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THE POWER OF NOW

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A GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL ENLIGHTENMENT

Eckhart Tolle

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You are here to enable the divine
purpose of the universe to unfold.
That is how important you are!

— Eckhart Tolle

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE TO THE PAPERBACK EDITION

Six years after it was first published, *The Power of Now* continues to play its part in the urgent task of the transformation of human consciousness. Although I was privileged to give birth to it, I feel that the book has taken on a life and momentum of its own. It has reached several million readers worldwide, many of whom have written to me to tell of the life-changing effect it has had on them. Due to the extremely high volume of correspondence I receive, I am regretfully no longer able to send personal replies, but I would like to take this opportunity to express my deepest gratitude to all those who have written to me to share their experiences. I am moved and deeply touched by many of those accounts, and they leave no doubt in my mind that an unprecedented shift in consciousness is indeed happening on our planet.

Nobody could have predicted the rapid growth of the book when Namaste Publishing in Vancouver published the first edition of three thousand copies in 1997. During its first year of publication, the book found its readers almost exclusively through word of mouth. That was the time when I would personally deliver a few copies every week to some small bookstores in Vancouver, something I found enormously satisfying, knowing that every book that I handed over had the potential of changing someone's life. Friends helped by placing copies of the book in spiritual bookstores farther afield: Calgary, Seattle, California, London. Stephen Gawtry, the manager of Watkins, the world's oldest metaphysical bookstore in London, England, wrote at the time, "I foresee great things for this book." He was right: by the second year *The Power of Now* had developed into an "underground bestseller," as one reviewer later called it. Then, after the book received a number of favorable reviews in various journals and magazines, its growth accelerated and finally became explosive when Oprah Winfrey, who had been deeply affected by the book, proceeded to tell the world about it. Five years after it was first published, it reached #1 on the *New York Times* bestseller list, and it is now available in thirty languages. It has been very well received and become a bestseller even in India, a country considered by many to be the birthplace of humanity's quest for spiritual enlightenment.

Most of the thousands of letters and emails that have been sent to me from all over the world are from ordinary men and women, but there are also letters from Buddhist monks and Christian nuns, from people in prison or facing a life-threatening illness or imminent death. Psychotherapists have written to say that they recommend the book to their patients or incorporate the teachings in their practice. Many of those letters and emails mention a lessening or even a complete disappearance of suffering and problem-making in people's lives as a result of reading *The Power of Now* and putting the teachings into practice in everyday life. There is frequent mention of the amazing and beneficial effects of inner body awareness, the sense of freedom that comes from letting go of self-identification with one's personal history and life-situation, and a newfound inner peace that arises as one learns to relinquish mental/emotional resistance to the "suchness" of the present moment. Many people have read the book more than once, and they comment that the text loses none of its freshness upon subsequent readings, indeed that the book's transformative power remains not only undiminished, but actually becomes intensified.

The more the dysfunction of the human mind plays itself out on the world stage, clearly visible to everyone in the daily television news reports, the greater the number of people who realize the urgent need for a radical change in human consciousness if humanity is not to destroy both itself and the planet. This need, as well as readiness in millions of people for the arising of a new consciousness, is the context within which the "success" of *The Power of Now* must be seen and understood.

This does not mean, of course, that everyone responds favorably to the book. In many people, as well as in most of the political and economic structures and the greater part of the media, the old consciousness is still deeply entrenched. Anyone who is still totally identified with the voice in their head — the stream of involuntary and incessant thinking — will inevitably fail to see what *The Power of Now* is all about. Some enthusiastic readers gave a copy of the book to a friend or relative and were surprised and disappointed when the recipient found it quite meaningless and could not get beyond the first few pages. "Mumbo jumbo" was all that *Time* magazine could see in a book that countless people around the globe found life-changing. Furthermore, any teaching that puts the spotlight of attention on the workings of the ego will necessarily provoke egoic reaction, resistance, and attack.

However, despite a certain amount of misunderstanding and critical dissent, the response to the book around the globe has been overwhelmingly positive. I feel confident that in the years to come millions more will be drawn to it, and

that *The Power of Now* will continue to make a vital contribution to the arising of a new consciousness and a more enlightened humanity.

— Eckhart Tolle
Vancouver, B.C.
April 19, 2004

THE POWER OF NOW

INTRODUCTION

THE ORIGIN OF THIS BOOK

I have little use for the past and rarely think about it; however, I would briefly like to tell you how I came to be a spiritual teacher and how this book came into existence.

Until my thirtieth year, I lived in a state of almost continuous anxiety interspersed with periods of suicidal depression. It feels now as if I am talking about some past lifetime or somebody else's life.

One night not long after my twenty-ninth birthday, I woke up in the early hours with a feeling of absolute dread. I had woken up with such a feeling many times before, but this time it was more intense than it had ever been. The silence of the night, the vague outlines of the furniture in the dark room, the distant noise of a passing train — everything felt so alien, so hostile, and so utterly meaningless that it created in me a deep loathing of the world. The most loathsome thing of all, however, was my own existence. What was the point in continuing to live with this burden of misery? Why carry on with this continuous struggle? I could feel that a deep longing for annihilation, for nonexistence, was now becoming much stronger than the instinctive desire to continue to live.

"I cannot live with myself any longer." This was the thought that kept repeating itself in my mind. Then suddenly I became aware of what a peculiar thought it was. "Am I one or two? If I cannot live with myself, there must be two of me: the 'I' and the 'self' that 'I' cannot live with." "Maybe," I thought, "only one of them is real."

I was so stunned by this strange realization that my mind stopped. I was fully conscious, but there were no more thoughts. Then I felt drawn into what seemed like a vortex of energy. It was a slow movement at first and then accelerated. I was gripped by an intense fear, and my body started to shake. I heard the words "resist nothing," as if spoken inside my chest. I could feel myself being sucked into a void. It felt as if the void was inside myself rather than outside. Suddenly, there was no more fear, and I let myself fall into that

void. I have no recollection of what happened after that.

I was awakened by the chirping of a bird outside the window. I had never heard such a sound before. My eyes were still closed, and I saw the image of a precious diamond. Yes, if a diamond could make a sound, this is what it would be like. I opened my eyes. The first light of dawn was filtering through the curtains. Without any thought, I felt, I knew, that there is infinitely more to light than we realize. That soft luminosity filtering through the curtains was love itself. Tears came into my eyes. I got up and walked around the room. I recognized the room, and yet I knew that I had never truly seen it before. Everything was fresh and pristine, as if it had just come into existence. I picked up things, a pencil, an empty bottle, marveling at the beauty and aliveness of it all.

That day I walked around the city in utter amazement at the miracle of life on earth, as if I had just been born into this world.

For the next five months, I lived in a state of uninterrupted deep peace and bliss. After that, it diminished somewhat in intensity, or perhaps it just seemed to because it became my natural state. I could still function in the world, although I realized that nothing I ever *did* could possibly add anything to what I already had.

I knew, of course, that something profoundly significant had happened to me, but I didn't understand it at all. It wasn't until several years later, after I had read spiritual texts and spent time with spiritual teachers, that I realized that what everybody was looking for had already happened to me. I understood that the intense pressure of suffering that night must have forced my consciousness to withdraw from its identification with the unhappy and deeply fearful self, which is ultimately a fiction of the mind. This withdrawal must have been so complete that this false, suffering self immediately collapsed, just as if a plug had been pulled out of an inflatable toy. What was left then was my true nature as the ever-present *I am:* consciousness in its pure state prior to identification with form. Later I also learned to go into that inner timeless and deathless realm that I had originally perceived as a void and remain fully conscious. I dwelt in states of such indescribable bliss and sacredness that even the original experience I just described pales in comparison. A time came when, for a while, I was left with nothing on the physical plane. I had no relationships, no job, no home, no socially defined identity. I spent almost two years sitting on park benches in a state of the most intense joy.

But even the most beautiful experiences come and go. More fundamental,

perhaps, than any experience is the undercurrent of peace that has never left me since then. Sometimes it is very strong, almost palpable, and others can feel it too. At other times, it is somewhere in the background, like a distant melody.

Later, people would occasionally come up to me and say: "I want what you have. Can you give it to me, or show me how to get it?" And I would say: "You have it already. You just can't feel it because your mind is making too much noise." That answer later grew into the book that you are holding in your hands.

Before I knew it, I had an external identity again. I had become a spiritual teacher.

THE TRUTH THAT IS WITHIN YOU

This book represents the essence of my work, as far as it can be conveyed in words, with individuals and small groups of spiritual seekers during the past ten years, in Europe and in North America. In deep love and appreciation, I would like to thank those exceptional people for their courage, their willingness to embrace inner change, their challenging questions, and their readiness to listen. This book would not have come into existence without them. They belong to what is as yet a small but fortunately growing minority of spiritual pioneers: people who are reaching a point where they become capable of breaking out of inherited collective mind-patterns that have kept humans in bondage to suffering for eons.

I trust that this book will find its way to those who are ready for such radical inner transformation and so act as a catalyst for it. I also hope that it will reach many others who will find its content worthy of consideration, although they may not be ready to fully live or practice it. It is possible that at a later time, the seed that was sown when reading this book will merge with the seed of enlightenment that each human being carries within, and suddenly that seed will sprout and come alive within them.

The book in its present form originated, often spontaneously, in response to questions asked by individuals in seminars, meditation classes, and private counseling sessions, and so I have kept the question-and-answer format. I learned and received as much in those classes and sessions as the questioners. Some of the questions and answers I wrote down almost verbatim. Others are generic, which is to say I combined certain types of questions that were frequently asked into one, and extracted the essence from different answers to form one generic answer. Sometimes, in the process of writing, an entirely

new answer came that was more profound or insightful than anything I had ever uttered. Some additional questions were asked by the editor so as to provide further clarification of certain points.

You will find that from the first to the last page, the dialogues continuously alternate between two different levels.

On one level, I draw your attention to what is *false* in you. I speak of the nature of human unconsciousness and dysfunction as well as its most common behavioral manifestations, from conflict in relationships to warfare between tribes or nations. Such knowledge is vital, for unless you learn to recognize the false as false — as not you — there can be no lasting transformation, and you would always end up being drawn back into illusion and into some form of pain. On this level, I also show you how not to make that which is false in you into a self and into a personal problem, for that is how the false perpetuates itself.

On another level, I speak of a profound transformation of human consciousness — not as a distant future possibility, but available now — no matter who or where you are. You are shown how to free yourself from enslavement to the mind, enter into this enlightened state of consciousness and sustain it in everyday life.

On this level of the book, the words are not always concerned with information, but often designed to draw you into this new consciousness as you read. Again and again, I endeavor to take you with me into that timeless state of intense conscious presence in the Now, so as to give you a taste of enlightenment. Until you are able to experience what I speak of, you may find those passages somewhat repetitive. As soon as you do, however, I believe you will realize that they contain a great deal of spiritual power, and they may become for you the most rewarding parts of the book. Moreover, since every person carries the seed of enlightenment within, I often address myself to the knower in you who dwells behind the thinker, the deeper self that immediately recognizes spiritual truth, resonates with it, and gains strength from it.

The pause symbol after certain passages is a suggestion that you may want to stop reading for a moment, become still, and feel and experience the truth of what has just been said. There may be other places in the text where you will do this naturally and spontaneously.

As you begin reading the book, the meaning of certain words, such as “Being” or “presence,” may not be entirely clear to you at first. Just read on. Questions

or objections may occasionally come into your mind as you read. They will probably be answered later in the book, or they may turn out to be irrelevant as you go more deeply into the teaching — and into yourself.

Don't read with the mind only. Watch out for any "feeling-response" as you read and a sense of recognition from deep within. I cannot tell you any spiritual truth that deep within you don't know already. All I can do is remind you of what you have forgotten. Living knowledge, ancient and yet ever new, is then activated and released from within every cell of your body.

The mind always wants to categorize and compare, but this book will work better for you if you do not attempt to compare its terminology with that of other teachings; otherwise, you will probably become confused. I use words such as "mind," "happiness," and "consciousness" in ways that do not necessarily correlate with other teachings. Don't get attached to any words. They are only stepping stones, to be left behind as quickly as possible.

When I occasionally quote the words of Jesus or the Buddha, from *A Course in Miracles* or from other teachings, I do so not in order to compare, but to draw your attention to the fact that in *essence* there is and always has been only one spiritual teaching, although it comes in many forms. Some of these forms, such as the ancient religions, have become so overlaid with extraneous matter that their spiritual essence has become almost completely obscured by it. To a large extent, therefore, their deeper meaning is no longer recognized and their transformative power lost. When I quote from the ancient religions or other teachings, it is to reveal their deeper meaning and thereby restore their transformative power — particularly for those readers who are followers of these religions or teachings. I say to them: there is no need to go elsewhere for the truth. Let me show you how to go more deeply into what you already have.

Mostly, however, I have endeavored to use terminology that is as neutral as possible in order to reach a wide range of people. This book can be seen as a restatement for our time of that one timeless spiritual teaching, the essence of all religions. It is not derived from external sources, but from the one true Source within, so it contains no theory or speculation. I speak from inner experience, and if at times I speak forcefully, it is to cut through heavy layers of mental resistance and to reach that place within you where you already *know,* just as I know, and where the truth is recognized when it is heard. There is then a feeling of exaltation and heightened aliveness, as something within you says: "Yes. I know this is true."

CHAPTER ONE

YOU ARE NOT YOUR MIND

THE GREATEST OBSTACLE TO ENLIGHTENMENT

Enlightenment — what is that?

A beggar had been sitting by the side of a road for over thirty years. One day a stranger walked by. "Spare some change?" mumbled the beggar, mechanically holding out his old baseball cap. "I have nothing to give you," said the stranger. Then he asked: "What's that you are sitting on?" "Nothing," replied the beggar. "Just an old box. I have been sitting on it for as long as I can remember." "Ever looked inside?" asked the stranger. "No," said the beggar. "What's the point? There's nothing in there." "Have a look inside," insisted the stranger. The beggar managed to pry open the lid. With astonishment, disbelief, and elation, he saw that the box was filled with gold.

I am that stranger who has nothing to give you and who is telling you to look inside. Not inside any box, as in the parable, but somewhere even closer: inside yourself.

"But I am not a beggar," I can hear you say.

Those who have not found their true wealth, which is the radiant joy of Being and the deep, unshakable peace that comes with it, are beggars, even if they have great material wealth. They are looking outside for scraps of pleasure or fulfillment, for validation, security, or love, while they have a treasure within that not only includes all those things but is infinitely greater than anything the world can offer.

The word enlightenment conjures up the idea of some superhuman accomplishment, and the ego likes to keep it that way, but it is simply your natural state of *felt* oneness with Being. It is a state of connectedness with something immeasurable and indestructible, something that, almost paradoxically, is essentially you and yet is much greater than you. It is finding your true nature beyond name and form. The inability to feel this

connectedness gives rise to the illusion of separation, from yourself and from the world around you. You then perceive yourself, consciously or unconsciously, as an isolated fragment. Fear arises, and conflict within and without becomes the norm.

I love the Buddha's simple definition of enlightenment as "the end of suffering." There is nothing superhuman in that, is there? Of course, as a definition, it is incomplete. It only tells you what enlightenment is not: no suffering. But what's left when there is no more suffering? The Buddha is silent on that, and his silence implies that you'll have to find out for yourself. He uses a negative definition so that the mind cannot make it into something to believe in or into a superhuman accomplishment, a goal that is impossible for you to attain. Despite this precaution, the majority of Buddhists still believe that enlightenment is for the Buddha, not for them, at least not in this lifetime.

You used the word Being. *Can you explain what you mean by that?*

Being is the eternal, ever-present One Life beyond the myriad forms of life that are subject to birth and death. However, Being is not only beyond but also deep within every form as its innermost invisible and indestructible essence. This means that it is accessible to you now as your own deepest self, your true nature. But don't seek to grasp it with your mind. Don't try to understand it. You can know it only when the mind is still. When you are present, when your attention is fully and intensely in the Now, Being can be felt, but it can never be understood mentally. To regain awareness of Being and to abide in that state of "feeling-realization" is enlightenment.

When you say Being, *are you talking about God? If you are, then why don't you say it?*

The word *God* has become empty of meaning through thousands of years of misuse. I use it sometimes, but I do so sparingly. By misuse, I mean that people who have never even glimpsed the realm of the sacred, the infinite vastness behind that word, use it with great conviction, as if they knew what they are talking about. Or they argue against it, as if they knew what it is that they are denying. This misuse gives rise to absurd beliefs, assertions, and egoic delusions, such as "*My* or *our* God is the only true God, and *your* God is false,"

or Nietzsche's famous statement "God is dead."

The word *God* has become a closed concept. The moment the word is uttered, a mental image is created, no longer, perhaps, of an old man with a white beard, but still a mental representation of someone or something outside you, and, yes, almost inevitably a *male* someone or something.

Neither *God* nor *Being* nor any other word can define or explain the ineffable reality behind the word, so the only important question is whether the word is a help or a hindrance in enabling you to experience That toward which it points. Does it point beyond itself to that transcendental reality, or does it lend itself too easily to becoming no more than an idea in your head that you believe in, a mental idol?

The word *Being* explains nothing, but nor does *God*. *Being*, however, has the advantage that it is an open concept. It does not reduce the infinite invisible to a finite entity. It is impossible to form a mental image of it. Nobody can claim exclusive possession of Being. It is your very essence, and it is immediately accessible to you as the feeling of your own presence, the realization *I am* that is prior to I am this or I am that. So it is only a small step from the word *Being* to the experience of Being.

What is the greatest obstacle to experiencing this reality?

Identification with your mind, which causes thought to become compulsive. Not to be able to stop thinking is a dreadful affliction, but we don't realize this because almost everybody is suffering from it, so it is considered normal.
This incessant mental noise prevents you from finding that realm of inner stillness that is inseparable from Being. It also creates a false mind-made self that casts a shadow of fear and suffering. We will look at all that in more detail later.

The philosopher Descartes believed that he had found the most fundamental truth when he made his famous statement: "I think, therefore I am." He had, in fact, given expression to the most basic error: to equate thinking with Being and identity with thinking. The compulsive thinker, which means almost everyone, lives in a state of apparent separateness, in an insanely complex world of continuous problems and conflict, a world that reflects the ever-

increasing fragmentation of the mind. Enlightenment is a state of wholeness, of being "at one" and therefore at peace. At one with life in its manifested aspect, the world, as well as with your deepest self and life unmanifested — at one with Being. Enlightenment is not only the end of suffering and of continuous conflict within and without, but also the end of the dreadful enslavement to incessant thinking. What an incredible liberation this is!

Identification with your mind creates an opaque screen of concepts, labels, images, words, judgments, and definitions that blocks all true relationship. It comes between you and yourself, between you and your fellow man and woman, between you and nature, between you and God. It is this screen of thought that creates the illusion of separateness, the illusion that there is you *and* a totally separate "other." You then forget the essential fact that, underneath the level of physical appearances and separate forms, you are one with all that *is*. By "forget," I mean that you can no longer *feel* this oneness as self-evident reality. You may *believe* it to be true, but you no longer *know* it to be true. A belief may be comforting. Only through your own experience, however, does it become liberating.

Thinking has become a disease. Disease happens when things get out of balance. For example, there is nothing wrong with cells dividing and multiplying in the body, but when this process continues in disregard of the total organism, cells proliferate and we have disease.

The mind is a superb instrument if used rightly. Used wrongly, however, it becomes very destructive. To put it more accurately, it is not so much that you use your mind wrongly — you usually don't use it at all. It uses *you*. This is the disease. You believe that you *are* your mind. This is the delusion. The instrument has taken you over.

I don't quite agree. It is true that I do a lot of aimless thinking, like most people, but I can still choose to use my mind to get and accomplish things, and I do that all the time.

Just because you can solve a crossword puzzle or build an atom bomb doesn't mean that you use your mind. Just as dogs love to chew bones, the mind loves to get its teeth into problems. That's why it does crossword puzzles and builds atom bombs. *You* have no interest in either. Let me ask you this: can you be free of your mind whenever you want to? Have you found the "off" button?

You mean stop thinking altogether? No, I can't, except maybe for a moment or two.

Then the mind is using you. You are unconsciously identified with it, so you don't even know that you are its slave. It's almost as if you were possessed without knowing it, and so you take the possessing entity to be yourself. The beginning of freedom is the realization that you are not the possessing entity — the thinker. Knowing this enables you to observe the entity. The moment you start *watching the thinker,* a higher level of consciousness becomes activated. You then begin to realize that there is a vast realm of intelligence beyond thought, that thought is only a tiny aspect of that intelligence. You also realize that all the things that truly matter — beauty, love, creativity, joy, inner peace — arise from beyond the mind. You begin to awaken.

FREEING YOURSELF FROM YOUR MIND

What exactly do you mean by "watching the thinker"?

When someone goes to the doctor and says, "I hear a voice in my head," he or she will most likely be sent to a psychiatrist. The fact is that, in a very similar way, virtually everyone hears a voice, or several voices, in their head all the time: the involuntary thought processes that you don't realize you have the power to stop. Continuous monologues or dialogues.

You have probably come across "mad" people in the street incessantly talking or muttering to themselves. Well, that's not much different from what you and all other "normal" people do, except that you don't do it out loud. The voice comments, speculates, judges, compares, complains, likes, dislikes, and so on. The voice isn't necessarily relevant to the situation you find yourself in at the time; it may be reviving the recent or distant past or rehearsing or imagining possible future situations. Here it often imagines things going wrong and negative outcomes; this is called worry. Sometimes this soundtrack is accompanied by visual images or "mental movies." Even if the voice is relevant to the situation at hand, it will interpret it in terms of the past. This is because the voice belongs to your conditioned mind, which is the result of all your past history as well as of the collective cultural mind-set you inherited. So you see and judge the present through the eyes of the past and get a totally distorted view of it. It is not uncommon for the voice to be a person's own worst enemy. Many people live with a tormentor in their head that

continuously attacks and punishes them and drains them of vital energy. It is the cause of untold misery and unhappiness, as well as of disease.

The good news is that you *can* free yourself from your mind. This is the only true liberation. You can take the first step right now. Start listening to the voice in your head as often as you can. Pay particular attention to any repetitive thought patterns, those old gramophone records that have been playing in your head perhaps for many years. This is what I mean by "watching the thinker," which is another way of saying: listen to the voice in your head, *be* there as the witnessing presence.

When you listen to that voice, listen to it impartially. That is to say, do not judge. Do not judge or condemn what you hear, for doing so would mean that the same voice has come in again through the back door. You'll soon realize: *there* is the voice, and here *I am* listening to it, watching it. This *I am* realization, this sense of your own presence, is not a thought. It arises from beyond the mind.

So when you listen to a thought, you are aware not only of the thought but also of yourself as the witness of the thought. A new dimension of consciousness has come in. As you listen to the thought, you feel a conscious presence — your deeper self — behind or underneath the thought, as it were. The thought then loses its power over you and quickly subsides, because you are no longer energizing the mind through identification with it. This is the beginning of the end of involuntary and compulsive thinking.

When a thought subsides, you experience a discontinuity in the mental stream — a gap of "no-mind." At first, the gaps will be short, a few seconds perhaps, but gradually they will become longer. When these gaps occur, you feel a certain stillness and peace inside you. This is the beginning of your natural state of felt oneness with Being, which is usually obscured by the mind. With practice, the sense of stillness and peace will deepen. In fact, there is no end to its depth. You will also feel a subtle emanation of joy arising from deep within: the joy of Being.

It is not a trancelike state. Not at all. There is no loss of consciousness here. The opposite is the case. If the price of peace were a lowering of your consciousness, and the price of stillness a lack of vitality and alertness, then they would not be worth having. In this state of inner connectedness, you are

much more alert, more awake than in the mind-identified state. You are fully present. It also raises the vibrational frequency of the energy field that gives life to the physical body.

As you go more deeply into this realm of no-mind, as it is sometimes called in the East, you realize the state of pure consciousness. In that state, you feel your own presence with such intensity and such joy that all thinking, all emotions, your physical body, as well as the whole external world become relatively insignificant in comparison to it. And yet this is not a selfish but a selfless state. It takes you beyond what you previously thought of as "your self." That presence is essentially you and at the same time inconceivably greater than you. What I am trying to convey here may sound paradoxical or even contradictory, but there is no other way that I can express it.

Instead of "watching the thinker," you can also create a gap in the mind stream simply by directing the focus of your attention into the Now. Just become intensely conscious of the present moment. This is a deeply satisfying thing to do. In this way, you draw consciousness away from mind activity and create a gap of no-mind in which you are highly alert and aware but not thinking. This is the essence of meditation.

In your everyday life, you can practice this by taking any routine activity that normally is only a means to an end and giving it your fullest attention, so that it becomes an end in itself. For example, every time you walk up and down the stairs in your house or place of work, pay close attention to every step, every movement, even your breathing. Be totally present. Or when you wash your hands, pay attention to all the sense perceptions associated with the activity: the sound and feel of the water, the movement of your hands, the scent of the soap, and so on. Or when you get into your car, after you close the door, pause for a few seconds and observe the flow of your breath. Become aware of a silent but powerful sense of presence. There is one certain criterion by which you can measure your success in this practice: the degree of peace that you feel within.

So the single most vital step on your journey toward enlightenment is this: learn to disidentify from your mind. Every time you create a gap in the stream of mind, the light of your consciousness grows stronger.

One day you may catch yourself smiling at the voice in your head, as you would smile at the antics of a child. This means that you no longer take the content of your mind all that seriously, as your sense of self does not depend on it.

ENLIGHTENMENT: RISING ABOVE THOUGHT

Isn't thinking essential in order to survive in this world?

Your mind is an instrument, a tool. It is there to be used for a specific task, and when the task is completed, you lay it down. As it is, I would say about 80 to 90 percent of most people's thinking is not only repetitive and useless, but because of its dysfunctional and often negative nature, much of it is also harmful. Observe your mind and you will find this to be true. It causes a serious leakage of vital energy.

This kind of compulsive thinking is actually an addiction. What characterizes an addiction? Quite simply this: you no longer feel that you have the choice to stop. It seems stronger than you. It also gives you a false sense of pleasure, pleasure that invariably turns into pain.

Why should we be addicted to thinking?

Because you are identified with it, which means that you derive your sense of self from the content and activity of your mind. Because you believe that you would cease to be if you stopped thinking. As you grow up, you form a mental image of who you are, based on your personal and cultural conditioning. We may call this phantom self the ego. It consists of mind activity and can only be kept going through constant thinking. The term *ego* means different things to different people, but when I use it here it means a false self, created by unconscious identification with the mind.

To the ego, the present moment hardly exists. Only past and future are considered important. This total reversal of the truth accounts for the fact that in the ego mode the mind is so dysfunctional. It is always concerned with keeping the past alive, because without it — who are you? It constantly projects itself into the future to ensure its continued survival and to seek some kind of release or fulfillment there. It says: "One day, when this, that, or the

other happens, I am going to be okay, happy, at peace." Even when the ego seems to be concerned with the present, it is not the present that it sees: It misperceives it completely because it looks at it through the eyes of the past. Or it reduces the present to a means to an end, an end that always lies in the mind-projected future. Observe your mind and you'll see that this is how it works.

The present moment holds the key to liberation. But you cannot find the present moment as long as you *are* your mind.

I don't want to lose my ability to analyze and discriminate. I wouldn't mind learning to think more clearly, in a more focused way, but I don't want to lose my mind. The gift of thought is the most precious thing we have. Without it, we would just be another species of animal.

The predominance of mind is no more than a stage in the evolution of consciousness. We need to go on to the next stage now as a matter of urgency; otherwise, we will be destroyed by the mind, which has grown into a monster. I will talk about this in more detail later. Thinking and consciousness are not synonymous. Thinking is only a small aspect of consciousness. Thought cannot exist without consciousness, but consciousness does not need thought.

Enlightenment means rising above thought, not falling back to a level below thought, the level of an animal or a plant. In the enlightened state, you still use your thinking mind when needed, but in a much more focused and effective way than before. You use it mostly for practical purposes, but you are free of the involuntary internal dialogue, and there is inner stillness. When you do use your mind, and particularly when a creative solution is needed, you oscillate every few minutes or so between thought and stillness, between mind and no-mind. No-mind is consciousness without thought. Only in that way is it possible to think creatively, because only in that way does thought have any real power. Thought alone, when it is no longer connected with the much vaster realm of consciousness, quickly becomes barren, insane, destructive.

The mind is essentially a survival machine. Attack and defense against other minds, gathering, storing, and analyzing information — this is what it is good at, but it is not at all creative. All true artists, whether they know it or not, create from a place of no-mind, from inner stillness. The mind then gives form to the creative impulse or insight. Even the great scientists have reported that their creative breakthroughs came at a time of mental quietude. The surprising result of a nationwide inquiry among America's most eminent

mathematicians, including Einstein, to find out their working methods, was that thinking "plays only a subordinate part in the brief, decisive phase of the creative act itself."[1] So I would say that the simple reason why the majority of scientists are *not* creative is not because they don't know how to think but because they don't know how to stop thinking!

It wasn't through the mind, through thinking, that the miracle that is life on earth or your body was created and is being sustained. There is clearly an intelligence at work that is far greater than the mind. How can a single human cell measuring 1/1,000 of an inch in diameter contain instructions within its DNA that would fill 1,000 books of 600 pages each? The more we learn about the workings of the body, the more we realize just how vast is the intelligence at work within it and how little we know. When the mind reconnects with that, it becomes a most wonderful tool. It then serves something greater than itself.

EMOTION: THE BODY'S REACTION TO YOUR MIND

What about emotions? I get caught up in my emotions more than I do in my mind.

Mind, in the way I use the word, is not just thought. It includes your emotions as well as all unconscious mental-emotional reactive patterns. Emotion arises at the place where mind and body meet. It is the body's reaction to your mind — or you might say, a reflection of your mind in the body. For example, an attack thought or a hostile thought will create a buildup of energy in the body that we call anger. The body is getting ready to fight. The thought that you are being threatened, physically or psychologically, causes the body to contract, and this is the physical side of what we call fear. Research has shown that strong emotions even cause changes in the biochemistry of the body. These biochemical changes represent the physical or material aspect of the emotion. Of course, you are not usually conscious of all your thought patterns, and it is often only through watching your emotions that you can bring them into awareness.

The more you are identified with your thinking, your likes and dislikes, judgments and interpretations, which is to say the less *present* you are as the watching consciousness, the stronger the emotional energy charge will be, whether you are aware of it or not. If you cannot feel your emotions, if you are cut off from them, you will eventually experience them on a purely physical level, as a physical problem or symptom. A great deal has been written about this in recent years, so we don't need to go into it here. A strong unconscious emotional pattern may even manifest as an external event that appears to just

happen to you. For example, I have observed that people who carry a lot of anger inside without being aware of it and without expressing it are more likely to be attacked, verbally or even physically, by other angry people, and often for no apparent reason. They have a strong emanation of anger that certain people pick up subliminally and that triggers their own latent anger.

If you have difficulty feeling your emotions, start by focusing attention on the inner energy field of your body. Feel the body from within. This will also put you in touch with your emotions. We will explore this in more detail later.

You say that an emotion is the mind's reflection in the body. But sometimes there is a conflict between the two: the mind says "no" while the emotion says "yes," or the other way around.

If you really want to know your mind, the body will always give you a truthful reflection, so look at the emotion, or rather *feel* it in your body. If there is an apparent conflict between them, the thought will be the lie, the emotion will be the truth. Not the ultimate truth of who you are, but the relative truth of your state of mind at that time.

Conflict between surface thoughts and unconscious mental processes is certainly common. You may not yet be able to bring your unconscious mind activity into awareness *as thoughts*, but it will always be reflected in the body *as an emotion*, and of this you *can* become aware. To watch an emotion in this way is basically the same as listening to or watching a thought, which I described earlier. The only difference is that, while a thought is in your head, an emotion has a strong physical component and so is primarily felt in the body. You can then allow the emotion to *be* there without being controlled by it. You no longer *are* the emotion; you are the watcher, the observing presence. If you practice this, all that is unconscious in you will be brought into the light of consciousness.

So observing our emotions is as important as observing our thoughts?

Yes. Make it a habit to ask yourself: What's going on inside me at this moment? That question will point you in the right direction. But don't

analyze, just watch. Focus your attention within. Feel the energy of the emotion. If there is no emotion present, take your attention more deeply into the inner energy field of your body. It is the doorway into Being.

An emotion usually represents an amplified and energized thought pattern, and because of its often overpowering energetic charge, it is not easy initially to stay present enough to be able to watch it. It wants to take you over, and it usually succeeds — unless there is enough presence in you. If you are pulled into unconscious identification with the emotion through lack of presence, which is normal, the emotion temporarily becomes "you." Often a vicious circle builds up between your thinking and the emotion: they feed each other. The thought pattern creates a magnified reflection of itself in the form of an emotion, and the vibrational frequency of the emotion keeps feeding the original thought pattern. By dwelling mentally on the situation, event, or person that is the perceived cause of the emotion, the thought feeds energy to the emotion, which in turn energizes the thought pattern, and so on.

Basically, all emotions are modifications of one primordial, undifferentiated emotion that has its origin in the loss of awareness of who you are beyond name and form. Because of its undifferentiated nature, it is hard to find a name that precisely describes this emotion. "Fear" comes close, but apart from a continuous sense of threat, it also includes a deep sense of abandonment and incompleteness. It may be best to use a term that is as undifferentiated as that basic emotion and simply call it "pain." One of the main tasks of the mind is to fight or remove that emotional pain, which is one of the reasons for its incessant activity, but all it can ever achieve is to cover it up temporarily. In fact, the harder the mind struggles to get rid of the pain, the greater the pain. The mind can never find the solution, nor can it afford to allow you to find the solution, because it is itself an intrinsic part of the "problem." Imagine a chief of police trying to find an arsonist when the arsonist *is* the chief of police. You will not be free of that pain until you cease to derive your sense of self from identification with the mind, which is to say from ego. The mind is then toppled from its place of power and Being reveals itself as your true nature.

Yes, I know what you are going to ask.

I was going to ask: What about positive emotions such as love and joy?

They are inseparable from your natural state of inner connectedness with Being. Glimpses of love and joy or brief moments of deep peace are possible whenever a gap occurs in the stream of thought. For most people, such gaps happen rarely and only accidentally, in moments when the mind is rendered "speechless," sometimes triggered by great beauty, extreme physical exertion, or even great danger. Suddenly, there is inner stillness. And within that stillness there is a subtle but intense joy, there is love, there is peace.

Usually, such moments are short-lived, as the mind quickly resumes its noise-making activity that we call thinking. Love, joy, and peace cannot flourish until you have freed yourself from mind dominance. But they are not what I would call emotions. They lie beyond the emotions, on a much deeper level. So you need to become fully conscious of your emotions and be able to *feel* them before you can feel that which lies beyond them. Emotion literally means "disturbance." The word comes from the Latin *emovere*, meaning "to disturb."

Love, joy, and peace are deep states of Being, or rather three aspects of the state of inner connectedness with Being. As such, they have no opposite. This is because they arise from beyond the mind. Emotions, on the other hand, being part of the dualistic mind, are subject to the law of opposites. This simply means that you cannot have good without bad. So in the unenlightened, mind-identified condition, what is sometimes wrongly called joy is the usually short-lived pleasure side of the continuously alternating pain/pleasure cycle. Pleasure is always derived from something outside you, whereas joy arises from within. The very thing that gives you pleasure today will give you pain tomorrow, or it will leave you, so its absence will give you pain. And what is often referred to as love may be pleasurable and exciting for a while, but it is an addictive clinging, an extremely needy condition that can turn into its opposite at the flick of a switch. Many "love" relationships, after the initial euphoria has passed, actually oscillate between "love" and hate, attraction and attack.

Real love doesn't make you suffer. How could it? It doesn't suddenly turn into hate, nor does real joy turn into pain. As I said, even before you are enlightened — before you have freed yourself from your mind — you may get glimpses of true joy, true love, or of a deep inner peace, still but vibrantly alive. These are aspects of your true nature, which is usually obscured by the mind. Even within a "normal" addictive relationship, there can be moments when the presence of something more genuine, something incorruptible, can be felt. But they will only be glimpses, soon to be covered up again through

mind interference. It may then seem that you had something very precious and lost it, or your mind may convince you that it was all an illusion anyway. The truth is that it wasn't an illusion, and you cannot lose it. It is part of your natural state, which can be obscured but can never be destroyed by the mind. Even when the sky is heavily overcast, the sun hasn't disappeared. It's still there on the other side of the clouds.

The Buddha says that pain or suffering arises through desire or craving and that to be free of pain we need to cut the bonds of desire.

All cravings are the mind seeking salvation or fulfillment in external things and in the future as a substitute for the joy of Being. As long as I am my mind, I am those cravings, those needs, wants, attachments, and aversions, and apart from them there is no "I" except as a mere possibility, an unfulfilled potential, a seed that has not yet sprouted. In that state, even my desire to become free or enlightened is just another craving for fulfillment or completion in the future. So don't seek to become free of desire or "achieve" enlightenment. Become present. Be there as the observer of the mind. Instead of quoting the Buddha, *be* the Buddha, *be* "the awakened one," which is what the word *buddha* means.

Humans have been in the grip of pain for eons, ever since they fell from the state of grace, entered the realm of time and mind, and lost awareness of Being. At that point, they started to perceive themselves as meaningless fragments in an alien universe, unconnected to the Source and to each other.

Pain is inevitable as long as you are identified with your mind, which is to say as long as you are unconscious, spiritually speaking. I am talking here primarily of emotional pain, which is also the main cause of physical pain and physical disease. Resentment, hatred, self-pity, guilt, anger, depression, jealousy, and so on, even the slightest irritation, are all forms of pain. And every pleasure or emotional high contains within itself the seed of pain: its inseparable opposite, which will manifest in time.

Anybody who has ever taken drugs to get "high" will know that the high eventually turns into a low, that the pleasure turns into some form of pain. Many people also know from their own experience how easily and quickly an intimate relationship can turn from a source of pleasure to a source of pain. Seen from a higher perspective, both the negative and the positive polarities are faces of the same coin, are both part of the underlying pain that is inseparable from the mind-identified egoic state of consciousness.

There are two levels to your pain: the pain that you create now, and the pain

from the past that still lives on in your mind and body. Ceasing to create pain in the present and dissolving past pain — this is what I want to talk about now.

CHAPTER TWO

CONSCIOUSNESS:
THE WAY OUT OF PAIN

CREATE NO MORE PAIN IN THE PRESENT

Nobody's life is entirely free of pain and sorrow. Isn't it a question of learning to live with them rather than trying to avoid them?

The greater part of human pain is unnecessary. It is self-created as long as the unobserved mind runs your life.

The pain that you create now is always some form of nonacceptance, some form of unconscious resistance to what *is*. On the level of thought, the resistance is some form of judgment. On the emotional level, it is some form of negativity. The intensity of the pain depends on the degree of resistance to the present moment, and this in turn depends on how strongly you are identified with your mind. The mind always seeks to deny the Now and to escape from it. In other words, the more you are identified with your mind, the more you suffer. Or you may put it like this: the more you are able to honor and accept the Now, the more you are free of pain, of suffering — and free of the egoic mind.

Why does the mind habitually deny or resist the Now? Because it cannot function and remain in control without time, which is past and future, so it perceives the timeless Now as threatening. Time and mind are in fact inseparable.

Imagine the Earth devoid of human life, inhabited only by plants and animals. Would it still have a past and a future? Could we still speak of time in any meaningful way? The question "What time is it?" or "What's the date today?" — if anybody were there to ask it — would be quite meaningless. The oak tree or the eagle would be bemused by such a question. "What time?" they would ask. "Well, of course, it's now. The time is now. What else is there?"

Yes, we need the mind as well as time to function in this world, but there

comes a point where they take over our lives, and this is where dysfunction, pain, and sorrow set in.

The mind, to ensure that it remains in control, seeks continuously to cover up the present moment with past and future, and so, as the vitality and infinite creative potential of Being, which is inseparable from the Now, becomes covered up by time, your true nature becomes obscured by the mind. An increasingly heavy burden of time has been accumulating in the human mind. All individuals are suffering under this burden, but they also keep adding to it every moment whenever they ignore or deny that precious moment or reduce it to a means of getting to some future moment, which only exists in the mind, never in actuality. The accumulation of time in the collective and individual human mind also holds a vast amount of residual pain from the past.

If you no longer want to create pain for yourself and others, if you no longer want to add to the residue of past pain that still lives on in you, then don't create any more time, or at least no more than is necessary to deal with the practical aspects of your life. How to stop creating time? Realize deeply that the present moment is all you ever have. Make the Now the primary focus of your life. Whereas before you dwelt in time and paid brief visits to the Now, have your dwelling place in the Now and pay brief visits to past and future when required to deal with the practical aspects of your life situation. Always say "yes" to the present moment. What could be more futile, more insane, than to create inner resistance to something that already *is*? What could be more insane than to oppose life itself, which is now and always now? Surrender to what *is*. Say "yes" to life — and see how life suddenly starts working *for* you rather than against you.

The present moment is sometimes unacceptable, unpleasant, or awful.

It is as it is. Observe how the mind labels it and how this labeling process, this continuous sitting in judgment, creates pain and unhappiness. By watching the mechanics of the mind, you step out of its resistance patterns, and you can then *allow the present moment to be*. This will give you a taste of the state of inner freedom from external conditions, the state of true inner peace. Then see what happens, and take action if necessary or possible.

Accept — then act. Whatever the present moment contains, accept it as if you had chosen it. Always work with it, not against it. Make it your friend and ally, not your enemy. This will miraculously transform your whole life.

PAST PAIN: DISSOLVING THE PAIN-BODY

As long as you are unable to access the power of the Now, every emotional pain that you experience leaves behind a residue of pain that lives on in you. It merges with the pain from the past, which was already there, and becomes lodged in your mind and body. This, of course, includes the pain you suffered as a child, caused by the unconsciousness of the world into which you were born.

This accumulated pain is a negative energy field that occupies your body and mind. If you look on it as an invisible entity in its own right, you are getting quite close to the truth. It's the emotional pain-body. It has two modes of being: dormant and active. A pain-body may be dormant 90 percent of the time; in a deeply unhappy person, though, it may be active up to 100 percent of the time. Some people live almost entirely through their pain-body, while others may experience it only in certain situations, such as intimate relationships, or situations linked with past loss or abandonment, physical or emotional hurt, and so on. Anything can trigger it, particularly if it resonates with a pain pattern from your past. When it is ready to awaken from its dormant stage, even a thought or an innocent remark made by someone close to you can activate it.

Some pain-bodies are obnoxious but relatively harmless, for example like a child who won't stop whining. Others are vicious and destructive monsters, true demons. Some are physically violent; many more are emotionally violent. Some will attack people around you or close to you, while others may attack you, their host. Thoughts and feelings you have about your life then become deeply negative and self-destructive. Illnesses and accidents are often created in this way. Some pain-bodies drive their hosts to suicide.

When you thought you knew a person and then you are suddenly confronted with this alien, nasty creature for the first time, you are in for quite a shock. However, it's more important to observe it in yourself than in someone else.

Watch out for any sign of unhappiness in yourself, in whatever form — it may be the awakening pain-body. This can take the form of irritation, impatience, a somber mood, a desire to hurt, anger, rage, depression, a need to have some drama in your relationship, and so on. Catch it the moment it awakens from its dormant state.

The pain-body wants to survive, just like every other entity in existence, and it can only survive if it gets you to unconsciously identify with it. It can then rise up, take you over, "become you," and live through you. It needs to get its "food" through you. It will feed on any experience that resonates with its own kind of energy, anything that creates further pain in whatever form: anger, destructiveness, hatred, grief, emotional drama, violence, and even illness. So the pain-body, when it has taken you over, will create a situation in your life that reflects back its own energy frequency for it to feed on. Pain can only feed on pain. Pain cannot feed on joy. It finds it quite indigestible.

Once the pain-body has taken you over, you want more pain. You become a victim or a perpetrator. You want to inflict pain, or you want to suffer pain, or both. There isn't really much difference between the two. You are not conscious of this, of course, and will vehemently claim that you do not want pain. But look closely and you will find that your thinking and behavior are designed to keep the pain going, for yourself and others. If you *were* truly conscious of it, the pattern would dissolve, for to want more pain is insanity, and nobody is consciously insane.

The pain-body, which is the dark shadow cast by the ego, is actually afraid of the light of your consciousness. It is afraid of being found out. Its survival depends on your unconscious identification with it, as well as on your unconscious fear of facing the pain that lives in you. But if you don't face it, if you don't bring the light of your consciousness into the pain, you will be forced to relive it again and again. The pain-body may seem to you like a dangerous monster that you cannot bear to look at, but I assure you that it is an insubstantial phantom that cannot prevail against the power of your presence.

Some spiritual teachings state that all pain is ultimately an illusion, and this is true. The question is: Is it true for you? A mere belief doesn't make it true. Do you want to experience pain for the rest of your life and keep saying that it is an illusion? Does that free you from the pain? What we are concerned with here is how you can *realize* this truth — that is, make it real in your own experience.

So the pain-body doesn't want you to observe it directly and see it for what it

is. The moment you observe it, feel its energy field within you, and take your attention into it, the identification is broken. A higher dimension of consciousness has come in. I call it *presence*. You are now the witness or the watcher of the pain-body. This means that it cannot use you anymore by pretending to be you, and it can no longer replenish itself through you. You have found your own innermost strength. You have accessed the power of Now.

What happens to the pain-body when we become conscious enough to break our identification with it?

Unconsciousness creates it; consciousness transmutes it into itself. St. Paul expressed this universal principle beautifully: "Everything is shown up by being exposed to the light, and whatever is exposed to the light itself becomes light." Just as you cannot fight the darkness, you cannot fight the pain-body. Trying to do so would create inner conflict and thus further pain. Watching it is enough. Watching it implies accepting it as part of what *is* at that moment.

The pain-body consists of trapped life-energy that has split off from your total energy field and has temporarily become autonomous through the unnatural process of mind identification. It has turned in on itself and become anti-life, like an animal trying to devour its own tail. Why do you think our civilization has become so life-destructive? But even the life-destructive forces are still life-energy.

When you start to disidentify and become the watcher, the pain-body will continue to operate for a while and will try to trick you into identifying with it again. Although you are no longer energizing it through your identification, it has a certain momentum, just like a spinning wheel that will keep turning for a while even when it is no longer being propelled. At this stage, it may also create physical aches and pains in different parts of the body, but they won't last. Stay present, stay conscious. Be the ever-alert guardian of your inner space. You need to be present enough to be able to watch the pain-body directly and feel its energy. It then cannot control your thinking. The moment your thinking is aligned with the energy field of the pain-body, you are identified with it and again feeding it with your thoughts.

For example, if anger is the predominant energy vibration of the pain-body and you think angry thoughts, dwelling on what someone did to you or what you are going to do to him or her, then you have become unconscious, and the pain-body has become "you." Where there is anger, there is always pain

underneath. Or when a dark mood comes upon you and you start getting into a negative mind-pattern and thinking how dreadful your life is, your thinking has become aligned with the pain-body, and you have become unconscious and vulnerable to the pain-body's attack. "Unconscious," the way that I use the word here, means to be identified with some mental or emotional pattern. It implies a complete absence of the watcher.

Sustained conscious attention severs the link between the pain-body and your thought processes and brings about the process of transmutation. It is as if the pain becomes fuel for the flame of your consciousness, which then burns more brightly as a result. This is the esoteric meaning of the ancient art of alchemy: the transmutation of base metal into gold, of suffering into consciousness. The split within is healed, and you become whole again. Your responsibility then is not to create further pain.

Let me summarize the process. Focus attention on the feeling inside you. Know that it is the pain-body. Accept that it is there. Don't *think* about it — don't let the feeling turn into thinking. Don't judge or analyze. Don't make an identity for yourself out of it. Stay present, and continue to be the observer of what is happening inside you. Become aware not only of the emotional pain but also of "the one who observes," the silent watcher. This is the power of the Now, the power of your own conscious presence. Then see what happens.

For many women, the pain-body awakens particularly at the time preceding the menstrual flow. I will talk about this and the reason for it in more detail later. Right now, let me just say this: If you are able to stay alert and present at that time and *watch* whatever you feel within, rather than be taken over by it, it affords an opportunity for the most powerful spiritual practice, and a rapid transmutation of all past pain becomes possible.

EGO IDENTIFICATION WITH THE PAIN-BODY

The process that I have just described is profoundly powerful yet simple. It could be taught to a child, and hopefully one day it will be one of the first things children learn in school. Once you have understood the basic principle of being present as the watcher of what happens inside you — and you "understand" it by experiencing it — you have at your disposal the most

potent transformational tool.

This is not to deny that you may encounter intense inner resistance to disidentifying from your pain. This will be the case particularly if you have lived closely identified with your emotional pain-body for most of your life and the whole or a large part of your sense of self is invested in it. What this means is that you have made an unhappy self out of your pain-body and believe that this mind-made fiction is who you are. In that case, unconscious fear of losing your identity will create strong resistance to any disidentification. In other words, you would rather be in pain — *be* the pain-body — than take a leap into the unknown and risk losing the familiar unhappy self.

