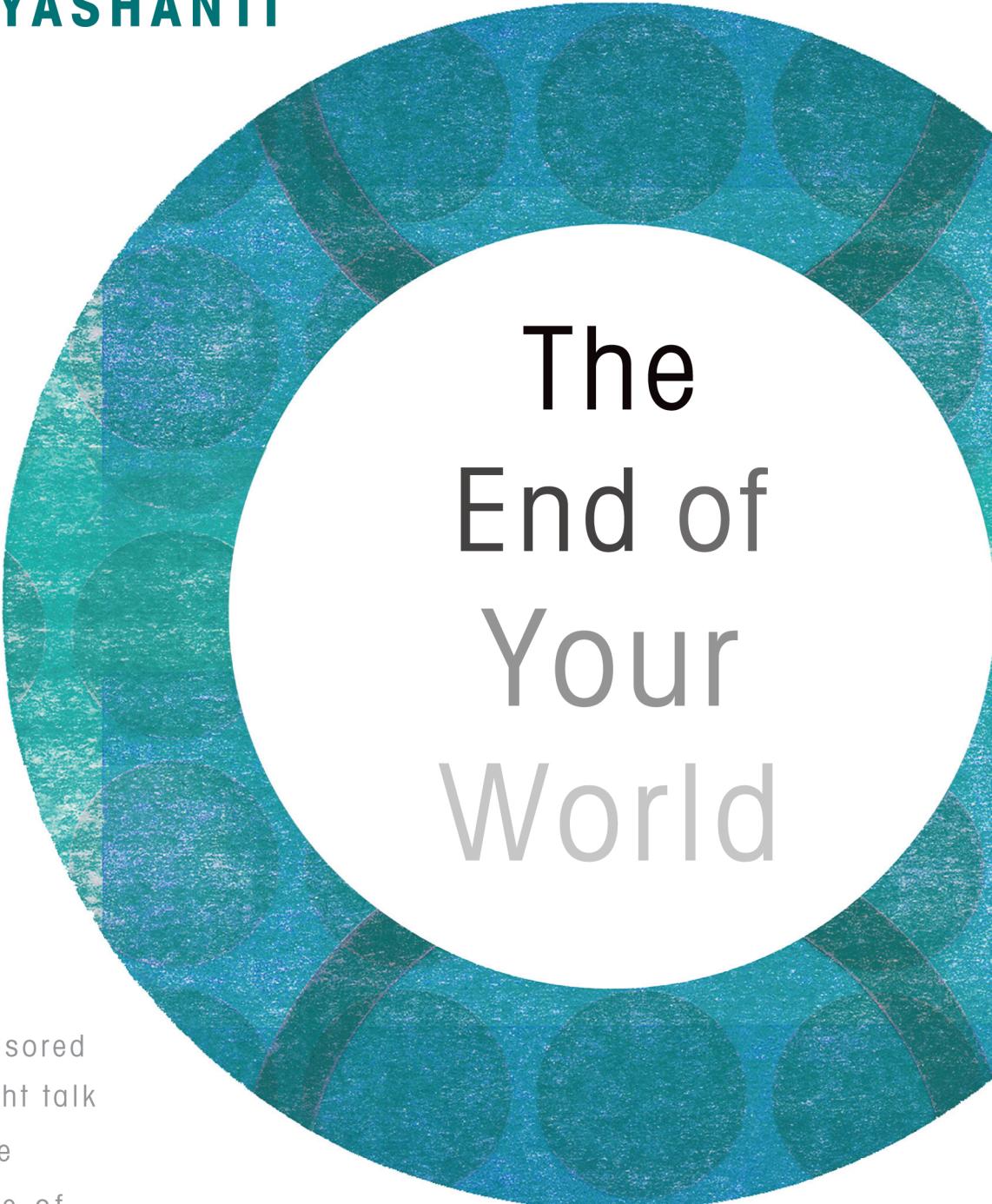


ADYASHANTI



The End of Your World

uncensored
straight talk
on the
nature of
enlightenment

More and more people are “waking up” spiritually. And for most of them, the question becomes: now what? “Information about life after awakening is usually not made public,” explains Adyashanti. “It’s most often shared only between teachers and their students.”

The End of Your World is his response to a growing need for direction on the spiritual path. Consider the book you hold in your hands Adyashanti’s personal welcome to “a new world, a state of oneness.”

Adyashanti begins by describing the “I got it/I lost it” phenomenon that perplexes so many of his students—the fluctuation between what he calls “non-abiding” awakening and the ultimate state of “abiding” enlightenment. With straight talk and penetrating insight, Adyashanti then points out the pitfalls and cul-de-sacs that “un-enlighten” us along the journey, including the trap of meaninglessness, how the ego can “co-opt” realization for its own purposes, the illusion of superiority that may accompany intense spiritual breakthroughs, and the danger of becoming “drunk on emptiness.”

“Full awakening comes when you sincerely look at yourself, deeper than you’ve imagined, and question everything,” teaches Adyashanti. *The End of Your World* is your invitation to join Adyashanti for an honest investigation of what you really are—and how to live once you discover it.

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ADYASHANTI

uncensored straight talk
on the nature of enlightenment

The
End of
Your
World



Sounds True, Inc.
Boulder, CO 80306

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to the Sierra Mountains of California.
In your high places, where the air gets thin, I found my
natural church and cathedral.

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Editor's Introduction

When I first met Adyashanti in the Fall of 2004, I was struck by the original and fresh way he taught about spiritual awakening. Although he honored his Zen lineage, he emphasized the importance of not relying on a specific teacher or method for realization. Instead, he talked about how important it is to look to our own direct experience and fearlessly explore the territory of our own lives. He also insisted that it is a myth that spiritual awakening is a rare phenomenon available only to a select few—such as people who have meditated in caves for decades or who wear special robes. He went further to say that this myth about the rarity of awakening can actually be an obstacle to our own process of discovery, because we believe in a limitation that is not real but self-imposed.

In retrospect, I think Adya (as he is called by friends and students) was speaking from the perspective of someone sitting atop the crest of a wave: a wave that is beginning to break in our lifetime. As Adya points out in Chapter 1, more and more people with varied backgrounds and histories of religious experience are beginning to describe “spiritual awakening”—an unshakable realization that who we are is the oneness of life—as the most important transformation of their lives. In the past few years, there appears to have been a shift in the collective perception of what is possible; spiritual awakening is no longer the domain of elite practitioners, but is suddenly within the reach of all of us.

As a publisher who has been making spiritual wisdom teachings available for over two decades, I am both thrilled about this new wave of interest in awakening and a bit concerned about the potential confusion, misunderstandings, and distortions that often accompany the idea of realization. To begin with, people mean very different things by the term *spiritual awakening*. I often wonder if people understand not only what is gained through this process, but also—and perhaps more important—what is *lost*. Additionally, as spiritual awakening has become more and more popularized, I have seen many people talk about their awakening from an ego perspective, co-opting the claim of awakening to somehow feel better and “more awake” than other people. But what troubles me the most is the number of people who deny anything in their experience—be it anger, depression, or family

trouble—that contradicts their idea of what it means to be an awakened person.

A little over a year ago, I was on the telephone with Adya, complaining about this phenomenon—about meeting so many people who seemed to misunderstand spiritual awakening and who are actually distancing themselves from their moment-to-moment experience in the name of being awake. Adya mentioned that he was actually lecturing quite a bit on just this very topic—on the misconceptions, pitfalls, and delusions that can occur after an initial experience of spiritual awakening. I immediately and with great enthusiasm asked Adya if he would deliver a series of talks on this topic so that Sounds True could publish these teachings in both audio and text form. He agreed, and the result is *The End of Your World: Uncensored Straight Talk on the Nature of Enlightenment*.

As Adya states in Chapter 1, there are very few resources available for people who have had an initial experience of spiritual awakening and want to understand how the process continues and unfolds. May this book be a helpful guide and further catalyst for this greatest of adventures.

Tami Simon
Publisher, Sounds True
June 2008
Boulder, Colorado

CHAPTER ONE

Exploring Life *After* Awakening

There's a phenomenon happening in the world today. More and more people are waking up—having real, authentic glimpses of reality. By this I mean that people seem to be having moments where they awaken out of their familiar senses of self, and out of their familiar senses of what the world is, into a much greater reality—into something far beyond anything they knew existed.

These experiences of awakening differ from person to person. For some, the awakening is sustained over time, while for others the glimpse is momentary—it may last just a split second. But in that instant, the whole sense of “self” disappears. The way they perceive the world suddenly changes, and they find themselves without any sense of separation between

themselves and the rest of the world. It can be likened to the experience of waking up from a dream—a dream you didn’t even know you were in until you were jolted out of it.

In the beginning of my teaching work, most of the people who came to me were seeking these deeper realizations of spirituality. They were seeking to wake up from the limiting and isolated senses of self they had imagined themselves to be. It’s this yearning that underpins all spiritual seeking: to discover for ourselves what we already intuit to be true—that there is more to life than we are currently perceiving.

But as time has passed, more and more people are coming to me who have already had glimpses of this greater reality. It is because of them that I am giving the teachings in this book.

The Dawning of Awakening

This discovery I’m talking about is traditionally referred to as *spiritual awakening*, because one awakens from the dream of separation created by the egoic mind. We realize—often quite suddenly—that our sense of self, which has been formed and constructed out of our ideas, beliefs, and images, is not really who we are. It doesn’t define us; it has no center. The ego may exist as a series of passing thoughts, beliefs, actions, and reactions, but in and of itself it has no identity. Ultimately all of the images we have about ourselves and the world turn out to be nothing but a resistance to things as they are. What we call *ego* is simply the mechanism our

mind uses to resist life as it is. In that way, ego isn't a thing as much as it is a verb. It is the resistance to what is. It is the pushing away or pulling toward. This momentum, this grasping and rejecting, is what forms a sense of a self that is distinct, or separate, from the world around us.

But with the dawn of awakening, this outside world begins to collapse. Once we lose our sense of self, it's as if we have lost the whole world as we knew it. At that moment—whether that moment is just a glimpse or something more sustained—we suddenly realize with incredible clarity that what we truly are is in no way limited to the small sense of self that we thought we were.

Awakening to truth or reality is something that is very hard to talk about because it is transcendent of speech. It is helpful, nevertheless, to work with some sort of a guidepost. The simplest thing one can say about the experiential knowledge of awakening is that it is *a shift in one's perception*. This is the heart of awakening. There is a shift in perception from seeing oneself as an isolated individual to seeing oneself, if we have a sense of self at all after this shift, as something much more universal—everything and everyone and everywhere at the same time.

This shift is not revolutionary; it's the same as looking in the mirror in the morning and having an intuitive sense that the face you are looking at is yours. It is not a mystical experience; it is a simple experience. When you look in the mirror, you experience the simple recognition, "Oh, that's

me.” When the shift of perception that’s called awakening happens, whatever our senses come into contact with is experienced as ourselves. It’s as if we think with everything we encounter, “Oh, that’s me.” We don’t experience ourselves in terms of our ego, in terms of a separate someone or separate entity. It’s more a feeling of the One recognizing itself, or Spirit recognizing itself.

Spiritual awakening is a remembering. It is not becoming something that we are not. It is not about transforming ourselves. It is not about changing ourselves. It is a remembering of what we are, as if we’d known it long ago and had simply forgotten. At the moment of this remembering, if the remembering is authentic, it’s not viewed as a personal thing. There is really no such thing as a “personal” awakening, because “personal” would imply separation. “Personal” would imply that it is the “me” or the ego that awakens or becomes enlightened.

But in a true awakening, it is realized very clearly that even the awakening itself is not personal. It is universal Spirit or universal consciousness that wakes up to itself. Rather than the “me” waking up, what we are wakes up *from* the “me.” What we are wakes up from the seeker. What we are wakes up from the seeking.

The problem with defining awakening is that upon hearing each of these descriptions, the mind creates another image, another idea of what this ultimate truth or ultimate reality is all about. As soon as these images are created, our

perception is distorted once again. In this way, it's really impossible to describe the nature of reality, except to say that it's not what we think it is, and it's not what we've been taught it is. In truth, *we are not capable of imagining what it is that we are*. Our nature is literally beyond all imagination. What we are is *that which is watching*—that consciousness which is watching us pretending to be a separate person. Our true nature is continually partaking of all experience, awake to every instant, to each and every moment.

In awakening, what's revealed to us is that we are not a thing, nor a person, nor even an entity. What we are is that which manifests as all things, as all experiences, as all personalities. We are that which dreams the whole world into existence. Spiritual awakening reveals that that which is unspeakable and unexplainable is actually what we are.

Abiding and Nonabiding Awakening

As I've mentioned, this experience of awakening can be just a glimpse, or it can be sustained over time. Now, some would say that if an awakening is momentary, it is not a real awakening. There are those who believe that, with authentic awakening, your perception opens up to the true nature of things and never closes back down again. I can understand this perspective, since ultimately the whole spiritual journey does lead us to a full awakening. Full awakening simply means that we perceive from the perspective of Spirit—from the view of oneness—all the time.

From this awakened perspective, there isn't any separation anywhere—not in the world, not in the universe, not in all the universes everywhere. The truth is anywhere and everywhere, at all times, in all dimensions, for all beings. It is a truth that is the source of everything that will ever be experienced—in life, after life, in this dimension or any other dimension.

From the perspective of the ultimate, literally everything—be it at a higher or lower dimension, here or there, yesterday, today, or tomorrow, everything—is but a manifestation of Spirit. It is Spirit itself that wakes up. So, ultimately, the trajectory every being is on, whether they know it or not, is a trajectory toward full awakening—toward a full knowing, toward a full experiential knowledge of what they are, toward unity, toward oneness.

But the moment of awakening may or may not result in a permanent seeing. As I said, some people will tell you that unless it's permanent, the awakening is not real. What I've seen as a teacher is that the person who has a momentary glimpse beyond the veil of duality and the person who has a permanent, "abiding" realization are seeing and experiencing the same thing. One person experiences it momentarily; another experiences it continually. But what is experienced, if it is true awakening, is the same: all is one; we are not a particular thing or a particular someone that can be located in a particular space; what we are is both nothing and everything, simultaneously.

So, as I see it, it doesn't really matter whether an awakening is instantaneous or continuous. It matters in the sense that there is a trajectory—nobody's heart will be totally fulfilled until that perceiving from the point of view of truth is continuous—but what is seen is an awakening, whether it is sustained or not.

This glimpse of awakening, which I call *nonabiding awakening*, is becoming more and more common. It happens for a moment, an afternoon, a day, a week—maybe as long as a month or two. Awareness opens up, the sense of the separate self falls away—and then, like the aperture on a camera lens, awareness closes back down. All of a sudden that person who had previously perceived true nonduality, true oneness, is quite surprisingly now perceiving back in the dualistic “dream state.” In the dream state, we’re back in our conditioned sense of self—in a limited, isolated sense of being.

The good news is that once a moment of this clear seeing has actually taken place, the aperture of our awareness can never completely close down again. It may seem like it has closed down completely, but it never quite does. In the deepest part of yourself, you don’t ever forget. Even if you’ve only glimpsed reality for a moment, something within you is changed forever.

Reality is nuclear; it’s incredibly powerful. It’s unimaginably potent. People can experience a flash of reality in the time it takes to snap your fingers, and the energy and the force that enters into them as a result is life altering.

Just one moment of awakening begins the dissolution of one's false sense of self and, subsequently, the dissolution of one's whole perception of the world.

Awakening Is Not What You Imagine It to Be

In a very real sense, it is much more accurate to talk about what we *lose* upon awakening rather than what we gain. We not only lose ourselves—who we thought we were—but we also lose our entire perception of the world. Separation is only a perception; in fact, when it comes to our world, there is nothing but perception. “Your world” is not your world; it is only your perception. So while it may seem negative at first, I think it’s much more useful to talk about spiritual awakening in terms of what we lose—what we awaken *from*. This means we’re talking about the dissolution of the image we have of ourselves, and it’s this dismantling of who we thought we were that is so startling when one wakes up.

And it is indeed startling: it’s not what we think it’s going to be like at all. I’ve never had a single student come back and say, “You know, Adya, I peered through the veil of separation, and it’s pretty much what I thought it would be. It measures up pretty closely to what I’ve been told.” Usually they come back and say, “This is nothing like what I imagined.”

This is especially interesting since many of the people I teach have been studying spirituality for many years, and they often have very intricate ideas about what awakening is

going to be like. But when it happens, it is always different from their expectations. In many ways, it is grander, but also in many ways, it is simpler. In truth, if it is to be true and real, awakening *must* be different from what we imagine it to be. This is because all of our imaginings about awakening are happening within the paradigm of the dream state. It is not possible to imagine something outside of the dream state when our consciousness is still within it.

How Does Your Life Change after Awakening?

With awakening there also comes a total reorganization of the way we perceive life—or at least the beginning of a reorganization. This is because awakening itself, while beautiful and amazing, often brings with it a sense of disorientation. Even though you as the One have awakened, there is still your whole human structure—your body, your mind, and your personality. Awakening can often be experienced as very disorienting to this human structure.

So it is the process that happens *after* awakening that I want to explore. As I've said, for a very few people, the moment of awakening will be complete. It will be final in a certain sense, and there will be no need for a continuing process. We might say that such people had an extraordinarily light karmic load; even though they may have experienced extreme suffering before awakening, one can see that their karmic inheritance, the conditioning that they were dealing with, wasn't too deep. This is very rare. Only a few people in

a given generation may wake up in such a way that there's no further process to undergo.

What I always tell people is this: don't count on that person being you. Better to count on being like everyone else, which means that you will undergo a process after an initial awakening. It won't be the end of your journey. What I will attempt to do here is to point you in a direction that may be useful and orienting as you embark on that journey. As my teacher used to say, it's like getting your foot in the front door. Just because you've gotten your foot in the front door doesn't mean you have turned the lights on; it doesn't mean you have learned to navigate in that different world that you've awakened to.

I'm very happy that this book, which is based on a series of talks I've given, offers me the opportunity to address this subject—the question of what happens *after* awakening. The information that exists on life after awakening is not usually made public. It's most often shared only between spiritual teachers and their students. The problem with that approach is that, as I've said, a lot of people are now having these moments of awakening, and there is very little coherent teaching available for them. In that sense, this book is meant to be a welcoming to that new world, that new state of oneness.

At this point I'd like to address those readers who are thinking, "Well, I haven't had one of those glimpses. I don't think I've really awakened." Others may not be sure if what

they have experienced is awakening or not. Wherever you are on this path, I believe this information is relevant. For, as it turns out, what happens *after* awakening is relevant to what happens *before* awakening.

In fact, the spiritual process isn't any different before awakening than afterward. It's just that, after awakening, the process is happening from a different perspective; you may think of it as a bird's-eye view versus a ground-level view. Before awakening, we don't know who we are. We think we are a separate, isolated person, in a particular body, walking around in a world that is distinct from us. Once awakening has happened, we are still walking around in that world; we just know that we are not limited to a particular body or personality and that we are actually not separate from the world around us.

It's important to note, as well, that we do not become immune to misperception simply because we've had a glimpse of awakening. Certain fixations and conditionings will linger even after we perceive from the place of oneness. The path after awakening, then, is a path of dissolving our *remaining* fixations—our hang-ups, you might say. So it's not that much different from the path *to* awakening, which is path of dissolving certain delusions we have, certain tendencies to contract. The difference is that, before awakening, our personality structure feels much weightier, much heavier, much denser, because our whole identity is actually wrapped up in our conditioning. After awakening we know

that the conditioning of our body-mind system is not personal; we know that it doesn't define us. That knowledge, that living truth, makes it much easier and much less threatening to address the unraveling of our illusions.

So there is a great similarity in what we're doing spiritually before awakening and what we are doing afterward. We are doing it from a different perspective; before awakening we are doing it from the perspective of separation, and after awakening we are doing it from the perspective of nonseparation. But *what* we're actually doing, the approach, the process itself, is quite similar. You might say that it's just happening on different levels of being. In that way, almost everything I'll be discussing in the chapters that follow can be applied to wherever you find yourself; it can be translated to your own experience.

The Willingness to Question Everything

As I often tell my own students, I do not present my teachings as statements of truth, because trying to put the truth into words is a fool's game. It's the approach we often take before awakening—we conceptualize the truth and then believe the concept. So rather than teaching some sort of theology or philosophy, I present my teachings as strategies. I am offering you strategies for awakening and strategies to help you with what happens after awakening.

All of the words I use are intended as pointers. In Zen there is a saying: Don't mistake the finger pointing to the

moon for the moon itself. Even though we may hear that a hundred times, we still have a tendency to make the mistake, over and over. So while I use lots of words, set certain contexts, and use certain metaphors, I ask you to keep in mind that everything I am teaching must be *awakened to*. It must be *lived* for it to be real. Nothing I say substitutes for the real, direct experience of knowing what you truly are. You need to be willing to question everything, to stop and ask yourself, “Do I really know what I think I know, or have I just taken on the beliefs and opinions of others? What do I actually *know*, and what do I want to believe or imagine? What do I know for certain?”

This one question—“What do I know for certain?”—is tremendously powerful. When you look deeply into this question, it actually destroys your world. It destroys your whole sense of self, and it’s meant to. You come to see that everything you think you know about yourself, everything you think you know about the world, is based on assumptions, beliefs, and opinions—things you believe because you were taught or told that they were true. Until we start to see these false perceptions for what they really are, consciousness will be imprisoned within the dream state.

In the same way, as soon as we allow ourselves to realize, “My gosh, I know almost nothing: I don’t know who I am. I don’t know what the world is. I don’t know if this is true. I don’t know if that is true,” something within our being opens up. When we are willing to step into the unknown

and its inherent insecurity, and not run back to anything for cover or for comfort—when we are willing to stand as if facing an oncoming wind and not wince—we can finally face our actual self.

Investigating the question, “What do I know for certain?” is also an invaluable tool once awakening has happened. Asking yourself this question aids in the dissolution of limitations and ideas, as well as the tendency to fixate—all of which continue after awakening.

No matter where you are on the path, then, it’s this willingness to stand up within yourself and ask this question, and to be open and sincere about what you find, that is the most important thing. It’s the backbone on which the entirety of your awakening and your life after awakening depends.

CHAPTER TWO

Authentic Awakening—And the Disorientation That Can Follow

Most of what we are told about awakening sounds like a sales pitch for enlightenment. In a sales pitch, we are told only the most positive aspects; we may even be told things that are not actually true. In the sales pitch for awakening, we are told that enlightenment is all about love and ecstasy, compassion and union, and a host of other positive experiences. It is often shrouded in fantastic stories, so we come to believe that awakening has to do with miracles and mystical powers. One of the most common sales pitches includes describing enlightenment as an experience of bliss. As a result, people think, “When I spiritually awaken, when I have union with God, I will enter into a state of constant ecstasy.” This is, of course, a deep misunderstanding of what awakening is.

There may be bliss *with* awakening, because it is actually a by-product of awakening, but it is not awakening itself. As long as we are chasing the by-products of awakening, we will miss the real thing. This is a problem, because many spiritual practices attempt to reproduce the by-products of awakening without giving rise to the awakening itself. We can learn certain meditative techniques—chanting mantras or singing *bhajans*, for example—and certain positive experiences will be produced. The human consciousness is tremendously pliable, and by taking part in certain spiritual practices, techniques, and disciplines, you can indeed produce many of the by-products of awakening—states of bliss, openness, and so on. But what often happens is that you end up with *only* the by-products of awakening, without the awakening itself.

It is important that we know what awakening is not, so that we no longer chase the by-products of awakening. We must give up the pursuit of positive emotional states through spiritual practice. The path of awakening is not about positive emotions. On the contrary, enlightenment may not be easy or positive at all. It is not easy to have our illusions crushed. It is not easy to let go of long-held perceptions. We may experience great resistance to seeing through even those illusions that cause us a great amount of pain.

This is something many people don't know they're signing up for when they start on a quest for spiritual awakening. As a teacher, one of the things that I find out about students relatively early on is whether they are interested in the real

thing—do they really want the truth, or do they actually just want to feel better? Because the process of finding the truth may not be a process where we feel increasingly better and better. It may be a process where we need to look at things honestly, sincerely, truthfully, and that may or may not be an easy thing to do.

The sincere call from reality to reality, the sincere call to awaken, is a call that comes from a very deep place within us. It comes from a place that wants the truth more than it wants to feel good. If our orientation is simply to feel better in each moment, then we'll continue to delude ourselves, because trying to feel better in the moment is exactly *how* we delude ourselves. We think our delusions are making us feel better. In order to awaken, we must break out of the paradigm of always seeking to feel better. Of course, we want to feel better; it's part of the human experience. Everybody wants to feel good. We are hardwired to seek more pleasure and less pain. But there is an even deeper impulse within us, and that is what I describe as the impulse to awaken.

It's this impulse to awaken that gives us the courage to look at all the ways in which we deceive ourselves. It is an impulse that calls us to take responsibility for our own lives. We can't get to enlightenment by riding on the coattails of an enlightened teacher; it doesn't work that way. Trying to do that makes us go blind; it means we do not want to think for ourselves; it means we do not want to examine things for ourselves. When we are blindly doing what we

are told—blindly following a teaching simply because it is ancient or revered—we end up with just what we’re asking for: blindness.

Another one of the great misunderstandings about awakening or enlightenment is that it is some sort of mystical experience. We might expect an experience akin to union with God: a merging with the environment or a dissolving into the ocean. This is not the case. Nor is awakening the same as suddenly having a tremendous amount of cosmic insight—insight into the way the whole universe is constructed, insight into the inner workings of what we think is reality.

I could go on and on, but essentially what is important to realize is that spiritual awakening is very different from having a mystical experience. Mystical experiences are beautiful. They are in many ways the highest and most pleasurable experiences that a “me” can have. The “me” is always seeking union. Many of the spiritual practices people engage in are actually meant to produce mystical experience of this variety, whether we’re talking about an experience of merging or visions of deities or feeling like our consciousness is expanding through space and time. But again, mystical experiences are not the same as awakening.

I am not saying that mystical experiences have no value, and I am not saying they aren’t transformative, because they often are. Mystical experiences can change the structure of the egoic self to a radical degree, and often in very positive

ways. So in the relative world of things, mystical experiences have a value. But when we are talking about spiritual awakening, we are not talking about personal experience. We are talking about awakening *from* the “me.” We are talking about going from one paradigm to a completely different paradigm, from one world to another.

I do not mean to imply that someone who is awake does not see the same world you see. Just as you see a chair, someone who is awake sees a chair. You see a car, and someone who is awake sees the car. The difference is that when one is truly awakened, when one has gone beyond the veil of duality, things that look different and distinct to everyone else are perceived as essentially the same. We see the chair, and at the same time we do not see ourselves as separate from the chair. Everything we see, everything we feel, everything we hear is literally a manifestation of the same thing.

One of the Hallmarks of a True Awakening Is the End of Seeking

With a true and authentic awakening, who and what we are becomes clear. There’s no longer a question about it; it is a done deal. In this way, one of the hallmarks of a true awakening is the end of seeking. You no longer feel the momentum, the push and the pull. The seeker has been revealed as the virtual reality it always was, and as such it disappears. The seeker has in some sense accomplished its task. It provided the necessary momentum to help propel

consciousness or Spirit out of its identification with the dream state and helped it to return back to its natural state of being.

Now, if it's the abiding type of awakening, then the seeker and the seeking are completely dissolved. If, on the other hand, the awakening is of a nonabiding character, then the seeker and seeking may be in the *process* of being dissolved, but may not be entirely dissolved yet. Either way, this dissolution of the seeker itself can transform one's life. For those of us on a spiritual path, our whole identity may have been wrapped up in being the seeker. Life may have literally been defined by spiritual seeking, by the yearning for God or union or enlightenment.

Then, all of a sudden, awakening happens. The seeker, the seeking, and the whole egoic structure that gets built up around the spiritual quest is suddenly gone. This identity is seen to be what it is—rather meaningless and not useful—and it falls away.

The Honeymoon of Awakening

This dropping away of the seeker can be experienced as a huge relief. It marks what I like to call *the honeymoon of awakening*. At least for me, this dropping away of the seeker and seeking was experienced as if an enormous weight had been taken off my shoulders. It was a very physical experience. I literally felt like a weight was removed—a weight I had no idea I'd been carrying.

This is a common experience for people upon awakening. At the moment that consciousness wakes up from its dream of separation, there is a great sense of relief. That's why some people will start laughing or crying or have some other sort of deep emotional release—they are feeling the relief of finally being outside of the dream state. I sometimes refer to this moment as *the first kiss*. Awakening is sort of like your first spiritual kiss, your first real kiss of reality, your introduction to the truth of who and what you are.

