

In every tradition there's crazy wisdom. There are the crazy [...] There are the monks laughing at the moon in **Zen Buddhism**. In **Sufism** there is a long tradition of that, and one of the best examples is somebody called Naseeruddin—that's one of his names. And there are as many stories about Naseeruddin as people can make up. I don't know how many actually happened. But there is a story of Naseeruddin going into a bank to cash a check. It was a large check, and the teller looked at the check—Naseeruddin was a very disreputable-looking fellow—and the teller looked at the check, and the check looked alright but Naseeruddin didn't. And finally he said, Well, sir, the check seems fine, but can you identify yourself? And Naseeruddin reached into his pocket, he pulled out a mirror, and he looked, and he said, Yup!

Now, it's interesting how subtle and yet how formal our identities are, and how much we're attached to them, because of how much we are used to our cards of identity. My name, social security number, my zip code, my address, my occupation—a whole set of labels that define who we think we are. When you and I are born, very shortly after we're born, we go into 'somebody-training.' We start to be trained to become somebody. And we're trained by other people who know who *they* are, and they're going to teach us who *we* are—very well-meaning, I mean—so that we can function in the world by being somebody.

And you become mother's little girl, or mother's little boy, or somebody who eats all his carrots. You start to develop an identity after a while. You're good, or you're bad, or you're a rascal, or you're... When I was very young—I was maybe nine or so—I came from a Jewish middle-class family, and it turned out that the best thing to want to be was a doctor. That was somebody. And everybody gave you microscopes, and books, and patted you, and smiled. And I milked that one until I was well into college and was flunking histology and sitology and embryology until the moment of truth came. And we carry our somebodies around with us, and it allows us to be with other people in an efficient way.

TV Metaphor

Now, just to get us all together into a metaphorical system, we can play—in the game of metaphors—any way you want. I mean, it depends on who you're talking to, how you pick your metaphor. But let's—I'm going to use one that just allows us to jump across systems easily, and if we all talk from the same one it'll make it more fun to play.

So just imagine you have, next to your eyes, a television channel-selector. And you set the selector on channel one, and you see *woman, man, old, young, thin, fat, dark, light*. You see the physical beings, you see physical entities; you see endomorphs, ectomorphs, and mesomorphs—if you're a scientist. If you are full of lust you would be on this channel. It's a channel on which you would see other bodies as whether or not they would fulfill your fantasies. So you would see everybody as bodies and you would see, there's a potential, there's a competitor, and that's irrelevant. You would see everybody as one of those three. That's the physical plane; that's what humans see, is channel one. You look at me, you see a 51-year-old bald man, caucasian. And that's what you get on channel one. Probably irrelevant.

Channel 2

Flip to channel two. Minnesota multiphasic personality inventory. Now you see *happy* and *sad*, you see *seeker*, you see *responsible, laid back*—all the social roles. You see *responsible teacher*. You see *judge*. You see *politician*, you see *mother*, you see *child*, you see all of these psychological-social dimensions on channel two. If you're in psychotherapy, this is the real channel. Nothing else is real.

Now, most of our cards of identity are on those two channels. Channel two is our storyline. Channel two is our psychological storyline, for the most part. It's *the world turns*, that's what channel two is. You know? Where am I going? Where did I come from? Will I make it? I'm lousing it up; if I could only get over this—that's on channel two. Channel two—I'm a warm, affable, intelligent, charming *teacher*.

Channel 3

Channel three is what we call a New-Age channel. *Scorpio*. On channel three there are only twelve of us. Channel three is also our mythic channel—it's the archetypes, it's the, like, I am the Buddha giving the **Sermon of the Deer Park**. The room is full, filled with earth-mothers and seekers after the holy grail, and you all have these very big mythic roles also, besides our more paltry psychological selves we like. Bigger games we're playing, in the larger **warp and woof** of things.

Now, notice about these first three channels that they are all—what you might call—matrices of individual differences. They're ways we can peg each other. Channel three: I'm an *Aries*. So if you go home and somebody says, Who did you hear this weekend? you can say, I heard a 51-year-old, bald, Caucasian man; warm, charming, affable teacher Aries. Then they know. And you really notice it on the astral plane. They say, What are you? I'm an Aries. Right! Of course. As if, now, that explains *everything*. And each plane up explains more. It actually does, it explains. But it's a system; it's a matrix of individual differences, in which you're different from you, from you, from you, from me. And we can peg each other. World of individual differences.

Channel 4

Channel four. Now you look into the eyes of another being, and you see another being just like you looking back at you. Are *you* in there? Far out! I'm in *here*. How did you get into that one? And what you see at that moment is another awareness just like you, but packaged differently. And you see channels one, two, and three as packaging. And this channel four, that entity, is—in Christianity it's called the soul; the eyes are the windows to the soul—so you see another soul just like you, but who is having an *entirely* different set of life experiences because they're packaged differently. And you see how much the package affects what their experience is all about. The package includes all the desires, all the fears, all the hopes, all the social perceptions.