If this applies to you, observe the resistance within yourself. Observe the attachment to your pain. Be very alert. Observe the peculiar pleasure you derive from being unhappy. Observe the compulsion to talk or think about it. The resistance will cease if you make it conscious. You can then take your attention into the pain-body, stay present as the witness, and so initiate its transmutation.

Only *you* can do this. Nobody can do it *for* you. But if you are fortunate enough to find someone who is intensely conscious, if you can be with them and join them in the state of presence, that can be helpful and will accelerate things. In this way, your own light will quickly grow stronger. When a log that has only just started to burn is placed next to one that is burning fiercely, and after a while they are separated again, the first log will be burning with much greater intensity. After all, it is the same fire. To be such a fire is one of the functions of a spiritual teacher. Some therapists may also be able to fulfill that function, provided that they have gone beyond the level of mind and can create and sustain a state of intense conscious presence while they are working with you.

THE ORIGIN OF FEAR

You mentioned fear as being part of our basic underlying emotional pain. How does fear arise, and why is there so much of it in people's lives? And isn't a certain amount of fear just healthy self-protection? If I didn't have a fear of fire, I might put my hand in it and get burned.

The reason why you don't put your hand in the fire is not because of fear, it's because you know that you'll get burned. You don't need fear to avoid unnecessary danger — just a minimum of intelligence and common sense. For

such practical matters, it is useful to apply the lessons learned in the past. Now if someone *threatened* you with fire or with physical violence, you might experience something like fear. This is an instinctive shrinking back from danger, but not the psychological condition of fear that we are talking about here. The psychological condition of fear is divorced from any concrete and true immediate danger. It comes in many forms: unease, worry, anxiety, nervousness, tension, dread, phobia, and so on. This kind of psychological fear is always of something that *might* happen, not of something that is happening now. *You* are in the here and now, while your mind is in the future. This creates an anxiety gap. And if you are identified with your mind and have lost touch with the power and simplicity of the Now, that anxiety gap will be your constant companion. You can always cope with the present moment, but you cannot cope with something that is only a mind projection — you cannot cope with the future.

Moreover, as long as you are identified with your mind, the ego runs your life, as I pointed out earlier. Because of its phantom nature, and despite elaborate defense mechanisms, the ego is very vulnerable and insecure, and it sees itself as constantly under threat. This, by the way, is the case even if the ego is outwardly very confident. Now remember that an emotion is the body's reaction to your mind. What message is the body receiving continuously from the ego, the false, mind-made self? Danger, I am under threat. And what is the emotion generated by this continuous message? Fear, of course.

Fear seems to have many causes. Fear of loss, fear of failure, fear of being hurt, and so on, but ultimately all fear is the ego's fear of death, of annihilation. To the ego, death is always just around the corner. In this mind-identified state, fear of death affects every aspect of your life. For example, even such a seemingly trivial and "normal" thing as the compulsive need to be right in an argument and make the other person wrong — defending the mental position with which you have identified — is due to the fear of death. If you identify with a mental position, then if you are wrong, your mind-based sense of self is seriously threatened with annihilation. So you as the ego cannot afford to be wrong. To be wrong is to die. Wars have been fought over this, and countless relationships have broken down.

Once you have disidentified from your mind, whether you are right or wrong makes no difference to your sense of self at all, so the forcefully compulsive and deeply unconscious need to be right, which is a form of violence, will no longer be there. You can state clearly and firmly how you feel or what you think, but there will be no aggressiveness or defensiveness about it. Your sense of self is then derived from a deeper and truer place within yourself, not from

the mind. Watch out for any kind of defensiveness within yourself. What are you defending? An illusory identity, an image in your mind, a fictitious entity. By making this pattern conscious, by witnessing it, you disidentify from it. In the light of your consciousness, the unconscious pattern will then quickly dissolve. This is the end of all arguments and power games, which are so corrosive to relationships. Power over others is weakness disguised as strength. True power is within, and it is available to you now.

So anyone who is identified with their mind and, therefore, disconnected from their true power, their deeper self rooted in Being, will have fear as their constant companion. The number of people who have gone beyond mind is as yet extremely small, so you can assume that virtually everyone you meet or know lives in a state of fear. Only the intensity of it varies. It fluctuates between anxiety and dread at one end of the scale and a vague unease and distant sense of threat at the other. Most people become conscious of it only when it takes on one of its more acute forms.

THE EGO'S SEARCH FOR WHOLENESS

Another aspect of the emotional pain that is an intrinsic part of the egoic mind is a deep-seated sense of lack or incompleteness, of not being whole. In some people, this is conscious, in others unconscious. If it is conscious, it manifests as the unsettling and constant feeling of not being worthy or good enough. If it is unconscious, it will only be felt indirectly as an intense craving, wanting and needing. In either case, people will often enter into a compulsive pursuit of ego-gratification and things to identify with in order to fill this hole they feel within. So they strive after possessions, money, success, power, recognition, or a special relationship, basically so that they can feel better about themselves, feel more complete. But even when they attain all these things, they soon find that the hole is still there, that it is bottomless. Then they are really in trouble, because they cannot delude themselves anymore. Well, they can and do, but it gets more difficult.

As long as the egoic mind is running your life, you cannot truly be at ease; you cannot be at peace or fulfilled except for brief intervals when you obtained what you wanted, when a craving has just been fulfilled. Since the ego is a derived sense of self, it needs to identify with external things. It needs to be both defended and fed constantly. The most common ego identifications have to do with possessions, the work you do, social status and recognition, knowledge and education, physical appearance, special abilities, relationships, personal and family history, belief systems, and often also political, nationalistic, racial, religious, and other collective identifications. None of

these is you.

Do you find this frightening? Or is it a relief to know this? All of these things you will have to relinquish sooner or later. Perhaps you find it as yet hard to believe, and I am certainly not asking you to *believe* that your identity cannot be found in any of those things. You will *know* the truth of it for yourself. You will know it at the latest when you feel death approaching. Death is a stripping away of all that is not you. The secret of life is to "die before you die" — and find that there is no death.

CHAPTER THREE

MOVING DEEPLY INTO THE NOW

DON'T SEEK YOUR SELF IN THE MIND

I feel that there is still a great deal I need to learn about the workings of my mind before I can get anywhere near full consciousness or spiritual enlightenment.

No, you don't. The problems of the mind cannot be solved on the level of the mind. Once you have understood the basic dysfunction, there isn't really much else that you need to learn or understand. Studying the complexities of the mind may make you a good psychologist, but doing so won't take you beyond the mind, just as the study of madness isn't enough to create sanity. You have already understood the basic mechanics of the unconscious state: identification with the mind, which creates a false self, the ego, as a substitute for your true self rooted in Being. You become as a "branch cut off from the vine," as Jesus puts it.

The ego's needs are endless. It feels vulnerable and threatened and so lives in a state of fear and want. Once you know how the basic dysfunction operates, there is no need to explore all its countless manifestations, no need to make it into a complex personal problem. The ego, of course, loves that. It is always seeking for something to attach itself to in order to uphold and strengthen its illusory sense of self, and it will readily attach itself to your problems. This is why, for so many people, a large part of their sense of self is intimately connected with their problems. Once this has happened, the last thing they want is to become free of them; that would mean loss of self. There can be a great deal of unconscious ego investment in pain and suffering.

So once you recognize the root of unconsciousness as identification with the mind, which of course includes the emotions, you step out of it. You become *present*. When you are present, you can allow the mind to be as it is without getting entangled in it. The mind in itself is not dysfunctional. It is a wonderful tool. Dysfunction sets in when you seek your self in it and mistake

it for who you are. It then becomes the *egoic* mind and takes over your whole life.

END THE DELUSION OF TIME

It seems almost impossible to disidentify from the mind. We are all immersed in it. How do you teach a fish to fly?

Here is the key: End the delusion of time. Time and mind are inseparable. Remove time from the mind and it stops — unless you choose to use it.

To be identified with your mind is to be trapped in time: the compulsion to live almost exclusively through memory and anticipation. This creates an endless preoccupation with past and future and an unwillingness to honor and acknowledge the present moment and *allow it to be*. The compulsion arises because the past gives you an identity and the future holds the promise of salvation, of fulfillment in whatever form. Both are illusions.

But without a sense of time, how would we function in this world? There would be no goals to strive toward anymore. I wouldn't even know who I am, because my past makes me who I am today. I think time is something very precious, and we need to learn to use it wisely rather than waste it.

Time isn't precious at all, because it is an illusion. What you perceive as precious is not time but the one point that is out of time: the Now. That is precious indeed. The more you are focused on time — past and future — the more you miss the Now, the most precious thing there is.

Why is it the most precious thing? Firstly, because it is the *only* thing. It's all there is. The eternal present is the space within which your whole life unfolds, the one factor that remains constant. Life is now. There was never a time when your life was *not* now, nor will there ever be. Secondly, the Now is the only point that can take you beyond the limited confines of the mind. It is your only point of access into the timeless and formless realm of Being.

NOTHING EXISTS OUTSIDE THE NOW

Aren't past and future just as real, sometimes even more real, than the present? After all, the past determines who we are, as well as how we perceive and behave in the present. And our future goals determine which actions we take in the present.

You haven't yet grasped the essence of what I am saying because you are trying to understand it mentally. The mind cannot understand this. Only *you* can. Please just listen.

Have you ever experienced, done, thought, or felt anything outside the Now? Do you think you ever will? Is it possible for anything to happen or *be* outside the Now? The answer is obvious, is it not?

Nothing ever happened in the past; it happened in the Now.

Nothing will ever happen in the future; it will happen in the Now.

What you think of as the past is a memory trace, stored in the mind, of a former Now. When you remember the past, you reactivate a memory trace — and you do so now. The future is an imagined Now, a projection of the mind. When the future comes, it comes as the Now. When you think about the future, you do it now. Past and future obviously have no reality of their own. Just as the moon has no light of its own, but can only reflect the light of the sun, so are past and future only pale reflections of the light, power, and reality of the eternal present. Their reality is "borrowed" from the Now.

The essence of what I am saying here cannot be understood by the mind. The moment you grasp it, there is a shift in consciousness from mind to Being, from time to presence. Suddenly, everything feels alive, radiates energy, emanates Being.

THE KEY TO THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION

In life-threatening emergency situations, the shift in consciousness from time to presence sometimes happens naturally. The personality that has a past and a future momentarily recedes and is replaced by an intense conscious presence, very still but very alert at the same time. Whatever response is needed then arises out of that state of consciousness.

The reason why some people love to engage in dangerous activities, such as

mountain climbing, car racing, and so on, although they may not be aware of it, is that it forces them into the Now — that intensely alive state that is free of time, free of problems, free of thinking, free of the burden of the personality. Slipping away from the present moment even for a second may mean death. Unfortunately, they come to depend on a particular activity to be in that state. But you don't need to climb the north face of the Eiger. You can enter that state now.

Since ancient times, spiritual masters of all traditions have pointed to the Now as the key to the spiritual dimension. Despite this, it seems to have remained a secret. It is certainly not taught in churches and temples. If you go to a church, you may hear readings from the Gospels such as "Take no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself," or "Nobody who puts his hands to the plow and *looks back* is fit for the Kingdom of God." Or you might hear the passage about the beautiful flowers that are not anxious about tomorrow but live with ease in the timeless Now and are provided for abundantly by God. The depth and radical nature of these teachings are not recognized. No one seems to realize that they are meant to be lived and so bring about a profound inner transformation.

The whole essence of Zen consists in walking along the razor's edge of Now — to be so utterly, so completely *present* that no problem, no suffering, nothing that is not *who you are* in your essence, can survive in you. In the Now, in the absence of time, all your problems dissolve. Suffering needs time; it cannot survive in the Now.

The great Zen master Rinzai, in order to take his students' attention away from time, would often raise his finger and slowly ask: "What, at this moment, is lacking?" A powerful question that does not require an answer on the level of the mind. It is designed to take your attention deeply into the Now. A similar question in the Zen tradition is this: "If not now, when?"

The Now is also central to the teaching of Sufism, the mystical branch of Islam. Sufis have a saying: "The Sufi is the son of time present." And Rumi, the great poet and teacher of Sufism, declares: "Past and future veil God from our sight; burn up both of them with fire."

Meister Eckhart, the thirteenth-century spiritual teacher, summed it all up beautifully: "Time is what keeps the light from reaching us. There is no greater obstacle to God than time."

ACCESSING THE POWER OF THE NOW

A moment ago, when you talked about the eternal present and the unreality of past and future, I found myself looking at that tree outside the window. I had looked at it a few times before, but this time it was different. The external perception had not changed much, except that the colors seemed brighter and more vibrant. But there was now an added dimension to it. This is hard to explain. I don't know how, but I was aware of something invisible that I felt was the essence of that tree, its inner spirit, if you like. And somehow I was part of that. I realize now that I hadn't truly seen the tree before, just a flat and dead image of it. When I look at the tree now, some of that awareness is still present, but I can feel it slipping away. You see, the experience is already receding into the past. Can something like this ever be more than a fleeting glimpse?

You were free of time for a moment. You moved into the Now and therefore perceived the tree without the screen of mind. The awareness of Being became part of your perception. With the timeless dimension comes a different kind of knowing, one that does not "kill" the spirit that lives within every creature and every thing. A knowing that does not destroy the sacredness and mystery of life but contains a deep love and reverence for all that *is*. A knowing of which the mind knows nothing.

The mind cannot know the tree. It can only know facts or information *about* the tree. My mind cannot know *you*, only labels, judgments, facts, and

opinions *about* you. Being alone knows directly.

There is a place for mind and mind knowledge. It is in the practical realm of day-to-day living. However, when it takes over all aspects of your life, including your relationships with other human beings and with nature, it becomes a monstrous parasite that, unchecked, may well end up killing all life on the planet and finally itself by killing its host.

You have had a glimpse of how the timeless can transform your perceptions. But an experience is not enough, no matter how beautiful or profound. What is needed and what we are concerned with is a permanent shift in consciousness.

So break the old pattern of present-moment denial and present-moment resistance. Make it your practice to withdraw attention from past and future whenever they are not needed. Step out of the time dimension as much as possible in everyday life. If you find it hard to enter the Now directly, start by observing the habitual tendency of your mind to want to escape from the Now. You will observe that the future is usually imagined as either better or worse than the present. If the imagined future is better, it gives you hope or pleasurable anticipation. If it is worse, it creates anxiety. Both are illusory. Through self-observation, more *presence* comes into your life automatically. The moment you realize you are not present, you *are* present. Whenever you are able to observe your mind, you are no longer trapped in it. Another factor has come in, something that is not of the mind: the witnessing presence.

Be present as the watcher of your mind — of your thoughts and emotions as well as your reactions in various situations. Be at least as interested in your reactions as in the situation or person that causes you to react. Notice also how often your attention is in the past or future. Don't judge or analyze what you observe. Watch the thought, feel the emotion, observe the reaction. Don't make a personal problem out of them. You will then feel something more powerful than any of those things that you observe: the still, observing presence itself behind the content of your mind, the silent watcher.

Intense presence is needed when certain situations trigger a reaction with a strong emotional charge, such as when your self-image is threatened, a challenge comes into your life that triggers fear, things "go wrong," or an

emotional complex from the past is brought up. In those instances, the tendency is for you to become "unconscious." The reaction or emotion takes you over — you "become" it. You act it out. You justify, make wrong, attack, defend. . .except that it isn't you, it's the reactive pattern, the mind in its habitual survival mode.

Identification with the mind gives it more energy; observation of the mind withdraws energy from it. Identification with the mind creates more time; observation of the mind opens up the dimension of the timeless. The energy that is withdrawn from the mind turns into presence. Once you can feel what it means to be present, it becomes much easier to simply choose to step out of the time dimension whenever time is not needed for practical purposes and move more deeply into the Now. This does not impair your ability to use time — past or future — when you need to refer to it for practical matters. Nor does it impair your ability to use your mind. In fact, it enhances it. When you do use your mind, it will be sharper, more focused.

LETTING GO OF PSYCHOLOGICAL TIME

Learn to use time in the practical aspects of your life — we may call this "clock time" — but immediately return to present-moment awareness when those practical matters have been dealt with. In this way, there will be no buildup of "psychological time," which is identification with the past and continuous compulsive projection into the future.

Clock time is not just making an appointment or planning a trip. It includes learning from the past so that we don't repeat the same mistakes over and over. Setting goals and working toward them. Predicting the future by means of patterns and laws, physical, mathematical and so on, learned from the past and taking appropriate action on the basis of our predictions.

But even here, within the sphere of practical living, where we cannot do without reference to past and future, the present moment remains the essential factor: Any lesson from the past becomes relevant and is applied *now*. Any planning as well as working toward achieving a particular goal is done *now*.

The enlightened person's main focus of attention is always the Now, but they are still peripherally aware of time. In other words, they continue to use clock time but are free of psychological time.

Be alert as you practice this so that you do not unwittingly transform clock time into psychological time. For example, if you made a mistake in the past and learn from it now, you are using clock time. On the other hand, if you

dwell on it mentally, and self-criticism, remorse, or guilt come up, then you are making the mistake into "me" and "mine": You make it part of your sense of self, and it has become psychological time, which is always linked to a false sense of identity. Nonforgiveness necessarily implies a heavy burden of psychological time.

If you set yourself a goal and work toward it, you are using clock time. You are aware of where you want to go, but you honor and give your fullest attention to the step that you are taking at this moment. If you then become excessively focused on the goal, perhaps because you are seeking happiness, fulfillment, or a more complete sense of self in it, the Now is no longer honored. It becomes reduced to a mere stepping stone to the future, with no intrinsic value. Clock time then turns into psychological time. Your life's journey is no longer an adventure, just an obsessive need to arrive, to attain, to "make it." You no longer see or smell the flowers by the wayside either, nor are you aware of the beauty and the miracle of life that unfolds all around you when you are present in the Now.

I can see the supreme importance of the Now, but I cannot quite go along with you when you say that time is a complete illusion.

When I say "time is an illusion," my intention is not to make a philosophical statement. I am just reminding you of a simple fact — a fact so obvious that you may find it hard to grasp and may even find it meaningless — but once fully realized, it can cut like a sword through all the mind-created layers of complexity and "problems." Let me say it again: the present moment is all you ever have. There is never a time when your life is not "this moment." Is this not a fact?

THE INSANITY OF PSYCHOLOGICAL TIME

You will not have any doubt that psychological time is a mental disease if you look at its collective manifestations. They occur, for example, in the form of ideologies such as communism, national socialism or any nationalism, or rigid religious belief systems, which operate under the implicit assumption that the highest good lies in the future and that therefore the end justifies the means. The end is an idea, a point in the mind-projected future, when salvation in

whatever form — happiness, fulfillment, equality, liberation, and so on — will be attained. Not infrequently, the means of getting there are the enslavement, torture, and murder of people in the present.

For example, it is estimated that as many as fifty million people were murdered to further the cause of communism, to bring about a "better world" in Russia, China, and other countries.[2] This is a chilling example of how belief in a future heaven creates a present hell. Can there be any doubt that psychological time is a serious and dangerous mental illness?

How does this mind pattern operate in *your* life? Are you always trying to get somewhere other than where you are? Is most of your *doing* just a means to an end? Is fulfillment always just around the corner or confined to short-lived pleasures, such as sex, food, drink, drugs, or thrills and excitement? Are you always focused on becoming, achieving, and attaining, or alternatively chasing some new thrill or pleasure? Do you believe that if you acquire more things you will become more fulfilled, good enough, or psychologically complete? Are you waiting for a man or woman to give meaning to your life?

In the normal, mind-identified or unenlightened state of consciousness, the power and infinite creative potential that lie concealed in the Now are completely obscured by psychological time. Your life then loses its vibrancy, its freshness, its sense of wonder. The old patterns of thought, emotion, behavior, reaction, and desire are acted out in endless repeat performances, a script in your mind that gives you an identity of sorts but distorts or covers up the reality of the Now. The mind then creates an obsession with the future as an escape from the unsatisfactory present.

NEGATIVITY AND SUFFERING HAVE THEIR ROOTS IN TIME

But the belief that the future will be better than the present is not always an illusion. The present can *be dreadful, and things* can *get better in the future, and often they do.*

Usually, the future is a replica of the past. Superficial changes are possible, but *real* transformation is rare and depends upon whether you can become present enough to dissolve the past by accessing the power of the Now. What you perceive as future is an intrinsic part of your state of consciousness now. If your mind carries a heavy burden of past, you will experience more of the same. The past perpetuates itself through lack of presence. The quality of your consciousness at this moment is what shapes the future — which, of course, can only be experienced as the Now.

You may win ten million dollars, but that kind of change is no more than skin deep. You would simply continue to act out the same conditioned patterns in more luxurious surroundings. Humans have learned to split the atom. Instead of killing ten or twenty people with a wooden club, one person can now kill a million just by pushing a button. Is that *real* change?

If it is the quality of your consciousness at this moment that determines the future, then what is it that determines the quality of your consciousness? Your degree of presence. So the only place where true change can occur and where the past can be dissolved is the Now.

All negativity is caused by an accumulation of psychological time and denial of the present. Unease, anxiety, tension, stress, worry — all forms of fear — are caused by too much future, and not enough presence. Guilt, regret, resentment, grievances, sadness, bitterness, and all forms of nonforgiveness are caused by too much past, and not enough presence. Most people find it difficult to believe that a state of consciousness totally free of all negativity is possible. And yet this is the liberated state to which all spiritual teachings point. It is the promise of salvation, not in an illusory future but right here and now.

You may find it hard to recognize that time is the cause of your suffering or your problems. You believe that they are caused by specific situations in your life, and seen from a conventional viewpoint, this is true. But until you have dealt with the basic problem-making dysfunction of the mind — its attachment to past and future and denial of the Now — problems are actually interchangeable. If all your problems or perceived causes of suffering or unhappiness were miraculously removed for you today, but you had not become more present, more conscious, you would soon find yourself with a similar set of problems or causes of suffering, like a shadow that follows you wherever you go. Ultimately, there is only one problem: the time-bound mind itself.

I cannot believe that I could ever reach a point where I am completely free of my problems.

You are right. You can never *reach* that point because you *are* at that point *now*.

There is no salvation in time. You cannot be free in the future. Presence is the key to freedom, so you can only be free now.

FINDING THE LIFE UNDERNEATH YOUR LIFE SITUATION

I don't see how I can be free now. As it happens, I am extremely unhappy with my life at the moment. This is a fact, and I would be deluding myself if I tried to convince myself that all is well when it definitely isn't. To me, the present moment is very unhappy; it is not liberating at all. What keeps me going is the hope or possibility of some improvement in the future.

You think that your attention is in the present moment when it's actually taken up completely by time. You cannot be both unhappy *and* fully present in the Now.

What you refer to as your "life" should more accurately be called your "life situation." It is psychological time: past and future. Certain things in the past didn't go the way you wanted them to go. You are still resisting what happened in the past, and now you are resisting what *is*. Hope is what keeps you going, but hope keeps you focused on the future, and this continued focus perpetuates your denial of the Now and therefore your unhappiness.

It is true that my present life situation is the result of things that happened in the past, but it is still my present situation, and being stuck in it is what makes me unhappy.

Forget about your life situation for a while and pay attention to your *life.*

What is the difference?

Your life situation exists in time.

Your life is now.

Your life situation is mind-stuff.

Your life is real.

Find the "narrow gate that leads to life." It is called the Now. Narrow your life down to this moment. Your life situation may be full of problems — most life situations are — but find out if you have any problem at this moment. Not tomorrow or in ten minutes, but now. Do you have a problem now?

When you are full of problems, there is no room for anything new to enter, no room for a solution. So whenever you can, make some room, create some space, so that you find the life underneath your life situation.

Use your senses fully. Be where you are. Look around. Just look, don't interpret. See the light, shapes, colors, textures. Be aware of the silent presence of each thing. Be aware of the space that allows everything to be. Listen to the sounds; don't judge them. Listen to the silence underneath the sounds. Touch something — anything — and feel and acknowledge its Being. Observe the rhythm of your breathing; feel the air flowing in and out, feel the life energy inside your body. Allow everything to be, within and without. Allow the "isness" of all things. Move deeply into the Now.

You are leaving behind the deadening world of mental abstraction, of time. You are getting out of the insane mind that is draining you of life energy, just as it is slowly poisoning and destroying the Earth. You are awakening out of the dream of time into the present.

ALL PROBLEMS ARE ILLUSIONS OF THE MIND

It feels as if a heavy burden has been lifted. A sense of lightness. I feel clear. . . but my problems are still there waiting for me, aren't they? They haven't been solved. Am I not just temporarily evading them?

If you found yourself in paradise, it wouldn't be long before your mind would say "yes, but. . . ." Ultimately, this is not about solving your problems. It's about realizing that there *are* no problems. Only situations — to be dealt with now, or to be left alone and accepted as part of the "isness" of the present moment until they change or *can* be dealt with. Problems are mind-made and need time to survive. They cannot survive in the actuality of the Now.

Focus your attention on the Now and tell me what problem you have at this moment.

I am not getting any answer because it is impossible to have a problem when your attention is fully in the Now. A situation that needs to be either dealt with or accepted — yes. Why make it into a problem? Why make anything into a problem? Isn't life challenging enough as it is? What do you need problems for? The mind unconsciously loves problems because they give you an identity of sorts. This is normal, and it is insane. "Problem" means that you are dwelling on a situation mentally without there being a true intention or possibility of taking action now and that you are unconsciously making it part of your sense of self. You become so overwhelmed by your life situation that you lose your sense of life, of Being. Or you are carrying in your mind the insane burden of a hundred things that you will or may have to do in the future instead of focusing your attention on the one thing that you *can* do now.

When you create a problem, you create pain. All it takes is a simple choice, a simple decision: no matter what happens, I will create no more pain for myself. I will create no more problems. Although it is a simple choice, it is also very radical. You won't make that choice unless you are truly fed up with suffering, unless you have truly had enough. And you won't be able to go through with it unless you access the power of the Now. If you create no more pain for yourself, then you create no more pain for others. You also no longer contaminate the beautiful Earth, your inner space, and the collective human psyche with the negativity of problem-making.

If you have ever been in a life-or-death emergency situation, you will know that it wasn't a problem. The mind didn't have *time* to fool around and make it into a problem. In a true emergency, the mind stops; you become totally present in the Now, and something infinitely more powerful takes over. This is why there are many reports of ordinary people suddenly becoming capable of incredibly courageous deeds. In any emergency, either you survive or you don't. Either way, it is not a problem.

Some people get angry when they hear me say that problems are illusions. I am threatening to take away their sense of who they are. They have invested much time in a false sense of self. For many years, they have unconsciously defined their whole identity in terms of their problems or their suffering. Who

would they be without it?

A great deal of what people say, think, or do is actually motivated by fear, which of course is always linked with having your focus on the future and being out of touch with the Now. As there are no problems in the Now, there is no fear either.

Should a situation arise that you need to deal with now, your action will be clear and incisive if it arises out of present-moment awareness. It is also more likely to be effective. It will not be a reaction coming from the past conditioning of your mind but an intuitive response to the situation. In other instances, when the time-bound mind would have reacted, you will find it more effective to do nothing — just stay centered in the Now.

A QUANTUM LEAP IN THE EVOLUTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

I have had glimpses of this state of freedom from mind and time that you describe, but past and future are so overwhelmingly strong that I cannot keep them out for long.

The time-bound mode of consciousness is deeply embedded in the human psyche. But what we are doing here is part of a profound transformation that is taking place in the collective consciousness of the planet and beyond: the awakening of consciousness from the dream of matter, form, and separation. The ending of time. We are breaking mind patterns that have dominated human life for eons. Mind patterns that have created unimaginable suffering on a vast scale. I am not using the word evil. It is more helpful to call it unconsciousness or insanity.

This breaking up of the old mode of consciousness or rather unconsciousness: is it something we have to do *or will it happen anyway? I mean, is this change inevitable?*

That's a question of perspective. The doing and the happening is in fact a single process; because you are one with the totality of consciousness, you cannot separate the two. But there is no absolute guarantee that humans will make it. The process isn't inevitable or automatic. Your cooperation is an essential part of it. However you look at it, it is a quantum leap in the evolution of consciousness, as well as our only chance of survival as a race.

THE JOY OF BEING

To alert you that you have allowed yourself to be taken over by psychological time, you can use a simple criterion. Ask yourself: Is there joy, ease, and

lightness in what I am doing? If there isn't, then time is covering up the present moment, and life is perceived as a burden or a struggle.

If there is no joy, ease, or lightness in what you are doing, it does not necessarily mean that you need to change *what* you are doing. It may be sufficient to change the *how*. "How" is always more important than "what." See if you can give much more attention to the *doing* than to the result that you want to achieve through it. Give your fullest attention to whatever the moment presents. This implies that you also completely accept what *is*, because you cannot give your full attention to something and at the same time resist it.

As soon as you honor the present moment, all unhappiness and struggle dissolve, and life begins to flow with joy and ease. When you act out of present-moment awareness, whatever you do becomes imbued with a sense of quality, care, and love — even the most simple action.

So do not be concerned with the fruit of your action — just give attention to the action itself. The fruit will come of its own accord. This is a powerful spiritual practice. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, one of the oldest and most beautiful spiritual teachings in existence, nonattachment to the fruit of your action is called Karma Yoga. It is described as the path of "consecrated action."

When the compulsive striving away from the Now ceases, the joy of Being flows into everything you do. The moment your attention turns to the Now, you feel a presence, a stillness, a peace. You no longer depend on the future for fulfillment and satisfaction — you don't look to it for salvation. Therefore, you are not attached to the results. Neither failure nor success has the power to change your inner state of Being. You have found the life underneath your life situation.

In the absence of psychological time, your sense of self is derived from Being, not from your personal past. Therefore, the psychological need to become anything other than who you are already is no longer there. In the world, on the level of your life situation, you may indeed become wealthy, knowledgeable, successful, free of this or that, but in the deeper dimension of Being you are complete and whole *now*.

In that state of wholeness, would we still be able or willing to pursue external goals?

Of course, but you will not have illusory expectations that anything or anybody in the future will save you or make you happy. As far as your life situation is concerned, there may be things to be attained or acquired. That's the world of form, of gain and loss. Yet on a deeper level you are already complete, and when you realize that, there is a playful, joyous energy behind what you do. Being free of psychological time, you no longer pursue your goals with grim determination, driven by fear, anger, discontent, or the need to become someone. Nor will you remain inactive through fear of failure, which to the ego is loss of self. When your deeper sense of self is derived from Being, when you are free of "becoming" as a psychological need, neither your happiness nor your sense of self depends on the outcome, and so there is freedom from fear. You don't seek permanency where it cannot be found: in the world of form, of gain and loss, birth and death. You don't demand that situations, conditions, places, or people should make you happy, and then suffer when they don't live up to your expectations.

Everything is honored, but nothing matters. Forms are born and die, yet you are aware of the eternal underneath the forms. You know that "nothing real can be threatened."[3]

When this is your state of Being, how can you not succeed? You have succeeded already.

CHAPTER FOUR

MIND STRATEGIES FOR AVOIDING THE NOW

LOSS OF NOW: THE CORE DELUSION

Even if I completely accept that ultimately time is an illusion, what difference is that going to make in my life? I still have to live in a world that is completely dominated by time.

Intellectual agreement is just another belief and won't make much difference to your life. To realize this truth, you need to live it. When every cell of your body is so present that it feels vibrant with life, and when you can feel that life every moment as the joy of Being, then it can be said that you are free of time.

But I still have to pay the bills tomorrow, and I am still going to grow old and die just like everybody else. So how can I ever say that I am free of time?

Tomorrow's bills are not the problem. The dissolution of the physical body is not a problem. Loss of Now is the problem, or rather: the core delusion that turns a mere situation, event, or emotion into a personal problem and into suffering. Loss of Now is loss of Being.

To be free of time is to be free of the psychological need of past for your identity and future for your fulfillment. It represents the most profound transformation of consciousness that you can imagine. In some rare cases, this shift in consciousness happens dramatically and radically, once and for all. When it does, it usually comes about through total surrender in the midst of intense suffering. Most people, however, have to work at it.

When you have had your first few glimpses of the timeless state of consciousness, you begin to move back and forth between the dimensions of time and presence. First you become aware of just how rarely your attention is truly in the Now. But to *know* that you are *not* present is a great success: That knowing *is* presence — even if initially it only lasts for a couple of seconds of

clock time before it is lost again. Then, with increasing frequency, you *choose* to have the focus of your consciousness in the present moment rather than in the past or future, and whenever you realize that you had lost the Now, you are able to stay in it not just for a couple of seconds, but for longer periods as perceived from the external perspective of clock time. So before you are firmly established in the state of presence, which is to say before you are fully conscious, you shift back and forth for a while between consciousness and unconsciousness, between the state of presence and the state of mind identification. You lose the Now, and you return to it, again and again. Eventually, presence becomes your predominant state.

For most people, presence is experienced either never at all or only accidentally and briefly on rare occasions without being recognized for what it is. Most humans alternate not between consciousness and unconsciousness but only between different levels of unconsciousness.

ORDINARY UNCONSCIOUSNESS AND DEEP UNCONSCIOUSNESS

What do you mean by different levels of unconsciousness?

As you probably know, in sleep you constantly move between the phases of dreamless sleep and the dream state. Similarly, in wakefulness most people only shift between ordinary unconsciousness and deep unconsciousness. What I call ordinary unconsciousness means being identified with your thought processes and emotions, your reactions, desires, and aversions. It is most people's normal state. In that state, you are run by the egoic mind, and you are unaware of Being. It is a state not of acute pain or unhappiness but of an almost continuous low level of unease, discontent, boredom, or nervousness — a kind of background static. You may not realize this because it is so much a part of "normal" living, just as you are not aware of a continuous low background noise, such as the hum of an air conditioner, until it stops. When it suddenly does stop, there is a sense of relief. Many people use alcohol, drugs, sex, food, work, television, or even shopping as anesthetics in an unconscious attempt to remove the basic unease. When this happens, an activity that might be very enjoyable if used in moderation becomes imbued with a compulsive or addictive quality, and all that is ever achieved through it is extremely short-lived symptom relief.

The unease of ordinary unconsciousness turns into the pain of deep unconsciousness — a state of more acute and more obvious suffering or unhappiness — when things "go wrong," when the ego is threatened or there

is a major challenge, threat, or loss, real or imagined, in your life situation or conflict in a relationship. It is an intensified version of ordinary unconsciousness, different from it not in kind but in degree.

In ordinary unconsciousness, habitual resistance to or denial of what *is* creates the unease and discontent that most people accept as normal living. When this resistance becomes intensified through some challenge or threat to the ego, it brings up intense negativity such as anger, acute fear, aggression, depression, and so on. Deep unconsciousness often means that the pain-body has been triggered and that you have become identified with it. Physical violence would be impossible without deep unconsciousness. It can also occur easily whenever and wherever a crowd of people or even an entire nation generates a negative collective energy field.

The best indicator of your level of consciousness is how you deal with life's challenges when they come. Through those challenges, an already unconscious person tends to become more deeply unconscious, and a conscious person more intensely conscious. You can use a challenge to awaken you, or you can allow it to pull you into even deeper sleep. The dream of ordinary unconsciousness then turns into a nightmare.

If you cannot be present even in normal circumstances, such as when you are sitting alone in a room, walking in the woods, or listening to someone, then you certainly won't be able to stay conscious when something "goes wrong" or you are faced with difficult people or situations, with loss or the threat of loss. You will be taken over by a reaction, which ultimately is always some form of fear, and pulled into deep unconsciousness. Those challenges are your tests. Only the way in which you deal with them will show you and others where you are at as far as your state of consciousness is concerned, not how long you can sit with your eyes closed or what visions you see.

So it is essential to bring more consciousness into your life in ordinary situations when everything is going relatively smoothly. In this way, you grow in presence power. It generates an energy field in you and around you of a high vibrational frequency. No unconsciousness, no negativity, no discord or violence can enter that field and survive, just as darkness cannot survive in the presence of light.

When you learn to be the witness of your thoughts and emotions, which is an essential part of being present, you may be surprised when you first become aware of the background "static" of ordinary unconsciousness and realize how rarely, if ever, you are truly at ease within yourself. On the level of your thinking, you will find a great deal of resistance in the form of judgment,

discontent, and mental projection away from the Now. On the emotional level, there will be an undercurrent of unease, tension, boredom, or nervousness. Both are aspects of the mind in its habitual resistance mode.

WHAT ARE THEY SEEKING?

Carl Jung tells in one of his books of a conversation he had with a Native American chief who pointed out to him that in his perception most white people have tense faces, staring eyes, and a cruel demeanor. He said: "They are always seeking something. What are they seeking? The whites always want something. They are always uneasy and restless. We don't know what they want. We think they are mad."

The undercurrent of constant unease started long before the rise of Western industrial civilization, of course, but in Western civilization, which now covers almost the entire globe, including most of the East, it manifests in an unprecedentedly acute form. It was already there at the time of Jesus, and it was there six hundred years before that at the time of Buddha, and long before that. Why are you always anxious? Jesus asked his disciples. "Can anxious thought add a single day to your life?" And the Buddha taught that the root of suffering is to be found in our constant wanting and craving.

Resistance to the Now as a collective dysfunction is intrinsically connected to loss of awareness of Being and forms the basis of our dehumanized industrial civilization. Freud, by the way, also recognized the existence of this undercurrent of unease and wrote about it in his book *Civilization and Its Discontents*, but he did not recognize the true root of the unease and failed to realize that freedom from it is possible. This collective dysfunction has created a very unhappy and extraordinarily violent civilization that has become a threat not only to itself but also to all life on the planet.

DISSOLVING ORDINARY UNCONSCIOUSNESS

So how can we be free of this affliction?

Make it conscious. Observe the many ways in which unease, discontent, and tension arise within you through unnecessary judgment, resistance to what *is*, and denial of the Now. Anything unconscious dissolves when you shine the light of consciousness on it. Once you know how to dissolve ordinary unconsciousness, the light of your presence will shine brightly, and it will be much easier to deal with deep unconsciousness whenever you feel its gravitational pull. However, ordinary unconsciousness may not be easy to

detect initially because it is so normal.

Make it a habit to monitor your mental-emotional state through self-observation. "Am I at ease at this moment?" is a good question to ask yourself frequently. Or you can ask: "What's going on inside me at this moment?" Be at least as interested in what goes on inside you as what happens outside. If you get the inside right, the outside will fall into place. Primary reality is within, secondary reality without. But don't answer these questions immediately. Direct your attention inward. Have a look inside yourself. What kind of thoughts is your mind producing? What do you feel? Direct your attention into the body. Is there any tension? Once you detect that there is a low level of unease, the background static, see in what way you are avoiding, resisting, or denying life — by denying the Now. There are many ways in which people unconsciously resist the present moment. I will give you a few examples. With practice, your power of self-observation, of monitoring your inner state, will become sharpened.

FREEDOM FROM UNHAPPINESS

Do you resent doing what you are doing? It may be your job, or you may have agreed to do something and are doing it, but part of you resents and resists it. Are you carrying unspoken resentment toward a person close to you? Do you realize that the energy you thus emanate is so harmful in its effects that you are in fact contaminating yourself as well as those around you? Have a good look inside. Is there even the slightest trace of resentment, unwillingness? If there is, observe it on both the mental and the emotional levels. What thoughts is your mind creating around this situation? Then look at the emotion, which is the body's reaction to those thoughts. Feel the emotion. Does it feel pleasant or unpleasant? Is it an energy that you would actually *choose* to have inside you? Do you *have* a choice?

Maybe you *are* being taken advantage of, maybe the activity you are engaged in *is* tedious, maybe someone close to you *is* dishonest, irritating, or unconscious, but all this is irrelevant. Whether your thoughts and emotions about this situation are justified or not makes no difference. The fact is that you are resisting what *is*. You are making the present moment into an enemy. You are creating unhappiness, conflict between the inner and the outer. Your unhappiness is polluting not only your own inner being and those around you but also the collective human psyche of which you are an inseparable part. The pollution of the planet is only an outward reflection of an inner psychic pollution: millions of unconscious individuals not taking responsibility for their inner space.

Either stop doing what you are doing, speak to the person concerned and express fully what you feel, or drop the negativity that your mind has created around the situation and that serves no purpose whatsoever except to strengthen a false sense of self. Recognizing its futility is important. Negativity is never the optimum way of dealing with any situation. In fact, in most cases it keeps you stuck in it, blocking real change. Anything that is done with negative energy will become contaminated by it and in time give rise to more pain, more unhappiness. Furthermore, any negative inner state is contagious: Unhappiness spreads more easily than a physical disease. Through the law of resonance, it triggers and feeds latent negativity in others, unless they are immune — that is, highly conscious.

Are you polluting the world or cleaning up the mess? You are responsible for your inner space; nobody else is, just as you are responsible for the planet. As within, so without: If humans clear inner pollution, then they will also cease to create outer pollution.

How can we drop negativity, as you suggest?

By dropping it. How do you drop a piece of hot coal that you are holding in your hand? How do you drop some heavy and useless baggage that you are carrying? By recognizing that you don't want to suffer the pain or carry the burden anymore and then letting go of it.

Deep unconsciousness, such as the pain-body, or other deep pain, such as the loss of a loved one, usually needs to be transmuted through acceptance combined with the light of your presence — your sustained attention. Many patterns in ordinary unconsciousness, on the other hand, can simply be dropped once you know that you don't want them and don't need them anymore, once you realize that you have a choice, that you are not just a bundle of conditioned reflexes. All this implies that you are able to access the power of Now. Without it, you have no choice.

If you call some emotions negative, aren't you creating a mental polarity of good and bad, as you explained earlier?

No. The polarity was created at an earlier stage when your mind judged the present moment as bad; this judgment then created the negative emotion.

But if you call some emotions negative, aren't you really saying that they shouldn't be

there, that it's not okay to have those emotions? My understanding is that we should give ourselves permission to have whatever feelings come up, rather than judge them as bad or say that we shouldn't have them. It's okay to feel resentful; it's okay to be angry, irritated, moody, or whatever — otherwise, we get into repression, inner conflict, or denial. Everything is okay as it is.

Of course. Once a mind pattern, an emotion, or a reaction is there, accept it. You were not conscious enough to have a choice in the matter. That's not a judgment, just a fact. If you *had* a choice, or realized that you *do* have a choice, would you choose suffering or joy, ease or unease, peace or conflict? Would you choose a thought or feeling that cuts you off from your natural state of well-being, the joy of life within? Any such feeling I call negative, which simply means bad. Not in the sense that "You shouldn't have done that," but just plain factual bad, like feeling sick in the stomach.

How is it possible that humans killed in excess of one hundred million fellow humans in the twentieth century alone?[4] Humans inflicting pain of such magnitude on one another is beyond anything you can imagine. And that's not taking into account the mental, emotional and physical violence, the torture, pain, and cruelty they continue to inflict on each other as well as on other sentient beings on a daily basis.

Do they act in this way because they are in touch with their natural state, the joy of life within? Of course not. Only people who are in a deeply negative state, who feel very bad indeed, would create such a reality as a reflection of how they feel. Now they are engaged in destroying nature and the planet that sustains them. Unbelievable but true. Humans are a dangerously insane and very sick species. That's not a judgment. It's a fact. It is also a fact that the sanity *is* there underneath the madness. Healing and redemption are available right now.

Coming back specifically to what you said — it is certainly true that when you accept your resentment, moodiness, anger, and so on, you are no longer forced to act them out blindly, and you are less likely to project them onto others. But I wonder if you are not deceiving yourself. When you have been practicing acceptance for a while, as you have, there comes a point when you need to go on to the next stage, where those negative emotions are not created anymore. If you don't, your "acceptance" just becomes a mental label that allows your ego to continue to indulge in unhappiness and so strengthen its sense of separation from other people, your surroundings, your here and now. As you know, separation is the basis for the ego's sense of identity. True acceptance would transmute those feelings at once. And if you really knew deeply that

everything is "okay," as you put it, and which of course is true, then would you have those negative feelings in the first place? Without judgment, without resistance to what *is*, they would not arise. You have an idea in your mind that "everything is okay," but deep down you don't really believe it, and so the old mental-emotional patterns of resistance are still in place. That's what makes you feel bad.

That's okay, too.

Are you defending your right to be unconscious, your right to suffer? Don't worry: Nobody is going to take that away from you. Once you realize that a certain kind of food makes you sick, would you carry on eating that food and keep asserting that it is okay to be sick?

WHEREVER YOU ARE, BE THERE TOTALLY

Can you give some more examples of ordinary unconsciousness?

See if you can catch yourself complaining, in either speech or thought, about a situation you find yourself in, what other people do or say, your surroundings, your life situation, even the weather. To complain is always nonacceptance of what *is*. It invariably carries an unconscious negative charge. When you complain, you make yourself into a victim. When you speak out, you are in your power. So change the situation by taking action or by speaking out if necessary or possible; leave the situation or accept it. All else is madness.

Ordinary unconsciousness is always linked in some way with denial of the Now. The Now, of course, also implies the here. Are you resisting your here and now? Some people would always rather be somewhere else. Their "here" is never good enough. Through self-observation, find out if that is the case in your life. Wherever you are, be there totally. If you find your here and now intolerable and it makes you unhappy, you have three options: remove yourself from the situation, change it, or accept it totally. If you want to take responsibility for your life, you must choose one of those three options, and you must choose now. Then accept the consequences. No excuses. No negativity. No psychic pollution. Keep your inner space clear.

If you take any action — leaving or changing your situation — drop the negativity first, if at all possible. Action arising out of insight into what is required is more effective than action arising out of negativity.

Any action is often better than no action, especially if you have been stuck in

an unhappy situation for a long time. If it is a mistake, at least you learn something, in which case it's no longer a mistake. If you remain stuck, you learn nothing. Is fear preventing you from taking action? Acknowledge the fear, watch it, take your attention into it, be fully present with it. Doing so cuts the link between the fear and your thinking. *Don't let the fear rise up into your mind*. Use the power of the Now. Fear cannot prevail against it.

If there is truly nothing that you can do to change your here and now, and you can't remove yourself from the situation, then accept your here and now totally by dropping all inner resistance. The false, unhappy self that loves feeling miserable, resentful, or sorry for itself can then no longer survive. This is called surrender. Surrender is not weakness. There is great strength in it. Only a surrendered person has spiritual power. Through surrender, you will be free internally of the situation. You may then find that the situation changes without any effort on your part. In any case, you are free.

Or is there something that you "should" be doing but are not doing it? Get up and do it now. Alternatively, completely accept your inactivity, laziness, or passivity at this moment, if that is your choice. Go into it fully. Enjoy it. Be as lazy or inactive as you can. If you go into it fully and consciously, you will soon come out of it. Or maybe you won't. Either way, there is no inner conflict, no resistance, no negativity.

Are you stressed? Are you so busy getting to the future that the present is reduced to a means of getting there? Stress is caused by being "here" but wanting to be "there," or being in the present but wanting to be in the future. It's a split that tears you apart inside. To create and live with such an inner split is insane. The fact that everyone else is doing it doesn't make it any less insane. If you have to, you can move fast, work fast, or even run, without projecting yourself into the future and without resisting the present. As you move, work, run — do it totally. Enjoy the flow of energy, the high energy of that moment. Now you are no longer stressed, no longer splitting yourself in two. Just moving, running, working — and enjoying it. Or you can drop the whole thing and sit on a park bench. But when you do, watch your mind. It may say: "You should be working. You are wasting time." Observe the mind. Smile at it.

Does the past take up a great deal of your attention? Do you frequently talk and think about it, either positively or negatively? The great things that you have achieved, your adventures or experiences, or your victim story and the dreadful things that were done to you, or maybe what you did to someone else? Are your thought processes creating guilt, pride, resentment, anger,

regret, or self-pity? Then you are not only reinforcing a false sense of self but also helping to accelerate your body's aging process by creating an accumulation of past in your psyche. Verify this for yourself by observing those around you who have a strong tendency to hold on to the past.

Die to the past every moment. You don't need it. Only refer to it when it is absolutely relevant to the present. Feel the power of this moment and the fullness of Being. Feel your presence.

Are you worried? Do you have many "what if" thoughts? You are identified with your mind, which is projecting itself into an imaginary future situation and creating fear. There is no way that you can cope with such a situation, because it doesn't exist. It's a mental phantom. You can stop this health-and life-corroding insanity simply by acknowledging the present moment. Become aware of your breathing. Feel the air flowing in and out of your body. Feel your inner energy field. All that you ever have to deal with, cope with, in real life — as opposed to imaginary mind projections — is *this moment*. Ask yourself what "problem" you have right now, not next year, tomorrow, or five minutes from now. What is wrong with this moment? You can always cope with the Now, but you can never cope with the future — nor do you have to. The answer, the strength, the right action or the resource will be there when you need it, not before, not after.

"One day I'll make it." Is your goal taking up so much of your attention that you reduce the present moment to a means to an end? Is it taking the joy out of your doing? Are you waiting to start living? If you develop such a mind pattern, no matter what you achieve or get, the present will never be good enough; the future will always seem better. A perfect recipe for permanent dissatisfaction and nonfulfillment, don't you agree?

Are you a habitual "waiter"? How much of your life do you spend waiting? What I call "small-scale waiting" is waiting in line at the post office, in a traffic jam, at the airport, or waiting for someone to arrive, to finish work, and so on. "Large-scale waiting" is waiting for the next vacation, for a better job, for the children to grow up, for a truly meaningful relationship, for success, to make money, to be important, to become enlightened. It is not uncommon for people to spend their whole life waiting to start living.

