

Enlightenment is a
Four-Letter Word

K.D. Parker



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Enlightenment is a Four-Letter Word

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

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Introduction

The 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 make matters worse, most of the experts who offer enlightenment teachings have not embodied the complete state and are not really able to guide seekers to a clear recognition of their higher self. 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?

The fundamental question asked by most 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 a reply to this question, as well as replies to many other questions about the spiritual journey, 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 one’s human self embodies the joy and wonderment of Spirit and where one’s divine self is informed by the virtue and integrity of one’s human self. 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. Using the words of Teilhard de Chardin we might say: “We don’t want to be human beings having a spiritual experience, we want to be spiritual beings having a human experience.”

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One problem with the question, “How do I reach enlightenment?” is that the one who exists in a state of separation and lack, the one in need of enlightenment (and 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.) Why? Because you are not that ego-self; and yet the whole of your spiritual journey is founded upon the assumption that you are that ego-self—that ego-self in desperate need of this enlightenment thing. And from this position of ego-self and its imagined state of separation you seek to know your true self. But that ego-self is not you, the seeker is not you, and, accordingly, whatever “you” may find on this false path is not going to be you either.

This path is about knowing the truth of our own existence; and to know that truth our heart, our intention, and our basic assumptions must be aligned with that truth. We have to begin from the assumption of unity, not separation; from the assumption of fullness, not lack; from the assumption that everything we seek, is already here, already us—not elsewhere.

The path of enlightenment is about making a fundamental shift in our sense of self, in the heart of our existence—from that small, ego-self to our true self as consciousness, beingness, and love. That 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 see its utter futility and the world of isolation and separation it creates for us and gently shift the nexus of our living awareness from the idea we have of ourselves to our true self. If we’re able to do that we open to a greater dimension of our being, a new existence, a new life. Enlightenment is not the return to some pristine self or a state of primordial innocence it’s a new birth, a new creation, a new unfoldment from where we are into infinite wholeness.

The Point of Infinity

The Point of Infinity is located in upstate New York between the towns of Ellenville and Woodbourne (both of which are sustained by large prisons). A little to the west of *The Point* are a few yoga ashrams, including the Sivananda Ashram and the Siddha Yoga Ashram. To the East is the town of Pine Bush, famous for its alien sightings. Further East is the Zen Monastery of Mount Tremper and the famous town of Woodstock. Locked between ashrams, monasteries, alien bases, and prisons—in the middle of no-man’s land—is *The Point of Infinity*. It’s a perfect place for a retreat. . . .

The Retreat Begins

The opening session begins after dinner. With coffee and tea still in hand, everyone makes their way to the large living room in the main house. Some twenty-five spiritual seekers are gathered; about half are from the New York area with others from Boston, Toronto, and elsewhere. The group is largely comprised of seasoned journeyers, those who are “in the know” with regards to the spiritual path. Some people sit comfortably on the couches and chairs near the back while others sit attentively on the floor. I pull up a chair and sit in the front of the room, near the fireplace.

We begin by having people introduce themselves, sharing the key features of their journey. After the sharing I finish up with a brief discussion about *dharma*, about how people should hold themselves during the retreat:

Part of the *dharma* or the way to be during this retreat is to focus on your experience and your 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). Nor do you want to

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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 human way. Stay with the heart, stay with what's true for you; let go of your judgment and fault-finding and enjoy the enlivening and supportive energy of being around fellow seekers. Be nobody and everybody at the same time.

This is not a silent retreat. You're not supposed to be silent. There will be plenty of time for meditation and contemplation but this should be balanced with the loving and positive energy that comes from high-level interactions with others. There are silent retreats you can go on—and these can be very helpful—but this is not one of them. At the same time, this is not a “chit-chat” retreat where you talk about whatever comes to your mind and get into conversations about generalities, world events, personal concerns, other people, etc. We want to have conscious conversations—conversations that are uplifting, that support our primary intention, that connect us with others in a deep and meaningful way.

We're not here to marvel at anyone's spiritual attainment or to try and impress anyone; we're here to learn how to honor ourselves and discover our true greatness. Now, when I come down to the gathering for tea, or whatever, you need not make any special kind of effort to avoid noticing me. I'm no more special than anyone else. I'm not “the enlightened guy.” Please don't project some image of enlightenment onto me or someone else and then respond to that person through your own projection. That's not what it means to be spiritual; 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, loving mother projections, or a scene where you honor one

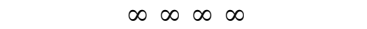
person more than another because you think they have some kind of attainment. We want to form a tribe, a family, not a showcase for displaying our spiritual stuff. We want to dwell in our true magnificence and support others in doing the same. We also want to be true to our own self and acknowledge what is coming up for us—be it good, bad, or indifferent. We want to discover who we are and what is true for us and not spend our energy in bolstering some kind of spiritual persona.

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 this gathering I'm sure we'll be returning to the same themes again and again. The material we cover will be more cyclical than linear. Advertising experts know that a person must hear the same message several times in several different ways before the message begins to register. The same applies to spiritual truths: a seeker must hear the same truths over and over again, from a number of different angles, before he begins to "get it." So if you hear something repeated don't allow your mind to dismiss it; see if you can go a little deeper into the theme 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 a working hypothesis, and either prove it or disprove it through your own contemplation and experience. All in all, I urge you to listen with care, proceed with caution, and most of all keep it real. Or, in the words of Shakespeare:

"This above all—to thine own self be true."



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

DAY ONE: Morning Session

Opening

The morning session begins ...

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 divine essence inform our human life and to have our emerging human qualities give expression to our divine essence. This is the approach to 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.

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

My aim is to have everyone discover his or her 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.

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We want to get in touch with 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 as a human being. Because, like it or not, so long as you are here in this incarnation you're always both—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. Trying to dismiss your human life in the hopes of reaching some transcendental state of bliss is a lopsided approach. Such an approach may bring temporary flashes but it will never lead you to the totality of yourself.

I also want to convey a high degree of clarity and spiritual understanding so that you don't waste your precious time on useless and must-miss spiritual endeavors.

That's my aim. And what's *your* aim? What's *your* intention? Where are *you* coming from? 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; 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.

So, at this point, what should be our primary aim or intention?

Our primary intention is to bring about a shift in our fundamental identity, in our fundamental sense of "I," in the very place from where we live our lives. We want to shift from this separating ego-existence to our true self as all-embracing consciousness or awareness. We want to awaken to our essential

unity with Life and express that unity through our individual lives. We don't want to get rid of our human self; we want to shift to a place that contains the very 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 expanding the breadth of our "I" and encompassing the whole of who we are, ego 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, give support to, or improve your personal story. I hope your life is pleasant, I hope your story is good, but I'm not here for any of that. I hope that you have some degree of satisfaction and fulfillment from this small portion of life you have laid claim to. I hope your health, finances, and relationships are in order and support your highest 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 success to your human life but neither is it to have you reach some state of enlightenment 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.

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I want you to fully embrace your human beingness and at the same time be centered in and as your infinite, one-with-Life self. Is that asking too much?

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

It's not about "reaching enlightenment" it's about becoming whole, full, and truly alive. At this stage of the game it's about knowing and feeling who you are as a human being and opening to the ever-quickening influx of Life. Reaching for some grand state of enlightenment when you don't even know who is on the path to begin with is a bit out-of-joint, no? Ninety-nine percent of the so-called spiritual seekers I meet are not even on the spiritual path; they're not even present to themselves. They're still pretty much wrecks as human beings. They need to get in touch with their own life before they can hope to attain something beyond the human dimension. Why concern yourself with the supreme goal when you have not even taken the first step? So forget about enlightenment. Put away all your hopes for some future attainment or some way to magically skip over all your human problems and find out who you are and what you need. *Who* is on the path to enlightenment? Do you even know the answer to that simple question?

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 the correct understanding?

That's the over-simplified version. 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 final state is going to solve all their problems and finally give them some peace. Don't worry, it

won't. All in all, most seekers are not even 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 one enlightenment or one awakening to *the* enlightened state. There are often sudden shifts or awakenings but these are invariably followed by challenging periods of integration and embodiment. In every case 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 of 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 false concept of sudden enlightenment has been perpetuated by all those Zen stories you hear 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 came afterwards, that were required to stabilize and integrate that state. All that long and 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 on the lecture circuit 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 deeper dimensions of the inner state, and fewer still have used that enlightened en-

ergy to bring about a true illumination of their human self. Most spiritual teachers are still “works in progress,” both on the human and spiritual levels. They can give teachings, they can talk about their experience, they can perhaps inspire, but few can actually transmit that enlightened state to others.

What I find interesting is that many of these teachers, in accordance with the concept of enlightenment they hold, are convinced that they have reached the one and only “final” state of enlightenment. They don’t realize that they have only taken the first step toward that state.

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”—which doesn’t mean much. What *degree* black belt? Now, if you only know one degree of black belt, which means you only know the *first* degree, you will generally say, “I’m a black belt in karate.” However, if you have passed beyond the first degree and attained higher degrees then you’ll 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 of enlightenment or the kind of enlightenment, he’s most likely talking about the first degree of enlightenment, or witness consciousness, or something like that.

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 God-aligned will play in the awakening process or the depth of the ignorance that beclouds most people.

Truly speaking, yes, you’re already free, you’re already

pure consciousness; nothing is blocking you. The problem is that you *think* you are this separate person who is bound and in need of liberation. You have thought yourself into being this person, and from that position 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 may have to act within the context of this limited mode in order to come to the end of your ego-self rope, in order to realize the utter hopelessness of your situation. Then there may be a letting go, an opening to something greater, but without learning what does not work, over and over again, and feeling the pain of that, you may never give up on the ego-self and its *modus operandi*.

Nothing you can do as this ego-self can liberate you because you’re not this ego-self; and, as it turns out, your identification with the ego-self is the very thing upon which your supposed bondage and suffering are based.

So, what *can* you do in your present state of separation? You can chant or do service, or take a walk in the park, it really doesn’t matter; the only thing that matters is your conscious awareness; being conscious of, or directing your awareness toward, that which you truly are; toward the unchanging consciousness that underlies all experience. You can also refine your intelligence and open up to your intuition; the knowing heart, is your surest guide in this state of seeming limitation.

The normal mode is “being unconscious,” lost in thought, merely reactive to conditions; the enhanced mode is “being conscious,” being present, being mindful; the preferred mode, however, the grace-invoking mode, is “being consciousness,” being aware of your own presence, holding your attention on that which is ever-present and unchanging. This we might also call “being awareness-ness.”

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 a prerequisite. In fact, believing that something extraordinary is required on the human level, that you 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, and this involves sincere application or work. Yet most seekers want some quick and easy path. They want enlightenment on their own terms, in accord with their limited concept of 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 puts himself in a position where he has to risk or hazard all he has does so with the hope that he will gain some quick and unearned advantage. 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 indulge in the idea that enlightenment will suddenly solve all his problems). Now don’t get me wrong, some energy transmissions may bring about an awakening or a sudden insight into your own nature but this does not mark any kind of final liberation or an end to your human struggles. Rather than an end, it is rightly seen as the beginning.

The irony here is that the poor prince from Morocco is, himself, involved in a 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 eye, by his senses, and not by his deeper wisdom; and that 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 what do you have to give? What is the risk? The real risk, of course, is in *not* risking all, in being half-hearted, in pur-

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suings the truth only when it is pleasant; in dilly-dallying your time away and squandering the great opportunity that life has given 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 is always a risk in that. We have to give up this conceptual identity, this self we know so well, and embrace our true self, which we do not know at all. We have to give up this known life of ego-separation for the unknowable freedom that lies beyond. And to do this, we have to risk all: we have to risk our very sense of existence. We have to give up the very belief in who we are. So, yes, we have to risk and hazard all we have, which is this faulty concept we have of ourselves, to become our true self, to become a fully-inspired human being. But we cannot do it in the hopes of gaining some fair or untoward advantage, or some final state of ego-security, or some undeserved gain; we have to do it out of love—the love of life, the love of truth, the love of knowing who we truly 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. The thing that comes to mind, however, is a scene from the movie, *Shakespeare in Love*. It's a scene in the boat where the wide-eyed Shakespeare is telling of his love for Lady Viola to a young boy, who just 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. 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.” Then, just as the boat is about to land, she, Lady Viola, dressed as the boy, leans over and kisses Shakespeare on the lips and then says in her own voice, “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 identity.

The pivotal moment of the scene is when she falls out of character and leans over and kisses him. She is kissing him as her true self. Shakespeare, believing that he is 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. 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

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we move beyond our deep-seated concepts and beyond our mental resistances to what is right here that we're able to recognize our beloved, the one we have always been with but never truly recognized.

In the enlightened state it's as if your Beloved, who was never missing, has suddenly returned; like the universe, which was always yours, is yours once again.