This honeymoon may last for a day, a week, six months, or a couple of years. It varies for different people. What characterizes the honeymoon period is complete flow—there is no resistance in your being, in your experience. Everything is flowing. Life is a flow; everything just seems to happen of its own volition. It is the experiential knowledge that everything is actually *being done*, that you as a separate entity aren't *doing* anything.

In the deepest sense, this honeymoon is an experience of complete and utter nonresistance. Within this nonresistance, life flows wonderfully and beautifully, almost magically. Things show up when they need to show up. Decisions are made without actually deciding them; everything has a sense of obviousness. It is the experience of Spirit completely unhindered, uncorrupted by illusion, conditioning, or contradiction. This flow may be a momentary experience, or it may last longer. Some people get so swept up in the honeymoon that they become almost

incapacitated for a period of time, lost in the bliss state for a week, a month, or even years.

In ancient times, people having this experience entered protected environments such as monasteries—places where those around them would understand. They'd be put in a nice little cell and left alone to let the process happen. They were fortunate to experience awakening in a context in which it was understood, seen as normal, and given the space it required.

In today's society, most of us having these realizations are not living in monasteries; we are not in a particularly supportive environment. In fact, in our society it is possible to have an amazing realization on Saturday and be back in the office on Monday morning. If your mind is still blown out in bliss, this can be very disorienting! Yet it's the reality of the situation we live in. Most modern people do not have the luxury of sitting in a cave for a few months and letting things shake down naturally. This is the state of our world, and it can be a challenge for some people.

The Disorientation That Often Occurs after Awakening

Whether the honeymoon of awakening lasts a day or a year, at some point, one starts to look around and realize that things have changed quite a bit. That which oriented us in our lives is no longer there. The beliefs we grabbed on to and used to define ourselves are now revealed to be empty and without substance. Much of our egoic motivation has

disappeared, which can be very disorienting to the mind. It's only at this particular point that people start to realize that almost everything that previously motivated them in life was self-centered. I do not mean that in a negative or judgmental way; I simply mean that the driving force propelling us through life when we are in the dream state is very self-centered. Our motivations have been fueled by "what do I want?" and "what don't I want?" We're constantly asking these questions. "What can I achieve? Who will love me? How much joy can I get? How much happiness can I get? How much unhappiness can I avoid? Can I get the right job? Can I find the right lover? Will I get enlightened?" These are all self-centered motivations in that the energy comes from the egoic state of consciousness.

Again, this is not bad or wrong; it's just the way it is. The dream state is the state where we perceive separation, where we think we are a separate entity and a separate being. That separate being is always seeking something—love, approval, success, money, maybe even enlightenment. But with real awakening, that whole structure of separation begins to dissolve under one's feet.

There is still a human being there; we don't disappear into a puff of smoke. Even our personality remains intact. Jesus had a personality; Buddha had a personality. Everybody who walks on the Earth has a personality. Infants, when they come out of their mothers' wombs, have personalities. It is one of the beauties of being that each of

us has a different personality. Dogs and cats, birds, even trees have different personalities.

The difference is that once we have seen beyond the veil of separation, *identification* with our particular personality begins to dissolve. Even if we've seen very deeply and the transformation has been great, there is still a basic personality structure present. But what used to fuel our personality, all of its old orienting principles and self-centered drives, has either disappeared or is in the process of disappearing.

In my own case, I had my first glimpse beyond the veil when I was twenty-five. It was of the nonabiding variety; it was not a permanent awakening. That said, something about that realization never left me. Somewhere inside I always knew that everything was one—that I was eternal, unborn, undying, and uncreated. I understood that my essential nature was not limited by or confined to my personality structure or the body I seemed to be inhabiting. There had been a dissolving, in a somewhat radical way, of the world as I had known it and of the self I had known myself to be. It was actually quite odd to be walking around without all of the motivations that previously informed my life. There was still a certain amount of self-centered motivation and egoic-centered energy. But there was also an immense amount of dissolution at the level of ego and at the level of the basic energy force that is derived from ego. I walked around saying to myself, “Well, why should I do this? Why should I do that? I’m not really motivated to do this anymore or that

anymore.” The things I had previously loved doing didn’t hold the same appeal. It was not that I resisted them or hated doing them, it was just that there was an absence of the self-centered energy that had previously driven my interest in these particular pursuits.

This is not uncommon. People often come to me and say, “Gee, I used to have all these things I loved to do—I used to have hobbies, and I used to like to go to dinner parties. I used to be into kite flying,” or running, or whatever it was they had previously enjoyed doing. I tell them that it is common for some of these interests to start to wane, especially if their interest in the activity had been fueled by the energy of separation. With these interests that are literally expressions of divisions of ego, it will suddenly seem like, “Where did they go?”

If we are spiritual practitioners, one of the things that we hope for is the dissolution of ego. We recognize the pain of the egoic state, and we hope we won’t be confined to it forever. But awakening itself is not the same as egoic dissolving. We can wake up whether the ego has dissolved or not. In fact, very strong and even destructive egos can awaken. Awakening *begins* the process. The result of the awakening—its fallout or aftermath—is a radical dissolving of ego.

This does not mean that the ego will be in cooperation. The ego may resist this dissolution with everything it has. It may bring out the entirety of its arsenal. Nevertheless, the process has begun. And ultimately, once you’ve had a

glimpse of reality, there's nothing you can do to stop the ego from dissolving in time.

But this dissolution, when it takes place, can be very disorienting. Awakening itself can be very disorienting. Everything you thought was true, you now see is not. The person you thought you were, you now see you are not. That itself can be blissful and a tremendous relief, and it can simultaneously be experienced as disorienting. "Who am I going to be now? What's going to move me? What's going to motivate this human being?"

Of course, if one is fully awake, one does not have these questions. But that is rare initially. For most people, there is a further process after awakening. So for most people these questions remain. There are no pat answers that a spiritual teacher can give, because any answer would just be turned into another goal by the ego. What's more useful is to understand that to be disoriented is part of the process of awakening; it is natural to be disoriented, because everything is new. You are new, your perception is new, and your perception of everything and everyone has now changed.

The disorientation arises because the mind is struggling to orient itself in a new context. It's like you are falling out of a plane. If you just let yourself fall, there is no problem. But as soon as you start to grasp at space as if to find your bearings, you feel very disoriented; you realize you don't know which way is up and which way is down.

So disorientation is not necessarily inherent in the awakened view; it arises from the mind trying to find orientation.

But one of the keys to the awakened view is that there is no orientation. Reality does not need an orientation. If there is an orientation, it is the orientation of a deep sense of relaxation, of allowing everything to be. Literally, you find your orientation through not trying to find your orientation. You find your orientation by letting go totally.

There's a phase in which we let go, and there does not immediately appear to arise in our consciousness a new energy that will move our lives. Of course, this energy exists and is moving through us all of the time; it is the energy of nondivision. It comes straight from the source, without being distorted. But there is often a gap between the dissolving of our ego motivations and the arising of this energy in our consciousness. So we may go through a period of wondering what new energy will move us along after awakening.

Again, what is important is to simply allow the process of egoic dissolution to occur. For most people, this dissolution process will go on for some years. In my case, there was a six-year period before there was an even deeper realization or awakening—not essentially different, but much clearer, deeper, and more complete. In order for this deeper realization to happen, a six-year period of the dissolving of ego was necessary. I can see that looking back. And so I'm not unlike the vast majority of people. After the first glimpse of awakening, we undergo a process that can lead to a clearer and much deeper perception of reality.

CHAPTER THREE

“I Got It, I Lost It”

There's a metaphor that I like to use to describe the journey from nonabiding to abiding awakening: that of a rocket ship. A rocket ship takes a tremendous amount of thrust and a tremendous amount of energy both to get off the ground and then to break the gravitational field as it travels through the sky and ultimately into space.

If there is enough fuel in the rocket and it gets far enough away from the Earth, it can eventually get beyond the gravitational field of the planet. Once the rocket is beyond the gravitational field of the Earth, the Earth no longer has the power to pull it back down.

As a metaphor, we can think of the egoic structure, or what I call the *dream state*, as the Earth. The dream

state has a gravitational force; it has the tendency to pull consciousness into itself. This gravitational force is really what one is dealing with throughout the entirety of the spiritual journey. Awakening is breaking free of this gravitational force. Initially, it may simply be leaving the dream state, awakening from the dream state of “me” and separation and isolation. But because we’ve awakened does not mean that consciousness has gotten past the gravitational pull of the dream state. If we haven’t gone completely beyond this gravitational field, we’re going to be pulled back toward the experience of “me” and the perception of separateness.

This gives rise to what I call the “I got it, I lost it” phenomenon. People report having amazing realizations about the truth, but then the next day, the next week, the next month, the next year they feel they have lost it. It’s like a rocket ship that left the ground, got a few miles up into the atmosphere, and then ran out of fuel—and now it’s being pulled back toward Earth.

Using the metaphor of the rocket ship is a way of thinking about the process of awakening. The moment of awakening itself—going from the dream state to reality—isn’t a process. It always happens spontaneously. But as I’ve said, the dissolution of the ego takes time. While the moment of awakening is instantaneous, there is a process that unfolds thereafter—the process of getting beyond the gravitational force of the dream state.

"I'm Awake, But . . ."

People come to me all the time and say, "Adya, I'm awake, but . . ." Of course, as soon as they say "but," I know as a teacher that they are not awake in this moment. They may have had a moment when they broke through the confines of duality and perceived truth, but they have not experienced an abiding awakening; they are not awake right now.

In terms of awakening, all that matters is right here and right now. What happened yesterday does not really have much to do with what is happening today. The question isn't, "Have I had an awakening?" The question is, "Is awakening awake right here and right now?"

When someone comes to me and says, "Adya, I had an awakening," the first thing I want to clarify with that person is whether or not the mind has already co-opted the awakening. Because if the person is saying "I" as an ego, as a "me," had an awakening, that is just another illusion. If it is a true awakening, we know that it is not the "me" that has awakened. Awakeness woke up *from* the "me"; Spirit woke up from its identification with ego.

The ego does not awaken; the "me" does not awaken. We are not the ego; we are not the "me." We are that which is awake to the ego and the "me." We are that which is awake to the world, and we are the whole world as well, when seen from the true perspective.

So as a teacher, I want first to find out if someone is claiming awakening from the standpoint of ego. Does the

person really believe “I” as a “me” has awakened? Of course, in conventional language we use terms like *I* and *me*—so it’s perfectly fine to use these kinds of words. Nonetheless, the first thing I try to clarify as a teacher—and the first thing I think everybody should clarify within themselves—is that it’s not the “me” who has awakened. Awakenedness woke up from the “me.”

Or as I like to say sometimes—it’s enlightenment that is enlightened. It is not the “me” that is enlightened. It is not the *person* that is enlightened. It is *enlightenment* that is enlightened. That may be hard to understand until one experiences it for oneself, but of course, all of spirituality is like that. Everything must be verified for and in oneself.

This “I got it, I lost it” phenomenon is the struggle, as it were, between our true nature and our imagined sense of self. It means our consciousness is not yet beyond the gravitational field of the dream state of ego, and so we vacillate between our true nature and our imagined sense of self—back and forth, back and forth.

This can be very disconcerting and can feel schizophrenic in a way. We’ve seen the deeper reality of things, and then we find ourselves back in the dream state. Part of us still knows the deeper reality; part of us knows that the egoic structure isn’t true. Part of us knows that whatever our mind believes, whatever interpretation it is making, is literally nothing but a dream in the mind and body. But the gravitational force of the dream state can still be very

strong. Even as we know the truth of our being, we can still find ourselves believing in ego. While we may know that a thought has no validity, is absolutely untrue, we may find ourselves believing in it anyway.

Before we awakened, we either believed a thought or we didn't believe a thought; that's all we knew. It was one or the other. But after a glimpse of awakening, things can become very strange. We may believe a thought and not believe a thought simultaneously, or we may act in a way that we know is not coming from the undivided vision that we have seen. It's like we feel compelled by inner forces we don't understand to behave in a way that we know is not true.

There are many examples of these kinds of experiences. If you recognize yourself in this phenomenon, I can only say that it is very common. That's not to say it isn't confusing. It often feels like you have made a great leap backward, that you have devolved. How can you believe a thought and not believe a thought at the same time? How can you be in a conversation with somebody, saying things that are coming from ego, knowing where they're coming from, but saying them anyway? This is very disconcerting.

At this point, a lot of people will assume that somehow they have made a mistake; that something has gone terribly wrong. But what is important to know is that nothing has gone wrong. No mistake has been made. This is just the next phase in one's awakening. It is the next unfolding. As I have said, it's rare when someone's initial awakening ends up in

abiding awakening. It happens, but not nearly as often as the other kind of awakening, in which our realization vacillates.

Some teachers would say that if awakening vacillates, then it is not true awakening. I'm not one of them, for reasons that I've already described. If we have seen the truth, we have seen the truth. Whether we've seen it for two seconds or for two thousand years, it's the same truth.

With Awakening, the Stakes Go Up

What do you do at this particular phase, during which awakening vacillates—turns on and off like a light switch that somebody's flipping back and forth and over which you have no control?

First, you start to understand that nothing has gone wrong, that this is just the next leg of your journey. If you run from this experience—if you try to solve this dilemma by running back and searching for that awake place—then you're avoiding this part of the journey. Once you realize that there's no problem here, you'll see that there may still be some confusion and some pain, but it's okay; vacillation can be very painful. In fact, it is much more painful to act in a way that we know is not true once we've seen that it is not true. Before we may have acted in ways that were based in untruth, but we didn't know it—we were totally in the dream state. As Jesus said, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do." When we are in the dream state, we do not know what we are doing. We are simply acting out of deep

programming. But once we have seen the true nature of things—once Spirit has opened its eyes within us—we suddenly know what we’re doing. There’s a much more accurate sense of whether we’re moving or speaking or even thinking from truth or not. When we act from a place of untruth anyway, in spite of our knowing, it’s much more painful than when we didn’t know our actions were untrue. When we say something to someone that we know is untrue, it causes an inner division that is vastly more painful than when we said the same thing and thought it was true.

So with awakening, the stakes go up. The more awake we get, the higher the stakes get. I remember when I was staying at a Buddhist monastery for a while. The abbess there, a wonderful woman, talked about this process of awakening as climbing a ladder. With each step you go, you have less and less tendency to look down. You have less tendency to act in ways you know aren’t true or to speak in ways you know aren’t true or do things you know aren’t coming from truth. You start to realize that the consequences have become greater; the more awake we get, the greater the consequences are. Finally, the consequences of acting outside of truth become immense; the slightest action or behavior that’s not in accordance with the truth can be unbearable to us.

This type of responsibility is not something we count on when we imagine awakening. We think that awakening will be a get out of jail free card. Initially we have a relationship with the spiritual freedom of awakening that is infantile.

We think that freedom is a personal thing; that it is about feeling extraordinarily good and free. But freedom is much more nuanced than that. It is not a personal thing; it is not an acquisition for us.

As we become more conscious, we begin to see that there are consequences. There are consequences to everything, and they get bigger and bigger the more we behave in ways that are not in harmony with what we know is true. This is actually a wonderful thing. It is what I call *fierce grace*. It is not a soft grace; it is not the kind of grace that is beautiful and uplifting. But it is a grace nonetheless. We know that when we act from what is not true, we will only be causing ourselves pain. That knowing is a grace.

Reality is always true to itself. When you're in harmony with it, you experience bliss. As soon as you are not in harmony with it, you experience pain. This is the law of the universe; it is the way things are. Nobody gets out of this law. To me, this knowledge is a grace. Reality is consistent. Argue with it, go against it, and it will hurt—every single time. It will hurt you, it will hurt others, and it will contribute to the general conflict of all beings.

But this fierceness is also beautiful. It helps orient us deeper and deeper into our true nature. We realize that to behave from any place other than our true nature is destructive to ourselves and, just as important, to the world and others around us. The more we understand this, the more often we are able to right ourselves when we get off course.

The Momentum of Our Conditioning

So why, then, does awakening vacillate? It mostly has to do with our conditioning. There are areas within ourselves that are so conditioned that, at first, not even awakening is able to penetrate them. As such, we haven't become totally free.

Another word for conditioning is *karma*. Karma is a word that comes from the East and, without going into any esoteric meanings or explanations, means *cause and effect*. It refers to the conditioning we've received from our life experiences—the things we are predisposed to like or not like, based on our past experience.

Our conditioning is in large part derived from our family of origin, the life we have lived, the situations we've been brought into, and life experiences that we've had. Parents and society condition our bodies and minds with their views, beliefs, morals, and norms. In this way we are conditioned to like certain things and not others, to want certain situations to arise and not others, to pursue fame or wealth or money or spirituality or love.

All of these things go into our conditioning. It's a bit like a computer program. If you have a computer and you load a program onto it, you are “conditioning” the computer to behave in a particular way. This is really what conditioning in a human being is like. Through life circumstances and upbringing and all the rest, the human being is conditioned, or programmed, to behave in certain ways.

You'll notice that if you get to know somebody well, if you become their great friend or lover or mate, you also get to know their conditioning. Because of this you can predict, with great accuracy, how they will react in a given circumstance—what they will want, what they won't want, what they will tend to avoid, and what they will tend to move toward. Once we get to know one another's conditioning, behavior becomes very predictable.

Most human beings derive their entire sense of self from their conditioning. They are literally conditioned, told, and taught who they are. If you're good, if you're bad, if you're worthy or unworthy, if you're lovable or unlovable—all this is conditioning, and all this creates a false sense of self.

In the same way, we are conditioned to view the world in a certain way. We are taught to see the world through certain eyes. Some people think the world is a wonderful place; some people think it is threatening. Some people are prone to have a liberal point of view, some a more conservative point of view. All of this is part of the conditioning of the body and mind, and all of this goes into the construction of a dualistic view of life and a dualistic view of self. This dualism is what I mean when I talk about conditioning.

At the moment of a real awakening, however, Spirit or consciousness is liberated from this conditioning. It suddenly wakes up from its own conditioned self, as if waking from a dream. Only when we have awakened from that

conditioned, illusory self do we know the incredible weight and burden that such conditioning is.

At the moment of awakening and maybe for quite some time afterward, the sense that conditioning could ever arise or become problematic again is completely foreign. This is one of the hallmarks of the awakened state—the sense that one could never again identify with the conditioned self. It seems unimaginable that we would ever go into a state of separation again. That sense of finality is inherent within the state of wakefulness.

Yet the vast majority of people who experience awakening will, at some point, find their conditioning arising again. Of course, awakening blows out a tremendous amount of conditioning; it literally blows it out of the system. But everybody's different as far as how *much* is blown out of the system. For some people, 10 percent of their conditioning will get blown out. For others it will be 90 percent. For still others, it will be somewhere in between. It's hard to say why awakening affects one person's conditioning one way and another person's another way. I could make speculations and get into metaphysical discussions about what might be going on, but ultimately the why doesn't matter. Either way, we are dealing with what we are dealing with. It's apparent that each being has a different sort of karmic inheritance; each person has a different karmic load that he or she carries. And it does no good to complain about your karmic load, whether you perceive it to be greater or lesser

than somebody else's. It is what it is. Karmic load actually doesn't have much to do with whether we can awaken, but it may have something to do with what happens right after that moment of awakening.

Asking the Right Question

When a person's awakening vacillates, he or she often asks me, "How do I stay in the awakened state?" That is asking the wrong question. In spirituality, it is important that we ask the right questions. To wonder how to stay in the awakened state is a totally reasonable thing to do, but the question itself is arising from the dream state. Spirit never asks itself, "How do I stay within myself?" That would be ridiculous. It just makes no sense, coming from the true nature of things. What makes more sense is to ask how you *unenlighten* yourself. What is still held on to? What is still confusing? What situations in life can get you to believe things that aren't true and cause you to go into contradiction, suffering, and separation? What is it specifically that has the power to entice consciousness back into the gravitational field of the dream state? We should not ask, "How do I stay awake?" Instead we should ask, "How is it that I'm unenlightening myself? How is it *specifically* that I'm putting myself back in illusion?"

There is no one answer to this question, as there is no one reason. There is no one way that people do it. People are pulled back by the gravitational force of the dream state for

many reasons—unconscious assumptions and belief patterns that are still operating, unconscious conflicts that somehow survived the explosive nature of awakening and reconstituted themselves, various forms of conditioning.

The process here becomes one of coming into right relationship with yourself and looking deeply at what it is that causes you to go back into the trance of separation. You need to start pinpointing the particular ways, the particular thoughts, the particular beliefs that put you back to sleep.

This phase of unfolding after awakening is not so much about rarefied spiritual practices. A lot of the conditioning that surfaces in our being is brought up in the rumble and tumble of existence. We are in relationship with situations and people, interacting with lovers and friends and children and all the rest. It is this gritty fabric of life where the spiritual rubber hits the road. What is required is the willingness to let life impact you; to let yourself *see* when life impacts you; to see if you go into any sort of separation about it, if you go into judgment, if you go into blame, if you go into “should” or “shouldn’t,” if you start to point the finger somewhere other than at yourself.

It’s coming to grips with the fact that the only person who can cause us to suffer, who can cause us to misperceive illusion and separation, who has this much power, is us. Nothing in the exterior environment causes us to lose a sense of the awakened state. Nobody we meet, no situation we deal with has the power to cause us to fall out of awakening.

This is one of the most important realizations we can make. It's all an inside job. It's all something we do to ourselves—mistakenly, unknowingly, and often times unconsciously.

So the difference here is that if we've really awakened, we have a much less personal relationship with all this remaining karmic conditioning. Before awakening, our own conditioning was viewed as extraordinarily personal. Our conditioning defined us. We derived a sense of self from our conditioning, from our false self, from our beliefs and opinions and desires and all the rest. Before awakening we were enmeshed in the dream state, and the dream state defined us. Once awakening has happened—if it's real, if it's authentic—we realize that even if illusions persist, they're not personal, and they don't define us.

This is to our great advantage. It's much easier to work with something if your sense of self is not being defined by it. It is much less frightening. Once there is the perception, from the awakened state, of one's own karma being impersonal—not having to do with any self, any body, any person—one's situation is much more workable. We understand that what we are experiencing is illusory, that it has to do with a momentum of misunderstanding.

It's as if you are in a car, barreling down the highway, and all of a sudden you pick your foot up off the accelerator. The moment your foot comes off is a metaphor for awakening. "Oh my God, this car doesn't define me. Riding in this

car doesn't define me. My foot on the accelerator doesn't define me. Where this car is going doesn't define me. The environment that it's traveling through doesn't define me. None of this has anything to do with who or what I am." That is what awakening reveals.

When we awaken, we are no longer fueling the trance of separation; we are no longer pumping energy into it. But even if you never put your foot back on the accelerator, the car still has momentum—karmic momentum. It doesn't immediately come to a stop in most cases. It has a diminishing momentum that slows down over time.

That said, we can also add energy to the existing momentum. We have to watch and discover when it is that we hop back in and put our foot back on the accelerator. Every time we reidentify with conditioning or karma, every time we believe a thought, we are putting energy back into the dream state, putting our foot back on that accelerator.

So the process after awakening involves learning how to keep your foot off the gas and recognizing what puts your foot back on. Even though it's not personal—even though reidentification is totally spontaneous and it's not happening *to* anybody and it's not anybody's fault—we still need to investigate how it happens.

In this, life itself is your greatest ally. As I've said, life is where the spiritual rubber hits the road. Life will show us where we are not clear. Being in relationship with life and others shows us clearly where we can still get hung up. If

we have true sincerity, we are not going to try to hide in the memory of an awakened state; we are not going to hide in the realization of the absolute. We are going to come out of hiding. We are not going to grab on to anything.

What I'm getting at is that it is totally natural to seemingly be awake one moment and then seemingly be asleep the next. It is natural to feel like you have lost some of the realization you had last week or last month or last year. The most important thing is to know that it is natural. Nothing has gone wrong; everything has just gone to a deeper level. Your entire system is being dredged clean in a deeper way. You are now capable of seeing yourself in a clearer light, and you are capable of seeing your tendency to go into separation in a more vivid way. You are seeing things that were unconscious before. They drove you, without you having any real understanding of what was going on. But now you can start to see what was not conscious before. This allowing everything to become more and more conscious is a big part of the process that occurs after awakening.

Fixating on the Absolute as a Way to Avoid Our Humanness

What I am teaching should not be mistaken for a self-improvement plan. This isn't about becoming a perfect being. This is about seeing what causes division within oneself. That is very different from having the goal of becoming a perfect person, because awakening and enlightenment

have nothing to do with becoming perfect, holy, or saintly. What is truly holy is perceiving from *wholeness*, which means not being divided inside. It is that which divides us inside that needs to be healed. What is required after a glimpse of awakening is radical honesty, a willingness to look at how we unenlighten ourselves, how we bring ourselves back into the gravitational force of the dream state, how we allow ourselves to be divided.

As a spiritual teacher, getting people to this state of honesty, or suggesting that they go there, can be quite difficult. This is because there is a strong tendency in the egoic structure to use awakening as a reason to hide from all of one's inner divisions. When I suggest some of the things I'm talking about here, like recognizing where we unenlighten ourselves, some of my students will say, "But there's nobody to do that. There is no person here. The ego and person is an illusion, so there's really no one to look inside." From the perception of awakening, there isn't a problem, even when things are a total mess. From the perception of awakening, there isn't a problem, therefore there is nothing to do. "If you perceive that there is something to do, you're deluded."

It can be very difficult for any spiritual teacher to get through to students like this, to get them to stop holding on to their fixation on an absolute view. This is one of the dangers of awakening: the tendency to grasp at a lopsided view. We grasp at the absolute view of awakening, and we deny anything else. It is actually the ego that fixates on the

absolute in this way, using it as an excuse for dismissing unenlightened behavior, thought patterns, and divided emotional states. As soon as we grasp at any view, we have gone blind to everything else.

This is why I emphasize that an important part of this phase of the journey is the willingness, the sincere commitment, to be very honest with oneself. Yes, there is the absolute view. It's true there is no problem; it's true there is no separate self. It's true there is nobody to do what I'm speaking about. But I'm not speaking to the ego here. I'm not telling the ego it needs to do something or doesn't need to do something. I'm not speaking to any sense of a separate self. What I'm speaking to is *reality itself*. Spirit is speaking to Spirit here. Reality is speaking to reality.

It may sound like I'm talking to a person and directing a person, but I'm not. What I'm speaking about here is inherent within the perception of awakening itself. That which is awake always moves toward that which is not awake. That which is awake has no fear of that which is not awake. It doesn't have any fear, because it doesn't perceive anything as separate or other than itself. That which is awake doesn't even perceive delusion or the dream state as separate or other than itself. It sees that everything is itself, equally itself.

But also, if we're honest, we can notice that within the truth of our being there is an inherent movement toward the releasing of any limitation, toward the releasing of ourselves from the dream state. There is a desire, for lack of a better

word, to release from hate, ignorance, greed, or any sense of confinement. The truth of our being is not content until it has freed itself of its own misunderstanding, its own fixations, its own illusions.

To allow that to happen, as a human being, we have to be willing to be honest with ourselves. While not denying what we've seen, we also have to see how things are, right here and right now. We need to look. We need to ask: "What in me can still go into division? What in me can still go into hate, into ignorance, into greed? What in me can cause me to feel divided, isolated, full of sorrow? Where are those spots in me that are less than awakened?"

We need to see these places, because that which is awakened in us is compassionate. Its nature is undivided, unconditioned love. It doesn't move away from that which is unawakened; it moves toward it. That within us which is awakened doesn't move away from the contradictions in our thought patterns or behaviors. It doesn't move away from fixations, it doesn't move away from pain, but quite the opposite. It moves toward it.

That's why so many truly enlightened beings—those who have proclaimed that everything is good, that all is well, who perceive no need to change anything or anybody—are often the very ones tending to those who are suffering, those who don't perceive truth. The truly enlightened beings are often those who dedicate their lives completely to the welfare of others.

Now, why would they do that? If everything is perfect as it is, if nothing needs to change, if everything is holy and divine exactly as it is, if all is well even when all isn't well, then why would these enlightened beings dedicate their lives to the welfare of others—what would be the point? Well, there wouldn't be one. If the absolute view were the only view, they wouldn't be doing it.

I would suggest that the reason so many people who get that far in their own awakening end up dedicating themselves to the welfare of others is that they haven't fixated on the absolute view. Without denying the absolute view of perfection, they are open to perceiving something more. They are open to perceiving the inherent compassion of reality itself.

Reality is in the process of awakening all of itself to itself. And that part of the picture is going to be very hard to see if we fixate on the absolute view; if we use the absolute view to hide from our humanness. Our humanness is also divine, and our humanness seeks to be penetrated through and through with truth and reality.