Waiting is a state of mind. Basically, it means that you want the future; you don't want the present. You don't want what you've got, and you want what you haven't got. With every kind of waiting, you unconsciously create inner conflict between your here and now, where you don't want to be, and the projected future, where you want to be. This greatly reduces the quality of your life by making you lose the present.

There is nothing wrong with striving to improve your life situation. You can improve your life situation, but you cannot improve your life. Life is primary. Life is your deepest inner Being. It is already whole, complete, perfect. Your life situation consists of your circumstances and your experiences. There is nothing wrong with setting goals and striving to achieve things. The mistake lies in using it as a substitute for the feeling of life, for Being. The only point of access for that is the Now. You are then like an architect who pays no attention to the foundation of a building but spends a lot of time working on the superstructure.

For example, many people are waiting for prosperity. It cannot come in the future. When you honor, acknowledge, and fully accept your present reality — where you are, who you are, what you are doing right now — when you fully accept what you have got, you are grateful for what you have got, grateful for what *is*, grateful for Being. Gratitude for the present moment and the fullness of *life now* is true prosperity. It cannot come in the future. Then, in time, that prosperity manifests for you in various ways.

If you are dissatisfied with what you have got, or even frustrated or angry about your present lack, that may motivate you to become rich, but even if you do make millions, you will continue to experience the inner condition of lack, and deep down you will continue to feel unfulfilled. You may have many exciting experiences that money can buy, but they will come and go and always leave you with an empty feeling and the need for further physical or psychological gratification. You won't abide in Being and so feel the fullness of life now that alone is true prosperity.

So give up waiting as a state of mind. When you catch yourself slipping into waiting . . . snap out of it. Come into the present moment. Just be, and enjoy being. If you are present, there is never any need for you to wait for anything. So next time somebody says, "Sorry to have kept you waiting," you can reply, "That's all right, I wasn't waiting. I was just standing here enjoying myself — in joy in my self."

These are just a few of the habitual mind strategies for denying the present moment that are part of ordinary unconsciousness. They are easy to overlook

because they are so much a part of normal living: the background static of perpetual discontent. But the more you practice monitoring your inner mental-emotional state, the easier it will be to know when you have been trapped in past or future, which is to say unconscious, and to awaken out of the dream of time into the present. But beware: The false, unhappy self, based on mind identification, lives on time. It knows that the present moment is its own death and so feels very threatened by it. It will do all it can to take you out of it. It will try to keep you trapped in time.

THE INNER PURPOSE OF YOUR LIFE'S JOURNEY

I can see the truth of what you are saying, but I still think that we must have purpose on our life's journey; otherwise we just drift, and purpose means future, doesn't it? How do we reconcile that with living in the present?

When you are on a journey, it is certainly helpful to know where you are going or at least the general direction in which you are moving, but don't forget: The only thing that is ultimately real about your journey is the step that you are taking at this moment. That's all there ever is.

Your life's journey has an outer purpose and an inner purpose. The outer purpose is to arrive at your goal or destination, to accomplish what you set out to do, to achieve this or that, which, of course, implies future. But if your destination, or the steps you are going to take in the future, take up so much of your attention that they become more important to you than the step you are taking now, then you completely miss the journey's inner purpose, which has nothing to do with *where* you are going or *what* you are doing, but everything to do with *how*. It has nothing to do with future but everything to do with the quality of your consciousness at this moment. The outer purpose belongs to the horizontal dimension of space and time; the inner purpose concerns a deepening of your Being in the vertical dimension of the timeless Now. Your outer journey may contain a million steps; your inner journey only has one: the step you are taking right now. As you become more deeply aware of this one step, you realize that it already contains within itself all the other steps as well as the destination. This one step then becomes transformed into an expression of perfection, an act of great beauty and quality. It will have taken you into Being, and the light of Being will shine through it. This is both the purpose and the fulfillment of your inner journey, the journey into yourself.

Does it matter whether we achieve our outer purpose, whether we succeed or fail in the world?

It will matter to you as long as you haven't realized your inner purpose. After that, the outer purpose is just a game that you may continue to play simply because you enjoy it. It is also possible to fail completely in your outer purpose and at the same time totally succeed in your inner purpose. Or the other way around, which is actually more common: outer riches and inner poverty, or to "gain the world and lose your soul," as Jesus puts it. Ultimately, of course, *every* outer purpose is doomed to "fail" sooner or later, simply because it is subject to the law of impermanence of all things. The sooner you realize that your outer purpose cannot give you lasting fulfillment, the better. When you have seen the limitations of your outer purpose, you give up your unrealistic expectation that it should make you happy, and you make it subservient to your inner purpose.

THE PAST CANNOT SURVIVE IN YOUR PRESENCE

You mentioned that thinking or talking about the past unnecessarily is one of the ways in which we avoid the present. But apart from the past that we remember and perhaps identify with, isn't there another level of past within us that is much more deep-seated? I am talking about the unconscious past that conditions our lives, especially through early childhood experiences, perhaps even past-life experiences. And then there is our cultural conditioning, which has to do with where we live geographically and the historical time period in which we live. All these things determine how we see the world, how we react, what we think, what kind of relationships we have, how we live our lives. How could we ever become conscious of all that or get rid of it? How long would that take? And even if we did, what would there be left?

What is left when illusion ends?

There is no need to investigate the unconscious past in you except as it manifests at this moment as a thought, an emotion, a desire, a reaction, or an external event that happens to you. Whatever you need to know about the unconscious past in you, the challenges of the present will bring it out. If you delve into the past, it will become a bottomless pit: There is always more. You may think that you need more time to understand the past or become free of

it, in other words, that the future will eventually free you of the past. This is a delusion. Only the present can free you of the past. More time cannot free you of time. Access the power of Now. That is the key.

What is the power of Now?

None other than the power of your presence, your consciousness liberated from thought forms.

So deal with the past on the level of the present. The more attention you give to the past, the more you energize it, and the more likely you are to make a "self" out of it. Don't misunderstand: Attention is essential, but not to the past as past. Give attention to the present; give attention to your behavior, to your reactions, moods, thoughts, emotions, fears, and desires as they occur in the present. *There's* the past in you. If you can be present enough to watch all those things, not critically or analytically but nonjudgmentally, then you are dealing with the past and dissolving it through the power of your presence. You cannot find yourself by going into the past. You find yourself by coming into the present.

Isn't it helpful to understand the past and so understand why we do certain things, react in certain ways, or why we unconsciously create our particular kind of drama, patterns in relationships, and so on?

As you become more conscious of your present reality, you may suddenly get certain insights as to *why* your conditioning functions in those particular ways — for example, why your relationships follow certain patterns — and you may remember things that happened in the past or see them more clearly. That is fine and can be helpful, but it is not essential. What is essential is your conscious presence. *That* dissolves the past. That is the transformative agent. So don't seek to understand the past, but be as present as you can. The past cannot survive in your presence. It can only survive in your absence.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE STATE OF PRESENCE

IT'S NOT WHAT YOU THINK IT IS

You keep talking about the state of presence as the key. I think I understand it intellectually, but I don't know if I have ever truly experienced it. I wonder — is it what I think it is, or is it something entirely different?

It's not what you think it is! You can't think about presence, and the mind can't understand it. Understanding presence is *being* present.

Try a little experiment. Close your eyes and say to yourself: "I wonder what my next thought is going to be." Then become very alert and wait for the next thought. Be like a cat watching a mouse hole. What thought is going to come out of the mouse hole? Try it now.

Well?

I had to wait for quite a long time before a thought came in.

Exactly. As long as you are in a state of intense presence, you are free of thought. You are still, yet highly alert. The instant your conscious attention sinks below a certain level, thought rushes in. The mental noise returns; the stillness is lost. You are back in time.

To test their degree of presence, some Zen masters have been known to creep up on their students from behind and suddenly hit them with a stick. Quite a shock! If the student had been fully present and in a state of alertness, if he had "kept his loin girded and his lamp burning," which is one of the analogies

that Jesus uses for presence, he would have noticed the master coming up from behind and stopped him or stepped aside. But if he were hit, that would mean he was immersed in thought, which is to say absent, unconscious.

To stay present in everyday life, it helps to be deeply rooted within yourself; otherwise, the mind, which has incredible momentum, will drag you along like a wild river.

What do you mean by "rooted within yourself"?

It means to inhabit your body fully. To always have some of your attention in the inner energy field of your body. To feel the body from within, so to speak. Body awareness keeps you present. It anchors you in the Now (see chapter 6).

THE ESOTERIC MEANING OF "WAITING"

In a sense, the state of presence could be compared to waiting. Jesus used the analogy of waiting in some of his parables. This is not the usual bored or restless kind of waiting that is a denial of the present and that I spoke about already. It is not a waiting in which your attention is focused on some point in the future and the present is perceived as an undesirable obstacle that prevents you from having what you want. There is a qualitatively different kind of waiting, one that requires your total alertness. Something could happen at any moment, and if you are not absolutely awake, absolutely still, you will miss it. This is the kind of waiting Jesus talks about. In that state, all your attention is in the Now. There is none left for daydreaming, thinking, remembering, anticipating. There is no tension in it, no fear, just alert presence. You are present with your whole Being, with every cell of your body. In that state, the "you" that has a past and a future — the personality, if you like — is hardly there anymore. And yet nothing of value is lost. You are still essentially yourself. In fact, you are more fully yourself than you ever were before, or rather it is only *now* that you are truly yourself.

"Be like a servant waiting for the return of the master," says Jesus. The servant does not know at what hour the master is going to come. So he stays awake, alert, poised, still, lest he miss the master's arrival. In another parable, Jesus speaks of the five careless (unconscious) women who do not have enough oil (consciousness) to keep their lamps burning (stay present) and so miss the bridegroom (the Now) and don't get to the wedding feast (enlightenment). These five stand in contrast to the five wise women who have enough oil (stay conscious).

Even the men who wrote the Gospels did not understand the meaning of these parables, so the first misinterpretations and distortions crept in as they were written down. With subsequent erroneous interpretations, the real meaning was completely lost. These are parables not about the end of the world but about the end of psychological time. They point to the transcendence of the egoic mind and the possibility of living in an entirely new state of consciousness.

BEAUTY ARISES IN THE STILLNESS OF YOUR PRESENCE

What you have just described is something that I occasionally experience for brief moments when I am alone and surrounded by nature.

Yes. Zen masters use the word *satori* to describe a flash of insight, a moment of no-mind and total presence. Although *satori* is not a lasting transformation, be grateful when it comes, for it gives you a taste of enlightenment. You may, indeed, have experienced it many times without knowing what it is and realizing its importance. Presence is needed to become aware of the beauty, the majesty, the sacredness of nature. Have you ever gazed up into the infinity of space on a clear night, awestruck by the absolute stillness and inconceivable vastness of it? Have you listened, truly listened, to the sound of a mountain stream in the forest? Or to the song of a blackbird at dusk on a quiet summer evening? To become aware of such things, the mind needs to be still. You have to put down for a moment your personal baggage of problems, of past and future, as well as all your knowledge; otherwise, you will see but not see, hear but not hear. Your total presence is required.

Beyond the beauty of the external forms, there is more here: something that cannot be named, something ineffable, some deep, inner, holy essence. Whenever and wherever there is beauty, this inner essence shines through somehow. It only reveals itself to you when you are present. Could it be that this nameless essence and your presence are one and the same? Would it be there without your presence? Go deeply into it. Find out for yourself.

When you experienced those moments of presence, you likely didn't realize that you were briefly in a state of no mind. This is because the gap between that state and the influx of thought was too narrow. Your *satori* may only have

lasted for a few seconds before the mind came in, but it was there; otherwise, you would not have experienced the beauty. Mind can neither recognize nor create beauty. Only for a few seconds, while you were completely present, was that beauty or that sacredness there. Because of the narrowness of that gap and a lack of vigilance and alertness on your part, you were probably unable to see the fundamental difference between the perception, the thoughtless awareness of beauty, and the naming and interpreting of it as thought: The time gap was so small that it seemed to be a single process. The truth is, however, that the moment thought came in, all you had was a memory of it.

The wider the time gap between perception and thought, the more depth there is to you as a human being, which is to say the more conscious you are.

Many people are so imprisoned in their minds that the beauty of nature does not really exist for them. They might say, "What a pretty flower," but that's just a mechanical mental labeling. Because they are not still, not present, they don't truly see the flower, don't feel its essence, its holiness — just as they don't know themselves, don't feel their own essence, their own holiness.

Because we live in such a mind-dominated culture, most modern art, architecture, music, and literature are devoid of beauty, of inner essence, with very few exceptions. The reason is that the people who create those things cannot — even for a moment — free themselves from their mind. So they are never in touch with that place within where true creativity and beauty arise. The mind left to itself creates monstrosities, and not only in art galleries. Look at our urban landscapes and industrial wastelands. No civilization has ever produced so much ugliness.

REALIZING PURE CONSCIOUSNESS

Is presence the same as Being?

When you become conscious of Being, what is really happening is that Being becomes conscious of itself. When Being becomes conscious of itself — that's presence. Since Being, consciousness, and life are synonymous, we could say that presence means consciousness becoming conscious of itself, or life attaining self-consciousness. But don't get attached to the words, and don't make an effort to understand this. There is nothing that you need to understand before you can become present.

I do understand what you just said, but it seems to imply that Being, the ultimate transcendental reality, is not yet complete, that it is undergoing a process of

development. Does God need time for personal growth?

Yes, but only as seen from the limited perspective of the manifested universe. In the Bible, God declares: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, and I am the living One." In the timeless realm where God dwells, which is also *your* home, the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega, are one, and the essence of everything that ever has been and ever will be is eternally present in an unmanifested state of oneness and perfection — totally beyond anything the human mind can ever imagine or comprehend. In our world of seemingly separate forms, however, timeless perfection is an inconceivable concept. Here even consciousness, which is the light emanating from the eternal Source, seems to be subject to a process of development, but this is due to our limited perception. It is not so in absolute terms. Nevertheless, let me continue to speak for a moment about the evolution of consciousness in this world.

Everything that exists has Being, has God-essence, has some degree of consciousness. Even a stone has rudimentary consciousness; otherwise, it would not be, and its atoms and molecules would disperse. Everything is alive. The sun, the earth, plants, animals, humans — all are expressions of consciousness in varying degrees, consciousness manifesting as form.

The world arises when consciousness takes on shapes and forms, thought forms and material forms. Look at the millions of life forms on this planet alone. In the sea, on land, in the air — and then each life form is replicated millions of times. To what end? Is someone or something playing a game, a game with form? This is what the ancient seers of India asked themselves. They saw the world as *lila*, a kind of divine game that God is playing. The individual life forms are obviously not very important in this game. In the sea, most life forms don't survive for more than a few minutes after being born. The human form turns to dust pretty quickly too, and when it is gone it is as if it had never been. Is that tragic or cruel? Only if you create a separate identity for each form, if you forget that its consciousness is God-essence expressing itself in form. But you don't truly *know* that until you realize your own God-essence as pure consciousness.

If a fish is born in your aquarium and you call him John, write out a birth certificate, tell him about his family history, and two minutes later he gets eaten by another fish — that's tragic. But it's only tragic because you projected a separate self where there was none. You got hold of a fraction of a dynamic process, a molecular dance, and made a separate entity out of it.

Consciousness takes on the disguise of forms until they reach such complexity

that it completely loses itself in them. In present-day humans, consciousness is completely identified with its disguise. It only knows itself as form and therefore lives in fear of the annihilation of its physical or psychological form. This is the egoic mind, and this is where considerable dysfunction sets in. It now looks as if something had gone very wrong somewhere along the line of evolution. But even this is part of *lila*, the divine game. Finally, the pressure of suffering created by this apparent dysfunction forces consciousness to disidentify from form and awakens it from its dream of form: It regains self-consciousness, but it is at a far deeper level than when it lost it.

This process is explained by Jesus in his parable of the lost son, who leaves his father's home, squanders his wealth, becomes destitute, and is then forced by his suffering to return home. When he does, his father *loves him more* than before. The son's state is the same as it was before, yet not the same. It has an added dimension of depth. The parable describes a journey from unconscious perfection, through apparent imperfection and "evil" to conscious perfection.

Can you now see the deeper and wider significance of becoming present as the watcher of your mind? Whenever you watch the mind, you withdraw consciousness from mind forms, and it then becomes what we call the watcher or the witness. Consequently, the watcher — pure consciousness beyond form — becomes stronger, and the mental formations become weaker. When we talk about watching the mind we are personalizing an event that is truly of cosmic significance: Through you, consciousness is awakening out of its dream of identification with form and withdrawing from form. This foreshadows, but is already part of, an event that is probably still in the distant future as far as chronological time is concerned. The event is called — the end of the world.

When consciousness frees itself from its identification with physical and mental forms, it becomes what we may call pure or enlightened consciousness, or presence. This has already happened in a few individuals, and it seems destined to happen soon on a much larger scale, although there is no absolute guarantee that it *will* happen. Most humans are still in the grip of the egoic mode of consciousness: identified with their mind and run by their mind. If they do not free themselves from their mind in time, they will be destroyed by it. They will experience increasing confusion, conflict, violence, illness, despair, madness. Egoic mind has become like a sinking ship. If you don't get off, you will go down with it. The collective egoic mind is the most

dangerously insane and destructive entity ever to inhabit this planet. What do you think will happen on this planet if human consciousness remains unchanged?

Already for most humans, the only respite they find from their own minds is to occasionally revert to a level of consciousness below thought. Everyone does that every night during sleep. But this also happens to some extent through sex, alcohol, and other drugs that suppress excessive mind activity. If it weren't for alcohol, tranquilizers, antidepressants, as well as the illegal drugs, which are all consumed in vast quantities, the insanity of the human mind would become even more glaringly obvious than it is already. I believe that, if deprived of their drugs, a large part of the population would become a danger to themselves and others. These drugs, of course, simply keep you stuck in dysfunction. Their widespread use only delays the breakdown of the old mind structures and the emergence of higher consciousness. While individual users may get some relief from the daily torture inflicted on them by their minds, they are prevented from generating enough conscious presence to rise above thought and so find true liberation.

Falling back to a level of consciousness below mind, which is the pre-thinking level of our distant ancestors and of animals and plants, is not an option for us. There is no way back. If the human race is to survive, it will have to go on to the next stage. Consciousness is evolving throughout the universe in billions of forms. So even if we didn't make it, this wouldn't matter on a cosmic scale. No gain in consciousness is ever lost, so it would simply express itself through some other form. But the very fact that I am speaking here and you are listening or reading this is a clear sign that the new consciousness *is* gaining a foothold on the planet.

There is nothing personal in this: I am not teaching you. You are consciousness, and you are listening to yourself. There is an Eastern saying: "The teacher and the taught together create the teaching." In any case, the words in themselves are not important. They are not the Truth; they only point to it. I speak from presence, and as I speak, you may be able to join me in that state. Although every word that I use has a history, of course, and comes from the past, as all language does, the words that I speak to you now are carriers of the high-energy frequency of presence, quite apart from the meaning they convey as words.

Silence is an even more potent carrier of presence, so when you read this or listen to me speak, be aware of the silence between and underneath the words. Be aware of the gaps. To listen to the silence, wherever you are, is an easy and

direct way of becoming present. Even if there is noise, there is always some silence underneath and in between the sounds. Listening to the silence immediately creates stillness inside you. Only the stillness in you can perceive the silence outside. And what is stillness other than presence, consciousness freed from thought forms? Here is the living realization of what we have been talking about.

CHRIST: THE REALITY OF YOUR DIVINE PRESENCE

Don't get attached to any one word. You can substitute "Christ" for presence, if that is more meaningful to you. Christ is your God-essence or the Self, as it is sometimes called in the East. The only difference between Christ and presence is that Christ refers to your indwelling divinity regardless of whether you are conscious of it or not, whereas presence means your *awakened* divinity or God-essence.

Many misunderstandings and false beliefs about Christ will clear if you realize that there is no past or future in Christ. To say that Christ *was* or *will be* is a contradiction in terms. Jesus was. He was a man who lived two thousand years ago and realized divine presence, his true nature. And so he said: "Before Abraham was, I am." He did not say: "I already existed before Abraham was born." That would have meant that he was still within the dimension of time and form identity. The words *I am* used in a sentence that starts in the past tense indicate a radical shift, a discontinuity in the temporal dimension. It is a Zen-like statement of great profundity. Jesus attempted to convey directly, not through discursive thought, the meaning of presence, of self-realization. He had gone beyond the consciousness dimension governed by time, into the realm of the timeless. The dimension of eternity had come into this world. Eternity, of course, does not mean endless time, but no time. Thus, the man Jesus became Christ, a vehicle for pure consciousness. And what is God's self-definition in the Bible? Did God say, "I have always been, and I always will be?" Of course not. That would have given reality to past and future. God said: "I AM THAT I AM." No time here, just presence.

The "second coming" of Christ is a transformation of human consciousness, a shift from time to presence, from thinking to pure consciousness, not the arrival of some man or woman. If "Christ" were to return tomorrow in some externalized form, what could he or she possibly say to you other than this: "I am the Truth. I am divine presence. I am eternal life. I am within you. I am

here. I am Now."

Never personalize Christ. Don't make Christ into a form identity. Avatars, divine mothers, enlightened masters, the very few that are real, are not special as persons. Without a false self to uphold, defend, and feed, they are more simple, more ordinary than the ordinary man or woman. Anyone with a strong ego would regard them as insignificant or, more likely, not see them at all.

If you are drawn to an enlightened teacher, it is because there is already enough presence in you to recognize presence in another. There were many people who did not recognize Jesus or the Buddha, as there are and always have been many people who are drawn to false teachers. Egos are drawn to bigger egos. Darkness cannot recognize light. Only light can recognize light. So don't believe that the light is outside you or that it can only come through one particular form. If only your master is an incarnation of God, then who are you? Any kind of exclusivity is identification with form, and identification with form means ego, no matter how well disguised.

Use the master's presence to reflect your own identity beyond name and form back to you and to become more intensely present yourself. You will soon realize that there is no "mine" or "yours" in presence. Presence is one.

Group work can also be helpful for intensifying the light of your presence. A group of people coming together in a state of presence generates a collective energy field of great intensity. It not only raises the degree of presence of each member of the group but also helps to free the collective human consciousness from its current state of mind dominance. This will make the state of presence increasingly more accessible to individuals. However, unless at least one member of the group is already firmly established in it and thus can hold the energy frequency of that state, the egoic mind can easily reassert itself and sabotage the group's endeavors. Although group work is invaluable, it is not enough, and you must not come to depend on it. Nor must you come to depend on a teacher or a master, except during the transitional period, when you are learning the meaning and practice of presence.

CHAPTER SIX

THE INNER BODY

BEING IS YOUR DEEPEST SELF

You spoke earlier about the importance of having deep roots within or inhabiting the body. Can you explain what you meant by that?

The body can become a point of access into the realm of Being. Let's go into that more deeply now.

I am still not quite sure if I fully understand what you mean by Being.

"Water? What do you mean by that? I don't understand it." This is what a fish would say if it had a human mind.

Please stop trying to understand Being. You have already had significant glimpses of Being, but the mind will always try to squeeze it into a little box and then put a label on it. It cannot be done. It cannot become an object of knowledge. In Being, subject and object merge into one.

Being can be *felt* as the ever-present *I am* that is beyond name and form. To feel and thus to know that you *are* and to abide in that deeply rooted state is enlightenment, is the truth that Jesus says will make you free.

Free from what?

Free from the *illusion* that you are nothing more than your physical body and your mind. This "illusion of the self," as the Buddha calls it, is the core error. Free from *fear* in its countless disguises as the inevitable consequence of that illusion — the fear that is your constant tormentor as long as you derive your sense of self only from this ephemeral and vulnerable form. And free from *sin*, which is the suffering you unconsciously inflict on yourself and others as long as this illusory sense of self governs what you think, say, and do.

LOOK BEYOND THE WORDS

I don't like the word sin. *It implies that I am being judged and found guilty*.

I can understand that. Over the centuries, many erroneous views and interpretations have accumulated around words such as *sin*, due to ignorance, misunderstanding, or a desire to control, but they contain an essential core of truth. If you are unable to look beyond such interpretations and so cannot recognize the reality to which the word points, then don't use it. Don't get stuck on the level of words. A word is no more than a means to an end. It's an abstraction. Not unlike a signpost, it points beyond itself. The word *honey* isn't honey. You can study and talk about honey for as long as you like, but you won't really *know* it until you taste it. After you have tasted it, the word becomes less important to you. You won't be attached to it anymore. Similarly, you can talk or think about *God* continuously for the rest of your life, but does that mean you know or have even glimpsed the reality to which the word points? It really is no more than an obsessive attachment to a signpost, a mental idol.

The reverse also applies: If, for whatever reason, you disliked the word *honey*, that might prevent you from ever tasting it. If you had a strong aversion to the word *God*, which is a negative form of attachment, you may be denying not just the word but also the reality to which it points. You would be cutting yourself off from the possibility of experiencing that reality. All this is, of course, intrinsically connected with being identified with your mind.

So, if a word doesn't work for you anymore, then drop it and replace it with one that does work. If you don't like the word *sin*, then call it unconsciousness or insanity. That may get you closer to the truth, the reality behind the word, than a long-misused word like *sin*, and leaves little room for guilt.

I don't like those words either. They imply that there is something wrong with me. I am being judged.

Of course there is something wrong with you — and you are not being judged.

I don't mean to offend you personally, but do you not belong to the human race that killed over one hundred million members of its own species in the twentieth century alone?

You mean guilt by association?
It is not a question of guilt. But as long as you are run by the egoic mind, you

are part of the collective insanity. Perhaps you haven't looked very deeply into the human condition in its state of dominance by the egoic mind. Open your eyes and see the fear, the despair, the greed, and the violence that are all-pervasive. See the heinous cruelty and suffering on an unimaginable scale that humans have inflicted and continue to inflict on each other as well as on other life forms on the planet. You don't need to condemn. Just observe. That is sin. That is insanity. That is unconsciousness. Above all, don't forget to observe your own mind. Seek out the root of the insanity there.

FINDING YOUR INVISIBLE AND INDESTRUCTIBLE REALITY

You said that identification with our physical form is part of the illusion, so how can the body, the physical form, bring you to a realization of Being?

The body that you can see and touch cannot take you into Being. But that visible and tangible body is only an outer shell, or rather a limited and distorted perception of a deeper reality. In your natural state of connectedness with Being, this deeper reality can be felt every moment as the invisible inner body, the animating presence within you. So to "inhabit the body" is to feel the body from within, to feel the life inside the body and thereby come to know that you are beyond the outer form.

But that is only the beginning of an inward journey that will take you ever more deeply into a realm of great stillness and peace, yet also of great power and vibrant life. At first, you may only get fleeting glimpses of it, but through them you will begin to realize that you are not just a meaningless fragment in an alien universe, briefly suspended between birth and death, allowed a few short-lived pleasures followed by pain and ultimate annihilation. Underneath your outer form, you are connected with something so vast, so immeasurable and sacred, that it cannot be conceived or spoken of — yet I am speaking of it now. I am speaking of it not to give you something to believe in but to show you how you can know it for yourself.

You are cut off from Being as long as your mind takes up all your attention. When this happens — and it happens continuously for most people — you are not in your body. The mind absorbs all your consciousness and transforms it into mind stuff. You cannot stop thinking. Compulsive thinking has become a collective disease. Your whole sense of who you are is then derived from mind activity. Your identity, as it is no longer rooted in Being, becomes a vulnerable and ever-needy mental construct, which creates fear as the predominant underlying emotion. The one thing that truly matters is then missing from

your life: awareness of your deeper self — your invisible and indestructible reality.

To become conscious of Being, you need to reclaim consciousness from the mind. This is one of the most essential tasks on your spiritual journey. It will free vast amounts of consciousness that previously had been trapped in useless and compulsive thinking. A very effective way of doing this is simply to take the focus of your attention away from thinking and direct it into the body, where Being can be felt in the first instance as the invisible energy field that gives life to what you perceive as the physical body.

CONNECTING WITH THE INNER BODY

Please try it now. You may find it helpful to close your eyes for this practice. Later on, when "being in the body" has become natural and easy, this will no longer be necessary. Direct your attention into the body. Feel it from within. Is it alive? Is there life in your hands, arms, legs, and feet — in your abdomen, your chest? Can you feel the subtle energy field that pervades the entire body and gives vibrant life to every organ and every cell? Can you feel it simultaneously in all parts of the body as a single field of energy? Keep focusing on the feeling of your inner body for a few moments. Do not start to think about it. Feel it. The more attention you give it, the clearer and stronger this feeling will become. It will feel as if every cell is becoming more alive, and if you have a strong visual sense, you may get an image of your body becoming luminous. Although such an image can help you temporarily, pay more attention to the feeling than to any image that may arise. An image, no matter how beautiful or powerful, is already defined in form, so there is less scope for penetrating more deeply.

The feeling of your inner body is formless, limitless, and unfathomable. You can always go into it more deeply. If you cannot feel very much at this stage, pay attention to whatever you *can* feel. Perhaps there is just a slight tingling in your hands or feet. That's good enough for the moment. Just focus on the feeling. Your body is coming alive. Later, we will practice some more. Please open your eyes now, but keep some attention in the inner energy field of the body even as you look around the room. The inner body lies at the threshold between your form identity and your essence identity, your true nature. Never lose touch with it.

§

TRANSFORMATION THROUGH THE BODY

Why have most religions condemned or denied the body? It seems that spiritual seekers have always regarded the body as a hindrance or even as sinful.

Why have so few seekers become finders?

On the level of the body, humans are very close to animals. All the basic bodily functions — pleasure, pain, breathing, eating, drinking, defecating, sleeping, the drive to find a mate and procreate, and of course birth and death — we share with the animals. A long time after their fall from a state of grace and oneness into illusion, humans suddenly woke up in what seemed to be an animal body — and they found this very disturbing. "Don't fool yourself. You are no more than an animal." This seemed to be the truth that was staring them in the face. But it was too disturbing a truth to tolerate. Adam and Eve saw that they were naked, and they became afraid. Unconscious denial of their animal nature set in very quickly. The threat that they might be taken over by powerful instinctual drives and revert back to complete unconsciousness was indeed a very real one. Shame and taboos appeared around certain parts of the body and bodily functions, especially sexuality. The light of their consciousness was not yet strong enough to make friends with their animal nature, to allow it to *be* and even enjoy that aspect of themselves — let alone to go deeply into it to find the divine hidden within it, the reality within the illusion. So they did what they had to do. They began to disassociate from their body. They now saw themselves as *having* a body, rather than just being it.

When religions arose, this disassociation became even more pronounced as the "you are not your body" belief. Countless people in East and West throughout the ages have tried to find God, salvation, or enlightenment through denial of the body. This took the form of denial of sense pleasures and of sexuality in particular, fasting, and other ascetic practices. They even inflicted pain on the body in an attempt to weaken or punish it because they regarded it as sinful. In Christianity, this used to be called mortification of the flesh. Others tried to escape from the body by entering trance states or seeking out-of-body experiences. Many still do. Even the Buddha is said to have practiced body denial through fasting and extreme forms of asceticism for six years, but he did not attain enlightenment until after he had given up this practice.

The fact is that no one has ever become enlightened through denying or fighting the body or through an out-of-body experience. Although such an experience can be fascinating and can give you a glimpse of the state of liberation from the material form, in the end you will always have to return to the body, where the essential work of transformation takes place. Transformation is *through* the body, not away from it. This is why no true master has ever advocated fighting or leaving the body, although their mind-based followers often have.

Of the ancient teachings concerning the body, only certain fragments survive, such as Jesus's statement that "your whole body will be filled with light," or they survive as myths, such as the belief that Jesus never relinquished his body but remained one with it and ascended into "heaven" with it. Almost no one to this day has understood those fragments or the hidden meaning of certain myths, and the "you are not your body" belief has prevailed universally, leading to body denial and attempts to escape from the body. Countless seekers have thus been prevented from attaining spiritual realization for themselves and becoming finders.

Is it possible to recover the lost teachings on the significance of the body or to reconstruct them from the existing fragments?

There is no need for that. All spiritual teachings originate from the same Source. In that sense, there is and always has been only one master, who manifests in many different forms. I am that master, and so are you, once you are able to access the Source within. And the way to it is through the inner body. Although all spiritual teachings originate from the same Source, once they become verbalized and written down they are obviously no more than collections of words — and a word is nothing but a signpost, as we talked about earlier. All such teachings are signposts pointing the way back to the Source.

I have already spoken of the Truth that is hidden within your body, but I will summarize for you again the lost teachings of the masters — so here is another signpost. Please endeavor to feel your inner body as you read or listen.

SERMON ON THE BODY

What you perceive as a dense physical structure called the body, which is subject to disease, old age, and death, is not ultimately real — is not you. It is a misperception of your essential reality that is beyond birth and death, and is due to the limitations of your mind, which, having lost touch with Being,

creates the body as evidence of its illusory belief in separation and to justify its state of fear. But do not turn away from the body, for within that symbol of impermanence, limitation, and death that you perceive as the illusory creation of your mind is concealed the splendor of your essential and immortal reality. Do not turn your attention elsewhere in your search for the Truth, for it is nowhere else to be found but within your body.

Do not fight against the body, for in doing so you are fighting against your own reality. You *are* your body. The body that you can see and touch is only a thin illusory veil. Underneath it lies the invisible inner body, the doorway into Being, into Life Unmanifested. Through the inner body, you are inseparably connected to this unmanifested One Life — birthless, deathless, eternally present. Through the inner body, you are forever one with God.

HAVE DEEP ROOTS WITHIN

The key is to be in a state of permanent connectedness with your inner body — to feel it at all times. This will rapidly deepen and transform your life. The more consciousness you direct into the inner body, the higher its vibrational frequency becomes, much like a light that grows brighter as you turn up the dimmer switch and so increase the flow of electricity. At this higher energy level, negativity cannot affect you anymore, and you tend to attract new circumstances that reflect this higher frequency.

If you keep your attention in the body as much as possible, you will be anchored in the Now. You won't lose yourself in the external world, and you won't lose yourself in your mind. Thoughts and emotions, fears and desires, may still be there to some extent, but they won't take you over.

Please examine where your attention is at this moment. You are listening to me, or you are reading these words in a book. That is the focus of your attention. You are also peripherally aware of your surroundings, other people, and so on. Furthermore, there may be some mind activity around what you are hearing or reading, some mental commentary. Yet there is no need for any of this to absorb *all* your attention. See if you can be in touch with your inner body at the same time. Keep some of your attention within. Don't let it all flow out. Feel your whole body from within, as a single field of energy. It is almost as if you were listening or reading with your whole body. Let this be your practice in the days and weeks to come.

Do not give all your attention away to the mind and the external world. By all means focus on what you are doing, but feel the inner body at the same time whenever possible. Stay rooted within. Then observe how this changes your state of consciousness and the quality of what you are doing.

Whenever you are waiting, wherever it may be, use that time to feel the inner body. In this way, traffic jams and lines become very enjoyable. Instead of mentally projecting yourself away from the Now, go more deeply into the Now by going more deeply into the body.

The art of inner-body awareness will develop into a completely new way of living, a state of permanent connectedness with Being, and will add a depth to your life that you have never known before.

It is easy to stay present as the observer of your mind when you are deeply rooted within your body. No matter what happens on the outside, nothing can shake you anymore.

Unless you stay present — and inhabiting your body is always an essential aspect of it — you will continue to be run by your mind. The script in your head that you learned a long time ago, the conditioning of your mind, will dictate your thinking and your behavior. You may be free of it for brief intervals, but rarely for long. This is especially true when something "goes wrong" or there is some loss or upset. Your conditioned reaction will then be involuntary, automatic, and predictable, fueled by the one basic emotion that underlies the mind-identified state of consciousness: fear.

So when such challenges come, as they always do, make it a habit to go within at once and focus as much as you can on the inner energy field of your body. This need not take long, just a few seconds. But you need to do it the moment that the challenge presents itself. Any delay will allow a conditioned mental-emotional reaction to arise and take you over. When you focus within and feel the inner body, you immediately become still and present as you are withdrawing consciousness from the mind. If a response is required in that situation, it will come up from this deeper level. Just as the sun is infinitely brighter than a candle flame, there is infinitely more intelligence in Being than in your mind.

As long as you are in conscious contact with your inner body, you are like a tree that is deeply rooted in the earth, or a building with a deep and solid foundation. The latter analogy is used by Jesus in the generally misunderstood parable of the two men who build a house. One man builds it on the sand, without a foundation, and when the storms and floods come, the house is

swept away. The other man *digs deep* until he reaches the rock, then builds his house, which is not swept away by the floods.

BEFORE YOU ENTER THE BODY, FORGIVE

I felt very uncomfortable when I tried to put my attention on the inner body. There was a feeling of agitation and some nausea. So I haven't been able to experience what you are talking about.

What you felt was a lingering emotion that you were probably unaware of, until you started putting some attention into the body. Unless you first give it some attention, the emotion will prevent you from gaining access to the inner body, which lies at a deeper level underneath it. Attention does not mean that you start *thinking* about it. It means to just observe the emotion, to feel it fully, and so to acknowledge and accept it as it is. Some emotions are easily identified: anger, fear, grief, and so on. Others may be much harder to label. They may just be vague feelings of unease, heaviness, or constriction, halfway between an emotion and a physical sensation. In any case, what matters is not whether you can attach a mental label to it but whether you can bring the feeling of it into awareness as much as possible. Attention is the key to transformation — and full attention also implies acceptance. Attention is like a beam of light — the focused power of your consciousness that transmutes everything into itself.

In a fully functional organism, an emotion has a very short life span. It is like a momentary ripple or wave on the surface of your Being. When you are not in your body, however, an emotion can survive inside you for days or weeks, or join with other emotions of a similar frequency that have merged and become the pain-body, a parasite that can live inside you for years, feed on your energy, lead to physical illness, and make your life miserable (see chapter 2).

So place your attention on feeling the emotion, and check whether your mind is holding on to a grievance pattern such as blame, self-pity, or resentment that is feeding the emotion. If that is the case, it means that you haven't forgiven. Non-forgiveness is often toward another person or yourself, but it may just as well be toward any situation or condition — past, present, or future — that your mind refuses to accept. Yes, there can be nonforgiveness even with regard to the future. This is the mind's refusal to accept uncertainty, to accept that the future is ultimately beyond its control. Forgiveness is to relinquish your grievance and so to let go of grief. It happens naturally once you realize that your grievance serves no purpose except to strengthen a false sense of self. Forgiveness is to offer no resistance to life — to allow life to live

through you. The alternatives are pain and suffering, a greatly restricted flow of life energy, and in many cases physical disease.

The moment you truly forgive, you have reclaimed your power from the mind. Nonforgiveness is the very nature of the mind, just as the mind-made false self, the ego, cannot survive without strife and conflict. The mind cannot forgive. Only *you* can. You become present, you enter your body, you feel the vibrant peace and stillness that emanate from Being. That is why Jesus said: "Before you enter the temple, forgive."

YOUR LINK WITH THE UNMANIFESTED

What is the relationship between presence and the inner body?

Presence is pure consciousness — consciousness that has been reclaimed from the mind, from the world of form. The inner body is your link with the Unmanifested, and in its deepest aspect *is* the Unmanifested: the Source from which consciousness emanates, as light emanates from the sun. Awareness of the inner body is consciousness remembering its origin and returning to the Source.

Is the Unmanifested the same as Being?

Yes. The word *Unmanifested* attempts, by way of negation, to express That which cannot be spoken, thought, or imagined. It points to what it *is* by saying what it is *not*. *Being*, on the other hand, is a positive term. Please don't get attached to either of these words or start believing in them. They are no more than signposts.

You said that presence is consciousness that has been reclaimed from the mind. Who does the reclaiming?

You do. But since in your essence you *are* consciousness, we might as well say that it is an awakening of consciousness from the dream of form. This does not mean that your own form will instantly vanish in an explosion of light. You can continue in your present form yet be aware of the formless and deathless deep within you.

I must admit that this is way beyond my comprehension, and yet on some deeper level I seem to know what you are talking about. It's more like a feeling than anything else. Am I deceiving myself?

No, you are not. Feeling will get you closer to the truth of who you are than thinking. I cannot tell you anything that deep within you don't already know. When you have reached a certain stage of inner connectedness, you recognize the truth when you hear it. If you haven't reached that stage yet, the practice of body awareness will bring about the deepening that is necessary.

SLOWING DOWN THE AGING PROCESS

In the meantime, awareness of the inner body has other benefits in the physical realm. One of them is a significant slowing down of the aging of the physical body.

Whereas the outer body normally appears to grow old and wither fairly quickly, the inner body does not change with time, except that you may feel it more deeply and become it more fully. If you are twenty years old now, the energy field of your inner body will feel just the same when you are eighty. It will be just as vibrantly alive. As soon as your habitual state changes from being out of the body and trapped in your mind to being in the body and present in the Now, your physical body will feel lighter, clearer, more alive. As there is more consciousness in the body, its molecular structure actually becomes less dense. More consciousness means a lessening of the illusion of materiality.

When you become identified more with the timeless inner body than with the outer body, when presence becomes your normal mode of consciousness and past and future no longer dominate your attention, you do not accumulate time anymore in your psyche and in the cells of the body. The accumulation of time as the psychological burden of past and future greatly impairs the cells' capacity for self-renewal. So if you inhabit the inner body, the outer body will grow old at a much slower rate, and even when it does, your timeless essence will shine through the outer form, and you will not give the appearance of an old person.

Is there any scientific evidence for this?

Try it out and you will *be* the evidence.

STRENGTHENING THE IMMUNE SYSTEM

Another benefit of this practice in the physical realm is a great strengthening of the immune system, which occurs when you inhabit the body. The more consciousness you bring into the body, the stronger the immune system, becomes. It is as if every cell awakens and rejoices. The body loves your attention. It is also a potent form of self-healing. Most illnesses creep in when you are not present in the body. If the master is not present in the house, all kinds of shady characters will take up residence there. When you inhabit your body, it will be hard for unwanted guests to enter.

It is not only your physical immune system that becomes strengthened; your psychic immune system is greatly enhanced as well. The latter protects you from the negative mental-emotional force fields of others, which are highly contagious. Inhabiting the body protects you not by putting up a shield, but by raising the frequency vibration of your total energy field, so that anything that vibrates at a lower frequency, such as fear, anger, depression, and so on, now exists in what is virtually a different order of reality. It doesn't enter your field of consciousness anymore, or if it does you don't need to offer any resistance to it because it passes right through you. Please don't just accept or reject what I am saying. Put it to the test.

There is a simple but powerful self-healing meditation that you can do whenever you feel the need to boost your immune system. It is particularly effective if used when you feel the first symptoms of an illness, but it also works with illnesses that are already entrenched if you use it at frequent intervals and with an intense focus. It will also counteract any disruption of your energy field by some form of negativity. However, it is not a substitute for the moment-to-moment practice of being in the body; otherwise, its effect will only be temporary. Here it is.

When you are unoccupied for a few minutes, and especially last thing at night before falling asleep and first thing in the morning before getting up, "flood" your body with consciousness. Close your eyes. Lie flat on your back. Choose different parts of your body to focus your attention on briefly at first: hands, feet, arms, legs, abdomen, chest, head, and so on. Feel the life energy inside those parts as intensely as you can. Stay with each part for fifteen seconds or so. Then let your attention run through the body like a wave a few times, from feet to head and back again. This need only take a minute or so. After that, feel the inner body in its totality, as a single field of energy. Hold that feeling for a few minutes. Be intensely present during that time, present in every cell of your body. Don't be concerned if the mind occasionally succeeds in drawing your attention out of the body and you lose yourself in some thought. As soon as you notice that this has happened, just return your attention to the inner

body.

LET THE BREATH TAKE YOU INTO THE BODY

At times, when my mind has been very active, it has acquired such momentum that I find it impossible to take my attention away from it and feel the inner body. This happens particularly when I get into a worry or anxiety pattern. Do you have any suggestions?

If at any time you are finding it hard to get in touch with the inner body, it is usually easier to focus on your breathing first. Conscious breathing, which is a powerful meditation in its own right, will gradually put you in touch with the body. Follow the breath with your attention as it moves in and out of your body. Breathe into the body, and feel your abdomen expanding and contracting slightly with each inhalation and exhalation. If you find it easy to visualize, close your eyes and see yourself surrounded by light or immersed in a luminous substance — a sea of consciousness. Then breathe in that light. Feel that luminous substance filling up your body and making it luminous also. Then gradually focus more on the feeling. You are now in your body. Don't get attached to any visual image.

CREATIVE USE OF MIND

If you need to use your mind for a specific purpose, use it in conjunction with your inner body. Only if you are able to be conscious without thought can you use your mind creatively, and the easiest way to enter that state is through your body. Whenever an answer, a solution, or a creative idea is needed, stop thinking for a moment by focusing attention on your inner energy field. Become aware of the stillness. When you resume thinking, it will be fresh and creative. In any thought activity, make it a habit to go back and forth every few minutes or so between thinking and an inner kind of listening, an inner stillness. We could say: don't just think with your head, think with your whole body.

THE ART OF LISTENING

When listening to another person, don't just listen with your mind, listen with your whole body. Feel the energy field of your inner body as you listen. That takes attention away from thinking and creates a still space that enables you to truly listen without the mind interfering. You are giving the other person space — space to be. It is the most precious gift you can give. Most people don't know how to listen because the major part of their attention is taken up by thinking. They pay more attention to that than to what the other person is saying, and none at all to what really matters: the Being of the other person underneath the words and the mind. Of course, you cannot feel someone else's Being except through your own. This is the beginning of the realization of oneness, which is love. At the deepest level of Being, you are one with all that is.

Most human relationships consist mainly of minds interacting with each other, not of human beings communicating, being in communion. No relationship can thrive in that way, and that is why there is so much conflict in relationships. When the mind is running your life, conflict, strife, and problems are inevitable. Being in touch with your inner body creates a clear space of no-mind within which the relationship can flower.

CHAPTER SEVEN

PORTALS INTO THE UNMANIFESTED

GOING DEEPLY INTO THE BODY

I can feel the energy inside my body, especially in my arms and legs, but I don't seem to be able to go more deeply, as you suggested earlier.

Make it into a meditation. It needn't take long. Ten to fifteen minutes of clock time should be sufficient. Make sure first that there are no external distractions such as telephones or people who are likely to interrupt you. Sit on a chair, but don't lean back. Keep the spine erect. Doing so will help you to stay alert. Alternatively, choose your own favorite position for meditation.

Make sure the body is relaxed. Close your eyes. Take a few deep breaths. Feel yourself breathing into the lower abdomen, as it were. Observe how it expands and contracts slightly with each in and out breath. Then become aware of the entire inner energy field of the body. Don't think about it — *feel* it. By doing this, you reclaim consciousness from the mind. If you find it helpful, use the "light" visualization I described earlier.

When you can feel the inner body clearly as a single field of energy, let go, if possible, of any visual image and focus exclusively on the feeling. If you can, also drop any mental image you may still have of the physical body. All that is left then is an all-encompassing sense of presence or "beingness," and the inner body is felt to be without a boundary. Then take your attention even more deeply into that feeling. Become one with it. Merge with the energy field, so that there is no longer a perceived duality of the observer and the observed, of you and your body. The distinction between inner and outer also dissolves now, so there is no inner body anymore. By going deeply into the body, you have transcended the body.

Stay in this realm of pure Being for as long as feels comfortable; then become aware again of the physical body, your breathing and physical senses, and open your eyes. Look at your surroundings for a few minutes in a meditative

way — that is, without labeling them mentally — and continue to feel the inner body as you do so.

Having access to that formless realm is truly liberating. It frees you from bondage to form and identification with form. It is life in its undifferentiated state prior to its fragmentation into multiplicity. We may call it the Unmanifested, the invisible Source of all things, the Being within all beings. It is a realm of deep stillness and peace, but also of joy and intense aliveness. Whenever you are present, you become "transparent" to some extent to the light, the pure consciousness that emanates from this Source. You also realize that the light is not separate from who you are but constitutes your very essence.

THE SOURCE OF CHI

Is the Unmanifested what in the East is called chi, a kind of universal life energy?

No, it isn't. The Unmanifested is the *source* of chi. Chi is the inner energy field of your body. It is the bridge between the outer you and the Source. It lies halfway between the manifested, the world of form, and the Unmanifested. Chi can be likened to a river or an energy stream. If you take the focus of your consciousness deeply into the inner body, you are tracing the course of this river back to its Source. Chi is movement; the Unmanifested is stillness. When you reach a point of absolute stillness, which is nevertheless vibrant with life, you have gone beyond the inner body and beyond chi to the Source itself: the Unmanifested. Chi is the link between the Unmanifested and the physical universe.

So if you take your attention deeply into the inner body, you may reach this point, this singularity, where the world dissolves into the Unmanifested and the Unmanifested takes on form as the energy stream of chi, which then becomes the world. This is the point of birth and death. When your consciousness is directed outward, mind and world arise. When it is directed inward, it realizes its own Source and returns home into the Unmanifested. Then, when your consciousness comes back to the manifested world, you reassume the form identity that you temporarily relinquished. You have a name, a past, a life situation, a future. But in one essential respect, you are not the same person you were before: You will have glimpsed a reality within yourself that is not "of this world," although it isn't separate from it, just as it

isn't separate from you.