*[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 feel ignorant or forgetful or limited about who they are or about their identity. They wholeheartedly believe that they are indeed this separate individual, and they hold that individuality as a given, as a truth. This jumbled and confused admixture of thoughts, feelings, memories, imaginings, and so forth that forms a person's fundamental sense of "me" feels quite normal even though it is permeated by a deep sense of dis-ease, out-of-sortsness, and lack. Very few people complain about it. Everyone complains about the things happening to them but few people really question their fundamental sense of me-as-this-separate-person which is at the root of their pain and discomfort.

The current 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, attaching too much reality to the content of thought and the separate sense of “me” it engenders.

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’re living in, and never question, always feels strange; you feel displaced and out of sorts; you have this nagging feeling that nothing will ever be enough or that something is missing. And that’s because you are missing. A true experience of your self is missing. In this version of reality your mind has scripted you right out of your own life. And most people feel that this is somehow “normal.” 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 the human dimension like someone who’s imprisoned or in separation from his or her beloved?

Yes. A seeker must be sensitive to the pain of separation, the discomfort of his condition. He must be willing to feel it. When there’s a deep sense of being boxed in and in exile from your own self, when you feel your soul painfully longing to return to a state of unity, you become a spiritual seeker. Most people don’t feel this kind of longing. They know something is

wrong but they don't know what it is. Instead of trying to escape from this prison of the ego-self their only aim is to try and make their prison cell bigger and more comfortable, to appease or avoid their pain but not eradicate its source.

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 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 mere human experience—and he wants that. Yet true freedom is not found by escaping from human life but by accepting it, by embracing it from unity, wholeness, and love.

This human body and this human life, *while you are here*, are inescapable. So you're stuck. Yet this human limitation, this seeming imprisonment, when rightly seen, is not a prison at all. It's your very route to freedom, to fullness. If you truly love the prison you're in, if you accept and choose to be limited in the particular way you are—which you can only do when unified with the all of Life—therein lies your freedom.

... 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. Nothing is alien to them, for there is nothing that is not One Taste.

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

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

From the unnecessary, self-imposed pain, yes; from the discontentment or angst that infinite consciousness must experience when confined to this limited form, *no*. With enlightenment that unnecessary pain is gone while the necessary pain of human existence does not go anywhere—yet now you're

able to relate to that pain from a place of total freedom. Those limitations, when embraced from unity, can be truly liberating!

You know there's a major difference between trying to get rid of, or appease, or run away from, or spiritualize that fundamental dis-ease at the core of your human existence and accepting or "owning" it from a higher dimension of self. When you actually "own" that pain you realize that most of your human pain had nothing to do with actual pain but more with your continued resistance to that pain. When you're in a position to "own" the limitations of your human existence, when you willingly accept that discomfort, then guess what? You're already beyond it. That discomfort becomes yet another wondrous expression of your own 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 don't want to struggle against or resist our life as it is miraculously appearing, but on another level we don't want to wholly accept things as they are now being presented to us by our conditioned mind. Your higher self could never be content with this flat, mind-made world you are now in, why should you?

Contentment (or rather "complacency") can be a kind of spiritual death; and a seeker may undo himself by falling into the slumber of such complacency. You will find ashrams and monasteries filled with complacent seekers who comfortably do the practices—you know, meditate, repeat mantras, 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 when they die. The only thing that troubles them is when they miss their *chai* or when someone makes noise coming into the meditation hall. That 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 little ego-self has to offer even if it comes in the form of a safe and peaceful spiritual life. There is certainly beauty and greatness in this human dimension and in living a spiritual life but none of that can compare to the boundless splendor of your own nature.

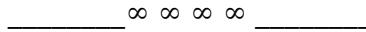
What most spiritual seekers need is to be in a state of crisis, a state of “divine discontentment.” Your soul is in crisis; if you are not also in a state of crisis, in a state of quiet or not so quiet desperation, then you’re out of sync with your soul’s longing. Crisis, desperation, realizing the true painfulness of your condition, and the intractable sense of being in exile from your own source puts a fire under your butt. And most people need this. Perhaps a more mature seeker may come at it from the positive side; he may be impelled to know his own nature and the truth of his own existence 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.

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 found in the *Vivekachudamani* or *Crest-Jewel of Discrimination* by Shankaracharya. 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.

As seekers of the truth we need to cultivate a beneficial approach to this world; we need to distinguish between what is real and what is not, between who we are and who we are not. We can't mix everything together in one bag and say, "This is me, I am one with everything." We need to understand the exact nature of this oneness and also its wondrous and multi-faceted expression. That's the only way to play this game. ...

Let's say you have a palette of colors. You can mix all the colors together and get a single, dark gray. Not much you can do with that. Or, you can blend the colors together in an intelligent way, on a canvas, to create something of beauty. Both we could say are non-dual yet one is dead and lifeless while the other is filled with life and beauty. Which one do you want?



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 beingness, where you are "contemporaneous with all instants of life." With enlightenment your fundamental sense of self is recognized as pure consciousness, all-embracing, one with Spirit yet inexplicably expressed through and as your limited human beingness. There is a felt sense of oneness with all you experience; there is clarity, aliveness, lightness of being, and ever-unfolding wonder. It's just your natural state, just being who you truly are.

Sometimes the term *enlightenment* gets mixed up with *awakening* or *witness consciousness* as these terms all point to some expansion beyond the mind. *Awakening* generally refers to a sudden shift or opening into an awareness of one's divine

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nature. *Enlightenment* generally refers to a state or station where that awakening has been stabilized and integrated with your human self. Some people clumsily call this the state of *embodied awakening* or worse yet *awakenment*. *Witness consciousness* is a pre-enlightenment state that is marked by a dis-identification with the mind and the objects of perception (and where you have a clear sense of yourself as being that impartial witness). Yet in this state there's still a fundamental 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 you are all that you have heretofore been witnessing, you've reached a state of unity or basic enlightenment, or what some people call, "abidance in nondual awareness." This is where you recognize your fundamental identity as pure awareness or consciousness, where there is no egoic sense of separation, where your sense of self is unified with all that you experience.

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 painful and uncomfortable; when you're enlightened that pebble is no longer there. Now someone might come up to you and ask, "Hey, what's it like to walk around without a pebble in your shoe?" And 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. You know everyone spends a great deal of life-energy sustaining their state of unenlightenment and remaining fearfully separate from the immensity that they are. So, what would it be like if you suddenly didn't have to spend all that vital energy in resisting, struggling, or remaining cut off from the wellspring of Life? What would it be like if you could just drop that weight? Well, everything would be a lot lighter. Everything would be flowing and easy and more naturally expressed. Joy and aliveness would bubble up. You would still be you, dealing with basic issues, with life's ups and downs, but there would be an underlying sense of lightness, ease, aliveness, joy, and freedom to everything.

In the enlightened state there is no separation between you and the ever-flow of Life, between you and all that is arising in each moment. Enlightenment does not get you beyond human life it delivers your own life to you; it allows you to enter into 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 yet you retain your own unique individuality. Your sense of "me" includes everyone but still there remains a special-case "me" that refers to you as this body-mind person. Waxing more poetic, we might say that you see everyone as an

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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, fully enmeshed in the struggles of their seemingly real human life. But, 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 light of creation and then from within that imagined state, or hallucination, they're searching 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 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 Unity, from Oneness, and not from the perspective of separation or entity-ness.

When you wake up from this dream and realize that all that you believe is not true, it does not mean that you no longer see people. You continue to perceive people, but you realize there is only one. ... There is only one Being, and our lives are the life of that Being. When you look at things from this perspective, it is natural to be loving. It is natural to be helpful and generous, because the other person is actually you, is very much a part of you, is as much you as you are you, not one iota less.

(Almaas, *Diamond Heart IV*, p. 100, 103)

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 your true “I,” which is not a thought or a construct. That “I” is your very nature. With enlightenment you no longer live as a separate individual but as an individualized expression of Infinite Oneness or “Onlyness.” Rather than being eliminated, the “I” is fulfilled; it becomes the true foundation of your life, the total embrace of all existence.

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 many 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* 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 anything—well, you’re still there but you as this separate entity, this conceived-of self, don’t exist. You have no *separate* identity, no *separate* sense of “I,” no existence apart from all that is and all that is not. When someone has not realized the full texture of enlightenment, when they are more identified with the universal (or empty) dimension of the Self than with the presence (or personal) dimension, then that “I”

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may seem to be missing. But when you become more sensitized to your human existence and the depth of your heart you begin to sense the mysterious presence of that “I” which, heretofore, seemed to be absent. Perhaps it was too close to notice. It seems 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 nature or personality or bring about an immediate transformation on the human level. You’re still pretty much you, with the same personality and conditioned patterns, but you’re no longer defined by or wholly identified with that old stuff. It’s still there, a bit like the ghost of Christmas past, but it’s no longer the sole foundation of your existence.

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 will not. Enlightenment 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 and express more fully who you are as a divine being and also as a human being. It allows you to fully participate in this creation and become a truly embodied expression of that infinite creativity.

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 help 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 that’s been entombed in your unconscious—because now, with the help of your own enlightened consciousness, and a stable sense of self, you have the power

to face, and work through, and finally dissolve all that stuff you have heretofore been able to avoid. In addition, parts of your lifestyle and other conditions in your life may change or fall away, sometimes painfully, so as to be more aligned with, and more supportive of, your newly emerging self.

Enlightenment is the only thing that will allow you to become a true human being. It is the beginning; it can be seen as a supreme opportunity. But that enlightenment has to be lived, it has to be expressed; it can only come to completion through you, through your life, 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 false sense of “I,” the false sense that you exist as this separate self that you want to “kill.” It’s the ego-me that you mis-take for your true self—well, it’s that mis-taking that you want to kill. And you don’t want to kill it, per se, you just want to see the ego-self for what it is—a representation, an ersatz self, a useful configuration but not you, not your true self.

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 self-image, for what it truly is—an image or something more like a mirage. We’re correcting 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 our 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-self and that ego-killing become. So, forget about killing the ego—'twould be better to love it to death.

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? Some people say that the ego is nothing more than our individual sense of "I." As such, it's necessary and quite real. We need it to develop as this person and function in this world. It's a divine principle that's integral to our human growth and existence. It can also be seen as a congealed pattern of thought, emotions, complexes, survival strategies, etc., that create this sense of individuality and which is needed in order to operate effectively in this world. As children, the ego comes about to protect our fragile self-identity; as adults, however, that which protected us during our childhood now imprisons us and prevents us from growing and developing beyond our three-year-old self and its protective patterns. It's like a suit of armor we put on to protect us but which then comes to confine us and lock us into our old patterns. Our ego-self must keep us curtailed and confined in order to protect us. But at what price? When confined in this way we cannot develop or come into our own as a true human being.

So you see, a major problem with this whole ego thing is that the term *ego* is confusing; everyone uses the term in a different way to mean a different thing. How can we kill the ego or love it or deal with it if we don't even know what it is? 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 individual self, the "I," or *das Ich* as Freud originally used the term? Is it this false or mistaken sense of self we have, where we believe ourselves to be this congealed pattern of thought and emotion, where we mis-take our self to be this separately-existing entity? Or is it our inner child, motivated by fear and protectiveness, which is still in the seat of power and

control, and which now prevents us from maturing beyond our own childish existence? Well, all of the above.

The first ego, the prideful self, is eradicated as we mature and embody our divine qualities. The second ego, the “I,” well, we don’t have to tamper with that. That is the universal function of individuality; we need that ego to exist, to grow and develop as a human being. The problem comes with the third ego, the “false ego” as it were. This is a case of mistaken identity. This is where we mistakenly believe ourselves to be this individual self, this separate entity. We have to see this mind-created self, this “I”-concept, for what it is—a useful *representation* of our true self but not our true self. The fourth ego, the inner child, well, that’s where we need to do a lot of work as well. Even with awakening (when we see beyond or through the falsity of the ego-self) that ego-child remains. Realization does not remove it. Certainly we are in a better position to work with that protected dimension of self but still it needs something more than spiritual enlightenment to “come into the fold” and give up its reign over us. And what is that?

Remember, this ego-child is still you; it’s your three-year old self still pulling the strings of your life. And this three-year old self is irrational, libidinal, scared, in need of love and protection, and still seeking its mother. Every attempt to kill it or deny it will only make it more fearful, more withdrawn, more ready to hide and protect itself. So, you have to befriend this child-self; you have to accept it, love it, embrace it; allow it to play out all its stuff, all its fear, without judgment or condemnation, until it feels safe, accepted, and loved. That’s all it wants. It wants to dissolve into your embrace. It wants to give itself to its sole object of affection, to you. But it can only do so in the context of unconditional love and safety. You have to nurture, accept, and protect your own child self. Only then can it enfold into your adult human self. No quick answer to this one. This

cannot be won with a sudden stroke of enlightenment or the sword of knowledge. This requires the loving embrace of a mother.

Between the Self or pure Consciousness and the inert physical body, there arises mysteriously the ego-sense or “I” notion [or phantom “I”], the hybrid which is neither of them, and this flourishes as an individual being. This ego or individual being is at the root of all that is futile and undesirable in life.

