareness; rather you're thinking about your body, your feelings, your life, your past, your future. From this little box you call "me" you're imagining how life's supposed to be instead of being in the flow of life itself. You're in touch with the ego's version of life yet out of touch with life as it is, as it is unfolding right now. So, are you truly alive? All you have are thoughts about life—reactions, interpretations, concerns, regrets. Perhaps you cling to the hope that you'll have some kind of new or awakened life in the future. Meanwhile, life is passing you by. This moment is passing you by. Everything of value, every opportunity is passing you by—because you're just not here for any of it. So what has all this doing, all this plotting, all this spiritual stuff gotten you? You're still stuck in this "me" box, exiled from the fullness of your own life. So, what have you got?

Seeking versus Being

If what we are seeking is already here, why seek at all? Why not just be? Why not just do nothing as some teachers suggest?

What does it mean—for someone totally identified with the ego-self—to do nothing? It means to take no action, to put forth no sincere effort, to keep on doing what you're already doing; it means to remain stuck in your present state of confusion and isolation. But that's not really living. The problem is that your ego-self is always doing, always resisting, always thwarting your true self, always rejecting Life as it is now appearing. So if you "do nothing" the reigns of your life remain in the hands of the ego-self and you perpetuate this cut-off, unfulfilled state you're now in. Not good.

In your current state you're *always* doing even when you're seemingly not doing anything. And what are you actually do-

ing? You're doing you as this individual person, as this separate entity; you're doing your separation, your fear, your resistance to Life; you're doing all your robotic, reactive conditioning. Now, if you could refrain from doing all of *that*, that would be non-doing. That would be your natural state. That would be you in the flow of Life; that would be your life as a seamless expression of the Divine. ...

There is a virtue in slowing down, in letting up on your ego-based doing, and simply relaxing into who you are, into the feeling of being you. Instead of trying to do nothing just slow down, stop striving, relax; don't take all your ego concerns so seriously; open up to the fullness that is here and stop holding on so tightly to all of the stuff that is not really you. ...

If you become still, and refrain from all your doing, and finally discover what is really here, you may come upon the grand peace that you hoped for. Rather, you might also come upon a discomfort, a dis-ease at the core of your being (which Saniel Bonder calls “the core wound.”) This is the fundamental discomfort of human existence—a discomfort that most people try to avoid, ignore, drown out, or spiritualize away. And what is that discomfort? It’s the discomfort that you, as infinite consciousness, feel when coming up against the limits of your human existence. It’s who you are and how you feel. So, instead of “doing” your usual ego thing and trying to get rid of this discomfort or keep it at bay just feel it, allow it, befriend it, and I daresay embrace it. And why do that? Because in doing so you embrace your totality, you become the all-accepting vessel of Life. You can never know or be who you are by resisting who you are, now can you?

If what we seek is already here why do we keep missing it? Is our seeking the problem or is it something else?

All this seeking is based on the premise that what you’re

seeking is indeed missing; and that you, as this individual, through some kind of self-effort or spiritual practice can somehow find what is missing. But the truth of the matter is that what your ego-self is seeking, what it's trying to get *for you*, is not missing. You are *never* missing. Your essence, your presence is never missing. How then can you find your own nature by seeking for it? That seeking is the very thing that causes you to overlook yourself; it's nothing but a denial of the present moment, of the beauty and perfection that's already here, that's already you. All said, your life of ego-seeking is one grand subterfuge, one big defense against who you truly are. The great treasure is missing to your ego-self, to your conditioned mind, but not to your higher nature or heart. How can you be missing to yourself? You can't. But it's possible to *imagine* or *pretend* to be something other than who you truly are and then get lost in that imaginary creation. And then, lost in that imaginary world, where you believe yourself to be this body-mind person, you direct the mind to find the real you. But the mind cannot find you; all it can find is the *concept* of you, the *thought* of you, the *object* representing you. It can only find things, discrete things, and you are not a thing. So, you have to abandon that whole approach and the whole notion that your mind-based seeking can do anything for you. You have to make that fundamental shift from seeking to being, from being "there" to being here, from being me-as-this-cut-off-person to being me-as-Consciousness-being-this-person.