Now let your spiritual practice be this: As you go about your life, don't give 100 percent of your attention to the external world and to your mind. Keep some within. I have spoken about this already. Feel the inner body even when engaged in everyday activities, especially when engaged in relationships or when you are relating with nature. Feel the stillness deep inside it. Keep the portal open. It is quite possible to be conscious of the Unmanifested throughout your life. You feel it as a deep sense of peace somewhere in the background, a stillness that never leaves you, no matter what happens out here. You become a bridge between the Unmanifested and the manifested, between God and the world. This is the state of connectedness with the Source that we call enlightenment.

Don't get the impression that the Unmanifested is separate from the manifested. How could it be? It is the life within every form, the inner essence of all that exists. It pervades this world. Let me explain.

DREAMLESS SLEEP

You take a journey into the Unmanifested every night when you enter the phase of deep dreamless sleep. You merge with the Source. You draw from it the vital energy that sustains you for a while when you return to the manifested, the world of separate forms. This energy is much more vital than food: "Man does not live by bread alone." But in dreamless sleep, you don't go into it consciously. Although the bodily functions are still operating, "you" no longer exist in that state. Can you imagine what it would be like to go into dreamless sleep with full consciousness? It is impossible to imagine it, because that state has no content.

The Unmanifested does not liberate you until you enter it consciously. That's why Jesus did not say: the truth will make you free, but rather: "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." This is not a conceptual truth. It is the truth of eternal life beyond form, which is known directly or not at all. But don't attempt to stay conscious in dreamless sleep. It is highly unlikely that you will succeed. At most, you may remain conscious during the dream phase, but not beyond that. This is called lucid dreaming, which may be interesting and fascinating, but it is not liberating.

So use your inner body as a portal through which you enter the Unmanifested, and keep that portal open so that you stay connected with the Source at all times. It makes no difference, as far as the inner body is concerned, whether your outer physical body is old or young, frail or strong. The inner body is

timeless. If you are not yet able to feel the inner body, use one of the other portals, although ultimately they are all one. Some I have spoken about at length already, but I'll mention them again briefly here.

OTHER PORTALS

The Now can be seen as the main portal. It is an essential aspect of every other portal, including the inner body. You cannot be *in your body* without being intensely present in the Now.

Time and the manifested are as inextricably linked as are the timeless Now and the Unmanifested. When you dissolve psychological time through intense present-moment awareness, you become conscious of the Unmanifested both directly and indirectly. Directly, you feel it as the radiance and power of your conscious presence — no content, just presence. Indirectly, you are aware of the Unmanifested in and through the sensory realm. In other words, you feel the God-essence in every creature, every flower, every stone, and you realize: "All that is, is holy." This is why Jesus, speaking entirely from his essence or Christ identity, says in the Gospel of Thomas: "Split a piece of wood; I am there. Lift up a stone, and you will find me there."

Another portal into the Unmanifested is created through the cessation of thinking. This can start with a very simple thing, such as taking one conscious breath or looking, in a state of intense alertness, at a flower, so that there is no mental commentary running at the same time. There are many ways to create a gap in the incessant stream of thought. This is what meditation is all about. Thought is part of the realm of the manifested. Continuous mind activity keeps you imprisoned in the world of form and becomes an opaque screen that prevents you from becoming conscious of the Unmanifested, conscious of the formless and timeless God-essence in yourself and in all things and all creatures. When you are intensely *present*, you don't need to be concerned about the cessation of thinking, of course, because the mind then stops automatically. That's why I said the Now is an essential aspect of every other portal.

Surrender — the letting go of mental-emotional resistance to what *is* — also becomes a portal into the Unmanifested. The reason for this is simple: inner resistance cuts you off from other people, from yourself, from the world around you. It strengthens the feeling of separateness on which the ego depends for its survival. The stronger the feeling of separateness, the more you are bound to the manifested, to the world of separate forms. The more you are bound to the world of form, the harder and more impenetrable your

form identity becomes. The portal is closed, and you are cut off from the inner dimension, the dimension of depth. In the state of surrender, your form identity softens and becomes somewhat "transparent," as it were, so the Unmanifested can shine through you.

It's up to you to open a portal in your life that gives you conscious access to the Unmanifested. Get in touch with the energy field of the inner body, be intensely present, disidentify from the mind, surrender to what *is*; these are all portals you can use — but you only need to use one.

Surely love must also be one of those portals?

No, it isn't. As soon as one of the portals is open, love is present in you as the "feeling-realization" of oneness. Love isn't a portal; it's what comes *through* the portal into this world. As long as you are completely trapped in your form identity, there can be no love. Your task is not to search for love but to find a portal through which love can enter.

SILENCE

Are there any other portals apart from those you just mentioned?

Yes, there are. The Unmanifested is not separate from the manifested. It pervades this world, but it is so well disguised that almost everybody misses it completely. If you know where to look, you'll find it everywhere. A portal opens up every moment.

Do you hear that dog barking in the distance? Or that car passing by? Listen carefully. Can you feel the presence of the Unmanifested in that? You can't? Look for it in the silence out of which the sounds come and into which they return. Pay more attention to the silence than to the sounds. Paying attention to outer silence creates inner silence: the mind becomes still. A portal is opening up.

Every sound is born out of silence, dies back into silence, and during its life span is surrounded by silence. Silence enables the sound to be. It is an intrinsic but unmanifested part of every sound, every musical note, every song, every word. The Unmanifested is present in this world as silence. This is why it has been said that nothing in this world is so like God as silence. All you have to do is pay attention to it. Even during a conversation, become conscious of the gaps between words, the brief silent intervals between sentences. As you do that, the dimension of stillness grows within you. You cannot pay attention to

silence without simultaneously becoming still within. Silence without, stillness within. You have entered the Unmanifested.

SPACE

Just as no sound can exist without silence, nothing can exist without no-thing, without the empty space that enables it to be. Every physical object or body has come out of nothing, is surrounded by nothing, and will eventually return to nothing. Not only that, but even inside every physical body there is far more "nothing" than "something." Physicists tell us that the solidity of matter is an illusion. Even seemingly solid matter, including your physical body, is nearly 100 percent empty space — so vast are the distances between the atoms compared to their size. What is more, even inside every atom there is mostly empty space. What is left is more like a vibrational frequency than particles of solid matter, more like a musical note. Buddhists have known that for over 2,500 years. "Form is emptiness, emptiness is form," states the *Heart Sutra*, one of the best known ancient Buddhist texts. The essence of all things is emptiness.

The Unmanifested is not only present in this world as silence; it also pervades the entire physical universe as space — from within and without. This is just as easy to miss as silence. Everybody pays attention to the things in space, but who pays attention to space itself?

You seem to be implying that "emptiness" or "nothing" is not just nothing, that there is some mysterious quality to it. What is this nothing?

You cannot ask such a question. Your mind is trying to make nothing into something. The moment you make it into something, you have missed it. Nothing — space — is the appearance of the Unmanifested as an externalized phenomenon in a sense-perceived world. That's about as much as one can say about it, and even that is a kind of paradox. It cannot become an object of knowledge. You can't do a Ph.D. on "nothing." When scientists study space, they usually make it into something and thereby miss its essence entirely. Not surprisingly, the latest theory is that space isn't empty at all, that it is filled with some substance. Once you have a theory, it's not too hard to find evidence to substantiate it, at least until some other theory comes along.

"Nothing" can only become a portal into the Unmanifested for you if you don't try to grasp or understand it.

Isn't that what we are doing here?

Not at all. I am giving you pointers to show you how you can bring the dimension of the Unmanifested into your life. We are not trying to understand it. There is nothing to understand.

Space has no "existence." "To exist" literally means "to stand out." You cannot understand space because it doesn't stand out. Although in itself it has no existence, it enables everything else to exist. Silence has no existence either, nor does the Un-manifested.

So what happens if you withdraw attention from the objects in space and become aware of space itself? What is the essence of this room? The furniture, pictures, and so on are *in* the room, but they are not the room. The floor, walls, and ceiling define the boundary of the room, but they are not the room either. So what is the essence of the room? Space, of course, empty space. There would be no "room" without it. Since space is "nothing," we can say that what is *not* there is more important than what is there. So become aware of the space that is all around you. Don't think about it. Feel it, as it were. Pay attention to "nothing."

As you do that, a shift in consciousness takes place inside you. Here is why. The inner equivalent to objects in space such as furniture, walls, and so on are your mind objects: thoughts, emotions, and the objects of the senses. And the inner equivalent of space is the consciousness that enables your mind objects to be, just as space allows all things to be. So if you withdraw attention from *things* — objects in space — you automatically withdraw attention from your mind objects as well. In other words: You cannot think *and* be aware of space — or of silence, for that matter. By becoming aware of the empty space around you, you simultaneously become aware of the space of no-mind, of pure consciousness: the Unmanifested. This is how the contemplation of space can become a portal for you.

Space and silence are two aspects of the same thing, the same no-thing. They are an externalization of inner space and inner silence, which is stillness: the infinitely creative womb of all existence. Most humans are completely unconscious of this dimension. There is no inner space, no stillness. They are out of balance. In other words, they know the world, or think they do, but they don't know God. They identify exclusively with their own physical and psychological form, unconscious of essence. And because every form is highly unstable, they live in fear. This fear causes a deep misperception of themselves and of other humans, a distortion in their vision of the world.

If some cosmic convulsion brought about the end of our world, the

Unmanifested would remain totally unaffected by this. *A Course in Miracles* expresses this truth poignantly: "Nothing real can be threatened. Nothing unreal exists. Herein lies the peace of God."

If you remain in conscious connection with the Unmanifested, you value, love, and deeply respect the manifested and every life form in it as an expression of the One Life beyond form. You also know that every form is destined to dissolve again and that ultimately nothing out here matters all that much. You have "overcome the world," in the words of Jesus, or, as the Buddha put it, you have "crossed over to the other shore."

THE TRUE NATURE OF SPACE AND TIME

Now consider this: If there were nothing but silence, it wouldn't exist for you; you wouldn't know what it is. Only when sound appears does silence come into being. Similarly, if there were only space without any objects in space, it wouldn't exist for you. Imagine yourself as a point of consciousness floating in the vastness of space — no stars, no galaxies, just emptiness. Suddenly, space wouldn't be vast anymore; it would not be there at all. There would be no speed, no movement from here to there. At least two points of reference are needed for distance and space to come into being. Space comes into being the moment the One becomes two, and as "two" become the "ten thousand things," as Lao Tse calls the manifested world, space becomes more and more vast. So world and space arise simultaneously.

Nothing could *be* without space, yet space is nothing. Before the universe came into being, before the "big bang," if you like, there wasn't a vast empty space waiting to be filled. There was no space, as there was no thing. There was only the Unmanifested — the One. When the One became "the ten thousand things," suddenly space seemed to be there and enabled the many to be. Where did it come from? Was it created by God to accommodate the universe? Of course not. Space is no-thing, so it was never created.

Go out on a clear night and look up at the sky. The thousands of stars you can see with the naked eye are no more than an infinitesimal fraction of what is there. Over 100 billion galaxies can already be detected with the most powerful telescopes, each galaxy an "island universe" with billions of stars. Yet what is even more awe-inspiring is the infinity of space itself, the depth and stillness that allows all of that magnificence to be. Nothing could be more awe-inspiring and majestic than the inconceivable vastness and stillness of space, and yet what is it? Emptiness, vast emptiness.

What appears to us as space in our universe perceived through the mind and

the senses is the Unmanifested itself, externalized. It is the "body" of God. And the greatest miracle is this: That stillness and vastness that enables the universe to *be* is not just out there in space — it is also within you. When you are utterly and totally *present*, you encounter it as the still inner space of no-mind. Within you, it is vast in depth, not in extension. Spacial extension is ultimately a misperception of infinite depth — an attribute of the one transcendental reality.

According to Einstein, space and time are not separate. I don't really understand it, but I think he is saying that time is the fourth dimension of space. He calls it the "space-time continuum."

Yes. What you perceive externally as space and time are ultimately illusory, but they contain a core of truth. They are the two essential attributes of God, infinity and eternity, perceived as if they had an external existence outside you. Within you, both space and time have an inner equivalent that reveals their true nature, as well as your own. Whereas space is the still, infinitely deep realm of no-mind, the inner equivalent of time is presence, awareness of the eternal Now. Remember that there is no distinction between them. When space and time are realized within as the Unmanifested — no-mind and presence — external space and time continue to exist for you, but they become much less important. The world, too, continues to exist for you, but it will not bind you anymore.

Hence, the ultimate purpose of the world lies not within the world but in transcendence of the world. Just as you would not be conscious of space if there were no objects in space, the world is needed for the Unmanifested to be realized. You may have heard the Buddhist saying: "If there were no illusion, there would be no enlightenment." It is through the world and ultimately through *you* that the Unmanifested knows itself. You are here to enable the divine purpose of the universe to unfold. *That is how important you are!*

CONSCIOUS DEATH

Apart from dreamless sleep, which I mentioned already, there is one other involuntary portal. It opens up briefly at the time of physical death. Even if you have missed all the other opportunities for spiritual realization during your lifetime, one last portal will open up for you immediately after the body has died.

There are countless accounts by people who had a visual impression of this portal as radiant light and then returned from what is commonly known as a

near-death experience. Many of them also spoke of a sense of blissful serenity and deep peace. In the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, it is described as "the luminous splendor of the colorless light of Emptiness," which it says is "your own true self." This portal opens up only very briefly, and unless you have already encountered the dimension of the Unmanifested in your lifetime, you will likely miss it. Most people carry too much residual resistance, too much fear, too much attachment to sensory experience, too much identification with the manifested world. So they see the portal, turn away in fear, and then lose consciousness. Most of what happens after that is involuntary and automatic. Eventually, there will be another round of birth and death. Their presence wasn't strong enough yet for conscious immortality.

So going through this portal does not mean annihilation?

As with all the other portals, your radiant true nature remains, but not the personality. In any case, whatever is real or of true value in your personality is your true nature shining through. This is never lost. Nothing that is of value, nothing that is *real*, is ever lost.

Approaching death and death itself, the dissolution of the physical form, is always a great opportunity for spiritual realization. This opportunity is tragically missed most of the time, since we live in a culture that is almost totally ignorant of death, as it is almost totally ignorant of anything that truly matters.

Every portal is a portal of death, the death of the false self. When you go through it, you cease to derive your identity from your psychological, mind-made form. You then realize that death is an illusion, just as your identification with form was an illusion. The end of illusion — that's all that death is. It is painful only as long as you cling to illusion.

CHAPTER EIGHT

ENLIGHTENED RELATIONSHIPS

ENTER THE NOW FROM WHEREVER YOU ARE

I always thought that true enlightenment is not possible except through love in a relationship between a man and a woman. Isn't this what makes us whole again? How can one's life be fulfilled until that happens?

Is that true in your experience? Has this happened to you?

Not yet, but how could it be otherwise? I know that it will *happen*.

In other words, you are waiting for an event *in time* to save you. Is this not the core error that we have been talking about? Salvation is not elsewhere in place or time. It is here and now.

What does that statement mean, "salvation is here and now"? I don't understand it. I don't even know what salvation means.

Most people pursue physical pleasures or various forms of psychological gratification because they believe that those things will make them happy or free them from a feeling of fear or lack. Happiness may be perceived as a heightened sense of aliveness attained through physical pleasure, or a more secure and more complete sense of self attained through some form of psychological gratification. This is the search for salvation from a state of unsatisfactoriness or insufficiency. Invariably, any satisfaction that they obtain is short-lived, so the condition of satisfaction or fulfillment is usually projected once again onto an imaginary point away from the here and now. "When I obtain *this* or am free of *that* — then I will be okay." This is the unconscious mind-set that creates the illusion of salvation in the future.

True salvation is fulfillment, peace, life in all its fullness. It is to be who you are, to feel within you the good that has no opposite, the joy of Being that depends on nothing outside itself. It is felt not as a passing experience but as

an abiding presence. In theistic language, it is to "know God" — not as something outside you but as your own innermost essence. True salvation is to know yourself as an inseparable part of the timeless and formless One Life from which all that exists derives its being.

True salvation is a state of freedom — from fear, from suffering, from a perceived state of lack and insufficiency and therefore from all wanting, needing, grasping, and clinging. It is freedom from compulsive thinking, from negativity, and above all from past and future as a psychological need. Your mind is telling you that you cannot get there from here. Something needs to happen, or you need to become this or that before you can be free and fulfilled. It is saying, in fact, that you need time — that you need to find, sort out, do, achieve, acquire, become, or understand something before you can be free or complete. You see time as the means to salvation, whereas in truth it is the greatest obstacle to salvation. You think that you can't get there from where and who you are at this moment because you are not yet complete or good enough, but the truth is that here and now is the only point from where you *can* get there. You "get" there by realizing that you *are* there already. You find God the moment you realize that you don't need to seek God. So there is no *only* way to salvation: Any condition can be used, but no particular condition is needed. However, there is only one point of access: the Now. There can be no salvation away from this moment. You are lonely and without a partner? Enter the Now from there. You are in a relationship? Enter the Now from there.

There is nothing you can ever do or attain that will get you closer to salvation than it is at this moment. This may be hard to grasp for a mind accustomed to thinking that everything worthwhile is in the future. Nor can anything that you ever did or that was done to you in the past prevent you from saying yes to what *is* and taking your attention deeply into the Now. You cannot do this in the future. You do it now or not at all.

LOVE/HATE RELATIONSHIPS

Unless and until you access the consciousness frequency of presence, all relationships, and particularly intimate relationships, are deeply flawed and ultimately dysfunctional. They may seem perfect for a while, such as when you are "in love," but invariably that apparent perfection gets disrupted as arguments, conflicts, dissatisfaction, and emotional or even physical violence

occur with increasing frequency. It seems that most "love relationships" become love/hate relationships before long. Love can then turn into savage attack, feelings of hostility, or complete withdrawal of affection at the flick of a switch. This is considered normal. The relationship then oscillates for a while, a few months or a few years, between the polarities of "love" and hate, and it gives you as much pleasure as it gives you pain. It is not uncommon for couples to become addicted to those cycles. Their drama makes them feel alive. When a balance between the positive/negative polarities is lost and the negative, destructive cycles occur with increasing frequency and intensity, which tends to happen sooner or later, then it will not be long before the relationship finally collapses.

It may appear that if you could only eliminate the negative or destructive cycles, then all would be well and the relationship would flower beautifully — but alas, this is not possible. The polarities are mutually interdependent. You cannot have one without the other. The positive already contains within itself the as yet unmanifested negative. Both are in fact different aspects of the same dysfunction. I am speaking here of what are commonly called romantic relationships — not of true love, which has no opposite because it arises from beyond the mind. Love as a continuous state is as yet very rare — as rare as conscious human beings. Brief and elusive glimpses of love, however, are possible whenever there is a gap in the stream of mind.

The negative side of a relationship is, of course, more easily recognizable as dysfunctional than the positive one. And it is also easier to recognize the source of negativity in your partner than to see it in yourself. It can manifest in many forms: possessiveness, jealousy, control, withdrawal and unspoken resentment, the need to be right, insensitivity and self-absorption, emotional demands and manipulation, the urge to argue, criticize, judge, blame, or attack, anger, unconscious revenge for past pain inflicted by a parent, and rage and physical violence.

On the positive side, you are "in love" with your partner. This is at first a deeply satisfying state. You feel intensely alive. Your existence has suddenly become meaningful because someone needs you, wants you, and makes you feel special, and you do the same for him or her. When you are together, you feel whole. The feeling can become so intense that the rest of the world fades into insignificance.

However, you may also have noticed that there is a neediness and a clinging quality to that intensity. You become addicted to the other person. He or she acts on you like a drug. You are on a high when the drug is available, but even

the possibility or the thought that he or she might no longer be there for you can lead to jealousy, possessiveness, attempts at manipulation through emotional blackmail, blaming and accusing — fear of loss. If the other person does leave you, this can give rise to the most intense hostility or the most profound grief and despair. In an instant, loving tenderness can turn into a savage attack or dreadful grief. Where is the love now? Can love change into its opposite in an instant? Was it love in the first place, or just an addictive grasping and clinging?

ADDICTION AND THE SEARCH FOR WHOLENESS

Why should we become addicted to another person?

The reason why the romantic love relationship is such an intense and universally sought-after experience is that it seems to offer liberation from a deep-seated state of fear, need, lack, and incompleteness that is part of the human condition in its unredeemed and unenlightened state. There is a physical as well as a psychological dimension to this state.

On the physical level, you are obviously not whole, nor will you ever be: You are either a man or a woman, which is to say, one-half of the whole. On this level, the longing for wholeness — the return to oneness — manifests as male-female attraction, man's need for a woman, woman's need for a man. It is an almost irresistible urge for union with the opposite energy polarity. The root of this physical urge is a spiritual one: the longing for an end to duality, a return to the state of wholeness. Sexual union is the closest you can get to this state on the physical level. This is why it is the most deeply satisfying experience the physical realm can offer. But sexual union is no more than a fleeting glimpse of wholeness, an instant of bliss. As long as it is unconsciously sought as a means of salvation, you are seeking the end of duality on the level of form, where it cannot be found. You are given a tantalizing glimpse of heaven, but you are not allowed to dwell there, and find yourself again in a separate body.

On the psychological level, the sense of lack and incompleteness is, if anything, even greater than on the physical level. As long as you are identified with the mind, you have an externally derived sense of self. That is to say, you get your sense of who you are from things that ultimately have nothing to do with who you are: your social role, possessions, external appearance, successes and failures, belief systems, and so on. This false, mind-made self, the ego, feels vulnerable, insecure, and is always seeking new things to identify with to give it a feeling that it exists. But nothing is ever enough to give it lasting

fulfillment. Its fear remains; its sense of lack and neediness remains.

But then that special relationship comes along. It seems to be the answer to all the ego's problems and to meet all its needs. At least this is how it appears at first. All the other things that you derived your sense of self from before now become relatively insignificant. You now have a single focal point that replaces them all, that gives meaning to your life, and through which you define your identity: the person you are "in love" with. You are no longer a disconnected fragment in an uncaring universe, or so it seems. Your world now has a center: the loved one. The fact that the center is outside you and that, therefore, you still have an externally derived sense of self does not seem to matter at first. What matters is that the underlying feelings of incompleteness, of fear, lack, and unfulfillment so characteristic of the egoic state are no longer there — or are they? Have they dissolved, or do they continue to exist underneath the happy surface reality?

If in your relationships you experience both "love" and the opposite of love — attack, emotional violence, and so on — then it is likely that you are confusing ego attachment and addictive clinging with love. You cannot love your partner one moment and attack him or her the next. True love has no opposite. If your "love" has an opposite, then it is not love but a strong ego-need for a more complete and deeper sense of self, a need that the other person temporarily meets. It is the ego's substitute for salvation, and for a short time it almost does feel like salvation.

But there comes a point when your partner behaves in ways that fail to meet your needs, or rather those of your ego. The feelings of fear, pain, and lack that are an intrinsic part of egoic consciousness but had been covered up by the "love relationship" now resurface. Just as with every other addiction, you are on a high when the drug is available, but invariably there comes a time when the drug no longer works for you. When those painful feelings reappear, you feel them even more strongly than before, and what is more, you now perceive your partner as the *cause* of those feelings. This means that you project them outward and attack the other with all the savage violence that is part of your pain. This attack may awaken the partner's own pain, and he or she may counter your attack. At this point, the ego is still unconsciously hoping that its attack or its attempts at manipulation will be sufficient punishment to induce your partner to change their behavior, so that it can use them again as a cover-up for your pain.

Every addiction arises from an unconscious refusal to face and move through your own pain. Every addiction starts with pain and ends with pain.

Whatever the substance you are addicted to — alcohol, food, legal or illegal drugs, or a person — you are using something or somebody to cover up your pain. That is why, after the initial euphoria has passed, there is so much unhappiness, so much pain in intimate relationships. They do not cause pain and unhappiness. They *bring out* the pain and unhappiness that is already in you. Every addiction does that. Every addiction reaches a point where it does not work for you anymore, and then you feel the pain more intensely than ever.

This is one reason why most people are always trying to escape from the present moment and are seeking some kind of salvation in the future. The first thing that they might encounter if they focused their attention on the Now is their own pain, and this is what they fear. If they only knew how easy it is to access in the Now the power of presence that dissolves the past and its pain, the reality that dissolves the illusion. If they only knew how close they are to their own reality, how close to God.

Avoidance of relationships in an attempt to avoid pain is not the answer either. The pain is there anyway. Three failed relationships in as many years are more likely to force you into awakening than three years on a desert island or shut away in your room. But if you could bring intense presence into your aloneness, that would work for you too.

FROM ADDICTIVE TO ENLIGHTENED RELATIONSHIPS

Can we change an addictive relationship into a true one?

Yes. Being present and intensifying your presence by taking your attention ever more deeply into the Now: Whether you are living alone or with a partner, this remains the key. For love to flourish, the light of your presence needs to be strong enough so that you no longer get taken over by the thinker or the pain-body and mistake them for who you are. To know yourself as the Being underneath the thinker, the stillness underneath the mental noise, the love and joy underneath the pain, is freedom, salvation, enlightenment. To disidentify from the pain-body is to bring presence into the pain and thus transmute it. To disidentify from thinking is to be the silent watcher of your thoughts and behavior, especially the repetitive patterns of your mind and the roles played by the ego.

If you stop investing it with "selfness," the mind loses its compulsive quality, which basically is the compulsion to judge, and so to resist what *is*, which creates conflict, drama, and new pain. In fact, the moment that judgment stops through acceptance of what *is*, you are free of the mind. You have made room for love, for joy, for peace. First you stop judging yourself; then you stop judging your partner. The greatest catalyst for change in a relationship is complete acceptance of your partner as he or she is, without needing to judge or change them in any way. That immediately takes you beyond ego. All mind games and all addictive clinging are then over. There are no victims and no perpetrators anymore, no accuser and accused. This is also the end of all codependency, of being drawn into somebody else's unconscious pattern and thereby enabling it to continue. You will then either separate — in love — or move ever more deeply into the Now together — into Being. Can it be that simple? Yes, it is that simple.

Love is a state of Being. Your love is not outside; it is deep within you. You can never lose it, and it cannot leave you. It is not dependent on some other body, some external form. In the stillness of your presence, you can feel your own formless and timeless reality as the unmanifested life that animates your physical form. You can then feel the same life deep within every other human and every other creature. You look beyond the veil of form and separation. This is the realization of oneness. This is love.

What is God? The eternal One Life underneath all the forms of life. What is love? To feel the presence of that One Life deep within yourself and within all creatures. To be it. Therefore, all love is the love of God.

Love is not selective, just as the light of the sun is not selective. It does not make one person special. It is not exclusive. Exclusivity is not the love of God but the "love" of ego. However, the intensity with which true love is felt can vary. There may be one person who reflects your love back to you more clearly and more intensely than others, and if that person feels the same toward you, it can be said that you are in a love relationship with him or her. The bond that connects you with that person is the same bond that connects you with the person sitting next to you on a bus, or with a bird, a tree, a flower. Only the degree of intensity with which it is felt differs.

Even in an otherwise addictive relationship, there may be moments when something more real shines through, something beyond your mutual

addictive needs. These are moments when both you and your partner's mind briefly subside and the pain-body is temporarily in a dormant state. This may sometimes happen during physical intimacy, or when you are both witnessing the miracle of childbirth, or in the presence of death, or when one of you is seriously ill — anything that renders the mind powerless. When this happens, your Being, which is usually buried underneath the mind, becomes revealed, and it is this that makes true communication possible.

True communication is communion — the realization of oneness, which is love. Usually, this is quickly lost again, unless you are able to stay present enough to keep out the mind and its old patterns. As soon as the mind and mind identification return, you are no longer yourself but a mental image of yourself, and you start playing games and roles again to get your ego needs met. You are a human mind again, pretending to be a human being, interacting with another mind, playing a drama called "love."

Although brief glimpses are possible, love cannot flourish unless you are permanently free of mind identification and your presence is intense enough to have dissolved the pain-body — or you can at least remain present as the watcher. The pain-body cannot then take you over and so become destructive of love.

RELATIONSHIPS AS SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

As the egoic mode of consciousness and all the social, political, and economic structures that it created enter the final stage of collapse, the relationships between men and women reflect the deep state of crisis in which humanity now finds itself. As humans have become increasingly identified with their mind, most relationships are not rooted in Being and so turn into a source of pain and become dominated by problems and conflict.

Millions are now living alone or as single parents, unable to establish an intimate relationship or unwilling to repeat the insane drama of past relationships. Others go from one relationship to another, from one pleasure-and-pain cycle to another, in search of the elusive goal of fulfillment through union with the opposite energy polarity. Still others compromise and continue to be together in a dysfunctional relationship in which negativity prevails, for the sake of the children or security, through force of habit, fear of being alone, or some other mutually "beneficial" arrangement, or even through the unconscious addiction to the excitement of emotional drama and pain.

However, every crisis represents not only danger but also opportunity. If relationships energize and magnify egoic mind patterns and activate the pain-

body, as they do at this time, why not accept this fact rather than try to escape from it? Why not cooperate with it instead of avoiding relationships or continuing to pursue the phantom of an ideal partner as an answer to your problems or a means of feeling fulfilled? The opportunity that is concealed within every crisis does not manifest until all the facts of any given situation are acknowledged and fully accepted. As long as you deny them, as long as you try to escape from them or wish that things were different, the window of opportunity does not open up, and you remain trapped inside that situation, which will remain the same or deteriorate further.

With the acknowledgment and acceptance of the facts also comes a degree of freedom from them. For example, when you *know* there is disharmony and you hold that "knowing," through your knowing a new factor has come in, and the disharmony cannot remain unchanged. When you *know* you are not at peace, your knowing creates a still space that surrounds your nonpeace in a loving and tender embrace and then transmutes your nonpeace into peace. As far as inner transformation is concerned, there is nothing you can *do* about it. You cannot transform yourself, and you certainly cannot transform your partner or anybody else. All you *can* do is create a space for transformation to happen, for grace and love to enter.

So whenever your relationship is not working, whenever it brings out the "madness" in you and in your partner, be glad. What was unconscious is being brought up to the light. It is an opportunity for salvation. Every moment, hold the knowing of that moment, particularly of your inner state. If there is anger, *know* that there is anger. If there is jealousy, defensiveness, the urge to argue, the need to be right, an inner child demanding love and attention, or emotional pain of any kind — whatever it is, *know* the reality of that moment and hold the knowing. The relationship then becomes your *sadhana*, your spiritual practice. If you observe unconscious behavior in your partner, hold it in the loving embrace of your knowing so that you won't react. Unconsciousness and knowing cannot coexist for long — even if the knowing is only in the other person and not in the one who is acting out the unconsciousness. The energy form that lies behind hostility and attack finds the presence of love absolutely intolerable. If you react at all to your partner's unconsciousness, you become unconscious yourself. But if you then remember to *know* your reaction, nothing is lost.

Humanity is under great pressure to evolve because it is our only chance of

survival as a race. This will affect every aspect of your life and close relationships in particular. Never before have relationships been as problematic and conflict ridden as they are now. As you may have noticed, they are not here to make you happy or fulfilled. If you continue to pursue the goal of salvation through a relationship, you will be disillusioned again and again. But if you accept that the relationship is here to make you *conscious* instead of happy, then the relationship *will* offer you salvation, and you will be aligning yourself with the higher consciousness that wants to be born into this world. For those who hold on to the old patterns, there will be increasing pain, violence, confusion, and madness.

I suppose that it takes two to make a relationship into a spiritual practice, as you suggest. For example, my partner is still acting out his old patterns of jealousy and control. I have pointed this out many times, but he is unable to see it.

How many people does it take to make your life into a spiritual practice? Never mind if your partner will not cooperate. Sanity — consciousness — can only come into this world through you. You do not need to wait for the world to become sane, or for somebody else to become conscious, before you can be enlightened. You may wait forever. Do not accuse each other of being unconscious. The moment you start to argue, you have identified with a mental position and are now defending not only that position but also your sense of self. The ego is in charge. You have become unconscious. At times, it may be appropriate to point out certain aspects of your partner's behavior. If you are very alert, very present, you can do so without ego involvement — without blaming, accusing, or making the other wrong.

When your partner behaves unconsciously, relinquish all judgment. Judgment is either to confuse someone's unconscious behavior with who they are or to project your own unconsciousness onto another person and mistake *that* for who they are. To relinquish judgment does not mean that you do not recognize dysfunction and unconsciousness when you see it. It means "being the knowing" rather than "being the reaction" and the judge. You will then either be totally free of reaction or you may react and still be the knowing, the space in which the reaction is watched and allowed to be. Instead of fighting the darkness, you bring in the light. Instead of reacting to delusion, you see the delusion yet at the same time look through it. Being the knowing creates a clear space of loving presence that allows all things and all people to be as they are. No greater catalyst for transformation exists. If you practice this, your partner cannot stay with you *and* remain unconscious.

If you both agree that the relationship will be your spiritual practice, so much the better. You can then express your thoughts and feelings to each other as soon as they occur, or as soon as a reaction comes up, so that you do not create a time gap in which an unexpressed or unacknowledged emotion or grievance can fester and grow. Learn to give expression to what you feel without blaming. Learn to listen to your partner in an open, nondefensive way. Give your partner space for expressing himself or herself. Be present. Accusing, defending, attacking — all those patterns that are designed to strengthen or protect the ego or to get its needs met will then become redundant. Giving space to others — and to yourself — is vital. Love cannot flourish without it. When you have removed the two factors that are destructive to relationships — when the pain-body has been transmuted and you are no longer identified with mind and mental positions — and if your partner has done the same, you will experience the bliss of the flowering of relationship. Instead of mirroring to each other your pain and your unconsciousness, instead of satisfying your mutual addictive ego needs, you will reflect back to each other the love that you feel deep within, the love that comes with the realization of your oneness with all that is. This is the love that has no opposite.

If your partner is still identified with the mind and the pain-body while you are already free, this will represent a major challenge — not to you but to your partner. It is not easy to live with an enlightened person, or rather it is *so* easy that the ego finds it extremely threatening. Remember that the ego needs problems, conflict, and "enemies" to strengthen the sense of separateness on which its identity depends. The unenlightened partner's mind will be deeply frustrated because its fixed positions are not resisted, which means they will become shaky and weak, and there is even the "danger" that they may collapse altogether, resulting in loss of self. The pain-body is demanding feedback and not getting it. The need for argument, drama, and conflict is not being met. But beware: Some people who are unresponsive, withdrawn, insensitive, or cut off from their feelings may think and try to convince others that they are enlightened, or at least that there is "nothing wrong" with them and everything wrong with their partner. Men tend to do that more than women. They may see their female partners as irrational or emotional. But if you can feel your emotions, you are not far from the radiant inner body just underneath. If you are mainly in your head, the distance is much greater, and you need to bring consciousness into the emotional body before you can reach the inner body.

If there isn't an emanation of love and joy, complete presence and openness toward all beings, then it is not enlightenment. Another indicator is how a

person behaves in difficult or challenging situations or when things "go wrong." If your "enlightenment" is egoic self-delusion, then life will soon give you a challenge that will bring out your unconsciousness in whatever form — as fear, anger, defensiveness, judgment, depression, and so on. If you are in a relationship, many of your challenges will come through your partner. For example, a woman may be challenged by an unresponsive male partner who lives almost entirely in his head. She will be challenged by his inability to *hear* her, to give her attention and space to be, which is due to his lack of presence. The absence of love in the relationship, which is usually more keenly felt by a woman than a man, will trigger the woman's pain-body, and through it she will attack her partner — blame, criticize, make wrong, and so on. This in turn now becomes *his* challenge. To defend himself against her pain-body's attack, which he sees as totally unwarranted, he will become even more deeply entrenched in his mental positions as he justifies, defends himself, or counterattacks. Eventually, this may activate his own pain-body. When both partners have thus been taken over, a level of deep unconsciousness has been reached, of emotional violence, savage attack and counterattack. It will not subside until both pain-bodies have replenished themselves and then enter the dormant stage. Until the next time.

This is only one of an endless number of possible scenarios. Many volumes have been written, and many more could be written, about the ways in which unconsciousness is brought out in male-female relationships. But, as I said earlier, once you understand the root of the dysfunction, you do not need to explore its countless manifestations.

Let's briefly look again at the scenario I have just described. Every challenge that it contains is actually a disguised opportunity for salvation. At every stage of the unfolding dysfunctional process, freedom from unconsciousness is possible. For example, the woman's hostility could become a signal for the man to come out of his mind-identified state, awaken into the Now, become present — instead of becoming even more identified with his mind, even more unconscious. Instead of "being" the pain-body, the woman could be the knowing that watches the emotional pain in herself, thus accessing the power of the Now and initiating the transmutation of the pain. This would remove the compulsive and automatic outward projection of it. She could then express her feelings to her partner. There is no guarantee, of course, that he will listen, but it gives him a good chance to become present and certainly breaks the insane cycle of the involuntary acting out of old mind patterns. If the woman misses that opportunity, the man could watch his own mental-emotional reaction to her pain, his own defensiveness, rather than *being* the reaction. He

could then watch his own pain-body being triggered and thus bring consciousness into his emotions. In this way, a clear and still space of pure awareness would come into being — the knowing, the silent witness, the watcher. This awareness does not deny the pain and yet is beyond it. It allows the pain to be and yet transmutes it at the same time. It accepts everything and transforms everything. A door would have opened up for her through which she could easily join him in that space.

If you are consistently or at least predominantly present in your relationship, this will be the greatest challenge for your partner. They will not be able to tolerate your presence for very long and stay unconscious. If they are ready, they will walk through the door that you opened for them and join you in that state. If they are not, you will separate like oil and water. The light is too painful for someone who wants to remain in darkness.

WHY WOMEN ARE CLOSER TO ENLIGHTENMENT

Are the obstacles to enlightenment the same for a man as for a woman?

Yes, but the emphasis is different. Generally speaking, it is easier for a woman to feel and be in her body, so she is naturally closer to Being and potentially closer to enlightenment than a man. This is why many ancient cultures instinctively chose female figures or analogies to represent or describe the formless and transcendental reality. It was often seen as a womb that gives birth to everything in creation and sustains and nourishes it during its life as form. In the *Tao Te Ching*, one of the most ancient and profound books ever written, the *Tao*, which could be translated as *Being*, is described as "infinite, eternally present, the mother of the universe." Naturally, women are closer to it than men since they virtually "embody" the Unmanifested. What is more, all creatures and all things must eventually return to the Source. "All things vanish into the Tao. It alone endures." Since the Source is seen as female, this is represented as the light and dark sides of the archetypal feminine in psychology and mythology. The Goddess or Divine Mother has two aspects: She gives life, and she takes life.

When the mind took over and humans lost touch with the reality of their divine essence, they started to think of God as a male figure. Society became male-dominated, and the female was made subordinate to the male.

I am not suggesting a return to earlier female representations of the divine. Some people now use the term *Goddess* instead of *God*. They are redressing a balance between male and female that was lost a long time ago, and that is

good. But it is still a representation and a concept, perhaps temporarily useful, just as a map or a signpost is temporarily useful, but more a hindrance than a help when you are ready to realize the reality beyond all concepts and images. What does remain true, however, is that the energy frequency of the mind appears to be essentially male. The mind resists, fights for control, uses, manipulates, attacks, tries to grasp and possess, and so on. This is why the traditional God is a patriarchal, controlling authority figure, an often angry man who you should live in fear of, as the Old Testament suggests. This God is a projection of the human mind.

To go beyond the mind and reconnect with the deeper reality of Being, very different qualities are needed: surrender, non-judgment, an openness that allows life to be instead of resisting it, the capacity to hold all things in the loving embrace of your knowing. All these qualities are much more closely related to the female principle. Whereas mind-energy is hard and rigid, Being-energy is soft and yielding and yet infinitely more powerful than mind. The mind runs our civilization, whereas Being is in charge of all life on our planet and beyond. Being is the very Intelligence whose visible manifestation is the physical universe. Although women are potentially closer to it, men can also access it within themselves.

At this time, the vast majority of men as well as women are still in the grip of the mind: identified with the thinker and the pain-body. This, of course, is what prevents enlightenment and the flowering of love. As a general rule, the major obstacle for men tends to be the thinking mind, and the major obstacle for women the pain-body, although in certain individual cases the opposite may be true, and in others the two factors may be equal.

DISSOLVING THE COLLECTIVE FEMALE PAIN-BODY

Why is the pain-body more of an obstacle for women?

The pain-body usually has a collective as well as a personal aspect. The personal aspect is the accumulated residue of emotional pain suffered in one's own past. The collective one is the pain accumulated in the collective human psyche over thousands of years through disease, torture, war, murder, cruelty, madness, and so on. Everyone's personal pain-body also partakes of this collective pain-body. There are different strands in the collective pain-body. For example, certain races or countries in which extreme forms of strife and violence occur have a heavier collective pain-body than others. Anyone with a strong pain-body and not enough consciousness to disidentify from it will not only continuously or periodically be forced to relive their emotional pain but

may also easily become either the perpetrator or the victim of violence, depending on whether their pain-body is predominantly active or passive. On the other hand, they may also be potentially closer to enlightenment. This potential isn't necessarily realized, of course, but if you are trapped in a nightmare you will probably be more strongly motivated to awaken than someone who is just caught in the ups and downs of an ordinary dream.

Apart from her personal pain-body, every woman has her share in what could be described as the collective female pain-body — unless she is fully conscious. This consists of accumulated pain suffered by women partly through male subjugation of the female, through slavery, exploitation, rape, childbirth, child loss, and so on, over thousands of years. The emotional or physical pain that for many women precedes and coincides with the menstrual flow is the pain-body in its collective aspect that awakens from its dormancy at that time, although it can be triggered at other times too. It restricts the free flow of life energy through the body, of which menstruation is a physical expression. Let's dwell on this for a moment and see how it can become an opportunity for enlightenment.

Often a woman is "taken over" by the pain-body at that time. It has an extremely powerful energetic charge that can easily pull you into unconscious identification with it. You are then actively possessed by an energy field that occupies your inner space and pretends to be you — but, of course, is not you at all. It speaks through you, acts through you, thinks through you. It will create negative situations in your life so that it can feed on the energy. It wants more pain, in whatever form. I have described this process already. It can be vicious and destructive. It is pure pain, past pain — and it is not you.

The number of women who are now approaching the fully conscious state already exceeds that of men and will be growing even faster in the years to come. Men may catch up with them in the end, but for some considerable time there will be a gap between the consciousness of men and that of women. Women are regaining the function that is their birthright and, therefore, comes to them more naturally than it does to men: to be a bridge between the manifested world and the Unmanifested, between physicality and spirit. Your main task as a woman now is to transmute the pain-body so that it no longer comes between you and your true self, the essence of who you are. Of course, you also have to deal with the other obstacle to enlightenment, which is the thinking mind, but the intense presence you generate when dealing with the pain-body will also free you from identification with the mind.

The first thing to remember is this: As long as you make an identity for

yourself out of the pain, you cannot become free of it. As long as part of your sense of self is invested in your emotional pain, you will unconsciously resist or sabotage every attempt that you make to heal that pain. Why? Quite simply because you want to keep yourself intact, and the pain has become an essential part of you. This is an unconscious process, and the only way to overcome it is to make it conscious.

To suddenly see that you are or have been attached to your pain can be quite a shocking realization. The moment you realize this, you have broken the attachment. The pain-body is an energy field, almost like an entity, that has become temporarily lodged in your inner space. It is life energy that has become trapped, energy that is no longer flowing. Of course, the pain-body is there because of certain things that happened in the past. It *is* the living past in you, and if you identify with it, you identify with the past. A victim identity is the belief that the past is more powerful than the present, which is the opposite of the truth. It is the belief that other people and what they did to you are responsible for who you are now, for your emotional pain or your inability to be your true self. The truth is that the only power there is is contained within this moment: It is the power of your presence. Once you know that, you also realize that *you* are responsible for your inner space now — nobody else is — and that the past cannot prevail against the power of the Now.

So identification prevents you from dealing with the pain-body. Some women who are already conscious enough to have relinquished their victim identity on the personal level are still holding on to a collective victim identity: "what men did to women." They are right — and they are also wrong. They are right inasmuch as the collective female pain-body *is* in large part due to male violence inflicted on women and repression of the female principle throughout the planet over millennia. They are wrong if they derive a sense of self from this fact and thereby keep themselves imprisoned in a collective victim identity. If a woman is still holding on to anger, resentment, or condemnation, she is holding on to her pain-body. This may give her a comforting sense of identity, of solidarity with other women, but it is keeping her in bondage to the past and blocking full access to her essence and true power. If women exclude themselves from men, that fosters a sense of separation and therefore a strengthening of the ego. And the stronger the ego, the more distant you are from your true nature.

So do not use the pain-body to give you an identity. Use it for enlightenment

instead. Transmute it into consciousness. One of the best times for this is during menses. I believe that, in the years to come, many women will enter the fully conscious state during that time. Usually, it is a time of unconsciousness for many women, as they are taken over by the collective female pain-body. Once you have reached a certain level of consciousness, however, you can reverse this, so instead of becoming unconscious you become *more* conscious. I have described the basic process already, but let me take you through it again, this time with special reference to the collective female pain-body.

When you know that the menstrual flow is approaching, before you feel the first signs of what is commonly called premenstrual tension, the awakening of the collective female pain-body, become very alert and inhabit your body as fully as possible. When the first sign appears, you need to be alert enough to "catch" it before it takes you over. For example, the first sign may be a sudden, strong irritation or a flash of anger, or it may be a purely physical symptom. Whatever it is, catch it before it can take over your thinking or behavior. This simply means putting the spotlight of your attention on it. If it is an emotion, feel the strong energy charge behind it. Know that it is the pain-body. At the same time, be the knowing; that is to say, be aware of your conscious presence and feel its power. Any emotion that you take your presence into will quickly subside and become transmuted. If it is a purely physical symptom, the attention that you give it will prevent it from turning into an emotion or a thought. Then continue to be alert and wait for the next sign of the pain-body. When it appears, catch it again in the same way as before.

Later, when the pain-body has fully awakened from its dormant state, you may experience considerable turbulence in your inner space for a while, perhaps for several days. Whatever form this takes, stay present. Give it your complete attention. Watch the turbulence inside you. Know it is there. Hold the knowing, and be the knowing. Remember: Do not let the pain-body use your mind and take over your thinking. Watch it. Feel its energy directly, inside your body. As you know, full attention means full acceptance.

Through sustained attention and thus acceptance, there comes transmutation. The pain-body becomes transformed into radiant consciousness, just as a piece of wood, when placed in or near a fire, itself is transformed into fire. Menstruation will then become not only a joyful and fulfilling expression of your womanhood but also a sacred time of transmutation, when you give birth to a new consciousness. Your true nature then shines forth, both in its female aspect as the Goddess and in its transcendental aspect as the divine Being that you are beyond male and female duality.

If your male partner is conscious enough, he can help you with the practice I have just described by holding the frequency of intense presence particularly at this time. If he stays present whenever you fall back into unconscious identification with the pain-body, which can and will happen at first, you will be able to quickly rejoin him in that state. This means that whenever the pain-body temporarily takes over, whether during menses or at other times, your partner will not mistake it for who you are. Even if the pain-body attacks him, as it probably will, he will not react to it as if it were "you," withdraw, or put up some kind of defense. He will hold the space of intense presence. Nothing else is needed for transformation. At other times, you will be able to do the same for him or help him reclaim consciousness from the mind by drawing his attention into the here and now whenever he becomes identified with his thinking.

In this way, a permanent energy field of a pure and high frequency will arise between you. No illusion, no pain, no conflict, nothing that is not *you*, and nothing that is not love can survive in it. This represents the fulfillment of the divine, transpersonal purpose of your relationship. It becomes a vortex of consciousness that will draw in many others.

GIVE UP THE RELATIONSHIP WITH YOURSELF

When one is fully conscious, would one still have a need for a relationship? Would a man still feel drawn to a woman? Would a woman still feel incomplete without a man?

Enlightened or not, you are either a man or a woman, so on the level of your form identity you are not complete. You are one-half of the whole. This incompleteness is felt as male-female attraction, the pull toward the opposite energy polarity, no matter how conscious you are. But in that state of inner connectedness, you feel this pull somewhere on the surface or periphery of your life. Anything that happens to you in that state feels somewhat like that. The whole world seems like waves or ripples on the surface of a vast and deep ocean. You are that ocean and, of course, you are also a ripple, but a ripple that has realized its true identity as the ocean, and compared to that vastness and depth, the world of waves and ripples is not all that important.

This does not mean that you don't relate deeply to other people or to your partner. In fact, you can relate deeply *only* if you are conscious of Being.

Coming from Being, you are able to focus beyond the veil of form. In Being, male and female are one. Your form may continue to have certain needs, but Being has none. It is already complete and whole. If those needs are met, that is beautiful, but whether or not they are met makes no difference to your deep inner state. So it is perfectly possible for an enlightened person, if the need for the male or female polarity is not met, to feel a sense of lack or incompleteness on the outer level of his or her being, yet at the same time be totally complete, fulfilled, and at peace within.