(Ramana, *The Teachings of*, p. 21)

Spiritual Chicanery

I have my doubts about this whole New Age scene. The spiritual path as it exists today is somewhat of a rouse that people use to perpetuate their own egoic sense of self 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, spiritualize things a bit, or add some meaning to their seemingly empty lives. They’re not interested in real transformation, in truly 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 and who's supposed to believe it?

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

Yes, but that does not keep the practitioners of Zen free from the same old nonsense. So long as there is an 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. 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 usually 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 meaning. 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 reveal my infinite nature?—anyway, 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 me on 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 pretty good. 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, and indicated 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 only 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 continued on his 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 up that woman 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 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 seek anything. He's not defined by or wedded to any tradition. He's beyond that. He's himself. He's in touch with the infinite flow of Life. He is no longer looking for life or fullness or enlightenment, he's simply 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 individuality or are you seeking enlightenment? They're not the same thing you know. The pursuit of enlightenment is something fundamentally different from the

mere seeking of peace or happiness. It's the upsurge of your soul. To truly walk this path, to bring it to some level of completion, a seeker must be impelled by a calling that is deeper than that of mere happiness. Everyone wants to be happy but few are called to know the truth of their own existence. And of those who are called, those in whom the impulse arises, how many actually respond? How many are willing to respond?

It's always good to get clear on what you're looking for and what you really want. If you take a good look you'll see that most people on the spiritual scene are out of place. Most should be working on their human self: getting their lives in order, becoming more integrated as a human being, and not doing all this spiritual stuff in the hopes of skipping over their human life or enlightening away their shortcomings. Not much is likely to happen if that's your approach—if you're out-of-joint with your human self, if you're weak, immature, or if you're looking for some blissful exit out of here.

Certainly you need not nor are required to perfect your human nature in order to awaken. You need some degree of wholeness, some degree of conscious presence, but human perfection and purity are not required.

And, when carefully considered, this whole notion of “seeking enlightenment” or “seeking realization” is somewhat amiss since most people have no idea what they're seeking and no idea who is doing the seeking. Rather, one should say, “I seek to know myself, the wholeness of my own nature, and what it means to be truly alive.” But, on another level, this whole notion of seeking is misplaced; it just comes down to seeing what is, being sensitive to that ever-present awareness, being attuned to who you already are. Everything you seek is, and must be, fully present. Thus, seeking for what you already have and who you already are is a bit of a folly; this kind of seeking keeps you locked in the dreamland of your separate self.

Spiritual teachers often say something like: “I don’t want to make you dream better, 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 the dream, something far greater than a mere glimpse of human happiness and peace. We’re looking to know the truth of our own existence, our boundless luminosity, our oneness with the all of Life—and then to live all of that, to give expression to all of that, through our unique individuality.

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, but this could hardly be counted as a profound insight. “Jed” also claims that his auto-writing method produces about two enlightened beings a year. And good luck finding those people either. 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 so-called meeting, so I’ll tell 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, unlosable 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 it; 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 at the table 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 a sociopath but I can’t say for sure. Maybe he was an enlightened guy. I don’t know. Either way, he talked a pretty good game. But after an hour or so I reached my fill of this nondual chit-chat 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 the better part of the afternoon with Jed McKenna. They seemed to be more exited 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 McKenna 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. I think Jed is dead—well, he was never really alive to be dead. He’s a fictional character. I did a quick search on the Internet and it seems that others have come to this same conclusion as well.

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

Well, in this case, little or nothing of what “Jed” has to say about enlightenment rings true. Just about everything the

book's author says about enlightenment and the path to enlightenment is misleading, incomplete, and overly simplified. Even an average seeker, making his best guess at enlightenment, could cut-and-paste a few good descriptions of the enlightened state and come up with something as good 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 *the* state of 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? Adyashanti describes this same method, telling how he would often go to a coffee shop and write down everything

that was true about a situation until he got to the bottom of it. I have even used this same method myself. This is 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 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 a false ego, yes we have a personality whose action is largely conditioned, but we also have a divine individuality. And the extent to which we can align ourselves—our thoughts, our actions, our intentions—with that higher dimension of our being, the extent to which we can intelligently direct our awareness and life-energy (even in the deluded state of the ego-self), to that extent we can positively influence our own growth and evolution.

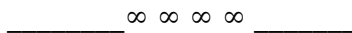
Nothing is going to happen without you, without your conscious intervention. Grace can open you up, teachers can support your development, and the whole universe can rush in to help you, but ultimately you alone are responsible for your

own experience, your own life, your own transformation.

But maybe these “do-nothing” teachers are onto something. Maybe we should go with that approach for a while and forget about all this other stuff. Let’s just hang out and let it happen. We’re here with a bunch of cool people. We’re surrounded by nature. There’s a waterfall nearby. So 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, what do we really have? Alright, that’s it, we’re done for the day. No more spiritual stuff. Nothing to do. Just be. Just enjoy yourself.

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. 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 together 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. One or two yogis 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, has gone 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.” (A four-letter word, of course, refers to a curse word, such as *s-h-i-t* or *f-u-c-k*.) Under this a few people wrote out various four-letter words such as *love*, *life*, *self*, etc. Someone had the idea to write out a few four-letter names such as *Jill*, *John*, *Mary*, *Jane*, etc. I suppose the idea behind these names is that an integral dimension of enlightenment is the embodiment of our personal self, our “Mary-ness,” our “John-ness,” and the realization that our unique, personal self is a pure and true expression of our infinite nature. So I thought it would be good to go over some of these four-letter words to see what we come up with.

Here’s one: *know* or perhaps *knowingness*. Is enlightenment knowable? Can we be enlightened and not know it?

Some people say that they’re enlightened yet they just don’t know it. But how can that be? Knowingness or 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 knowing yourself, of having a direct connection to 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.

But for the sake of discussion we could say that the state of enlightenment is self-evident; if you don't recognize your own nature, as such, then you're not enlightened. In the state of enlightenment you, as consciousness, know yourself as consciousness; and you know this most clearly in contrast to your previous condition, where you only knew yourself as this person, this "me," this conceptual "I"-self. But there's definitely a knowingness. (We could even say that you know yourself as that knowingness, as that self-aware consciousness.) When consciousness does not know itself, when it's displaced or projected onto something other than itself, such as this body-mind-person, then, it's unconscious of itself. So, yes, you're already that consciousness, that knowingness, but if you're not aware of who you are you can't experience, enjoy, or partake in own infinite nature. So, what good is it? If you have a priceless gem but cannot find it, or if you have it but don't know what you have, then what good is it?

All said, enlightenment is not something you can attain; it's the clear recognition and livingness of who you already are.

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 Shaivism they say that the one, essential quality of Shiva is supreme freedom. So, in the enlightened state, when you're one with your own nature, you, too, experience that freedom.

... 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.) In the embodied enlightened state you experience the necessary pain of life but in a luminous and expansive way; and you're free from the self-imposed, resistive pain that comes about through ignorance of your own nature. 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 all humanity and living in a transcendent, pain-free, emotion-free state is the 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 ego-centric and partial toward the transcendent, toward escapism, toward "getting off the wheel." It lacks the full texture that can only come about through the 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 freedom from pain nor about some spiritual short-cut that allows you to skip over your human nature and all its challenges. The human dimension is not a big mistake; it's not some cosmic dumping ground; it's not some "tight squeeze" or some obstacle we have to skip over or 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 perfect our enlightenment and our humanity and show us the true value of our human beingness. Being here is exactly where we need to be. And, how do I know this? Well, because we're here.

Enlightenment is a Four-Letter Word

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 become 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, this and that are both part of the experience.

It’s important to understand that enlightenment is not an experience; in an enlightened state you’re aligned with the very root of experience, the consciousness or “isness” that underlies all experience and allows for an experiential sense of unity with all creation but this is not an experience in an of itself.

In regards to “everything, nothing, and this,” yes, you realize that you are *everything* (or *that*)—all of life, all of creation, infinite consciousness; that you are *nothing*, the source, the mysterious absolute that gives rise to everything; that you are *this*, this person, 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 mass mentality which is mostly compromised 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 totally choiceless; but it's a conscious, accepted choicelessness as opposed to the unconscious kind of robotic life most people are engaged in. Instead of being wholly concerned about expressing our individual, 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 unity we are choiceless, unable to express an individual will that is not in harmony with, and an expression of, the Divine Will. ...

Awakening to a deeper dimension of self can sometimes wreak havoc on someone who is not mature or developed as a human being (or without a teacher). Such an awakening can leave that person will-less and unable to muster the motivation to do anything. He may feel inclined to sit on a park bench for weeks or months. He's stunned by the immensity of what he has fallen into. All he can do is sit there and do nothing. This may be part of what he needs to do in order to integrate or learn to live with the higher vibration of the awakened state.

Isn't will, which is an assertion of the individual or ego-self, opposed to open, which suggests a letting-go of one's will?

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 we get to that kind of transparency when we're stuck in this opaqueness, when our current will is solely human-based and ego-driven? Well, we have to become soft, we have to become still, we have to relax into who we truly are and get out of our own way. We have to decentralize our human sense of "me" and open up to the operation of that higher will as it is already operating in and through us.

When you're aligned with the Divine, a dynamic, co-creative flow becomes your *modus operandi*. There's no pressing need to exert your human will, as such, because, supported

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by the Infinite Will, everything you do becomes an effortless and natural expression of your own being. Exerting your human will in a way that aligns you with the Divine is necessary at the beginning, but this same kind of will, employed at a later stage, puts you at odds with the flow of Life. Let's say you want to get your boat to a river. Okay, that requires effort and determination. So you need that. But once your boat's in the water, and effortlessly moving downstream, that same effort (so necessary at the beginning) 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?

This seeming paradox of how to employ our human will to get beyond human will has confounded spiritual seekers throughout the ages. Some people try to get beyond their will by doing nothing or by showing no personal preference. The problem with this will-less, do-nothing approach is that the Divine Itself has a will; it has a purpose and direction. So we cannot align ourselves with the Divine Will by acting in a way that is different from, or out of sync with, that Will. ...

Somewhere along the line you need to convince yourself—your ego, your intelligence, whatever—that this is not about becoming powerless or losing something. It's about aligning

with the ultimate power. It's about getting the whole universe! It's about becoming a co-creator in the evolving process of your own transformation. Ultimately, *that* is the Will 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 his or her own human self. You must discover the operation of *that* Will in your life; you must have your will, your thoughts, and your heart be *en rapport* with that Will. That Will has but one intention—your fulfillment, your freedom, your enlightenment.

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 conscious 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, mentalized version of self, a concept of self, is not living, it's not being truly alive.

Stephen Jourdain talked about how his awakening produced an immense surge and a reintroduction to life, which he described 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 the All of Life in and through your individual existence. You can't find it anywhere else. Enlightenment is not some far-off state—

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well, from the perspective of our “little self” it may certainly seem that way; rather, it’s showing up right here, right now, as your very 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 Life itself, from the all-embracing Oneness. Can you do that? What would that be like? That would be enlightenment. That would be total non-resistance to the flow of Life, complete abandonment to each and every moment of life. That would be you.

This path is about attuning to Life, opening to Life, living Life as a unique human being. And to do this, to be *en rapport* with Life, and to be the fullness that you are, you must “see through” and dissolve the concepts, the blocks, and the resistive defenses that curtail your existence and entomb you in the ego-self. See how all this stuff “added unto you,” all this stuff that is not even you, blocks you from the simplicity of the present moment and Life itself. With sincere work, supported by the quickening presence of your one-with-Spirit self, these deep-seated tendencies and childish ego structures will lose their grip over you. You’ll expand beyond them. You’ll tap into the well-spring 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*. Yes, enlightenment is here, and now. It’s the realization that we are that ever-present “here-ness,” that all-embracing “nowness,” that indivisible “isness.”

Enlightenment is always here but it’s not fully here because it’s always evolving through us, through our developing human life. As we come to live and embody the enlightened state we become more and more here, more and more now, more and more who we already are. So it’s 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 fulfillment they seek. You know, the perfect wife or husband, the great family, the house, the white picket fence. Spiritual seekers are also seeking some future something but they have another set of ideas. They're trying to get back to Eden, or reach some kind of enlightenment, or peace, or fulfillment. But all that seeking is problematic: it supplants the immediacy of one's present experience with some future something. 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 have that right now. You need to attune to the deep and subtle calling of your soul right now. You need to find that deep satisfaction with this moment, with who you are, right now. That is what your life, your energy, and your consciousness should be founded upon. It's okay to have future goals but the present-based awareness of your life and the subtle attunement with your soul's ever-present expression should be happening right here, right now. It's not something you can put off to the future. No divine convergence of circumstances in the future will ever be better than the one that is before you right now.

One day you may look out and see a tea cup or a chair and suddenly realize that everything is right here; everything you've been seeking for all these years is right here in front of you. You've been looking at it the whole time. Everything is right here; so what is there to seek? And, looking back on your life, you may realize that all your seeking was one protracted avoidance, one huge side-step, one grand ego-hallucination.