Eden

This notion of relying upon the mind to find your true self and the futility of that approach is hinted at in the story of Eden. When Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden a whirling sword was placed East of Eden to block their return. Now Eden is a metaphor for your true nature, something that

most human beings are in seeming exile from. So you have to look at this story in terms of your self, your own consciousness, and not in terms of some ancient past. What is blocking your return, now? What is preventing you from knowing your own nature? The whole-hearted belief that you are this separate person and the staunch defense of that position; and, with it, the mental displacement of your consciousness into the past or the future. But what else? What does the whirling sword represent? I read somewhere that the sword can be likened to the *pointer of a compass*. And why is it whirling around? Well, if you're standing at the exact place you're trying to locate, and then rely upon your handy compass to point you in the right direction, the pointer will be going round and round, trying to find the place it's looking for. The pointer will always point to some place *other than where you are* and, therefore, it will always point you in the wrong direction. Any direction is the wrong direction because you're already where you are. Any reliance upon a compass (i.e. the mind) to "get you here" will always lead you astray. The solution, then, is to abandon the compass, to stop seeking or trying to get somewhere and simply be where you already are; to relax into "the simple feeling of being" and the fullness that is already here. Can you do that? Can you stop relying upon the mind and its direction and simply be who (and where) you already are? This is the only kind of "non-doing" we're talking about. Your mind cannot get you *here* because you're already here. The only thing the mind can do is lead you elsewhere. And, when you make the mistake of relying upon your mind to tell you *who* you are, all you'll get is a lot of stuff *about* who you are, a lot of descriptions about your body, your personality, your profession, your position in life but not the truth or immediacy of your own existence. Now, let's be clear about one thing: it's not the mind that leads you astray. The mind is just doing its normal thing—

cutting things up, analyzing, projecting—trying to help you in whatever way it can. It's not the mind but your wholesale belief in the mind's version of reality, and your continued hope that the mind will lead you to some kind of realization in the future that leads you astray. This is what cuts you off from the now, from life, from your own existence—not the mind. Eden is right here, right now but your mind is telling you that it's somewhere or some-when else. This—all that is showing up right now—is Eden. It's right here. It can never be anyplace else.

You're in Eden right now but you're imagining yourself into another scenario; and your belief in the realness of your own imaginal creation is the very heart of your exile. Another problem is that the Eden that's showing up right now does not match your *concept* of Eden or what you thinks it's supposed to be like; so, even though it's right here you keep missing it, you keep overlooking it. You're not actually in exile; you never were in exile; you've never been separate from the heart of God. You're only imagining it to be so and then dreaming of ways to “get back to the Garden.” You have to pull yourself out of this hallucination, this mind-made realm of separation. You have to be the self that is already here and not the self that you have imagined is lost out there, trying to get here.

Instead of unconsciously imagining we're in exile could we consciously imagine that we're in Eden? Would this be helpful?

You don't have to imagine that you're in Eden because you're already in Eden! You just have to feel into where you already are. Why accept this mental banishment from Eden and then, from that imagined place of exile, imagine that you are no longer in exile? Just abandon the imagined ego-self; don't be that one who is seemingly “out there.” You're already here, now you just have to *be here*.

But, yes, depending on where you are, it might be helpful

to use your creative imagination; your creative imagination is too attenuated at this point for true creation but you can employ it to help overcome or neutralize the bondage or separation that you are unwittingly creating for yourself. Right now you're imagining that you are separate from the Source, that you are this person-self in exile from God. So creatively imagine the opposite—that you're in Eden, that you're already here, at the Source, with the Presence of God. What would that feel like? Now, enter into that feeling, become that feeling. An essential element of all creativity is feeling; imagining something is not enough, you must feel the reality of what you have imagined for it to have any efficacy. ... The state we're talking about is beyond the reach of your mental faculties; yet the sheer act of using your creative imagination will put you in greater *en rapport* with the ever-liberating power of Grace.