So if you and I are meeting on channel four—see, it's... when meeting on channel one, we're meeting in Snowmass and Windstar; in a room. When meeting on channel four, we're just these souls who happen to be sharing a moment, wondering what we're doing on Earth; comparing notes. And the time and space of this is just somewhat incidental to the forms we happen to be meeting in at this moment.

Channel 5

You flip to channel five—it's like two mirrors facing each other. You see yourself looking at yourself looking at yourself. Because on channel five, there's only one of us. That's *Sh'ma Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu Adonai Ehad*: Hear, O Israel: the Lord is our God, the Lord is One. It's not one plus Dorothy, or one plus Pete. It's just one. So from channel five, we are one in drag, or we are one at play.

And if you were the One on channel five, Well, what'll I do—you wouldn't say 'today,' because you're not in today in there—but you'd say, Well, what'll I do? I think I'll become Betty. Like, I think I'll play hide-and-seek. Then you become the many, and you bring your awareness down, and you go into a little one of it. I think I'll go into some of them. And then you look out at the rest and say, Oh, God! Scary. And you see others as 'them,' and then you get all scared and you say, Okay, all of you are free, and you come back into the One. Whew, that was heavy. I don't think I'll play that one again.

Channel 6

So from channel five, we are the One at play. And, just to keep the Buddhists happy, we flip to channel six, where you disappear, I disappear, and the channel selector disappears; none of it is, was—it's all void.

System

Okay. Now we have a system to play with. Now, when I talk about you being born and going into somebody-training, the somebody-training you specifically went into was primarily channels one and two. And the anxiety that was attendant to the way in which you started to become somebody—let me point out: when you are born you are not busy being separate. It's all one thing to you; it's all one undifferentiated thing. And then something along the way comes along, and you start to see that you aren't all of it. Now, I don't know—I have a suspicion that my critical moment was when I bit my mother's breast, and she said, Hey, that's not yours! I think that's

mine. She pushed me away. There was something that happened where, suddenly, I had a sense that I did something that I fell out of grace. I was no longer at home in the universe; I was a separate entity that felt a yearning to get back. I suck. I eat. I grab. I want. I try to incorporate. I try to come back into the One. I am now a separate entity.

I learned separateness somewhere along the way. I bought into my separateness, and the emotional loading with which you do that means that you get very, very concerned about who you are; your identity. And in order to be functional in the world—to be, as a separate entity, to *survive*—because you begin to feel there's this vast power around you, and you experience impotence, or inadequacy, or whatever the roots of human neuroses are—you develop a sense of separateness, and there is this vastness, and you're always trying to make it alright to come back in. Whether you come back in through eating, through collecting, through your eyes, drawing in through—later—through all of [the] achievements, through sexuality; always trying to come back into the One, into the unity, into the feeling of being in the Tao, in the harmony of things, in the way of things—instead of being separate.

Thinking Mind

And the most powerful vehicle you have on channel two for developing your separateness and your computer system for functioning efficiently as a separate entity—where I'm me and you're you—is your thinking mind; your analytic, thinking mind, your conceptual mind. Now, the thinking mind is very addicting, because it gives us so much power. The thinking mind puts us on the Moon, the thinking mind does all these, the thinking mind gives us technology, the thinking mind gives us so much stuff.

I grew up learning the statement *cogito ergo sum*—I studied Latin, and it says, I think, therefore I am, meaning you are an identity with your thinking mind. I am the *thinker*. Like, you wake up in the morning, and from the moment you wake up you start things like, Gotta go to the bathroom. I could sleep five more minutes. It's warm in that corner of the bed. Gotta do the laundry. Wonder if the stove is still hot. Smell coffee. Ooh, I'm so sleepy. What was I dreaming about? Gotta go to the bathroom. Wonder if the car will start? And on you start, and you just start. Brrrrrrrr—it's like a triphammer: Think! Think! Think! Think! Think! Think! And each one is your mind, your awareness is—just imagine your awareness being the light, and it's like, What'll I think? and each thought is coming forth saying, Think of me! Think of me! I'm real. Think of me.

It's like that story of the drunk looking for the watch, and somebody comes along to help them, and they're under a streetlamp, and the fellows are looking, and finally he says, Well, where exactly did you lose the watch? And the drunk points up the alley. Well, what are you looking here for? He says, Because there's a light here. Well, that's the situation: that you end up studying what your thinking mind can know as an object, and everything you can't you say is irrelevant. Well, it turns out most of what we are ends up in the category of irrelevant.