Bull

Here's another one: *bull*. That pretty much sums up the whole enlightenment thing. And the idea of pursuing enlightenment when you're not even present to yourself, when you don't know who you are as a person, when you solely exist in the fantasyland of your own mind, and when you have no clue as to what you are looking for or why you're looking for it, is bull to the max.

I'm sure you know all the bullshit scenarios: You want to reach the state of enlightenment—whatever that is—so you go to a teacher and he says, “Sit and face this wall for ten years and something is bound to happen.” Or you go and sign up for a special awakening and you're told that the spiritual energy will do everything for you—and some day, if you just keep doing the practices, something will happen. Or you're told to stand under a waterfall and repeat some sacred phrase, and someday it will happen. (You won't have any hair left but at least you'll be enlightened, or will you?) Why do spiritual seekers tolerate 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 a bunch of crap. 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 or are you still pretty much living as this person, doing the same practices, 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. According to this definition, most spiritual seekers are insane. They do the same practices day after day, year after year, with no real transformation, no enlightenment—nothing but surface changes—yet they believe that one day something fundamentally different will happen. Now that’s insane!

But, for the sake of discussion, let’s go with your scenario. Let’s assume it’s not *all* bull. Let’s assume you’ve attained something of worth. 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 and a better feeling about your life. Okay, not bad. 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 or avoid the challenges of life. Okay. All of that is good but none of it has anything to do with enlightenment; none of it has gotten you beyond your little self, or your seeking, or your fundamental identity as this separate ego-self. So according to my view, it’s all bull. You’re still the same little “me” seeking the big “E.” 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 practice 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, or without 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 some kind of enlightenment 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

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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 bull.

It could also be that the seeker and the path are both true but not in resonance; if this were the case, a true seeker would recognize it as such 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 wholly occupy and live your life through this mind-made version of yourself, then there’s *always* a struggle, *always* a sense of dis-ease. Living as a separate human being, cut off from your own source, and then trying to make that hopeless and untenable situation work—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 even be rather difficult—yet there’s always an underlying sense of ease, and flow, and fullness. And that’s because your life and 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, and have true desire, pure-heartedness, and earnestness—and access to an enlightened teacher and a transmission—then it's not that difficult. Still, it requires effort and commitment but at least it's attainable. How many years and lifetimes have you been living in this wretched state of the ego-self, amassing layer upon layer of egoic conditioning and bondage? This has been going on for a very long time. So if it takes a few years to reverse all of this, 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—then it's not only not easy to attain, 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 stuff, 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. An enlightened state can descend upon you even if you are 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 enlightened state, and become a true human being, you will have to do the work.

It seems that many seekers nowadays are looking for an easy path to enlightenment. Do you find this to be the case?

There's a Sufi quote that goes something like, “The shortcut to the king's house is the long way home.” Perhaps you

have some idea of what this means. All these so-called seekers who are looking for instant enlightenment, some kind of special awakening, some kind of 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 who takes that shortcut; and so the ego-self may get somewhere but not you. Seekers spend years on that long, meandering shortcut with little or nothing to show for it. 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 seek every manner of help you can get, but a sincere seeker is looking for the truth not some quick and easy way to enlightenment.

Full

Here's a good one: *full*. Yes, enlightenment is full—it's full of light, full of wonder, full of life, full of everything. This thing is not about attaining some state of cosmic bliss, it's about being full, being the totality that you are, being a whole and integral human being.

Enlightenment can be truly understood as a state of fullness, wholeness, and integrity. It's a state of being the fullness that you already are; yet, it's also a state where more and more of your total self gets included and integrated with who you are as this person, this divine individual expression. Transcendence does not come by rising above who you are, by becoming disinterested in your human nature, and finally becoming free of it, but rather by a total merging into your humanity. This is about becoming yourself so fully that there is no room for "other," no room for doubt, division, self-consciousness, or anything that will take you out of the fullness of the moment. There is only you—the wholeness of you, the fullness of you, the all-embracing love of you.

'I-I Am'

Here's one, *I-I am*. 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 yourself as "I am That" which is the essence of enlightenment.

"I am That" may be the essence but it's only half the story. What about "I am this"? I can only be *That* from the perspective of *this*. If I am That alone then there is no experience of my own existence. So perhaps we could revise "I-I am" to mean, "I am That *and* I am this" or "I am That as this," "Or I am That *now being* this."

A clear understanding of "I" or "I am"—and what it actually refers to, and how it gets conceptualized, displaced, usurped, and objectified 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?

You have to take a good look at who you are, who you think you are, and your assumptions about who you think you are. Let's use a simple example: say you wake up one morning and you're upset or agitated over something. You have the feeling, "I am upset." But what is the unquestioned assumption that is giving rise to and sustaining that feeling? The assumption of being this separate entity, this "me"-person. Underlying the feeling, "I am upset," is the unquestioned assumption, "I am this person who is upset." You have to sense yourself as this person to *have* the feeling of being upset. Let's dismantle this a little further: the simple line, "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 thoughts, feelings, or even the sense of being this person.

This is your true foundation, your boundless self. This “I am” is actually of the nature of infinite capacity and acceptance; it becomes whatever you want it to become. You’re upset, you say “I am upset,” but you could just as easily have been happy and said “I am happy.” To that “I am” sadness and happiness are the same; both are wholly accepted. In addition, “I am” has the infinite capacity to know; it is pure knowingness: it not only accepts and becomes whatever you want, it also knows. You know you are upset, you know you are happy. This miracle is going on all the time yet you are oblivious to it; you only notice what that “I am” refers to or what it has become but never what it is, never what you actually are. “I am” is the root of the root, the very you of you, yet you miss it every time. And why? Because this “I am” has been reduced to a concept, to a believed-in idea you have of yourself. And this unquestioned sense of “I am this person” has become your given, your standard, the foundation from which you live and experience life. All in all, you’ve gone from being the universal “I am,” to being this separate person, to being someone who is upset. Now I’m not saying, don’t be upset; I’m saying be the pure “I am” that you are, be the unique individual that you are, then be upset (if you must). Don’t get rid of being upset, just be the whole of who you are; then, from that truth, be upset, or happy, or whatever you want. Now how difficult is that?

That universal “I am” is who we are. Being that pure “I am” before it gets reduced, before it becomes anything, before it becomes us as this individual person, is the answer to the question, “Who am I?”

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

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

If we recognize ourselves as that “I Am,” as universal consciousness, would we ever wake up being upset?

Yes. You’re still a human being. You still have a past. You still have your stuff to work through. The difference being that once you realize your fundamental nature as that “I Am,” you experience that upsetness from the perspective of unity, from a place of wholeness and acceptance. You experience your life from the all-inclusive knowingness of *I am that “I Am”* and not from the lame and fractured perspective of *I am this person*.

It’s like an actor playing the role of an upset character. If the actor believes he’s the character things are going to be quite difficult, and upsetting; but if the actor knows he’s playing the role of an upset character, with great panache, then that’s something quite different. That upsetness is experienced within the context of greatness and perfection.

What if you were the greatest actor of all time playing the role of you? What would that be like?

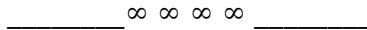
Love

And the final word for today is love. *Love*, as most people understand the term, involves some kind of overwhelming emotion. When you fall in love with someone and say, “I love you,” or perhaps something more urgent like, “I am in love with you,” what are you saying? You’re saying, “I have these needs and desires, these hopes, idealizations, expectations, concepts, etc. that you fulfill for me.” Love in this regard is the promise of some kind of completion, some kind of emotional satisfaction. But love is not an emotion. It may be experienced as an emotion but it is not an emotion, per se. Love is deeper, more penetrating than a mere emotion. So, what is love? Love is love, love is everything, but we might say that the essence of love is self-sacrifice. Losing yourself. Giving yourself, the all of

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yourself, to another. It's the total embrace of something with the totalness of your being—it's an embrace, a giving so complete that you are completely lost in the giving. It's the whole-hearted acceptance of someone or something, as is; it's the holding, supporting, "seeing," and giving of yourself to someone or something, exactly as it is. And this love goes way beyond the human realm. It is the very nature of the universe, the heart of all creation. We've been talking about this bland, nondescript, unnoticed conscious 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 fullness of its being, embracing it so deeply that it becomes that thing, exactly as it is? Is that not the very nature of love? Right now you are bathing in that love. The whole universe exists as the embrace of that love. In the enlightened state you recognize yourself as that love, as that presence, that stillness that gives itself completely, that sacrifices itself in such a way that everything can be exactly as it is—including your own human self. In your present state 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 Verb**

DAY THREE: Morning Session

Where Are You?

Where are you? Where is your consciousness stationed? What sense of self or identity are you occupying? And how did you get there? That's what we want to discover. You can forget all your grand schemes about 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 don't know what is true for you. In fact, all this striving for a vague and uncertain goal somewhere off in the future cuts you off from the immediacy and opportunity that life is offering you right here, right now. So be here. 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 true for you right here, right now.

As a general principle we might say: Wherever your consciousness is, that's where you are. And you don't end up being where you are by some random chain of events; your concepts, hopes, and desires have landed you there. You're there because, on some level, it feels right, it feels natural to be there. Even so, most people are in the completely wrong place. They're living in an imaginary, entity-based world of separation that is two or three permutations away from life itself. And

though on one level they want to be there, on a deeper level they feel out-of-sorts, disjointed, and besieged by a gnawing sense of lack. On the surface things may seem okay; and so long as a person remains on the surface of life he, too, may feel okay. But, if you dig a little deeper you'll discover quite a different story. You'll discover the real pain of your situation. You'll discover the simple truth that you are not this separate person you believe yourself to be. You are not the ideas or concepts you have about yourself. All of that is your ego-self. All of that is one big resistance to who you truly are.

When we come right down to it, the question "Where am I?" just like "Who am I?" is still a question being asked by the mind; and it is the mind that also attempts to come up with some kind of acceptable answer. So, it's a bit of a closed-loop, a tautology. Rather than asking about where you are or who you are, simply *feel* your own presence, feel your own connection to life. Get in touch with your body, your "hereness," and relax into the feeling of being yourself. What does it *feel* like to be alive, to exist *as you*? Get out of the mind and into your heart, your here-and-nowness. Feel your body-sense; feel what it's like to exist in and as this body. And as you are grounded in the depths of the here and now, open yourself to the unknowable, ungraspable mystery that you are. Dare to be that all-embracing consciousness, living as the source of all existence, inseparable from Life, even while limited to this body, this mind, this life. Feel into that divine simultaneity.

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 actuality means to imagine that you are this body-mind person, to imagine that you are this separate entity, that you are "out," and then from that outer position to look

“inward” toward something. Some people call this “digging a hole to install a ladder to wash the basement windows.” And when you do all of this and finally look within, what are you looking at? Maybe your thoughts, your emotions, or perhaps the ego-knower, which enables the mind to see and check its own processes. 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 processes is not “looking within.” Looking within is about getting in touch with the one who is looking. It really means *being* within, being the subject, the knowing awareness, the beholder of your every experience. Looking at your internal functioning may be a valuable process and part of becoming more human and more in tune with yourself but that’s not “looking within” as we are using the term. The primary thing to understand about looking within is that it’s not about looking, it’s about being or abiding as your true self; it’s about being that which is beyond the mind, beyond the looking. It’s about being who you are, not about looking for who you are.

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 presence seems to be missing, what you’re really saying is that a true and direct experience of yourself is missing. So, what’s causing that? Well, pretty much everything: your mind, your thoughts, your concepts, your expectations, your conditioning, your attachments; 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, the one thing upon which all the other blocks are founded and sustained, is the insistent belief that you are this

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separately-existing person, this “me”-center. Your belief is an actual creation. It creates a false sense of self and you end up living your life through, and as, that false self. Your mistaken identification with everything that is not you and your total involvement with that believed-to-be-you self, is the primary thing blocking you from realizing the infinitude that you are. In sum, the believed-in concept of “you” is blocking you.

On another level, it's even simpler than that. What is blocking you? Nothing. 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 you think 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 your consciousness is somewhere else, imagining that something is blocking you.

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 appealing, something it perceives as being beneficial. So, if you happen to stray upon presence, or catch a glimpse of it, it will not register with your mind because it's too bland; it has no apparent value. It's really nothing. Your mind will just overlook it and keep searching for something special, like a dog looking for a bone. So, if you go with the mind, you're going to miss it every time. The mind always directs you to find something that is *not* here; but what you seek is always here. So amidst all these apparent changes discover that which is always here and which never changes.

It's something like the white canvas of a painting: you never really see or notice the canvas; all you see are the colorful forms painted upon that backdrop. The canvas is your own awareness or consciousness; it's that primary dimension of self

you never notice but the very part of yourself that allows you to be this person, to experience your own life. So, in every experience, in every moment there are two things going on: there is you as pure consciousness, as pure allowance, as the sheer capacity for experience (the canvas); and you as this person, having this particular experience, living your unique and irreplaceable life (the painted picture).