Eden is your true self. It's something far greater than anything you could ever imagine or conceive of. If you could just let go of all your conscious and unconscious imaginings you would find yourself at the very heart of creation. You would find that all through the ages you never left Eden. After this "long, strange trip" you end up being where you already are and have always been. You really didn't go anywhere.

We don't end up anywhere other than where we have always been, except that we perceive where we have always been completely differently. We realize that the heaven everyone is seeking is where we have always been.

(Adyashanti, *The End of Your World*, p. 114)

In the Eden story there comes a time when Adam names everything. Is there any significance to that part of the story?

When trying to understand biblical accounts—if that's something you want to do—you have to look at things now, how they relate to you. So hold the position that you are Adam. You are the first person in your life. What significance does

this naming of things have for *you*? How does this naming—and this world of words, thoughts, and concepts it creates—affect you and your relationship to life?

I think God may have tricked Adam (and *you*) into this naming of things because it's our naming of things—our mental break-up of The One into distinct things, each of which we take to be an independently-existing entity—that exiles us from the real, God-present world. When God decided to banish Adam and Eve to where could He banish them? Where in creation does God not exist in His fullness? Well, *He* couldn't banish them but they could banish themselves (or be tricked into banishing themselves) by creating an imaginary world of exile and then living in *that* world—while, of course, still being in Eden! That is the only place where we, as human beings, can be banished—into our own imaginary world, a world where we exist as an entity in separation from everything else. Your words and concepts have created that world of exile and your wholesale belief in the realness of that world is what's keeping you there.

When Adam started naming things (like a child does when he first learns language) he started to divide up his own sense of "I," which initially encompassed everything. The more things he named the more he populated his world with things that were seemingly *other than* his own self and the more he felt walled-in and isolated. In the end, Adam's sense of "I" referred exclusively to himself as this body-mind person. "Me" as this ego-self was born and "Me" as the all of existence was lost. Living as this imagined person in this world of objects, seemingly separate and in exile from the wonderment of Life, is the banishment we're talking about, nothing else.

Now, if you could banish that banishment, if you could remove that mental overlay and liberate your consciousness from that fabricated sense of "me" you would be right here,

where you already are, in Eden. You don't have to do anything to be where you already are, you just have to be here.

Now, bear in mind that the error is not in our naming of things but in the mis-taking of those named things to be independent realities. It's okay to have names and concepts and to use those distinctions in a meaningful way but we have to take this somewhat arbitrary demarcation rather lightly. We have to allow the words to do what they were meant to do but we cannot remain entrapped by representational reality they create.

Now, when Adam named things he did not adopt the words of others and then have those words shape his own experience of life; he first had a direct experience of a thing and then he created a word to match that experience. People nowadays have it backwards: first they learn the words of others, of their culture, and then try to retrofit their experience into those words. And what they end up with is a world of words and concepts but not a complete, matured, or direct experience to match those words. And things get worse when a child is forced to speak or read at too early an age, before he has established his own relationship to the world around him. What happens then is that the words and the concepts usurp his true connection to life. Before he can even ride a bike he's ensconced in a world where his true sense of self, his direct connection to life, and his inherent sense of wonder are gone—all replaced by words, by flat representations of life. ... When you say "I am," what do those words refer to? You need to discover that. You need to have a direct experience of yourself before the words take over, otherwise you'll remain in exile from yourself, lost in a lifeless world of someone else's creation.

What does “Me” or “I am” actually refer to? I mean, what did it refer to before Adam named everything?