Now, most people spend their entire lives with an identity in channels one and two, and it's as if they have created a room for themselves with their mind of who I am, and what is me, and what is not me, and how it all is. And then they—no matter how miserable the room is—they will never step out of it. I mean, I get images of—I've seen that photograph in the paper of a battered child who's been burned with cigarette ends by the mother, and just very badly battered. And the child is in the arms of a police matron who looks very motherly, and very loving, and very soft, and she's taking the baby away; and there's the mother, who looks very, very angry, and very bitter and hard. And the baby is *screaming* for its mother. It's that one.

Separateness

Now if, as is the case for most people, the need of that separateness to be sure it knows where it is, and how it is, and are you my friend or my enemy, and who can I get what from, and is it safe, and where do I go, where don't I go—this map, the map built from the place of my separateness. I am so attached to those identities on channel one and two that all the information that comes to me from channels three, four, five, and six I, in effect, reject. It's all there. You exist on channel one, two, three, four, five, six. Now, this is a model we're playing with, and if it gets too far out, just assume I took too many drugs in the sixties or something.

We're going to assume the information is coming in on every one of these channels as to who you are. One, two, three, four, five, six. But you're so attached to channels one and two that the other information on these other channels, you treat—and the words you use are 'irrelevant,' or 'error,' or 'I was out of my mind,' or 'I spaced out,' or 'I'm losing it,' or 'I don't know what just happened,' or... like, when I first took psilocybin—the mushrooms—and I had these experiences which were... like, I experienced that I was perfect. You know, that I *was* part of the universe and it was all perfect. Well, I know I'm not perfect, says channel one and two. So, what I do in order to preserve my model of myself, which is certainly inadequate and not perfect, is I say of that experience—because I'm a psychologist, you remember; a professor of psychology—I say, Interesting hallucination. Do you see? I have a label. It's called a reductionistic label. It's a label that makes it less than important. It's not *real*. As my father used to say: Rich, come down to reality! which meant, Get a job! Get your act together on this plane.

Awakening

As **William James** said—in 1906—he said,

Our normal, waking consciousness is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there may lay other types of consciousness. We may spend our entire lives without knowing of their existence, but apply the requisite stimulus and there they are in their completeness. Their existence forbids our premature closing of our accounts with reality.

(quoted from *The Varieties of Religious Experience*)

But most of us do. We say, *This* is reality, and all the rest of that is... is... la-la-land. It's playing. It's out there, somewhere. But somewhere along the line, for some people, in some birth, there is what's called 'awakening.' What awakening is, is that you acknowledge that channels three, four, five, and six—specifically: four, five and six—have some reality to them. You allow that they are potentially real, which means that the channels one and two, which previously you were treating as *absolutely* real, now are only relatively real. So what you have done in that moment is: you have done to your social perception what Einstein did to Newtonian physics. You learn Newtonian physics—I learned Newtonian physics as, This is absolute truth. And then Einstein came along and said, Depends on where you're standing. He just shifted it from absolute to relative reality.

Now, how that awakening occurs for any individual is as varied as there are individuals. When you're ripe for that awakening, a leaf can fall—who knows. See, I—in the sixties—was part of a club of people who had all awakened through *Better Living Through Chemistry*. And we would have these club meetings, which were—you know? I know—and we just reassured each other that we knew. And we all identified the experience we were having with our method. All of the club used to look—they all used to dress the same way; everybody used to wear white, and they smiled a lot, and they had flowers, and they all smiled, and they knew, you know? Moderate repressed aggression.

And at one lecture there was the club, and I was sort of an uncle to the club; my role. And down in the front row there was a woman who was in her late sixties, and she had on a hat that had little strawberries and cherries on it. She had a black patent leather bag, and a print dress, and responsible-looking oxfords. And I would say these things that only those of us that *knew* would know, and she would go like this. And I became aware of her in the front row, and I thought, How does she know? I mean, she's not an acid-head; there's no doubt about it. So I'd say something *more* esoterically outrageous that only people that've *really* been playing out between channels five and six would even think relevant, and she'd go: [gestures]. Maybe she has a nervous—you know? And I saw, when I'd speak, that she only responded at certain moments. When she did, she only responded when I made a point. And so, at the end of the lecture, I smiled broadly at her and she came over, and she said, Thank you so much, she said, that was just—that felt just right. I understood that perfectly. That's just the way I understand it to be. How do you *know*? What is it that you've done that allows you to know these things we're talking about? She leaned forward very conspiratorially and she said, I crochet!