For this process of complete awakening to fulfill itself, it is necessary to be totally sincere. This is very different from a therapeutic approach. We aren't investigating ourselves to try to fix everything in order to be happy. That would be operating from the perspective of the dream state, and it might be useful if we were still in the dream state. But what I am talking about is a different motivation. It is

recognizing the inherent nature of reality to awaken all of itself to itself. That's what reality is doing. Inside of you and inside of everyone, reality is moving to wake all of itself up to itself. Everything within our human structure is going to be uncovered in the process.

We are going to have to come completely out of hiding from anything. People sometimes ask me, "Well, Adya, what does this actually mean? What should I be doing?" And I say, start with something very simple. Stop avoiding things. If there is anything that is unresolved in yourself, turn toward it. Face it. Look at it. Stop avoiding it. Stop moving the other way. Stop using a moment of awakening as a means to not deal with something that may be less than awake within you.

Start to face it. Start to see it. In the simple willingness to see yourself, in simple sincerity, the truth starts to reveal itself to itself. It's not necessarily a technique-oriented endeavor here. The technique is sincerity; we need to really want the truth. We need to want the truth even more than we want to experience the truth. This sincerity isn't something we can impose; it's inherent within reality itself.

This type of radical sincerity may be hard to uncover for some people. It can come as quite a surprise that we can have an amazing glimpse of the true nature of things, and then come back into the gravitational field of duality and find the body and mind still horrendously conflicted. This can be very surprising, not only for the people it's happening

within, but for those around them. One minute, such a person could be extraordinarily wise, and the next minute he or she might be extraordinarily deluded. This isn't only confusing to the person; it's confusing to everybody around him or her.

In fact, this causes some people to doubt the nature of awakening itself. Somebody has a great awakening experience but is still sort of a jerk. Who cares about awakening, then? While understandable, that conclusion can only be made by someone who does not fully understand the process of awakening. The fact is, we can have a very deep seeing of the true nature of things, while remaining, on the human level, very conflicted and deluded in certain areas of our lives. We need the sincerity to stop shying away from that, to actually turn, look, and face any place where we perceive something less than awakenedness, something less than unity. When we perceive divisiveness in ourselves, we must face it.

CHAPTER FOUR

We Come to Nirvana by Way of Samsara

t would be wonderful if we could have a moment of awakening and then never be caught by the illusion of thought again, but as I've said, this isn't usually how it works. We can have a deep realization of our true nature, seeing that the mind itself is a dream and that the person we thought we were is a dream, but that doesn't necessarily mean we will never be deluded by a thought again. There are certain thoughts that continue to arise. I call them "Velcro" thoughts—they are those spontaneous thoughts that occur in given situations that hook us. This type of thought causes an almost immediate reidentification with the thinking pattern. It could be a judging thought, a thought that makes one feel ashamed or small, or it could be a thought that makes one feel angry or accusatory.

The reality that certain “sticky” thought patterns still recur after awakening comes as a bit of a disappointment to many people. They may have believed that if they had a true awakening they would never again believe thoughts that cause them to suffer. But this isn’t necessarily true. It is true that the more spiritual awakening matures in us, the more we see through; there is less and less tendency to get caught by thought.

I remember someone asking one of my favorite Indian sages—Nisargadatta Maharaj—whether the egoic personality ever arose in him. He said, very casually, “Of course it does, but I see at once that it is illusion and I discard it.” This was a wonderful thing to hear—that even someone of the spiritual stature of Nisargadatta was saying that there is always a possibility that an old conditioned tendency can arise. He simply recognized it as illusory at the moment of its arising, and in that seeing, it was cast aside. It dissolved.

Someone like Nisargadatta Maharaj—someone very mature in his spiritual awakening—can operate like that. For him, a thought pattern arose, its illusory nature was revealed immediately and spontaneously, and it dissolved very quickly. But most people don’t start out that way, not even after a very profound awakening.

In fact, it’s not at all uncommon for some of the deepest and most contracted thought patterns to arise just after awakening. This sometimes comes as a surprise to people. Part of what happens when we awaken is that the top gets

ripped off of our ability to suppress, and we find it very hard to hold anything at bay. In the aftermath of an awakening, some very powerful thought forms may arise—things we pushed down very deeply, that we tried to keep unconscious. But now everything starts to come into the light of being. It is not at all uncommon for us to find that certain thoughts have the power to Velcro us into a temporary state of identification.

Freedom through Inquiry

At these times, what's important is to avoid what I call *spiritual bypassing*—dismissing the thought, ignoring the fact that we got caught in a moment of reidentification. We often use nondual language to this end. We tell ourselves, “Oh, that's just identification. It doesn't matter, since there's nobody to do anything anyway. Everything's happening spontaneously, after all.”

This is a subtle yet effective way of hiding from our own experience. It allows us to avoid dealing with our continuing tendency to reidentify. What is important is to have the willingness to look at these moments of identification clearly and honestly.

There are many ways to engage in self-inquiry. I found writing to be helpful to me, both before awakening and for a certain period of time afterward. If I noticed myself slipping back into identification, I would go to a coffee shop with a pad of paper and a pencil, and I would start to write

about it. Writing about what happened actually helped me enter into the thought pattern that had triggered the reidentification. I would define exactly which thought or belief had caught me, and what the inner worldview of that thought was.

For example, if we do something that makes us feel silly or embarrassed, our mind might have the thought, “I shouldn’t have done that,” or “That was stupid of me.” If you take a thought that small and you start to really open it, you’ll see right away that thought and feeling are linked; one is actually the doorway into the other. The thought, “I shouldn’t have done that,” comes with a feeling—perhaps the feeling of embarrassment or anger. In this we see the inner worldview of the thought, and how it pulls us into identification.

It is important that we don’t use this type of inquiry simply as a mental tool. If we do that, we start to understand everything on the mental level. The problem is, the mental level is often disconnected from the emotional level. We may understand something clearly in our mind, but emotionally we may still be conflicted about it. When we inquire, it is important that we are using both body and mind; both feeling and thought. We must see which thoughts generate which feelings, and which thoughts are generated *from* feelings. It is a cycle: a thought creates a feeling, and that feeling creates the next thought—which then creates the next feeling.

When I would go to the coffee shop with a pad of paper and a pencil, I would get very specific about exactly what the thought was that caused that moment of reidentification, and I would start to write about it. I would look at exactly how that thought viewed the world. To do that, I would have to enter into how I felt. I would have to zero in on what believing that particular thought—be it condemnation or embarrassment or what have you—generated at the feeling level. Then I would enter into the feeling and allow myself to feel the feeling.

The next step would be to ask myself about the belief pattern of the feeling. How does this feeling see the world? How does this feeling see self? What's the worldview? What I started to see was that each thought and feeling contained a world in and of itself, a whole belief structure. Through a willingness to enter into the feeling, I discovered that the feeling had a voice. I could hear that voice in my mind, and I would discover that it had certain specific beliefs and ideas.

Very often we find that the beliefs and ideas contained in our thinking and feeling come from our childhood. They may come from very early memories of being embarrassed or put down or shamed or terrified or angered or saddened. If we start to investigate in a meditative way, where body and mind are linked, our inquiry can start to uncover these deep inner experiences. You can't just think about it; you can't say, "This is a thought; I know it's not true," and be done with

it. I would sometimes spend hours in the coffee shop, refusing to leave until I had gotten to the bottom of one single thought pattern. I knew that if that thought could hook me into reidentification, then another thought could hook me again. The more awake we become, the more that reidentification hurts. It's like being pulled forcibly out of heaven, back into hell. When you feel like you're in hell, you'll do anything you can to release yourself.

So I would apply this inquiry process with great diligence. I would stick with it until I saw all the way through a moment of identification. I would know that I had gotten there when it completely released from my system.

I had to revisit certain patterns of thinking, feeling, and reaction on several different occasions. Each time the process of insight would go deeper, revealing more and more. As it did, I would get down to the core beliefs, thoughts, and feelings. What was required was a willingness to stick with the inquiry so that the illusion could be pulled up by its root.

It's like weeding your yard. When I weed my yard, I'm embarrassed to say I tend to pull all the weeds out by the top. My wife, on the other hand, is a little more patient. When she weeds, she pulls things out by the root. You know she's done the weeding, because the weeds don't grow back for a few months. When I do the yard work, there are new weeds the next week.

Fortunately, I didn't do that in my own inner life. In the process of inquiry I'm describing, I found myself very

focused. I was willing to go very deep, all the way to the root of whichever thought was causing a painful reaction.

I don't mean to imply that everybody needs to undertake a process of writing. Each of us has to find our own way. Maybe writing will help you; maybe investigating your thought patterns in a meditative way will help you. Ultimately what's important is to go to the heart of the thinking and feeling process. Only then can we find the illusory beliefs that are creating pain in the present moment.

Most of us have had difficult moments in our lives, and in those times we've developed spontaneous coping strategies. When we are young and an event happens that causes us more pain than we are able to face head on, we come up with a belief that allows us to survive the situation.

Maybe a child's parents are dysfunctional. It's too much for the child to face the fact that his parents are not capable of taking care of him particularly well. That knowledge is so threatening to the child's well-being that he will create a less-threatening story to help survive the situation. Instead of seeing that his parents are dysfunctional, he might form a belief pattern that there is something wrong with *him*. At these kinds of moments, forming a belief pattern helps us cope and get through difficult times. We start this pattern in childhood, but it can continue into later life as well.

When we sincerely inquire into these belief patterns, we find that they are no longer useful strategies. While they may have helped us cope with difficult situations in the past,

they have outworn their usefulness. Thought itself is not a useful strategy. Telling ourselves any story about any event will always cause pain. Ultimately, any formulation we make in our minds about the past or the present will be in conflict with life as it is, with what is actually happening.

When these Velcro thoughts and emotions arise, the key is to face and investigate whatever belief structures underlie them. In that moment, inquiry *is* your spiritual practice. To avoid this practice is to avoid your own awakening. Anything you avoid in life will come back, over and over again, until you're willing to face it—to look deeply into its true nature.

Again, the only way to know that we've seen into the true nature of something is that the story we're telling ourselves releases. It is not only seen to be illusion; it is felt to be illusion. I often tell students to stick with it until it falls away. The choice is between meditative inquiry and becoming a victim. That's the choice you have—to be a victim to your own ideas and beliefs, or to feel into them until they drop away.

Through inquiry we come to see that all beliefs are of equal value. What I think somebody should have done or shouldn't have done has no value. What they actually did is of equal value to what I think they *should* have done. Only when we see that our thoughts, judgments, and opinions are just as true as their opposites are the polarities of thought balanced. If the opposing thought is just as true as the thought I believe, then the whole structure of thought collapses. If an

opinion that is different from mine has just as much right to exist as mine does, then it's impossible to say which opinion is real or true. They're both either real or not real. When we see this, there's an internal balancing of the opposites, and thought is no longer polarized. Only when thought is balanced in this way does the dualistic structure of thinking lose its validity and start to collapse.

This is not something that we see once; it is something that we see any and every time it is necessary to see it. There is no such thing as past awakening; past awakening is past. The only thing that is relevant is the present. Am I awake to the truth right now, and not only in my mind, but in the entirety of my being? Do I actually see that the entire structure of a personal worldview and a personal self is nothing but a dream in universal mind? This is all that is relevant.

What we saw yesterday may or may not have an impact on today. If it's still alive and vital and that's the perception from which we are seeing things, fine; we are free. If it's not, then we must come out of denial. We must be willing to see that we are believing something; that somewhere, we're grasping.

This willingness to not bypass illusion is very important. My teacher told me that we come to nirvana by way of *samsara*. We come to the truth, to freedom, by the way of bondage. We come to see the true nature of things by seeing through the illusory nature of things.

We don't come to nirvana by avoiding *samsara*. We don't come to heaven by avoiding hell or trying to sidestep it. We

don't come to clarity by avoiding confusion. We don't come to freedom by avoiding that which is less than freedom. The truth is quite the opposite.

Our illusions—the beliefs we hold on to—are the very doorways to our freedom. We simply have to enter through them, without grasping or pushing away. We must not believe them, but we must not run from them, either. We need to see each moment of apparent bondage as an invitation to freedom. Then it becomes an act of love, an act of compassion, to stop running away.

Each moment is the moment that needs to be happening. Each experience we have is the divine invitation. It may be a beautifully engraved invitation, or it may be a very fierce invitation, but each moment is the invitation. I couldn't possibly emphasize this more: the texture and flow of our lives, from moment to moment, is itself what reveals freedom. Life itself shows us what we need to see through in order to be free.

So it is necessary that we don't run from life, that we actually face what's happening in an honest and sustained way. When we do this, we come to see that we truly do come to nirvana by way of samsara. This doesn't mean we stay stuck in samsara. Instead, we unhook ourselves from it. We un-Velcro our samsaric and illusory thoughts, and by doing so, we end up in nirvana.

Awakening reveals our already perfect inherent freedom. It also becomes the groundwork from which we

develop the wherewithal—the clarity and courage—to look into anything that may have the power to Velcro us into pain and identification. Over time, this seeing and releasing becomes natural; it becomes spontaneous. At the beginning, it may be somewhat tedious. It may take quite a bit of time and intention, maybe even some real effort and discipline. As time goes on, however, it becomes more and more natural, more and more spontaneous. At a certain point, this seeing and releasing becomes so internalized that it's almost automatic. A thought arises, and there may be an instant of identification. Inquiry meets the thought, and it opens itself to freedom. Once this inward releasing is deeply internalized, the whole process can take a split second. That's the way awakening moves. At times, we don't even know it's happening. But it is happening: Awareness is freeing itself, over and over and over. And as I have said, the key is sincerity. It's the willingness to meet, sincerely and honestly, what is happening in our body and mind. That is always the doorway to freedom—a freedom that only happens now and now and now and now.

CHAPTER FIVE

Coming Completely Out of Hiding

I want to share a story with you. Some years ago I was on the island of Maui, and I was giving a talk on how truth manifests in the context of life after awakening. I asked the audience to consider with me the following kinds of questions: What would it be like if we didn't avoid anything we knew to be true? What if we came out of hiding in all areas of our life? What if we completely stopped avoiding ourselves, because that literally is the awakened life?

The next day there was another meeting, with a question and answer session. An older gentleman in his fifties or sixties raised his hand, and he said something really beautiful. He said, "I was listening to the talk last night about truthfulness, about being honest, about having a

willingness to face oneself as one is and not hide in some past realization.

"My wife and I have been on the edge of a divorce for quite some time now. When we went home after we heard your talk, we just sat down and started to tell each other the truth. We started to tell each other what was true for ourselves."

He went on to say that it wasn't like when they *used* to tell each other the truth, which was more like trying to *convince* each other of the truth. It wasn't about one of them being right and the other one being wrong. It was just telling the truth, very simply. It was confessing exactly what they had been experiencing for a long time, confessing the fact that they felt separate and distant from each other, confessing the very secrets that were *causing* them to feel separate and isolated. "We actually just sat there and told each other the truth," he said. "I would tell the truth, and then I would allow my wife to tell truth. Then I would tell truth, and then allow her to tell truth."

He said it wasn't that they were working anything out or trying to come to conclusions; they were simply coming out of hiding. They literally talked from eleven o'clock at night to three o'clock in the morning (which, he also said, was the reason he was kind of blurry and tired at the moment!).

He finished by saying that it was the most extraordinary evening of his entire life: just that evening of telling truth. Not *asserting* truth and not *denying* truth, just simply telling it in a very sincere way, coming completely out of hiding.

I have found over the years of working with people, even people who have had very deep and profound awakenings, that most people have a fear of being truthful, of really being honest—not only with others, but with themselves as well. Of course, the core of this fear is that most people know intuitively that if they were actually totally truthful and totally sincere and honest, they would no longer be able to control anybody.

We can not control somebody with whom we have been truthful. We can only control people if we tell half-truths, if we shave down what is true. When we tell the total truth, our inside is suddenly on the outside. There's nothing hidden anymore. For most human beings, being that exposed brings up incredible fear. Most people walk around thinking, "My god, if anybody could look inside of me, if anybody could see what is happening in there, what my fears are, what my doubts are, what my truths are, what I really perceive, they would be horrified."

Most people are protecting themselves. They are holding a lot of things in. They are not living honest, truthful, and sincere lives, because if they were to do so, they would have no control. Of course, they don't have control anyway, but they would have no illusion of control, either.

So this man told me about how extraordinary his evening had been, and he said, "You know, to be quite honest, we don't know if we'll stay together or not." It has been many years now, and they are still together, but at the time

they didn't know one way or the other. But they even had the honesty to say *that*. They had the honesty to know that they had made a beginning by telling each other the truth, by being honest, by being real, but they weren't trying to control the outcome.

Most people don't get out of childhood without having many experiences of being wounded for telling the truth. Someone said, "You can't say that," or "You shouldn't say that," or "That wasn't appropriate." As a result, most of us have very deep underlying conditioning that being just who we are is not okay. We have been conditioned to believe that there are times when it is okay to be truthful and honest, and there are times when it is not okay to be truthful and honest. Most human beings actually have an imprinting—not only in their minds, but in their bodies and their emotions—that if they are honest, if they are real, something bad is going to happen. Somebody is not going to like it. They won't be able to control their environment if they tell the truth.

But telling the truth is an aspect of awakening. It may not seem like it, because it's very practical and very human. It's not transcendent. It's not about pure consciousness, it's about how pure consciousness manifests as a human being in an undivided way. We must be able to manifest what we realize, and we must also come to grips with and start to notice the very forces within us that keep us from manifesting truthfulness in every situation.

Almost every time I've given a talk like this in public, someone will come up to me later and say, "You know that talk you gave on truthfulness and honesty and all that?" And I'll go, "Yeah, I remember the talk." And they'll say, "Well, somebody came up in the parking lot afterward and decided that she needed to tell me all the rotten things she thought about me, in the name of honesty."

And I just kind of shake my head. I hesitate to even give talks on this topic, because it's so easy to misunderstand.

Truth is a very high standard. Truth is not a plaything. To tell what is true within ourselves is not to tell what we *think*; it is not to tell our opinion. It is not to dump the garbage can of our mind onto somebody else. All of that is illusion, distortion, projection. Truth is not unloading our opinions onto someone. That is not truth. Truth is not telling our beliefs about things. That is not truth. Those are ways that we actually *hide* from truth.

Truth is much more intimate than that. When we tell the truth, it has the sense of a confession. I don't mean a confession of something bad or wrong, but I mean the sense where we come completely out of hiding. Truth is a simple thing. To speak the truth is to speak from a sense of total and absolute unprotectedness.

To tell truth with any consistency, we not only have to meet every place in ourselves that is afraid of telling truth, we also have to see the belief structure we have that tells us, "I can't do that." Those belief structures are by their

very nature based in unreality. To know this is not enough; you have to actually *see* it, to really perceive exactly what you believe. What are the exact belief structures that cause you to go into duality, that cause you to go into conflict and hiding? Only then can you tell truth in the way I'm discussing here.

True Freedom Is a Gift to Everybody and Everything

Part of awakening, if it is true and authentic, is the gift of freedom to the whole world. Upon awakening, freedom is given to everybody. True freedom isn't simply "I'm free." True freedom is "Everything is free." This means everybody has the freedom to be who they are—whether they are awake or not awake, deluded or not deluded.

Freedom is the realization that everything and everybody gets to be exactly as they are. Unless we've come to that point, unless we've seen that this is how reality sees things, then we're actually withholding freedom from the world. We're seeing it as a possession, and we're only concerned with ourselves. How good I can feel? How free I can feel? True freedom is a gift to everything and everybody.

Upon his awakening, the Buddha said, "I and all beings everywhere have simultaneously realized liberation." From the conventional mind, that is impossible to understand. "If everything woke up," someone might say, "then why am I not awake? If the Buddha was correct, that the whole world woke up when he woke up, then why am I not awake?" I

can't really explain the Buddha's statement to the conventional mind. What Buddha was communicating was that it wasn't the Buddha who woke up—it wasn't this person who woke up—it was the totality that woke up. The *totality* was expressing awakening through the being of the Buddha.

The important thing is allowing the whole world to wake up. Part of allowing the whole world to wake up is recognizing that the whole world is free—everybody is free to be as they are. Until the whole world is free to agree with you or disagree with you, until you have given the freedom to everyone to like you or not like you, to love you or hate you, to see things as you see them or to see things differently—until you have given the whole world its freedom—you'll never have your freedom.

This is an important part of awakening, and it is an easy part to miss. Again, if we were fully awake, it would be impossible to miss this, but most people do not awaken all at once. The idea of freedom is very important, however. Everybody gets to be as they are. Only when everyone is allowed to be as they are—when you have given them that freedom, the freedom they already possess—do you find within yourself the capacity to be honest and real and true.

We cannot be true as long as we are expecting or wanting others to agree with us. That will cause us to contract—maybe they won't like what I say; maybe they won't agree; maybe they won't like me. When we are protecting ourselves, we are also withholding freedom from everybody

else. When we realize that we are the one and only Spirit that manifests as everything and everyone, in the very nature of that realization is total freedom for all.

There is a certain fearlessness in this realization. People sometimes come to me and say, “Well, Adya, there’s still some inner place”—and, I find, it’s often a very early childhood place—“that’s afraid to just be what I know to be true.” And, of course, I’ll say, “You have to look at it, to see how you, yourself, formed certain belief structures based on what happened in the past. You have to look into it and see if those belief structures are really true.” But also, we need to recognize that we have no way of knowing or predicting how the world will receive us. Part of being awake is being willing to be crucified. If we think that to be awake means the whole world will agree with us, then we are in a total delusion. Jesus found that out. Here was an awakened being—the son of God, as they say in Christianity. And what happened to the son of God? He got crucified for expressing what he knew to be true.

Inside human consciousness there is a deep taboo that says it is not okay to realize the truth of being. I’m not talking about preaching it, necessarily; I’m talking about just being what you perceive. This taboo says, “That’s not okay. You will be crucified for that; you will be killed for it.” Of course, in our human history, people *have* been killed for it. We have a long history in many societies of getting rid of or killing truly enlightened beings, because true enlightenment

does not conform to the dream state. In fact, many times the dream state feels offended and threatened by true enlightenment, because a truly enlightened being cannot be controlled. Even the threat of death cannot control an enlightened being. The threat of death could not control Jesus. He was going to live his life as he was destined to live it, whether that meant life or death for him.

Thus, as a human being, we can't have these childish ideas that enlightenment means "everybody loves me." Maybe everybody will love you, but more likely some will and some won't. But when you have given the whole world its freedom, then you have gone a long way toward finding your own freedom. They are tied inextricably, one to the other.

Sincerity Is the Key

The most important thing is not that you try to convince anybody of the truth that you see. What is really important is that you are truthful with yourself. If you can be truthful with yourself, then you can be truthful with anybody. There is no real usefulness in becoming overly focused on being truthful with everybody else. Although that's necessary, the place to start is with yourself—can you be totally sincere with yourself? Can you go to that place that is beyond blame, beyond judgment, beyond should and shouldn't? Can you go to that place that is so sincere you won't shy away from any part of yourself that is still in conflict; you won't use the perception of truth to hide from something that feels less than liberating?

It is really a question of sincerity. As I said, this is not a self-improvement program. Once you discover the level of sincerity and honesty I am describing, you find that sincerity and honesty are manifestations of the absolute nature of being. To be this sincere with yourself may not be easy, initially. You may see things about yourself you don't want to see. You may see the parts of yourself that stand in seemingly stark contrast to everything you have realized. Nonetheless, this is where awakening moves; awakening moves toward and into that which is not awake. Sincerity is what allows this movement to happen, and it does happen if you are real with yourself.

Coming completely out of hiding, being willing to see every point of fixation, every way you go into division, enables this part of the journey to continue. As this happens, you feel your heart opening, your mind opening; you feel yourself opening on levels that you never dreamed possible. These levels are not just transcendent of humanness, but also right *within* your humanness, because there is no separation between your human being and your divine being.

A great Zen master, Huang Po, said that you are no greater for being a Buddha and no less for being a human being. What he was saying is that a Buddha and a human are not separate; they are not different. Although we awaken from the dream state and the illusion of simply being a human being, still there will be a return, as it were, until we

see that our human nature and our divine nature are one—one being, one expression, one truth.

Sincerity is the key. You have to be willing; you have to want to see everything. When you want to see everything, you *will* see everything.

Transcendence as Avoidance

A lot of students who come to see me have the unconscious idea that enlightenment means one should be able to feel complete happiness, total bliss, and total freedom in any situation. This is one of the unconscious beliefs that many people have about awakening, and it's another misperception

It is true that, after awakening, the exterior situations and circumstances of life stop having such an ability to throw us off center. But it's also true that, when we awaken, we start to become more conscious of the patterns of behavior in our lives that are not in harmony with what we have realized. If you believe the misperception that enlightenment is only about happiness, bliss, and freedom, you will be motivated to transcend or escape those areas of your life that feel less than fully functional. But sooner or later, as we become more awake, we find that there is more and more pressure to encounter and deal with those areas of our lives that we have been avoiding, where we are less than fully conscious.

I have found that a lot of people become quite afraid when they start to realize where this whole movement of awakening is taking them, that it is taking them into an area

where they will be called to be unusually honest and real and come completely out of hiding. This is contrary to the idea of awakening being simply a transcendence of life, the finding of a safe haven in some inner experience where we don't have to deal with life as it is. Awakening is, in fact, quite the opposite: it's a state of being in which we find the capacity to deal with our lives as they actually are. But as I said, many people are afraid of this part of the process, because it demands that we come out of hiding on every level. A lot of people are afraid to let truth penetrate certain relationships they may be in—be they family or friendships or love relationships or marriages. It can be much more comfortable to hide from the truth, to hide from certain patterns of dysfunction that may be present.

There's a story I love that points to how challenging it can be to face ourselves in relationship—and how, if we do not face ourselves, we can actually stall our spiritual unfolding. There was a senior student of a well-known Zen teacher who was being groomed to become a teacher himself. This person had been married for quite some time and had three children. He had shared with his teacher that he and his wife were not getting along well. She was angry at him because in her view he was getting more and more distant and not participating in the family, not really connecting with her or the children.

As it happens, both the husband and the wife were students of this teacher. When he heard about their situation,

he said, “There’s a retreat coming up next month. I want you both to come to this retreat.” So they went, expecting to engage in the retreat like they always did—to sit many periods of meditation a day, to maintain silence, and to spend most of the time looking inward.

But when the retreat began, the teacher called the two of them to see him privately and said, “I have a different retreat I want you two to be on. I have arranged for a bedroom for you here at the temple. I want you both to stay in the same bed for twenty-four hours, and I don’t want you to leave the bed except to go to the bathroom. I don’t care what you do while you’re there, but you have to stay in the same bed for twenty-four hours. Then come back and see me.”

Being students of his, they did what he asked. They went to the bedroom and stayed in the same bed for twenty-four hours. When they reported back to the teacher how things had gone, he scratched his head. “Hmmmm,” he said. “How about one more day? Stay in the bed one more day.”

So they left the interview with the teacher, and they went back to the bed for another a day. This was a seven-day retreat, and every single day the Zen teacher told them the same thing. He kept saying go back to the bed and stay there together. By the end of the retreat, they had actually reconnected; they had really met each other again, and their marriage was saved.

Now this was a really wise teacher. He realized that his senior student, the husband who was being groomed to be

a spiritual teacher himself, certainly had some very deep realizations. But he was also exhibiting one of the dangers of awakening—that one can start to divorce oneself from the grittiness of life and the grittiness of relationship. In relationship, you have to have a willingness to not stay hidden away in a transcendent state. You have to come out of it, as it were, and deal with people and situations.

This student was starting to hide within his realization. He was starting to not deal with things that were unpleasant or difficult. He was using his realization as a reason to avoid dealing with them. His teacher spotted this and was wise enough to put him in a situation where he was forced to deal with his wife, with his situation, with his relationship. He couldn't just hide out in a transcendent state.

Ultimately, we find that enlightenment—if it's true and real—does not allow us to avoid anything. In fact, the enlightened perspective actually makes it quite difficult, and ultimately impossible, to turn away from any part of our life.

So, after awakening, many people begin to come to grips with certain patterns in their lives that have been less than conscious. Some people may even discover that certain changes in their relationships and the pattern of their lives are necessary. This can be a frightening part of the process, because all of a sudden we are no longer hiding from ourselves. We wonder, “Will my relationship survive this? Will it work? Will my lover leave me? Will my friend still want to be friends with me? Will my work environment,

my relationship with my boss—or whatever—actually still work, or will it change in unexpected ways?”