In the quest for enlightenment, is being gay a help or a hindrance, or does it not make any difference?

As you approach adulthood, uncertainty about your sexuality followed by the realization that you are "different" from others may force you to disidentify from socially conditioned patterns of thought and behavior. This will automatically raise your level of consciousness above that of the unconscious majority, whose members unquestioningly take on board all inherited patterns. In that respect, being gay can be a help. Being an outsider to some extent, someone who does not "fit in" with others or is rejected by them for whatever reason, makes life difficult, but it also places you at an advantage as far as enlightenment is concerned. It takes you out of unconsciousness almost by force.

On the other hand, if you then develop a sense of identity based on your gayness, you have escaped one trap only to fall into another. You will play roles and games dictated by a mental image you have of yourself as gay. You will become unconscious. You will become unreal. Underneath your ego mask, you will become very unhappy. If this happens to you, being gay will have become a hindrance. But you always get another chance, of course. Acute unhappiness can be a great awakener.

Is it not true that you need to have a good relationship with yourself and love yourself before you can have a fulfilling relationship with another person?

If you cannot be at ease with yourself when you are alone, you will seek a relationship to cover up your unease. You can be sure that the unease will then reappear in some other form within the relationship, and you will probably hold your partner responsible for it.

All you really need to do is accept this moment fully. You are then at ease in the here and now and at ease with yourself.

But do you need to have a relationship with yourself at all? Why can't you just *be* yourself? When you have a relationship with yourself, you have split yourself into two: "I" and "myself," subject and object. That mind-created duality is the root cause of all unnecessary complexity, of all problems and conflict in your life. In the state of enlightenment, you *are* yourself — "you" and "yourself" merge into one. You do not judge yourself, you do not feel sorry for yourself, you are not proud of yourself, you do not love yourself, you do not hate yourself, and so on. The split caused by self-reflective consciousness is healed, its curse removed. There is no "self" that you need to protect, defend, or feed anymore. When you are enlightened, there is one relationship that you no longer have: the relationship with yourself. Once you have given that up, all your other relationships will be love relationships.

CHAPTER NINE

BEYOND HAPPINESS AND UNHAPPINESS THERE IS PEACE

THE HIGHER GOOD BEYOND GOOD AND BAD

Is there a difference between happiness and inner peace?

Yes. Happiness depends on conditions being perceived as positive; inner peace does not.

Is it not possible to attract only positive conditions into our life? If our attitude and our thinking are always positive, we would manifest only positive events and situations, wouldn't we?

Do you truly know what is positive and what is negative? Do you have the total picture? There have been many people for whom limitation, failure, loss, illness, or pain in whatever form turned out to be their greatest teacher. It taught them to let go of false self-images and superficial ego-dictated goals and desires. It gave them depth, humility, and compassion. It made them more *real*.

Whenever anything negative happens to you, there is a deep lesson concealed within it, although you may not see it at the time. Even a brief illness or an accident can show you what is real and unreal in your life, what ultimately matters and what doesn't.

Seen from a higher perspective, conditions *are* always positive. To be more precise: they are neither positive nor negative. They are as they are. And when you live in complete acceptance of what *is* — which is the only sane way to live — there is no "good" or "bad" in your life anymore. There is only a higher good — which includes the "bad." Seen from the perspective of the mind, however, there is good-bad, like-dislike, love-hate. Hence, in the Book of Genesis, it is said that Adam and Eve were no longer allowed to dwell in

"paradise" when they "ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil."

This sounds to me like denial and self-deception. When something dreadful happens to me or someone close to me — accident, illness, pain of some kind, or death — I can pretend that it isn't bad, but the fact remains that it is *bad, so why deny it?*

You are not pretending anything. You are allowing it to be as it is, that's all. This "allowing to be" takes you beyond the mind with its resistance patterns that create the positive-negative polarities. It is an essential aspect of forgiveness. Forgiveness of the present is even more important than forgiveness of the past. If you forgive every moment — allow it to be as it is — then there will be no accumulation of resentment that needs to be forgiven at some later time.

Remember that we are not talking about happiness here. For example, when a loved one has just died, or you feel your own death approaching, you cannot be happy. It is impossible. But you *can* be at peace. There may be sadness and tears, but provided that you have relinquished resistance, underneath the sadness you will feel a deep serenity, a stillness, a sacred presence. This is the emanation of Being, this is inner peace, the good that has no opposite.

What if it is a situation that I can do something about? How can I allow it to be and change it at the same time?

Do what you have to do. In the meantime, accept what *is*. Since mind and resistance are synonymous, acceptance immediately frees you from mind dominance and thus reconnects you with Being. As a result, the usual ego motivations for "doing" — fear, greed, control, defending or feeding the false sense of self — will cease to operate. An intelligence much greater than the mind is now in charge, and so a different quality of consciousness will flow into your doing.

"Accept whatever comes to you woven in the pattern of your destiny, for what could more aptly fit your needs?" This was written two thousand years ago by Marcus Aurelius, one of those exceedingly rare humans who possessed worldly power as well as wisdom.

It seems that most people need to experience a great deal of suffering before they will relinquish resistance and accept — before they will forgive. As soon as they do, one of the greatest miracles happens: the awakening of Being-consciousness through what appears as evil, the transmutation of suffering into inner peace. The ultimate effect of all the evil and suffering in the world is

that it will force humans into realizing who they are beyond name and form. Thus, what we perceive as evil from our limited perspective is actually part of the higher good that has no opposite. This, however, does not become true for you except through forgiveness. Until that happens, evil has not been redeemed and therefore remains evil.

Through forgiveness, which essentially means recognizing the insubstantiality of the past and allowing the present moment to be as it is, the miracle of transformation happens not only within but also without. A silent space of intense presence arises both in you and around you. Whoever or whatever enters that field of consciousness will be affected by it, sometimes visibly and immediately, sometimes at deeper levels with visible changes appearing at a later time. You dissolve discord, heal pain, dispel unconsciousness — without *doing* anything — simply by *being* and holding that frequency of intense presence.

THE END OF YOUR LIFE DRAMA

In that state of acceptance and inner peace, even though you *may not call it "bad," can anything still come into your life that would be called "bad" from a perspective of ordinary consciousness?*

Most of the so-called bad things that happen in people's lives are due to unconsciousness. They are self-created, or rather ego-created. I sometimes refer to those things as "drama." When you are fully conscious, drama does not come into your life anymore. Let me remind you briefly how the ego operates and how it creates drama.

Ego is the unobserved mind that runs your life when you are not present as the witnessing consciousness, the watcher. The ego perceives itself as a separate fragment in a hostile universe, with no real inner connection to any other being, surrounded by other egos which it either sees as a potential threat or which it will attempt to use for its own ends. The basic ego patterns are designed to combat its own deep-seated fear and sense of lack. They are resistance, control, power, greed, defense, attack. Some of the ego's strategies are extremely clever, yet they never truly solve any of its problems, simply because the ego itself is the problem.

When egos come together, whether in personal relationships or in

organizations or institutions, "bad" things happen sooner or later: drama of one kind or another, in the form of conflict, problems, power struggles, emotional or physical violence, and so on. This includes collective evils such as war, genocide, and exploitation — all due to massed unconsciousness. Furthermore, many types of illness are caused by the ego's continuous resistance, which creates restrictions and blockages in the flow of energy through the body. When you reconnect with Being and are no longer run by your mind, you cease to create those things. You do not create or participate in drama anymore.

Whenever two or more egos come together, drama of one kind or another ensues. But even if you live totally alone, you still create your own drama. When you feel sorry for yourself, that's drama. When you feel guilty or anxious, that's drama. When you let the past or future obscure the present, you are creating time, psychological time — the stuff out of which drama is made. Whenever you are not honoring the present moment by allowing it to be, you are creating drama.

Most people are in love with their particular life drama. Their story is their identity. The ego runs their life. They have their whole sense of self invested in it. Even their — usually unsuccessful — search for an answer, a solution, or for healing becomes part of it. What they fear and resist most is the end of their drama. As long as they *are* their mind, what they fear and resist most is their own awakening.

When you live in complete acceptance of what *is*, that is the end of all drama in your life. Nobody can even have an argument with you, no matter how hard he or she tries. You cannot have an argument with a fully conscious person. An argument implies identification with your mind and a mental position, as well as resistance and reaction to the other person's position. The result is that the polar opposites become mutually energized. These are the mechanics of unconsciousness. You can still make your point clearly and firmly, but there will be no reactive force behind it, no defense or attack. So it won't turn into drama. When you are fully conscious, you cease to be in conflict. "No one who is at one with himself can even conceive of conflict," states *A Course in Miracles*. This refers not only to conflict with other people but more fundamentally to conflict within you, which ceases when there is no longer any clash between the demands and expectations of your mind and what *is*.

IMPERMANENCE AND THE CYCLES OF LIFE

However, as long as you are in the physical dimension and linked to the collective human psyche, physical pain — although rare — is still possible. This is not to be confused with suffering, with mental-emotional pain. All suffering is ego-created and is due to resistance. Also, as long as you are in this dimension, you are still subject to its cyclical nature and to the law of impermanence of all things, but you no longer perceive this as "bad" — it just *is*.

Through allowing the "isness" of all things, a deeper dimension underneath the play of opposites reveals itself to you as an abiding presence, an unchanging deep stillness, an uncaused joy beyond good and bad. This is the joy of Being, the peace of God.

On the level of form, there is birth and death, creation and destruction, growth and dissolution, of seemingly separate forms. This is reflected everywhere: in the life cycle of a star or a planet, a physical body, a tree, a flower; in the rise and fall of nations, political systems, civilizations; and in the inevitable cycles of gain and loss in the life of an individual.

There are cycles of success, when things come to you and thrive, and cycles of failure, when they wither or disintegrate and you have to let them go in order to make room for new things to arise, or for transformation to happen. If you cling and resist at that point, it means you are refusing to go with the flow of life, and you will suffer.

It is not true that the up cycle is good and the down cycle bad, except in the mind's judgment. Growth is usually considered positive, but nothing can grow forever. If growth, of whatever kind, were to go on and on, it would eventually become monstrous and destructive. Dissolution is needed for new growth to happen. One cannot exist without the other.

The down cycle is absolutely essential for spiritual realization. You must have failed deeply on some level or experienced some deep loss or pain to be drawn to the spiritual dimension. Or perhaps your very success became empty and meaningless and so turned out to be failure. Failure lies concealed in every success, and success in every failure. In this world, which is to say on the level of form, everybody "fails" sooner or later, of course, and every achievement eventually comes to naught. All forms are impermanent.

You can still be active and enjoy manifesting and creating new forms and circumstances, but you won't be identified with them. You do not need them to give you a sense of self. They are not your life — only your life situation.

Your physical energy is also subject to cycles. It cannot always be at a peak.

There will be times of low as well as high energy. There will be periods when you are highly active and creative, but there may also be times when everything seems stagnant, when it seems that you are not getting anywhere, not achieving anything. A cycle can last for anything from a few hours to a few years. There are large cycles and small cycles within these large ones. Many illnesses are created through fighting against the cycles of low energy, which are vital for regeneration. The compulsion to do, and the tendency to derive your sense of self-worth and identity from external factors such as achievement, is an inevitable illusion as long as you are identified with the mind. This makes it hard or impossible for you to accept the low cycles and allow them to be. Thus, the intelligence of the organism may take over as a self-protective measure and create an illness in order to force you to stop, so that the necessary regeneration can take place.

The cyclical nature of the universe is closely linked with the impermanence of all things and situations. The Buddha made this a central part of his teaching. All conditions are highly unstable and in constant flux, or, as he put it, impermanence is a characteristic of every condition, every situation you will ever encounter in your life. It will change, disappear, or no longer satisfy you. Impermanence is also central to Jesus's teaching: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal. . . ."

As long as a condition is judged as "good" by your mind, whether it be a relationship, a possession, a social role, a place, or your physical body, the mind attaches itself to it and identifies with it. It makes you happy, makes you feel good about yourself, and it may become part of who you are or think you are. But nothing lasts in this dimension where moth and rust consume. Either it ends or it changes, or it may undergo a polarity shift: The same condition that was good yesterday or last year has suddenly or gradually turned into bad. The same condition that made you happy then makes you unhappy. The prosperity of today becomes the empty consumerism of tomorrow. The happy wedding and honeymoon become the unhappy divorce or the unhappy coexistence. Or a condition disappears, so its absence makes you unhappy. When a condition or situation that the mind has attached itself to and identified with changes or disappears, the mind cannot accept it. It will cling to the disappearing condition and resist the change. It is almost as if a limb were being torn off your body.

We sometimes hear of people who have lost all their money or whose reputations have been ruined committing suicide. Those are the extreme cases. Others, whenever a major loss of one kind or another occurs, just become

deeply unhappy or make themselves ill. They cannot distinguish between their life and their life situation. I recently read about a famous actress who died in her eighties. As her beauty started to fade and became ravaged by old age, she grew desperately unhappy and became a recluse. She, too, had identified with a condition: her external appearance. First, the condition gave her a happy sense of self, then an unhappy one. If she had been able to connect with the formless and timeless life within, she could have watched and allowed the fading of her external form from a place of serenity and peace. Moreover, her external form would have become increasingly transparent to the light shining through from her ageless true nature, so her beauty would not really have faded but simply become transformed into spiritual beauty. However, nobody told her that this is possible. The most essential kind of knowledge is not yet widely accessible.

The Buddha taught that even your happiness is *dukkha* — a Pali word meaning "suffering" or "unsatisfactoriness." It is inseparable from its opposite. This means that your happiness and unhappiness are in fact one. Only the illusion of time separates them.

This is not being negative. It is simply recognizing the nature of things, so that you don't pursue an illusion for the rest of your life. Nor is it saying that you should no longer appreciate pleasant or beautiful things or conditions. But to seek something through them that they cannot give — an identity, a sense of permanency and fulfillment — is a recipe for frustration and suffering. The whole advertising industry and consumer society would collapse if people became enlightened and no longer sought to find their identity through *things*. The more you seek happiness in this way, the more it will elude you. Nothing out there will ever satisfy you except temporarily and superficially, but you may need to experience many disillusionments before you realize that truth. Things and conditions can give you pleasure, but they will also give you pain. Things and conditions can give you pleasure, but they cannot give you *joy*. Nothing can *give* you joy. Joy is uncaused and arises from within as the joy of Being. It is an essential part of the inner state of peace, the state that has been called the peace of God. It is your natural state, not something that you need to work hard for or struggle to attain.

Many people never realize that there can be no "salvation" in anything they do, possess, or attain. Those who do realize it often become world-weary and depressed: If nothing can give you true fulfillment, what is there left to strive

for, what is the point in anything? The Old Testament prophet must have arrived at such a realization when he wrote: "I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind." When you reach this point, you are one step away from despair — and one step away from enlightenment.

A Buddhist monk once told me: "All I have learned in the twenty years that I have been a monk I can sum up in one sentence: All that arises passes away. This I know." What he meant, of course, was this: I have learned to offer no resistance to what *is*; I have learned to allow the present moment to be and to accept the impermanent nature of all things and conditions. Thus have I found peace.

To offer no resistance to life is to be in a state of grace, ease, and lightness. This state is then no longer dependent upon things being in a certain way, good or bad. It seems almost paradoxical, yet when your inner dependency on form is gone, the general conditions of your life, the outer forms, tend to improve greatly. Things, people, or conditions that you thought you needed for your happiness now come to you with no struggle or effort on your part, and you are free to enjoy and appreciate them — while they last. All those things, of course, will still pass away, cycles will come and go, but with dependency gone there is no fear of loss anymore. Life flows with ease.

The happiness that is derived from some secondary source is never very deep. It is only a pale reflection of the joy of Being, the vibrant peace that you find within as you enter the state of nonresistance. Being takes you beyond the polar opposites of the mind and frees you from dependency on form. Even if everything were to collapse and crumble all around you, you would still feel a deep inner core of peace. You may not be happy, but you will be at peace.

USING AND RELINQUISHING NEGATIVITY

All inner resistance is experienced as negativity in one form or another. All negativity *is* resistance. In this context, the two words are almost synonymous. Negativity ranges from irritation or impatience to fierce anger, from a depressed mood or sullen resentment to suicidal despair. Sometimes the resistance triggers the emotional pain-body, in which case even a minor situation may produce intense negativity, such as anger, depression, or deep grief.

The ego believes that through negativity it can manipulate reality and get what it wants. It believes that through it, it can attract a desirable condition or dissolve an undesirable one. *A Course in Miracles* rightly points out that, whenever you are unhappy, there is the unconscious belief that the unhappiness "buys" you what you want. If "you" — the mind — did not believe that unhappiness works, why would you create it? The fact is, of course, that negativity does not work. Instead of attracting a desirable condition, it stops it from arising. Instead of dissolving an undesirable one, it keeps it in place. Its only "useful" function is that it strengthens the ego, and that is why the ego loves it.

Once you have identified with some form of negativity, you do not want to let go, and on a deeply unconscious level, you do not want positive change. It would threaten your identity as a depressed, angry, or hard-done-by person. You will then ignore, deny, or sabotage the positive in your life. This is a common phenomenon. It is also insane.

Negativity is totally unnatural. It is a psychic pollutant, and there is a deep link between the poisoning and destruction of nature and the vast negativity that has accumulated in the collective human psyche. No other life-form on the planet knows negativity, only humans, just as no other life-form violates and poisons the Earth that sustains it. Have you ever seen an unhappy flower or a stressed oak tree? Have you come across a depressed dolphin, a frog that has a problem with self-esteem, a cat that cannot relax, or a bird that carries hatred and resentment? The only animals that may occasionally experience something akin to negativity or show signs of neurotic behavior are those that live in close contact with humans and so link into the human mind and its insanity.

Watch any plant or animal and let it teach you acceptance of what *is*, surrender to the Now. Let it teach you Being. Let it teach you integrity — which means to be one, to be yourself, to be real. Let it teach you how to live and how to die, and how *not* to make living and dying into a problem.

I have lived with several Zen masters — all of them cats. Even ducks have taught me important spiritual lessons. Just watching them is a meditation. How peacefully they float along, at ease with themselves, totally present in the Now, dignified and perfect as only a mindless creature can be. Occasionally, however, two ducks will get into a fight — sometimes for no apparent reason, or because one duck has strayed into another's private space. The fight usually lasts only for a few seconds, and then the ducks separate, swim off in opposite directions, and vigorously flap their wings a few times. They then continue to

swim on peacefully as if the fight had never happened. When I observed that for the first time, I suddenly realized that by flapping their wings they were releasing surplus energy, thus preventing it from becoming trapped in their body and turning into negativity. This is natural wisdom, and it is easy for them because they do not have a mind that keeps the past alive unnecessarily and then builds an identity around it.

Couldn't a negative emotion also contain an important message? For example, if I often feel depressed, it may be a signal that there is something wrong with my life, and it may force me to look at my life situation and make some changes. So I need to listen to what the emotion is telling me and not just dismiss it as negative.

Yes, recurring negative emotions do sometimes contain a message, as do illnesses. But any changes that you make, whether they have to do with your work, your relationships, or your surroundings, are ultimately only cosmetic unless they arise out of a change in your level of consciousness. And as far as that is concerned, it can only mean one thing: becoming more present. When you have reached a certain degree of presence, you don't need negativity anymore to tell you what is needed in your life situation. But as long as negativity *is* there, use it. Use it as a kind of signal that reminds you to be more present.

How do we stop negativity from arising, and how do we get rid of it once it is there?

As I said, you stop it from arising by being fully present. But don't become discouraged. There are as yet few people on the planet who can sustain a state of continuous presence, although some are getting close to it. Soon, I believe, there will be many more.

Whenever you notice that some form of negativity has arisen within you, look on it not as a failure, but as a helpful signal that is telling you: "Wake up. Get out of your mind. Be present."

There is a novel by Aldous Huxley called *Island*, written in his later years when he became very interested in spiritual teachings. It tells the story of a man shipwrecked on a remote island cut off from the rest of the world. This island contains a unique civilization. The unusual thing about it is that its inhabitants, unlike those of the rest of the world, are actually sane. The first thing that the man notices are the colorful parrots perched in the trees, and they seem to be constantly croaking the words "Attention. Here and Now. Attention. Here and Now." We later learn that the islanders taught them these

words in order to be reminded continuously to stay present.

So whenever you feel negativity arising within you, whether caused by an external factor, a thought, or even nothing in particular that you are aware of, look on it as a voice saying "Attention. Here and Now. Wake up." Even the slightest irritation is significant and needs to be acknowledged and looked at; otherwise, there will be a cumulative buildup of unobserved reactions. As I said before, you may be able to just drop it once you realize that you don't want to have this energy field inside you and that it serves no purpose. But then make sure that you drop it completely. If you cannot drop it, just accept that it is there and take your attention into the feeling, as I pointed out earlier.

As an alternative to dropping a negative reaction, you can make it disappear by imagining yourself becoming transparent to the external cause of the reaction. I recommend that you practice it with little, even trivial, things first. Let's say that you are sitting quietly at home. Suddenly, there is the penetrating sound of a car alarm from across the street. Irritation arises. What is the purpose of the irritation? None whatsoever. Why did you create it? You didn't. The mind did. It was totally automatic, totally unconscious. Why did the mind create it? Because it holds the unconscious belief that its resistance, which you experience as negativity or unhappiness in some form, will somehow dissolve the undesirable condition. This, of course, is a delusion. The resistance that it creates, the irritation or anger in this case, is far more disturbing than the original cause that it is attempting to dissolve.

All this can be transformed into spiritual practice. Feel yourself becoming transparent, as it were, without the solidity of a material body. Now allow the noise, or whatever causes a negative reaction, to pass right through you. It is no longer hitting a solid "wall" inside you. As I said, practice with little things first. The car alarm, the dog barking, the children screaming, the traffic jam. Instead of having a wall of resistance inside you that gets constantly and painfully hit by things that "should not be happening," let everything pass through you.

Somebody says something to you that is rude or designed to hurt. Instead of going into unconscious reaction and negativity, such as attack, defense, or withdrawal, you let it pass right through you. Offer no resistance. It is as if there is nobody there to get hurt anymore. *That* is forgiveness. In this way, you become invulnerable. You can still tell that person that his or her behavior is unacceptable, if that is what you choose to do. But that person no longer has the power to control your inner state. You are then in your power — not in someone else's, nor are you run by your mind. Whether it is a car alarm, a

rude person, a flood, an earthquake, or the loss of all your possessions, the resistance mechanism is the same.

I have been practicing meditation, I have been to workshops, I have read many books on spirituality, I try to be in a state of nonresistance — but if you ask me whether I have found true and lasting inner peace, my honest answer would have to be "no." Why haven't I found it? What else can I do?

You are still seeking outside, and you cannot get out of the seeking mode. Maybe the next workshop will have the answer, maybe that new technique. To you I would say: Don't look for peace. Don't look for any other state than the one you are in now; otherwise, you will set up inner conflict and unconscious resistance. Forgive yourself for not being at peace. The moment you *completely* accept your non-peace, your non-peace becomes transmuted into peace. Anything you accept fully will get you there, will take you into peace. This is the miracle of surrender.

You may have heard the phrase "turn the other cheek," which a great teacher of enlightenment used two thousand years ago. He was attempting to convey symbolically the secret of nonresistance and nonreaction. In this statement, as in all his others, he was concerned only with your inner reality, not with the outer conduct of your life.

Do you know the story of Banzan? Before he became a great Zen master, he spent many years in the pursuit of enlightenment, but it eluded him. Then one day, as he was walking in the marketplace, he overheard a conversation between a butcher and his customer. "Give me the best piece of meat you have," said the customer. And the butcher replied, "Every piece of meat I have is the best. There is no piece of meat here that is not the best." Upon hearing this, Banzan became enlightened.

I can see you are waiting for some explanation. When you accept what *is*, every piece of meat — every moment — is the best. That is enlightenment.

THE NATURE OF COMPASSION

Having gone beyond the mind-made opposites, you become like a deep lake. The outer situation of your life and whatever happens there is the surface of the lake. Sometimes calm, sometimes windy and rough, according to the

cycles and seasons. Deep down, however, the lake is always undisturbed. You are the whole lake, not just the surface, and you are in touch with your own depth, which remains absolutely still. You don't resist change by mentally clinging to any situation. Your inner peace does not depend on it. You abide in Being — unchanging, timeless, deathless — and you are no longer dependent for fulfillment or happiness on the outer world of constantly fluctuating forms. You can enjoy them, play with them, create new forms, appreciate the beauty of it all. But there will be no need to attach yourself to any of it.

When you become this detached, does it not mean that you also become remote from other human beings?

On the contrary. As long as you are unaware of Being, the reality of other humans will elude you, because you have not found your own. Your mind will like or dislike their form, which is not just their body but includes their mind as well. True relationship becomes possible only when there is an awareness of Being. Coming from Being, you will perceive another person's body and mind as just a screen, as it were, behind which you can feel their true reality, as you feel yours. So, when confronted with someone else's suffering or unconscious behavior, you stay present and in touch with Being and are thus able to look beyond the form and feel the other person's radiant and pure Being through your own. At the level of Being, all suffering is recognized as an illusion. Suffering is due to identification with form. Miracles of healing sometimes occur through this realization, by awakening Being-consciousness in others — if they are ready.

Is that what compassion is?

Yes. Compassion is the awareness of a deep bond between yourself and all creatures. But there are two sides to compassion, two sides to this bond. On the one hand, since you are still here as a physical body, you share the vulnerability and mortality of your physical form with every other human and with every living being. Next time you say, "I have nothing in common with this person," remember that you have a great deal in common: A few years from now — two years or seventy years, it doesn't make much difference — both of you will have become rotting corpses, then piles of dust, then nothing at all. This is a sobering and humbling realization that leaves little room for pride. Is this a negative thought? No, it is a fact. Why close your eyes to it? In that sense, there is total equality between you and every other creature.

One of the most powerful spiritual practices is to meditate deeply on the

mortality of physical forms, including your own. This is called: Die before you die. Go into it deeply. Your physical form is dissolving, is no more. Then a moment comes when all mind-forms or thoughts also die. Yet *you* are still there — the divine presence that you are. Radiant, fully awake. Nothing that was real ever died, only names, forms, and illusions.

The realization of this deathless dimension, your true nature, is the other side of compassion. On a deep feeling-level, you now recognize not only your own immortality but through your own that of every other creature as well. On the level of form, you share mortality and the precariousness of existence. On the level of Being, you share eternal, radiant life. These are the two aspects of compassion. In compassion, the seemingly opposite feelings of sadness and joy merge into one and become transmuted into a deep inner peace. This is the peace of God. It is one of the most noble feelings that humans are capable of, and it has great healing and transformative power. But true compassion, as I have just described it, is as yet rare. To have deep empathy for the suffering of another being certainly requires a high degree of consciousness but represents only one side of compassion. It is not complete. True compassion goes beyond empathy or sympathy. It does not happen until sadness merges with joy, the joy of Being beyond form, the joy of eternal life.

TOWARD A DIFFERENT ORDER OF REALITY

I don't agree that the body needs to die. I am convinced that we can achieve physical immortality. We believe in death and that's why the body dies.

The body does not die because you believe in death. The body exists, or seems to, because you believe in death. Body and death are part of the same illusion, created by the egoic mode of consciousness, which has no awareness of the Source of life and sees itself as separate and constantly under threat. So it creates the illusion that you are a body, a dense, physical vehicle that is constantly under threat.

To perceive yourself as a vulnerable body that was born and a little later dies — that's the illusion. Body and death: one illusion. You cannot have one without the other. You want to keep one side of the illusion and get rid of the other, but that is impossible. Either you keep all of it or you relinquish all of it.

However, you cannot escape from the body, nor do you have to. The body is

an incredible misperception of your true nature. But your true nature is concealed somewhere within that illusion, not outside it, so the body is still the only point of access to it.

If you saw an angel but mistook it for a stone statue, all you would have to do is adjust your vision and look more closely at the "stone statue," not start looking somewhere else. You would then find that there never was a stone statue.

If belief in death creates the body, why does an animal have a body? An animal doesn't have an ego, and it doesn't believe in death. . . .

But it still dies, or seems to.

Remember that your perception of the world is a reflection of your state of consciousness. You are not separate from it, and there is no objective world out there. Every moment, your consciousness creates the world that you inhabit. One of the greatest insights that has come out of modern physics is that of the unity between the observer and the observed: the person conducting the experiment — the observing consciousness — cannot be separated from the observed phenomena, and a different way of looking causes the observed phenomena to behave differently. If you believe, on a deep level, in separation and the struggle for survival, then you see that belief reflected all around you and your perceptions are governed by fear. You inhabit a world of death and of bodies fighting, killing, and devouring each other.

Nothing is what it seems to be. The world that you create and see through the egoic mind may seem a very imperfect place, even a vale of tears. But whatever you perceive is only a kind of symbol, like an image in a dream. It is how your consciousness interprets and interacts with the molecular energy dance of the universe. This energy is the raw material of so-called physical reality. You see it in terms of bodies and birth and death, or as a struggle for survival. An infinite number of completely different interpretations, completely different worlds, is possible and, in fact, exists — all depending on the perceiving consciousness. Every being is a focal point of consciousness, and every such focal point creates its own world, although all those worlds are interconnected. There is a human world, an ant world, a dolphin world, and so on. There are countless beings whose consciousness frequency is so different from yours that you are probably unaware of their existence, as they are of yours. Highly conscious beings who are aware of their connectedness with the Source and with each other would inhabit a world that to you would

appear as a heavenly realm — and yet all worlds are ultimately one.

Our collective human world is largely created through the level of consciousness we call mind. Even within the collective human world there are vast differences, many different "sub-worlds," depending on the perceivers or creators of their respective worlds. Since all worlds are interconnected, when collective human consciousness becomes transformed, nature and the animal kingdom will reflect that transformation. Hence the statement in the Bible that in the coming age "The lion shall lie down with the lamb." This points to the possibility of a completely different order of reality.

The world as it appears to us now is, as I said, largely a reflection of the egoic mind. Fear being an unavoidable consequence of egoic delusion, it is a world dominated by fear. Just as the images in a dream are symbols of inner states and feelings, so our collective reality is largely a symbolic expression of fear and of the heavy layers of negativity that have accumulated in the collective human psyche. We are not separate from our world, so when the majority of humans become free of egoic delusion, this inner change will affect all of creation. You will literally inhabit a new world. It is a shift in planetary consciousness. The strange Buddhist saying that every tree and every blade of grass will eventually become enlightened points to the same truth. According to St. Paul, the whole of creation is waiting for humans to become enlightened. That is how I interpret his saying that "The created universe is waiting with eager expectation for God's sons to be revealed." St. Paul goes on to say that all of creation will become redeemed through this: "Up to the present. . .the whole created universe in all its parts groans as if in the pangs of childbirth."

What is being born is a new consciousness and, as its inevitable reflection, a new world. This is also foretold in the New Testament Book of Revelation: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away."

But don't confuse cause and effect. Your primary task is not to seek salvation through creating a better world, but to awaken out of identification with form. You are then no longer bound to this world, this level of reality. You can feel your roots in the Unmanifested and so are free of attachment to the manifested world. You can still enjoy the passing pleasures of this world, but there is no fear of loss anymore, so you don't need to cling to them. Although you can enjoy sensory pleasures, the craving for sensory experience is gone, as is the constant search for fulfillment through psychological gratification, through feeding the ego. You are in touch with something infinitely greater than any pleasure, greater than any manifested thing.

In a way, you then don't need the world anymore. You don't even need it to be different from the way it is.

It is only at this point that you begin to make a real contribution toward bringing about a better world, toward creating a different order of reality. It is only at this point that you are able to feel true compassion and to help others at the level of cause. Only those who have transcended the world can bring about a better world.

You may remember that we talked about the dual nature of true compassion, which is awareness of a common bond of shared mortality and immortality. At this deep level, compassion becomes healing in the widest sense. In that state, your healing influence is primarily based not on doing but on being. Everybody you come in contact with will be touched by your presence and affected by the peace that you emanate, whether they are conscious of it or not. When you are fully present and people around you manifest unconscious behavior, you won't feel the need to react to it, so you don't give it any reality. Your peace is so vast and deep that anything that is not peace disappears into it as if it had never existed. This breaks the karmic cycle of action and reaction. Animals, trees, flowers will feel your peace and respond to it. You teach through being, through demonstrating the peace of God. You become the "light of the world," an emanation of pure consciousness, and so you eliminate suffering on the level of cause. You eliminate unconsciousness from the world.

This doesn't mean that you may not also teach through doing — for example, by pointing out how to disidentify from the mind, recognize unconscious patterns within oneself, and so on. But who you *are* is always a more vital teaching and a more powerful transformer of the world than what you say, and more essential even than what you do.

Furthermore, to recognize the primacy of Being, and thus work on the level of cause, does not exclude the possibility that your compassion may simultaneously manifest on the level of doing and of effect by alleviating suffering whenever you come across it. When a hungry person asks you for bread and you have some, you will give it. But as you give the bread, even though your interaction may only be very brief, what really matters is this moment of shared Being, of which the bread is only a symbol. A deep healing takes place within it. In that moment, there is no giver, no receiver.

But there shouldn't be any hunger and starvation in the first place. How can we create a better world without tackling evils such as hunger and violence first?

All evils are the *effect* of unconsciousness. You can alleviate the effects of unconsciousness, but you cannot eliminate them unless you eliminate their cause. True change happens within, not without.

If you feel called upon to alleviate suffering in the world, that is a very noble thing to do, but remember not to focus exclusively on the outer; otherwise, you will encounter frustration and despair. Without a profound change in human consciousness, the world's suffering is a bottomless pit. So don't let your compassion become one-sided. Empathy with someone else's pain or lack and a desire to help need to be balanced with a deeper realization of the eternal nature of all life and the ultimate illusion of all pain. Then let your peace flow into whatever you do and you will be working on the levels of effect and cause simultaneously.

This also applies if you are supporting a movement designed to stop deeply unconscious humans from destroying themselves, each other, and the planet, or from continuing to inflict dreadful suffering on other sentient beings. Remember: Just as you cannot fight the darkness, so you cannot fight unconsciousness. If you try to do so, the polar opposites will become strengthened and more deeply entrenched. You will become identified with one of the polarities, you will create an "enemy," and so be drawn into unconsciousness yourself. Raise awareness by disseminating information, or at the most, practice passive resistance. But make sure that you carry no resistance within, no hatred, no negativity. "Love your enemies," said Jesus, which, of course, means "have no enemies."

Once you get involved in working on the level of effect, it is all too easy to lose yourself in it. Stay alert and very, very present. The causal level needs to remain your primary focus, the teaching of enlightenment your main purpose, and peace your most precious gift to the world.

CHAPTER TEN

THE MEANING OF SURRENDER

ACCEPTANCE OF THE NOW

You mentioned "surrender" a few times. I don't like that idea. It sounds somewhat fatalistic. If we always accept the way things are, we are not going to make any effort to improve them. It seems to me what progress is all about, both in our personal lives and collectively, is not to accept the limitations of the present but to strive to go beyond them and create something better. If we hadn't done this, we would still be living in caves. How do you reconcile surrender with changing things and getting things done?

To some people, surrender may have negative connotations, implying defeat, giving up, failing to rise to the challenges of life, becoming lethargic, and so on. True surrender, however, is something entirely different. It does not mean to passively put up with whatever situation you find yourself in and to do nothing about it. Nor does it mean to cease making plans or initiating positive action.

Surrender is the simple but profound wisdom of *yielding to* rather than *opposing* the flow of life. The only place where you can experience the flow of life is the Now, so to surrender is to accept the present moment unconditionally and without reservation. It is to relinquish inner resistance to what *is*. Inner resistance is to say "no" to what *is*, through mental judgment and emotional negativity. It becomes particularly pronounced when things "go wrong," which means that there is a gap between the demands or rigid expectations of your mind and what *is*. That is the pain gap. If you have lived long enough, you will know that things "go wrong" quite often. It is precisely at those times that surrender needs to be practiced if you want to eliminate pain and sorrow from your life. Acceptance of what *is* immediately frees you from mind identification and thus reconnects you with Being. Resistance *is* the mind.

Surrender is a purely inner phenomenon. It does not mean that on the outer level you cannot take action and change the situation. In fact, it is not the overall situation that you need to accept when you surrender, but just the tiny segment called the Now.

For example, if you were stuck in the mud somewhere, you wouldn't say: "Okay, I resign myself to being stuck in the mud." Resignation is not surrender. You don't need to accept an undesirable or unpleasant life situation. Nor do you need to deceive yourself and say that there is nothing wrong with being stuck in the mud. No. You recognize fully that you want to get out of it. You then narrow your attention down to the present moment without mentally labeling it in any way. This means that there is no judgment of the Now. Therefore, there is no resistance, no emotional negativity. You accept the "isness" of this moment. Then you take action and do all that you can to get out of the mud. Such action I call positive action. It is far more effective than negative action, which arises out of anger, despair, or frustration. Until you achieve the desired result, you continue to practice surrender by refraining from labeling the Now.

Let me give you a visual analogy to illustrate the point I am making. You are walking along a path at night, surrounded by a thick fog. But you have a powerful flashlight that cuts through the fog and creates a narrow, clear space in front of you. The fog is your life situation, which includes past and future; the flashlight is your conscious presence; the clear space is the Now.

Non-surrender hardens your psychological form, the shell of the ego, and so creates a strong sense of separateness. The world around you and people in particular come to be perceived as threatening. The unconscious compulsion to destroy others through judgment arises, as does the need to compete and dominate. Even nature becomes your enemy and your perceptions and interpretations are governed by fear. The mental disease that we call paranoia is only a slightly more acute form of this normal but dysfunctional state of consciousness.

Not only your psychological form but also your physical form — your body — becomes hard and rigid through resistance. Tension arises in different parts of the body, and the body as a whole contracts. The free flow of life energy through the body, which is essential for its healthy functioning, is greatly restricted. Bodywork and certain forms of physical therapy can be helpful in restoring this flow, but unless you practice surrender in your everyday life, those things can only give temporary symptom relief since the cause — the resistance pattern — has not been dissolved.

There is something within you that remains unaffected by the transient circumstances that make up your life situation, and only through surrender do you have access to it. It is your life, your very Being — which exists eternally in the timeless realm of the present. Finding this life is "the one thing that is needed" that Jesus talked about.

If you find your life situation unsatisfactory or even intolerable, it is only by surrendering first that you can break the unconscious resistance pattern that perpetuates that situation.

Surrender is perfectly compatible with taking action, initiating change, or achieving goals. But in the surrendered state a totally different energy, a different quality, flows into your doing. Surrender reconnects you with the source-energy of Being, and if your doing is infused with Being, it becomes a joyful celebration of life energy that takes you more deeply into the Now. Through nonresistance, the quality of your consciousness and, therefore, the quality of whatever you are doing or creating is enhanced immeasurably. The results will then look after themselves and reflect that quality. We could call this *surrendered action*. It is not work as we have known it for thousands of years. As more humans awaken, the word *work* is going to disappear from our vocabulary, and perhaps a new word will be created to replace it.

It is the quality of your consciousness at this moment that is the main determinant of what kind of future you will experience, so to surrender is the most important thing you can do to bring about positive change. Any action you take is secondary. No truly positive action can arise out of an unsurrendered state of consciousness.

I can see that if I am in a situation that is unpleasant or unsatisfactory and I completely accept the moment as it is, there will be no suffering or unhappiness. I will have risen above it. But I still can't quite see where the energy or motivation for taking action and bringing about change would come from if there isn't a certain amount of dissatisfaction.

In the state of surrender, you see very clearly what needs to be done, and you take action, doing one thing at a time and focusing on one thing at a time. Learn from nature: See how everything gets accomplished and how the miracle of life unfolds without dissatisfaction or unhappiness. That's why Jesus said: "Look at the lilies, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin."

If your overall situation is unsatisfactory or unpleasant, *separate out this instant* and surrender to what *is*. That's the flashlight cutting through the fog. Your state of consciousness then ceases to be controlled by external conditions. You are no longer coming from reaction and resistance.

Then look at the specifics of the situation. Ask yourself, "Is there anything I can do to change the situation, improve it, or remove myself from it?" If so, you take appropriate action. Focus not on the one hundred things that you will or may have to do at some future time but on the one thing that you can do now. This doesn't mean you should not do any planning. It may well be that planning is the one thing you can do now. But make sure you don't start to run "mental movies," project yourself into the future, and so lose the Now. Any action you take may not bear fruit immediately. Until it does — do not resist what is. If there is no action you can take, and you cannot remove yourself from the situation either, then use the situation to make you go more deeply into surrender, more deeply into the Now, more deeply into Being. When you enter this timeless dimension of the present, change often comes about in strange ways without the need for a great deal of doing on your part. Life becomes helpful and cooperative. If inner factors such as fear, guilt, or inertia prevented you from taking action, they will dissolve in the light of your conscious presence.

Do not confuse surrender with an attitude of "I can't be bothered anymore" or "I just don't care anymore." If you look at it closely, you will find that such an attitude is tainted with negativity in the form of hidden resentment and so is not surrender at all but masked resistance. As you surrender, direct your attention inward to check if there is any trace of resistance left inside you. Be very alert when you do so; otherwise, a pocket of resistance may continue to hide in some dark corner in the form of a thought or an unacknowledged emotion.

FROM MIND ENERGY TO SPIRITUAL ENERGY

Letting go of resistance is easier said than done. I still don't see clearly how *to let go. If you say it is by surrendering, the question remains: "How?"*

Start by acknowledging that there *is* resistance. *Be* there when it happens, when the resistance arises. Observe how your mind creates it, how it labels the situation, yourself, or others. Look at the thought process involved. Feel the energy of the emotion. By witnessing the resistance, you will see that it serves no purpose. By focusing all your attention on the Now, the unconscious resistance is made conscious, and that is the end of it. You cannot be conscious

and unhappy, conscious *and* in negativity. Negativity, unhappiness, or suffering in whatever form means that there is resistance, and resistance is always unconscious.

Surely I can be conscious of my unhappy feelings?

Would you choose unhappiness? If you did not choose it, how did it arise? What is its purpose? Who is keeping it alive? You say that you are conscious of your unhappy feelings, but the truth is that you are identified with them and keep the process alive through compulsive thinking. All *that* is unconscious. If you were conscious, that is to say totally present in the Now, all negativity would dissolve almost instantly. It could not survive in your presence. It can only survive in your absence. Even the pain-body cannot survive for long in your presence. You keep your unhappiness alive by giving it time. That is its lifeblood. Remove time through intense present-moment awareness and it dies. But do you want it to die? Have you truly had enough? Who would you be without it?

Until you practice surrender, the spiritual dimension is something you read about, talk about, get excited about, write books about, think about, believe in — or don't, as the case may be. It makes no difference. Not until you surrender does it become a living reality in your life. When you do, the energy that you emanate and which then runs your life is of a much higher vibrational frequency than the mind energy that still runs our world — the energy that created the existing social, political, and economic structures of our civilization, and which also continuously perpetuates itself through our educational systems and the media. Through surrender, spiritual energy comes into this world. It creates no suffering for yourself, for other humans, or any other life form on the planet. Unlike mind energy, it does not pollute the earth, and it is not subject to the law of polarities, which dictates that nothing can exist without its opposite, that there can be no good without bad. Those who run on mind energy, which is still the vast majority of the Earth's population, remain unaware of the existence of spiritual energy. It belongs to a different order of reality and will create a different world when a sufficient number of humans enter the surrendered state and so become totally free of negativity. If the Earth is to survive, this will be the energy of those who inhabit it.

Jesus referred to this energy when he made his famous prophetic statement in the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the gentle; they shall have the earth for their possession." It is a silent but intense presence that dissolves the

unconscious patterns of the mind. They may still remain active for a while, but they won't run your life anymore. The external conditions that were being resisted also tend to shift or dissolve quickly through surrender. It is a powerful transformer of situations and people. If conditions do not shift immediately, your acceptance of the Now enables you to rise above them. Either way, you are free.

SURRENDER IN PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

What about people who want to use me, manipulate or control me? Am I to surrender to them?

They are cut off from Being, so they unconsciously attempt to get energy and power from you. It is true that only an unconscious person will try to use or manipulate others, but it is equally true that only an unconscious person *can* be used and manipulated. If you resist or fight unconscious behavior in others, you become unconscious yourself. But surrender doesn't mean that you allow yourself to be used by unconscious people. Not at all. It is perfectly possible to say "no" firmly and clearly to a person or to walk away from a situation and be in a state of complete inner nonresistance at the same time. When you say "no" to a person or a situation, let it come not from reaction but from insight, from a clear realization of what is right or not right for you at that moment. Let it be a nonreactive "no," a high-quality "no," a "no" that is free of all negativity and so creates no further suffering.

I am in a situation at work that is unpleasant. I have tried to surrender to it, but I find it impossible. A lot of resistance keeps coming up.

If you cannot surrender, take action immediately: Speak up or do something to bring about a change in the situation — or remove yourself from it. Take responsibility for your life. Do not pollute your beautiful, radiant inner Being nor the Earth with negativity. Do not give unhappiness in any form whatsoever a dwelling place inside you.

If you cannot take action, for example if you are in prison, then you have two choices left: resistance or surrender. Bondage or inner freedom from external conditions. Suffering or inner peace.

Is nonresistance also to be practiced in the external conduct of our lives, such as nonresistance to violence, or is it something that just concerns our inner life?

You only need to be concerned with the inner aspect. That is primary. Of course, that will also transform the conduct of your outer life, your relationships, and so on.

Your relationships will be changed profoundly by surrender. If you can never accept what *is*, by implication you will not be able to accept anybody the way they are. You will judge, criticize, label, reject, or attempt to change people. Furthermore, if you continuously make the Now into a means to an end in the future, you will also make every person you encounter or relate with into a means to an end. The relationship — the human being — is then of secondary importance to you, or of no importance at all. What you can get out of the relationship is primary — be it material gain, a sense of power, physical pleasure, or some form of ego gratification.

Let me illustrate how surrender can work in relationships. When you become involved in an argument or some conflict situation, perhaps with a partner or someone close to you, start by observing how defensive you become as your own position is attacked, or feel the force of your own aggression as you attack the other person's position. Observe the attachment to your views and opinions. Feel the mental-emotional energy behind your need to be right and make the other person wrong. That's the energy of the egoic mind. You make it conscious by acknowledging it, by feeling it as fully as possible. Then one day, in the middle of an argument, you will suddenly realize that you have a choice, and you may decide to drop your own reaction — just to see what happens. You surrender. I don't mean dropping the reaction just verbally by saying, "Okay, you are right," with a look on your face that says, "I am above all this childish unconsciousness." That's just displacing the resistance to another level, with the egoic mind still in charge, claiming superiority. I am speaking of letting go of the entire mental-emotional energy field inside you that was fighting for power.

The ego is cunning, so you have to be very alert, very present, and totally honest with yourself to see whether you have truly relinquished your identification with a mental position and so freed yourself from your mind. If you suddenly feel very light, clear, and deeply at peace, that is an unmistakable sign that you have truly surrendered. Then observe what happens to the other person's mental position as you no longer energize it through resistance. When identification with mental positions is out of the way, true communication begins.

What about nonresistance in the face of violence, aggression, and the like?

Nonresistance doesn't necessarily mean doing nothing. All it means is that any "doing" becomes nonreactive. Remember the deep wisdom underlying the practice of Eastern martial arts: Don't resist the opponent's force. Yield to overcome.

Having said that, "doing nothing" when you are in a state of intense presence is a very powerful transformer and healer of situations and people. In Taoism, there is a term called *wu wei*, which is usually translated as "actionless activity" or "sitting quietly doing nothing." In ancient China, this was regarded as one of the highest achievements or virtues. It is radically different from inactivity in the ordinary state of consciousness, or rather unconsciousness, which stems from fear, inertia, or indecision. The real "doing nothing" implies inner nonresistance and intense alertness.

On the other hand, if action is required, you will no longer react from your conditioned mind, but you will respond to the situation out of your conscious presence. In that state, your mind is free of concepts, including the concept of non-violence. So who can predict what you will do?

The ego believes that in your resistance lies your strength, whereas in truth resistance cuts you off from Being, the only place of true power. Resistance is weakness and fear masquerading as strength. What the ego sees as weakness is your Being in its purity, innocence, and power. What it sees as strength is weakness. So the ego exists in a continuous resistance-mode and plays counterfeit roles to cover up your "weakness," which in truth is your power.

Until there is surrender, unconscious role-playing constitutes a large part of human interaction. In surrender, you no longer need ego defenses and false masks. You become very simple, very real. "That's dangerous," says the ego. "You'll get hurt. You'll become vulnerable." What the ego doesn't know, of course, is that only through the letting go of resistance, through becoming "vulnerable," can you discover your true and essential invulnerability.

TRANSFORMING ILLNESS INTO ENLIGHTENMENT

If someone is seriously ill and completely accepts their condition and surrenders to the illness, would they not have given up their will to get back to health? The determination to fight the illness would not be there anymore, would it?

Surrender is inner acceptance of what *is* without any reservations. We are talking about your *life* — this instant — not the conditions or circumstances of your life, not what I call your life situation. We have spoken about this already.