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)

This realization is so extraordinary that you can never, ever fully comprehend it, or your Self, thereafter. Yet it is so ordinary that at times you can't find any realization to point to it at all. ... And it is so *obvious*. 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 we go in and out of enlightenment all the time in our ordinary awareness but that we don't recognize it. Do you find this to be the case?

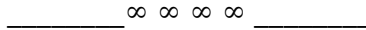
All of the time, yes, in every moment. In every moment the true self is there, permeating your normal awareness, but with the same constancy your mind refuses to recognize or register it. Between every thought that reality shines through, but with every me-thought that reality is missed, marginalized, and rendered irrelevant. The conditioned mind misses it every time. People fail to recognize what is right in front of them. They have, as they say, Reality Deficit Disorder, or RDD, and it's

highly contagious. However, the moment your mind stops or pauses—or the moment you disidentify from thought—the immediacy of your true self is there. You just have to get beyond your concepts of reality and open up to that which is ever-present and ever-revealing itself as all that is.

Having your true self pop up now and again, recognized or unrecognized, is of little or no value. The infinite value is realized only when the awareness of your true self is stabilized, when you recognize it as your fundamental identity, when you live your life from that divine and luminous reality.

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 one's individuality and the uniqueness of one's human self?

The impersonal is only half the story. The self as an impersonal emptiness or absolute is emphasized in many Eastern traditions; while the self as pure love, as the Beloved, is emphasized in Sufism; and a personal embodiment of this mysterious absolute is now part of an emerging Western paradigm.

In the early stages of enlightenment there is often 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 into life is missing. You, the fullness of your human beingness, is missing. That which ever-fills the emptiness, the outpouring of the heart, is missing. Impersonal enlightenment is about reaching some state beyond your human existence; personal enlightenment is about embodying the absolute state, integrating it with your human life, and becoming an exuberant expression of it through and as your unique human self. Paradoxically, your total absence is what allows you to be most fully here, most fully “you.”

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 this?

As a foundation for any spiritual approach, it's always good to get in touch with your human self, to solidify your human existence, 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, discover who you are as a person and what you really want.

In answer to the question, “Who are you?” we might say that you are universal consciousness *and* this individual, this unique configuration or pattern of life-force. When you become aware of that unchanging presence you are tuning into yourself as pure consciousness; when you become aware of your feelings and your body you are tuning into yourself as this individualized expression of pure consciousness. Those are the two dimensions of self we want to embrace. Now we come to

the self we want to dismantle, divorce ourselves from; this is the self we want to see through or at least see it for what it is. This self is a useful concept or representation of our true self but *not* our true self. We are not this concept we have of our self. This concept is not false, per se; it's a true and useful concept but it's only a concept, a representation, an imagined configuration. It's not who we actually are. This concept of self becomes the false "I" or false ego when we mis-take that self concept to be our true self, when we exist and live our life as that mental image, that conceptual self, and not as our truly divine and human self.

Most people are lost in an abstract world of thought where they are *thinking about* their body or *thinking about* themselves or their feelings; but we want to actually feel what it means to be alive, what it means to be this divine individual, to be in direct connection with ourselves, with our aliveness, without the intermediary of any self-concept. This unalloyed experience of our human self is similar in many ways to the direct, self-feeling we had as a child. We want that; we want to be in direct, experiential communion with our individual self, which includes our life-force (or aliveness), our body, and our feelings. (We can talk about transcendence and all that once we have something to transcend.) But, really, is there something we need to transcend? We are infinite consciousness *and* this individualized life-force; and to be truly alive, to be truly awake, we need to be both, to live as both.

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?

We could say that you are pure consciousness living as this person, this imagined person you believe yourself to be. To get some sense of this, imagine that you are talking with a friend or

a loved one. Get a clear image of that person in your mind. Now, say something to that person, give them a compliment or say a kind word. Now, see how they respond. Do they smile or say something positive in return? Okay. . . . now stop. Don't get further involved in that imaginary scene where neither you nor your friend exist. Don't mis-take that imagined version of your friend to be your actual friend. That would be insane. Now let's get back to *you*, to the insanity of human existence. Right now you are mis-taking your imagined self, your mental version of yourself, to be your real self—and you don't even know you're doing it! It is so difficult to catch or see through this error because you have been doing it, uninterruptedly, since you were three years old. When you imagine your friend (in this exercise) you are conscious enough to know the difference between the imagined version of your friend and your real friend; but when it comes to you, your life right now, you cannot see the difference. You truly believe that this imagined version of yourself is you, the real you. That's the fundamental error. So you exist, yes, but not as this mental fabrication of self, this separate person you believe yourself to be. That fabricated self is not the real you just as your imagined friend is not your real friend; or just as a picture of a sunset is not a real sunset. That picture is indeed a real picture of the sunset but not the sunset itself.

What about mindfulness methods? Are they helpful?

If your consciousness is dominated by subconscious tendencies the first thing you must do is establish a center, get yourself out of that subconscious undertow and into the here and now. Only then can you purposefully direct your attention and make any kind of progress. The practice of 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 your true nature which

exists prior to thought. For that, you must be able to “let go” of your mindfulness and relax into the silence of your own being. Too much mindfulness can become another block, another thing 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 is to get beyond the mind, to abide in and as pure consciousness, prior to thought.

What about the practice of watching your thoughts?

Watching your thoughts is a good first step. It's a way to step back from your own mind and help you dis-identify with thought, the thinking process, and the mind itself. 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 bring focus and stillness to the mind which, again, can be helpful if your mind is scattered or at the mercy of subconscious 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.

There is some talk about the difference between a living mantra and a *dead* or *inert* mantra; and some people hold that only a mantra received from a master, who himself (or herself) 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 master 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 transformation. Anything done with feeling and devotion is, of course, better than something done without it but, still, this does not necessarily impart a practice with true potency.

What about the practice of following the breath or the practice of focusing on the gap or space 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. 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 really means you are not focused on any thing. When you focus on the gap or on nothingness there's nothing for the mind to grab hold of. Your mind will ever try to turn the gap into some kind of object that it can grasp but it will never get anywhere. After a while it may realize its own uselessness in 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 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

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awareness remains stationed in that singular consciousness prior to the breath and your awareness of it.

What about self-inquiry?

For self-inquiry to be truly beneficial a few things must be in place. First, you have to be motivated by a deep interest in discovering the truth of your own existence, and you have to be crazed enough to persist at all cost. The inquiry has to relate to you, to who you are. “Negative” self-inquiry involves getting to the root of, and exposing the falsity of, your current sense of self; it’s more about undoing what you are not than realizing what you are. “Positive” self-inquiry involves discovering the unchanging unity of your own existence amidst the ever-changing experiences of life. ...

Right now you exist as a mere thought, a mental representation, an internal object to yourself. How did that come about? How did that happen to you? We want to get to the bottom of this confusion, this error. We want to discover the clear difference between who we really are (the pure “I am”) and who we *think* we are (this person, this conceptual entity, this I-thought).

Ramana Maharshi’s primary teaching revolved around the practice of 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 discovering the falsity of the phantom “I.” When the phantom “I” is seen through, or seen as being false and “dissolves,” you do not cease to exist nor does the “I” itself disappear. What happens is that you experience that “I” in its true formlessness, as pure awareness, as all existence, as sheer illumination, and not as something confined or exclusive to this person, this body, or this conceptual self. You continue to live in and as that small self yet now from the perspective of being the Supreme “I.”

It's okay to have an I-thought, to tentatively live as this imagined self, this ego-self; but it's not so good when you believe yourself to be that self.

You are never reducible to an object, to something graspable by the mind. You are the very sense of "I am" before it became something other than itself, before it became you as this body, this person, this little "me." You are the constant, unchanging principle of Life—of your life, of your experience. Okay, now that you know who you are the only thing left is to *be* who you are, to dare to *live* as you are.

Self-enquiry 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 term actually means.

Meditation, as the term is used today, points to two different modes or practices. First there is "doing meditation" (or mind-based meditation), which involves focus or concentration on such things as the breath, a flame, a mantra, an energy center in the body, and so forth. These types of practices are primarily aimed at getting you, your awareness, 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, focusing the mind, whatever. They could be seen as a prelude to "true meditation" which has nothing to do with the mind or doing anything; and we might be better off calling this second mode of meditation "being" or "abidance." This is the real "meditation" so to speak. This is not about doing anything or being present, it's about *being presence*; it's about abiding in and as presence, being and existing as the all-embracing, unchanging awareness or consciousness. It's not about trying to arrive at or

attain who you are by use of some concentration method. It's a dimension beyond all of that.

True meditation or "being" is not about attaining anything in the future; it's founded upon the direct knowingness that everything is already here, already present. It's not about stopping the mind or controlling your thoughts or trying to get beyond the mind; it's about being or "dropping into" who you already are—that luminous presence, that primordial consciousness which is unaffected by thought or experience.

What about getting help from angels or spirit guides?

It's all good; it can be helpful. Everything is good so long as it supports, and does not divert you from, your primary aim. Of course, you have to be open and sensitive enough to receive that kind of "higher" guidance. (And consider the possibility that these guides and angels are not "out there" but manifestations of your own innate wisdom.)

You know, people spend a lot of time seeking guidance from books, teachers, spirits, and the like—all of which is good—but they might do even better by forming a conscious relationship with the font of all wisdom, which is their subconscious mind or what we might better call the *super-conscious mind*. I think something of use along these lines might be found in the teachings of Huna. [For example, see: *Mastering Your Hidden Self* by Serge King.] In every moment that higher mind is supporting you and guiding you and, likewise, in every moment you simply ignore it. So the approach is to tune into your higher wisdom, your heart wisdom; to become more sensitive to its presence, its influence, its guidance and support. When you have no conscious contact with your own higher self (or higher mind) it's a bit like owning a mansion but living your whole life in the basement. It's pretty dark down there.

And you would also do very well for yourself by forming a

conscious relationship with your own body, which is an embodied expression of your higher mind. (And in this regard, you may want to look at some of Jennifer Hough's work.) Every clue you need, as well as perfect feedback and guidance, can be had when you tune into your own body. Truly, your body is the temple of spirit, the beacon of guidance, the truest support in every moment of your life.

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 perhaps 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 about trying to improve or spiritualize your ego-self and its flawed relationship to life. (This seems to be the *modus operandi* of most spiritual seekers.) Maybe you need 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 be alive, enter a real relationship, get a real job—or maybe not. Either way, you've got to take a ruthless look at where you are and find out what's working and not working.

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 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 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 balanced and alive you are as a human being. All the rest is a façade, a pretence; nothing but 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. 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 same 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, 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 fully enlightened. 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. Well, get me off that road.

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 and said it represented a true description of the enlightened state? For instance, Satyam Nadeem 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?

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 self-inflicted pain that comes when you don’t know your true self. You’re done with the fatigue that comes from a continual resistance to life and your own human nature. You’re done with your flat, dull, mentalized relationship to life and all the fear, dis-ease, and discontentment based on that false, separation-based existence. You’re done with being wholly defined by conditions, thoughts, feelings, and all the stuff comprising your self-conceived image. You’re done with all that self-imposed pain and energy-draining stuff but you’re not done with growth and development on the human level. You’re not done with your human stuff or your fundamental conditioning or the many challenges of life. But, when you’re awakened to

your own nature, all of that noise, once so pressing and important, is now like a whisper. It's muted. It no longer determines who you or how you live. And, for the first time, you're in a position to truly transform, illumine, and dissolve those burdens from the past and fully develop as a human being.

All in all, there is no finish line here. You're never done. And most people have not even begun. Rather than an end, awakening or enlightenment is just the beginning—the beginning of this endless journey leading to infinity ... of perhaps to the *Point of Infinity*.

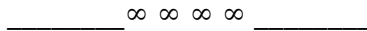
End of Day Three

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, and still others share with me the realization that they're not really spiritual seekers but human seekers, and that what they have to do is to dedicate themselves to doing real human work, with getting a life, rather than trying to skip over all their human challenges. Regardless of who's getting what, a deep sense of community has emerged; there's a growing feeling that we're all on a sacred caravan moving through time toward that inevitable Oneness.

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 and then head up to my room. At 11:05 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 inter-

ested 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 for spiritual instruction. Okay, I'll play along. 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. There's no open seat so I direct her to sit on the edge of my bed. She sits in a cross-legged position on the bed and I sit right across from her. After talking 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. I always look to develop a deeper, lasting connection. Perhaps this relates to Saturn's position in my natal chart rather than some great spiritual attainment. The next thing I know Tara's lying down beside me with her head placed on my shoulder, her leg wrapped over mine. We lay there in silence, breathing. As my fingers run through the gentle curls of her hair I say something like, "We don't have to rush into anything; we can just enjoy the moment." . . . I drift back to a time when I first began to transcend body-consciousness; I had just been with a beautiful 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 did not sit well with her. "What about me?" she said. "I want you to make love 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 now, which includes the full embrace of her human self as well as her goddess self. Making love with the goddess, in some fantasy-land, divorced from a person and her humanity, is incomplete. It’s *too* transcendent, *too* divine. . . . I catch the goddess’s eye. She pulls me in with her leg. We cuddle some more and I slowly drift into a space between worlds. Minutes or hours pass, I don’t know which, and then I begin to stir. The night’s cuddling has come to an end. 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’m not sure what “love” means in this case but I’ll take it. We make it to our feet, then to the door, then a lingering embrace, and off she goes. . . . The weatherman says it’s supposed to be nice and sunny on Sunday—but sometimes, you know, the weatherman lies.