And of course, most human beings are afraid of change. We may want change, but change always has a quality of unknowingness; you never know how something is going to turn out. But this is an important part of becoming fully awake; we have to come fully out of hiding. We have to confront our life as it is. Is this relationship satisfying; is it based on truth? I don't mean is the relationship perfect or ideal. That's not relevant. What is relevant is whether it's a relationship based on honesty and truthfulness and wholeness, or not.

What is it that we are relating to in each other, exactly? Where are we relating from? Are we relating from that place where we see that the other is our own self, actually the same nature as our own self? And are we acting that way and moving that way? Are we willing to face the fears that come up? As I said, most people are afraid of change. We fear that if we come out of hiding—if we come out of denial—we might lose a lover, a friend, a mate. The truth is, we might. We never know.

I constantly tell people that enlightenment is no guarantee that your life is going to go the way you planned. Life will be much better than it was, but that doesn't mean it's going to go the way you want it to. In the end, it's about truth; it is about being truthful in all aspects, at all levels of our being.

Enlightenment is not simply an escape; it's not simply a transcendence. It is that state of being from which we

can encounter our lives and our relationships as they are. Life itself is nothing but relationship. In the ultimate view of things, it's the relationship of the One with the One, of Spirit with Spirit. Then there is the *appearance* of this relationship—the dance of relationship, the dance of life. And in this dance, it is absolutely essential that we not hide from anything.

If you do try to hide from something—if you are in a relationship that is dysfunctional or a job that is tremendously unsatisfying, and you choose not to deal with it—the consequence of that denial is that you will not truly be liberated. You won't ever be capable of being fully free, because any area where we choose to remain unconscious will ultimately have an impact upon us, as well as upon others.

The call to come out of denial is not something that is imposed upon life. It may sound that way; it may sound like I'm saying, "Here's what you need to do, here's what you're supposed to do, and if you do it, you'll be a better person and have a better life." It may sound that way, but it's not at all the perspective from which I'm speaking. I'm simply saying that awakened consciousness moves in particular ways. It does not deny anything. It does not hide; it is not avoiding any part of life. That which we are, that which is fully awake, is also ultimately fully engaged and fearless. It moves the way it moves, out of unconditional love and truthfulness. It is only the fear in the mind—the fear that constructs the illusion of ego—that causes one to recoil from this phase of the spiritual life.

I want to emphasize this. If you avoid those aspects of your life that are not in harmony, those aspects of your life where you may still be in denial, that kind of avoidance is going to hinder your spiritual awakening. In the early stages, it may not have much of an effect. But later, as we get into the more mature opening of realization, there is no more room for denial. This is something that a lot of people don't count on. A lot of us think that somehow enlightenment is going to allow us to avoid dealing with those things in ourselves that we find uncomfortable.

Awakening can be the ground from which we meet every person and situation. It can be the ground from which we relate to all the circumstances of life. But this takes a lot of courage and a lot of fearlessness. It also takes something I continue to emphasize: a very simple sincerity. This kind of sincerity arises from that which loves the truth and sees that the truth is the greatest good.

To be anything less than real, to be in avoidance of anything at all, diminishes our experience of who we are. As I often say to my students, to be less than truthful with the people and situations in your life is to withhold the expression of who you are. In the end, we must come to see that truth itself is the highest good, that truth itself is the greatest expression and manifestation of love. Ultimately, love and truth are identical; they are like two sides of a coin. You can't have truth without love, and you can't have love without truth.

Awakening calls forth a transformation in both our interior and exterior lives. Again, please don't think this transformation is about having the perfect life or the perfect job or the perfect mate or the perfect marriage or the perfect friendship. This is not about perfection; it is about wholeness. It is not about having things exactly as we want them, but about having things exactly as they are. When we allow things to be, a sense of harmony develops; the gap between our realization and who we are as a human being gets smaller and smaller. A seamless continuum begins to emerge between realization and expression, awakening and its actualization.

CHAPTER SIX

Common Delusions, Traps, and Points of Fixation

There are some common traps that come with awakening—certain cul-de-sacs or eddies or points of fixation in which we can become caught. It's very useful to understand these traps, because they can be quite insidious; they can sneak up on you before you even know what's happening.

It's not that these delusions are inherent within awakening. It's just that—as I've said many times already—most people are traversing the territory from nonabiding awakening to abiding awakening. Part of this transition process can include the arising of certain delusions, where the ego grasps at awakening. It grasps at the realizations inherent within awakening, almost as if it were grasping the raw energy of

enlightenment and starting to utilize it to its own ends. The trickiness with some of these delusions is that they can be quite subtle, and while they may be obvious to the people around you, they can be hard to spot in yourself.

Now please remember that not everybody goes through all of the experiences I will describe here. Awakening is not linear. If what I am outlining is not part of your experience, please don't worry about that at all.

Getting Stuck in a Sense of Superiority

One of the most common delusions after awakening is the delusion of superiority. This is very common in spiritual circles. People can get stuck in a sense of superiority whether they are awake or not; it's a trap in the dream state just as it's a trap when somebody is traversing from nonabiding to abiding awakening. But after awakening, the egoic mind can come in and start to feel a personal sense of betterment, as if awakening made oneself better than another. This is very common; it's almost a natural part of the process.

Inherent in this delusion is the sense that we know something. Because we have awakened, we know. Because we have awakened, we're right. Because we have awakened, we are *always* right. At this point, the ego—which is the constructor of the dream state—can take that perception and start to create what I call an *enlightened ego*. There's nothing more distasteful than an enlightened ego. It's an ego that *thinks* it is enlightened, an ego that *thinks* it is awake, an ego

that is using some of the energy and realization of awakening to construct a new and superior sense of self.

I've seen people who have had an authentic moment of awakening use their realization to dismiss anything and everything they do not want to see. I've had people say to me, "But Adya, there is no ego; there is no 'me.' Since there's no 'me,' there's nothing to do." And I'll say, "Yes, but have you noticed that you have an incredible capacity to act like a jerk sometimes?" And they'll say, "Well, that may be true, but there's nobody here to do anything about it. It's all spontaneously unfolding. To think that I should address it in any way is just more dream-state delusion."

It's hard to get through to a person who is stuck in a place like that, a place of grasping on to certain insights and hiding behind them. When we are in a true state of awakedness, we never use what we have realized as a way to hide from anything within ourselves. We welcome everything into the light of being. As soon as we notice ourselves using our own realization as a means to dismiss unconscious behavior, we should immediately recognize that we're operating from a state of delusion.

As I said earlier, the absolute view of things is true. There is no separate doer; the ego is an illusion. Ultimately, there is no separate entity to *do* anything, and everything does happen spontaneously. But there is a deeper truth. The problem with this deeper truth is that it's very hard to put into words.

There is a scripture in the Buddhist tradition called the Heart Sutra, which says that there is no birth, no old age, and no death, and no end to birth, old age, or death. This is a very important part of the sutra. There is no birth, no old age, and no death. This is true from the absolute point of view. But unless we've also realized, simultaneously, that there is no *end* to birth, old age, and death, then our realization is not complete. If our realization is not complete, it's prone to be used by the ego as a construct to hide behind, and as justification for lots of unenlightened behavior.

This is very common in spirituality. It is very common for the ego to say to itself, "Oh, I have awakened, and I've seen that everything is spontaneous. Therefore, I'm not responsible for anything that happens. If you don't like it, sorry for you; you just haven't seen the ultimate nature of reality." This is a type of egoic delusion, based on superiority. As I've said, this delusion is very common, and it's why I emphasize that on the journey from nonabiding to abiding awakening, our greatest ally is a deep and profound sense of sincerity. With sincerity, we're able to recognize that this superiority is a form of arrogance, a way the mind is using insight to hide.

As a spiritual teacher, this is a difficult thing to get people to realize. This particular type of delusion comes with a well-defended egoic structure. It's very difficult to get through.

Sometimes the most difficult egos to penetrate are those that have had a glimpse of reality. You would think

that if someone had a real glimpse of reality—even if it was momentary—his or her ego could never reconstruct itself in such a highly defended way. But that is not the case; some people can become highly deluded, even after they've had an awakening.

What I have seen in my years of teaching is that often people who have this overt sense of superiority want to make sure other people hear them and know what they know. They want to make sure that people agree with them or, more important, that people know that they are enlightened. I've had people literally jump up onto the stage when I'm teaching and grab a microphone and start to tell the audience their version of what the truth is. In such moments, I have the sense that I probably can't get through to these people. Given enough time, however, life will get through to them. The beauty is that when we are functioning from a place that is less than true, it won't ultimately work for us in life. It will break down at some point. We will be brought to our knees in one way or another. Ultimately, we will encounter ourselves. There is no such thing as deluding ourselves permanently; life doesn't work that way.

Each of us has to look and see if we feel any sense of inflation, any sense of superiority, any sense of looking down our noses at anybody we think is not awake. If you do feel a sense of superiority, know this: This is not the view of true awakening. This is the view of an ego that is grabbing awakening and pretending to be awake.

It is also important to know that after awakening, some amount of this superiority is normal. In Zen we have a phrase for it: “drunk on emptiness.” It means being a bit drunk on the inherent energy and beauty of awakening itself. Now, if upon awakening the egoic structure were really dissolved, there would be no ego to get drunk. But that doesn’t happen in most cases. In most cases, what is left of the egoic structure gets exuberantly drunk on the realizations of awakening. Again, I’m not saying that this is bad; I’m simply saying that it happens, overtly or subtly.

If you notice this happening, just notice it. It won’t go away because you become horrified by it any more than it will go away because you believe it and act it out. See it for what it is—part of the awakening process for a lot of people.

If you stay in a place that is sincere, you will know that any sense of superiority is not true. This will allow you to look and see what you are saying to yourself, what your mind is saying that is making you feel superior. Because remember, it is only the mind that deludes us. All delusions begin in the mind. All delusions are based on various ways we’re talking to ourselves and then believing what we are saying.

The key to unraveling any delusion, to seeing through anything that separates us, is to uncover its genesis. What are you telling yourself that is creating a sense of division, whether it’s a sense of superiority or anything else?

When Jesus encountered a group of people who were stoning a woman, he said, “Let he who is without sin cast

the first stone.” Jesus is speaking from a state of nonseparation here; he is not seeing himself as better than the woman being stoned, no matter what deed she has committed. What he’s saying is that nobody is without sin. Sin means missing the mark; nobody is without misunderstandings. We’ve all done things we wish we hadn’t. We have all acted in less than enlightened ways. We are none of us different from anyone else. For this reason, when we operate from the point of view of nonseparation, any sense of superiority dissolves.

If you notice a sense of superiority in yourself, the most important thing is not to believe it. Don’t try to push it away, but don’t believe it. If you stay in a state where you’re not believing it, but also not pushing it out of your system, then a dissolving happens. If you try to push it away, remember that whatever you resist, persists. Whatever you try to push away, you’re actually energizing.

I have a story from my own life that I think illustrates quite well how a hidden sense of superiority can arise, and how to deal with it. I can remember when I was twenty-five, and I had my first real sort of spiritual awakening. It was very powerful and very freeing. There I was, a twenty-five-year-old kid who suddenly had no fear in his system. I knew that I was deathless and could not be harmed, and all of our inherent survival instincts disappeared out of my system.

A few months after that realization, I went to see my teacher. I would always see her on Sunday mornings. We’d sit and meditate, she’d give a talk, we’d meditate a little more,

and then we would all have breakfast together. This time when I sat down in that room with all of the other students, this sense of superiority arose in me. It really surprised me. Over time, I started calling it “Superiority Man.”

I was sitting there in meditation, and all of a sudden Superiority Man arose. I looked around, and there was this sense that the other people in the room knew nothing. They didn’t know anything about the truth; they didn’t know anything about reality. I, on the other hand, had had this great realization. I was immediately horrified because, fortunately for me, I knew it wasn’t true. The realization itself had shown me that superiority is a total dream, an egoic fantasy. But that didn’t keep Superiority Man from making an appearance.

My mind was creating this great sense of superiority out of the facts of awakening. At the same time, there was a deeper knowing that the feeling had no basis in truth. I tried everything to get rid of Superiority Man. At first I just tried reminding myself that it wasn’t true, going back to that place inside where the superiority had no reality. And yet every time I would show up for meditation, week after week, this sense of superiority would arise.

I tried everything. First, I tried hating it to death. Then I tried loving it to death—accepting it and allowing it to be, in hope that it would go away. I would look at where it was coming from, why it was arising. As the weeks went by, I tried every strategy I could come up with to eliminate it, and

all the strategies failed. Every Sunday morning I would show up, sit down, and Superiority Man would arise.

Finally, one morning, I realized that there was actually nothing I could do about Superiority Man. It was like being completely defeated. I realized I had tried everything to get rid of it, and nothing was working. There was nothing I could do.

It wasn't a dismissal; it wasn't like I was becoming blind to it. It was an authentic, sincere realization. It was a moment of utter defeat. I saw that it doesn't matter how much I've realized, I can still be defeated. I can still have something arise within me that is not true, that I can't actually get rid of, even after the awakening that happened.

I sat there and allowed myself to be defeated. I meditated for a while longer, then I got up with everyone else and we started to have breakfast. I noticed that when we all sat down to breakfast together, the sense of superiority lifted. It wasn't because I suddenly understood something—there was no reason. I had realized that there was nothing I could do about it. Encountering the fact that I could not get rid of this arrogance, no matter what I tried, was one of the first experiences I had—and there would be many more—of the futility of personal will.

So if you find yourself feeling a sense of superiority after awakening, don't try to push it away. Don't try to push any negativity away. But don't feed it, either. Just see it for what it is. That's the most important thing.

The Trap of Meaninglessness

There are other traps that can come up with this process of going from an initial glimpse of awakening to abiding awakening. Again, these traps or cul-de-sacs aren't inherent to awakening itself; they are delusions that arise from the mind's relationship with the awakened view. The awakened view is far beyond what the mind can grasp, and the mind's inherent nature is to contain everything that it sees. It is the mind that is the source of these delusions after awakening.

One of the most common of these traps is a sense of meaninglessness. From our new view of reality, we are free from the egoic desire to find meaning. We see that the ego's desire to find meaning in life is actually a substitute for the perception of *being* life itself. The search for meaning in life is a surrogate for the knowledge that we *are* life. Only someone who is disconnected from life itself will seek meaning. Only someone disconnected from life will look for purpose.

I'm not saying that people shouldn't look for meaning or purpose; these are relatively wise strategies that help people cope with life. But remember that the yearning to find the meaning of life, to find the purpose of existence, is ultimately derived from the dream state—a state in which we have no real knowledge of what we are and are unconscious of our true nature.

When there is a true realization, when we wake up from the dream state, we realize that to search for meaning is no longer appropriate. When we have a direct connection with

life, all of a sudden the quest for meaning and purpose seems rather paltry and insignificant. It is no longer a motivator in our life. The drive for meaning and purpose dissolves because we are coming from a different perspective—a perspective where such things don't really exist, certainly not in the old way. They no longer exist from an egoic standpoint.

When we wake up, we see the dream state for what it is. How could a dream state have meaning? How could a dream state have purpose? It's just a *dream*, right? That is true. But as I have said over and over, after awakening there is still a human being with a human mind that is trying to make sense of things. The mind is even trying to make sense of awakening itself. Since for most people there's not a total disappearance of the ego, the mind continues to try to make sense of the insights of awakening. The mind will start to say, "Oh God, I no longer have any purpose or meaning." You have seen too much of reality to believe in egoic purpose or meaning any longer. Yet there is still enough ego structure left to be invested in meaning and purpose. The illusion of ego is noticing that there is no meaning; it is peering into the truth, as it were, which can be very disorienting.

It is at this point that some people get trapped in this thing called meaninglessness. Life seems to have no meaning. In the most negative sense, life has no purpose. It's as if the ego was a big balloon, and now all its air has been let out. Through your perception of reality, the balloon has been deflated, and all that's left is this limp piece of rubber. But

the balloon is still there, and it's asking, "What happened? What happened to the air? What happened to the meaning in my life? What happened to my purpose?"

With the remnants of the egoic structure still in place, it's sometimes easy to get caught in a negative sense of meaninglessness and purposelessness. From an awakened point of view, to say there's no meaning and no purpose is tremendously positive. And it is positive because one has found something better than meaning or purpose. One has actually awakened as the very essence of existence itself. What could have more meaning than that? What could have more purpose than that?

But from the point of view of the ego, this can be devastating. If you are not careful, you can get caught in a whirlwind or tide pool of ego that can whirl you into a depressive state. I've met people over the years who have had a very real seeing, but their ego has reacted to what they saw. Ego literally reacts to the reality that was perceived, and the reaction can be very negative. The ego may get depressed; meaning and purpose have dissolved out of its structure, and there's still enough ego there to sit around and feel bad about it.

Some people can spend quite a period of time stuck in this depressive place. One of the antidotes to being stuck in meaninglessness is to see that we are only looking at truth from the ego's point of view. There is nothing in awakening for the ego. Awakening wakes up *from* the ego, so from the

ego's point of view, awakening has no benefit. Awakening benefits *being*; it benefits what you really are. But it does not bring benefit to the ego. Actually, there's nothing more devastating than looking at truth from the standpoint of ego. One may think it would be wonderful if the ego could see the truth, that the ego would be overwhelmed with joy and happiness. But that is usually not the case.

Being Stuck in Emptiness

Another of the traps you may discover is similar to being stuck in meaninglessness: being stuck in emptiness. Being stuck in emptiness is a form of being stuck in the transcendent, being stuck in the position of the witness.

Initially, it can feel wonderful to be in a state of witnessing, a state in which we realize that we are not somebody who is witnessing, but that we are witnessing itself. Although it is true that we are the witness to everything, there is also a deluded aspect that is easy to get caught in.

The ego can set up camp anywhere; it is a shape-shifter. If superiority doesn't work, meaninglessness might; if meaninglessness doesn't work, then setting up camp as the disconnected witness might. The ego is constantly in flux. Once you're onto it—once you've discovered it in one aspect of your being—it will disappear, only to reappear somewhere else. It is very cunning, very subtle. In fact, as I see it, the ego's illusion is one of the most impressive forces in all of nature.

The “me,” or the ego, can set itself up as the witness. Initially, this can feel tremendously freeing, especially for people who have experienced a lot of pain and suffering in life. All of a sudden they are the witness, and there is extraordinary relief in no longer being identified as the main character in their life. But the position of the witness can become a fixation, and when it does, a sense of dryness can start to creep in. In this situation, the witness sees itself as unconnected with what is being witnessed. This means, of course, that there hasn’t been a true and thorough realization. It is more like a half realization; it’s like being halfway awake.

There’s an ancient saying that the great sage Ramana Maharshi used to talk about, which goes like this: “The world is illusion. Brahman alone is real. The world is Brahman.” This saying speaks to certain insights that come with awakening. The first insight, that “the world is illusion,” is not a philosophical statement. Seeing that the world is illusion is part of the awakening experience. It is something that is known; we discover that there is no such thing as an objective world out there, separate from us. This first statement, then, is pointing to this insight, which comes with realization.

The next statement, “Brahman alone is real,” points us toward the recognition of the eternal witness. The witness to the world is where all the reality is. From this perspective of awakening, the witness is experienced to be much more

real than what is witnessed. What is witnessed is seen to be like a dream, like a movie or a novel, unfolding in front of us. There's a great amount of freedom in this, but also a great tendency to become stuck in the idea that "I am the witness to what is."

So far, we've seen that these two statements are true: "The world is illusion," and "Brahman alone is real." (The latter of these could also be understood as "The witness alone is real.") But without the third statement, "The world is Brahman," we would not have true nonduality. In the statement, "The world is Brahman," we have the realization of true oneness. "The world is Brahman" collapses the position of the external witness. The witness position collapses into the totality, and suddenly we're not witnessing from the outside anymore. Instead, witnessing is taking place from everywhere simultaneously—inside, outside, around, up, down. Everything everywhere is being witnessed from inside and outside simultaneously, because what is being witnessed *is* what is witnessing. The seer and what is seen are the same. Unless that is realized, we can get stuck in the place of the witness. We can become stuck in a transcendent void, in emptiness.

I remember once when a woman shared her vision of awakening with me. This was someone whom I would ask to start teaching just a couple of years later. When she first came to me, she would tell me about what she was seeing and about her realization. She was looking for someone to

talk to, not necessarily a teacher. She didn't really need to receive teachings at that point; she just needed someone who could hear what she was saying and who saw through the same eyes she did.

We were sitting in a room together talking, and she was describing what was happening for her. There were tears streaming down her face at the bliss and the joy of realization itself, of discovering our true nature. The first thing I said to her was, "All that's wonderful, it's all beautiful, but don't get stuck in the deathless."

What I meant by that was *don't get stuck in the transcendent*. The transcendent is real, and it's very beautiful, but don't get stuck there. There is actually nowhere to get stuck; there is nowhere we should fixate. There is no particular point of view that we need to hold on to and grasp.

To be truly awake, to be enlightened, is to be free of all grasping—to be free of all points of view. That state is literally indescribable. We cannot conceptualize what that state of being is like. Up until that point, we can always conceptualize to some extent. As a teacher, I can explain certain aspects of realization—facets on the jewel of enlightenment, as I like to call them. I can always talk about certain cuts, certain angles. But how do you talk about the whole jewel?

The answer is that you can't. As a great Taoist sage said, the Tao that can be spoken is not the true Tao. This is like saying the truth that can be spoken is not the *true* truth. That's why I always tell my students that my aim in teaching

is to fail—to fail as well as I possibly can. To try to speak the unspeakable is to know, from the very beginning, that you are going to fail. So my intention is to fail as well as I can at speaking what's not speakable. Even though I can't speak about the whole jewel, I can speak from the place of truth. Then maybe someone listening will *hear* from that same place. It's not a place that belongs to me; it is a place that's true to what we are. It is that place of knowing.

Truth is not proprietary. Nobody owns it, and nobody has more of it than anyone else. Some may have realized it or remembered it more than others, but it's important to understand that the truth does not belong to anyone. Nobody owns what we are. It's an equal gift. The journey of awakening is just remembering who and what we are, remembering what we've always known.

So these points along the way where we can get fixated—whether it's in superiority, meaninglessness, or being stuck in the witness—are just a few of the ways that the ego can become deluded within the rarified atmosphere of realization. It doesn't seem to make sense to say that, but in experience, it happens all the time. It's also part of the journey; that's why I say it's natural.

Bit by bit, if we are sincere, we begin to see each time we fixate. Somewhere, somehow, at some point in time, something in us realizes that our awakening is not complete.

I can remember years ago when I was in this witnessing position. At first it was wonderful and amazing and

profound and transformative. But over time, I started to have this intuition, this little voice that said, “This isn’t the whole thing. This isn’t oneness; this isn’t unity.” The witness was perceived as being totally free of the “me” that I thought I was, totally free of the human being that I imagined myself to be. But the illusion that the witness was different from what was being witnessed remained. For me, as for many people, the next phase of the journey of awakening was the collapsing of the witness position. It starts to collapse when we see that if witnessing is different from the witness, then there is an inherent division. Letting yourself see this division is the beginning of the collapse of the external witness. With that collapse, you can start to see the elements of ego that are using the witnessing position as a way to hide, to not be touched by life, to not feel certain feelings, to not encounter our lives directly and intimately in a gritty, human way.

As I have said over and over, the seeing of an untruth is the biggest element in its dissolution. Make no mistake—to see a fixation within ourselves because someone explains it to us is not enough. It’s not enough to have somebody lay it out for you. It must be discovered in oneself, for oneself.

You need to sit with these things and investigate them. Don’t imagine they’re true simply because I say they’re true. We all have to discover this in ourselves, for ourselves, as if for the first time. These teachings—my communicating this material—is really just an invitation to take a deeper, more intimate look yourself, to be more real and honest.

Because the truth is that, in one sense, we are all alone. We have to investigate for ourselves; nobody can do it for us. No one is going to touch you on the head and wake you up all at once forever and ever, amen. It just doesn't happen that way, and the sooner we get out of that delusion, the better.

Full awakening comes when we take responsibility for ourselves. What I mean is that we must take responsibility for really looking at ourselves, into ourselves—discovering the capacity to see more deeply than we ever imagined. We tend not to discover that capacity as long as we're relying on somebody else, on an external authority.

I'm here to give hints and clues, and to question the answers you've already assumed are true. The true role of teachers is to question their students' answers, not to sit around giving answers of their own. Most people who come to me already think they know something. My job is to question what they think they know, as a means to help deliver them back to themselves.

By looking deeply at ourselves, we start to find our way out of these cul-de-sacs. As we do, something else starts to unfold. A whole other perception unfolds when we stop fixating egoically—when the ego stops trying to re-create itself as an “enlightened ego,” when it stops looking at the nature of reality and drawing false conclusions. When through investigation, meditation, and deep looking these delusions start to die, then a whole new area of our spiritual life begins to open up.

It's an area not dictated by the illusions of ego. It is the ever-opening, the ever-deeper remembering of the more subtle aspects of our true nature. It is what we are all called to. It is the very nature of spiritual unfolding itself.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Life Itself Holds Up a Mirror for Our Awakening

I want to share some aspects of my own journey of unfolding. We have been speaking about transitioning from what I'm calling nonabiding awakening to abiding awakening. For me, like most people, there was a process that unfolded in my life after the initial great awakening that occurred when I was twenty-five years old, a process of unfolding that lasted about seven years. I have already talked about some of what happened for me. But I want to describe something else that is not often addressed in spiritual discussions: How life itself, everyday life, can be our most valuable teacher. I'm going to use some of my own experiences to illustrate this point.

Almost from the time I was born, I had a competitive nature. For most of my life this manifested itself through

various sports. By age thirteen, I was competing in bicycle racing. By the time I reached my later teens and early twenties, I was competing at a relatively high level. Training and competition took up a big part of my life. So when I had a moment of awakening at twenty-five, and a whole different process started in my life, it surprised me. I really hadn't expected it.

As time went by, I had a sense that the realization I'd experienced wasn't complete—I could tell there were still parts of my egoic personality structure that weren't fully aligned with what I had realized and what I knew. I tried to address this through my spiritual practice, which at the time was primarily meditation and self-inquiry through writing.

But beyond our spiritual practices, there is life itself. Sometime within a year of this awakening, I came down with a series of illnesses that really flattened me. It was physically difficult, but it was also difficult for what remained of my egoic structure. A big part of my identity in the previous fifteen years had been built around being an athlete and being physically fit—more physically fit than 99 percent of the people I knew.

As is our tendency, I had formed a real sense of self around being a physically dominant person. By dominant, I don't mean that I was necessarily big; I'm not. I am a relatively short, lightly built person, but as a competitive cyclist, I did not have to be large to be dominant. It was about being more physically fit than one's peers, and I had

a tremendous amount of identity built around this kind of dominance.

During these illnesses, that identity was being wiped out. It's hard to have an identity as an athlete, certainly as a dominant athlete, when you're withering away in bed.

In the early stages of being ill, every time I would start to feel just a little bit better, I would find myself out on a bike ride. This, of course, put my body back into overwhelm, and I would find myself ill again. For months I went back and forth between being ill and then trying to be fit again, making myself more and more sick in the process. Finally, I made myself so sick that I was in bed for about six months.

At the end of the six-month period, I had a great realization. It wasn't the same as enlightenment or awakening, but it was an important realization nonetheless. I realized that I was no longer an athlete. I no longer met the criteria to consider myself an athlete—I was not physically strong, I didn't have great endurance, and I was no longer a great competitor. The persona of “the athlete” no longer belonged to me.

As I started to feel better, I had an incredible sense of relief and lightness, because I didn't have to be that physically dominant person anymore. Of course, the glimpse of awakening I'd had at twenty-five had already shown me I wasn't actually that person. But as is often the case after an enlightenment experience, the ego structure hadn't given up quite that easily. So once I was well again, I started to see my illness as a true gift, a form of grace. It literally reduced me

to something as weak as a puppy, and in the process offered me relief from that egoic mandate to be an athlete. It was the relief of being literally nobody. It had given me an even more visceral sense of what I had realized at twenty-five—that I was nobody, that I was unborn, undying, and uncreated. It was wonderful to feel this—to be nobody and nothing—on such a deeply human level.

I would love to be able to report that the dissolving away and crushing of the egoic sense of self was final at that point. But as I began to feel better, I started exercising again. I have always had a love of physical exercise. I have a body that loves to be worked, and I find a lot of joy in physical activity. It was a great joy to ride my bike again—through the forest, through the mountains, around where I lived. It was even more enjoyable than it had been before, because there was the joy of the activity itself combined with the fact that I didn't have to be competitive anymore. I didn't have to be physically dominant; I could simply ride.