With regard to illness, this is what it means. Illness is part of your life situation. As such, it has a past and a future. Past and future form an uninterrupted continuum, unless the redeeming power of the Now is activated through your conscious presence. As you know, underneath the various conditions that make up your life situation, which exists in time, there is something deeper, more essential: your Life, your very Being in the timeless Now.

As there are no problems in the Now, there is no illness either. The belief in a label that someone attaches to your condition keeps the condition in place, empowers it, and makes a seemingly solid reality out of a temporary imbalance. It gives it not only reality and solidity but also a continuity in time that it did not have before. By focusing on this instant and refraining from labeling it mentally, illness is reduced to one or several of these factors: physical pain, weakness, discomfort, or disability. *That* is what you surrender to — now. You do not surrender to the idea of "illness." Allow the suffering to force you into the present moment, into a state of intense conscious presence. Use it for enlightenment.

Surrender does not transform what *is*, at least not directly. Surrender transforms *you*. When *you* are transformed, your whole world is transformed, because the world is only a reflection. We spoke about this earlier.

If you looked in the mirror and did not like what you saw, you would have to be mad to attack the image in the mirror. That is precisely what you do when you are in a state of nonacceptance. And, of course, if you attack the image, it attacks you back. If you accept the image, no matter what it is, if you become friendly toward it, it cannot *not* become friendly toward you. This is how you change the world.

Illness is not the problem. *You* are the problem — as long as the egoic mind is in control. When you are ill or disabled, do not feel that you have failed in some way, do not feel guilty. Do not blame life for treating you unfairly, but do not blame yourself either. All that is resistance. If you have a major illness, use it for enlightenment. Anything "bad" that happens in your life — use it for enlightenment. Withdraw time from the illness. Do not give it any past or future. Let it force you into intense present-moment awareness — and see what happens.

Become an alchemist. Transmute base metal into gold, suffering into consciousness, disaster into enlightenment.

Are you seriously ill and feeling angry now about what I have just said? Then

that is a clear sign that the illness has become part of your sense of self and that you are now protecting your identity — as well as protecting the illness. The condition that is labeled "illness" has nothing to do with who you truly are.

WHEN DISASTER STRIKES

As far as the still unconscious majority of the population is concerned, only a critical limit-situation has the potential to crack the hard shell of the ego and force them into surrender and so into the awakened state. A limit-situation arises when through some disaster, drastic upheaval, deep loss, or suffering your whole world is shattered and doesn't make sense anymore. It is an encounter with death, be it physical or psychological. The egoic mind, the creator of this world, collapses. Out of the ashes of the old world, a new world can then come into being.

There is no guarantee, of course, that even a limit-situation will do it, but the potential is always there. Some people's resistance to what *is* even intensifies in such a situation, and so it becomes a descent into hell. In others, there may only be partial surrender, but even that will give them a certain depth and serenity that were not there before. Parts of the ego shell break off, and this allows small amounts of the radiance and peace that lie beyond the mind to shine through.

Limit-situations have produced many miracles. There have been murderers on death row waiting for execution who, in the last few hours of their lives, experienced the egoless state and the deep joy and peace that come with it. The inner resistance to the situation they found themselves in became so intense as to produce unbearable suffering, and there was nowhere to run and nothing to do to escape it, not even a mind-projected future. So they were forced into complete acceptance of the unacceptable. They were forced into surrender. In this way, they were able to enter the state of grace with which comes redemption: complete release from the past. Of course, it is not really the limit-situation that makes room for the miracle of grace and redemption, but the act of surrender.

So whenever any kind of disaster strikes, or something goes seriously "wrong" — illness, disability, loss of home or fortune or of a socially defined identity, breakup of a close relationship, death or suffering of a loved one, or your own impending death — know that there is another side to it, that you are just one step away from something incredible: a complete alchemical transmutation of the base metal of pain and suffering into gold. That one step

is called surrender.

I do not mean to say that you will become happy in such a situation. You will not. But fear and pain will become transmuted into an inner peace and serenity that come from a very deep place — from the Unmanifested itself. It is "the peace of God, which passes all understanding." Compared to that, happiness is quite a shallow thing. With this radiant peace comes the realization — not on the level of mind but within the depth of your Being — that you are indestructible, immortal. This is not a belief. It is absolute certainty that needs no external evidence or proof from some secondary source.

TRANSFORMING SUFFERING INTO PEACE

I read about a stoic philosopher in ancient Greece who, when he was told that his son had died in an accident, replied, "I knew he was not immortal." Is that surrender? If it is, I don't want it. There are some situations in which surrender seems unnatural and inhuman.

Being cut off from your feelings is not surrender. But we don't know what his inner state was when he said those words. In certain extreme situations, it may still be impossible for you to accept the Now. But you always get a second chance at surrender.

Your first chance is to surrender each moment to the reality of that moment. Knowing that what *is* cannot be undone —because it already *is* — you say yes to what *is* or accept what isn't. Then you do what you have to do, whatever the situation requires. If you abide in this state of acceptance, you create no more negativity, no more suffering, no more unhappiness. You then live in a state of nonresistance, a state of grace and lightness, free of struggle.

Whenever you are unable to do that, whenever you miss that chance — either because you are not generating enough conscious presence to prevent some habitual and unconscious resistance pattern from arising or because the condition is so extreme as to be absolutely unacceptable to you — then you are creating some form of pain, some form of suffering. It may look as if the situation is creating the suffering, but ultimately this is not so — your resistance is.

Now here is your second chance at surrender: If you cannot accept what is outside, then accept what is *inside*. If you cannot accept the external condition, accept the internal condition. This means: Do not resist the pain. Allow it to be there. Surrender to the grief, despair, fear, loneliness, or whatever form the

suffering takes. Witness it without labeling it mentally. Embrace it. Then see how the miracle of surrender transmutes deep suffering into deep peace. This is your crucifixion. Let it become your resurrection and ascension.

I do not see how one can surrender to suffering. As you yourself pointed out, suffering is *non-surrender. How could you surrender to non-surrender?*

Forget about surrender for a moment. When your pain is deep, all talk of surrender will probably seem futile and meaningless anyway. When your pain is deep, you will likely have a strong urge to escape from it rather than surrender to it. You don't want to feel what you feel. What could be more normal? But there is no escape, no way out. There are many pseudo escapes — work, drink, drugs, anger, projection, suppression, and so on — but they don't free you from the pain. Suffering does not diminish in intensity when you make it unconscious. When you deny emotional pain, everything you do or think as well as your relationships become contaminated with it. You broadcast it, so to speak, as the energy you emanate, and others will pick it up subliminally. If they are unconscious, they may even feel compelled to attack or hurt you in some way, or you may hurt them in an unconscious projection of your pain. You attract and manifest whatever corresponds to your inner state.

When there is no way out, there is still always a way *through*. So don't turn away from the pain. Face it. Feel it fully. *Feel* it — don't *think* about it! Express it if necessary, but don't create a script in your mind around it. Give all your attention to the feeling, not to the person, event, or situation that seems to have caused it. Don't let the mind use the pain to create a victim identity for yourself out of it. Feeling sorry for yourself and telling others your story will keep you stuck in suffering. Since it is impossible to get away from the feeling, the only possibility of change is to move into it; otherwise, nothing will shift. So give your complete attention to what you feel, and refrain from mentally labeling it. As you go into the feeling, be intensely alert. At first, it may seem like a dark and terrifying place, and when the urge to turn away from it comes, observe it but don't act on it. Keep putting your attention on the pain, keep feeling the grief, the fear, the dread, the loneliness, whatever it is. Stay alert, stay present — present with your whole Being, with every cell of your body. As you do so, you are bringing a light into this darkness. This is the flame of your consciousness.

At this stage, you don't need to be concerned with surrender anymore. It has happened already. How? Full attention *is* full acceptance, is surrender. By giving full attention, you use the power of the Now, which is the power of

your presence. No hidden pocket of resistance can survive in it. Presence removes time. Without time, no suffering, no negativity, can survive.

The acceptance of suffering is a journey into death. Facing deep pain, allowing it to be, taking your attention into it, is to enter death consciously. When you have died this death, you realize that there is no death — and there is nothing to fear. Only the ego dies. Imagine a ray of sunlight that has forgotten it is an inseparable part of the sun and deludes itself into believing it has to fight for survival and create and cling to an identity other than the sun. Would the death of this delusion not be incredibly liberating?

Do you want an easy death? Would you rather die without pain, without agony? Then die to the past every moment, and let the light of your presence shine away the heavy, time-bound self you thought of as "you."

THE WAY OF THE CROSS

There are many accounts of people who say they have found God through their deep suffering, and there is the Christian expression "the way of the cross," which I suppose points to the same thing.

We are concerned with nothing else here.

Strictly speaking, they did not find God through their suffering, because suffering implies resistance. They found God through surrender, through total acceptance of what *is*, into which they were forced by their intense suffering. They must have realized on some level that their pain was self-created.

How do you equate surrender with finding God?

Since resistance is inseparable from the mind, relinquishment of resistance — surrender — is the end of the mind as your master, the impostor pretending to be "you," the false god. All judgment and all negativity dissolve. The realm of Being, which had been obscured by the mind, then opens up. Suddenly, a great stillness arises within you, an unfathomable sense of peace. And within that peace, there is great joy. And within that joy, there is love. And at the innermost core, there is the sacred, the immeasurable, That which cannot be named.

I don't call it finding God, because how can you find that which was never lost, the very life that you are? The word God is limiting not only because of

thousands of years of misperception and misuse, but also because it implies an entity other than you. God is Being itself, not a being. There can be no subject-object relationship here, no duality, no you *and* God. God-realization is the most natural thing there is. The amazing and incomprehensible fact is not that you *can* become conscious of God but that you are *not* conscious of God. The way of the cross that you mentioned is the old way to enlightenment, and until recently it was the only way. But don't dismiss it or underestimate its efficacy. It still works.

The way of the cross is a complete reversal. It means that the worst thing in your life, your cross, turns into the best thing that ever happened to you, by forcing you into surrender, into "death," forcing you to become as nothing, to become as God — because God, too, is no-thing.

At this time, as far as the unconscious majority of humans is concerned, the way of the cross is still the only way. They will only awaken through further suffering, and enlightenment as a collective phenomenon will be predictably preceded by vast upheavals. This process reflects the workings of certain universal laws that govern the growth of consciousness and thus was foreseen by some seers. It is described, among other places, in the Book of Revelation or Apocalypse, though cloaked in obscure and sometimes impenetrable symbology. This suffering is inflicted not by God but by humans on themselves and on each other, as well as by certain defensive measures that the Earth, which is a living, intelligent organism, is going to take to protect herself from the onslaught of human madness.

However, there is a growing number of humans alive today whose consciousness is sufficiently evolved not to need any more suffering before the realization of enlightenment. You may be one of them.

Enlightenment through suffering — the way of the cross — means to be forced into the kingdom of heaven kicking and screaming. You finally surrender because you can't stand the pain anymore, but the pain could go on for a long time until this happens. Enlightenment consciously chosen means to relinquish your attachment to past and future and to make the Now the main focus of your life. It means choosing to dwell in the state of presence rather than in time. It means saying yes to what *is*. You then don't need pain anymore. How much more time do you think you will need before you are able to say, "I will create no more pain, no more suffering"? How much more pain do you need before you can make that choice?

If you think that you need more time, you will get more time — and more pain. Time and pain are inseparable.

THE POWER TO CHOOSE

What about all those people who, it seems, actually want to suffer? I have a friend whose partner is physically abusive toward her, and her previous relationship was of a similar kind. Why does she choose such men, and why is she refusing to get out of that situation now? Why do so many people actually choose pain?

I know that the word *choose* is a favorite New Age term, but it isn't entirely accurate in this context. It is misleading to say that somebody "chose" a dysfunctional relationship or any other negative situation in his or her life. Choice implies consciousness — a high degree of consciousness. Without it, you have no choice. Choice begins the moment you disidentify from the mind and its conditioned patterns, the moment you become present. Until you reach that point, you are unconscious, spiritually speaking. This means that you are compelled to think, feel, and act in certain ways according to the conditioning of your mind. That is why Jesus said: "Forgive them, for they know not what they do." This is not related to intelligence in the conventional sense of the word. I have met many highly intelligent and educated people who were also completely unconscious, which is to say completely identified with their mind. In fact, if mental development and increased knowledge are not counterbalanced by a corresponding growth in consciousness, the potential for unhappiness and disaster is very great.

Your friend is stuck in a relationship with an abusive partner, and not for the first time. Why? No choice. The mind, conditioned as it is by the past, always seeks to re-create what it knows and is familiar with. Even if it is painful, at least it is familiar. The mind always adheres to the known. The unknown is dangerous because it has no control over it. That's why the mind dislikes and ignores the present moment. Present-moment awareness creates a gap not only in the stream of mind but also in the past-future continuum. Nothing truly new and creative can come into this world except through that gap, that clear space of infinite possibility.

So your friend, being identified with her mind, may be recreating a pattern learned in the past in which intimacy and abuse are inseparably linked. Alternatively, she may be acting out a mind pattern learned in early childhood according to which she is unworthy and deserves to be punished. It is possible, too, that she lives a large part of her life through the pain-body, which always seeks more pain on which to feed. Her partner has his own unconscious patterns, which complement hers. Of course her situation is self-created, but who or what is the self that is doing the creating? A mental-

emotional pattern from the past, no more. Why make a self out of it? If you tell her that she has chosen her condition or situation, you are reinforcing her state of mind identification. But is her mind pattern who she is? Is it her self? Is her true identity derived from the past? Show your friend how to be the observing presence behind her thoughts and her emotions. Tell her about the pain-body and how to free herself from it. Teach her the art of inner-body awareness. Demonstrate to her the meaning of presence. As soon as she is able to access the power of the Now, and thereby break through her conditioned past, she *will* have a choice.

Nobody *chooses* dysfunction, conflict, pain. Nobody *chooses* insanity. They happen because there is not enough presence in you to dissolve the past, not enough light to dispel the darkness. You are not fully here. You have not quite woken up yet. In the meantime, the conditioned mind is running your life.

Similarly, if you are one of the many people who have an issue with their parents, if you still harbor resentment about something they did or did not do, then you still believe that they had a choice — that they could have acted differently. It always *looks* as if people had a choice, but that is an illusion. As long as your mind with its conditioned patterns runs your life, as long as you *are* your mind, what choice do you have? None. You are not even there. The mind-identified state is severely dysfunctional. It is a form of insanity. Almost everyone is suffering from this illness in varying degrees. The moment you realize this, there can be no more resentment. How can you resent someone's illness? The only appropriate response is compassion.

So that means nobody is responsible for what they do? I don't like that idea.

If you are run by your mind, although you have no choice you will still suffer the consequences of your unconsciousness, and you will create further suffering. You will bear the burden of fear, conflict, problems, and pain. The suffering thus created will eventually force you out of your unconscious state.

What you say about choice also applies to forgiveness, I suppose. You need to be fully conscious and surrender before you can forgive.

"Forgiveness" is a term that has been in use for two thousand years, but most people have a very limited view of what it means. You cannot truly forgive yourself or others as long as you derive your sense of self from the past. Only through accessing the power of the Now, which is your own power, can there be true forgiveness. This renders the past powerless, and you realize deeply

that nothing you ever did or that was ever done to you could touch even in the slightest the radiant essence of who you are. The whole concept of forgiveness then becomes unnecessary.

And how do I get to that point of realization?

When you surrender to what *is* and so become fully present, the past ceases to have any power. You do not need it anymore. Presence is the key. The Now is the key.

How will I know when I have surrendered?

When you no longer need to ask the question.

NOTES

1 Arthur Koestler, *The Ghost in the Machine* (London: Arkana, 1989), p. 180.
2 Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, *The Grand Failure* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1989), pp. 239–40.
3 *A Course in Miracles* (Huntington Station, NY: Foundation for Inner Peace, 1975), introduction.
4 Ruth L. Sivard, *World Military and Social Expenditures 1996, 16th Edition* (Washington D.C.: World Priorities, 1996), p. 7.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Eckhart Tolle was born in Germany, where he spent the first thirteen years of his life. After graduating from the University of London, he was a research scholar and supervisor at Cambridge University. When he was twenty-nine, a profound spiritual transformation virtually dissolved his old identity and radically changed the course of his life.

He devoted the next few years to understanding, integrating, and deepening that transformation, which marked the beginning of an intense inward journey. Eckhart is not aligned with any particular religion or tradition. In his teaching, he conveys a simple yet profound message with the timeless and uncomplicated clarity of the ancient spiritual masters: there is a way out of suffering and into peace.

Eckhart is currently traveling extensively, taking his teachings and his presence throughout the world. He has lived in Vancouver, Canada, since 1996.

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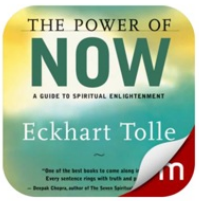

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A NEW EARTH

CHAPTER ONE

The Flowering of Human Consciousness

EVOCATION

Earth, 114 million years ago, one morning just after sunrise: The first flower ever to appear on the planet opens up to receive the rays of the sun. Prior to this momentous event that heralds an evolutionary transformation in the life of plants, the planet had already been covered in vegetation for millions of years. The first flower probably did not survive for long, and flowers must have remained rare and isolated phenomena, since conditions were most likely not yet favorable for a widespread flowering to occur. One day, however, a critical threshold was reached, and suddenly there would have been an explosion of color and scent all over the planet—if a perceiving consciousness had been there to witness it.

Much later, those delicate and fragrant beings we call flowers would come to play an essential part in the evolution of consciousness of another species. Humans would increasingly be drawn to and fascinated by them. As the consciousness of human beings developed, flowers were most likely the first thing they came to value that had no utilitarian purpose for them, that is to say, was not linked in some way to survival. They provided inspiration to countless artists, poets, and mystics. Jesus tells us to contemplate the flowers and learn from them how to live. The Buddha is said to have given a "silent sermon" once during which he held up a flower and gazed at it. After a while, one of those present, a monk called Mahakasyapa, began to smile. He is said to have been the only one who had understood the sermon. According to legend, that smile (that is to say, realization) was handed down by twenty-eight successive masters and much later became the origin of Zen.

Seeing beauty in a flower could awaken humans, however briefly, to the beauty that is an essential part of their own innermost being, their true nature. The first recognition of beauty was one of the most significant events in the evolution of human consciousness. The feelings of joy and love are intrinsically connected to that recognition. Without our fully realizing it, flowers would become for us an expression in form of that which is most high, most sacred, and ultimately formless within ourselves. Flowers, more fleeting,

more ethereal, and more delicate than the plants out of which they emerged, would become like messengers from another realm, like a bridge between the world of physical forms and the formless. They not only had a scent that was delicate and pleasing to humans, but also brought a fragrance from the realm of spirit. Using the word "enlightenment" in a wider sense than the conventionally accepted one, we could look upon flowers as the enlightenment of plants.

Any life-form in any realm—mineral, vegetable, animal, or human—can be said to undergo "enlightenment." It is, however, an extremely rare occurrence since it is more than an evolutionary progression: It also implies a discontinuity in its development, a leap to an entirely different level of Being and, most important, a lessening of materiality.

What could be heavier and more impenetrable than a rock, the densest of all forms? And yet some rocks undergo a change in their molecular structure, turn into crystals, and so become transparent to the light. Some carbons, under inconceivable heat and pressure, turn into diamonds, and some heavy minerals into other precious stones.

Most crawling reptilians, the most earthbound of all creatures, have remained unchanged for millions of years. Some, however, grew feathers and wings and turned into birds, thus defying the force of gravity that had held them for so long. They didn't become better at crawling or walking, but transcended crawling and walking entirely.

Since time immemorial, flowers, crystals, precious stones, and birds have held special significance for the human spirit. Like all life-forms, they are, of course, temporary manifestations of the underlying one Life, one Consciousness. Their special significance and the reason why humans feel such fascination for and affinity with them can be attributed to their ethereal quality.

Once there is a certain degree of Presence, of still and alert attention in human beings' perceptions, they can sense the divine life essence, the one indwelling consciousness or spirit in every creature, every life-form, recognize it as one with their own essence and so love it as themselves. Until this happens, however, most humans see only the outer forms, unaware of the inner essence, just as they are unaware of their own essence and identify only with their own physical and psychological form.

In the case of a flower, a crystal, precious stone, or bird, however, even someone with little or no Presence can occasionally sense that there is more there than the mere physical existence of that form, without knowing that this is the reason why he or she is drawn toward it, feels an affinity with it. Because of its ethereal nature, its form obscures the indwelling spirit to a lesser degree than is the case with other life-forms. The exception to this are all newborn life-forms—babies, puppies, kittens, lambs, and so on. They are fragile, delicate, not yet firmly established in materiality. An innocence, a sweetness and beauty that are not of this world still shine through them. They delight even relatively insensitive humans.

So when you are alert and contemplate a flower, crystal, or bird without naming it mentally, it becomes a window for you into the formless. There is an inner opening, however slight, into the realm of spirit. This is why these three

"en-lightened" life-forms have played such an important part in the evolution of human consciousness since ancient times; why, for example, the jewel in the lotus flower is a central symbol of Buddhism and a white bird, the dove, signifies the Holy Spirit in Christianity. They have been preparing the ground for a more profound shift in planetary consciousness that is destined to take place in the human species. This is the spiritual awakening that we are beginning to witness now.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK

Is humanity ready for a transformation of consciousness, an inner flowering so radical and profound that compared to it the flowering of plants, no matter how beautiful, is only a pale reflection? Can human beings lose the density of their conditioned mind structures and become like crystals or precious stones, so to speak, transparent to the light of consciousness? Can they defy the gravitational pull of materialism and materiality and rise above identification with form that keeps the ego in place and condemns them to imprisonment within their own personality?

The possibility of such a transformation has been the central message of the great wisdom teachings of humankind. The messengers—Buddha, Jesus, and others, not all of them known—were humanity's early flowers. They were precursors, rare and precious beings. A widespread flowering was not yet possible at that time, and their message became largely misunderstood and often greatly distorted. It certainly did not transform human behavior, except in a small minority of people.

Is humanity more ready now than at the time of those early teachers? Why should this be so? What can you do, if anything, to bring about or accelerate this inner shift? What is it that characterizes the old egoic state of consciousness, and by what signs is the new emerging consciousness recognized? These and other essential questions will be addressed in this book. More important, this book itself is a transformational device that has come out of the arising new consciousness. The ideas and concepts presented here may be important, but they are secondary. They are no more than signposts pointing toward awakening. As you read, a shift takes place within you.

This book's main purpose is not to add new information or beliefs to your mind or to try to convince you of anything, but to bring about a shift in consciousness, that is to say, to awaken. In that sense, this book is not "interesting." Interesting means you can keep your distance, play around with ideas and concepts in your mind, agree or disagree. This book is about you. It will change your state of consciousness or it will be meaningless. It can only awaken those who are ready. Not everyone is ready yet, but many are, and with each person who awakens, the momentum in the collective consciousness grows, and it becomes easier for others. If you don't know what awakening means, read on. Only by awakening can you know the true meaning of that word. A glimpse is enough to initiate the awakening process, which is irreversible. For some, that glimpse will come while reading this book. For many others who may not even have realized it, the process has already

begun. This book will help them recognize it. For some, it may have begun through loss or suffering; for others, through coming into contact with a spiritual teacher or teaching, through reading *The Power of Now* or some other spiritually alive and therefore transformational book—or any combination of the above. If the awakening process has begun in you, the reading of this book will accelerate and intensify it.

An essential part of the awakening is the recognition of the unawakened you, the ego as it thinks, speaks, and acts, as well as the recognition of the collectively conditioned mental processes that perpetuate the unawakened state. That is why this book shows the main aspects of the ego and how they operate in the individual as well as in the collective. This is important for two related reasons: The first is that unless you know the basic mechanics behind the workings of the ego, you won't recognize it, and it will trick you into identifying with it again and again. This means it takes you over, an imposter pretending to be you. The second reason is that the act of recognition itself is one of the ways in which awakening happens. When you recognize the unconsciousness in you, that which makes the recognition possible *is* the arising consciousness, *is* awakening. You cannot fight against the ego and win, just as you cannot fight against darkness. The light of consciousness is all that is necessary. You are that light.

OUR INHERITED DYSFUNCTION

If we look more deeply into humanity's ancient religions and spiritual traditions, we will find that underneath the many surface differences there are two core insights that most of them agree on. The words they use to describe those insights differ, yet they all point to a twofold fundamental truth. The first part of this truth is the realization that the "normal" state of mind of most human beings contains a strong element of what we might call dysfunction or even madness. Certain teachings at the heart of Hinduism perhaps come closest to seeing this dysfunction as a form of collective mental illness. They call it *maya,* the veil of delusion. Ramana Maharshi, one of the greatest Indian sages, bluntly states: "The mind is maya."

Buddhism uses different terms. According to the Buddha, the human mind in its normal state generates *dukkha*, which can be translated as suffering, unsatisfactoriness, or just plain misery. He sees it as a characteristic of the human condition. Wherever you go, whatever you do, says the Buddha, you will encounter *dukkha*, and it will manifest in every situation sooner or later.

According to Christian teachings, the normal collective state of humanity is one of "original sin." *Sin* is a word that has been greatly misunderstood and misinterpreted. Literally translated from the ancient Greek in which the New Testament was written, to sin means to miss the mark, as an archer who misses the target, so to sin means to *miss the point* of human existence. It means to live unskillfully, blindly, and thus to suffer and cause suffering. Again, the term, stripped of its cultural baggage and misinterpretations, points to the dysfunction inherent in the human condition.

The achievements of humanity are impressive and undeniable. We have created sublime works of music, literature, painting, architecture, and

sculpture. More recently, science and technology have brought about radical changes in the way we live and have enabled us to do and create things that would have been considered miraculous even two hundred years ago. No doubt: The human mind is highly intelligent. Yet its very intelligence is tainted by madness. Science and technology have magnified the destructive impact that the dysfunction of the human mind has upon the planet, other life-forms, and upon humans themselves. That is why the history of the twentieth century is where that dysfunction, that collective insanity, can be most clearly recognized. A further factor is that this dysfunction is actually intensifying and accelerating.

The First World War broke out in 1914. Destructive and cruel wars, motivated by fear, greed, and the desire for power, had been common occurrences throughout human history, as had slavery, torture, and widespread violence inflicted for religious and ideological reasons. Humans suffered more at the hands of each other than through natural disasters. By the year 1914, however, the highly intelligent human mind had invented not only the internal combustion engine, but also bombs, machine guns, submarines, flame throwers, and poison gas. Intelligence in the service of madness! In static trench warfare in France and Belgium, millions of men perished to gain a few miles of mud. When the war was over in 1918, the survivors looked in horror and incomprehension upon the devastation left behind: ten million human beings killed and many more maimed or disfigured. Never before had human madness been so destructive in its effect, so clearly visible. Little did they know that this was only the beginning.

By the end of the century, the number of people who died a violent death at the hand of their fellow humans would rise to more than one hundred million. They died not only through wars between nations, but also through mass exterminations and genocide, such as the murder of twenty million "class enemies, spies, and traitors" in the Soviet Union under Stalin or the unspeakable horrors of the Holocaust in Nazi Germany. They also died in countless smaller internal conflicts, such as the Spanish civil war or during the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia when a quarter of that country's population was murdered.

We only need to watch the daily news on television to realize that the madness has not abated, that it is continuing into the twenty-first century. Another aspect of the collective dysfunction of the human mind is the unprecedented violence that humans are inflicting on other life-forms and the planet itself—the destruction of oxygen-producing forests and other plant and animal life; ill-treatment of animals in factory farms; and poisoning of rivers, oceans, and air. Driven by greed, ignorant of their connectedness to the whole, humans persist in behavior that, if continued unchecked, can only result in their own destruction.

The collective manifestations of the insanity that lies at the heart of the human condition constitute the greater part of human history. It is to a large extent a history of madness. If the history of humanity were the clinical case history of a single human being, the diagnosis would have to be: chronic paranoid delusions, a pathological propensity to commit murder and acts of extreme violence and cruelty against his perceived "enemies"—his own

unconsciousness projected outward. Criminally insane, with a few brief lucid intervals.

Fear, greed, and the desire for power are the psychological motivating forces not only behind warfare and violence between nations, tribes, religions, and ideologies, but also the cause of incessant conflict in personal relationships. They bring about a distortion in your perception of other people and yourself. Through them, you misinterpret every situation, leading to misguided action designed to rid you of fear and satisfy your need for *more*, a bottomless hole that can never be filled.

It is important to realize, however, that fear, greed, and the desire for power are not the dysfunction that we are speaking of, but are themselves created by the dysfunction, which is a deep-seated collective delusion that lies within the mind of each human being. A number of spiritual teachings tell us to let go of fear and desire. But those spiritual practices are usually unsuccessful. They haven't gone to the root of the dysfunction. Fear, greed, and desire for power are not the ultimate causal factors. Trying to become a good or better human being sounds like a commendable and high-minded thing to do, yet it is an endeavor you cannot ultimately succeed in unless there is a shift in consciousness. This is because it is still part of the same dysfunction, a more subtle and rarified form of self-enhancement, of desire for more and a strengthening of one's conceptual identity, one's self-image. You do not become good by trying to be good, but by finding the goodness that is already within you, and allowing that goodness to emerge. But it can only emerge if something fundamental changes in your state of consciousness.

The history of Communism, originally inspired by noble ideals, clearly illustrates what happens when people attempt to change external reality—create a new earth—without any prior change in their inner reality, their state of consciousness. They make plans without taking into account the blueprint for dysfunction that every human being carries within: the ego.

THE ARISING NEW CONSCIOUSNESS

Most ancient religions and spiritual traditions share the common insight—that our "normal" state of mind is marred by a fundamental defect. However, out of this insight into the nature of the human condition—we may call it the bad news—arises a second insight: the good news of the possibility of a radical transformation of human consciousness. In Hindu teachings (and sometimes in Buddhism also), this transformation is called *enlightenment*. In the teachings of Jesus, it is *salvation*, and in Buddhism, it is *the end of suffering*. *Liberation* and *awakening* are other terms used to describe this transformation.

The greatest achievement of humanity is not its works of art, science, or technology, but the recognition of its own dysfunction, its own madness. In the distant past, this recognition already came to a few individuals. A man called Gautama Siddhartha, who lived 2,600 years ago in India, was perhaps the first who saw it with absolute clarity. Later, the title Buddha was conferred upon him. *Buddha* means "the awakened one." At about the same time, another of humanity's early awakened teachers emerged in China. His name was Lao Tzu. He left a record of his teaching in the form of one of the most

profound spiritual books ever written, the *Tao Te Ching*.

To recognize one's own insanity is, of course, the arising of sanity, the beginning of healing and transcendence. A new dimension of consciousness had begun to emerge on the planet, a first tentative flowering. Those rare individuals then spoke to their contemporaries. They spoke of sin, of suffering, of delusion. They said, "Look how you live. See what you are doing, the suffering you create." They then pointed to the possibility of awakening from the collective nightmare of "normal" human existence. They showed the way.

The world was not yet ready for them, and yet they were a vital and necessary part of human awakening. Inevitably, they were mostly misunderstood by their contemporaries, as well as by subsequent generations. Their teachings, although both simple and powerful, became distorted and misinterpreted, in some cases even as they were recorded in writing by their disciples. Over the centuries, many things were added that had nothing to do with the original teachings, but were reflections of a fundamental misunderstanding. Some of the teachers were ridiculed, reviled, or killed; others came to be worshiped as gods. Teachings that pointed the way beyond the dysfunction of the human mind, the way out of the collective insanity, were distorted and became themselves part of the insanity.

And so religions, to a large extent, became divisive rather than unifying forces. Instead of bringing about an ending of violence and hatred through a realization of the fundamental oneness of all life, they brought more violence and hatred, more divisions between people as well as between different religions and even within the same religion. They became ideologies, belief systems people could identify with and so use them to enhance their false sense of self. Through them, they could make themselves "right" and others "wrong" and thus define their identity through their enemies, the "others," the "nonbelievers" or "wrong believers" who not infrequently they saw themselves justified in killing. Man made "God" in his own image. The eternal, the infinite, and unnameable was reduced to a mental idol that you had to believe in and worship as "my god" or "our god."

And yet…and yet…in spite of all the insane deeds perpetrated in the name of religion, the Truth to which they point still shines at their core. It still shines, however dimly, through layers upon layers of distortion and misinterpretation. It is unlikely, however, that you will be able to perceive it there unless you have at least already had glimpses of that Truth within yourself. Throughout history, there have always been rare individuals who experienced a shift in consciousness and so realized within themselves that toward which all religions point. To describe that nonconceptual Truth, they then used the conceptual framework of their own religions.

Through some of those men and women, "schools" or movements developed within all major religions that represented not only a rediscovery, but in some cases an intensification of the light of the original teaching. This is how Gnosticism and mysticism came into existence in early and medieval Christianity, Sufism in the Islamic religion, Hasidism and Kabbala in Judaism, Advaita Vedanta in Hinduism, Zen and Dzogchen in Buddhism. Most of these schools were iconoclastic. They did away with layers upon layers of deadening conceptualization and mental belief structures, and for this reason

most of them were viewed with suspicion and often hostility by the established religious hierarchies. Unlike mainstream religion, their teachings emphasized realization and inner transformation. It is through those esoteric schools or movements that the major religions regained the transformative power of the original teachings, although in most cases, only a small minority of people had access to them. Their numbers were never large enough to have any significant impact on the deep collective unconsciousness of the majority. Over time, some of those schools themselves became too rigidly formalized or conceptualized to remain effective.

SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGION

What is the role of the established religions in the arising of the new consciousness? Many people are already aware of the difference between spirituality and religion. They realize that having a belief system—a set of thoughts that you regard as the absolute truth—does not make you spiritual no matter what the nature of those beliefs is. In fact, the more you make your thoughts (beliefs) into your identity, the more cut off you are from the spiritual dimension within yourself. Many "religious" people are stuck at that level. They equate truth with thought, and as they are completely identified with thought (their mind), they claim to be in sole possession of the truth in an unconscious attempt to protect their identity. They don't realize the limitations of thought. Unless you believe (think) exactly as they do, you are wrong in their eyes, and in the not-too-distant past, they would have felt justified in killing you for that. And some still do, even now.

The new spirituality, the transformation of consciousness, is arising to a large extent outside of the structures of the existing institutionalized religions. There were always pockets of spirituality even in mind-dominated religions, although the institutionalized hierarchies felt threatened by them and often tried to suppress them. A large-scale opening of spirituality outside of the religious structures is an entirely new development. In the past, this would have been inconceivable, especially in the West, the most mind-dominated of all cultures, where the Christian church had a virtual franchise on spirituality. You couldn't just stand up and give a spiritual talk or publish a spiritual book unless you were sanctioned by the church, and if you were not, they would quickly silence you. But now, even within certain churches and religions, there are signs of change. It is heartwarming, and one is grateful for even the slightest signs of openness, such as Pope John Paul II visiting a mosque as well as a synagogue.

Partly as a result of the spiritual teachings that have arisen outside the established religions, but also due to an influx of the ancient Eastern wisdom teachings, a growing number of followers of traditional religions are able to let go of identification with form, dogma, and rigid belief systems and discover the original depth that is hidden within their own spiritual tradition at the same time as they discover the depth within themselves. They realize that how "spiritual" you are has nothing to do with what you believe but everything to do with your state of consciousness. This, in turn, determines how you act in the world and interact with others.

Those unable to look beyond form become even more deeply entrenched in their beliefs, that is to say, in their mind. We are witnessing not only an unprecedented influx of consciousness at this time but also an entrenchment and intensification of the ego. Some religious institutions will be open to the new consciousness; others will harden their doctrinal positions and become part of all those other man-made structures through which the collective ego will defend itself and "fight back." Some churches, sects, cults, or religious movements are basically collective egoic entities, as rigidly identified with their mental positions as the followers of any political ideology that is closed to any alternative interpretation of reality.

But the ego is destined to dissolve, and all its ossified structures, whether they be religious or other institutions, corporations, or governments, will disintegrate from within, no matter how deeply entrenched they appear to be. The most rigid structures, the most impervious to change, will collapse first. This has already happened in the case of Soviet Communism. How deeply entrenched, how solid and monolithic it appeared, and yet within a few years, it disintegrated from within. No one foresaw this. All were taken by surprise. There are many more such surprises in store for us.

THE URGENCY OF TRANSFORMATION

When faced with a radical crisis, when the old way of being in the world, of interacting with each other and with the realm of nature doesn't work anymore, when survival is threatened by seemingly insurmountable problems, an individual life-form—or a species—will either die or become extinct or rise above the limitations of its condition through an evolutionary leap.

It is believed that the life-forms on this planet first evolved in the sea. When there were no animals yet to be found on land, the sea was already teeming with life. Then at some point, one of the sea creatures must have started to venture onto dry land. It would perhaps crawl a few inches at first, then, exhausted by the enormous gravitational pull of the planet, it would return to the water, where gravity is almost nonexistent and where it could live with much greater ease. And then it tried again and again and again, and much later would adapt to life on land, grow feet instead of fins, develop lungs instead of gills. It seems unlikely that a species would venture into such an alien environment and undergo an evolutionary transformation unless it was compelled to do so by some crisis situation. There may have been a large sea area that got cut off from the main ocean where the water gradually receded over thousands of years, forcing fish to leave their habitat and evolve.

Responding to a radical crisis that threatens our very survival—this is humanity's challenge now. The dysfunction of the egoic human mind, recognized already more than 2,500 years ago by the ancient wisdom teachers and now magnified through science and technology, is for the first time threatening the survival of the planet. Until very recently, the transformation of human consciousness—also pointed to by the ancient teachers—was no more than a possibility, realized by a few rare individuals here and there, irrespective of cultural or religious background. A widespread flowering of

human consciousness did not happen because it was not yet imperative.

A significant portion of the earth's population will soon recognize, if they haven't already done so, that humanity is now faced with a stark choice: Evolve or die. A still relatively small but rapidly growing percentage of humanity is already experiencing within themselves the breakup of the old egoic mind patterns and the emergence of a new dimension of consciousness.

What is arising now is not a new belief system, a new religion, spiritual ideology, or mythology. We are coming to the end not only of mythologies but also of ideologies and belief systems. The change goes deeper than the content of your mind, deeper than your thoughts. In fact, at the heart of the new consciousness lies the transcendence of thought, the newfound ability of rising above thought, of realizing a dimension within yourself that is infinitely more vast than thought. You then no longer derive your identity, your sense of who you are, from the incessant stream of thinking that in the old consciousness you take to be yourself. What a liberation to realize that the "voice in my head" is not who I am. Who am I then? The one who sees that. The awareness that is prior to thought, the space in which the thought—or the emotion or sense perception—happens.

Ego is no more than this: identification with form, which primarily means thought forms. If evil has any reality—and it has a relative, not an absolute, reality—this is also its definition: complete identification with form—physical forms, thought forms, emotional forms. This results in a total unawareness of my connectedness with the whole, my intrinsic oneness with every "other" as well as with the Source. This forgetfulness is original sin, suffering, delusion. When this delusion of utter separateness underlies and governs whatever I think, say, and do, what kind of world do I create? To find the answer to this, observe how humans relate to each other, read a history book, or watch the news on television tonight.

If the structures of the human mind remain unchanged, we will always end up re-creating fundamentally the same world, the same evils, the same dysfunction.

A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH

The inspiration for the title of this book came from a Bible prophecy that seems more applicable now than at any other time in human history. It occurs in both the Old and the New Testament and speaks of the collapse of the existing world order and the arising of "a new heaven and a new earth."[1] We need to understand here that heaven is not a location but refers to the inner realm of consciousness. This is the esoteric meaning of the word, and this is also its meaning in the teachings of Jesus. Earth, on the other hand, is the outer manifestation in form, which is always a reflection of the inner. Collective human consciousness and life on our planet are intrinsically connected. *"A new heaven" is the emergence of a transformed state of human consciousness, and "a new earth" is its reflection in the physical realm.* Since human life and human consciousness are intrinsically one with the life of the planet, as the old consciousness dissolves, there are bound to be synchronistic geographic and climatic natural upheavals in many parts of the planet, some of which we are

already witnessing now.

CHAPTER TWO

Ego: The Current State of Humanity

Words, no matter whether they are vocalized and made into sounds or remain unspoken as thoughts, can cast an almost hypnotic spell upon you. You easily lose yourself in them, become hypnotized into implicitly believing that when you have attached a word to something, you know what it is. The fact is: You don't know what it is. You have only covered up the mystery with a label. Everything, a bird, a tree, even a simple stone, and certainly a human being, is ultimately unknowable. This is because it has unfathomable depth. All we can perceive, experience, think about, is the surface layer of reality, less than the tip of an iceberg.

Underneath the surface appearance, everything is not only connected with everything else, but also with the Source of all life out of which it came. Even a stone, and more easily a flower or a bird, could show you the way back to God, to the Source, to yourself. When you look at it or hold it and *let it be* without imposing a word or mental label on it, a sense of awe, of wonder, arises within you. Its essence silently communicates itself to you and reflects your own essence back to you. This is what great artists sense and succeed in conveying in their art. Van Gogh didn't say: "That's just an old chair." He looked, and looked, and looked. He sensed the Beingness of the chair. Then he sat in front of the canvas and took up the brush. The chair itself would have sold for the equivalent of a few dollars. The painting of that same chair today would fetch in excess of $25 million.

When you don't cover up the world with words and labels, a sense of the miraculous returns to your life that was lost a long time ago when humanity, instead of using thought, became possessed by thought. A depth returns to your life. Things regain their newness, their freshness. And the greatest miracle is the experiencing of your essential self as prior to any words, thoughts, mental labels, and images. For this to happen, you need to disentangle your sense of I, of Beingness, from all the things it has become mixed up with, that is to say, identified with. That disentanglement is what this book is about.

The quicker you are in attaching verbal or mental labels to things, people, or situations, the more shallow and lifeless your reality becomes, and the more deadened you become to reality, the miracle of life that continuously unfolds within and around you. In this way, cleverness may be gained, but wisdom is

lost, and so are joy, love, creativity, and aliveness. They are concealed in the still gap between the perception and the interpretation. Of course we have to use words and thoughts. They have their own beauty—but do we need to become imprisoned in them?

Words reduce reality to something the human mind can grasp, which isn't very much. Language consists of five basic sounds produced by the vocal cords. They are the vowels *a, e, i, o, u*. The other sounds are consonants produced by air pressure: *s, f, g*, and so forth. Do you believe some combination of such basic sounds could ever explain who you are, or the ultimate purpose of the universe, or even what a tree or stone is in its depth?

THE ILLUSORY SELF

The word "I" embodies the greatest error and the deepest truth, depending on how it is used. In conventional usage, it is not only one of the most frequently used words in the language (together with the related words: "me," "my," "mine," and "myself") but also one of the most misleading. In normal everyday usage, "I" embodies the primordial error, a misperception of who you are, an illusory sense of identity. This is the ego. This illusory sense of self is what Albert Einstein, who had deep insights not only into the reality of space and time but also into human nature, referred to as "an optical illusion of consciousness." That illusory self then becomes the basis for all further interpretations, or rather misinterpretations of reality, all thought processes, interactions, and relationships. Your reality becomes a reflection of the original illusion.

The good news is: If you can recognize illusion as illusion, it dissolves. The recognition of illusion is also its ending. Its survival depends on your mistaking it for reality. In the seeing of who you are not, the reality of who you are emerges by itself. This is what happens as you slowly and carefully read this and the next chapter, which are about the mechanics of the false self we call the ego. So what is the nature of this illusory self ?

What you usually refer to when you say "I" is not who you are. By a monstrous act of reductionism, the infinite depth of who you are is confused with a sound produced by the vocal cords or the thought of "I" in your mind and whatever the "I" has identified with. So what do the usual "I" and the related "me," "my," or "mine" refer to?

When a young child learns that a sequence of sounds produced by the parents' vocal cords is his or her name, the child begins to equate a word, which in the mind becomes a thought, with who he or she is. At that stage, some children refer to themselves in the third person. "Johnny is hungry." Soon after, they learn the magic word "I" and equate it with their name, which they have already equated with who they are. Then other thoughts come and merge with the original I-thought. The next step are thoughts of me and mine to designate things that are somehow part of "I." This is identification with objects, which means investing *things*, but ultimately thoughts that represent things, with a sense of self, thereby deriving an identity from them. When "my" toy breaks or is taken away, intense suffering arises. Not because of any intrinsic value that the toy has—the child will soon lose interest in it, and it

will be replaced by other toys, other objects—but because of the thought of "mine." The toy became part of the child's developing sense of self, of "I."

And so as the child grows up, the original I-thought attracts other thoughts to itself: It becomes identified with a gender, possessions, the sense-perceived body, a nationality, race, religion, profession. Other things the "I" identifies with are roles—mother, father, husband, wife, and so on—accumulated knowledge or opinions, likes and dislikes, and also things that happened to "me" in the past, the memory of which are thoughts that further define my sense of self as "me and my story." These are only some of the things people derive their sense of identity from. They are ultimately no more than thoughts held together precariously by the fact that they are all invested with a sense of self. This mental construct is what you normally refer to when you say "I." To be more precise: Most of the time it is not you who speaks when you say or think "I" but some aspect of that mental construct, the egoic self. Once you awaken, you still use the word "I," but it will come from a much deeper place within yourself.

Most people are still completely identified with the incessant stream of mind, of compulsive thinking, most of it repetitive and pointless. There is no "I" apart from their thought processes and the emotions that go with them. This is the meaning of being spiritually unconscious. When told that there is a voice in their head that never stops speaking, they say, "What voice?" or angrily deny it, which of course *is* the voice, is the thinker, is the unobserved mind. It could almost be looked upon as an entity that has taken possession of them.

Some people never forget the first time they disidentified from their thoughts and thus briefly experienced the shift in identity from being the content of their mind to being the awareness in the background. For others it happens in such a subtle way they hardly notice it, or they just notice an influx of joy or inner peace without knowing the reason.

THE VOICE IN THE HEAD

That first glimpse of awareness came to me when I was a first-year student at the University of London. I would take the tube (subway) twice a week to go to the university library, usually around nine o'clock in the morning, toward the end of the rush hour. One time a woman in her early thirties sat opposite me. I had seen her before a few times on that train. One could not help but notice her. Although the train was full, the seats on either side of her were unoccupied, the reason being, no doubt, that she appeared to be quite insane. She looked extremely tense and talked to herself incessantly in a loud and angry voice. She was so absorbed in her thoughts that she was totally unaware, it seemed, of other people or her surroundings. Her head was facing downward and slightly to the left, as if she were addressing someone sitting in the empty seat next to her. Although I don't remember the precise content, her monologue went something like this: "And then she said to me…so I said to her you are a liar how dare you accuse me of…when you are the one who has always taken advantage of me I trusted you and you betrayed my trust…." There was the angry tone in her voice of someone who has been wronged,

who needs to defend her position lest she become annihilated.

As the train approached Tottenham Court Road Station, she stood up and walked toward the door with still no break in the stream of words coming out of her mouth. That was my stop too, so I got off behind her. At street level, she began to walk toward Bedford Square, still engaged in her imaginary dialogue, still angrily accusing and asserting her position. My curiosity aroused, I decided to follow her as long as she was walking in the same general direction I had to go in. Although engrossed in her imaginary dialogue, she seemed to know where she was going. Soon we were within sight of the imposing structure of Senate House, a 1930s high-rise, the university's central administrative building and library. I was shocked. Was it possible that we were going to the same place? Yes, that's where she was heading. Was she a teacher, a student, an office worker, a librarian? Maybe she was some psychologist's research project. I never knew the answer. I walked twenty steps behind her, and by the time I entered the building (which ironically was the location of the headquarters of the "Mind Police" in the film version of George Orwell's novel, *1984*), she had already been swallowed up by one of the elevators.

I was somewhat taken aback by what I had just witnessed. A mature first-year student at twenty-five, I saw myself as an intellectual in the making, and I was convinced that all the answers to the dilemmas of human existence could be found through the intellect, that is to say, by thinking. I didn't realize yet that thinking without awareness *is* the main dilemma of human existence. I looked upon the professors as sages who had all the answers and upon the university as the temple of knowledge. How could an insane person like her be part of this?

I was still thinking about her when I was in the men's room prior to entering the library. As I was washing my hands, I thought: I hope I don't end up like her. The man next to me looked briefly in my direction, and I suddenly was shocked when I realized that I hadn't just thought those words, but mumbled them aloud. "Oh my God, I'm already like her," I thought. Wasn't my mind as incessantly active as hers? There were only minor differences between us. The predominant underlying emotion behind her thinking seemed to be anger. In my case, it was mostly anxiety. She thought out loud. I thought—mostly—in my head. If she was mad, then everyone was mad, including myself. There were differences in degree only.

For a moment, I was able to stand back from my own mind and see it from a deeper perspective, as it were. There was a brief shift from thinking to awareness. I was still in the men's room, but alone now, looking at my face in the mirror. At that moment of detachment from my mind, I laughed out loud. It may have sounded insane, but it was the laughter of sanity, the laughter of the big-bellied Buddha. "Life isn't as serious as my mind makes it out to be." That's what the laughter seemed to be saying. But it was only a glimpse, very quickly to be forgotten. I would spend the next three years in anxiety and depression, completely identified with my mind. I had to get close to suicide before awareness returned, and then it was much more than a glimpse. I became free of compulsive thinking and of the false, mind-made I.