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

DAY FOUR: Morning Session

Who Are You?

Yesterday we opened with the question, “Where 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 *pre-tending* 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 all but hijacked your consciousness and your existence and, unwittingly, you are supporting this whole charade. That “me” is the concept of you masquerading as you; and it’s always doing, doing, doing. It’s been doing *you* for all these years. But now it’s time to stop. Stop affording that “me,” that phantom “I,” the power to be you. Stop living as this flat, lifeless creation and know what it means to be truly alive. Stop thinking life and start living life. Stop being who you are not and be who you are. Is that asking too much? And rather than trying to run away from your life, hoping to attain some kind of ethereal state bliss, somewhere off in Neverland, come to know who you are as this human being, here and now. Feel what it’s like to be you.

You have to awaken to the perfection and potential that you already are and live from that truth. Even the higher power you pray to cannot awaken you to the truth of your own self. Only you can do that. And one reason why nothing out-

side of yourself can awaken you 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 or who wants to remain 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 are going about their business in the deep and intractable slumber of an imagined sleep?

So, do you recommend that, in our inquiry, we seek to answer the questions "Where am I?" and "Who am I?"

I think a more telling question would be "What am I?" or more precisely, "What is actually here?" Is there a body here, a body-sense here? Yes. Is there a mind here, thoughts here? Yes. Is there the concept of a person (or the belief that you exist as this person) here? Yes. But is there an actual person here? Maybe not. 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 will see that this so-called person you believe yourself to be is not really a person but a mental construct that holds together or configures all these perceptions in a useful and meaningful way. But this person you believe yourself to be, this rock-solid identity upon which your whole life is built, does not exist as such. It's a mental construct. All these elements seemingly point toward a person yet no such person is here. So, it would be good to find out what it actually here as opposed to what you imagine is here.

In addition to knowing what is here (or what is *not* 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 truly discover what is here and to fully live what is 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, so they enter the spiritual path—and then they strive to attain some kind of disembodied, out-of-touch-with-life (or life-transcending) spiritual state. That’s the ego’s plan: it involves trading in one cut-off, fragmented state for another; it involves skipping over your feeling, one-with-life self (and your own body) on your way to enlightenment. The plan is to become a spiritual being by not being a real human being. But that never works.

As mentioned, we have three fundamental selves: the conditioned, *ego-self* (which can be our false self or our true, individual self); the *one-with-life self* (or the feeling, body-self); and the *one-with-spirit self* (which is our self as infinite consciousness, our so-called “true” self). To be here, to be both a spiritual and a human being, you have to be all three selves; all three selves have to be “in play.” Only then can you fully know what is here (through the agency of the true ego-self), and fully be here (as the one-with-life, body-self), and fully embrace the love and beauty that is here (as the spirit-self).

What would it be like to be to totality of who you are, to live as that fullness all the time? That would be enlightenment.

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 is pretty much 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 his inherent sense of lack or unenlightenment, no longer

exists, as such. You discover that this unenlightened seeker was never really you; it was only a conceptual self, a “virtual reality” self masquerading as you. With enlightenment, that virtual self is still there yet we realize it is not who we are. It no longer defines us. It no longer reduces us to one instant in time and space. This individual sense allows us to evolve and to express the wonder of Life through our unique and irreplaceable vantage-point but we no longer identify with it, we no longer believe it to be who we truly are.

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, full of leaves, 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 really know the point of this story. I suppose it has something to do with being patient or having faith. If these seekers asked me the same question I would say, “You will never reach liberation.” In other words, the one who feels cut off, isolated, and incomplete, that virtual self that is seeking liberation, will never reach it because you are not that person, that conceived-of entity. Liberation is gaining freedom from that concept of self, from that self that exists in a state of lack, isolation and dis-ease. Liberation from what?—from the seeker of liberation!

Now don’t get me wrong: the person you feel yourself to be is not going to disappear. That person will remain pretty much same but you will suddenly realize that you, your essential self, is 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; all that stuff will still be there but none of it will

bind you or 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, essentially 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)

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 how 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 even want this thing they're purportedly seeking? Is their life about trying to find some meaning or fulfillment through a variety of surface, me-based pursuits, 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 assured of victory by entering a true path with sincerity and earnestness, and with the right kind of enlightened support and guidance, is the only critical factor.

The Zen Ox-Herding Pictures

Knowing where you are and getting clear on your present state of enlightenment or unenlightenment can be helpful but trying to map this out can be a bit tricky. Everyone is different, every path is unique, and everyone is evolving on multiple dimensions at the same time. So maps are nothing but rough

outlines. Even so, they can be useful.

That said, I thought it might be good to look at the Zen Ox-herding pictures. That's a pretty famous map, one that most seekers have heard about or are familiar with. So let's see if we can use these pictures to tell us something about the journey home. Can someone find the pictures? If you look through some of the books on the shelves 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 the Ox represents *the awareness dimension of our true nature*, or presence, or consciousness, not the whole of our true nature. (To make things simple I'm going to use the term *Ox* instead of *Bull* because there's already enough bull around here. And I may lean more toward the term *presence*, as opposed to *consciousness* or *awareness*, since that's a term often used in Zen.)

One characteristic of the Ox is that it's stable and grounded and doesn't come and go like our thoughts and emotions. 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.

Also, 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." At this early stage

the seeker is beset by a gnawing sense of confusion, dis-ease, and deficiency; he has an urge for something but he doesn't know what to seek or where to seek it. He has an itch so to speak but doesn't know where to scratch. The Ox (his fundamental sense of self or presence) is missing and he doesn't even know there's an Ox to be missing. So, it never even occurs to him to seek the Ox. The search at this stage is peripheral, human-based, and wholly directed by the ego-self and its needs. The seeker may do lots of spiritual practice in the hope of finding some relief to his problems or becoming more spiritual but none of that has anything to do with discovering his own presence. He's still at picture zero. Remember, we're talking about you, not some woodcut boy.



Then, 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 be led to find some book, or you may hear something or meet someone who tells you about your higher nature and enlightenment. You have no idea what this really means but even so you want it. So you set out in search of something 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, you don't know where to look for it, and you don't know anyone who can help you find it, but still you search on. (I guess we're still talking about picture zero here but hopefully we're moving toward picture one.) Now the folly begins. You get involved with all kinds of teachers; you do all kinds of spiritual practices. Perhaps you become a devout

Enlightenment is a Four-Letter Word

Christian, or Muslim, or Jew, or dedicate yourself to some such hyper-dualistic religion. And none of this is likely to get you anywhere. In many ways, you're more lost now, both to yourself and your higher nature, than when you first began.

After getting involved with all this spiritual stuff you come to realize that it's all bull. None of these spiritual pursuits or concepts can get you beyond your own ego-self. All you're doing is spiritualizing your ego-self and its illusion of separation.

At some point you realize that what you're seeking is your own self, your own nature; and that's available to you right here, right now, as your own presence, as your own consciousness. You don't need anything outside yourself to give you what is already yours. Now you're "Seeking the Ox." Now you're an informed seeker, guided by clarity, intelligence, and heartedness. Now your path is founded upon a direct investigation of your own nature, your very sense of "I."



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 regarding your own presence. You're certain of the existence of your higher nature even though you haven't yet experienced it.

The Ox is the one thing that's always present, the one thing that's never missing. It's the constant knowingness or awareness of your own existence. It's your very own nature, the "you" of you. How could it ever be missing? (Even so, most people are completely aloof to this vast dimension of their being.) In every moment, you're not only looking right at it; it's the very thing that's doing the looking!



Then, because of your efforts or in spite of them, you catch a “Glimpse of the Ox.” You come upon a clear and direct experience of your own presence. For the first time you experience your presence in a solid way, as a dimension of self independent of thought and emotion. The picture shows the butt of the Ox, not the whole Ox. You don’t have it yet but this glimpse gives you a certainty, a knowingness. Now, at least, 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 to put forth a conscious and concerted effort to overcome the inertia that constantly pulls you back into the folds and seeming safety of your old and reliable 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 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 cannot catch what you already have, what you already are. The whole of it is to realize what you already have, what you already are.

Enlightenment is a Four-Letter Word

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, which Sanial Bonder calls "the Rot," and which Almaas refers to as the loss of the primary object. It's the stage where you reach the end of your rope; where none of your old ego-strategies work anymore; where your spiritual efforts and seeking have hit a wall; where you feel hopeless and ineffectual and finally give up. In sum, where everything turns to crap. This is sometimes referred to as "the dark night of the soul" but it's really the dark night of the ego. It's the first form of ego death; it's the death of your old way of doing things, of your ego's strategy for enlightenment, of your tried and true spiritual practices and the premises upon which they were based. And this can be pretty painful and disorienting if you're identified with being that ego-self. There's no way to sugar-coat this difficult falling away, this giving up, this destruction of your ego's master plan for enlightenment. But, hey, it's all good.



At some point, you let go of your striving, your effort to try and catch the Ox, and you deeply 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.) This "catching" is not so much a result of effort and strain but of relaxing into what is already here and who you already are. As such, this is a state of pure allowance. You may have heard the Cat Stevens album *Catch Bull at Four*. Well this is picture four, catch-

ing the bull or Catching the Ox. Catching hold of the Ox does not mean you have control over 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. However, you don't yet have it. You don't yet realize that the Ox is your own nature; it's the one thing you have always been, the one thing you can't catch because it's what you already are. At this point you still sense yourself as being separate from presence, such that you can hold it or catch it. You have it but you don't have it. 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 willfulness and a certain kind of force. Such 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 the same kind of exertion is problematic. Presence cannot be captured or tamed through any kind of direct force or will. It must be allowed, opened to. You already are presence. You don't have to catch hold of what you already are. At this stage you have to give up this exertion, this seeking, this struggling and relax into who you already are. So, this picture might be called, "Allowing the Ox (Your Presence) to be You."

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. Because 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 establishing presence (or consciousness) as



your fundamental identity. It's about coming back to an awareness of presence again and again until you realize that presence is your own nature, your deepest self. What you've been seeking all these years has been the most obvious thing of all—you.

The word "taming," as in Taming the Ox, refers to the "conscious becoming" of presence, the ever-deepening sense of holding presence and knowing it as your self. However, there is another kind of "taming," the taming of enlightenment, which takes place later on, after basic enlightenment (or picture seven in this series). This is a stage of integration, stabilization, and embodiment. 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 consciousness is no longer determined by what you are seeing or reacting to. You're "above it all"; you're not involved with what you are witnessing. But you're still divided, still cut off, still in a state of duality. This duality is represented by the boy *riding upon* the Ox, above the ground, untouched by his surroundings. While riding the Ox he 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, still aloof to his own life and the world in which he lives.



Next we come to picture seven; here the boy is not *riding* the Ox home, he is Home. He has “Gone Beyond the Ox” (or “Transcended the Ox”). Or we could say he has “Become the Ox.” There is no more Ox; the seeker realizes that the Ox is his own nature. The subtle duality of witness consciousness has collapsed into an unshakable unity; the seeker becomes the all-embracing presence, the ever-present awareness, and is unified with everything within the field of his awareness. This is the state of unity consciousness. There is nothing that 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 arising.

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. The sense of being in exile from the heart of life is replaced by a unitive merging and embrace. The deep confusion about who you are is replaced by clarity and knowingness. And where there was only lack one finds infinite fullness and potential. Yet the journey continues ...

The experience is of everything, the whole universe in all of its content and dimensions, as pure consciousness, pure presence or love. This is a state of oneness and harmony, the state of the real world, but I differentiate it from the experience of the absolute, which is transcendent to presence and consciousness, and turns out to be the inner essence of the state of oneness.

(Almaas, *Luminous Night’s Journey*, p. 78)

Once you realize your essential identity as presence, as consciousness, then you have to be it, you have to live it, you have to integrate it with your human life. Presence has to be

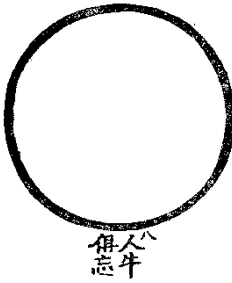


tamed, and that entails a process of embodiment, integration, and “catching up.” Here the awakened state is integrated with your human life; here you must live it. Rather than “Taming Enlightenment” we might better call this phase “Bull in a China Shop.” Here the old and outmoded patterns of your human life must be brought up to speed and aligned with your awakened presence—and this process can be rather difficult, tumultuous, and disorienting. Now is the time when you have to grow up and become a true human and spiritual being, and this often involves some “growing pains.” That three year old ego-self does not want to change; it does not want to let go if its toy—and that toy is you! The ego-self and its infantile conditioning—and the unconscious inertia supporting it—does not vanish with enlightenment; you still have to work through it. This requires a deep level of inner and outer support. But don’t worry, now that you’ve come into conscious union with your true self it will be there to empower and support you every step of the way.