But as time passed, I noticed that I was no longer just going for rides and enjoying myself. I had begun to shift, subtly, into a training regimen, as if I were a competitive cyclist again. I wasn't a competitive cyclist anymore; I had retired a few years back. Still, I found myself training as if I were preparing for competition. I was conscious of the process as it was happening. I would actually say to myself, “I know that the only reason I'm training is so I can put my egoic personality structure back together.” I was conscious

of what was happening, but not conscious enough to let it go. I was not yet ready to give up reconstructing myself. As a result, I found myself training as if I were going to the Olympics. And a year later I was sick again, back in bed for another six months, with another crushing illness. Again, the whole identity around being physically dominant was squeezed out of my system, and once again I felt the amazing relief of not having to be somebody, not having to see myself in a particular light.

After the second illness, I never again craved the resurrection of that old persona, the physically dominant person I had been. I still felt the joy in exercising, in using my body, but that second illness eradicated the egoic tendency to find an identity around a body-centered image. This was a great relief and a great joy.

It would be wonderful to say that I could have accomplished this through my spiritual practices or through inquiry or through meditation. But in my case, which I think is similar for many, many people, the greatest solvent for ego is found within our lives—the fabric of our existence, the grit of what's actually happening in our everyday experience.

I find that this is often overlooked within the context of spirituality. Many of us are using our spirituality as a way to *avoid* life, to avoid seeing things we really need to see, to avoid being confronted with our own misunderstandings and illusions. It is very important to know that life itself is

often our greatest teacher. Life is full of grace—sometimes it's wonderful grace, beautiful grace, moments of bliss and happiness and joy, and sometimes it's fierce grace, like illness, losing a job, losing someone we love, or a divorce. Some people make the greatest leaps in their consciousness when addiction has them on their knees, for example, and they find themselves reaching out for a different way of being. Life itself has a tremendous capacity to show us truth, to wake us up. And yet, many of us avoid this thing called life, even as it is attempting to wake us up.

The divine itself *is* life in motion. The divine is using the situations of our lives to accomplish its own awakening, and many times it takes the difficult situations to wake us up.

The irony is that most human beings spend their lives avoiding painful situations. Not that we are successful, but we are always trying to avoid pain. We have an unconscious belief that our greatest growth in consciousness and awareness comes through beautiful moments. We may, indeed, make great leaps in consciousness through beautiful moments, but I'd say that most people make their greatest leaps in consciousness in the difficult times.

This is something a lot of people don't want to acknowledge—that our greatest difficulties, suffering, and pain are a form of fierce grace. They are potent and important components of our awakening, if we're ready for them. If we're ready to turn and face them, we can see and receive the gifts that they have to offer—even if the gifts sometimes feel like

they are being forced upon us. Whether the circumstance is illness, the death of a loved one, divorce, addiction, problems at work—it's important to face our life situations in order to see the inherent gifts that are available.

In my case, it would be nice to be able to say that after the two illnesses I experienced, my egoic structure had been completely dissolved, that it wasn't trying to put itself back together, and that I was existing in the clear light of being at all times and in all situations. Unfortunately, my karma is apparently not quite that pure. There was much more to come. In fact, more than I ever could have imagined.

After I had my first awakening, one of my teachers said something to me that, at the time, seemed very odd. I could tell that my teacher was happy about what had occurred, and that she recognized something significant had happened to me. Yet in that same meeting, she told me certain things to watch out for. She basically said, "Here are ways you can throw away what you have realized, that you can avoid the truth that you have realized. This is how you might put yourself back to sleep."

When I tell this story, people always ask, "What were those ways? What exactly did your teacher tell you?" But my sense of it is that my teacher was telling me ways that were particular to me. They're not necessarily universal. The funny thing was that my teacher told me about four or five specific things to watch out for, and it was only many years later that I realized that every single thing she had warned

me about had happened. I had done every single one of those things she told me to watch out for.

And of course, I lived through all of them. It wasn't that it was wrong to do those things; in fact, it was by living through them that I saw how necessary it was for me to experience those mistakes.

One of the most powerful warnings my teacher gave me at the time sounded quite odd. She told me to be careful, because a lot of people at my same stage will meet someone, fall in love, and go traveling with that person as a way to avoid themselves. At the time I thought, "What on Earth could that mean?" It seemed so far-fetched and specific—not just meeting someone, but then falling in love and going on a trip. It didn't seem to fit into my context at all.

But lo and behold, about four and a half years later, I met a woman. It was one of those situations where the relationship was like Velcro. Everything inside of me that was needy or addictive or unhealthy fit perfectly with this person. Everything that she had inside of her that was unhealthy fit perfectly with what was unhealthy in me. The relationship was formed around some very unconscious patterns.

I won't tell you the whole sordid tale, but the long and short of it is that we did travel together overseas, and this relationship was, in fact, unbelievably difficult. It pushed every single button I had. It pushed me in a way that I never believed I could be pushed, and I suffered in ways that I couldn't have imagined.

The relationship was a dysfunctional disaster, and I had become an emotional wreck by going through it. At some point I realized the situation was insane. “What am I doing?” I thought. “How did I get myself here? And how am I going to get myself out of this?” At that point I started to realize something important—that once again I had gotten myself into a situation by not being truthful with myself. I had let myself be pulled by desire and attachment, and had not been honest about what was happening.

I realized that the only way to get out of it was to start being radically and deeply truthful with myself, to start taking total responsibility for where I had ended up. I saw that the only way I could actually do that was to let go of every image I had of myself, because each image I had of myself, whether it was a good person or a helpful person or a nice person or an awake person or a wise person or a stupid person—every image I had was part of what had unconsciously driven me into this situation.

The only way to get out of the relationship was to start to let go of everything that had gotten me into it in the first place. What had gotten me into it were all the various ways I was still perceiving myself from an egoic level. The only way out of it was to let go of the person I wanted to be.

As I said, I won’t bore you with the details, but through this process there was a deeper, more extraordinary dissolution of the egoic self than I had previously experienced. It wasn’t a dissolving like when you sit in meditation and your

sense of self dissolves into a wonderful state of presence. It was more like someone was ripping layers off of me, one by one. It was very unceremonious. It wasn't nice, it wasn't kind, and it wasn't easy. It was existence shoving a mirror in front of my face and literally holding me there so I could not look away for even a second.

This was undoubtedly the most difficult period of my whole life. Through this process, though, I finally found the willingness to let go of everything I thought I was. I was able to let go of every sense of self that could ever arise—whether it was a wonderful sense of self or a terrible sense of self, a helpful sense of self or an unhelpful sense of self. By finally allowing the experience to wake me up, to sober me up, I was able to let go. The relationship and its breakup was an emotional bottoming out. It felt like I had been squeezed like a rag—all sense of self had been squeezed out of me. But through the experience, I also started to sense that something amazing was happening; I started to feel the sense of freedom that comes when karmic conditioning is squeezed out of your system.

With the awakening that I had at twenty-five, I realized that I was not my body and mind and personality; I realized that it was all a dream. But what I did not realize is that even though you know it is a dream, you still have to deal with it. If the body and the mind and the personality are still divided, if there are still conflicts in your system that are unmet, there will be a gravitational pull to bring consciousness back into suffering.

I saw that what happens in the body and mind can't ultimately be avoided. Everything has to be dealt with—everything. Everything has to be seen through. If what was realized was to be embodied, to be fully lived, then this process, however difficult, was one of the most important processes of my entire life. It was like coming through those periods of illness I described; after it was over, I once again felt that I was nobody and nothing. This was not just on an absolute level, not just on an awakened level, but also on an embodied level, as a human being. I felt inside what it's like to be nobody, to be nothing, as a human being. It may sound negative, but when it's fully felt, it is extraordinarily positive—humbling in the most positive and beautiful sense of the word.

I tell this story because everybody has their own story. Everybody has their own ways in which life is attempting to hold up a mirror, to squeeze the conditioned self out of us, to squeeze out of us the holding and grasping, to squeeze out all of our beliefs and ideas and concepts and self-images.

If we are willing to look, we will see that life is always in the process of waking us up. If we are not in harmony with life, if we are working in opposition to it, then it is a rough ride indeed, as my own life can attest.

When we are not willing to see what life is trying to show us, it will keep ramping up the intensity until we are willing to see what we need to see. In this way, life itself is our greatest ally. It is almost a spiritual cliché to say that life

is your greatest teacher. Students nod as if they know what that means. But we can only know what it means when we have been through it, when we have allowed ourselves to have life hold a mirror up, so we can see ourselves clearly.

To think that enlightenment only comes through wonderful experiences is to delude yourself. Yes, there are those cases where someone has a spontaneous awakening, and he or she doesn't have a lot of karmic tendencies to see through. But that is rare. For most of us, the path to enlightenment is not rosy. We need to acknowledge this, because otherwise we're only going to let ourselves travel toward that which feels good, that which supports our image of what the path of awakening should be. For most people, the path of awakening does have wonderful moments, profound moments and realizations. But it is also a gritty thing. It's not what most people sign up for when they say they want to be enlightened. The truth of the matter is that most people who say they want awakening don't actually want to awaken. They want *their version* of awakening. What they actually want is to be really happy in their dream state. And that's okay, if that's as far as they've evolved.

But the real, sincere impulse toward enlightenment is something that goes far beyond the desire to make our dream state better. It is an impulse that is willing to subject itself to whatever is needed in order to wake up. The authentic impulse toward enlightenment is that internal prayer asking for whatever it is that will bring us to a full

awakening, no matter whether it turns out to be wonderful or terrible. It is an impulse that puts no conditions on what we have to go through.

This authentic impulse can be a bit frightening, because when you feel it, you know it is real. When you have let go of all conditions—when you have let go of how you want your own awakening to be and what you want the journey to be like—you have let go of your illusion of control.

I don't want to set up yet another idea that awakening has to be difficult. Even that is an illusion, an image. Awakening itself need not be difficult. But the transition from nonabiding awakening to abiding awakening often asks more of us than we can imagine.

In fact, we have to be willing to lose our whole world. That may sound romantic when you first hear it—"Oh, yes, let me sign up! I'm willing to lose my whole world." But when your whole world starts to crumble, and you start to emerge from unimaginably deep states of denial, it is something altogether different. It is something altogether more real and gritty. It's something that some people sign up for and some people don't.

We don't need to have any image about what it is going to take to awaken—whether it is going to be easy or difficult. It may be easy; it may be difficult. It may be easy *and* difficult. It may be anything you can imagine; it may be a lot you can't imagine. That is the danger of giving this teaching, of me recounting my own story or saying that particular

things may happen on the path. The mind may grasp it and say, “Oh, life has to be really difficult if I’m going to awaken. I have to go through difficult moments.” This is not necessarily so. What you have to be willing to do is to encounter yourself and to face your own uncertainty. But how many of us want to let go into uncertainty, into the unknown, into the uncontrollable?

Perhaps more than you’d think. I encounter more and more people all the time who are willingly engaging this journey, this path to that place where we have actually always and already been.

This isn’t a journey about becoming something. This is about *unbecoming who we are not*, about undeceiving ourselves. In the end, it’s ironic. We don’t end up anywhere other than where we have always been, except that we perceive where we have always been completely differently. We realize that the heaven everyone is seeking is where we have always been.

It’s one thing to say that everything is already heaven, that everybody is already awake, that everyone is already Spirit. It’s true, but as one wise Zen master said long ago, “A fat lot of good that does you if you don’t know it.”

Once again, what is required is a certain sense of honesty. Everything is already inherently complete, already fully Spirit. We are already as much as we will ever be. But the question is—do we know it? Have we realized it? If we have not, what is it that’s causing us to perceive otherwise?

And if we have realized it, are we living it? Is it becoming actualized? Is it functioning in our lives?

And so one of the most important steps is to come into agreement with your life so that you're not turning away from yourself in any way. And the amazing thing is that when we are no longer turning away from ourselves, we find a great amount of energy, a great capacity for clarity and wisdom, and we start to see everything we need to see.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Energetic Component of Awakening

Awakening brings many different transformations to the person. Awakening is waking up *from* the person, yes, but it also has a profound impact on, and in many ways transforms, the person. To give concreteness to what I am talking about, I've been telling you about my personal experience—my own awakening at twenty-five and some of the subsequent struggles I had. I'd like to continue with that.

At about age thirty-two, and in many ways unexpected, there was another great awakening. It was not essentially different from the awakening I had at twenty-five, but it was much, much clearer. I think it would be accurate to say that the awakening I had at twenty-five was a bit hazy. It

was like walking out into the sunlight, but on a foggy day. Even though there was a change of perception, it wasn't totally clear.

At thirty-two, the awakening that happened was extraordinarily clear. It was an irrevocable and irreversible event, an irreversible seeing. What I saw, which was not essentially different from what I saw at age twenty-five, was that I am everything and I am nothing, and also I am beyond everything and nothing. I saw that what I am is inexpressible. It had the sense of going through and through and through—right to the very root of existence.

I'm not interested in talking about that particular awakening in any detail right now. All I will say is that, afterward, what had been realized was never unrealized. It was never forgotten; the aperture didn't close down again. At the same time, there were phenomena that occurred on the physical level, and that's what I'd like to talk about now. These physical or energetic phenomena are often a part of awakening. Some people will experience some of what I am going to talk about even before awakening, while others will only experience it afterward. As such, what I am going to speak about is applicable whether or not one has experienced awakening.

When we have realized the true nature of existence—when existence itself has awakened to itself—there is almost always an energetic component to the realization. By energetic component, what I mean is that there is a profound

realignment of the way our system works. A type of rewiring occurs in the mind, at the mental level, and there is a rewiring of how we sense and perceive on an emotional level. There is also a very deep change in the way the whole energetic system of our body, both material and subtle, flows and moves and is experienced.

One of the most common energetic changes that occurs with deep realizations is simply the pure release of a lot of energy into our system. It's not that our system is getting an influx of energy from outside of itself; instead, when we become really conscious, the blocks and barriers—the internal dams—open up. As they do, there is an immense release of energy. In fact, anytime the egoic structure dissolves, there is a releasing of energy.

In many ways, it is only in retrospect that we come to understand that the dream state itself, the state of egoic separation, chews up a tremendous amount of energy. Only once it dissolves can we see the immense amount of energy required to continue the perception of separation that most of us live with. While we're in it, we have no sense just how much energy is being spent on the dream of separation. You may have certain moments of suffering or despair, and in those moments you can feel how the perception of separation is draining your energy. But it is only when consciousness has spontaneously freed itself from the dream state that there is a huge internal release—mostly because the blocks are no longer there.

I don't want to give the impression that this energy is going to be experienced in any particular way and at any particular intensity. For some people, this movement of energy is very pronounced; for others, it is very subtle, like a small blip on their radar screen.

One of the most common things that happens as this energy starts to open up within us is insomnia—often our systems are not accustomed to the amount of raw energy coursing through. It is possible that, for quite a while after an awakening, you will find your system “revved up.” It can take a while for our internal mechanisms—the mind, the body, and the subtle body—to adapt to the new amount of energy we are experiencing. This adjustment rarely happens overnight.

After awakening, most people find that their system is playing catch-up, working overtime to integrate and adapt to the new influx of energy that comes with the dissolution of the dream state. It is common that people will come to see me and say, “Adya, I haven’t slept well for six months,” or “I haven’t slept more than three or four hours in any night for the last three years.”

This does not necessarily mean that anything has gone wrong. There is always the potential for the mind to comment on what’s happening, to tell itself, “I’m not sleeping enough. I can’t deal with this. Something must be terribly wrong.” But from a different point of view, there’s nothing wrong. The whole energy of the body is realigning itself;

it's coming into a different state of harmony. It may take some time.

At this gross physical level of energy, I've seen people experience all sorts of things in addition to insomnia. Sometimes people will experience heart palpitations. Others experience spontaneous movements of the body, where the body will release energy spontaneously—a leg might twitch out, or an arm might rise without warning. The system is being moved by a force that the mind doesn't understand.

In addition to an influx of energy on the physical level, there are often energetic transformations occurring on a more subtle level—the level of the mind. For a couple of years after my awakening at thirty-two, I felt like my mind was one of those old telephone switchboards where they had to unplug a jack from one outlet and put it into another. It felt like the wiring in my mind was being undone and put together in different ways.

I can't say that I knew what was happening or that I had any understanding of it; it just felt like my mind was being rewired. I could feel a deep structural transformation happening in my brain, in the way my mind was working and functioning. That energetic process continued for two years, almost as if something or someone was in my brain cells, redirecting and restructuring them.

After a couple of years I noticed a much greater capacity for clarity and simplicity. My mind became a more subtle tool, a more powerful tool; it could be used in a very

precise way, like a laser. Before this transformation happened, I wouldn't say that my mind operated on that level, so there was some sort of a transformation that led to a new sense of clarity and focus.

There was also a significant quieting of the mind. I had done many years of meditation, where I'd tried to quiet the mind, but this quieting was different. There was no *trying* to quiet it. As the mind was being restructured—as the brain was being wired in different ways—it became much quieter. The thoughts that moved through my mind were more often “functional thoughts”—things that were actually necessary to think about.

We humans spend maybe 10 percent of our time thinking about things we really need to think about. We spend the other 90 percent of our time imagining, fantasizing, and becoming involved in all sorts of internal stories and dramas that have no basis in truth. After the awakening, I noticed that more of my thoughts were falling into the former category, and fewer were fantasies and stories I was telling myself.

This transformation of the mind takes place over time, because it is a physical process of transformation. When our consciousness is no longer obsessed with the mind, the mind relaxes, softens, and opens. This transition may even wreak havoc with one's memory. I've had many students develop memory problems, some who have even gotten checked for Alzheimer's. There is actually nothing wrong with them;

they are simply undergoing a transformational process, an energetic process in the mind.

This process is normal. In order for the mind to be brought into harmony with what has been seen, the mind and the brain need to be restructured. I heard a recording by Eckhart Tolle, a popular spiritual teacher, who said that for a good two years after his awakening, he had a hard time using his mind. The work he was doing at the time required him to use his mind, so it was a real struggle for him.

Inevitably, if we realize that this is a natural process, that this sort of reorganization on the mental level is something we don't need to interfere with or improve upon, there can be a relaxation. The most important thing is to relax and let the reorientation process happen. The side effects can be disconcerting, but if you don't believe your thoughts about them, everything is actually fine. It's only the mind that will tell you that what is happening is difficult, that you can't handle it.

Many times when people say they haven't slept well in six months, and I can tell they have anxiety around that fact, I ask them, "Do you really need more sleep than you're getting? Do you actually know that you need to sleep more than you are? Or are you sitting there in bed at night telling yourself how tired you are going to be the next day?" It is amazing what happens when we let go of the thought patterns that say, "I should get more sleep," when we realize that it's just a thought. When we let go of the mind's interpretation about

what is happening, there is a much deeper relaxation in the system. This relaxation itself promotes a quickening of the physical transformation.

There are energetic transformations that occur not only in the way we think and conceptualize, but also in the way we feel—how our senses connect with the world around us. After awakening, people often find that their senses become extraordinarily acute. It is common, for example, to notice a widening of our field of peripheral vision. We might also start to sense things, to feel things we didn't feel before. We might be able to feel what somebody else is feeling, or we might find that we have become sensitive to the energy of environments and the energy fields of other people. We might sense, for the first time, the energy fields of animals or trees or plants or our houses or particular rooms.

As this energetic unfolding happens, it is an opening of the entirety of our being. At times, people will have a tough time with it. Some people come to me and say, “I feel everything everybody else is feeling. I feel what is happening inside everybody else.” That may sound mystical and nice, but think about the fact that most people are conflicted. Who wants to go around feeling everybody's conflicted energy? In that way, this heightened sensitivity can be problematic for some people.

Again, there are usually some unconscious thoughts occurring that are creating the sense that there is a problem. We need to be clear that each of us has our own responsibility;

that it is not necessary for you to feel everything somebody else feels. What somebody else feels is theirs to feel. You may have access to it, but that doesn't mean it is yours to experience. There is sometimes an underlying infatuation with one's empathic ability, which can itself be problematic. Part of you may find it unpleasant to feel what's happening with people, but another part of you might like it. It's like eavesdropping on someone's energetic state. If we unconsciously find that pleasurable, then it will happen more and more. If, on the other hand, we're not actually that interested—we're not pushing it away, but we are not seeking it out, either—then our attention goes where it is appropriate for it to go. Sometimes it is appropriate to feel what others are feeling, especially if you are in communion or relationship with them; it can help you to understand them on a kinesthetic level. But you start to realize it's not necessary to go around feeling what everybody else is feeling when you're not in relationship with them. You realize their business is their business, not yours.

This isn't a callous thing to say. It's a way to orient ourselves to our newfound sensitivity, so we don't get too involved in everybody else's business. It is also important to note that some people experience these kinds of empathic experiences without awakening at all, and other people have these kinds of experiences long before awakening. These types of experiences aren't indicative of awakening, but are common aftereffects.

The most important thing is to see through any sense of self that may be derived from this kind of extraordinary experience, to see through any sense of self that may be seeking to derive entertainment or power from an experience. There are lots of capacities that can develop for someone who is awake. A person who has awakened may acquire the capacity to heal. Just being in the person's presence may be healing for others. The ability to heal is, of course, a wonderful thing; it is a wonderful capacity to have. But if the ego structure rebuilds itself around being a healer, that itself will cause difficulties.

For these reasons, it's important not to become infatuated with this new level of energy. If we do become infatuated with various capacities that may arise—what are sometimes referred to as *siddhis* or spiritual powers—it can become another spiritual trap.

Ultimately, if these powers do come, they come as gifts; they don't come as something to grab hold of and reconstruct our sense of self around. In fact, many spiritual traditions warn students not to grasp at these powers, not to attempt to enhance them in any way. While there are many cautionary tales available, this doesn't mean we should avoid these special gifts that can arise with awakening. The idea is to just let them be, as they are, as a natural part of the process.

Notice, Allow, Open, Relax

There are things you can do to help ground this energy if you feel particularly overwhelmed. For me this process of

energetic reorientation lasted for a period of four or five years before it settled down. I was lucky that my wife, Mukti, who was a practicing acupuncturist at the time, could help ground the energy through acupuncture. I often suggest that to people; if the energy moving in your system seems overwhelming, sometimes simple things like acupuncture or acupressure can help you ground the energy. Sometimes just walking on the Earth in bare feet can help ground the energy that is moving through your system—this can be very helpful.

Now to be clear, I wouldn't necessarily suggest that you try to control the energy. I've seen a lot of people get into trouble with this. If you are going to do anything to help the process along, be sure to stick to simply grounding the energy.

Sometimes this heightened level of energy, when it gets moving and flowing, will come up against blockages in our physical system. These blockages may be experienced as various forms of pressure in the body. Sometimes people feel a contraction in the heart or the gut, or a pressure at the top of the head or behind each of the eyebrows. If this happens, the important thing is to notice it's happening and to relax. It's not that you have to try to unblock the energy. Given enough time, these blockages tend to open. If you are interested in addressing the blockages, I suggest you sit quietly and put your attention on them. Just leave your attention there; touch the blockage and see what wants to

be shown to you. Don't try to direct it or force it, just open to what may want to be shown.

Ultimately, what is most helpful is to keep the thinking process out of what is happening. When you experience an awakening, a lot of things will happen that you didn't necessarily plan on. What happens may not fit into the context you grew up with. Just know that these kinds of movements and transformations in the body, the mind, and the senses are natural and normal to the awakening process.

It is useful to understand that an energetic unfolding is very much a part of spiritual unfolding. They almost always come hand in hand. As I said earlier, some people will experience these energetic unfoldings overtly or profoundly or maybe even for a while somewhat disturbingly. Other people will find them to be so mild that they almost don't notice them at all. What I am offering here is a general outline. If you understand the process, things go much more smoothly, mostly because you're not worried about them anymore.

CHAPTER NINE

When Awakening Penetrates the Mind, Heart, and Gut

At the age of twenty-five, after the initial awakening that I have described, I could have assumed, “Oh, this is it; this is all there is to it; I’ve seen the absolute nature of reality.” I could have gone about proclaiming to the world what I had discovered. But I was very lucky that there was a small voice inside of me that said, “This isn’t really it. This isn’t the whole of it. Keep going.”

This little voice was like a savior in a sense. Because, at that particular point in the journey, there is a great tendency to want to grasp what is seen, to claim it, own it, and then to go about making a new “enlightened self,” an “enlightened me” out of what has been realized.

I was lucky to have this voice inside. Sometimes the voice that tells us to keep going comes from outside of us—from circumstances, from life itself. Either way, it is essential that an initial awakening isn't owned or claimed—that there is no assumption of completion. Even though it may feel like the journey has ceased, it is important to realize that it is the old journey that has ceased, the journey toward that initial seeing, the journey where you didn't have any consciousness of who and what you were. Now a new journey begins—the journey of expressing nondivision at every level of your being. And this is a journey that may take years to complete itself.

What Does It Mean to Be Undivided?

In these teachings, I've talked about being undivided, and I've equated awakening with being in an undivided state. But I want to make sure that no one gets a mistaken idea of what it means to be undivided. Nondivision is the *effect* of awakening; it is the expression of the realization of our true nature. As I have said, being undivided has nothing to do with being perfect or saintly. Also, there is no guarantee after awakening that, in any particular moment, you will not experience division in some way; there is no guarantee that division will never happen again. In fact, to be free, to be awakened, is to let go of concern with such things, with how awakened one is or isn't.

One of the great poems of the Zen tradition ends with this description of the awakened state: "To be without

anxiety about imperfection.” So, to be undivided does not mean to be perfect. Being undivided does not conform to images we might have in our mind about holiness or perfection. If someone were to look at my life, I’m sure they could come up with lots of reasons to say something like, “Oh, that doesn’t fit my idea of what an enlightened being would be. That doesn’t fit my image of what an undivided being is like.” I’m sure that my life would probably not conform to a lot of people’s ideals about what they think enlightenment should look like. Because, in truth, I’m much more of an ordinary person than most people would imagine. To me, part of awakening is dying into ordinariness, into nonanxiety.

Regardless of what someone might say looking at my life or anyone else’s life, the state of nondivision is not something you can understand until it starts to wake up within you. I can only encourage you not to believe any image that may arise in your mind of holiness or perfection, because these images only get in the way. Being undivided—seeing and acting from nonseparation, from oneness—is something that we must each discover for ourselves. What is it to see beyond love and hate, beyond good and evil, beyond right and wrong? These things must be discovered in your own experience. Evaluating other people’s experience of nondivision is not helpful. The only thing that matters is where *you* are. In any moment, are you experiencing and acting from division, or are you experiencing and acting from oneness? Which is it?

As I have mentioned, awakening impacts people in different ways depending on their conditioning. One model that I have found useful in working with students is to consider how awakening impacts us on three different levels of our being: at the mental level (the level of the mind), at the emotional level (the level of the heart), and at the existential level (the level of the gut). As awakening penetrates the totality of our being, we can experience varying degrees of nondivision at each of these levels. Please keep in mind that these three levels are metaphoric; this is just a tool to help make sense of something that people experience. As long as this conceptual model isn't held with too much rigidity, it may be of use.

At the moment of an authentic awakening, Spirit is completely liberated on all levels of being, all at once. All of a sudden we become awakened to a view, to a way of perceiving, that is totally different than anything we previously knew. In the wake of that event we may or may not stabilize in that full and complete view equally at all levels of our being. Often it is like a bungee cord that completely extends itself, but then through certain karmic tendencies, pulls itself back. It never goes all the way back to where it started before awakening, but it retracts to a certain level. This can happen unevenly, in different ways throughout our being.

Awakening at the Level of the Mind

Let's begin by looking at what happens at the level of the mind in the wake of an experience of realization. What does

it mean to experience nondivision at the level of the mind? We all know what it is like to be divided on the level of mind, to have one thought in conflict with another, to have one part of the mind saying, “I should do this,” and another part of the mind saying, “I shouldn’t do that.” To have a divided mind is to have a mind in conflict with itself.

Most of our minds are in great conflict. Our patterns of thinking move back and forth between good and bad, right and wrong, holy and unholy, worthy and unworthy, and even between enlightened and unenlightened. These polarizing thoughts cause the experience of divisiveness at the level of the mind.

As we awaken and that awakening penetrates and is revealed at the level of mind, what we first see is that nothing in the structure of thought is ultimately true. Now don’t misunderstand me—I’m not saying that the mind is without value or is somehow bad. The mind, which is nothing but thought, is a tool, like all other tools. It is a tool like a hammer, a saw, or a computer is a tool.

But in the state of consciousness that most human beings are in, the mind is easily mistaken for something it’s not. The mind is not seen as a tool, but instead as the source of a sense of self. Most people are constantly asking their mind, “Who am I?” “What is life?” “What is true?” They’re looking to their mind to tell them what should and shouldn’t be. This is ridiculous! You wouldn’t go into your garage and ask your hammer who you are or what’s the right or wrong thing to

do. If you did, and your hammer could speak back to you, it would probably say, “What are you asking me for? I’m the wrong tool to be asking these kinds of questions.”