The above incident not only gave me a first glimpse of awareness, it also

planted the first doubt as to the absolute validity of the human intellect. A few months later, something tragic happened that made my doubt grow. On a Monday morning, we arrived for a lecture to be given by a professor whose mind I admired greatly, only to be told that sadly he had committed suicide sometime during the weekend by shooting himself. I was stunned. He was a highly respected teacher and seemed to have all the answers. However, I could as yet see no alternative to the cultivation of thought. I didn't realize yet that thinking is only a tiny aspect of the consciousness that we are, nor did I know anything about the ego, let alone being able to detect it within myself.

CONTENT AND STRUCTURE OF THE EGO

The egoic mind is completely conditioned by the past. Its conditioning is twofold: It consists of content and structure.

In the case of a child who cries in deep suffering because his toy has been taken away, the toy represents content. It is interchangeable with any other content, any other toy or object. The content you identify with is conditioned by your environment, your upbringing, and surrounding culture. Whether the child is rich or poor, whether the toy is a piece of wood shaped like an animal or a sophisticated electronic gadget makes no difference as far as the suffering caused by its loss is concerned. The reason why such acute suffering occurs is concealed in the word "my," and it is structural. The unconscious compulsion to enhance one's identity through association with an object is built into the very structure of the egoic mind.

One of the most basic mind structures through which the ego comes into existence is identification. The word "identification" is derived from the Latin word *idem*, meaning "same" and *facere*, which means "to make." So when I identify with something, I "make it the same." The same as what? The same as I. I endow it with a sense of self, and so it becomes part of my "identity." One of the most basic levels of identification is with things: My toy later becomes my car, my house, my clothes, and so on. I try to find myself in things but never quite make it and end up losing myself in them. That is the fate of the ego.

IDENTIFICATION WITH THINGS

The people in the advertising industry know very well that in order to sell things that people don't really need, they must convince them that those things will add something to how they see themselves or are seen by others; in other words, add something to their sense of self. They do this, for example, by telling you that you will stand out from the crowd by using this product and so by implication be more fully yourself. Or they may create an association in your mind between the product and a famous person, or a youthful, attractive, or happy-looking person. Even pictures of old or deceased celebrities in their prime work well for that purpose. The unspoken assumption is that by buying this product, through some magical act of appropriation, you become like them, or rather the surface image of them. And so in many cases you are not buying a product but an "identity

enhancer." Designer labels are primarily collective identities that you buy into. They are expensive and therefore "exclusive." If everybody could buy them, they would lose their psychological value and all you would be left with would be their material value, which likely amounts to a fraction of what you paid.

What kind of things you identify with will vary from person to person according to age, gender, income, social class, fashion, the surrounding culture, and so on. *What* you identify with is all to do with content; whereas, the unconscious compulsion to identify is structural. It is one of the most basic ways in which the egoic mind operates.

Paradoxically, what keeps the so-called consumer society going is the fact that trying to find yourself through things doesn't work: The ego satisfaction is short-lived and so you keep looking for more, keep buying, keep consuming.

Of course, in this physical dimension that our surface selves inhabit, things are a necessary and inescapable part of our lives. We need housing, clothes, furniture, tools, transportation. There may also be things in our lives that we value because of their beauty or inherent quality. We need to honor the world of things, not despise it. Each thing has Beingness, is a temporary form that has its origin within the formless one Life, the source of all things, all bodies, all forms. In most ancient cultures, people believed that everything, even so-called inanimate objects, had an indwelling spirit, and in this respect they were closer to the truth than we are today. When you live in a world deadened by mental abstraction, you don't sense the aliveness of the universe anymore. Most people don't inhabit a living reality, but a conceptualized one.

But we cannot really honor things if we use them as a means to self-enhancement, that is to say, if we try to find ourselves through them. This is exactly what the ego does. Ego-identification with things creates attachment to things, obsession with things, which in turn creates our consumer society and economic structures where the only measure of progress is always *more*. The unchecked striving for more, for endless growth, is a dysfunction and a disease. It is the same dysfunction the cancerous cell manifests, whose only goal is to multiply itself, unaware that it is bringing about its own destruction by destroying the organism of which it is a part. Some economists are so attached to the notion of growth that they can't let go of that word, so they refer to recession as a time of "negative growth."

A large part of many people's lives is consumed by an obsessive preoccupation with things. This is why one of the ills of our times is object proliferation. When you can no longer feel the life that you are, you are likely to try to fill up your life with things. As a spiritual practice, I suggest that you investigate your relationship with the world of things through self-observation, and in particular, things that are designated with the word "my." You need to be alert and honest to find out, for example, whether your sense of self-worth is bound up with things you possess. Do certain things induce a subtle feeling of importance or superiority? Does the lack of them make you feel inferior to others who have more than you? Do you casually mention things you own or show them off to increase your sense of worth in someone else's eyes and through them in your own? Do you feel resentful or angry and

somehow diminished in your sense of self when someone else has more than you or when you lose a prized possession?

THE LOST RING

When I was seeing people as a counselor and spiritual teacher, I would visit a woman twice a week whose body was riddled with cancer. She was a schoolteacher in her midforties and had been given no more than a few months to live by her doctors. Sometimes a few words were spoken during those visits, but mostly we would sit together in silence, and as we did, she had her first glimpses of the stillness within herself that she never knew existed during her busy life as a schoolteacher.

One day, however, I arrived to find her in a state of great distress and anger. "What happened?" I asked. Her diamond ring, of great monetary as well as sentimental value, had disappeared, and she said she was sure it had been stolen by the woman who came to look after her for a few hours every day. She said she didn't understand how anybody could be so callous and heartless as to do this to her. She asked me whether she should confront the woman or whether it would be better to call the police immediately. I said I couldn't tell her what to do, but asked her to find out how important a ring or anything else was at this point in her life. "You don't understand," she said. "This was my grandmother's ring. I used to wear it every day until I got ill and my hands became too swollen. It's more than just a ring to me. How can I not be upset?"

The quickness of her response and the anger and defensiveness in her voice were indications that she had not yet become present enough to look within and to disentangle her reaction from the event and observe them both. Her anger and defensiveness were signs that the ego was still speaking through her. I said, "I am going to ask you a few questions, but instead of answering them now, see if you can find the answers within you. I will pause briefly after each question. When an answer comes, it may not necessarily come in the form of words." She said she was ready to listen. I asked: "Do you realize that you will have to let go of the ring at some point, perhaps quite soon? How much more time do you need before you will be ready to let go of it? Will you become less when you let go of it? Has *who you are* become diminished by the loss?" There were a few minutes of silence after the last question.

When she started speaking again, there was a smile on her face, and she seemed at peace. "The last question made me realize something important. First I went to my mind for an answer and my mind said, 'Yes, of course you have been diminished.' Then I asked myself the question again, 'Has who I am become diminished?' This time I tried to feel rather than think the answer. And suddenly I could feel my I Am-ness. I have never felt that before. If I can feel the I Am so strongly, then who I am hasn't been diminished at all. I can still feel it now, something peaceful but very alive."

"That is the joy of Being," I said. "You can only feel it when you get out of your head. Being must be felt. It can't be thought. The ego doesn't know about it because thought is what it consists of. The ring was really in your head as a

thought that you confused with the sense of I Am. You thought the I Am or a part of it was in the ring.

"Whatever the ego seeks and gets attached to are substitutes for the Being that it cannot feel. You can value and care for things, but whenever you get attached to them, you will know it's the ego. And you are never really attached to a thing but to a thought that has 'I,' 'me,' or 'mine' in it. Whenever you completely accept a loss, you go beyond ego, and who you are, the I Am which is consciousness itself, emerges."

She said, "Now I understand something Jesus said that never made much sense to me before: 'If someone takes your shirt, let him have your coat as well.'"

"That's right," I said. "It doesn't mean you should never lock your door. All it means is that sometimes letting things go is an act of far greater power than defending or hanging on."

In the last few weeks of her life as her body became weaker, she became more and more radiant, as if light were shining through her. She gave many of her possessions away, some to the woman she thought had stolen the ring, and with each thing she gave away, her joy deepened. When her mother called me to let me know she had passed away, she also mentioned that after her death they found her ring in the medicine cabinet in the bathroom. Did the woman return the ring, or had it been there all the time? Nobody will ever know. One thing we do know: Life will give you whatever experience is most helpful for the evolution of your consciousness. How do you know this is the experience you need? Because this is the experience you are having at this moment.

Is it wrong then to be proud of one's possessions or to feel resentful toward people who have more than you? Not at all. That sense of pride, of needing to stand out, the apparent enhancement of one's self through "more than" and diminishment through "less than" is neither right nor wrong—it is the ego. The ego isn't wrong; it's just unconscious. When you observe the ego in yourself, you are beginning to go beyond it. Don't take the ego too seriously. When you detect egoic behavior in yourself, smile. At times you may even laugh. How could humanity have been taken in by this for so long? Above all, know that the ego isn't personal. It isn't who you are. If you consider the ego to be your personal problem, that's just more ego.

THE ILLUSION OF OWNERSHIP

To "own" something—what does it really mean? What does it mean to make something "mine"? If you stand on a street in New York, point to a huge skyscraper and say, "That building is mine. I own it," you are either very wealthy or you are delusional or a liar. In any case, you are telling a story in which the thought form "I" and the thought form "building" merge into one. That's how the mental concept of ownership works. If everybody agrees with your story, there will be signed pieces of paper to certify their agreement with it. You are wealthy. If nobody agrees with the story, they will send you to a psychiatrist. You are delusional, or a compulsive liar.

It is important to recognize here that the story and the thought forms that

make up the story, whether people agree with it or not, have absolutely nothing to do with who you are. Even if people agree with it, it is ultimately a fiction. Many people don't realize until they are on their deathbed and everything external falls away that *no thing* ever had anything to do with who they are. In the proximity of death, the whole concept of ownership stands revealed as ultimately meaningless. In the last moments of their life, they then also realize that while they were looking throughout their lives for a more complete sense of self, what they were really looking for, their Being, had actually always already been there, but had been largely obscured by their identification with things, which ultimately means identification with their mind.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit," Jesus said, "for theirs will be the kingdom of heaven."[1] What does "poor in spirit" mean? No inner baggage, no identifications. Not with things, nor with any mental concepts that have a sense of self in them. And what is the "kingdom of heaven"? The simple but profound joy of Being that is there when you let go of identifications and so become "poor in spirit."

This is why renouncing all possessions has been an ancient spiritual practice in both East and West. Renunciation of possessions, however, will not automatically free you of the ego. It will attempt to ensure its survival by finding something else to identity with, for example, a mental image of yourself as someone who has transcended all interest in material possessions and is therefore superior, is *more* spiritual than others. There are people who have renounced all possessions but have a bigger ego than some millionaires. If you take away one kind of identification, the ego will quickly find another. It ultimately doesn't mind what it identifies with as long as it has an identity. Anticonsumerism or antiprivate ownership would be another thought form, another mental position, that can replace identification with possessions. Through it you could make yourself right and others wrong. As we shall see later, making yourself right and others wrong is one of the principal egoic mind patterns, one of the main forms of unconsciousness. In other words, the content of the ego may change; the mind structure that keeps it alive does not.

One of the unconscious assumptions is that by identifying with an object through the fiction of ownership, the apparent solidity and permanency of that material object will endow your sense of self with greater solidity and permanency. This applies particularly to buildings and even more so to land since it is the only thing you think you can own that cannot be destroyed. The absurdity of owning something becomes even more apparent in the case of land. In the days of the white settlement, the natives of North America found ownership of land an incomprehensible concept. And so they lost it when the Europeans made them sign pieces of paper that were equally incomprehensible to them. They felt they belonged to the land, but the land did not belong to them.

The ego tends to equate having with Being: I have, therefore I am. And the more I have, the more I am. The ego lives through comparison. How you are seen by others turns into how you see yourself. If everyone lived in a mansion or everyone was wealthy, your mansion or your wealth would no longer serve to enhance your sense of self. You could then move to a simple cabin, give up

your wealth, and regain an identity by seeing yourself and being seen as more spiritual than others. How you are seen by others becomes the mirror that tells you what you are like and who you are. The ego's sense of self-worth is in most cases bound up with the worth you have in the eyes of others. You need others to give you a sense of self, and if you live in a culture that to a large extent equates self-worth with how much and what you have, if you cannot look through this collective delusion, you will be condemned to chasing after things for the rest of your life in the vain hope of finding your worth and completion of your sense of self there.

How do you let go of attachment to things? Don't even try. It's impossible. Attachment to things drops away by itself when you no longer seek to find yourself in them. In the meantime, just be aware of your attachment to things. Sometimes you may not know that you are attached to something, which is to say, identified, until you lose it or there is the threat of loss. If you then become upset, anxious, and so on, it means you are attached. If you are aware that you are identified with a thing, the identification is no longer total. "I am the awareness that is aware that there is attachment." That's the beginning of the transformation of consciousness.

WANTING: THE NEED FOR MORE

The ego identifies with having, but its satisfaction in having is a relatively shallow and short-lived one. Concealed within it remains a deep-seated sense of dissatisfaction, of incompleteness, of "not enough." "I don't have enough yet," by which the ego really means, "I *am* not enough yet."

As we have seen, *having*—the concept of ownership—is a fiction created by the ego to give itself solidity and permanency and make itself stand out, make itself special. Since you cannot find yourself through having, however, there is another more powerful drive underneath it that pertains to the structure of the ego: the need for more, which we could also call "wanting." No ego can last for long without the need for more. Therefore, wanting keeps the ego alive much more than having. The ego wants to want more than it wants to have. And so the shallow satisfaction of having is always replaced by more wanting. This is the psychological need for more, that is to say, more things to identify with. It is an addictive need, not an authentic one.

In some cases, the psychological need for more or the feeling of not enough that is so characteristic of the ego becomes transferred to the physical level and so turns into insatiable hunger. The sufferers of bulimia will often make themselves vomit so they can continue eating. Their mind is hungry, not their body. This eating disorder would become healed if the sufferers, instead of being identified with their mind, could get in touch with their body and so feel the true needs of the body rather than the pseudo-needs of the egoic mind.

Some egos know what they want and pursue their aim with grim and ruthless determination—Genghis Khan, Stalin, Hitler, to give just a few larger-than-life examples. The energy behind their wanting, however, creates an opposing energy of equal intensity that in the end leads to their downfall. In the meantime, they make themselves and many others unhappy, or, in the larger-than-life examples, create hell on earth. Most egos have conflicting

wants. They want different things at different times or may not even know what they want except that they don't want what is: the present moment. Unease, restlessness, boredom, anxiety, dissatisfaction, are the result of unfulfilled wanting. Wanting is structural, so no amount of content can provide lasting fulfillment as long as that mental structure remains in place. Intense wanting that has no specific object can often be found in the still-developing ego of teenagers, some of whom are in a permanent state of negativity and dissatisfaction.

The physical needs for food, water, shelter, clothing, and basic comforts could be easily met for all humans on the planet, were it not for the imbalance of resources created by the insane and rapacious need for more, the greed of the ego. It finds collective expression in the economic structures of this world, such as the huge corporations, which are egoic entities that compete with each other for more. Their only blind aim is profit. They pursue that aim with absolute ruthlessness. Nature, animals, people, even their own employees, are no more than digits on a balance sheet, lifeless objects to be used, then discarded.

The thought forms of "me" and "mine," of "more than," of "I want," "I need," "I must have," and of "not enough" pertain not to content but to the structure of the ego. The content is interchangeable. As long as you don't recognize those thought forms within yourself, as long as they remain unconscious, you will believe in what they say; you will be condemned to acting out those unconscious thoughts, condemned to seeking and not finding —because when those thought forms operate, no possession, place, person, or condition will ever satisfy you. No content will satisfy you, as long as the egoic structure remains in place. No matter what you have or get, you won't be happy. You will always be looking for something else that promises greater fulfillment, that promises to make your incomplete sense of self complete and fill that sense of lack you feel within.

IDENTIFICATION WITH THE BODY

Apart from objects, another basic form of identification is with "my" body. Firstly, the body is male or female, and so the sense of being a man or woman takes up a significant part of most people's sense of self. Gender becomes identity. Identification with gender is encouraged at an early age, and it forces you into a role, into conditioned patterns of behavior that affect all aspects of your life, not just sexuality. It is a role many people become completely trapped in, even more so in some of the traditional societies than in Western culture where identification with gender is beginning to lessen somewhat. In some traditional cultures, the worst fate a woman can have is to be unwed or barren, and for a man to lack sexual potency and not be able to produce children. Life's fulfillment is perceived to be fulfillment of one's gender identity.

In the West, it is the physical appearance of the body that contributes greatly to the sense of who you think you are: its strength or weakness, its perceived beauty or ugliness relative to others. For many people, their sense of self-worth is intimately bound up with their physical strength, good looks,

fitness, and external appearance. Many feel a diminished sense of self-worth because they perceive their body as ugly or imperfect.

In some cases, the mental image or concept of "my body" is a complete distortion of reality. A young woman may think of herself as overweight and therefore starve herself when in fact she is quite thin. She cannot see her body anymore. All she "sees" is the mental concept of her body, which says "I am fat" or "I will become fat." At the root of this condition lies identification with the mind. As people have become more and more mind-identified, which is the intensification of egoic dysfunction, there has also been a dramatic increase in the incidence of anorexia in recent decades. If the sufferer could look at her body without the interfering judgments of her mind or even recognize those judgments for what they are instead of believing in them—or better still, if she could feel her body from within—this would initiate her healing.

Those who are identified with their good looks, physical strength, or abilities experience suffering when those attributes begin to fade and disappear, as of course they will. Their very identity that was based on them is then threatened with collapse. In either case, ugly or beautiful, people derive a significant part of their identity, be it negative or positive, from their body. To be more precise, they derive their identity from the I-thought that they erroneously attach to the mental image or concept of their body, which after all is no more than a physical form that shares the destiny of all forms—impermanence and ultimately decay.

Equating the physical sense-perceived body that is destined to grow old, wither, and die with "I" always leads to suffering sooner or later. To refrain from identifying with the body doesn't mean that you neglect, despise, or no longer care for it. If it is strong, beautiful, or vigorous, you can enjoy and appreciate those attributes—while they last. You can also improve the body's condition through right nutrition and exercise. If you don't equate the body with who you are, when beauty fades, vigor diminishes, or the body becomes incapacitated, this will not affect your sense of worth or identity in any way. In fact, as the body begins to weaken, the formless dimension, the light of consciousness, can shine more easily through the fading form.

It is not just people with good or near-perfect bodies who are likely to equate it with who they are. You can just as easily identify with a "problematic" body and make the body's imperfection, illness, or disability into your identity. You may then think and speak of yourself as a "sufferer" of this or that chronic illness or disability. You receive a great deal of attention from doctors and others who constantly confirm to you your conceptual identity as a sufferer or a patient. You then unconsciously cling to the illness because it has become the most important part of who you perceive yourself to be. It has become another thought form with which the ego can identify. Once the ego has found an identity, it does not want to let go. Amazingly but not infrequently, the ego in search of a stronger identity can and does create illnesses in order to strengthen itself through them.

FEELING THE INNER BODY

Although body-identification is one of the most basic forms of ego, the good

news is that it is also the one that you can most easily go beyond. This is done not by trying to convince yourself that you are not your body, but by shifting your attention from the external form of your body and from thoughts about your body—beautiful, ugly, strong, weak, too fat, too thin—to the feeling of aliveness inside it. No matter what your body's appearance is on the outer level, beyond the outer form it is an intensely alive energy field.

If you are not familiar with "inner body" awareness, close your eyes for a moment and find out if there is life inside your hands. Don't ask your mind. It will say, "I can't feel anything." Probably it will also say, "Give me something more interesting to think about." So instead of asking your mind, go to the hands directly. By this I mean become aware of the subtle feeling of aliveness inside them. It is there. You just have to go there with your attention to notice it. You may get a slight tingling sensation at first, then a feeling of energy or aliveness. If you hold your attention in your hands for a while, the sense of aliveness will intensify. Some people won't even have to close their eyes. They will be able to feel their "inner hands" at the same time as they read this. Then go to your feet, keep your attention there for a minute or so, and begin to feel your hands and feet at the same time. Then incorporate other parts of the body —legs, arms, abdomen, chest, and so on—into that feeling until you are aware of the inner body as a global sense of aliveness.

What I call the "inner body" isn't really the body anymore but life energy, the bridge between form and formlessness. Make it a habit to feel the inner body as often as you can. After a while, you won't need to close your eyes anymore to feel it. For example, see if you can feel the inner body whenever you listen to someone. It almost seems like a paradox: When you are in touch with the inner body, you are not identified with your body anymore, nor are you identified with your mind. This is to say, you are no longer identified with form but moving away from form-identification toward formlessness, which we may also call Being. It is your essence identity. Body awareness not only anchors you in the present moment, it is a doorway out of the prison that is the ego. It also strengthens the immune system and the body's ability to heal itself.

FORGETFULNESS OF BEING

Ego is always identification with form, seeking yourself and thereby losing yourself in some form. Forms are not just material objects and physical bodies. More fundamental than the external forms—things and bodies—are the thought forms that continuously arise in the field of consciousness. They are energy formations, finer and less dense than physical matter, but they are forms nonetheless. What you may be aware of as a voice in your head that never stops speaking is the stream of incessant and compulsive thinking. When every thought absorbs your attention completely, when you are so identified with the voice in your head and the emotions that accompany it that you lose yourself in every thought and every emotion, then you are totally identified with form and therefore in the grip of ego. Ego is a conglomeration of recurring thought forms and conditioned mental-emotional patterns that are invested with a sense of I, a sense of self. Ego arises when your sense of

Beingness, of "I Am," which is formless consciousness, gets mixed up with form. This is the meaning of identification. This is forgetfulness of Being, the primary error, the illusion of absolute separateness that turns reality into a nightmare.

FROM DESCARTES'S ERROR TO SARTRE'S INSIGHT

The seventeenth-century philosopher Descartes, regarded as the founder of modern philosophy, gave expression to this primary error with his famous dictum (which he saw as primary truth): "I think, therefore I am." This was the answer he found to the question "Is there anything I can know with absolute certainty?" He realized that the fact that he was always thinking was beyond doubt, and so he equated thinking with Being, that is to say, identity—I am—with thinking. Instead of the ultimate truth, he had found the root of the ego, but he didn't know that.

It took almost three hundred years before another famous philosopher saw something in that statement that Descartes, as well as everybody else, had overlooked. His name was Jean-Paul Sartre. He looked at Descartes's statement "I think, therefore I am" very deeply and suddenly realized, in his own words, "The consciousness that says 'I am' is not the consciousness that thinks." What did he mean by that? When you are aware that you are thinking, that awareness is not part of thinking. It is a different dimension of consciousness. And it is that awareness that says "I am." If there were nothing but thought in you, you wouldn't even know you are thinking. You would be like a dreamer who doesn't know he is dreaming. You would be as identified with every thought as the dreamer is with every image in the dream. Many people still live like that, like sleepwalkers, trapped in old dysfunctional mind-sets that continuously re-create the same nightmarish reality. When you know you are dreaming, you are awake within the dream. Another dimension of consciousness has come in.

The implication of Sartre's insight is profound, but he himself was still too identified with thinking to realize the full significance of what he had discovered: an emerging new dimension of consciousness.

THE PEACE THAT PASSES ALL UNDERSTANDING

There are many accounts of people who experienced that emerging new dimension of consciousness as a result of tragic loss at some point in their lives. Some lost all of their possessions, others their children or spouse, their social position, reputation, or physical abilities. In some cases, through disaster or war, they lost all of these simultaneously and found themselves with "nothing." We may call this a limit-situation. Whatever they had identified with, whatever gave them their sense of self, had been taken away. Then suddenly and inexplicably, the anguish or intense fear they initially felt gave way to a sacred sense of Presence, a deep peace and serenity and complete freedom from fear. This phenomenon must have been familiar to St. Paul, who used the expression "the peace of God which passeth all understanding."[2] It is indeed a peace that doesn't seem to make sense, and the

people who experienced it asked themselves: In the face of *this*, how can it be that I feel such peace?

The answer is simple, once you realize what the ego is and how it works. When forms that you had identified with, that gave you your sense of self, collapse or are taken away, it can lead to a collapse of the ego, since ego *is* identification with form. When there is nothing to identify with anymore, who are you? When forms around you die or death approaches, your sense of Beingness, of I Am, is freed from its entanglement with form: Spirit is released from its imprisonment in matter. You realize your essential identity as formless, as an all-pervasive Presence, of Being prior to all forms, all identifications. You realize your true identity as consciousness itself, rather than what consciousness had identified with. That's the peace of God. The ultimate truth of who you are is not I am this or I am that, but I Am.

Not everybody who experiences great loss also experiences this awakening, this disidentification from form. Some immediately create a strong mental image or thought form in which they see themselves as a victim, whether it be of circumstances, other people, an unjust fate, or God. This thought form and the emotions it creates, such as anger, resentment, self-pity, and so on, they strongly identify with, and it immediately takes the place of all the other identifications that have collapsed through the loss. In other words, the ego quickly finds a new form. The fact that this new form is a deeply unhappy one doesn't concern the ego too much, as long as it has an identity, good or bad. In fact, this new ego will be more contracted, more rigid and impenetrable than the old one.

Whenever tragic loss occurs, you either resist or you yield. Some people become bitter or deeply resentful; others become compassionate, wise, and loving. Yielding means inner acceptance of what is. You are open to life. Resistance is an inner contraction, a hardening of the shell of the ego. You are closed. Whatever action you take in a state of inner resistance (which we could also call negativity) will create more outer resistance, and the universe will not be on your side; life will not be helpful. If the shutters are closed, the sunlight cannot come in. When you yield internally, when you surrender, a new dimension of consciousness opens up. If action is possible or necessary, your action will be in alignment with the whole and supported by creative intelligence, the unconditioned consciousness which in a state of inner openness you become one with. Circumstances and people then become helpful, cooperative. Coincidences happen. If no action is possible, you rest in the peace and inner stillness that come with surrender. You rest in God.

CHAPTER THREE

The Core of Ego

Most people are so completely identified with the voice in the head—the incessant stream of involuntary and compulsive thinking and the emotions that accompany it—that we may describe them as being possessed by their mind. As long as you are completely unaware of this, you take the thinker to be who you are. This is the egoic mind. We call it egoic because there is a sense of self, of I (ego), in every thought—every memory, every interpretation, opinion, viewpoint, reaction, emotion. This is unconsciousness, spiritually speaking. Your thinking, the content of your mind, is of course conditioned by the past: your upbringing, culture, family background, and so on. The central core of all your mind activity consists of certain repetitive and persistent thoughts, emotions, and reactive patterns that you identify with most strongly. This entity is the ego itself.

In most cases, when you say "I," it is the ego speaking, not you, as we have seen. It consists of thought and emotion, of a bundle of memories you identify with as "me and my story," of habitual roles you play without knowing it, of collective identifications such as nationality, religion, race, social class, or political allegiance. It also contains personal identifications, not only with possessions, but also with opinions, external appearance, long-standing resentments, or concepts of yourself as better than or not as good as others, as a success or failure.

The content of the ego varies from person to person, but in every ego the same structure operates. In other words: Egos only differ on the surface. Deep down they are all the same. In what way are they the same? They live on identification and separation. When you live through the mind-made self comprised of thought and emotion that is the ego, the basis for your identity is precarious because thought and emotion are by their very nature ephemeral, fleeting. So every ego is continuously struggling for survival, trying to protect and enlarge itself. To uphold the I-thought, it needs the opposite thought of "the other." The conceptual "I" cannot survive without the conceptual "other." The others are most other when I see them as my enemies. At one end of the scale of this unconscious egoic pattern lies the egoic compulsive habit of faultfinding and complaining about others. Jesus referred to it when he said, "Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?"[1] At the other end of the scale, there is physical

violence between individuals and warfare between nations. In the Bible, Jesus' question remains unanswered, but the answer is, of course: Because when I criticize or condemn another, it makes me feel bigger, superior.

COMPLAINING AND RESENTMENT

Complaining is one of the ego's favorite strategies for strengthening itself. Every complaint is a little story the mind makes up that you completely believe in. Whether you complain aloud or only in thought makes no difference. Some egos that perhaps don't have much else to identify with easily survive on complaining alone. When you are in the grip of such an ego, complaining, especially about other people, is habitual and, of course, unconscious, which means you don't know what you are doing. Applying negative mental labels to people, either to their face or more commonly when you speak about them to others or even just think about them, is often part of this pattern. Name-calling is the crudest form of such labeling and of the ego's need to be right and triumph over others: "jerk, bastard, bitch"—all definitive pronouncements that you can't argue with. On the next level down on the scale of unconsciousness, you have shouting and screaming, and not much below that, physical violence.

Resentment is the emotion that goes with complaining and the mental labeling of people and adds even more energy to the ego. Resentment means to feel bitter, indignant, aggrieved, or offended. You resent other people's greed, their dishonesty, their lack of integrity, what they are doing, what they did in the past, what they said, what they failed to do, what they should or shouldn't have done. The ego loves it. Instead of overlooking unconsciousness in others, you make it into their identity. Who is doing that? The unconsciousness in you, the ego. Sometimes the "fault" that you perceive in another isn't even there. It is a total misinterpretation, a projection by a mind conditioned to see enemies and to make itself right or superior. At other times, the fault may be there, but by focusing on it, sometimes to the exclusion of everything else, you amplify it. And what you react to in another, you strengthen in yourself.

Nonreaction to the ego in others is one of the most effective ways not only of going beyond ego in yourself but also of dissolving the collective human ego. But you can only be in a state of nonreaction if you can recognize someone's behavior as coming from the ego, as being an expression of the collective human dysfunction. When you realize it's not personal, there is no longer a compulsion to react as if it were. By not reacting to the ego, you will often be able to bring out the sanity in others, which is the unconditioned consciousness as opposed to the conditioned. At times you may have to take practical steps to protect yourself from deeply unconscious people. This you can do without making them into enemies. Your greatest protection, however, is being conscious. Somebody becomes an enemy if you personalize the unconsciousness that is the ego. Nonreaction is not weakness but strength. Another word for nonreaction is forgiveness. To forgive is to overlook, or rather to look through. You look through the ego to the sanity that is in every human being as his or her essence.

The ego loves to complain and feel resentful not only about other people but also about situations. What you can do to a person, you can also do to a situation: make it into an enemy. The implication is always: This should not be happening; I don't want to be here; I don't want to be doing this; I'm being treated unfairly. And the ego's greatest enemy of all is, of course, the present moment, which is to say, life itself.

Complaining is not to be confused with informing someone of a mistake or deficiency so that it can be put right. And to refrain from complaining doesn't necessarily mean putting up with bad quality or behavior. There is no ego in telling the waiter that your soup is cold and needs to be heated up—if you stick to the facts, which are always neutral. "How dare you serve me cold soup…." That's complaining. There is a "me" here that loves to feel personally offended by the cold soup and is going to make the most of it, a "me" that enjoys making someone wrong. The complaining we are talking about is in the service of the ego, not of change. Sometimes it becomes obvious that the ego doesn't really want change so that it can go on complaining.

See if you can catch, that is to say, notice, the voice in the head, perhaps in the very moment it complains about something, and recognize it for what it is: the voice of the ego, no more than a conditioned mind-pattern, a thought. Whenever you notice that voice, you will also realize that you are not the voice, but the one who is aware of it. In fact, you are the awareness that is aware of the voice. In the background, there is the awareness. In the foreground, there is the voice, the thinker. In this way you are becoming free of the ego, free of the unobserved mind. The moment you become aware of the ego in you, it is strictly speaking no longer the ego, but just an old, conditioned mind-pattern. Ego implies unawareness. Awareness and ego cannot coexist. The old mind-pattern or mental habit may still survive and reoccur for a while because it has the momentum of thousands of years of collective human unconsciousness behind it, but every time it is recognized, it is weakened.

REACTIVITY AND GRIEVANCES

Whereas resentment is often the emotion that goes with complaining, it may also be accompanied by a stronger emotion such as anger or some other form of upset. In this way, it becomes more highly charged energetically. Complaining then turns into reactivity, another of the ego's ways of strengthening itself. There are many people who are always waiting for the next thing to react against, to feel annoyed or disturbed about—and it never takes long before they find it. "This is an outrage," they say. "How dare you…." "I resent this." They are addicted to upset and anger as others are to a drug. Through reacting against this or that they assert and strengthen their feeling of self.

A long-standing resentment is called a grievance. To carry a grievance is to be in a permanent state of "against," and that is why grievances constitute a significant part of many people's ego. Collective grievances can survive for centuries in the psyche of a nation or tribe and fuel a never-ending cycle of violence.

A grievance is a strong negative emotion connected to an event in the sometimes distant past that is being kept alive by compulsive thinking, by retelling the story in the head or out loud of "what someone did to me" or "what someone did to us." A grievance will also contaminate other areas of your life. For example, while you think about and feel your grievance, its negative emotional energy can distort your perception of an event that is happening in the present or influence the way in which you speak or behave toward someone in the present. One strong grievance is enough to contaminate large areas of your life and keep you in the grip of the ego.

It requires honesty to see whether you still harbor grievances, whether there is someone in your life you have not completely forgiven, an "enemy." If you do, become aware of the grievance both on the level of thought as well as emotion, that is to say, be aware of the thoughts that keep it alive, and feel the emotion that is the body's response to those thoughts. Don't try to let go of the grievance. *Trying* to let go, to forgive, does not work. Forgiveness happens naturally when you see that it has no purpose other than to strengthen a false sense of self, to keep the ego in place. The seeing is freeing. Jesus' teaching to "Forgive your enemies" is essentially about the undoing of one of the main egoic structures in the human mind.

The past has no power to stop you from being present now. Only your grievance about the past can do that. And what is a grievance? The baggage of old thought and emotion.

BEING RIGHT, MAKING WRONG

Complaining as well as faultfinding and reactivity strengthen the ego's sense of boundary and separateness on which its survival depends. But they also strengthen the ego in another way by giving it a feeling of superiority on which it thrives. It may not be immediately apparent how complaining, say, about a traffic jam, about politicians, about the "greedy wealthy" or the "lazy unemployed," or your colleagues or ex-spouse, men or women, can give you a sense of superiority. Here is why. When you complain, by implication you are right and the person or situation you complain about or react against is wrong.

There is nothing that strengthens the ego more than being right. Being right is identification with a mental position—a perspective, an opinion, a judgment, a story. For you to be right, of course, you need someone else to be wrong, and so the ego loves to make wrong in order to be right. In other words: You need to make others wrong in order to get a stronger sense of who you are. Not only a person, but also a situation can be made wrong through complaining and reactivity, which always implies that "this should not be happening." Being right places you in a position of imagined moral superiority in relation to the person or situation that is being judged and found wanting. It is that sense of superiority the ego craves and through which it enhances itself.

IN DEFENSE OF AN ILLUSION

Facts undoubtedly exist. If you say: "Light travels faster than sound," and

someone else says the opposite is the case, you are obviously right, and he is wrong. The simple observation that lightning precedes thunder could confirm this. So not only are you right, but you know you are right. Is there any ego involved in this? Possibly, but not necessarily. If you are simply stating what you know to be true, the ego is not involved at all, because there is no identification. Identification with what? With mind and a mental position. Such identification, however, can easily creep in. If you find yourself saying, "Believe me, I know" or "Why do you never believe me?" then the ego has already crept in. It is hiding in the little word "me." A simple statement: "Light is faster than sound," although true, is now in the service of illusion, of ego. It has become contaminated with a false sense of "I" it has become personalized, turned into a mental position. The "I" feels diminished or offended because somebody doesn't believe what "I" said.

Ego takes everything personally. Emotion arises, defensiveness, perhaps even aggression. Are you defending the truth? No, the truth, in any case, needs no defense. The light or sound does not care about what you or anybody else thinks. You are defending yourself, or rather the illusion of yourself, the mind-made substitute. It would be even more accurate to say that the illusion is defending itself. If even the simple and straightforward realm of facts can lend itself to egoic distortion and illusion, how much more so the less tangible realm of opinions, viewpoints, and judgments, all of them thought forms that can easily become infused with a sense of "I."

Every ego confuses opinions and viewpoints with facts. Furthermore, it cannot tell the difference between an event and its reaction to that event. Every ego is a master of selective perception and distorted interpretation. Only through awareness—not through thinking—can you differentiate between fact and opinion. Only through awareness are you able to see: There is the situation and here is the anger I feel about it, and then realize there are other ways of approaching the situation, other ways of seeing it and dealing with it. Only through awareness can you see the totality of the situation or person instead of adopting one limited perspective.

TRUTH: RELATIVE OR ABSOLUTE?

Beyond the realm of simple and verifiable facts, the certainty that "I am right and you are wrong" is a dangerous thing in personal relationships as well as in interactions between nations, tribes, religions, and so on.

But if the belief "I am right; you are wrong" is one of the ways in which the ego strengthens itself, if making yourself right and others wrong is a mental dysfunction that perpetuates separation and conflict between human beings, does that mean there is no such thing as right or wrong behavior, action, or belief ? And wouldn't that be the moral relativism that some contemporary Christian teachings see as the great evil of our times?

The history of Christianity is, of course, a prime example of how the belief that you are in sole possession of the truth, that is to say, right, can corrupt your actions and behavior to the point of insanity. For centuries, torturing and burning people alive if their opinion diverged even in the slightest from Church doctrine or narrow interpretations of scripture (the "Truth") was

considered right because the victims were "wrong." They were so wrong that they needed to be killed. The Truth was considered more important than human life. And what was the Truth? A story you had to believe in; which means, a bundle of thoughts.

The one million people that mad dictator Pol Pot of Cambodia ordered killed included everybody who wore glasses. Why? To him, the Marxist interpretation of history was the absolute truth, and according to his version of it, those who wore glasses belonged to the educated class, the bourgeoisie, the exploiters of the peasants. They needed to be eliminated to make room for a new social order. His truth also was a bundle of thoughts.

The Catholic and other churches are actually correct when they identify relativism, the belief that there is no absolute truth to guide human behavior, as one of the evils of our times; but you won't find absolute truth if you look for it where it cannot be found: in doctrines, ideologies, sets of rules, or stories. What do all of these have in common? They are made up of thought. Thought can at best point to the truth, but it never *is* the truth. That's why Buddhists say "The finger pointing to the moon is not the moon." All religions are equally false and equally true, depending on how you use them. You can use them in the service of the ego, or you can use them in the service of the Truth. If you believe only your religion is the Truth, you are using it in the service of the ego. Used in such a way, religion becomes ideology and creates an illusory sense of superiority as well as division and conflict between people. In the service of the Truth, religious teachings represent signposts or maps left behind by awakened humans to assist you in spiritual awakening, that is to say, in becoming free of identification with form.

There is only one absolute Truth, and all other truths emanate from it. When you find that Truth, your actions will be in alignment with it. Human action can reflect the Truth, or it can reflect illusion. Can the Truth be put into words? Yes, but the words are, of course, not it. They only point to it.

The Truth is inseparable from who you are. Yes, you *are* the Truth. If you look for it elsewhere, you will be deceived every time. The very Being that you are is Truth. Jesus tried to convey that when he said, "I am the way and the truth and the life."[2] These words uttered by Jesus are one of the most powerful and direct pointers to the Truth, if understood correctly. If misinterpreted, however, they become a great obstacle. Jesus speaks of the innermost I Am, the essence identity of every man and woman, every life-form, in fact. He speaks of the life that you are. Some Christian mystics have called it the Christ within; Buddhists call it your Buddha nature; for Hindus, it is Atman, the indwelling God. When you are in touch with that dimension within yourself—and being in touch with it is your natural state, not some miraculous achievement—all your actions and relationships will reflect the oneness with all life that you sense deep within. This is love. Laws, commandments, rules, and regulations are necessary for those who are cut off from who they are, the Truth within. They prevent the worst excesses of the ego, and often they don't even do that. "Love and do what you will," said St. Augustine. Words cannot get much closer to the Truth than that.

THE EGO IS NOT PERSONAL

On a collective level, the mind-set "We are right and they are wrong" is particularly deeply entrenched in those parts of the world where conflict between two nations, races, tribes, religions, or ideologies is long-standing, extreme, and endemic. Both sides of the conflict are equally identified with their own perspective, their own "story," that is to say, identified with thought. Both are equally incapable of seeing that another perspective, another story, may exist and also be valid. Israeli writer Y. Halevi speaks of the possibility of "accommodating a competing narrative,"[3] but in many parts of the world, people are not yet able or willing to do that. Both sides believe themselves to be in possession of the truth. Both regard themselves as victims and the "other" as evil, and because they have conceptualized and thereby dehumanized the other as the enemy, they can kill and inflict all kinds of violence on the other, even on children, without feeling their humanity and suffering. They become trapped in an insane spiral of perpetration and retribution, action and reaction.

Here it becomes obvious that the human ego in its collective aspect as "us" against "them" is even more insane than the "me," the individual ego, although the mechanism is the same. By far the greater part of violence that humans have inflicted on each other is not the work of criminals or the mentally deranged, but of normal, respectable citizens in the service of the collective ego. One can go so far as to say that on this planet "normal" equals insane. What is it that lies at the root of this insanity? Complete identification with thought and emotion, that is to say, ego.

Greed, selfishness, exploitation, cruelty, and violence are still all-pervasive on this planet. When you don't recognize them as individual and collective manifestations of an underlying dysfunction or mental illness, you fall into the error of personalizing them. You construct a conceptual identity for an individual or group, and you say: "This is who he is. This is who they are." When you confuse the ego that you perceive in others with their identity, it is the work of your own ego that uses this misperception to strengthen itself through being right and therefore superior, and through reacting with condemnation, indignation, and often anger against the perceived enemy. All this is enormously satisfying to the ego. It strengthens the sense of separation between yourself and the other, whose "otherness" has become magnified to such an extent that you can no longer feel your common humanity, nor the rootedness in the one Life that you share with each human being, your common divinity.

The particular egoic patterns that you react to most strongly in others and misperceive as their identity tend to be the same patterns that are also in you, but that you are unable or unwilling to detect within yourself. In that sense, you have much to learn from your enemies. What is it in them that you find most upsetting, most disturbing? Their selfishness? Their greed? Their need for power and control? Their insincerity, dishonesty, propensity to violence, or whatever it may be? Anything that you resent and strongly react to in another is also in you. But it is no more than a form of ego, and as such, it is completely impersonal. It has nothing to do with who that person is, nor has it anything to do with who you are. Only if you mistake it for who you are can observing it within you be threatening to your sense of self.

In certain cases, you may need to protect yourself or someone else from being harmed by another, but beware of making it your mission to "eradicate evil," as you are likely to turn into the very thing you are fighting against. Fighting unconsciousness will draw you into unconsciousness yourself. Unconsciousness, dysfunctional egoic behavior, can never be defeated by attacking it. Even if you defeat your opponent, the unconsciousness will simply have moved into you, or the opponent reappears in a new disguise. Whatever you fight, you strengthen, and what you resist, persists.

These days you frequently hear the expression "the war against" this or that, and whenever I hear it, I know that it is condemned to failure. There is the war against drugs, the war against crime, the war against terrorism, the war against cancer, the war against poverty, and so on. For example, despite the war against crime and drugs, there has been a dramatic increase in crime and drug-related offenses in the past twenty-five years. The prison population of the United States has gone up from just under 300,000 in 1980 to a staggering 2.1 million in 2004.[4] The war against disease has given us, amongst other things, antibiotics. At first, they were spectacularly successful, seemingly enabling us to win the war against infectious diseases. Now, many experts agree that the widespread and indiscriminate use of antibiotics has created a time bomb and that antibiotic-resistant strains of bacteria, so-called super bugs, will in all likelihood bring about a reemergence of those diseases and possibly epidemics. According to the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, medical treatment is the third-leading cause of death after heart disease and cancer in the United States. Homeopathy and Chinese medicine are two examples of possible alternative approaches to disease that do not treat the illness as an enemy and therefore do not create new diseases.

War is a mind-set, and all action that comes out of such a mind-set will either strengthen the enemy, the perceived evil, or, if the war is won, will create a new enemy, a new evil equal to and often worse than the one that was defeated. There is a deep interrelatedness between your state of consciousness and external reality. When you are in the grip of a mind-set such as "war," your perceptions become extremely selective as well as distorted. In other words, you will see only what you want to see and then misinterpret it. You can imagine what kind of action comes out of such a delusional system. Or instead of imagining it, watch the news on TV tonight.

Recognize the ego for what it is: a collective dysfunction, the insanity of the human mind. When you recognize it for what it is, you no longer misperceive it as somebody's identity. Once you see the ego for what it is, it becomes much easier to remain nonreactive toward it. You don't take it personally anymore. There is no complaining, blaming, accusing, or making wrong. Nobody is wrong. It is the ego in someone, that's all. Compassion arises when you recognize that all are suffering from the same sickness of the mind, some more acutely than others. You do not fuel the drama anymore that is part of all egoic relationships. What is its fuel? Reactivity. The ego thrives on it.

DO YOU WANT PEACE OR DRAMA?

You want peace. There is no one who does not want peace. Yet there is something else in you that wants the drama, wants the conflict. You may not be able to feel it at this moment. You may have to wait for a situation or even just a thought that triggers a reaction in you: someone accusing you of this or that, not acknowledging you, encroaching on your territory, questioning the way you do things, an argument about money…. Can you then feel the enormous surge of force moving through you, the fear, perhaps being masked by anger or hostility? Can you hear your own voice becoming harsh or shrill, or louder and a few octaves lower? Can you be aware of your mind racing to defend its position, justify, attack, blame? In other words, can you awaken at that moment of unconsciousness? Can you feel that there is something in you that is at war, something that feels threatened and wants to survive at all cost, that needs the drama in order to assert its identity as the victorious character within that theatrical production? Can you feel there is something in you that would rather be right than at peace?

BEYOND EGO: YOUR TRUE IDENTITY

When the ego is at war, know that it is no more than an illusion that is fighting to survive. That illusion thinks it is you. It is not easy at first to *be* there as the witnessing Presence, especially when the ego is in survival mode or some emotional pattern from the past has become activated, but once you have had a taste of it, you will grow in Presence power, and the ego will lose its grip on you. And so a power comes into your life that is far greater than the ego, greater than the mind. All that is required to become free of the ego is to be aware of it, since awareness and ego are incompatible. Awareness is the power that is concealed within the present moment. This is why we may also call it Presence. The ultimate purpose of human existence, which is to say, your purpose, is to bring that power into this world. And this is also why becoming free of the ego cannot be made into a goal to be attained at some point in the future. Only Presence can free you of the ego, and you can only be present Now, not yesterday or tomorrow. Only Presence can undo the past in you and thus transform your state of consciousness.

What is spiritual realization? The belief that you are spirit? No, that's a thought. A little closer to the truth than the thought that believes you are who your birth certificate says you are, but still a thought. Spiritual realization is to see clearly that what I perceive, experience, think, or feel is ultimately not who I am, that I cannot find myself in all those things that continuously pass away. The Buddha was probably the first human being to see this clearly, and so *anata* (no self) became one of the central points of his teaching. And when Jesus said, "Deny thyself," what he meant was: Negate (and thus undo) the illusion of self. If the self—ego—were truly who I am, it would be absurd to "deny" it.

What remains is the light of consciousness in which perceptions, experiences, thoughts, and feelings come and go. That is Being, that is the deeper, true I. When I know myself as that, whatever happens in my life is no

longer of absolute but only of relative importance. I honor it, but it loses its absolute seriousness, its heaviness. The only thing that ultimately matters is this: Can I sense my essential Beingness, the I Am, in the background of my life at all times? To be more accurate, can I sense the I Am that I Am at this moment? Can I sense my essential identity as consciousness itself ? Or am I losing myself in what happens, losing myself in the mind, in the world?

ALL STRUCTURES ARE UNSTABLE

Whatever form it takes, the unconscious drive behind ego is to strengthen the image of who I think I am, the phantom self that came into existence when thought—a great blessing as well as a great curse—began to take over and obscured the simple yet profound joy of connectedness with Being, the Source, God. Whatever behavior the ego manifests, the hidden motivating force is always the same: the need to stand out, be special, be in control; the need for power, for attention, for more. And, of course, the need to feel a sense of separation, that is to say, the need for opposition, enemies.

The ego always wants something from other people or situations. There is always a hidden agenda, always a sense of "not enough yet," of insufficiency and lack that needs to be filled. It uses people and situations to get what it wants, and even when it succeeds, it is never satisfied for long. Often it is thwarted in its aims, and for the most part the gap between "I want" and "what is" becomes a constant source of upset and anguish. The famous and now classic pop song, "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction," is the song of the ego. The underlying emotion that governs all the activity of the ego is fear. The fear of being nobody, the fear of nonexistence, the fear of death. All its activities are ultimately designed to eliminate this fear, but the most the ego can ever do is to cover it up temporarily with an intimate relationship, a new possession, or winning at this or that. Illusion will never satisfy you. Only the truth of who you are, if realized, will set you free.

Why fear? Because the ego arises by identification with form, and deep down it knows that no forms are permanent, that they are all fleeting. So there is always a sense of insecurity around the ego even if on the outside it appears confident.