And at that moment I sort of knew that the game wasn't the one I thought it was, because until then I had always identified the method of getting somewhere—what you got—with your method of getting there. And what happens to all of us is: if your method is crocheting, you can't *understand* why everybody isn't crocheting. Crocheting is the only way, you know? And that's your way. You do it through Zen sitting, you just feel so sorry for those poor slobes that don't sit. How much do *you* sit? you ask. If yours is skiing you can't *believe* that other people could be living here and don't ski. If it's sex—You mean, you are celibate? You know? Because you can't *conceive* of it, it's just inconceivable that somebody would throw away the ecstasy of transcendence.

But yet, when you look around, you see that people arrive at that by a *tremendous* variety of ways. And you see, when you can separate

the method from where the method takes you, you can hear that same quality of delight in a surfer, in a skier, in a sexual aficionado, in a bouillabaisse-cooker, in a cabin-builder, in—you know—in a problem-solver

Einstein Rational Mind

I mean, Einstein just went into *ecstatic* states. He went into places. He transcended. He went into places; he said, I didn't arrive at my understanding of the fundamental laws of the universe through my rational mind. (**) Rational mind's in channel two. He went into some other way of knowing the universe. He's trying to solve a problem about the relation of mass and energy, and he's so one-pointed at it that, just like following the breath, he goes through a doorway into another way of being in the universe in which everything is here. It's a *Gestalt*-way, it's a subjective way; it's not object, it's not subject-object. The thinking mind always thinks about something. So as long as you're in your thinking mind, you're always one thought away from where the action is. You're always feeling separate from the universe, because you're always thinking about the universe.

You can imagine **Bach** just having that doorway open into another realm of relationship to the universe where the sound *is*, where all the laws *are*, and if you have that doorway open, and then it comes down through you, then you can just sit around writing—just, all you are, really, is copying, in this bizarre sense. I mean, you, as an instrument, are merely a vehicle through which this stuff is coming. And, I mean, somebody like **Mozart**'s output—it's not like he sits down and thinks, Well, what'll I do today? All he does is open up, and then the stuff comes through. It's as if you go into this place where all *is*, it's not conceptual, it just all is.

And then, as you come back down into form—if you're doing it sequentially—as you come back down into form, if your form happens

to be music, it comes out through music. If your form happens to be physics, it comes out through $E=mc^2$. If your form happens to be art, it comes through *David*, the sculpture of David by Michelangelo.

Altered States

Now when you go into these other altered states of consciousness, as they call it—or come into the spirit, if you want it in a religious metaphor—there are things that you see that are very different from the way you see them in what's called 'normal waking consciousness'—so, channel two. Like, when you are looking at the universe from channel five—from the way God sees it, just outside of time and space—you're just awareness, and it's just looking at forms. Looking down or at forms; all form. What you become aware of is that all form is law; is lawfully related; that the nature of form is that it is connected to everything else in a lawful way. It's all changing, and all the change is lawful. And you just see it. You see law every way you look. You can look at it in genetics, you can look at it in quantum mechanics, you can look at it in music, you can look at it in archeology, astronomy, astrology, you can look at it in the *Kabbalah*, you can look at the *I Ching*, you can look at it in the *Quran*, et cetera. Every way you look you see law, and you see everything is related to everything else lawfully, including your body.

And when you see all this law related, which includes psychology and sociology, and suffering, and death, and violence, and it's all lawful. From that point of view, when you look out and you just see the law, and you say, *It's perfect!* You see the perfection of the law made manifest. It's all perfect. But then you come back down into your human heart. Perfect? I mean, can you look at the world—does it seem perfect to you? The suffering, starvation, violence, paranoia, the fear in people? Look in yourself, look at your own suffering, your own neuroses. Want to call that perfect?

The Paradox of Perfection

It's a paradox; what would be a paradox to the rational mind. A paradox. Perfect? Not perfect. If you buy the reality of your human heart, which empathises, it's sure not perfect. If you go up, it's perfect. So wouldn't you rather stay in a place where it's all perfect? That's the model of *high*: let's get high, where it's all perfect. It's all perfect. Spilled the Coca-Cola—perfect. Somebody falls down in front of you and you say, Karma. It's a very cold place, it's a very impersonal place. But it's a very safe place. Nuclear bomb may fall—right; well, all lawful. Just seeing form, lawfully manifest, wherever you go, and it's all just doing perfect.

How to Deal with Suffering

But you see, when you come down at the human level, the amount of suffering is so painful—to see it, to stay open, to keep your heart open to suffering in the world—is so painful that you finally have to close your heart down. Or—you either close your heart down to function down there, or you go up. Those are the, really, two choices you have. You either sort of burn out by the closing down; that's what most nurses and doctors do: they have to face suffering and death each day. Or people who work in things where there's just *so* much suffering you can't even begin to conceive of ending it. No matter how hard you work, you just close down a little bit; you just close your heart down a little bit. But that's the way it is. You just can't bear it. Or else you go up into that just karma, impersonal thing. Those are the kind of options you have.