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 for 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 mysterious source and inner nature of All. Here we realize that all existence is but the creative expression or outpouring of the unborn Absolute. Being fully 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 state of pure absence or the Absolute you are unified with the uncreated and unchanging source of creation. In the previous picture you were one with everything—on *this side* of creation. Here you are one with absence, with the 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 human life. It’s a state that’s universal and impersonal; a state where your own existence as the very holder of the state is still missing.

One thing to understand about enlightenment is that each stage has an inherent fullness to it and you cannot 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 you!

Picture eight used to be the final picture in this 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? 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 here we realize ourselves as that original impulse, that primordial value, that overflowing and ever-filling love. “Reaching the Source” can be seen as a stage “beyond polarities” where there is a miraculous and paradoxical co-existence of presence and absence, emptiness and fullness, the unborn source of being and the ever-born expression of love. This is a deeper stage of realization that Zen rarely reaches.

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 or heartedness. 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 perfected, it must be filled with overflowing delight, with an outpouring of the heart, with aliveness, beauty, and wonder. 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 creation is an outpouring of Divine delight then we are not complete or in perfect unity with the Divine unless we too are an embodiment and an expression of that same delight.

This picture is a nature scene. Nature is a pure 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.



Now we come to the last stage on this journey, a stage of wholeness and unity, where all the inner dimensions are unified and where one's human self is seamlessly integrated with the wholeness of one's divine nature. Here it all comes back to you. You have 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 one's life and Life Itself create a contemporaneous expression of wonder. But this is not a final end; your whole life is ever-deepening, ever-evolving, ever-expressing and reflecting 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.

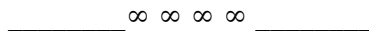
(Adyashanti, *The End of Your World*, p. 168)

Pictures seven, eight, nine, and ten can be seen as representing different stages of enlightenment. (And for more insight into these deepening stages of enlightenment you might want to look at some of the writings of Anadi.) Picture seven represents enlightenment to pure consciousness where you feel yourself in co-extensive unity with all existence; where everything is experienced as your own self, as your own conscious-

ness. Picture eight represents enlightenment to the Absolute, where you realize yourself as the unborn Source of all, as the ground of existence and as 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, infinite value, and, indeed, as the very impulse of all existence. Picture ten represents enlightenment to *yourself*, to the beholder of all these enlightened states, to pure subjectivity, to the one-with-Spirit self in whom all these previous dimensions of enlightenment are integrated, and unified, and expressed through and as this unique and divine individual that you are.

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. Outwardly, he appears to be an ordinary human being—and, by the way, he is an ordinary human being! But unlike the rest of humankind, where everyone is unconscious and running away from who they are, he is a human being just being himself. 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 real difference between the two. He can drink wine, 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, or a saintly demeanor, or instantly move beyond all suffering? This seems to be the kind of transformation we most often hear about.

Misinformed and somewhat idealistic seekers often believe that when a person awakens the whole of his human nature is suddenly transformed and all his problems disappear. This is not the case. Enlightenment does not impart you with intellectual knowledge or wisdom. It does not turn you into a flawless human being. It does not change the core conditions of your life. You still have to do that. There may be a softening of your human personality, an insight into the very nature of the human experience, and the emergence of a new, unimaginable potential but not an immediate or complete transformation on the human level. Enlightenment does not turn someone into a master poet or musician. These are aspects of the human dimension that must be developed independently of the enlightened state. Opening to your own nature illumines your actions and affords you with an essential foundation from which to do inner work but it doesn't *do* anything for you. You still have to do the work of becoming a whole and integral human being; you still have to take responsibility for your own growth and transformation. Over years and lifetimes deep-seated patterns have been infused into the very matrix of your body and mind; and all of that continues to play out until it is "seen through," transmuted, and brought into alignment with your higher nature. This is part of the post-enlightenment work you must do.

And instead of unending bliss things can be challenging before they get better. 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 sensitive to life and so it can pack a bigger wallop. You may also have a sense of being trapped or "held down." Let me explain this by way of analogy: when I was young, my father gave me an old Mercedes Benz diesel which had a top speed of just over 60 mile 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 my father gave me 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 own 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 a person enters in a dual mode of evolution: a new, evolutionary course begins for his spiritual self—which was not possible before because he did not have access to his spiritual self—and, also, he continues to evolve as a human being, only now with the whole of his human dimension guided and empowered by the presence of his 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. ...

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 self, yes, you are aloof to all of that—and you may also be aloof in some state of *samadhi* or nothingness, where you feel no one is home—but when you fully embody the state of pure consciousness, and yourself as this human being, then you're not aloof to all of that. Rather, you *are* all of that!

Earlier we talked about three selves or three identities—or what could be understood as three existences of “I am.” The first is the conceptual self, the ego-self as it were. This self is the ruler of the “normal” human state; this is where you believe yourself to be, and live your life as, this separate body-mind person. (This ability to conceive of yourself as a separate entity is a useful function of your human existence; it only becomes a problem when you come to believe that you are that conceived-of entity, when you fail to see it as an extension or usefulness of who you truly are.) Then there is the pure, individual self; we could also call this the child-self or the one-with-life self. This is the pure self you occupied as a child; a self without conditions or mind-imposed barriers; a self in direct communion with the flowing joy of life. Then there is your true self, your self as infinite consciousness, your self as the absolute mystery from and upon which everything comes into existence. With realization you see past this error of believing yourself to be this separate individual, this I-thought; you get more and more in touch with your feeling, one-with life nature; and you realize your fundamental identity and being as pure consciousness. In other words, all three selves come on-line. That's the good news *and* the bad news.

You see, with enlightenment your actions are no longer determined or plotted out in accord with how you think others

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may see you (which is the *modus operandi* of the ego-self) but in line with how you feel and how life moves you in the moment. You are no longer in a mentalized world, buffered from the infinitude of your joy or the depth of your sorrow. As such, you are more exposed, more vulnerable; you can no longer hide behind the old ego-buffer. And in this state of being in direct communion with life, in being a true human being, you are now open to laugh all of your laughter and cry all of your tears. Old patterns and hurts may cause emotions such as anger to flare up; but now you are not impelled to suppress all of that stuff or spiritualize it away like a well-trained spiritual person is want to do. So, anger may flare up. Sadness may flare up. Long-suppressed tears may finally well up.

Anger is largely the result of unfulfilled desires and it is 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, but naturally transmute it.

It seems that an awakened state can sometimes corrupt the human self and empower the ego, and we sometimes see this with spiritual teachers. Do you find this to be the case?

Whenever there's spiritual power mixed in with an unchecked 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 an undeveloped 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 he was before that 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. He has to keep up that spiritual façade. And he's more likely to spend time and energy on maintaining that outer show than on becoming a true human being.

And then, of course, there are the false gurus; these are people who have a certain charisma or sway over others, mixed in with some spiritual knowledge, and perhaps the ability to channel some form of collective energy, 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 unenlightened power-mongers and sociopaths come into 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 rather 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 you see affected by some teachers, which has become a prototype for “the look” of an enlightened being, is pure hype. There's no enlightened look. When someone awakens to his own nature, and realizes his unity with everything, he becomes more authentic, more individualistic, and often more quirky—and not free of the problems, concerns, and 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. I spent time with him in Canada and also in France. He smoked all the time and ate whatever he liked. I

was once with him right before he was about to give a talk and his fly was broken. I had to help him fix it with a safety pin. He loved to play golf. Looking back on his life he wished he had become a golf pro instead of a real estate agent. 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. It was on that trip that I first heard about this place. Unfortunately, he never made it out here; he passed away earlier this year. That was a very sad day.

Then there is Kabir Helminski and his wife Camille. I cannot say enough good things about them. They're in the game. They have a life. Many enlightened beings I know abide in a deep inner state but flounder as human beings; we could say they have two loaves of bread in the oven, where one is baked and the other is half-baked. But Kabir and his wife are the full package; they embody both the human and the divine.

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 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 down in Texas with her significant other. 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."

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.

(Helminki, *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?

In terms of the human state, or what could be seen as the “normal” human condition, well, what are its primary characteristics? What are its binding agencies? First, most human beings have the unshakable conviction that they are this individual, this person, living in separation from others, from the world, from Life—sometimes living in relative ease and sometimes feeling that they’re pitted up against the world. Living as a separate self engenders a deep sense of being isolated, cut off, and in exile. There’s an intractable discomfort here because living and conceiving of yourself as this separate individual puts you at odds with your own nature and the pressing truth that you are contemporaneous with all of Life. How can you be cut off from everything when you *are* everything?! Well, you can’t but that’s how most people feel. That’s the state of separation and isolation most people have imagined for them-

selves; and that sense of separation fuels the spiritual search. As a seeker you're in a bit of a bind: every moment you're imagining yourself to be this bound, cut-off, unenlightened person, and every other moment you're seeking to be free from that ego-self and all its limitations. So which one is it?

Another thing people experience in the “normal” human state is a real sense of confusion about who and what they are. If someone asks the question “Who am I?”—which many spiritual seekers seem to do—they can't get a solid answer. What their mind comes up with is a vague and confused mass of concepts, thoughts, identities, feelings, body descriptions, job descriptions, but not who they are. In other words, 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 with is some concept they have of themselves. They think they are this personality, or this self-image, or this spiritual or religious person, or whatever. But they are not really that. They experience themselves as an uncertain and confused admixture of thoughts, concepts, beliefs, and emotions, all of which are in a constant state of flux and tenuously held together by some imagined sense of “me.” So, naturally, one feels confused and out-of-sorts; and marred by an unshakable sense of discomfort, dis-ease, and distrust. The very heart of one's existence is absent from one's experience of life. How can there be any peace or fulfillment in that?

And along with this confusion is the sense that something fundamental is missing from one's life, that nothing is quite right. Beneath all one's apparent gains there's a lingering sense of lack, a sense that nothing is ever going to do it or be enough—or maybe that something in them is never going to be enough. As a result, life becomes one, prolonged desperation, one protracted search to fill that emptiness or find some kind of fulfillment or meaning. People try to gloss over, ignore, or keep

this nagging feeling at arm's length by gaining all kind of possessions, stuffing themselves with food, staying busy or entertained, or whatever. But none of that does any good. Beneath it all, they still feel cut off, confused, and empty.

So that's your basic human condition, the state of your ego-self—and it ain't pretty. When you're living as this mere concept of yourself, as this ego-entity in separation from everything else, then you experience pain and discomfort from every side and everything binds you; yet, when you're living as your true self, as this divine human being, everything leads toward freedom because you are freedom itself.

With enlightenment the *unnecessary* pain that comes about when you're fully identified with your ego-based self disappears, and all the energy, aliveness, and life-force that was heretofore expended in the maintenance of that unnatural state of separation comes rushing back to you. For the first time you know what it means to be fully alive. There's no struggle against anything. Things become effortless, joyful, and light.

With enlightenment life takes on a tone of clarity, openness, trust, and wonder. You gain 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 ups and downs of human life, and the unavoidable limitations of human beingness, but always in the context of your inherent state of unity, joy, and well-being.

A lot of what I just said is in line with the teachings of Saniel Bonder; and I think Almaas's writings, particularly the *Diamond Heart* series, might shed some light on this as well.

Upon entering our Second Life, all these fundamental qualities of how we suffer life in our Spirit/Matter split [i.e., our previous human existence] do indeed disappear, never to return. . . . Fundamental separateness yields to fundamental unity, non-separateness, oneness, Onlyness. You don't just know it in your mind or your soul, you feel it in your body. Fundamental confu-

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sion 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)

Regarding this ego-based pain, can I get rid of it? It seems to me that that is one of the primary aims of spiritual practice.