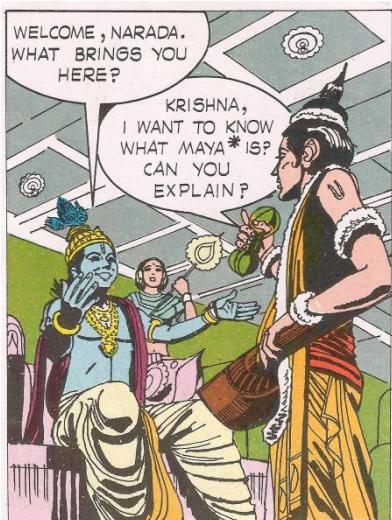
Before the sense of “I am” even arises there’s a nameless or unnamable sense of self, of your own existence. There is no word or abstraction we need in order to know this reality. It just is; it’s uncreated, it’s self-existing, and it’s not exclusive to you as this individual. It’s not yours. Then we adopt a word to individualize our existence and that word is “I” (or “I am.”) That word represents *the concept we have of ourselves as an individual entity*. The word and the meaning we impart to it wholly replaces our felt, undivided sense of “I.” This fundamental truncation then gives rise to further permutations of “I,” such as “I am this” and “I am not that.” Instead of knowing ourselves as the whole panorama—where “I” encompasses everything—our sense of “I” gets bound to this single expression, referring exclusively to our body-mind self. With awakening our sense of “I” does not change it’s simply freed from all those mind-created boundaries, referring once again to itself as that Universal “I” Consciousness.

Could we do a reverse practice, where we consciously assign a sense of “me” or “I” to each arising perception, to that tree, to that person, to what we see and hear and touch?

Yes, you could do this as a practice. This would be yet another positive way to use your creative imagination. With each perception invoke that sense of “I,” assign that sense of “I” to everything that arises in your field of awareness; experience everything as your own self.

When I say ‘I am,’ I do not mean a separate entity with a body as its nucleus. I mean the totality of being, the ocean of consciousness, the entire universe of all that is and knows.

(Nisargadatta, *I Am That*, p. 180

Maya

A few years ago I came across a story in an Indian comic book that went something like this: The celestial sage Narada wants to know the nature of *maya* (which is the illusion of the world) so he goes to Lord Krishna and asks for an explanation. Krishna says, "Narada, *maya* is not something I can explain; to know it you will have to experience it for yourself. Come with me and I will show you *maya*." And so they leave the capital city and journey into a dry, barren region. They walk and walk and after a few hours of walking Krishna sits down on a rock and says, "Narada, I'm thirsty. Could you get me some water from that nearby village?" Narada, the eager devotee, rushes to the village to get some water. When he arrives at the well he spots the most beautiful women he's ever seen. He thinks that she must be some kind of goddess. Now he's thirsty; so he asks her for a drink, which she gladly gives to him. She smiles at him, he smiles at her, they start talking, and you know the rest. ... Narada walks her home and asks the girl's father for her hand in marriage. The father says, "You look like a strong, young man; if you marry my daughter you'll have to take over the family farm when I die." Narada agrees. He'll do anything to have that girl as his wife. So he gets married and begins working the fields. A few years later the father dies and Narada takes over the farm. He is happily married with a beautiful wife and four children. Everything is perfect.

Then one day a massive storm hits and the floods wipe

away his house and his fields. He manages to get his wife and four children into a small boat but cannot keep it afloat; the boat capsizes and his wife and all his children drown. Narada lands on a large rock and sits there in total ruin. He cries out, “O Lord, why have you done this to me?” Then he hears a voice: “Narada, where’s my water?” At that moment the whole scene disappears and Narada finds himself on a rock next to Lord Krishna. Narada pleads with the Lord, “O Krishna, please bring back my wife and my children.” And Krishna laughs, saying that he could not bring them back because they never existed, the whole thing was a dream, the whole thing was *maya*.

I don’t agree with this concept of *maya*, where the whole world thought to be an illusion. The world is not purposeless or unreal, it’s just not what you think it is. It’s a singularity; it’s Consciousness appearing in the form of all these seemingly separate objects, experiences, feelings, sensations, etc. Likewise, you’re not who you think you are. You’re not merely this person, even though that’s what you may believe—you’re pure Consciousness appearing as this person, living through and as this person. When you cannot see the truth of who you are, when you do not know your ever-present self in the context of your temporal existence, when you are unaware of your unity with all of Life that’s *maya*, that’s illusion, that’s bondage.