Because how do you *begin*, on the human plane, to handle all the suffering? You go to fix that one, put your finger in that hole in the dike, and that one's leaking. And you go to do that one, and *that* one's

leaking. Where do you even begin? And I'm sure you are all on the good-guy mailing list just like I am. And I sit with pen poised over checkbook. Well, is it going to be the whales? Is it going to be the battered children? Is it going to be the nuclear movement? Is it going to be the Democratic congressman? Is it going to be the children of Africa? Is it going to be the Cambodian refugee camps? You know? Who's suffering more? And everyone is saying, We are the key one, and you see that you can't *possibly* deal with all the suffering

Getting High

And for me, for many years, I thought the game was to get high and get rid of my down. Because when I got high I was one with the universe, I felt it was all so clear, it was so light. And all stuff that brought me down I would put over there, and I would divide the world into that which kept me high and that which brought me down. And I'd say, Can't go home and visit the folks, they bring me down. I started to have these little categories in life. Can't work in the world; business [and] money brings me down, you know? And it was all these things that bring you down.

And I suffered from what you could call vertical schizophrenia. I mean, I even had two names for it: there was Dick Alpert, and there was Ram Dass. And Ram Dass saw everything as love, and everybody as brothers and sisters, and it was all unfolding of the law. And down here is Dick Alpert. He was greedy, lustful, frightened, neurotic—human. But no matter how hard I pushed, Dick Alpert didn't go away. It was as if I theoretically knew that it was all one, but it was all one except for that stuff that I was pushing away.

And somewhere along the line in the past ten years I saw that the game was not to get high, the game was to become free. And 'free' meant you weren't standing anywhere, and 'free' meant that you had to embrace your lows as well as your highs, and 'free' meant that as

long as you pushed away anything, it had you. It's like, the minute you are *not* doing something—I'm not being Dick Alpert—it's got you. And when it says that there is nowhere to stand in the spiritual journey it means channel one, two, three, four, five, six. You stand nowhere; there's nowhere where you are not, and there's nowhere where you are.

The Dance

And it's an interesting thing that, the quieter you get, and the more you start to hear how it all is—including yourself—the less clearly are you manipulative about it. The more you try to hear your part in the dance, and understand the dance has meaning—it isn't an error, it's not like somebody screwed up. And if somebody hasn't screwed up, it would all be nice now. I mean, it's a particular class; that we're going through a certain curriculum. It's not the be all, end all. It's a certain strata of reality in which certain kinds of opportunities for certain kinds of experiences are available.

Buddha's Lists

It's like Buddha. When you ask Buddha who we are, Buddha has these wonderful lists. He has **five hindrances**, he's got **ten fetters**, he's got 24 no-no's and 52 this's and that's—I mean, the [??] is full of lists. But just taking the five hindrances to play with. He said who we are: well, we've got lust and greed—that's just one, it isn't two; can't say I have one of these but not the other—lust and greed, then, the second one is hatred and ill will, the third one is agitation of mind, fourth are our old friends sloth and torpor, and the fifth one is doubt. Five hindrances.

The Human Curriculum

Now, if you were to set up an intentional community. Say, who will we have in it? Well, let's have people with lust and greed, hatred and ill will, agitation, sloth and torpor, and doubt. What do you think the community would end up like? This! This is it. This is the one we created. And people that have those kinds of attachments of mind taper here. Because this is the place where the sandpaper's available to work through those things. Which means—from channel four, from a soul's point of view—you now look at your human birth just the way you got it, right now, *just* the way it is, and realize that you created it. What you are doing on Earth is: you created a program for yourself, you created a curriculum. It's called *Human 305*, and until you finish that curriculum, you'll be sent back again, and again, and again.

Like, somebody comes to me and says, I hear you're living in New Mexico now—which isn't true, but they say 'I hear you're living in Santa Fe'—I want to come study with you because I have been living in New York and I can't stand it. And I say, Well, I don't take on students, but in your case I'll make an exception, and your first assignment as my student is to go live in New York for two years.

Because New York is just New York. It's not doing anything. You're doing it to yourself through New York. New York is merely showing you your own attachments of mind. If there's something that you don't like, or you love, that's in *you*, that's not out there. It means you're attached to needs, desires, fears, aversions, et cetera.

Getting Caught

When do you lose it that it's a curriculum and get caught in the curriculum? When do you get caught in the forms and start to suffer? The minute you are attached to form, you suffer. And the minute you

deny form, that's attachment. Do you hear it? You can't grab, you can't push away. You are—as the Bible says—you are *in* the world but not *of* the world.