But we do that with the mind. We’ve forgotten that the mind is a tool—a very powerful and useful tool. Everything begins in the mind. Every car you drive, every building you enter, every shopping mall you go into—all of it started as a thought in someone’s mind. That thought was then deemed useful and necessary, and the idea was made manifest through action. So the mind is powerful and useful.

But in human consciousness, the mind is not seen simply as a tool. What has happened instead is that the mind has usurped reality. It has become its own reality to such an extent that we human beings find our sense of self—who we think we are, our self-image—in our thinking process.

As the light of awakening starts to penetrate on the level of mind, we see that mind has no inherent reality to it. It’s a tool that reality can use, but it’s not reality. In and of itself, a thought is just a thought. A thought has no truthfulness to it. You can have the thought of a glass of water, but if you’re thirsty, you can’t drink the thought. You can think about a glass of water until you die, but to actually pick up a physical glass and drink the water is a totally different experience. You can pick up the glass and drink the water without any thought of glass or water. And so thought itself is empty; it’s empty of reality. At best, thought is symbolic. It may point in the direction of a truth or an object, but many thoughts

don't even do that. Many thoughts in human consciousness are just thoughts thinking about other thoughts—thinking about thinking. Meditators will be meditating, and one thought will be, "I shouldn't be thinking." But, of course, that thought is, itself, a thought. It's very easy to get trapped in various loops of thinking about thinking.

As we awaken on the level of mind, we begin to perceive from beyond the mind. We realize that the mind itself is empty of reality, and this is a profound realization. It's easy to say that the mind is empty of reality. It may even be an easy thing for some people to understand. But to *see* that the mind is empty of reality is radical in the extreme. It's radical to see that our whole sense of self and the world is created in the mind. When we see that the structure of thought holds no intrinsic reality, we come to see that the world as we perceive it, through the mind, can't have any reality. This is earthshaking; the self that we perceive ourselves to be has no reality.

Awakening on the level of mind is the destruction of your entire world. This is something that we can never, ever anticipate. What is destroyed is our entire worldview—all the ways we are conditioned, all of our belief structures, all of the belief structures of humanity, from the present time to the distant past—all of them go into forming this particular world, this consensus that human beings have agreed upon, this viewing of things as true, literally down to "I'm a human being" or "There is such a thing as a world" or "The

world needs to be a particular way.” Awakening on the level of mind is a complete destruction of all of this, and thus of our entire world.

When we awaken at the level of the mind, we begin to think, “My goodness, the way I saw the world was a complete fabrication, literally the stuff of dreams. It had no basis in reality whatsoever. The way I saw myself was also completely fabricated.” It doesn’t matter whether you see yourself as enlightened or unenlightened, good or bad, worthy or unworthy. Nondivision at the level of mind is to have all of these ego structures completely wiped away. It’s almost impossible for me to coherently express how thorough this destruction of the world is on the mental level. It is to see that there is no such thing as a true thought and to get that at the deepest level, to see that all of the models we create, even the spiritual models, the teachings, are literally the stuff of dreams.

Buddha himself said that all dharmas are empty. The dharmas are the teachings. The dharmas are the very truths he was speaking. One of the truths he was speaking was that all of these dharmas, all these truths that he just told to his students, are all empty. The truth of who you are lies far beyond even the greatest dharmas, the greatest sutras, the greatest ideas that could ever be spoken or written down or read.

This is experienced inwardly as destruction. I often tell people to make no mistake about it—enlightenment is a destructive process. It has nothing to do with becoming

better or being more or less happy. Enlightenment is the crumbling away of untruth. It's seeing through the facade of pretense. It's the complete eradication of everything we imagined to be true—from ourselves to the world.

In this process we discover that even the greatest inventions of the greatest minds in human history are but the dreams of children. We start to see that all the great philosophies and all the great philosophers are part of the dream. Awakening at the level of the mind is like pulling back the curtain, like Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*. She expects to see the Great Oz, but when the curtain is pulled back, it turns out that the Great Oz is a little man pulling levers. Seeing through the nature of mind is like this. It's a radical thing. It's unexpected when we see that everything that purports to be truth is actually part of the dream state and is holding the dream state together.

There is no such thing as an enlightened thought. It is quite a shock to our system to see this. In fact, most of us protect ourselves from seeing this truth. We say we want truth, but do we really? We say we want to know reality, but when it appears, it's so different from what we thought. It doesn't fit into our context; it doesn't fit with our images. It's something completely beyond them. It's not just beyond them, it actually destroys our ability to see the world in the old way. It renders our world rubble.

When it is all said and done, what we are left with is nothing. We are totally empty-handed, with nothing to grasp

on to. As Jesus said, “The birds have their nests in the trees and the foxes have their holes in the ground, but the son of man has nowhere to rest his head.” There is no concept, no thought structure upon which you can rest.

This is what total release means. Only with complete release can the truth of what we are shine through undistorted. But this complete release on the level of mind is not something that usually happens thoroughly at the moment of one’s initial glimpse of truth. Our mental constructs usually continue to crumble for some time after awakening. That is, if you allow it—if you see that the crumbling of mind and our world is what the truth of being is seeking to accomplish. We can’t see things in their true nature until we stop seeing things in their untrue nature.

To be fully awakened on the level of mind is a very deep thing. More often than not, when I encounter people who have had some authentic awakening, I find that, to some degree, their minds have co-opted what they’ve realized and turned it into another mental formulation. This will, of course, cause the direct realization to slip through their fingers. Sooner or later we find out that we cannot conceptualize the truth. When we realize that, the mind becomes a tool. The mind becomes useful for something other than thought. There emerges the possibility that mind and thought and even speech can originate from a different place. What is then using the mind is Being. Thought can arise from silence; speech can arise from silence; communication

can arise from silence—from a place far beyond the mind. And then the mind is used as a tool, as a device to communicate, to point, to orient. But it always remains transparent to itself; it never fixates and creates a new belief or ideology.

Awakening at the Level of the Heart

The word *heart* refers to our whole emotional system, our whole emotional body. To be awake on the level of emotion, first and foremost, means to no longer be deriving a sense of self from how and what we feel. If we feel good, if we feel bad, if we feel healthy, if we feel sick, if we feel awake, if we feel tired—we are no longer finding and deriving a sense of self through what we experience, through what we feel.

Usually, someone's sense of self is linked to and enmeshed with what they feel. So if we say to ourselves, "I feel angry," or "I am angry," what we are really saying is that at this moment my sense of self has fused with the emotion of anger. And, of course, that fusion is an illusion, because what we are cannot be defined by an emotion that runs through the body.

Awakening on the level of emotion means that we start to see and understand that what we feel does not tell us who and what we are. It tells us what we feel, period. What we feel doesn't need to be avoided or denied, but it doesn't define us. When we are no longer defining self on the level of emotion, our sense of self is liberated from the level of emotion, from the conflicted feelings that are on the emotional level.

For most human beings it represents a revolutionary transformation to no longer be defining ourselves through what we feel. But, of course, we can't get there by avoiding what we feel. Our emotions and our feelings are actually fantastic pointers to what is unresolved in our being, to what we may or may not have seen through. Our bodies are great truth meters; as soon as we go into an emotional sense of divisiveness—hate, envy, jealousy, greed, blame, shame, all the rest—we know we are perceiving from the state of division. These emotions that come from divisiveness are like little red flags, reminding us that we are not perceiving the true nature of things.

Emotional turmoil tells us that we have an unconscious belief that isn't true. Our mind has packaged something—maybe it has packaged an event in the present; maybe it has packaged the past. What we know is that it has packaged an event in such a way that it is causing us turmoil.

The emotional body is a fantastic way to enter into anything and everything that needs to be seen. It is an entry point into any illusion, anything that causes a sense of separation. If we are unstable emotionally—if we can be knocked out of emotional balance very easily—then it's vital we start to look at our emotional lives. I don't mean to imply that we need to analyze our emotions or take a therapeutic approach—that may be necessary and beneficial for some people, but that's not what I am talking about here. I am talking about dealing with the emotional body at a more fundamental level. I'm

talking about inquiring into the nature of fear, the nature of anger. When we feel an emotional contraction, what is that contraction about?

Most of our emotions—especially so-called negative emotions—can be traced back to anger, fear, and judgment. These three are generated when we believe our thoughts. Our emotional life and our intellectual life are not actually separate; they are one thing. Our emotional life reveals our unconscious intellectual life. We react emotionally to thoughts that we often don't even know we're having; in that way, those unconscious thoughts are made manifest.

Often people will come to me with some particular emotion that is troubling them—it may be fear, anger, resentment, jealousy, anything. I tell them that if they want to release it, they have to get at the underlying worldview of the feeling. What would the emotion say if it could speak? What belief patterns does it have? What is it judging?

What I'm really asking is how this person is being drawn into an emotional state of division. As I've said, we are set up to experience negative emotion any time we are perceiving from a state of division. Our emotional life is a clear and dependable indicator of when we are perceiving things from division. Whenever we go into division, there is some level of emotional conflict that we can feel, which can function as a call to attention. As soon as one feels emotional conflict, the questions that should be asked are: "In what way am I going into division? At this moment, what's causing this sense of

separation, isolation, or protectiveness? What is it that I'm believing? What assumptions have I made that are being reproduced in my body and made manifest as emotion?"

In this way emotion and thought are linked; they are two manifestations of the same thing. They cannot be separated. Often when people come to me with a negative emotion, I ask them to identify the thought behind that emotion or feeling. Sometimes people insist there isn't a thought behind the emotion. In that case, I suggest they just sit with the emotion, meditate on it. If the emotion could speak, what would it say?

Time and time again, once people have worked with a difficult feeling for a day, two days, or a week, they have this sort of "aha!" They say to me, "Adya, I really believed that there was no thought attached to my emotion. I thought it was simply fear or anger or resentment. But actually, as I got really deep into it and I got really quiet, all of a sudden I could start to hear the story. I could hear the thoughts that were creating the emotion."

Once they are able to find the thoughts that are generating their emotions, they can start the inquiry into what the thought is, exactly, and whether it's true. Because, of course, no thought that causes division is true.

This is shocking. All of us grew up in a world where certain negative emotions were thought to be justified. The feeling of being a victim is a good example. We say, "Well such and such happened to me, so-and-so did something to

me, and therefore I am a victim.” We can construct a whole intellectual and emotional life around the belief that we are justified in being a victim. But when we look at this, we see that this is just a means by which we go into separation. Reality doesn’t see things in terms of victims. It sees things from a totally different perspective. We may think, “So-and-so shouldn’t have said that to me.” But the reality is that they did. As soon as the mind says something shouldn’t have happened, we experience internal division. It is immediate. Why do we experience division? Because we are in an argument with reality.

This much is assured: if we argue with reality, for any reason, we will go into division. That is just the way it works. *Reality is simply what is.* As soon as we have anything in us that judges it, that condemns it, that says it shouldn’t be, we will feel division.

Most of us are taught that to go into division about certain things is natural. We’re taught that we would be deluding ourselves if we didn’t go into division about certain things, about our own suffering or somebody else’s. It’s as if we wouldn’t really be a feeling person if we didn’t internally experience a certain divisiveness, given particular events.

But this is one of the surprising and even shocking parts of coming into the deeper realms of realization: we realize there isn’t a justified reason to argue with reality, because we’ll never win the fight. Arguing with reality is a sure way to suffer, a perfect prescription for suffering.

Worse still, we find that we're tied to whatever it is that we're arguing with. Whether it happened thirty years ago or yesterday morning, if we argue with it, we're trapped by it. We are reexperiencing the same pain over and over and over. Arguing with something doesn't help us get beyond it; it doesn't help us deal with it. It actually imprisons us; it ties us to whatever it is we're arguing with.

It is surprising indeed to realize that none of our arguments with what is, or with what was, have any basis in truth. Our arguments are just part of the dream state. Now, to say they're part of the dream state or to hear someone else say it is not enough. Each of us has to look for ourselves; each of us has to look into our own emotional life to bring into awareness anything that has the power to cause us to experience division. We need to look at our emotions and see them for what they are; we need to question their truthfulness, to meditate on them in silence, and to let the deeper truths reveal themselves.

As I said, this isn't necessarily an analytical process. True inquiry is experiential. We aren't seeking to stop something from happening, for true inquiry has no goal other than truth itself. It's not trying to heal us or to stop us from feeling unpleasant feelings. Inquiry can't be motivated solely by a desire not to suffer. The impulse not to suffer is understandable, but there is something else that must accompany genuine inquiry, which is the desire and the willingness to see what is true, to see how we ourselves are putting ourselves into conflict.

Once we realize that it is you and I who put ourselves into conflict—that nobody and no situation in our life has the power to do it—we see that our emotional life is a portal. It offers an invitation to look deeply, to look from the awakened state—a state that is not trying to change or alter anything, but is itself a lover of truth.

It might be easy to misinterpret what I'm saying to mean that all negative emotions are indications of division. This is not what I mean to imply. One can be sad without feeling divided. One can feel grief without being divided. One can feel a certain amount of anger without being divided. In our western culture we don't have much context for this idea. In the East, however, there are whole litanies of wrathful deities; in the Tibetan Buddhist and Hindu traditions, for example, the personifications of God and the Divine are not always sitting on a lotus in heaven smiling beatifically. In these traditions, as in others around the world, spirituality is inclusive of a vast array of human emotional experience. Thus one should not conclude that the presence of negative emotions—or what we call negative emotions—is an indication of illusion. The key is whether or not the emotion is being derived from divisiveness. If it is, then the emotion is based on an illusion. If you inquire sincerely and discover that an emotion is not derived from divisiveness, then it is not based on illusion. Seeing this opens us up to having a wide range of emotions. We open up, becoming a big space in which the winds of different emotions can travel through

our system. The freedom I am talking about, then, is the freedom from emotions that are derived from division.

How Do Emotions Hold Together the Illusion of the Separate Self?

If we look deeply, we see that fear is the lynchpin that holds our emotional sense of self intact. So why are we so afraid? Because we have this idea of who we are that is limited and separate. We have an image of ourselves as somebody who can be hurt or damaged or offended.

We have to see, through our own investigation, that this sense of self, this sense of separateness, is an illusion. It's not true. It's a little lie we tell ourselves. It is that little conclusion—that I am the person I imagine myself to be—that opens us up to fear. Because that person we imagine ourselves to be also imagines that it can be hurt at any moment, that illusory sense of self sees life as very dangerous. Someone can come up and say an unkind word, and the illusory sense of self can immediately go into conflict and pain and suffering. We feel insecure because our sense of self can be harmed so easily.

Our sense of being a separate self is derived from a mixing of thought and feeling. The majority of our emotions are derived from what we think. Below the neck, our body is a duplicating machine for what our mind thinks. The body and mind are connected; they're two sides of one coin. We feel what we think. When we have an emotion, what we're

actually experiencing is a thought. The thought itself is often not conscious. The amazing thing about the way we're hooked up is that our feeling center, our heart center, duplicates thought into feeling; it transforms concepts into very real, alive, felt sensations.

When I talk about the level of mind and the level of heart, it may sound like I'm talking about two different things. I'm actually speaking of one phenomena: body and mind, feeling and emotion, two sides of one coin.

As we start to wake up from the fixations and identifications at the level of mind and the level of emotion, we come to see that there isn't someone to be hurt; there isn't anyone or anything to be threatened by life. In truth, *we are life itself*. When we see and perceive that we are the totality of life, we are no longer afraid of it; we no longer feel afraid of birth, life, and death. But until we see that, we will see life as intimidating, as a barrier we somehow have to get through.

Awakening on the level of emotion frees us from these fear-based fixations. When we begin to awaken at this level, we are free to sense the world in a deeper way; a whole different potential becomes available to us. The emotional body, the whole heart-centered area, is capable of incredible sensitivity. It is the sense organ of the unmanifest. It is that through which the unmanifest senses itself, experiences itself, and knows itself. This is very different from a concept of "me" sensing itself and finding itself through emotion and feeling. The more awake we are, the more we are able to

experience the whole body-mind as a literal sensing instrument of the absolute, unified self.

In a manner of speaking, the more we awaken from the emotional body, the more the emotional body itself awakens. It opens. The less conflicted we are in our emotions, the more open our emotional body becomes. This is because the more we realize there's nothing to protect—that all the thoughts and ideas and beliefs that cause us to go into emotional protection are false—the more open we become.

Awakening at this level is very much an opening of the spiritual heart. Perhaps you've seen the depictions of Christ in which he is literally reaching in, pulling the skin of his chest open, and revealing a beautiful, radiant, glowing heart. This is one depiction of the opening of the spiritual heart. An awakened being is a tremendously emotionally available being—someone who is not defending himself or herself on the emotional level or the intellectual level. Part of what happens when we awaken at the level of the heart is that we experience ourselves in an ultimate sense to be totally unguarded. When we are unguarded, what naturally flows out of us is love—unconditional love.

The ultimate nature of reality is indiscriminate; reality is what is. The truest sign of an awakened heart is that it is an indiscriminate lover of what is. This means it loves everything, because it sees everything as itself. This is the birth of unconditional love. Once this unconditional love starts to open within us, it is the way in which reality expresses

itself. Reality being in love with itself happens through the awakened heart. It's not a personal thing. It is reality, an indiscriminate lover, in love with itself. It loves everything and everybody. It loves even those who, from a personality level, you may not love. It is amazing when you start to realize that you love things and events and people you don't love on a personality level. You realize it doesn't matter. When the truth is awakened, it loves everything; it loves the people that your personality likes and it loves the people that your personality doesn't like. The awakened heart loves the world as it is, not just as it could be. The more we awaken at this level, the more we experience unconditional love, which is one of the deepest callings of human life.

Awakening at the Level of the Gut

The third type of awakening is awakening at the level of the gut. The level of the gut is our most existential sense of self. It's that part of ourselves where there is a core type of grasping—a grasping at our root. It's like having a fist in the middle of your gut; it is our most rudimentary sense of self. It is that which grasps and contracts. It is that grasping and contracting around which all the other senses of self are constructed.

When Spirit or consciousness comes into form, into manifestation, initially it is experienced as a shock. This sudden movement from unlimited potential into the limited experience of form is shocking to consciousness itself. This

grasping in the gut is that contraction, that shock, experienced at the physical level.

To get a sense of what I am describing, imagine that you are being born. You are coming out of a totally protected, warm, nurturing environment, and all of a sudden you're in a room. It's much colder than where you came from; there are glaring lights and loud voices. Somebody is grabbing at you, pulling on you. This is your first introduction to life itself, life outside the womb. If you can imagine that, it's easy to see how that little baby could get a clench in the gut. It's so violent, so sudden, and so unexpected that it can create this sort of grasping.

In addition to that initial shock of coming into form, we have many experiences that reinforce a grasping in the gut throughout our lives. Whether in childhood or during the growing up process, most of us have experiences that cause us to clamp down in fear and shock from time to time. These experiences exacerbate that grasping at the level of the gut.

How do we meet that grasping? How do we deal with it? Ultimately, we have to meet the fear of that grasping, because that's what the grasping is—just a fear response. It's as if you have a fist holding on in your gut, and it's yelling out, "No, no, no, no! No to life, no to death, no to being, no to not being! No, no, no! I will grasp! I will hold on! I will not let go!"

Even the movement toward awakening itself can, at times, generate fear. As people get closer to awakening,

it is common for them to experience fear—because awakening is the sudden releasing of this grasping in the gut. There's no guarantee that the grasping will stay released; it may grab hold again. But initially, awakening is the release of this holding. As people are coming close to awakening, they commonly experience an intuitive sense of clutching and holding on even more tightly, as if one is going to be destroyed or killed. It is an irrational fear that arises through the system.

When people tell me they are having this kind of experience, the first thing I tell them is that it's common, that almost everybody has this experience at some point. "It's not a problem," I say. "You're just now becoming conscious of a grasping that you may not have been conscious of before."

At this point, a common question is, "How do I get rid of it?" This question is coming from the perspective of egoic consciousness. Egoic consciousness always wants to get rid of what's not comfortable. But, of course, whatever you try to get rid of, you tend to sustain. The very act of trying to get rid of something sustains it. By trying to get rid of something, you're unconsciously granting it reality. You must perceive it to be real if you're trying to get rid of it, so that unconscious granting of reality adds energy to the very thing you're trying to get rid of. This type of clenching can't be solved through a technique. In one sense, the awareness that there is nothing you can do is the most important realization you can have.

Asking, “What should I do?” is a veiled way of saying, “How do I control this situation?” The only antidote for this kind of willfulness is to let it go. How does one let go of willfulness? Well, it becomes very tricky, because even one’s effort to let go of willfulness is itself a willful act.

Probably everyone has had the experience of trying to let go or trying to surrender. But trying and surrendering are mutually exclusive concepts. As long as we’re trying, there is no letting go.

So there comes a point where all technique vanishes, where anything that we’ve learned about how to readjust consciousness into a clearer state will fail us. Our techniques will be of no use. There will come a point in time when we will have to realize that there’s nothing “I” can do to let go at the existential level; there’s nothing “I” can do in order to surrender. Yet surrender and letting go are absolutely what is called for.

At that point, the most important thing is to let this fact in—that there’s nothing the “I” or the “me” can do. Fully letting that in, being fully penetrated by that awareness, is itself the final letting go; it is itself the opening of the fist, the opening of the most existential, rudimentary sense of self.

In order for that to happen, it must be seen that there is no way you can do it. You must come to the end of the line; you must come to the end of your rope. Only then can spontaneous surrender happen. The only thing we can do as human beings is to see that all holding on is futile; all

holding on is a veiled form of rejecting who and what we really are.

When you surrender the grasping at the level of the gut, it may feel like you are going to die. But *you* don't die; the illusion of a separate self dies. Still, it may feel like you are going to die. Only when you are willing to die for the sake of truth can that grasping truly and authentically let go.

Before I go further with this, I want to add something that may apply to some people. There are some people who have had extraordinarily difficult times in their lives—who have experienced traumatic events that may have caused an even deeper grasping at this root level of being. For these people, the grasping at the level of the gut may be reinforced as they come closer to a deeper stage of consciousness. If this is the case for you, it is important not to force anything. You may need specialized help to deal with this aspect of awakening; it may be necessary to find some way to address the deeper sense of trauma you are experiencing before you will be able to let it go. If this is the case, I recommend finding somebody who truly knows how to deal with such experiences, how to meet them in a useful way. You will know that the approach this person is offering is useful because it will start working. This root level of grasping will start to let go.

Of course, growing up is traumatic to some degree for all of us. Even if you had a wonderful upbringing, the most lovely parents, and the most wonderful environment in the world, there's no getting away without experiencing some

level of trauma. Life itself is traumatic in one sense; it is traumatic to a sense of separate self. Life itself is a threat to the sense of a separate self. There's no getting away from it.

Awakening at the level of the gut requires facing and releasing our deepest existential fear. It also requires facing and releasing what I call *personal will*, or the part of us that says, "This is what I want and the way I want it to be." Ultimately, the personal will is an illusion, which is why it is so frustrating when we try to use it to control and dictate events. But illusion or not, it must be faced and dealt with. This task calls for the deepest surrender, the deepest devotion and sincerity to truth itself.

True realization, true enlightenment, comes through a complete relinquishing of personal will—a complete letting go. Of course, this often generates fear in our illusory sense of self, which can only interpret the letting go of personal will as traumatic. We fear letting go will open us up to danger. We think that if we let go of personal will, we'll never get what we want, the world will never be the way we want it to be, and nothing will ever happen the way we want it to happen.

What we ultimately see is that these conclusions are themselves just thoughts. There is no such thing as a personal will, actually, but until we see that, the experience of willfulness is something we must engage.

This is where we start to encounter the wisdom of being disillusioned. When we feel disillusioned with something,

it means we're coming to the end of our willfulness. It's only by coming to the end of our willfulness that transformation happens.

Those who have been addicted to drugs or alcohol and have recovered know that a very important component in recovery is coming to the end of your personal will. You realize that you can't change your addiction through willfulness; your will is not that strong, and you can't do it on your own. When an addict "bottoms out," what this really means is that his or her personal will has broken down. And when our personal will has broken down, a whole different force comes rushing into our system. It's the force of Spirit, and it can now become operational, because we are no longer avoiding it through grasping at personal will.

All of us, in our own process of awakening, will visit the limitation of our personal will. Most of us will visit it several different times, on deeper and deeper levels, until it is fully extinguished.

The loss of personal will isn't really a loss at all. It's not as if we become the doormat of humanity, that we stop knowing what to do or how to do it. Quite the opposite happens. By surrendering the illusion of the personal will, a whole different state of consciousness is born in us; a rebirth happens. It's almost like a resurrection happens from deep within us. This resurrection is very hard to explain, like many things in spirituality, but in essence we start to be moved by the completeness and totality of life itself.

The depiction of this kind of movement is very vivid in the Taoist tradition, which focuses on the expression of the Tao, or the truth, through us. If you read through the Tao Te Ching or look at some of the Taoist teachings, you start to get a feel for how willfulness is replaced by a sense of flow.

When you get out of the driver's seat, you find that life can drive itself, that actually life has *always* been driving itself. When you get out of the driver's seat, it can drive itself so much easier—it can flow in ways you never imagined. Life becomes almost magical. The illusion of the "me" is no longer in the way. Life begins to flow, and you never know where it will take you.

As their sense of personal will diminishes, people often say to me, "I don't even know how to make a decision anymore." This is because they are operating less and less from a personal point of view. There is a new way of operating, and it is not really about making this decision or that decision, the right decision or the wrong decision. It is more like navigating a flow. You feel where events are moving, and you feel for the right thing to do. It's like a river that knows which way to turn around a rock—to the left or to the right. It's an intuitive and innate sense of knowing.

This kind of flow is always available to us, but most of us are too lost in the complexities of our thinking to feel that there's a simple and natural flow to life. But underneath the turmoil of thought and emotion, and underneath the

grasping of the personal will, there is indeed a flow. There is a simple movement of life.

One of my favorite definitions of enlightenment comes from a Jesuit priest named Anthony de Mello, who passed away some years ago. Someone asked him to define his experience of enlightenment. He said, “Enlightenment is absolute cooperation with the inevitable.” I love that, because it defines enlightenment not just as a realization, but as an activity. Enlightenment is when everything within us is in cooperation with the flow of life itself, with the inevitable.

When we’re not so conflicted and divided inside, we get a feel for the inevitable—where life is moving, what direction it is going in. We no longer ask, “Is this the right way? How do I know it’s the right or wrong way?” This kind of question actually distorts our perception. There’s something much more subtle occurring; it’s the flow of life itself.

As we surrender our willfulness—as we meet the fear in the gut and find the sincere willingness to say yes to whatever we’re afraid of—everything that I’m speaking about becomes available for us. When we say a simple and sincere yes to life, yes to death, yes to the ego’s own dissolving, we don’t have to struggle anymore. It becomes a new way of navigating through life. Flow is what navigates us through life—not concepts, not ideas, not what we should or shouldn’t do, not what’s right or wrong. Over time, what we come to see is that flow is always amazing.

It is the expression of unity, it directs our existence in ways that are healing and loving, and it bring things together in ways we couldn't imagine.

CHAPTER TEN

Effort or Grace?

I'm often asked how much of the process of awakening is grace, and how much of it requires a certain conscious diligence or effort.

To be honest, that kind of question is very difficult to answer. In the radical schools of nonduality, many people would say that everything is up to grace, and there is no place for effort. These people would say, "Radically, radically let go; radically leave everything up to grace, because there is no separate doer; there is only the will of God, and everything is inextricable from the will of God, so ultimately everything is grace."

Then, of course, there are other schools and approaches that would be much more effort-centered. These schools

would say that you must strive to transcend your own illusions; you must make a great amount of effort; you must have a great amount of spiritual discipline; you must have the willingness to really look and question.

These two points of view are often in denial of each other. The type of teachings that say you must make a lot of effort often have little room for spontaneity and naturalness. The type of teachings that say everything is the will of God—that there is no part for you to play, so you might as well just relax and let it all happen—can become fixated on an absolute point of view that often neglects a greater vision. One of the things I realized, a long time ago, is that the truth never lies in any polarized statement or dualistic formulation. Certainly my experience of the ultimate nature of reality is something that can't be expressed or formulated in a dualistic way; it is beyond all dualistic points of view.

So when people ask me whether they need to make effort or not, whether it's all grace, or whether it requires any of their attention, the most useful pointer I can offer is to look within for the answer. If you are really truthful with yourself, you will know from the inside whether it is necessary to investigate a fixation in the mind or in the body or in the gut; you will know when you are called to discipline yourself and look closely at something. And if you need to make effort to look at it, then so be it. Make the effort to look at it, question it, and uncover it.