Perhaps the point of the story is that Narada went to the village to get some water, to nourish his soul, but he got lost along the way. He forgot why he was there. Instead of keeping true to his higher purpose he was taken in by the pull of his old tendencies. And this tells the tale of many seekers: how they begin with one intention, with one purpose but fall into something else along the way. So, ask yourself, “Am I being true to my higher purpose, to my heart’s true desire, or am I lost in the concerns, distractions, and urgencies of my so-called life? Am I pursuing the water or am I filling my time with endless distrac-

tions, or perhaps passing my days in some tranquil ashram existence that I believe will bring me some kind of realization in the end?" Why are you here and what are you doing here? You have to get to the bottom of this. Let's enjoy this apparent world. Let's use it to our advantage—to learn, to grow, to help us become true human beings—but let's not get so lost to ourselves and our true purpose such that we squander the precious and irreplaceable opportunity that Life is offering us.

Life is a Four-Letter Word

When we get right down to it, this whole pursuit of enlightenment is rather bizarre. The spiritual scene looks like one big Fellini movie or maybe like that Charlie Chaplin film where everyone is busy working in a factory, making something, but without a clue as to what they're making. What are we seeking after all? Some far-out state of bliss and freedom? Some mystical feeling of oneness? Some state that only a few people in India have been able to attain? What are we actually looking for? This whole thing seems odd because we pretend not to be ourselves and then, from that imagined position of separation, we seek to know ourselves, our fullness, our unity with Life. We have imagined ourselves into a world that is lifeless, a world in which we are not even present to ourselves (or only present as an object); and then from within that mental construction we look for ourselves, hoping to God that we can find our true self somewhere in that world. Thank God we cannot!

Earlier we talked about four-letter words that indicate enlightenment or one of its qualities. The final word for today is *life*. What we're talking about here is Life—the all of Life, the aliveness and joy of Life, the wonder of Life. That's what it's all about. Life is the one good thing we can never get too much of because that is our very nature. So you can put away all your grand schemes about attaining some kind of enlightenment

that will solve all your problems, transport you into some blissful void, or get you off the Great Wheel. You can forget about your righteous loyalty to this or that guru. You can forget about your spiritual identity, your years of service, your special robes. That's just another trap of the mind, just another way to avoid life. We don't want that. What we want is life—not seeking life, or thinking *about* life, or spiritual ways to improve life, just life.

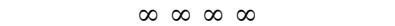
But who after all is living your life? Who is the one to whom this life comes? "Me." That's the bottom line. The one who experiences the dream, the one who seeks to get out of there, the one who awakens from the dream—that's "Me." Me is the foundation of every enlightened state; Me is Spirit itself; Me is the Enjoyer of all experience, and Me is the truth, the essence of who you are.

You can forget about all this so-called spiritual stuff; rather discover the one who is always here. Discover yourself, your truest nature, your aliveness and joy. You are the source and substance of it all. You are the power, the goodness, the glory. It is your sublime awareness, your preciousness, your sacred existence that empowers and illuminates every dimension of life. *Life, love, good, free, self, true—all in all it comes down to you.*

Me, in the most personal sense of the term, is the ultimate reality—but it takes itself for something it is not. As inadmissible as this might seem to most people, this personal Me is the infinite, the absolute being, the ultimate. Whoever doesn't conceive things this way cannot hope to knock at the door of himself with the chance of seeing it open.

(Jourdain, *Radical Awakening*, p. 152)

End of the Retreat





*I read every holy scripture
and performed all the rituals of faith.*

*I journeyed to every sacred site
and chanted the thousand names of God.*

*I pledged myself at every shrine
and gave my life to all that is true ...*

*But the moment your lips touched mine
I forgot everything I ever knew.*

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