Awakening, Desire, Awareness

And imagine now that you and I have taken birth, specifically, in order to awaken fully, to become free. And that the birth experience, the incarnation, is a series of experiences that *we*—back up, back here—have designed to help us awaken, to confront us with our attachment. You see, you and I each see a world that is a projection of our own attachments. You know this, probably, from psychology. And there is a statement: The truth waits for eyes unclouded by longing. When you want something, you only see what you want. If you're hungry, you just see what's edible. And if you get hungry enough, everything becomes edible. **Donner Party**, for example.

Now, how would it be possible to be in a human birth and still see what is true? You would have to extricate yourself from attachment to your desires. As a separate entity you have desires: you're part of a species that must reproduce, must survive, you have desires to survive, desires to reproduce, you have desires for security and stability, desires for pleasure. Does this mean you have to give up these desires? No. I didn't say that. The game is to extricate your awareness from attachment, or identification, to the desire. Desires go on. They're there. The only point is, you are no longer an identity with those desires.

You say, Well, I can't imagine how that could be! But you're doing it all the time. Very often, you are performing behavior that is satisfying various needs on your part, and yet your awareness is not caught in being the actor, or being the getter of gratification. And yet, you're doing it. For example, many of you find yourself hurtling through space—hopefully in a car—hurtling through space, guiding

three, four thousand pounds of metal, making *incredibly* complex decisions about centrifugal and centripetal force, and inertia, and things like that, all kinds of complex physics laws, and all the time you might be tuning the radio, looking for police, thinking about where you're going, remembering where you've been—you never even *think* about thinking about driving. And you knew who you think about driving. And then it goes in what we call base brain, and it's just sort of happening. It's a *very* complex behavior.

And you say, Well, driving is one thing. But really, then there's important things I've got to think about. Is that true? The question is: is there anything in life, is there any drama in life that is so seductive that it pulls you in where you lose your space? Where you lose that part of you that is not identified with the desire? As long as you see life as a set of choices about what it is you want out of life, it's very confusing. The moment you can identify with the soul and see life as a curriculum for awakening, then everything—shall I buy a new car or not?—well, how does that relate to my soul's awakening? And then you *see*—from that point of view: should I buy a new car or not?—the answer (although most people don't want to hear it) doesn't matter. Because getting the new car is going to face me with certain learning experiences, not getting the car is going to face me with experiences.

Should I Get Divorced

See, people come to me and they say, Should I get divorced or shouldn't I? I mean, they usually come with, Should I get divorced or shouldn't I? you know? Really—they juiced it up. Now, when I say to them, You know, it doesn't matter, they don't want to hear that at all, because they're in the world that turns; they're *really* in there, they don't want to hear that space at all.

But look at it: when you're at a choice point about any action, like, Should I marry or not? The part of you that, if you marry, the part

of you that didn't want to marry is going to sit there; it's going to still be there. And if you don't marry, the part of you that wanted to marry is going to still be there. So you're going to have to work with that stuff either way, aren't you? From a point of view of awakening, you're going to awaken either way. And when you can stand back far enough into this space, you can see that all of your life experiences, independent of what they are, are all learning experiences.

Then you say, Well, does it matter at all? Well, from a *human* point of view, it matters. From a soul's point of view it doesn't matter, because you're going to grow through all of it. So from a human point of view you do your best to optimize pleasure, happiness, all the nice things of life. From your soul's point of view you take what comes down the pike. And because you have that perspective going simultaneously, you're not—if you're just in your human situation and you don't get what you want, you're *really* bummed out. If, on the other hand, you have this other perspective, you work to get what you want and if you don't... ah, so, work with what I got. And at first you awaken out of your attachments, and then the attachments pull you back in, and then you are back wanting, desiring, fearing, hoping, yearning, et cetera.

Ouspensky and Self-Remembering

And then, as the process goes on, you start to develop that spaciousness of awareness, that presence, that open-heartedness, even as you are having these desires. For a long time, however, a desire will take over your consciousness. **Ouspensky**—who was one of the students of **Gurdjieff**—wrote a book called *In Search of the Miraculous*, and he advocated a method called *Self-Remembering* in which you sort of developed a witness which was another part of you that noticed what you were doing. And he describes how he would experiment with himself, and he'd say, Ouspensky is setting out for a

walk. Ouspensky is walking down the street. Ouspensky is turning left. And he would be very watching, Ouspensky is lifting his left foot. Ouspensky is lifting his right foot. And he was just watching all of it, witnessing it. And then he saw his tobacconist's shop, and he remembered he needed pipe tobacco. And he lost it, completely. Two days later, he remembered he was doing an experiment. You know, he just went under, completely, into the desire; the desire just took him over.