Again, all of our fixations originate on the level of ideas. One of the entry points is to look at what you believe, what specific thought is causing you to perceive separateness or to go into emotional division. This is the discipline, the effort part of the process of awakening: the willingness and the courage to question. Sometimes it is necessary to move beyond a sort of inner slothfulness or laziness and challenge ourselves to look at something with clarity.

I often tell my students that it is necessary to have the courage to question. The courage to question takes real energy. It requires courage to look at something really deeply. It requires focus and attention to look at your underlying patterns, the underlying belief structures of a mental, physical, or emotional fixation. If we are being sincere and honest with ourselves, there is an intuitive sense of what we are avoiding. If we can find the capacity to be honest, we'll start to feel in ourselves when we're being called to make effort.

If we're listening deeply, we'll also feel when it is time to let go, when it is time to let grace do what only grace can do. We'll know when it's time to open and let go of any amount of striving or struggling, which may include letting go of inquiry or questioning. There's a time to know when you've done everything there is for you to do, when you've accomplished your goal, and the time has come to let go and let something other than your illusory sense of self take over.

There is no prescription that I can give for when to do one and when to do the other—it's a matter of sensitivity, a

matter of being honest with yourself. Sometimes people ask me whether they should meditate or not. “Some people say that I shouldn’t meditate, because it’s just more self-seeking,” they say. “Others say I should meditate, because if I don’t meditate, I may never wake up. What do you think?”

To those people I say, “Well, you tell me—are you called to meditate? It’s not a matter of should or shouldn’t; it’s not even a matter of whether it’s your mind or your ego asking the question. What’s deeper than that? What’s underneath that? What do you actually know? What do you actually know—whether you want to know it or not?”

This is the important question.

I think one of the teacher’s primary tasks is to help students connect to their own intuitive, natural sense of direction—“the inner teacher,” as it is sometimes called. I’m well aware that many people have little sense of the inner teacher. There are people who are so conflicted that it’s almost impossible for them to find it. In that case, an external teacher may be necessary to give direction, to help them see where they need to go and what they need to look at in order to find this inner sense of guidance.

Too many people abdicate responsibility for themselves. Too many people in spirituality want someone to tell them what to do. They want the teacher to say, “Do this or don’t do that. Meditate this much or meditate that much.” If we get caught in this habit, we can stay in a sort of spiritual infancy. At a certain point we need to grow up; we need

to look inside ourselves for our inner guidance. There are things most human beings know; they just don't want to know them. They know deep down that certain things in their lives are working or aren't working, that certain parts of their lives are functional and others are dysfunctional. But sometimes, as human beings, we don't want to know what's not convenient. So we pretend not to know.

What is most important is to come out of pretending. There is a time and a place for everything. There's a time to make effort and to be disciplined. There is a time to let go and realize you cannot do it alone, that it is up to grace, that effort and struggling and striving play no part.

But understand one thing: the trajectory of our spiritual lives—no matter what our path, whether it's a progressive path or a direct path, whether it is a devotional path or otherwise—the trajectory of our spiritual lives and of all spiritual awakening is toward surrender. Ultimately, that's the name of the spiritual game. Everything we do spiritually is leading us to a spontaneous state of surrender—to letting go. That is where it all leads, no matter what the path is, no matter what the practice is. Once you know that, you notice that each step along the way is the next opportunity to surrender. It may take effort to get there; it may take effort to get you to the point where you are willing to let go into grace, but ultimately the whole of spirituality boils down to letting go of the illusion of the separate self, letting go of the way we think the world is and the way we think it should be.

We need the willingness to lose our world. That willingness is the surrender; that willingness is the letting go. And each of us has to find what that letting go means for us, what we need to let go of. Whether it's easy or difficult doesn't matter in the slightest. It is the letting go that is ultimately important.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Natural State

People often ask me where awakening takes us. Where does all this end? This question is very hard to answer, because anything I say may become another goal in the mind. Goals in the mind are, of course, great hindrances to becoming fully conscious and fully awake. Yet there is indeed a trajectory to awakening; there is a maturing from awakening to what could be called enlightenment. It is very hard to say what enlightenment is. Enlightenment is not really different from awakening, but it is what awakening matures into. It's the same way that we mature from a child into an adult human being, into an old human being, and who knows what beyond that. The mature experience and expression of awakening is rather difficult to express,

but in some way it is necessary that it be expressed. At least, as a teacher, I attempt to express it; I attempt to fail well in my expression of it.

The deeper we move into the direct experience of being, of the unborn, undying, uncreated that we are, the more we start to move into a true sense of nonduality. By nonduality, I mean living beyond relative and absolute. In a certain sense, our experience opens up even beyond the perception of unity, even beyond the experience of oneness. We realize the core of ourselves, the essence of ourselves, to be something much more akin to pure potential. We realize ourselves to be pure potential, before it has become anything—before it has become the One, before it has become the many, before it has become this or that.

The maturing of awakening is this profound return to our essence, to the simplicity of what we are, which is before and beyond being and nonbeing. It is before and beyond existing and not existing. It is where there is a disappearance, as it were, where our minds are no longer fixating on any level of experience. Our minds are not fixating on any particular expression. The tendency to fixate has been liberated.

This state is not a mystical state. It is not a state of immensity or a state of specialness. It is a state of naturalness and ease. On the human level, it is experienced as deep ease and deep naturalness and deep simplicity.

On another level, it is the undeniable sense that whatever the journey has been, there is a certain sense of finality.

As one old Zen master said, it's like a job well done. At the end of the day, you just go home. At a certain point in one's spiritual life, it is as if everything is spontaneously put down. This is hard to understand until it actually starts to happen to you. Spirituality itself is put down. Freedom is put down. It's necessary for us to be free of our need for freedom, to be enlightened from our need for enlightenment.

At a certain point this starts to happen naturally and spontaneously. We even lose what I call the spiritual world, because the whole idea of spirituality is itself a fabrication. It's perhaps a necessary fabrication at a certain point in time, but it's a fabrication nonetheless. At a certain point, all fabrications dissolve and disappear. That doesn't mean they don't have any usefulness. It simply means we see that everything is transparent. We see that, as the Buddha said, everything is ephemeral. Everything is fleeting; everything is of the nature of a dream. We come to realize that even our greatest realizations, our greatest moments of "aha," are actually dreams within the infinity of the unborn. It is almost like we realize that even one's own great awakening was just another dream that never happened. And even so, there's a sense of shining reality; there is a shining presence through it all.

Now this state of simplicity and naturalness, as I said, is difficult to describe. There's a danger in describing it, as I mentioned, because the description of it may turn into another image, another goal. But sooner or later, this totally natural state of being is going to dawn. When it does, it is as

if one has “gone beyond.” It’s described in one of the Buddhist scriptures as “Gone, gone, gone beyond, completely gone.” Our own awakening takes us beyond everything. It takes us even beyond awakening itself, not to mention the various forms of spirituality or religion or whatever it may have been that helped propel consciousness beyond its fixation and identification with form.

We might assume that when consciousness has gone far enough beyond to be free of the gravitational force of the dream state, that such a person might never come back. You could almost imagine that person disappearing in some sort of transcendent haze. But that’s not what ends up happening. When there is a total letting go, a total devotion to truth and truth itself for its own sake, then we find that the very thing we let go of—the dualistic dream, the people we thought we were, the life we thought was actually real—calls to us in a new way. We find ourselves, in a simple and ordinary way, right back in our life. We must leave it so we can return anew. As Jesus said, we must be “in the world but not of the world,” which means to be in the world but not caught by the world. We are willing to be incarnate, but it’s a conscious incarnation, and it’s a willing incarnation.

Once we’ve traversed this territory, which is really the traversing of a dream, then we can actually inhabit form—the form of our own body, the form of life itself. Consciousness does not go back into identification. 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 a reentering, coming back down from the summit of the mountain, as it were. As long as we're staying at the summit of awakening, in the transcendent place of the absolute, where we are forever unborn and forever untouched and forever undying, there is an incompleteness to our realization.

Quite surprisingly, upon reentry, life becomes very simple and ordinary. We no longer feel driven to have extraordinary moments, to have transcendent experiences. Sitting at the table in the morning and drinking a cup of tea is perfectly adequate. Drinking a cup of tea is experienced as a full expression of ultimate reality. The cup itself is a full expression of everything we have realized. Walking down the hallway, each step is a complete expression of the deepest realization. Raising a family, dealing with children, going to work, going on vacation—all of it is a true expression of that which is inexpressible.

In a certain sense, enlightenment is dying into the ordinary, or into an extraordinary ordinariness. We start to realize the ordinary is extraordinary. It's almost like catching onto a hidden secret—that all along we were in the promised land, all along we were in the kingdom of heaven. From the very beginning, there was only nirvana, as the Buddha would say. But we were misperceiving things. By believing the images in the mind, by contracting through fear, hesitation, and doubt, we misperceived where we were. We didn't

realize we were in heaven; we didn't realize we were in the promised land. We didn't realize that nirvana is right here, right now, exactly where we are.

This kind of view, this perception, doesn't make sense to the conventional mind. The conventional mind would say, "Well that all sounds wonderful, but there are still people starving; children are still going hungry. There's abuse, violence, hate, ignorance, and greed." Certainly, there is the experience of all those things; that is undeniable. But simultaneously we see that all of this division is the product of dreaming human minds. This doesn't mean that we dismiss or avoid it; quite the contrary. What we see is the underlying perfection of life. It is from that groundwork of seeing, experiencing, and literally knowing the underlying perfection of life that we are moved by an entirely different force. No longer are we pushed or pulled; no longer do we feel like we need to achieve. No longer do we feel like we need to be known or recognized or confirmed or loved or hated or liked or disliked. Those are simply states of consciousness within the dreaming mind. Once we have reconciled all those opposites, and they've been harmonized within our system, something else moves us in life. It's something extraordinarily simple. That force, that energy that moves us, is at the same time the very substance of our own being, our own self.

This energy is undivided. It is forever completely transcendent and forever completely right here, right now, this moment. There is never a need for a different, better

moment. When we see this moment as it truly is, we see something extraordinary. We don't feel the need to turn this moment into anything other than what it is, because it is extraordinary as it is. When we perceive this, we have healed the illusory split within ourselves, and we have started to heal the illusory split within the greater consciousness of humanity.

Our greatest contribution to humanity is our awakening. It is to literally leave the state of consciousness that the mass of humanity is in and discover the truth of our being, which is the truth of all beings. When we do this, we come back as a gift, a newborn. We are, in a certain sense, reborn.

In the Christian tradition, there is the story of Christ's transfiguration—literally, a transformation. It was not only a realization, but a transformation—a new birth, which had incredible impact and influence. Sometimes, through trying to help on the exterior level, we can miss that the greatest help we can offer is our own awakening. This doesn't mean that we avoid doing what we can on the exterior level—lending help, feeding the hungry, caring for the poor and the sick. This doesn't mean that any of that is avoided or not useful. But ultimately what we come to realize is that our greatest contribution is to heal the illusory divisions within ourselves. That's the ultimate gift we can give to humanity; that's what's going to change humanity. Humanity is not going to change because we figure out a different system of government. It won't change because of something that is

imposed from the outside, because of noble ideas or grand systems. True transformation always comes from the inside. It comes from awakening. We come to see that the outside world is nothing but an expression of the inside. What is manifest is nothing but an expression of the unmanifest.

If as a culture, as a species, we continue to dwell in a divided state of consciousness, no matter what we change on the outside, we will continue to manifest division. But each of us who comes into the natural, simple, undivided state is making a contribution to all beings—without trying, without taking any credit, without even knowing it. When you become undivided in your own consciousness, you become part of the manifestation of unity. You come to know that enlightenment is extraordinarily wonderful and profound, but also very simple.

The great definition of enlightenment is simply *the natural state of being*. We have been hypnotized into thinking that the perception of division and fear and conflict is actually the natural state of humanity. But at another point, when we've become more conscious, we see that this state of division is not natural. As I've said before, it takes a tremendous amount of energy to maintain the illusion of division, because it's not the natural state. This fact should be obvious, because division doesn't feel natural. It may feel common, it may feel like it's the usual thing, you may see it all around you, but when you feel that same conflict inside yourself, you realize it doesn't feel natural. It feels divided; it feels conflicted.

So the state of consciousness that a great majority of humanity is in is not natural. It's altered. We do not need to go looking for altered states of consciousness; humanity is already in an altered state of consciousness. It's called *separation*. Separation is the ultimate altered state of consciousness.

Contrary to a popular misunderstanding, enlightenment has nothing to do with an altered state of consciousness. Enlightenment is an unaltered state of consciousness. It is pure consciousness as it actually is, before it is turned into something, before it is altered in any way.

The kingdom of heaven is the natural state of being. Nirvana isn't a goal that we grab on to; it's not something we try to attain or try to impose upon ourselves. It is only discovered by realizing the totally natural and spontaneous way of being. It can only be experienced by realizing who we are and what we are when we are simply being in a conscious way.

This is the promise of awakening. It's not only a personal promise for oneself, but a promise for consciousness itself, and therefore for all beings. It is the promise of non-division, of unity, and of the world that may arise out of that. None of us knows the type of world that would arise if all of humanity were to enter a state of undivided consciousness. We may imagine such a world, but in truth we all must admit that that world is unknown. There can be no image created about the world. We will all find out

what that world may be as it comes into fruition, whenever it does come into fruition. But this simple and natural state of awakening, this allowing ourselves to literally disappear into absolute simplicity, is not seen as a big deal. It's just natural. It's not better than or higher than anything or anybody. It's simply the natural state of being. It's totally democratic. It's the inheritance of everybody.

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Story of the Wedding

I want to end by telling you a story. There are certain moments in life that seem to embody what we have realized. For me there was just such a moment—it was almost as if the entire spiritual journey was encapsulated for me in this one particular experience. It happened at a wedding. It was quite a large wedding, held in a gymnasium. The ceremony had already taken place, and everybody had been seated. We were all eating together, talking, and having a great time. The energy was really wonderful and warm.

I tend to be about the fastest eater I know, so as usual I headed back to the buffet to get a second helping rather quickly. I loaded up my plate with all sorts of tasty things, turned around, and looked out over the gymnasium full of

people. I've always found that weddings are amazing snapshots of humanity. I saw the bride and groom, and they were having a wonderful time. I saw the little children running around playing. I saw the parents who were anxiously trying to control their children. I saw the very old people. I saw an encapsulation of the whole human condition.

At that moment, it suddenly hit me that I would never again see life as most human beings see it. It was as if at that moment I felt like something within me was completely leaving the human condition. Viewing things from a conventional perspective was over for me; it was finished. This knowing was accompanied by a bit of nostalgia. There was a part of me that thought, "It's not all suffering; it's not all bad. There are wonderful moments. Here I am at this wedding, and there are all these wonderful people having different interactions." But in that moment I saw that the way most human beings view the world was no longer the way I viewed it. And I knew I'd never view it that way again. Whatever had happened, there was no going back.

Even if I wanted to go back and see things as I used to see them, I couldn't do it. Somehow a bridge had been crossed, and in crossing the bridge it had been burned. There was just that moment of hesitation, that moment of nostalgia, and I closed my eyes and let myself feel it. When I opened my eyes, the nostalgia was gone.

All of a sudden there I was, standing there, holding my plate of food at this wedding, and there was the realization

that even though I don't see things the way most people around me see them, *this is it*. This is life, and it is absolutely wonderful, amazingly beautiful. The only thing left for me to do was to walk back into the world. So with my plate of food in hand, I walked back into the very view I had just been looking at. And I did what everybody else was doing—I started talking to this person, talking to that person. It was a moment of recognizing what it means to leave the human condition, which views things from separateness, and simultaneously to reenter the human condition, to walk right back into the fray—to see that life, just as it is, is an absolutely amazing manifestation of the deepest reality.

From that moment on, life as it is, exactly as it is, has always seemed slightly magical, slightly amazing. Even if it's insane, even when human beings do things to one another that are literally insane, still there's always been and always is this sense that this is the only place to be. This is actually the promised land, as it is, if only we will open our eyes and see it.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

An Interview with Adyashanti

The teachings that are included in The End of Your World were recorded in San Jose, California, over the course of three days in August, 2007. After Adya delivered this series of talks, Sounds True publisher, Tami Simon, had the chance to interview Adya and ask questions related to these teachings. Their conversation follows.

TAMI SIMON Let's return to your metaphor of awakening being compared to a rocket ship achieving liftoff. How do people know if their rocket ship of being has actually taken off? I could imagine some people being deluded about this. Maybe they have read lots of books about spiritual awakening, so they make the leap in their mind that awakening has occurred, but perhaps in reality they are simply sputtering

on the ground. How do we know for sure that we have attained liftoff?

ADYASHANTI It's not an easy question to answer. The only way I can answer it is to reiterate what the nature of awakening is.

The moment of awakening is very similar to when you wake up from a dream at night. You feel that you have awakened from one world to another, from one context to a totally different context. On a feeling level, that is the feeling of awakening. This whole separate self that you thought was real, and even the world that you thought was objective, or other, all of a sudden seems as if it's not as real as you thought.

I'm not saying it is or isn't a dream; I'm saying that it's almost like a dream. Upon awakening, the experience is that life is like a dream that's happening within what you are—within vast, infinite space. Awakening is not experiencing vast, infinite space, feeling spacious or expanded or blissful or whatever. These feelings may be by-products of awakening, but they are not the awakening itself. Awakening, quite apart from its by-products, is a change of perspective. Everything we thought was real is seen to not be real at all; it's more like a dream that's happening within the infinite expanse of emptiness. What is actually real is the infinite expanse of emptiness. It's the same way that, when you dream at night, your dream does not have reality; it's

your mind, dreaming your dream, which actually has the reality—relatively speaking.

TS When you describe your own life story, you say that the rocket ship of your being achieved liftoff at a specific time and date—when you were twenty-five years old. Do you think it is possible that for some people their ship lifted off over a period of a few years—that there wasn't any specific moment that it happened, but instead it was more like a gradual dawning that that their rocket ship wasn't on the Earth anymore?

ADYA I've seen that, too. I've met people for whom awakening almost happened as if in retrospect, like it snuck up on them. The transition may not have been marked by distinctive, obvious moments. It's almost like they snuck out of the dream or snuck into outer space, and then at some point there was recognition, "Oh, when did that happen?" They can't really point to any distinct moment when there was a change, but they recognize at some point that a real, total change has happened. So it can sneak up on you; it can happen that way, too.

TS Not to kill the metaphor here, but is it possible to say that the rocket ship requires a certain kind of fuel, and if so, what kind of fuel?

ADYA I wish I could say what the fuel is. I don't know that it's really possible to say what the fuel is, because it's not limited to something personal. Awakening does not happen just to people who really want it. Awakening does not happen just to people who are sincerely looking for it. It happens to some people completely out of the blue. I've met awakened people who were not on a spiritual path at all. In fact, I've met people who were in denial of spirituality, and then boom—out of nowhere—awakening hits them. We couldn't call such people sincere, and we couldn't say they were pursuing spiritual realization or even had an obvious yearning for it. Of course, the vast majority of people who have an experience of awakening have had some energy, some yearning, to awaken to a deeper sense of reality. That's true, but the problem is, anytime we say "this" is necessary or "that" is necessary, there will always be examples to the contrary. Awakening is a mystery. There is no direct cause and effect, really. It would be nice if there were, but there really isn't a direct cause and effect.

TS When you describe the rocket ship, you use the metaphor to talk about nonabiding awakening versus abiding awakening, with the idea that abiding awakening means you are permanently outside of the gravitational field of the dream state, outside of our habitual tendencies to constellate as a separate self. Are you outside of that gravitational field?

ADYA I always hesitate to answer a question like that, but I'm going to try to answer it. I don't feel that I can say, "Yes, I am outside of the gravitational force." It's not really like that. That's where the metaphor breaks down. All of these metaphors, all these ways of explaining things, they're just that—they're metaphors, and they do have certain limitations.

I would say that my experience is that I no longer believe the next thought that I have. I'm not capable of actually believing a thought that happens. I have no control over what thoughts appear, but I can't believe that the thought is real or true or significant. And because no thought can be grasped as real, true, or significant, that itself has an experiential impact; it is the experience of freedom.

If somebody wanted to call that "being beyond the gravitational force of the dream state," fine, but I am always hesitant about claiming something. I always remind everybody I talk to that all I know is right now. I don't know about tomorrow. Tomorrow a thought could come by that could catch me, Velcro me, pull me into separation and delusion. I don't know—maybe it will; maybe it won't. I have no way of knowing that. All I know is right now.

That is why I hesitate to say, "Oh yes, I have crossed a certain goal or finish line," because I don't see it that way. It sounds like that when I'm teaching, but that is the limitation of speech. What I really know is that I don't know. What I really know is that there are no guarantees. I don't know

what may happen tomorrow, or the next instant, whether I'll be deluded one instant from now. What I do know is that I can never possibly know that.

TS Okay, I accept that you don't know about what may happen moving forward in terms of when a Velcro thought may occur, but when was the last time you had a Velcro thought, looking back?

ADYA To be clear, I'm not saying I can't have a Velcro thought or that I don't experience Velcro thoughts. A thought can come that can cause an instant of grasping, that can cause a momentary experience of a certain separateness. I'm not saying that it can't happen or that it doesn't happen. What I'm saying is that when it does happen, the gap between it happening and the seeing through it is very small. I don't know if there's such a state in which such "sticky" thoughts or such moments of grasping would never arise in the human system. It seems to me that to have a human body and mind is to go through those kinds of experiences occasionally. The difference is that at a certain point the gap between the arising of a sticky thought and its disappearance becomes so narrow that the arising and disappearing is almost simultaneous.

So I wouldn't say that I'm at some state where Velcro thoughts never arise at all. It is just that the gap gets so small that, at a certain point, you almost can't see a gap. I think there are ideas that enlightenment is about getting to some

place where nothing uncomfortable ever happens, where no delusory thought will ever walk through your consciousness—those very ideas about enlightenment are delusions; it just doesn't seem to work that way.

Besides, it doesn't really matter. When that gap is so narrow that it can be seen through very quickly, all of a sudden that's part of the freedom, too. We realize it doesn't matter that we've had a thought, because we don't get caught for very long. That's really part of the freedom. I think the rest is selling enlightenment as something it's not. I understand that people can hear what I say and create an image about what abiding realization is. But that's not what I mean to portray. It's more like the gap between the divisive thought and believing in the thought becomes almost nonexistent.

TS I am curious what kinds of situations are troublesome and difficult for you. In our conversations, you've shared with me that you can get frustrated at your computer, when, say, your Internet connection or printer is not working. What do you do in those moments? Do you do something to close that gap, or is it just automatic?

ADYA Well, usually the frustration is there, and it's experienced. I experience it, but there's no judging thought about it. That's a real key. And I don't mean that it is dismissed, not paid attention to, but there's no judging thought. In general,

it comes, it's experienced, there's no judging thought about it, and then it passes. It's not taken as significant.

There is no secondary thought pattern, "Oh, I shouldn't have gotten frustrated," or "Why did I get frustrated?" or whatever it may be. Thoughts are involved, because it's the thoughts that create the frustration, but they are seen to not be true. Seeing that they're not true dissipates the frustration.

Now, in the past, the process would have been much longer. The inquiry would have been more intense and sustained, and I'd really look at things. But like I said, that gap has narrowed down now, so things happen almost automatically. In a certain sense, it's like being a musician. You practice your scales, and you practice your scales, and you practice your scales, and then at a certain point it's become so internalized that it happens almost without any conscious intention. That to me is what happens with inquiry. At a certain point, it just happens, with little if any conscious intention.

TS You often talk about thoughts and feelings like they are two sides of the same coin. Isn't it possible to have feelings that don't have any thoughts associated with them? What about moments of intense awe or an appreciation of beauty, when tears spontaneously come forward? At such moments, isn't it possible that you aren't really thinking anything but that something is just welling up at the feeling level? Or do you believe we are thinking but perhaps at a subtle, subliminal level?

ADYA There is what I would call *pure* feeling or pure emotion, as anybody who has experienced a great moment of beauty or awe knows. There are pure sensory perceptions, a feeling that comes in that is not created by thought. It happens. However, I would say that the vast majority of emotions that most people experience are duplications of the thinking process; they are thoughts turning into emotion.

But there is pure emotion or pure feeling that bypasses the thinking process. They are how this sensing instrument of ours, this beautiful sensing instrument we call a body, is interacting with the environment, and that is a pure interaction; it's not a virtual interaction.

TS All thinking is virtual?

ADYA All thinking is virtual, sure.

TS But if there are feelings that are not derived from thinking, then perhaps there are gut experiences that also aren't derived from thinking?

ADYA The gut is just another way in which we sense the world. You hear this when people say, "I have a gut feeling." Sensing with the gut is a certain type of intuitive capacity; it is an instinctual way of knowing. We feel things through that place in the body: our gut is an intuitive sense organ. Of course, we can feel things that are duplications

of the mind—fearful thoughts, angry thoughts, conflicting thoughts, contracting thoughts—but the gut also responds as a pure sense organ to what's happening.

When thought isn't constricting who we are, people have these kinds of intuitive experiences. Say you walk up to the edge of a cliff. You look down, and you see a huge expanse. There may be fear when you look down, but if you are sensitive, you might notice another response, which is that your consciousness may actually fill the expanse. When we look at huge expanses, often we breathe in, right? In the breathing in, we're feeling our consciousness open to that environment. We breathe into our lungs, into our heart center, into our gut. Our whole being, our whole body, is in tune with the environment. This kind of opening of the heart—when the lungs go “aah” as consciousness expands—isn't happening because we're thinking. This is happening because consciousness is interacting with the environment. This is what I mean by *pure* sensation or *pure* feeling. And yes, it happens through gut sensations as well. It's very powerful, and it's very, very beautiful.

It's literally the experience of intimacy. It is our being experiencing itself with an incredible intimacy. I'm not saying it's wrong to comment on it, but as soon as we say something, as soon as we turn to our friend, something changes. For most people, that experience happens for a split second, and then they turn to somebody and say, “Isn't it beautiful?” And that's not a wrong thing to say. I say it to

people, too, sometimes. But at that moment, if you're sensitive, you notice that your whole internal environment starts to change, and you start to experience what you just said. Then you are moving into a virtual experience. It's slightly different from that moment of awe, that moment where the entire body is participating in perception.

TS It's one thing for someone to have the experience of pure feeling when they are experiencing awe and wonder in nature, but is it possible to have a pure feeling when it comes to an emotion like anger? Do you think it's possible to have a feeling like anger that isn't a duplicated thought?

ADYA Of course, of course. This idea that enlightenment is about people having beatific, silly little smiles on their faces all the time is simply an illusion. I like to counter that with imagining that we are in a modern-day church, and somebody comes in the back door and blows his lid like Jesus did, kicking over the money changers, yelling at the top of his lungs, "How dare you defile my father's house!" I mean, Jesus was throwing a holy fit, right? He was upset. He wasn't faking it. He was literally upset. And he was expressing his upset.

So can one be upset from a nondivided state? Of course, you can. Every emotion is available to us. To be awake doesn't mean we have fewer emotions available to us. Emotion is just a way that existence functions through us. There is a divided form of anger, and there is an undivided form of anger.

TS Well, how would I be able to distinguish that inside myself, if I feel a divided form of anger or undivided anger?

ADYA If you feel divided inside.

TS If all of me feels angry, then it's undivided?

ADYA I think we've all had the experience where we feel completely angry, but it still feels divisive, conflicted. There is a kind of anger that is—how can I say it?—a good work. In the Tibetan tradition, for example, they have certain depictions of wrathful deities with flaming swords and fire coming out of their hair and their eyes, looking very angry and fierce and frightening, but there is something in those depictions that is different from when you experience your average, ordinary, conflicted anger. It's something that's hard to describe, but if you look at these depictions, what's being shown is a different kind of anger. It's not an anger that's tearing apart in a negative way; it is an anger that is tearing apart in a positive way. I may not be doing a very good job of expressing this, but what I am trying to communicate is that even the experience of anger can come from a pure place.

TS I am particularly interested in exploring this topic, because I am someone who used to experience a pretty narrow range of emotions. As I've been growing as a person I now have available to me this huge, wide range of emotional

experience, and it's really interesting, rich, and glorious in a lot of ways. When I hear you teach that most emotional experiences are duplicate images of thoughts, I want to really understand which emotional experiences are derivative, based on concepts, and which are pure. And how do I know the difference?

ADYA Please don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying that virtual emotions are something that shouldn't happen or are somehow wrong or somehow secondary. For example, I can think about my wife, Mukti. I can envision her in my mind, and I can feel an incredible, wonderful upswelling of love. I know that that emotional experience is virtual. I know I'm making it up in my mind; I know I'm making it up literally in thought. That doesn't make it wrong. But if I were to equate that emotional experience of love with real love, then I would be living an illusion, perhaps a heavenly illusion, but an illusion nonetheless.