Seeing that pain for what it is and understanding its primary cause is something different from adamantly trying to get rid of it. Again, who is trying to get rid of that pain—the very one who is the root cause of the pain. Instead of blindly trying to get rid of the pain, in accord with your old ego-avoidance strategy, discover the one who's running from the pain, the one who has set up your whole life so as to avoid that pain. Who is that one? That's your ego-self. And, right now, that's you; that's the dimension of self you're identified with, that's the dimension of self you occupy and live from. Okay, let's work with that delusion. And how do we do that? Not by running, or avoiding, or spiritualizing it away but by taking a good look at what is there. You have to own or own up to your ego-self; you have to feel the pain of being that separate, confused, unfulfilled entity. And again, it's not pretty. You may complain when I say you have to consciously be your ego-self, saying, "But I am pure consciousness. I don't want to go backwards. Why should I become my ego?" Well, because you already *are* your ego; you're presently living your life as this ego-self; your pursuit of enlightenment is based upon the premise and belief that you are indeed this ego-self. That's your foundation and that's the source of your problem. So, you have to feel the pain of that error in order to be motivated enough to resolve it. Up till now you've been living as this ego-self unconsciously, unquestioningly; now you have to do it consciously, truthfully, with open eyes. You have to understand and acknowledge the

truth of your situation, the deep shit you're in. It's not going backwards; it's simply being truthful about where you are. Of course, you are not *really* that ego-self. Your fundamental identity is that of supreme consciousness but so long as you are *living* as that ego-self, *fully identified with* that ego-self, and fully convinced that you are that ego-self, well, for all intents and purposes, you are that ego-self. Or, more correctly, we might say you are being and living your life as that ego-self. You have to be conscious of that. Maybe someday you'll realize your true nature as pure consciousness and know beyond all doubt that you are not that ego-self. I don't know. But right now you live and exist as that ego-self; everything you do is based upon the wholly-accepted premise that you are this ego-self. Your hopes, your desires, your ambitions and your pursuit of enlightenment are all based on the conviction that you are the ego-self. But that's a mistake. That's a painful error. You need to see and feel the pain of this error you are living—and correct it—rather than avoiding it or trying to spiritualize it away. Looked at from a true perspective, you will see that the pain is here to help you; it's based on your higher wisdom; it shows you where you are stuck and the truth of your situation.

But your ego knows nothing of this. Your ego has but one agenda: to protect you from pain, even the very pain that it is imposing upon you. And very helpful to the ego's agenda are all those spiritual practices you do to gloss over or anesthetize yourself to the pain of your ego-based existence. 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 be in pain. As Alan Watts once said, "The ego is an illusion married to a futility." If your life is founded upon the promise and enlightenment strategy of your ego-self—and upon the belief that somehow, in some imagined future, your ego-self is

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going to deliver to you what you truly long for—well then, yes, the whole of your life will be an illusion married to a futility, and a painful one at that.

Is that ego pain something different from the fundamental pain or discomfort of human life you talked about earlier?

Recall that your nature is that of infinite freedom. Any contraction, limitation, or curtailment of your fundamental nature is experienced as pain or discomfort. Pain is a continuum that is determined by your level of constriction or limitation. Besides the normal human pain that we are all familiar with, that comes and goes, and which can be seen as a conditioned kind of pain, there are more fundamental, unconditioned types of pain (or limitations) that are inherent to your human existence. These types of pain do not come and go; they are always there, in the background, and are so familiar that they often go by unnoticed. The first kind of pain is the pain you invariably feel when you conceive of yourself, and live your life as, this separate, cut-off, isolated, and rather confused individual. This is the pain of being or living as the ego-self. The second kind of pain is the inherent discomfort of human existence, the discomfort that infinite consciousness feels when limited to this particular human form. This discomfort is unconditioned; every human being experiences it at the core of his or her being; and, at this stage of human evolution, it is a necessary and useful kind of discomfort. It's the very discomfort that impels us to develop and know our selves as that infinite freedom.

You can wholly eradicate the pain of the ego-self by seeing through its delusion and realizing that your fundamental nature is pure consciousness and not this body-mind person. You can't, however, get rid of the fundamental discomfort of being a human being so long as you are a human being but you can certainly come into a different relationship to it: you can accept

it and make peace with it and co-house with it, instead of doing everything you can to resist, avoid, or eradicate it.

A good way understand this fundamental human discomfort is to look at it from the perspective of unity rather than separation. First of all, who or what are you? For now, let's say that you, in essence, are Infinite Consciousness. Now, if you're infinite consciousness then *any* limitation, even a necessary limitation—such as being a human being, an angel, an overlord of a galaxy, or whatever—is going to limit your infinite nature and, as such, create some kind of discomfort or dis-ease in your being. (It's often sensed as a feeling of being trapped, displaced, out-of-sorts, or as a general kind of dis-ease or anxiety at the core of your being.) Any limitation, any form that infinite Consciousness assumes—so long as the infinite Consciousness is able to remain conscious of itself—is going to carry with it some kind of friction or fundamental dis-ease. That fundamental discomfort at the core of your being is the feeling of being you; it's how you as infinite Consciousness feel when limited to this human form. And so, when you feel it, when you attune to it, when you come into resonance with it, that discomfort acts like a beacon that leads you to a sense of yourself as infinite Consciousness.

And how do we come to recognize and attune ourselves to this fundamental discomfort?

Well, you recognize it by attuning to it, by slowing down, by relaxing, by getting out of your mind and its interpretation of experience, and getting to your own core. Stop doing and feel. Stop running around and relax. Stop going hither and yon and just be where you are. Get below all that noise. In a word, slow it all down. And, when you're still enough and relaxed enough to feel that discomfort, feel it! Don't enact your usual ego-strategies and do everything you can to avoid that discom-

fort, rather, accept it, welcome it, understand it; feel it and fall into it, and see what happens. Sorry, the bliss will have to wait.

Most of what I just said about this fundamental discomfort or “core wound” comes from the teachings of Saniel Bonder. Understanding the nature of the core wound and becoming more conscious as to how it shows up in your life—and befriending it, and “feeling into” it—could be of great benefit to your human and spiritual development.

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. And this integration of the two stimulates, remarkably enough, an inexorable biological process that then, over time, actually heals and transmutes those limited, frail, weak qualities of your true and total Being. In other words, the healing eventuates not as a result of anxious seeking but rather as a result of peaceful, if often quite intense, cooperation with what is already inevitable. (Bonder, *Waking Down*, p. 29-30)

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*. That’s a book you’ll have to read at least five times to fully appreciate its brilliance. The first time I read it I took out my pencil and underlined every significant passage; by the time I was done the whole book was underlined. (I tried reading a few other books by Aurobindo but could not get through any of them; the only book I could read was *The Synthesis of Yoga—Part I*.) Very early in the book Aurobindo describes the abso-

lute 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 is able to transmit his or her awakened state. This transmission is one of the most palpable forms of grace; it’s an absolute boon for every seeker and, in virtually all cases, an absolute necessity. This transmission shifts your energy; it plants a seed, it opens a potential, and it puts you in resonance with a higher order of your being. You have to do the rest, you have to work with and honor this rare gift, yet without this “outside help” very few seekers can get anywhere.

And I’m not talking about some kind of “initiation” or a single, cataclysmic awakening of one’s spiritual energy; I am talking about an ongoing transmission that takes place between a seeker and an enlightened teacher. This is referred to in Zen as a “transmission of mind to mind”; but the Chinese character for “mind” is the same as the character for “heart” so, more precisely, it could be understood as a “transmission of heart to heart.” It takes place on a level beyond the mind, beyond the cognitive intelligence. It penetrates one’s whole being. This transmission potentiates every spiritual practice and aspiration. Without it, your spiritual efforts are likely to be lifeless and without effect. So, yes, an ongoing relationship with, and direct transmission from, an enlightened teacher is rather crucial.

Is there any value in trying to mirror or emulate the outer actions or inner state of a spiritual teacher? Would this somehow put us in resonance with the quickening 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

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place on a level that is deeper than your ego-self, your mind, and your will. Your heart, your soul, and your subconscious mind naturally resonate with, or template, the silent energy of a master; it's nothing you can do. It takes place on its own. Instead of trying to mirror or emulate a spiritual teacher it would be better to mirror or emulate your self, to discover your self, to be your self, to live what is true for you.

This reminds me of story my brother once told me: 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."

Are you a spiritual guide? Do you give any kind of formal or informal transmission?

At this stage of the game I am not a spiritual guide. I do not have followers or students. I do not give formal initiation or participate in any kind of ongoing transmission. However, if you deeply contemplate the truths we've been discussing, if you're open to the energetic charge of this retreat, if you come with a pure and sincere heart, you're likely to gain something quite valuable during your time here.

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.

You say 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 got anywhere. Most followers of the guru don't have a guru nor do they want one. They're looking for a strong father figure, or a loving mother figure, or someone with a saintly demeanor who can bless them and tell them that everything is going to be alright; or perhaps someone with spiritual power who can ignite within

them some kind of far-out or blissful emotional state. That's what most people want and that's what they get. And that's okay. But a true seeker wants something more; he wants someone who can help deliver him from the tyranny of his false sense of separation, empower his human 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; it is to open up or provide a channel between you and the quickening power of grace, the divine energy of the universe. It's this power that leads to ultimate transformation. Neither you, nor your ego, nor your efforts, nor a human teacher can bring about this kind of radical and complete transformation; all of that can help but 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 illumining 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 possible correspondence between the stages of the spiritual path and the planets of the solar system. Could you talk a little more about that?

People may be getting bored with all this talk about stages, and I think we covered things pretty well this morning, so for now I'll just give you the basics: In terms of the solar system and the stages of the spiritual journey, well, it begins where you are, on planet Earth. But before you're able to begin this

journey in earnest 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, or becoming sensitive to, the whole of your feeling nature. This feeling nature, which is the essence of your one-with-life self, and which puts you in direct communion with life, is something that most spiritual seekers ignore, skip over, see as “non-spiritual,” or deem to be irrelevant—but this is a grave error.

Mercury and Venus are the personal planets, integral to the human dimension, so you have to imbibe these fundamental human energies and reach some level of maturation on the human level before you can truly journey outward through the solar system (and inward through your own depths).

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 pursuits. Mars, being the god of war, might also prompt you to try an approach that involves “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 person. Perhaps after years of bootless practice you realize that all of this spiritual stuff you’ve been doing is not working, and has never really worked. And maybe at this point you’ll be 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 whole action-based approach to enlightenment, you’ll move beyond Mars. What happens next is that you hit the asteroid belt. I’m not sure what this ocean of floating rock and ice

represents. Perhaps it points to a dismantling or smashing up of your old ego way of doing things.

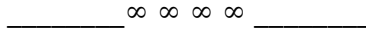
Beyond the asteroid belt is Jupiter. This giant of the solar system represents the initial expanse and euphoria of enlightenment, where our primary identity shifts from me-as-this-person to me-as-infinite-consciousness. But Jupiter is nowhere near the end. You see, even though you realize your fundamental 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 charm 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 of your infinite nature hitting those human limits is represented by Saturn. This challenge of Saturn, which is part of every hero's or heroine's path, has its divine purpose: it makes you strong; it connects you with the heart of life; it serves as a catalyst to heal the deep splits within your psyche; it completes and gives shape to your human existence and your lived enlightenment. Saturn forces us to accept our human limits; and we do this, paradoxically, by discovering the infinite freedom that is being expressed through and as those limits.

Beyond Saturn are the planets of Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto. These planets are all involved with the process of embodiment, of integrating your human life with the "higher order" of enlightened consciousness. 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 end. Neptune represents the mystery, depth, and fluidity of the ocean of consciousness you have just plunged into (and which you cannot possibly fathom or grab hold of with your mind). And Pluto represents the final destruction of your separate ego-sense and the perhaps the perfecting of your human beingness.

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This integration of the planetary energies may suggest an end of your human evolution but it does not signify any kind of final end. The whole universe lies beyond. Now that you've completed this phase of the journey, and reached a higher octave of your being and of life the journey continues in yet another form. Enlightenment marks the beginning of the journey beyond the realm; integrating and perfecting that enlightenment through your human existence, by perfectly living it, comes next; and a whole new stage of evolution comes after that. We never know what will come next, only that something will come next. As I have said before, there is no end to this.

End of Day Four



**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 somehow 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*—though I'm not sure if he ever got beyond his Jesuit-ness. (Somehow when I walk into this place I feel as if I'm walking into someone's version of a Jesuit monastery.) 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 people who are here, who have come from various traditions: they have left their old traditions but unwittingly define themselves through their 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, drunken self—nor constantly keeping an eye on his old habits to insure that he doesn't regress—would never say, "I have been sober" or "I am a recovering alcoholic." They would have gone beyond that old self and come up with a whole new identity, one that is not related to, or contingent upon, the old one.

The Point has been a way-station or spiritual half-way house for various 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 books around here. Books can be a double-edged sword: they can orient you and keep you on track but when relied upon too heavily they can become a hindrance. And, of course, if you read the wrongs books it may do you more harm than good. So, you might want to follow the 80-20 or 90-10 rule, which means for every hour you spend reading about spirituality you should spend nine hours in practice, or in 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 been referring 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. The trouble begins when someone enters the "spiritual path" in an attempt to appease or somehow skip over their human life. This kind of ill-begotten spirituality 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. In with this mix you often find a few people who have reached significant states of spiritual illumination and true maturity but these are few and far between.

In truth, the spiritual path *begins* with enlightenment, with

(Pages 115 - 152 are missing)



*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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* Aziz Kristof now goes by the name of "Anadi."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

K.D. Parker studied various forms of Sufism, yoga, and Eastern disciplines for the past 25 years; and has given seminars on spiritual practice and enlightenment both in the US and abroad. He is considered a master in the art of *Tai Chi* and *Nodachi* long swords. His unique style of teaching is a blend of practical instruction, story-telling, and deep insight into the enlightened state.