And I think you can all feel that, you can feel where you're going along very spacious, very free, very loving, very open, and then something comes up that pulls you, completely, into your attachment, your fear, your yearning, your—like, you go to church and you start to sing, and you're singing, Holy, holy, ho-ly Lord, God almighty, and suddenly it all opens up, and there's the angels and the trumpets and the chariots, and the whole *mishpacha* are all here, and you look at everybody in the congregation; they're so beautiful, and they're my brothers and sisters, you love them—your fourth *chakra* just opened—and you say, Oh, I'm never going to change. This is—I'm always going to feel this way. And it may last until dinner, when somebody else gets the legs. At some moment you pull back into your separateness.

The Process for Awakening

And the process of using your life experiences as a vehicle for awakening is to sit with that process. You babysit this process in yourself, so that you see yourself get stuck, and then you see yourself come up for air, and you begin to notice what it is that sticks you; where you're clining, which things grab your awareness. And very often your awareness will be almost totally grabbed by something, but there'll be *one* little thread. It's like, I'll go into a depression, but there's a little part of me that's saying, Boy, am I depressed!

Now, the part of me that's noticing it isn't depressed, it's just noticing. The rest of me is depressed. And I want to make the distinction between what psychologists call dissociation as a mechanism of defense where, because something is so unpleasant, you push it away and stand back from it and you say, Look at all that depression. Doesn't matter to me. That's different. And that's—often, spirituality, or what you say I'm doing for spiritual reasons, is really a psychodynamic reason. You're really doing it in order to avoid the pain of living. You go up, or you go into that kind of 'doesn't matter to me.'

I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about what it means to be in the world but not of the world, which means to stay open to the human condition, to your fear, longing, hopes, joys, arousals, depression, loneliness, self-pity, anger, jealousy, and at the same moment, simultaneously, develop a spaciousness that surrounds it. Just like sky surrounds clouds. And what you do at first—to develop an appreciation of that part of you that isn't form, that isn't wanting, yearning, separate, needful—you do your methods: you do meditation, you do devotion, you do whatever you do. You study, you come to retreats, you do these kind of things.

And then, as your faith in that part of you gets stronger, you don't push away your human experiences as much. You dive into them more deeply—until, finally, when you look at a Zen monk that is really free, you see somebody that is *richly* living life. They're not, sort of, dallying on the side, sticking a toe in the water. To be in the world but not of the world. If you're going to get the lessons of life, you've got to live life. Because the experiences are the ways you work through the attachments, not by avoiding the experiences.

You don't avoid life and get free from it. Life is a series of experiences. You've got to be *in* them—allow the risk of attachment, and constantly be also connecting to this part that has nothing to do with the attachment. And you see all of your feelings and all of that is happening—it doesn't mean you're not experiencing them. But it

means, in addition to experiencing them, you are also cultivating spaciousness.

Why So Serious

There is some quality of release from suffering the minute you can nurture in yourself that little bit of spaciousness. You can call it the cosmic giggle, you can call it anything you want. It has a certain humor to it. The humor that you've taken it all so seriously. I mean, how poignant we are. We get so lost in our melodrama. Are you always riding the waves, or are you sitting like a big tuna down in the ocean? Just sort of sitting there, looking up and saying, Wow! Look! Looking from this place where you're just undulating, undulating in space.

Listening

A medium step in getting to that spaciousness—one of the methods is *noticing* all this stuff, noticing what catches you, what grabs you, in which you are separating. Part of your consciousness is the noticer and part of it is the desirer. Then, as you get further on, even the noticer disappears and there's just space. You're not busy self-consciously noticing; there's just spaciousness and the way you do it. Like, I'm talking to you? Same moment, I'm not talking to you. And if you are quiet enough, if you are busy just being the listener, you're not meeting me in another place where we are just quietly hanging out together, watching the words come and go.

And there's a certain type of listening. Like in the Tibetan tradition, **Milarepa**, the Tibetan yogi, is often pictured with his hand around his ear, listening. It's like you listen your way into—it's not

listening with your ear, it's just... you become an instrument of *tuning*, in which you're tuning into more and more of what is. It's like becoming part of the Tao, the Way of things.

Selzer's Mortal Lessons

And what I want to read [to] you is an example of this. It's from a book called *Mortal Lessons* by a doctor named Selzer, and these are his words.

On the bulletin board in the front hall of the hospital where I work, there appeared an announcement. 'Yeshi Dhonden,' it read, 'will make rounds at six o'clock on the morning of June 10. The particulars were then given, followed by a notation, 'Yeshi Dhonden is Personal Physician to the Dalai Lama.' I am not so leathery a skeptic that I would knowingly ignore an emissary from the gods. Not only might such sangfroid be inimical to one's earthly well-being, it could take care of eternity, as well.

Thus, on the morning of June 10, I join the clutch of whitecoats waiting in the small conference room adjacent to the ward selected for the rounds. The air in the room is heavy with ill-concealed dubiety and suspicion of bamboozlement.