I can create that kind of image in my mind, and at times I do that; her image or thoughts about her float through my mind, and there is a wonderful upwelling in the heart. So the first thing is to understand that just because an emotional experience is being derived from the mind, that doesn't make it bad or something one shouldn't experience.

If we look carefully, we will see that the vast majority of emotions that human beings experience are derived from what we are telling ourselves at the moment. That doesn't

make those emotions bad or wrong, it's just a fact. Even if we look at something and then comment on it, we can have a positive emotional response. But if we investigate our experience, often we'll realize that what we're actually experiencing is a thought telling us "that's beautiful" or "that's ugly."

How can you tell if an emotion is a pure feeling or is derived from thought? You need to look to see if the emotion comes with a story, if it has images with it. If it does come with images or a story, then you know, "Oh, okay, that's something that's being created; I'm actually experiencing the thoughts in my mind." Which is fine; it is fine to do that. It is just that we can be deluded when we derive our sense of reality from that.

TS What about pure perception at the level of the mind? Is there some experience of "awakened mind" in which the mind functions not only as a fabricator of concepts and abstractions but also as a pure sense organ?

ADYA On the level of mind, there is the pure perception of infinity, or what Buddhists call *emptiness*—the perception of vast, vast, vast, vast vastness. It is being perceived not through the mind in terms of thought, but we could say that section of the body, the mind area, is literally where we are taking in the vastness of infinity, the vastness of space, the pure light of being, the almost blinding light of being. That is being seen on the level of mind, not on the level of thinking.

Perceiving in this way is a different capacity than just thinking; it is the mind as a sensing instrument sensing infinity.

TS You mentioned that all spiritual paths ultimately bring us to a state of total surrender. But what if the parts of us that don't want to surrender are hidden, quite buried in our psyche? Consciously, we might surrender everything, but some part of us in our unconscious might still be clutching. How do we get those hiding places to come forward? I can imagine hearing your teaching on surrender and thinking, okay, I basically understand. I know what it means to be on my knees. I know what it means to throw myself down on the ground. But what about the parts in me that won't surrender? They're not obvious to me.

ADYA There may be nothing you can do about it. This is the thing that people avoid the most, right? Give me something; give me a teaching; give me some hope. Of course, inside of us there are totally unconscious ways of holding, patterns of holding that we don't have any access to. Maybe you don't have access to it, period. End of story. That's it.

You will have access to it at the exact moment that you are meant to have access to it. We may not like that. People may not like to hear that, but let's look at our lives, not philosophy or teaching or what we choose to tell ourselves, right?

At least in my life, I can certainly look and see that there were moments where I did not have certain capacities yet.

They just weren't there. I have no idea what I could have done to bring those capacities forward. At certain points, I couldn't have even heard somebody who told me how to have those capacities.

I had my own teacher tell me certain things literally hundreds of times over the years. And only after ten years did I think, "Oh . . . now I get it. Now I understand. Now it has sunk in." How was I going to force it ten years before? Could I have forced it? It doesn't appear as though I could have.

This may not be the empowering spiritual teaching you are looking for, but everything has its time; everything has its place. Ego is not in control of what's happening. *Life* is in control of what's happening. To insist that something can empower us, all at once, to dive into ourselves and see anything and everything we need to see to awaken, is working at odds with people's experience.

Everything happens in its time. You're not in control. This isn't something we want to hear, though, is it? It isn't something our mind wants. Mostly we want to hear things that empower our sense of control. And we radically push away anything that does not empower our sense of control.

I say this to people all the time. When you start to accept what you see as true—not what I say, but your experience—that's when everything starts to change.

Many times students come to me and say, "I can't do anything about this, this part of my delusional apparatus,

this part of my personality.” They’ll ask, “What do I do? What do I do?” Often I say, “Well, let’s go back. You just told me there’s nothing you *can* do. Is that true? Has anything worked so far?” “No, nothing’s worked so far.” And I ask, “Can you find anything to do? Can you see anything to do?” And sometimes they’ll tell me, “No, honestly, I can’t see anything to do.” And I’ll say, “What would happen if you actually ingested that part of your experience that is telling you there is nothing you can do? What if you took it in instead of trying to push it away?”

Often, when they take this in—not just conceptually, not as a teaching that can be dismissed, but really allowing it into the body—then this realization of what it is like to live without resistance starts to change everything. Sometimes the experiences that we are pushing away contain the most transformative insights we need to have. Who would suspect that seeing that there’s nothing, nothing, nothing I can do is going to be transformative? We’re not taught that. We’re taught to avoid that piece of knowledge at all costs. Even if it’s part of your experience, year after year, decade after decade—even if you keep experiencing the same thing over and over—the impulse is to avoid it, to not let it in, to push it away. See what I mean?

We’re all junkies. Really, we’re all just junkies wanting to be high and free. It’s the same dynamic. It’s the alcoholic who realizes, “There’s nothing I can do,” who is on the way to sobering up. As long as that person sitting there is saying,

"I can do this. I'm in control. I can find a way beyond this," no transformation is going to happen. Bottoming out is nothing more than coming out of denial. There's nothing I can do, and look where I am. We don't need to know so much about what to do. We need to have a mirror in front of us, so we are able to see what we see. When that alcoholic sees and that drug addict sees that there is nothing they can do, that they are powerless to stop their addiction—only then do they start to see themselves in a clearer light.

There's a transformation that starts to happen that is not contrived; it is not practiced; it is not technique oriented. To me, spirituality is a willingness to fall flat on your face. That's why, although my students often put me up on a pedestal and think I've figured out something wonderful, I tell them all the time—my path was the path of failure. Everything I tried failed. It doesn't mean that the trying didn't play an important role. The trying did play a role. The effort did play a role. The struggle did play a role.

But it played a role because it got me to an end of that role. I danced that dance until it was extinguished. But I failed. I failed at meditating well; I failed at figuring out the truth. Everything I ever used to succeed spiritually failed. But at the moment of failure, that's when everything opens up.

We know that, right? This isn't sacred knowledge. Almost everybody knows this; we've experienced it in our lives. We've seen moments like this. But it's not something we want to know, because it's not convenient.

TS You suggested that we ask of ourselves, “What do I know for certain?” I would ask that question of you. Is there anything you know for certain?

ADYA Only that I am; that’s it. One thing. So in many senses I’m the dumbest person on the planet. Literally. Everything else, to me, is in a state of flux and uncertainty. Everything else we only dream that we know. I don’t know what should happen. I don’t know if we’re evolving or devolving; I don’t know any of that.

But the thing is, I know that I don’t know. And contrary to what you might think, that knowledge hasn’t disempowered me. I haven’t gone to sit in a cave in the Himalayas or to just sit on the couch and say, “Oh well. There’s nothing for me to do, because I don’t know anything.”

Quite the contrary—life has a part to play through me, and so I play that part. I’m in union with the part life plays through me. The part changes all the time, moment to moment, but that’s what I’m in union with. I’m no longer arguing with life—it gets to play its part through me, and now it gets to play its part with agreement, instead of disagreement.

And it seems that when we’re in the deepest state of agreement, the part life plays through us is very satisfying; it’s literally everything we ever wanted, even though it doesn’t look like anything we ever wanted.

TS I loved your teaching on the cul-de-sacs that people can get into after an initial experience of awakening. I am curious if you would comment on a cul-de-sac that I see fairly often, which is when people decide to take on some kind of special mission to save the world after they have an initial awakening experience. Do you see this as a cul-de-sac, a way that the ego has claimed the awakening experience for its own aggrandizement?

ADYA Let me talk about it from my experience. Awakening didn't engender that sense for me. I didn't feel like I needed to go out and save the world, but strangely enough, when my teacher asked me to start teaching, to start sharing the possibility of this realization, what arose in me was a sense of possibility. I saw that awakening was possible for anybody and everybody. There was a certain sense of missionary zeal about it, which can be alluring and empowering. There's something wonderful in that inspiration when it comes from a true place.

There was a lot of energy for it, especially in the first couple of years that I was teaching. I've found that it can be part and parcel of awakening, because one senses that all this suffering is unnecessary; one really can wake up from this. A sense of mission can come from that place.

After a few years of feeling that missionary zeal myself, I noticed it started to ebb. At first it was like I was a new puppy in the house, jumping up and down at your legs all the time,

wanting attention and wanting you to do something. The first couple of years of my teaching I felt empowered with what works and what helps people, and I wanted to share it with people. But after two or three years, that energy waned. I started to feel more like an old dog that was curled up at the side of its master's easy chair, lying there and letting the world go by.

At this point in my life, the sense of missionary zeal is pretty much gone. There is no sense that something needs to happen. I see the potential in everybody, but there's no sense of hurry about it.

I see it as a process of maturing. It's a phase that many of us go through. I think the key is—do we go through it? Do we keep going? Or, at some point, does that missionary zeal provide the platform for the ego's reformation? If that starts happening—if the ego uses awakening as a new and improved missionary platform—that can lead to all kinds of distortions.

For example, we might start seeing ourselves as the savior of humanity or our teachings as the greatest teachings ever. As far as I can see, if things go that way, we start to get delusional. Often, when this happens, it's because someone's ego has grasped on to some powerful experience he or she has had. If there's latent energy there, and that energy starts flowing into the ego, it can lead to some of the deepest delusions possible.

We've seen this from time to time in disastrous cult-like behavior. This can happen when there is a lot of energy

flowing into the ego and deluding it. Before you know it, you think you are the savior of humanity.

Whereas in truth, none of us is the savior of humanity. The greatest avatar who has ever walked the Earth, if such embodiments even exist, is like a grain of sand on a vast beach. As human beings, we are all just doing our little part. It's the totality; it's the One itself that we are but expressions of. If any of us start to think we are playing a bigger part than we are—if we see ourselves as anything but a small part of an infinite mosaic—it seems to me we're starting to become inflated and deluding ourselves.

TS Do you have any suggestions for how we can point out to people that their ego is using their realization as a form of personal territory? I encounter this quite a lot and have difficulty pointing it out in any kind of effective way.

ADYA Traditionally, there were some safeguards used by spiritual traditions to prevent the ego using realization in this way, but if we look back in the history of spirituality, we see the safeguards didn't work that well. Often, people who had a profound realization were part of a bigger community. Even teachers were part of a community of teachers. The idea was that people would keep an eye on each other.

In truth, it never happened like it was supposed to. Teachers can keep an eye on their students, but once

somebody breaks out of that role, there's not that much keeping an eye on each other. I mean, we've seen that in almost every tradition. There are people who get inflated or go off on some strange tangent. I do think it's perfectly appropriate that we try, if not to change people, then to reflect back to them—especially if we see somebody really half-cocked. Not that they'll listen!

I wish I had a good antidote to what you are describing. I've mentioned that, as a teacher, when I discover students who are inflated with their own realization, it is the hardest thing for me to get them out of. I think it's one of the hardest things for a spiritual teacher to deal with. And if a spiritual teacher has a difficult time with his or her students, where there is already a certain sense of trust, how much harder is it going to be for the average person to come up to someone and say, "Hey, you know, you may not be as pristine an example of liberation as you think you are." It can be a really difficult thing to do.

Without making excuses for anybody, we do each have a certain karmic makeup. I have been the type of person, through no choice of my own, who has never been attracted to power. Here I am, a spiritual teacher, which is a role that people give great power to. However, the way I see it, the truth is that I have no power at all except the power that other people grant me. All the power is in the students' hands. And it's good for people to know that. I've always experienced that when people give me too much power or

authority, I start to feel like I'm living in a surreal bubble. Inherent in people giving other people power is a projection, right? When somebody gives me too much power, they've projected that I am something different from them. And I find that a surreal environment to be in. That's why I avoid it as much as I can, because it has a sense of unreality to it.

Other people, quite obviously, are more attracted to power than I am. They find it alluring to be the positive projection of others. It's enticing to them. I couldn't say exactly why; it's just never been comfortable for me, personally.

TS At the age of twenty-five, when you experienced what you call your "first awakening," you mentioned that you heard a voice that said, "Keep going, keep going." What is that voice? Would you call it your conscience, or the still, small voice within?

ADYA You can call it either one of those.

TS It seems that if we each have that type of inner voice, then that inner voice would keep us from co-opting our realizations into a personal power play. You heard that voice that said your realization was not complete, but does everybody possess an inner voice like that?

ADYA In one sense, I would say yes. In an ultimate sense, we are all the same, so we all have access to the same capacities.

At the relative level, however, the question is whether everybody *hears* their inner voice. Apparently, not everyone does.

What is this inner voice of wisdom? It is what I am pointing to when I talk about sincerity. It is the intelligence within us that keeps us on track, keeps us in alignment.

In one sense, I think almost everybody has experienced this still, small voice. The example I often give is when you are dating some man or some woman and it ends badly. Something inside you says, “Don’t do that again.” But then we meet someone new, and we don’t listen to the voice. We are attracted; this person is sexy, and we just want to be with him or her. In the end, we find that the still, small voice was correct. We shouldn’t have kept dating that person. In the end, it all collapses, and in the end, this still, small voice wins.

So this still, small voice is not mystical. It is something that I think a vast majority of people have heard at times. But we’re so good at dismissing it. We want that still, small voice to justify itself—to tell us *why*. One of the good indications that the voice within us is authentic and sincere is that it will never justify itself. If you ask it, “Why?” you’ll get silence. If you ask it to explain itself, it won’t. The still, small voice doesn’t need to do that—and it doesn’t.

If you are talking to the ego and you ask, “Why?” it will talk back to you. If you ask the ego, “Does this mean everything will be okay?” it will give you assurances. The still, small voice, though, has an inherent sort of insecurity about it. It offers no guarantees. The voice is a gift. Either we listen or we don’t.

Why I listened, and why others don't, I don't know. I couldn't say why. I'm just glad that the voice was there in my case, and that I could hear it. It was persistent. And, by the way, I didn't always listen to it. Many, many times I didn't listen to it.

TS Is that voice like a guide, a protector, or just part of our mind, part of who we are?

ADYA I think it's all of that. It is a guide. It is a protector. It is the flow of existence. By the way, this intelligent flow of existence doesn't always show up as a voice. It's not always audible. At this point, for me, it's very rarely audible. At other points, it was literally a voice. As I said, during that first realization, the voice said, "This isn't the whole of it. Keep going," and it was an audible experience.

But now, this guiding intelligence appears more as a flow. It is more like sensing the energy currents in life. The voice is also an indicator of the flow. I think it has to become a voice when we can't feel the natural flow of life, the flow to turn left or the flow to turn right, the flow to do this or the flow to do that.

Many of us aren't sensitive enough to feel that, and so the flow appears as a voice. But at this point, for me, it's much more like following a natural flow. As the Taoists would say, follow the flow of the Tao.

So it has different aspects to it. It's a flow. It's a voice. It's a protector voice. It's your counselor. It's your conscience, but not the conscience society taught us. It is a different

conscience than that. Because the conscience that society taught us is our superego—and that conscience always contains judgments. This is not the superego. This is something else. This comes from a totally different state of being.

TS You've talked about how, early on, you came to the discovery that you couldn't ride the coattails of a teacher, a path, or a tradition, that you were going to have to find your own way, and how important that was.

ADYA That was hugely important for me.

TS And you encouraged your students to also find their own way. What is interesting to me is that, at the same time, it seems that many people, including me, feel a connection with you and feel somehow less alone because of knowing you, almost like we are alone but together at the same time. Could you talk about that?

ADYA When I was in my early twenties, and I realized that I needed to find my own way and not rely solely on a tradition or a teacher, an image came to me. It was an image of being out on a space walk with a cord connecting me to a space capsule, and at a certain point, I reached down and cut the connecting cord. I was alone, and I wasn't dependent on anyone or anything. Yet, this didn't mean that I left my teacher; this didn't mean that I left my tradition. I didn't

reject anything. It was simply a seeing that ultimately the responsibility is here; it's in me. Ultimately, no tradition, no teacher, no teaching is going to save me from myself. I realized I can't abdicate that authority.

And, of course, at that moment, it was very frightening. I thought, my God, what if I delude myself? At that moment, I knew that I didn't know much. And yet there I was, determined that everything needed to be verified inside.

Many people have told me that they see themselves as my students and that it is different from studying with other teachers, because I'm not the kind of spiritual teacher who has a personal relationship with my students. I come, I teach, we interact when I teach, but I don't have a retreat center; I don't have an avenue in which we relate in a casual way. It is moment by moment by moment by moment by moment.

This is not the only kind of relationship to have with a teacher, by the way. I think close student-teacher relationships have a great part to play as well. In fact, when my teaching started to get bigger, when it went from small to quite large over the course of several years, there were some people who missed the smallness. The smallness worked for some people—I would teach; we'd have tea or lunch or breakfast afterward, and that worked for certain people. When the teaching got bigger, and by necessity the structure of things changed, for some of those people it no longer worked. They had to go find something that better met their needs, where there was more intimacy.

By the very nature of it, the style in which I teach is one in which people need to at once stand on their own, but also through standing on their own to find a certain intimacy with each other. That's where I meet people, in that place where I see them as whole and capable and having capacities that they may not think they have. And when they stand there, and they start to discover their own inner sufficiency, that's where we meet. I don't meet people in their insufficiency, where they don't think they're capable. The more they stand up in themselves, the more we find ourselves meeting in an intimate way, a very personal, impersonal way.

There are a lot of influences that come to our aid when we're willing to be on our own—seen and unseen, known and unknown. The point is not to get stuck on the idea that it is all about being alone. That is a particular experience of a moment of aloneness, of facing oneself, of not grasping on to the teacher or the tradition or the teachings—including mine, by the way. All of a sudden, you are left with yourself; that is the aloneness. But when we face that, and we are willing to be there, mysteriously we start to find we have lots of company. There are lots of people doing the same thing. The teachings start to be seen in a different way; the teachers that we may study with start to be seen in a different way. A much more mature relationship ensues from that point.

TS During what you call your “final awakening,” at the age of thirty-two, you have mentioned in other interviews that

part of that experience included seeing your past lives. I realize that this is not something you like to talk about.

ADYA Yes, we know each other well enough that you know that, but it looks like you are going to move forward anyway—good for you.

TS The legend, as you know, is that the Buddha, sitting under the Bodhi Tree, saw his past lives flash before him as part of his awakening. I'd like to know what you saw.

ADYA I will try to explain what happened experientially. At the moment of awakening, it was as though I was completely outside who I thought I was. There was a vast, vast, vast emptiness. In that vast emptiness, in that infinite emptiness, there was the smallest, smallest, smallest point of light you could imagine. And that smallest point of light was a thought, just floating out there. And the thought was: "I." And when I turned and looked at the thought, all I had to do was become interested in it, in any way interested, and this little point of light would move closer and closer and closer. It was like moving close to a knothole in a fence—when you get your eye right up to it, you don't see the fence anymore; you see what's on the other side.

So as this little point of "I" came closer, I started to perceive through this point called "me." And I found that in that point called "me" was the whole world. The whole world

was contained within that “I,” within that little point called “me.” There wasn’t really an I, but an emptiness that could go into and out of that point, in and out of it, and it’s like the whole world could flicker on and off, and on and off, and on and off.

And then I noticed there were all sorts of other points, points, and I could enter each one of those points, and each one of those points was a different world, a different time, and I was a different person, a totally different manifestation in each one of those points. I could go into each one of them and see a totally different dream of self and a totally different world that was being dreamed as well.

For the most part, what I saw was anything that was unresolved about the dream of “me” in a particular lifetime. There were certain confusions, fears, hesitations, and doubts that were unresolved in particular lifetimes. In certain lifetimes, what was unresolved was a feeling of confusion about what happened at the time of death. In one lifetime, I drowned and did not know what was happening, and there was tremendous terror and confusion as the body disappeared into the water.

Seeing this lifetime and the confusion at the moment of death, I immediately knew what I had to do. I had to rectify the confusion and explain to the dream of me that I died, that I fell off a boat and drowned. When I did this, all of a sudden the confusion from that lifetime popped like a bubble, and there was a tremendous sense of freedom. Many

past life dreams appeared, and each one of them seemed to focus on something that had been in conflict, something that was unresolved from a different incarnation. I went through each one of them and unhooked the confusion.

TS Were you lying on a carpeted floor with your eyes closed, or something?

ADYA No, actually, the strangest thing was that I was walking across the living room when all of this happened. I can't tell you how long I was walking. It could have been five seconds—because all of this is outside of time—I don't actually know. I could have been walking across the living room floor for five hours, but I was, literally, just walking across the living room.

And it's not like I stood still; I was walking, and it all happened right in the midst of what I was doing. I walked across the living room, I went into the backyard, I was doing something, I don't even remember what I was doing, and simultaneously this whole other thing was happening, too. I know it sounds odd. This didn't happen in a moment of meditation; it was completely mixed in as a part of ordinary life.

As you know, I haven't talked much about this kind of thing. I don't want to talk to a lot of people about past lives, especially the radical nondualists who say that there is nobody who was born, there is nobody who has past lives,

there are no incarnations, and so on. Of course, that is all true; it's all a dream, even past lives. When I talk about them at all, I talk about them as past dreams. I dreamed I was this person; I dreamed I was that person.

Personally, I've never tried to gather experiences of past lives and wrap them all up in some sort of metaphysical understanding. I don't have a clear understanding about what a past life is, except that it seems clear to me that it also has the nature of a dream; it doesn't have objective, actual existence. Nonetheless, the experience I had happened. Since it happened, I can't say it didn't happen. But in my own mind, I don't try to figure it all out. All I know is what happened.

TS Was there a sense when you looked at each of these dreams that there was some kind of resolution occurring?

ADYA Yes. Not only a resolution there, but also a resolution now. Because it's all one thing. Because anything that was unresolved in one of those dreams was unresolved now. Because it's the same; there's a connection.

One of the reasons I haven't talked much about past lives is that some people who are extraordinarily awake have never seen a past life at all. Being aware of past lives is not a necessity. I'm not a particularly mystical person. There was a relatively short period of time, a few months, when I had these kinds of experiences happen occasionally, and since

then, every now and then, but not with any great consistency. So they don't need to happen; it's just that they did happen, and it's not uncommon for them to happen for some people. What people usually see, if their experiences are real, is what needs to be seen, what needs to be freed.

As one great Buddhist abbess said to me, "You usually don't have a past life that shows you what a sterling example of enlightenment you were, because enlightenment leaves no trace; it is like a fire that burns clean. There's no karmic imprint it leaves behind." She said if you have any past lives, you're probably going to see what a grade-A jackass you were—which I loved, and which has corresponded to my experience. I didn't necessarily always see what a grade-A jackass I was, although in some cases, I saw that I was a lot more than a grade-A jackass. Most of the past lives I saw were moments of confusion, moments of unresolved karmic conflict.

TS Part of the reason I am bringing up the topic of past lives is that I have heard several people say something like this about you: "Adya must have been a realized being in a past life, and that's why he's had such tremendous breakthroughs at such an early age and is able to articulate teachings on awakening in such an original way." What do you think about that comment?

ADYA If you ask me point blank, then yes, I've seen myself doing something similar to what I'm doing in this lifetime

many times before. But again, I don't know the whole metaphysics of past lives and how they work, and I don't see things happening in terms of linear cause and effect. In fact, my experience of past lives isn't that they are actually past. I call them that, because that's how people relate to them, but if I were to say what my real experience is, it's more like simultaneous lives.

It's like if you have a dream at night, and in the dream you are a particular person. And in your dream you start to remember, say, all these past lives. Say you remember fifty past lives very intimately, very clearly. "Oh, this happened or that happened." And it seems like it happened in the past. Then you wake up from the dream, and you're lying there in your bed and, "Wow, that was an interesting dream. I dreamed that I was somebody who had all of these past life experiences." It may occur to you, "Wait a minute, I was dreaming up those past lives, all at once. All of them were being dreamed right now. They didn't have any existence before I dreamed them." That's kind of how I see it.

I don't see them as past, because they're all simultaneously occurring, all simultaneously interacting.

TS Having seen through the fence hole opening to different dreams, what do you think will happen—and don't say you don't know!—when we die? What do you think that experience will be like?

ADYA And I can't say I don't know? Well now you've really tied my hands, Tami.

My mind doesn't go to what will happen when I die. If I think about death, the only place my mind goes is that death is just the next experience—that's all it is. It's the next experience; it is a different experience than sitting here talking to you, undeniably, but ultimately it's the next experience that consciousness has.

Nothing dies. Spirit doesn't die, but it does have the experience that we call death—the dissolution of a body, the dissolution of a lifespan, of a personality—all that dissolves. And Spirit or consciousness has that experience, just like it has the experience of being born and living, and talking to you at this moment.

This moment is Spirit having this experience. If you ask me, "What's death going to be like?" I can't relate to it as this thing we think of as death actually happening the way we think it does. I have nothing in me that relates to death as an actual fact. I relate to death as an experience. Just like the next experience. It will be wonderful to see what that experience is like. But I don't see it with a sense of finality or with any of the common connotations that we think of as death.

TS Do you think there's any quality of experience that's available after death that's not available when you are incarnate?

ADYA Waking up is dying. That's what it is. When the awakening happened, I died. Everything disappeared, blanked out. Everything that everybody fears the most is what happened to me. Total blankness. Absolute nonexistence. Nothingness, nothingness, nothingness. At that moment, no past life, no present life—nothing—no consciousness, no birth, no sickness, no nothing. Zero. It's everything that everybody is terrified of. That's what happened to me; that's death.

And it just so happens that death is itself life. We must die in order to truly live. We must experience absolute non-existence in order to truly exist, in a conscious way.

TS I've heard people say, "Such and such will become available after you die, but while you're in a human body, you can't know this or that. Once you're not in a body, then there'll be enough freed up for you to know."

ADYA All of us will experience exactly what we believe. If you believe that, that's what you will experience. Remember, there's no such thing as "objective" reality, an objective way that everything must work. It works the way you dream it to work. That's the only way it works. That's the only thing that's happening. So if one believes that, it means that's the dream that consciousness is having through them, but that dream has no more validity than any other dream.

Of course, at the moment of physical death, there is the dropping away of the physical experience. In a sense, it's a

forced awakening. When the physical body drops away, the personality structure is going to drop away as well. It's not that you are going to be detached from it; it's just going to be taken away. At that moment, a lot becomes available, because a lot of what you grab hold of is no longer there. You're no longer dreaming the body into existence—it's just not there. So does a lot become possible? Of course.

The same thing is true for some people who are near death. Some of the most amazing experiences I've had have been with human beings who are very close to death. I've come to visit them at their bedside. And those who are ready for it have already let go. Sitting at their bedside, you can feel death approaching and how they have already let go of the body. In a real sense, they've already died, they have already let go, and they already know, some of them, that all is well.

When you're lucky enough to be in the presence of someone like that, there is an experience of total radiance. It is as if the body has become totally transparent to Spirit, to the inner presence. And the only reason it's become transparent is because the person is no longer holding on to it.

So, clearly, the actual physical moment of death doesn't need to happen for someone to let go, not ultimately.

About the Author

ADYASHANTI (whose name means “primordial peace”) dares all seekers of peace and freedom to take the possibility of liberation in this life seriously. He began teaching in 1996, at the request of his Zen teacher with whom he had been studying for fourteen years. Since then, many spiritual seekers have awakened to their true nature while spending time with Adyashanti.

The author of *Emptiness Dancing*, *The Impact of Awakening*, and *My Secret Is Silence*, Adyashanti offers spontaneous and direct nondual teachings that have been compared to those of the early Zen masters and Advaita Vedanta sages. However, Adya says, “If you filter my words through any tradition or ‘-ism,’ you will miss altogether

what I am saying. The liberating truth is not static; it is alive. It cannot be put into concepts and be understood by the mind. The truth lies beyond all forms of conceptual fundamentalism. What you are is the beyond—awake and present, here and now already. I am simply helping you to realize that.”

A native of Northern California, Adyashanti lives with his wife, Annie, and teaches extensively in the San Francisco Bay Area, offering satsangs, weekend intensives, and silent retreats. He also travels to teach in other areas of the United States and Canada. For more information, please visit www.adyashanti.org.

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began teaching in 1996 after a series of transformative spiritual awakenings, at the request of his Zen teacher with whom he had been studying for fourteen years. Adya's teachings have been compared to the early *Ch'an* (Zen) masters of China as well as teachers of Advaita Vedanta in India. His published works include the books *Emptiness Dancing*, *True Meditation*, and *My Secret Is Silence*, and the audio learning course *Spontaneous Awakening*. For more information, please visit www.adyashanti.org.

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