You can imagine... all these Western doctors.

At precisely six o'clock he appears: a short, golden, barrely man, dressed in a sleeveless robe of saffron and maroon. His scalp is shaven, and the only visible hair is a scanty black line above each hooded eye.

He bows in greeting while his young interpreter makes the introduction. Yeshi Dhonden, we are told, will examine a patient selected by a member of the staff. The diagnosis is as unknown to Yeshi Dhonden as it is to us. The examination of the patient will take place in our presence, after which we will reconvene in the conference room, where Yeshi Dhonden will discuss the case. We are further informed that, for the past two hours, Yeshi Dhonden has purified himself by bathing, fasting, and prayer. I, having breakfasted well, performed only the most desultory of ablutions, and given no thought at all to my soul, glance furtively at my fellows. Suddenly, we seem a soiled, uncouth lot.

The patient had been awakened early and told that she was to be examined by a foreign doctor, and had been asked to produce a fresh specimen of urine. So when we enter her room, the woman shows no surprise. She has long ago taken on that mixture of compliance and resignation that is the face of chronic illness. This was to be but another in an endless series of tests and examinations. Yeshi Dhonden steps to the bedside while the rest stand apart, watching. For a long time he gazes at the woman, favoring no part of her body with his eyes, but seeming to fix his glance at a place just above her supine form. I, too, study her: no physical sign nor obvious symptom gives a clue to the nature of her disease.

At last, he takes her hand, raising it in both of his own. Now, he bends over the bed in a kind of crouching stance, his head drawn down into the collar of his robe. His eyes are closed as he feels for her pulse. In a moment he has found the spot, and for the next half hour—the next *half* hour—he remains thus, suspended above the patient like some exotic golden bird with folded wings, holding the pulse of the woman beneath his fingers, cradling her hand in his. All the power of the man seems to have been drawn down into this one purpose. It is palpitation of the pulse raised to the state of ritual. From the foot of the bed where I stand, it is as though he and the patient have entered a special place of isolation; of apartness, about which a vacancy hovers and across which no violation is possible.

After a moment, the woman rests back upon her pillow. From time to time, she raises her head to look at the strange figure above her, then sinks back once more. I cannot see their hands joined in a correspondence that is exclusive, intimate; his fingertips receiving the voice of her sick body through the rhythm and throb she offers at her wrist.

All at once, I am envious—not of him, not of Yeshi Dhonden for his gift of beauty and holiness—but of her. I want to be held like that, touched so, received. And I know that I, who have palpitated a hundred thousand pulses, have not felt a single one.

At last, Yeshi Dhonden straightens, gently places the woman's hand upon the bed, and steps back. The interpreter produces a small wooden bowl and two sticks. Yeshi Dhonden pours a portion of the urine specimen into the bowl, proceeds to whip the liquid with the two sticks. This he does for several minutes until a foam is raised. Then, bowing above the bowl, he inhales the odor three times, he sets down the bowl, and turns to leave. All this while he has not uttered a single word.

As he nears the door, the woman raises her head and calls out to him in a voice at once urgent and serene. “Thank you, doctor. Thank you,” she says, and touches with her other hand the place he had held on her wrist, as though to recapture something that had visited there. Yeshi Dhonden turns back for a moment to gaze at her, then steps into the corridor. Rounds are at an end.

We are seated once more in the conference room. Yeshi Dhonden speaks now, for the first time, in soft Tibetan sounds that I have never heard before. He has barely begun when the young interpreter begins to translate. The two voices continuing in tandem—a bilingual fugue, the one chasing the other. It is like the chanting of monks. He speaks of winds coursing through the body of the woman, currents that break against barriers, eddying. These vortices are in her blood, he says. The last spendings of an imperfect heart. Between the chambers of her heart, long, long before she was born, a wind had come and blown open a deep gate that must never be opened. Through it charge the full waters of her river, as the mountain stream cascades in the springtime, battering, knocking loose the land, and flooding her breath. Thus he speaks, and is silent.

“May we now have the diagnosis?” a professor asks.

The host of these rounds, the man who knows, answers. “Congenital heart disease. Interventricular septal defect, with resultant heart failure.”

“A gateway in the heart,” I think, “that must not be opened. Through it charge the full waters that flood her breath.”

So here, then, is the doctor, listening to the sounds of the body to which the rest of us are deaf. He is more than doctor, he is priest.

Once you can appreciate that there are other parts of your being from which the universe is heard differently, and that when you rest in these other parts of your being, you hear clearly and can then understand the meaning of your manifestation and how to function within it, then the sense you adopt is of someone who is listening.

Tuning. It’s like tuning an instrument. You’re tuning and listening, tuning and listening to what is; to what is.