As I was walking with a friend through a beautiful nature reserve near Malibu in California, we came upon the ruins of what had been once a country house, destroyed by a fire several decades ago. As we approached the property, long overgrown with trees and all kinds of magnificent plants, there was a sign by the side of the trail put there by the park authorities. It read: danger. all structures are unstable. I said to my friend, "That's a profound sutra [sacred scripture]." And we stood there in awe. Once you realize and accept that all structures (forms) are unstable, even the seemingly solid material ones, peace arises within you. This is because the recognition of the impermanence of all forms awakens you to the dimension of the formless within yourself, that which is beyond death. Jesus called it "eternal life."

THE EGO'S NEED TO FEEL SUPERIOR

There are many subtle but easily overlooked forms of ego that you may observe in other people and, more important, in yourself. Remember: The moment you become aware of the ego in yourself, that emerging awareness is who you are beyond ego, the deeper "I." The recognition of the false is already the arising of the real.

For example, you are about to tell someone the news of what happened. "Guess what? You don't know yet? Let me tell you." If you are alert enough, present enough, you may be able to detect a momentary sense of satisfaction within yourself just before imparting the news, even if it is bad news. It is due to the fact that for a brief moment there is, in the eyes of the ego, an imbalance in your favor between you and the other person. For that brief moment, you know *more* than the other. The satisfaction that you feel is of the ego, and it is derived from feeling a stronger sense of self relative to the other person. Even if he or she is the president or the pope, you feel superior in that moment because you know *more*. Many people are addicted to gossiping partly for this reason. In addition, gossiping often carries an element of malicious criticism and judgment of others, and so it also strengthens the ego through the implied but imagined moral superiority that is there whenever you apply a negative judgment to anyone.

If someone has more, knows more, or can do more than I, the ego feels threatened because the feeling of "less" diminishes its imagined sense of self relative to the other. It may then try to restore itself by somehow diminishing, criticizing, or belittling the value of the other person's possessions, knowledge, or abilities. Or the ego may shift its strategy, and instead of competing with the other person, it will enhance itself by association with that person, if he or she is important in the eyes of others.

EGO AND FAME

The well-known phenomenon of "name dropping," the casual mention of who you know, is part of the ego's strategy of gaining a superior identity in the eyes of others and therefore in its own eyes through association with someone "important." The bane of being famous in this world is that who you are becomes totally obscured by a collective mental image. Most people you meet want to enhance their identity—the mental image of who they are—through association with you. They themselves may not know that they are not interested in you at all, but only in strengthening their ultimately fictitious sense of self. They believe that through you they can be more. They are looking to complete themselves through you, or rather through the mental image they have of you as a famous person, a larger-than-life collective conceptual identity.

The absurd overvaluation of fame is just one of the many manifestations of egoic madness in our world. Some famous people fall into the same error and identify with the collective fiction, the image people and the media have created of them, and they begin to actually see themselves as superior to ordinary mortals. As a result, they become more and more alienated from themselves and others, more and more unhappy, more and more dependent on their continuing popularity. Surrounded only by people who feed their

inflated self-image, they become incapable of genuine relationships.

Albert Einstein, who was admired as almost superhuman and whose fate it was to become one of the most famous people on the planet, never identified with the image the collective mind had created of him. He remained humble, egoless. In fact, he spoke of "a grotesque contradiction between what people consider to be my achievements and abilities and the reality of who I am and what I am capable of."[5]

This is why it is hard for a famous person to be in a genuine relationship with others. A genuine relationship is one that is not dominated by the ego with its image-making and self-seeking. In a genuine relationship, there is an outward flow of open, alert attention toward the other person in which there is no wanting whatsoever. That alert attention is Presence. It is the prerequisite for any authentic relationship. The ego always either wants something, or if it believes there is nothing to get from the other, it is in a state of utter indifference: It doesn't care about you. And so, the three predominant states of egoic relationships are: wanting, thwarted wanting (anger, resentment, blaming, complaining), and indifference.

CHAPTER FOUR

Role-playing: The Many Faces of the Ego

An ego that wants something from another—and what ego doesn't—will usually play some kind of role to get its "needs" met, be they material gain, a sense of power, superiority, or specialness, or some kind of gratification, be it physical or psychological. Usually people are completely unaware of the roles they play. They *are* those roles. Some roles are subtle; others are blatantly obvious, except to the person playing it. Some roles are designed simply to get attention from others. The ego thrives on others' attention, which is after all a form of psychic energy. The ego doesn't know that the source of all energy is within you, so it seeks it outside. It is not the formless attention which is Presence that the ego seeks, but attention in some *form*, such as recognition, praise, admiration, or just to be noticed in some way, to have its existence acknowledged.

A shy person who is afraid of the attention of others is not free of ego, but has an ambivalent ego that both wants and fears attention from others. The fear is that the attention may take the form of disapproval or criticism, that is to say, something that diminishes the sense of self rather than enhances it. So the shy person's fear of attention is greater than his or her need of attention. Shyness often goes with a self-concept that is predominately negative, the belief of being inadequate. Any conceptual sense of self—seeing myself as this or that—is ego, whether predominately positive (I am the greatest) or negative (I am no good). Behind every positive self-concept is the hidden fear of not being good enough. Behind every negative self-concept is the hidden desire of being the greatest or better than others. Behind the confident ego's feeling of and continuing need for superiority is the unconscious fear of inferiority. Conversely, the shy, inadequate ego that feels inferior has a strong hidden desire for superiority. Many people fluctuate between feelings of inferiority and superiority, depending on situations or the people they come into contact with. All you need to know and observe in yourself is this: Whenever you feel superior or inferior to anyone, that's the ego in you.

VILLAIN, VICTIM, LOVER

Some egos, if they cannot get praise or admiration, will settle for other forms of attention and play roles to elicit them. If they cannot get positive attention, they may seek negative attention instead, for example, by provoking a negative reaction in someone else. Some children already do that too. They misbehave to get attention. The playing of negative roles becomes particularly pronounced whenever the ego is magnified by an active pain-body, that is to say, emotional pain from the past that wants to renew itself through experiencing more pain. Some egos perpetrate crimes in their search for fame. They seek attention through notoriety and other people's condemnation. "Please tell me that I exist, that I am not insignificant," they seem to say. Such pathological forms of ego are only more extreme versions of normal egos.

A very common role is the one of victim, and the form of attention it seeks is sympathy or pity or others' interest in *my* problems, "me and my story." Seeing oneself as a victim is an element in many egoic patterns, such as complaining, being offended, outraged, and so on. Of course, once I am identified with a story in which I assigned myself the role of victim, I don't want it to end, and so, as every therapist knows, the ego does not want an end to its "problems" because they are part of its identity. If no one will listen to my sad story, I can tell it to myself in my head, over and over, and feel sorry for myself, and so have an identity as someone who is being treated unfairly by life or other people, fate or God. It gives definition to my self-image, makes me into someone, and that is all that matters to the ego.

In the early stages of many so-called romantic relationships, role-playing is quite common in order to attract and keep whoever is perceived by the ego as the one who is going to "make me happy, make me feel special, and fulfill all my needs." "I'll play who you want me to be, and you'll play who I want you to be." That's the unspoken and unconscious agreement. However, role-playing is hard work, and so those roles cannot be sustained indefinitely, especially once you start living together. When those roles slip, what do you see? Unfortunately, in most cases, not yet the true essence of that being, but that which covers up the true essence: the raw ego divested of its roles, with its pain-body, and its thwarted wanting which now turns into anger, most likely directed at the spouse or partner for having failed to remove the underlying fear and sense of lack that is an intrinsic part of the egoic sense of self.

What is commonly called "falling in love" is in most cases an intensification of egoic wanting and needing. You become addicted to another person, or rather to your image of that person. It has nothing to do with true love, which contains no wanting whatsoever. The Spanish language is the most honest in regard to conventional notions of love: *Te quiero* means "I want you" as well as "I love you." The other expression for "I love you," *te amo*, which does not have this ambiguity, is rarely used—perhaps because true love is just as rare.

LETTING GO OF SELF-DEFINITIONS

As tribal cultures developed into the ancient civilizations, certain functions began to be allotted to certain people: ruler, priest or priestess, warrior,

farmer, merchant, craftsman, laborer, and so on. A class system developed. Your function, which in most cases you were born into, determined your identity, determined who you were in the eyes of others, as well as in your own eyes. Your function became a role, but it wasn't recognized as a role: It was who you were, or thought you were. Only rare beings at the time, such as the Buddha or Jesus, saw the ultimate irrelevance of caste or social class, recognized it as identification with form and saw that such identification with the conditioned and the temporal obscured the light of the unconditioned and eternal that shines in each human being.

In our contemporary world, the social structures are less rigid, less clearly defined than they used to be. Although most people are, of course, still conditioned by their environment, they are no longer automatically assigned a function and with it an identity. In fact, in the modern world, more and more people are confused as to where they fit in, what their purpose is, and even who they are.

I usually congratulate people when they tell me, "I don't know who I am anymore." Then they look perplexed and ask, "Are you saying it is a good thing to be confused?" I ask them to investigate. What does it mean to be confused? "I don't know" is not confusion. Confusion is: "I don't know, but I should know" or "I don't know, but I need to know." Is it possible to let go of the belief that you should or need to know who you are? In other words, can you cease looking to conceptual definitions to give you a sense of self ? Can you cease looking to *thought* for an identity? When you let go of the belief that you should or need to know who you are, what happens to confusion? Suddenly it is gone. When you fully accept that you don't know, you actually enter a state of peace and clarity that is closer to who you truly are than thought could ever be. Defining yourself through thought is limiting yourself.

PRE-ESTABLISHED ROLES

Of course different people fulfill different functions in this world. It cannot be otherwise. As far as intellectual or physical abilities are concerned—knowledge, skills, talents, and energy levels—human beings differ widely. What really matters is not what function you fulfill in this world, but whether you identify with your function to such an extent that it takes you over and becomes a role that you play. When you play roles, you are unconscious. When you catch yourself playing a role, that recognition creates a space between you and the role. It is the beginning of freedom from the role. When you are completely identified with a role, you confuse a pattern of behavior with who you are, and you take yourself very seriously. You also automatically assign roles to others that correspond to yours. For example, when you visit doctors who are totally identified with their role, to them you will not be a human being but a patient or a case history.

Although the social structures in the contemporary world are less rigid than in ancient cultures, there are still many pre-established functions or roles that people readily identify with and which thus become part of the ego. This causes human interactions to become inauthentic, dehumanized, alienating. Those pre-established roles may give you a somewhat comforting sense of

identity, but ultimately, you lose yourself in them. The functions people have in hierarchical organizations, such as the military, the church, a government institution, or large corporation, easily lend themselves to becoming role identities. Authentic human interactions become impossible when you lose yourself in a role.

Some pre-established roles we could call social archetypes. To mention just a few: the middle-class housewife (not as prevalent as it used to be, but still widespread); the tough macho male; the female seductress; the "nonconformist" artist or performer; a person of "culture" (a role quite common in Europe) who displays a knowledge of literature, fine art, and music in the same way as others might display an expensive dress or car. And then there is the universal role of adult. When you play that role, you take yourself and life very seriously. Spontaneity, lightheartedness, and joy are not part of that role.

The hippie movement that originated on the West Coast of the United States in the 1960s and then spread throughout the Western world came out of many young people's rejection of social archetypes, of roles, of pre-established patterns of behavior as well as egoically based social and economic structures. They refused to play the roles their parents and society wanted to impose on them. Significantly, it coincided with the horrors of the Vietnam War, in which more than 57,000 young Americans and 3 million Vietnamese died and through which the insanity of the system and the underlying mind-set was exposed for all to see. Whereas in the 1950s, most Americans were still extremely conformist in thought and behavior, in the 1960s, millions of people began to withdraw their identification with a collective conceptual identity because the insanity of the collective was so obvious. The hippie movement represented a loosening of the hitherto rigid egoic structures in the psyche of humanity. The movement itself degenerated and came to an end, but it left behind an opening, and not just in those who were part of the movement. This made it possible for ancient Eastern wisdom and spirituality to move west and play an essential part in the awakening of global consciousness.

TEMPORARY ROLES

If you are awake enough, aware enough, to be able to observe how you interact with other people, you may detect subtle changes in your speech, attitude, and behavior depending on the person you are interacting with. At first, it may be easier to observe this in others; then, you may also detect it in yourself. The way in which you speak to the chairman of the company may be different in subtle ways from how you speak to the janitor. How you speak to a child may be different from how you speak to an adult. Why is that? You are playing roles. You are not yourself, neither with the chairman nor with the janitor or the child. When you walk into a store to buy something, when you go to a restaurant, the bank, the post office, you may find yourself slipping into pre-established social roles. You become a customer and speak and act as such. And you may be treated by the salesperson or waiter, who is also playing a role, as a customer. A range of conditioned patterns of behavior come into effect between two human beings that determine the nature of the

interaction. Instead of human beings, conceptual mental images are interacting with each other. The more identified people are with their respective roles, the more inauthentic the relationships become.

You have a mental image not only of who the other person is, but also of who you are, especially in relation to the person you are interacting with. So *you* are not relating with that person at all, but who you think you are is relating to who you think the other person is and vice versa. The conceptual image your mind has made of yourself is relating to its own creation, which is the conceptual image it has made of the other person. The other person's mind has probably done the same, so every egoic interaction between two people is in reality the interaction between four conceptual mind-made identities that are ultimately fictions. It is therefore not surprising there is so much conflict in relationships. There *is* no true relationship.

THE MONK WITH SWEATY PALMS

Kasan, a Zen teacher and monk, was to officiate at a funeral of a famous nobleman. As he stood there waiting for the governor of the province and other lords and ladies to arrive, he noticed that the palms of his hands were sweaty.

The next day he called his disciples together and confessed he was not yet ready to be a true teacher. He explained to them that he still lacked the sameness of bearing before all human beings, whether beggar or king. He was still unable to look through social roles and conceptual identities and see the sameness of being in every human. He then left and became the pupil of another master. He returned to his former disciples eight years later, enlightened.

HAPPINESS AS A ROLE VS. TRUE HAPPINESS

"How are you?" "Just great. Couldn't be better." True or false?

In many cases, happiness is a role people play, and behind the smiling façade, there is a great deal of pain. Depression, breakdowns, and overreactions are common when unhappiness is covered up behind a smiling exterior and brilliant white teeth, when there is denial, sometimes even to one's self, that there is much unhappiness.

"Just fine" is a role the ego plays more commonly in America than in certain other countries where being and looking miserable is almost the norm and therefore more socially acceptable. It is probably an exaggeration, but I am told that in the capital of one Nordic country you run the risk of being arrested for drunken behavior if you smile at strangers in the street.

If there is unhappiness in you, first you need to acknowledge that it is there. But don't say, "I'm unhappy." Unhappiness has nothing to do with who you are. Say: "There is unhappiness in me." Then investigate it. A situation you find yourself in may have something to do with it. Action may be required to change the situation or remove yourself from it. If there is nothing you can do, face what is and say, "Well, right now, this is how it is. I can either accept it, or make myself miserable." The primary cause of unhappiness is

never the situation but your thoughts about it. Be aware of the thoughts you are thinking. Separate them from the situation, which is always neutral, which always is as it is. There is the situation or the fact, and here are my thoughts about it. Instead of making up stories, stay with the facts. For example, "I am ruined" is a story. It limits you and prevents you from taking effective action. "I have fifty cents left in my bank account" is a fact. Facing facts is always empowering. Be aware that what you think, to a large extent, creates the emotions that you feel. See the link between your thinking and your emotions. Rather than being your thoughts and emotions, be the awareness behind them.

Don't seek happiness. If you seek it, you won't find it, because seeking is the antithesis of happiness. Happiness is ever elusive, but freedom from unhappiness is attainable now, by facing what is rather than making up stories about it. Unhappiness covers up your natural state of well-being and inner peace, the source of true happiness.

PARENTHOOD: ROLE OR FUNCTION?

Many adults play roles when they speak to young children. They use silly words and sounds. They talk down to the child. They don't treat the child as an equal. The fact that you temporarily know more or that you are bigger does not mean the child is not your equal. The majority of adults, at some point in their lives, find themselves being a parent, one of the most universal roles. The all-important question is: Are you able to fulfill the function of being a parent and fulfill it well, without identifying with that function, that is, without it becoming a role? Part of the necessary function of being a parent is looking after the needs of the child, preventing the child from getting into danger, and at times telling the child what to do and not to do. When being a parent becomes an identity, however, when your sense of self is entirely or largely derived from it, the function easily becomes overemphasized, exaggerated, and takes you over. Giving children what they need becomes excessive and turns into spoiling; preventing them from getting into danger becomes overprotectiveness and interferes with their need to explore the world and try things out for themselves. Telling children what to do or not to do becomes controlling, overbearing.

What is more, the role-playing identity remains in place long after the need for those particular functions has passed. Parents then cannot let go of being a parent even when the child grows into an adult. They can't let go of the need to be needed by their child. Even when the adult child is forty years old, parents can't let go of the notion "I know what's best for you." The role of parent is still being played compulsively, and so there is no authentic relationship. Parents define themselves by that role and are unconsciously afraid of loss of identity when they cease being parents. If their desire to control or influence the actions of their adult child is thwarted—as it usually is—they will start to criticize or show their disapproval, or try to make the child feel guilty, all in an unconscious attempt to preserve their role, their identity. On the surface it looks as if they were concerned about their child, and they themselves believe it, but they are only really concerned about preserving

their role-identity. All egoic motivations are self-enhancement and self-interest, sometimes cleverly disguised, even from the person in whom the ego operates.

A mother or father who identifies with the parental role may also try to become more complete through their children. The ego's need to manipulate others into filling the sense of lack it continuously feels is then directed toward them. If the mostly unconscious assumptions and motivations behind the parent's compulsion to manipulate their children were made conscious and voiced, they would probably include some or all of the following: "I want you to achieve what I never achieved; I want you to be somebody in the eyes of the world, so that I too can be somebody through you. Don't disappoint me. I sacrificed so much for you. My disapproval of you is intended to make you feel so guilty and uncomfortable that you finally conform to my wishes. And it goes without saying that I know what's best for you. I love you and I will continue to love you if you do what I know is right for you."

When you make such unconscious motivations conscious, you immediately see how absurd they are. The ego that lies behind them becomes visible, as does its dysfunction. Some parents that I spoke to suddenly realized, "My God, is this what I have been doing?" Once you see what you are doing or have been doing, you also see its futility, and that unconscious pattern then comes to an end by itself. Awareness is the greatest agent for change.

If your parents are doing this to you, do not tell them they are unconscious and in the grip of the ego. That will likely make them even more unconscious, because the ego will take up a defensive position. It is enough for you to recognize that it is the ego in them, that it is not who they are. Egoic patterns, even long-standing ones, sometimes dissolve almost miraculously when you don't oppose them internally. Opposition only gives them renewed strength. But even if they don't, you can then accept your parents' behavior with compassion, without needing to react to it, that is to say, without personalizing it.

Be aware also of your own unconscious assumptions or expectations that lie behind your old, habitual reactions to them. "My parents should approve of what I do. They should understand me and accept me for who I am." Really? Why should they? The fact is they don't because they can't. Their evolving consciousness hasn't made the quantum leap to the level of awareness yet. They are not yet able to disidentify from their role. "Yes, but I can't feel happy and comfortable with who I am unless I have their approval and understanding." Really? What difference does their approval or disapproval truly make to who you are? All such unexamined assumptions cause a great deal of negative emotion, much unnecessary unhappiness.

Be alert. Are some of the thoughts that go through your mind the internalized voice of your father or mother, saying perhaps something like, "You are not good enough. You will never amount to anything," or some other judgment or mental position? If there is awareness in you, you will be able to recognize that voice in your head for what it is: an old thought, conditioned by the past. If there is awareness in you, you no longer need to believe in every thought you think. It's an old thought, no more. Awareness

means Presence, and only Presence can dissolve the unconscious past in you.

"If you think you are so enlightened," Ram Dass said, "go and spend a week with your parents." That is good advice. The relationship with your parents is not only the primordial relationship that sets the tone for all subsequent relationships, it is also a good test for your degree of Presence. The more shared past there is in a relationship, the more present you need to be; otherwise, you will be forced to relive the past again and again.

CONSCIOUS SUFFERING

If you have young children, give them help, guidance, and protection to the best of your ability, but even more important, give them space—space to be. They come into this world through you, but they are not "yours." The belief "I know what's best for you" may be true when they are very young, but the older they get, the less true it becomes. The more expectations you have of how their life should unfold, the more you are in your mind instead of being present for them. Eventually, they will make mistakes, and they will experience some form of suffering, as all humans do. In fact, they may be mistakes only from your perspective. What to you is a mistake may be exactly what your children need to do or experience. Give them as much help and guidance as you can, but realize that you may also at times have to allow them to make mistakes, especially as they begin to reach adulthood. At times, you may also have to allow them to suffer. Suffering may come to them out of the blue or it may come as the consequence of their own mistakes.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if you could spare them from all suffering? No, it wouldn't. They would not evolve as human beings and would remain shallow, identified with the external form of things. Suffering drives you deeper. The paradox is that suffering is caused by identification with form and erodes identification with form. A lot of it is caused by the ego, although eventually suffering destroys the ego—but not until you suffer consciously.

Humanity is destined to go beyond suffering, but not in the way the ego thinks. One of the ego's many erroneous assumptions, one of its many deluded thoughts is "I should not have to suffer." Sometimes the thought gets transferred to someone close to you: "My child should not have to suffer." That thought itself lies at the root of suffering. Suffering has a noble purpose: the evolution of consciousness and the burning up of the ego. The man on the cross is an archetypal image. He is every man and every woman. As long as you resist suffering, it is a slow process because the resistance creates more ego to burn up. When you accept suffering, however, there is an acceleration of that process which is brought about by the fact that you suffer consciously. You can accept suffering for yourself, or you can accept it for someone else, such as your child or parent. In the midst of conscious suffering, there is already the transmutation. The fire of suffering becomes the light of consciousness.

The ego says, "I shouldn't have to suffer," and that thought makes you suffer so much more. It is a distortion of the truth, which is always paradoxical. The truth is that you need to say yes to suffering before you can transcend it.

CONSCIOUS PARENTING

Many children harbor hidden anger and resentment toward their parents and often the cause is inauthenticity in the relationship. The child has a deep longing for the parent to be there as a human being, not as a role, no matter how conscientiously that role is being played. You may be doing all the right things and the best you can for your child, but even doing the best you can is not enough. *In fact, doing is never enough if you neglect Being.* The ego knows nothing of Being but believes you will eventually be saved by doing. If you are in the grip of the ego, you believe that by doing more and more you will eventually accumulate enough "doings" to make yourself feel complete at some point in the future. You won't. You will only lose yourself in doing. The entire civilization is losing itself in doing that is not rooted in Being and thus becomes futile.

How do you bring Being into the life of a busy family, into the relationship with your child? The key is to give your child attention. There are two kinds of attention. One we might call form-based attention. The other is formless attention. Form-based attention is always connected in some way with doing or evaluating. "Have you done your homework? Eat your dinner. Tidy up your room. Brush your teeth. Do this. Stop doing that. Hurry up, get ready."

What's the next thing we have to do? This question pretty much summarizes what family life is like in many homes. Form-based attention is of course necessary and has its place, but if that's all there is in the relationship with your child, then the most vital dimension is missing and Being becomes completely obscured by doing, by "the cares of the world," as Jesus puts it. Formless attention is inseparable from the dimension of Being. How does it work?

As you look at, listen to, touch, or help your child with this or that, you are alert, still, completely present, not wanting anything other than that moment as it is. In this way, you make room for Being. In that moment, if you are present, you are not a father or mother. You are the alertness, the stillness, the Presence that is listening, looking, touching, even speaking. You are the Being behind the doing.

RECOGNIZING YOUR CHILD

You are a human being. What does that mean? Mastery of life is not a question of control, but of finding a balance between human and Being. Mother, father, husband, wife, young, old, the roles you play, the functions you fulfill, whatever you do—all that belongs to the human dimension. It has its place and needs to be honored, but in itself it is not enough for a fulfilled, truly meaningful relationship or life. Human alone is never enough, no matter how hard you try or what you achieve. Then there is Being. It is found in the still, alert presence of Consciousness itself, the Consciousness that you are. Human is form. Being is formless. Human and Being are not separate but interwoven.

In the human dimension, you are unquestionably superior to your child. You are bigger, stronger, know more, can do more. If that dimension is all you know, you will feel superior to your child, if only unconsciously. And you will

make your child feel inferior, if only unconsciously. There is no equality between you and your child because there is only form in your relationship, and in form, you are of course not equal. You may love your child, but your love will be human only, that is to say, conditional, possessive, intermittent. Only beyond form, in Being, are you equal, and only when you find the formless dimension in yourself can there be true love in that relationship. The Presence that you are, the timeless I Am, recognizes itself in another, and the other, the child in this case, feels loved, that is to say, recognized.

To love is to recognize yourself in another. The other's "otherness" then stands revealed as an illusion pertaining to the purely human realm, the realm of form. The longing for love that is in every child is the longing to be recognized, not on the level of form, but on the level of Being. If parents honor only the human dimension of the child but neglect Being, the child will sense that the relationship is unfulfilled, that something absolutely vital is missing, and there will be a buildup of pain in the child and sometimes unconscious resentment toward the parents. "Why don't you recognize me?" This is what the pain or resentment seems to be saying.

When another recognizes you, that recognition draws the dimension of Being more fully into this world through both of you. That is the love that redeems the world. I have been speaking of this with specific reference to the relationship with your child, but it equally applies, of course, to all relationships.

It has been said "God is love" but that is not absolutely correct. God is the One Life in and beyond the countless forms of life. Love implies duality: lover and beloved, subject and object. So love is the recognition of oneness in the world of duality. This is the birth of God into the world of form. Love makes the world less worldly, less dense, more transparent to the divine dimension, the light of consciousness itself.

GIVING UP ROLE-PLAYING

To do whatever is required of you in any situation without it becoming a role that you identify with is an essential lesson in the art of living that each one of us is here to learn. You become most powerful in whatever you do if the action is performed for its own sake rather than as a means to protect, enhance, or conform to your role identity. Every role is a fictitious sense of self, and through it everything becomes personalized and thus corrupted and distorted by the mind-made "little me" and whatever role it happens to be playing. Most of the people who are in positions of power in this world, such as politicians, TV personalities, business as well as religious leaders, are completely identified with their role, with a few notable exceptions. They may be considered VIPs, but they are no more than unconscious players in the egoic game, a game that looks so important yet is ultimately devoid of true purpose. It is, in the words of Shakespeare, "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."[1] Amazingly, Shakespeare arrived at this conclusion without having the benefit of television. If the egoic earth drama has any purpose at all, it is an indirect one: It creates more and more suffering on the planet, and suffering, although largely ego-created, is in the end also

ego-destructive. It is the fire in which the ego burns itself up.

In a world of role-playing personalities, those few people who don't project a mind-made image—and there are some even on TV, in the media, and the business world—but function from the deeper core of their Being, those who do not attempt to appear more than they are but are simply themselves, stand out as remarkable and are the only ones who truly make a difference in this world. They are the bringers of the new consciousness. Whatever they do becomes empowered because it is in alignment with the purpose of the whole. Their influence, however, goes far beyond what they do, far beyond their function. Their mere presence—simple, natural, unassuming—has a transformational effect on whoever they come into contact with.

When you don't play roles, it means there is no self (ego) in what you do. There is no secondary agenda: protection or strengthening of your self. As a result, your actions have far greater power. You are totally focused on the situation. You become one with it. You don't try to be anybody in particular. You are most powerful, most effective, when you are completely yourself. But don't try to be yourself. That's another role. It's called "natural, spontaneous me." As soon as you are trying to be this or that, you are playing a role. "Just be yourself" is good advice, but it can also be misleading. The mind will come in and say, "Let's see. How can I be myself ?" Then, the mind will develop some kind of strategy: "How to be myself." Another role. "How can I be myself ?" is, in fact, the wrong question. It implies you have to do something to be yourself. But how doesn't apply here because you are yourself already. Just stop adding unnecessary baggage to who you already are. "But I don't know who I am. I don't know what it means to be myself." If you can be absolutely comfortable with not knowing who you are, then what's left is who you are—the Being behind the human, a field of pure potentiality rather than something that is already defined.

Give up defining yourself—to yourself or to others. You won't die. You will come to life. And don't be concerned with how others define you. When they define you, they are limiting themselves, so it's their problem. Whenever you interact with people, don't be there primarily as a function or a role, but as a field of conscious Presence.

Why does the ego play roles? Because of one unexamined assumption, one fundamental error, one unconscious thought. That thought is: I am not enough. Other unconscious thoughts follow: I need to play a role in order to get what I need to be fully myself; I need to get more so that I can be more. But you cannot be more than you are because underneath your physical and psychological form, you are one with Life itself, one with Being. In form, you are and will always be inferior to some, superior to others. In essence, you are neither inferior nor superior to anyone. True self-esteem and true humility arise out of that realization. In the eyes of the ego, self-esteem and humility are contradictory. In truth, they are one and the same.

THE PATHOLOGICAL EGO

In a wider sense of the word, the ego itself is pathological, no matter what

form it takes. When we look at the ancient Greek root of the word *pathological,* we discover just how appropriate that term is when applied to the ego. Although the word is normally used to describe a condition of disease, it is derived from *pathos,* which means suffering. This is, of course, exactly what the Buddha already discovered 2,600 years ago as a characteristic of the human condition.

A person in the grip of ego, however, does not recognize suffering as suffering, but will look upon it as the only appropriate response in any given situation. The ego in its blindness is incapable of seeing the suffering it inflicts on itself and on others. Unhappiness is an ego-created mental-emotional disease that has reached epidemic proportions. It is the inner equivalent of the environmental pollution of our planet. Negative states such as anger, anxiety, hatred, resentment, discontent, envy, jealousy, and so on, are not recognized as negative but as totally justified and are further misperceived not as self-created but as caused by someone else or some external factor. "I am holding you responsible for my pain." This is what by implication the ego is saying.

The ego cannot distinguish between a situation and its interpretation of and reaction to that situation. You might say, "What a dreadful day," without realizing that the cold, the wind, and the rain or whatever condition you react to are not dreadful. They are as they are. What is dreadful is your reaction, your inner resistance to it, and the emotion that is created by that resistance. In Shakespeare's words, "There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so."[2] What is more, suffering or negativity is often misperceived by the ego as pleasure because up to a point the ego strengthens itself through it.

For example, anger or resentment strengthen the ego enormously by increasing the sense of separateness, emphasizing the otherness of others and creating a seemingly unassailable fortresslike mental position of "rightness." If you were able to observe the physiological changes that take place inside your body when possessed by such negative states, how they adversely affect the functioning of the heart, the digestive and immune systems, and countless other bodily functions, it would become abundantly clear that such states are indeed pathological, are forms of suffering and not pleasure.

Whenever you are in a negative state, there is something in you that wants the negativity, that perceives it as pleasurable, or that believes it will get you what you want. Otherwise, who would want to hang on to negativity, make themselves and others miserable, and create disease in the body? So, whenever there is negativity in you, if you can be aware at that moment that there is something in you that takes pleasure in it or believes it has a useful purpose, you are becoming aware of the ego directly. The moment this happens, your identity has shifted from ego to awareness. This means the ego is shrinking and awareness is growing.

If in the midst of negativity you are able to realize "At this moment I am creating suffering for myself" it will be enough to raise you above the limitations of conditioned egoic states and reactions. It will open up infinite possibilities which come to you when there is awareness—other vastly more intelligent ways of dealing with any situation. You will be free to let go of your unhappiness the moment you recognize it as unintelligent. Negativity is not intelligent. It is always of the ego. The ego may be clever, but it is not

intelligent. Cleverness pursues its own little aims. Intelligence sees the larger whole in which all things are connected. Cleverness is motivated by self-interest, and it is extremely short-sighted. Most politicians and businesspeople are clever. Very few are intelligent. Whatever is attained through cleverness is short-lived and always turns out to be eventually self-defeating. Cleverness divides; intelligence includes.

THE BACKGROUND UNHAPPINESS

The ego creates separation, and separation creates suffering. The ego is therefore clearly pathological. Apart from the obvious ones such as anger, hatred, and so on, there are other more subtle forms of negativity that are so common they are usually not recognized as such, for example, impatience, irritation, nervousness, and being "fed up." They constitute the background unhappiness that is many people's predominant inner state. You need to be extremely alert and absolutely present to be able to detect them. Whenever you do, it is a moment of awakening, of disidentification from the mind.

Here is one of the most common negative states that is easily overlooked, precisely because it is so common, so normal. You may be familiar with it. Do you often experience a feeling of discontent that could best be described as a kind of background resentment? It may be either specific or nonspecific. Many people spend a large part of their lives in that state. They are so identified with it that they cannot stand back and see it. Underlying that feeling are certain unconsciously held beliefs, that is to say, thoughts. You think these thoughts in the same way that you dream your dreams when you are asleep. In other words, you don't know you are thinking those thoughts, just as the dreamer doesn't know he is dreaming.

Here are some of the most common unconscious thoughts that feed the feeling of discontent or background resentment. I have stripped away the content from those thoughts so that the bare structure remains. They become more clearly visible that way. Whenever there is unhappiness in the background of your life (or even in the foreground), you can see which of these thoughts applies and fill in your own content according to your personal situation:

"There is something that needs to happen in my life before I can be at peace (happy, fulfilled, etc.). And I resent that it hasn't happened yet. Maybe my resentment will finally make it happen."

"Something happened in the past that should not have happened, and I resent that. If that hadn't happened, I would be at peace now."

"Something is happening now that should not be happening, and it is preventing me from being at peace now."

Often the unconscious beliefs are directed toward a person and so "happening" becomes "doing":

"You should do this or that so that I can be at peace. And I resent that you haven't done it yet. Maybe my resentment will make you do it."

"Something you (or I) did, said, or failed to do in the past is preventing me from being at peace now."

"What you are doing or failing to do now is preventing me from being at peace."

THE SECRET OF HAPPINESS

All of the above are assumptions, unexamined thoughts that are confused with reality. They are stories the ego creates to convince you that you cannot be at peace now or cannot be fully yourself now. Being at peace and being who you are, that is, being yourself, are one. The ego says: Maybe at some point in the future, I can be at peace—if this, that, or the other happens, or I obtain this or become that. Or it says: I can never be at peace because of something that happened in the past. Listen to people's stories and they could all be entitled "Why I Cannot Be at Peace Now." The ego doesn't know that your only opportunity for being at peace *is* now. Or maybe it does know, and it is afraid that you may find this out. Peace, after all, is the end of the ego.

How to be at peace now? By making peace with the present moment. The present moment is the field on which the game of life happens. It cannot happen anywhere else. Once you have made peace with the present moment, see what happens, what you can do or choose to do, or rather what life does through you. There are three words that convey the secret of the art of living, the secret of all success and happiness: One With Life. Being one with life is being one with Now. You then realize that you don't live your life, but life lives you. Life is the dancer, and you are the dance.

The ego loves its resentment of reality. What is reality? Whatever is. Buddha called it *tatata*—the suchness of life, which is no more than the suchness of this moment. Opposition toward that suchness is one of the main features of the ego. It creates the negativity that the ego thrives on, the unhappiness that it loves. In this way, you make yourself and others suffer and don't even know that you are doing it, don't know that you are creating hell on earth. To create suffering without recognizing it—this is the essence of unconscious living; this is being totally in the grip of the ego. The extent of the ego's inability to recognize itself and see what it is doing is staggering and unbelievable. It will do exactly what it condemns others for and not see it. When it is pointed out, it will use angry denial, clever arguments, and self-justifications to distort the facts. People do it, corporations do it, governments do it. When all else fails, the ego will resort to shouting or even to physical

violence. Send in the marines. We can now understand the deep wisdom in Jesus' words on the cross: "Forgive them for they know not what they do."

To end the misery that has afflicted the human condition for thousands of years, you have to start with yourself and take responsibility for your inner state at any given moment. That means now. Ask yourself, "Is there negativity in me at this moment?" Then, become alert, attentive to your thoughts as well as your emotions. Watch out for the low-level unhappiness in whatever form that I mentioned earlier, such as discontent, nervousness, being "fed up," and so on. Watch out for thoughts that appear to justify or explain this unhappiness but in reality cause it. The moment you become aware of a negative state within yourself, it does not mean you have failed. It means that you have succeeded. Until that awareness happens, there is identification with inner states, and such identification is ego. With awareness comes disidentification from thoughts, emotions, and reactions. This is not to be confused with denial. The thoughts, emotions, or reactions are recognized, and in the moment of recognizing, disidentification happens automatically. Your sense of self, of who you are, then undergoes a shift: Before you were the thoughts, emotions, and reactions; now you are the awareness, the conscious Presence that witnesses those states.

"One day I will be free of the ego." Who is talking? The ego. To become free of the ego is not really a big job but a very small one. All you need to do is be aware of your thoughts and emotions—as they happen. This is not really a "doing," but an alert "seeing." In that sense, it is true that there is nothing you can do to become free of the ego. When that shift happens, which is the shift from thinking to awareness, an intelligence far greater than the ego's cleverness begins to operate in your life. Emotions and even thoughts become depersonalized through awareness. Their impersonal nature is recognized. There is no longer a self in them. They are just human emotions, human thoughts. Your entire personal history, which is ultimately no more than a story, a bundle of thoughts and emotions, becomes of secondary importance and no longer occupies the forefront of your consciousness. It no longer forms the basis for your sense of identity. You are the light of Presence, the awareness that is prior to and deeper than any thoughts and emotions.

PATHOLOGICAL FORMS OF EGO

As we have seen, the ego is in its essential nature pathological, if we use the word in its wider sense to denote dysfunction and suffering. Many mental disorders consist of the same egoic traits that operate in a normal person, except that they have become so pronounced that their pathological nature is now obvious to anyone, except the sufferer.

For example, many normal people tell certain kinds of lies from time to time in order to appear more important, more special, and to enhance their image in the mind of others: who they know, what their achievements, abilities, and possessions are, and whatever else the ego uses to identify with. Some people, however, driven by the ego's feeling of insufficiency and its need to have or be "more," lie habitually and compulsively. Most of what they tell you about themselves, their story, is a complete fantasy, a fictitious edifice

the ego has designed for itself to feel bigger, more special. Their grandiose and inflated self-image can sometimes fool others, but usually not for long. It is then quickly recognized by most people as a complete fiction.

The mental illness that is called paranoid schizophrenia, or paranoia for short, is essentially an exaggerated form of ego. It usually consists of a fictitious story the mind has invented to make sense of a persistent underlying feeling of fear. The main element of the story is the belief that certain people (sometimes large numbers or almost everyone) are plotting against me, or are conspiring to control or kill me. The story often has an inner consistency and logic so that it sometimes fools others into believing it too. Sometimes organizations or entire nations have paranoid belief systems at their very basis. The ego's fear and distrust of other people, its tendency to emphasize the "otherness" of others by focusing on their perceived faults and make those faults into their identity, is taken a little further and makes others into inhuman monsters. The ego needs others, but its dilemma is that deep down it hates and fears them. Jean-Paul Sartre's statement "Hell is other people" is the voice of the ego. The person suffering from paranoia experiences that hell most acutely, but everyone in whom the egoic patterns still operate will feel it to some degree. The stronger the ego in you, the more likely it is that in your perception other people are the main source of problems in your life. It is also more than likely that you will make life difficult for others. But, of course, you won't be able to see that. It is always others who seem to be doing it to you.

The mental illness we call paranoia also manifests another symptom that is an element of every ego, although in paranoia it takes on a more extreme form. The more the sufferer sees himself persecuted, spied on, or threatened by others, the more pronounced becomes his sense of being the center of the universe around whom everything revolves, and the more special and important he feels as the imagined focal point of so many people's attention. His sense of being a victim, of being wronged by so many people, makes him feel very special. In the story that forms the basis of his delusional system, he often assigns to himself the role of both victim and potential hero who is going to save the world or defeat the forces of evil.

The collective ego of tribes, nations, and religious organizations also frequently contains a strong element of paranoia: us against the evil others. It is the cause of much human suffering. The Spanish Inquisition, the persecution and burning of heretics and "witches," the relations between nations leading up to the First and Second World Wars, Communism throughout its history, the "Cold War," McCarthyism in America in the 1950s, prolonged violent conflict in the Middle East are all painful episodes in human history dominated by extreme collective paranoia.

The more unconscious individuals, groups, or nations are, the more likely it is that egoic pathology will assume the form of physical violence. Violence is a primitive but still very widespread way in which the ego attempts to assert itself, to prove itself right and another wrong. With very unconscious people, arguments can easily lead to physical violence. What is an argument? Two or more people express their opinions and those opinions differ. Each person is so identified with the thoughts that make up their opinion, that those thoughts harden into mental positions which are invested with a sense of self. In other

words: Identity and thought merge. Once this has happened, when I defend my opinions (thoughts), I feel and act as if I were defending my very self. Unconsciously, I feel and act as if I were fighting for survival and so my emotions will reflect this unconscious belief. They become turbulent. I am upset, angry, defensive, or aggressive. I need to win at all cost lest I become annihilated. That's the illusion. The ego doesn't know that mind and mental positions have nothing to do with who you are because the ego is the unobserved mind itself.

In Zen they say: "Don't seek the truth. Just cease to cherish opinions." What does that mean? Let go of identification with your mind. Who you are beyond the mind then emerges by itself.

WORK—WITH AND WITHOUT EGO

Most people have moments when they are free of ego. Those who are exceptionally good at what they do may be completely or largely free of ego while performing their work. They may not know it, but their work has become a spiritual practice. Most of them are present while they do their work and fall back into relative unconsciousness in their private life. This means their state of Presence is for the time being confined to one area of their life. I have met teachers, artists, nurses, doctors, scientists, social workers, waiters, hairdressers, business owners, and salespeople who perform their work admirably without any self-seeking, fully responding to whatever the moment requires of them. They are one with what they do, one with the Now, one with the people or the task they serve. The influence such people have upon others goes far beyond the function they perform. They bring about a lessening of the ego in everyone who comes into contact with them. Even people with heavy egos sometimes begin to relax, let down their guard, and stop playing their roles when they interact with them. It comes as no surprise that those people who work without ego are extraordinarily successful at what they do. Anybody who is one with what he or she does is building the new earth.

I have also met many others who may be technically good at what they do but whose ego constantly sabotages their work. Only part of their attention is on the work they perform; the other part is on themselves. Their ego demands personal recognition and wastes energy in resentment if it doesn't get enough —and it's never enough. "Is someone else getting more recognition than me?" Or their main focus of attention is profit or power, and their work is no more than a means to that end. When work is no more than a means to an end, it cannot be of high quality. When obstacles or difficulties arise in their work, when things don't go according to expectation, when other people or circumstances are not helpful or cooperative, instead of immediately becoming one with the new situation and responding to the requirements of the present moment, they react against the situation and so separate themselves from it. There is a "me" that feels personally offended or resentful, and a huge amount of energy is burned up in useless protest or anger, energy that could be used for solving the situation if it were not being misused by the ego. What is more, this "anti"-energy creates new obstacles, new opposition. Many people are truly their own worst enemy.

People unknowingly sabotage their own work when they withhold help or information from others or try to undermine them lest they become more successful or get more credit than "me." Cooperation is alien to the ego, except when there is a secondary motive. The ego doesn't know that the more you include others, the more smoothly things flow and the more easily things come to you. When you give little or no help to others or put obstacles in their path, the universe—in the form of people and circumstances—gives little or no help to you because you have cut yourself off from the whole. The ego's unconscious core feeling of "not enough" causes it to react to someone else's success as if that success had taken something away from "me." It doesn't know that your resentment of another person's success curtails your own chances of success. In order to attract success, you need to welcome it wherever you see it.

THE EGO IN ILLNESS

An illness can either strengthen or weaken the ego. If you complain, feel self-pity, or resent being ill, your ego becomes stronger. It also becomes stronger if you make the illness part of your conceptual identity: "I am a sufferer of such and such a disease." Ah, so now we know who you are. Some people, on the other hand, who in normal life have a big ego, suddenly become gentle and kind and much nicer people when they are ill. They may gain insights they may never have had in their normal life. They may access their inner knowing and contentment and speak words of wisdom. Then, when they get better, energy returns and so does the ego.

When you are ill, your energy level is quite low, and the intelligence of the organism may take over and use the remaining energy for the healing of the body, and so there is not enough left for the mind, that is to say, egoic thinking and emotion. The ego burns up considerable amounts of energy. In some cases, however, the ego retains the little energy that remains and uses it for its own purposes. Needless to say, those people who experience a strengthening of the ego in illness take much longer to recover. Some never do, and so the illness becomes chronic and a permanent part of their false sense of self.

THE COLLECTIVE EGO

How hard it is to live with yourself! One of the ways in which the ego attempts to escape the unsatisfactoriness of personal selfhood is to enlarge and strengthen its sense of self by identifying with a group—a nation, political party, corporation, institution, sect, club, gang, football team.

In some cases the personal ego seems to dissolve completely as someone dedicates his or her life to working selflessly for the greater good of the collective without demanding personal rewards, recognition, or aggrandizement. What a relief to be freed of the dreadful burden of personal self. The members of the collective feel happy and fulfilled, no matter how hard they work, how many sacrifices they make. They appear to have gone beyond ego. The question is: Have they truly become free, or has the ego simply shifted from the personal to the collective?

A collective ego manifests the same characteristics as the personal ego, such as the need for conflict and enemies, the need for more, the need to be right against others who are wrong, and so on. Sooner or later, the collective will come into conflict with other collectives, because it unconsciously seeks conflict and it needs opposition to define its boundary and thus its identity. Its members will then experience the suffering that inevitably comes in the wake of any ego-motivated action. At that point, they may wake up and realize that their collective has a strong element of insanity.

It can be painful at first to suddenly wake up and realize that the collective you had identified with and worked for is actually insane. Some people at that point become cynical or bitter and henceforth deny all values, all worth. This means that they quickly adopted another belief system when the previous one was recognized as illusory and therefore collapsed. They didn't face the death of their ego but ran away and reincarnated into a new one.

A collective ego is usually more unconscious than the individuals that make up that ego. For example, crowds (which are temporary collective egoic entities) are capable of committing atrocities that the individual away from the crowd would not be. Nations not infrequently engage in behavior that would be immediately recognizable as psychopathic in an individual.

As the new consciousness emerges, some people will feel called upon to form groups that reflect the enlightened consciousness. These groups will not be collective egos. The individuals who make up these groups will have no need to define their identity through them. They no longer look to any form to define who they are. Even if the members that make up those groups are not totally free of ego yet, there will be enough awareness in them to recognize the ego in themselves or in others as soon as it appears. However, constant alertness is required since the ego *will* try to take over and reassert itself in any way it can. Dissolving the human ego by bringing it into the light of awareness —this will be one of the main purposes of these groups, whether they be enlightened businesses, charitable organizations, schools, or communities of people living together. Enlightened collectives will fulfill an important function in the arising of the new consciousness. Just as egoic collectives pull you into unconsciousness and suffering, the enlightened collective can be a vortex for consciousness that will accelerate the planetary shift.

INCONTROVERTIBLE PROOF OF IMMORTALITY

Ego comes about through a split in the human psyche in which identity separates into two parts that we could call "I" and "me" or "me" and "myself." Every ego is therefore schizophrenic, to use the word in its popular meaning of split personality. You live with a mental image of yourself, a conceptual self that you have a relationship with. Life itself becomes conceptualized and separated from who you are when you speak of "my life." The moment you say or think "my life" and believe in what you are saying (rather than it just being a linguistic convention), you have entered the realm of delusion. If there is such a thing as "my life," it follows that I and life are two separate things, and so I can also lose my life, my imaginary treasured possession. Death becomes a seeming reality and a threat. Words and concepts

split life into separate segments that have no reality in themselves. We could even say that the notion "my life" is the original delusion of separateness, the source of ego. If I and life are two, if I am separate from life, then I am separate from all things, all beings, all people. But how could I be separate from life? What "I" could there be apart from life, apart from Being? It is utterly impossible. So there is no such thing as "my life," and I don't *have* a life. I *am* life. I and life are one. It cannot be otherwise. So how could I lose my life? How can I lose something that I don't have in the first place? How can I lose something that I Am? It is impossible.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Pain-Body

The greater part of most people's thinking is involuntary, automatic, and repetitive. It is no more than a kind of mental static and fulfills no real purpose. Strictly speaking, you don't think: Thinking happens to you. The statement "I think" implies volition. It implies that you have a say in the matter, that there is choice involved on your part. For most people, this is not yet the case. "I think" is just as false a statement as "I digest" or "I circulate my blood." Digestion happens, circulation happens, thinking happens.

The voice in the head has a life of its own. Most people are at the mercy of that voice; they are possessed by thought, by the mind. And since the mind is conditioned by the past, you are then forced to reenact the past again and again. The Eastern term for this is karma. When you are identified with that voice, you don't know this, of course. If you knew it, you would no longer be possessed because you are only truly possessed when you mistake the possessing entity for who you are, that is to say, when you become it.

For thousands of years, humanity has been increasingly mind-possessed, failing to recognize the possessing entity as "not self." Through complete identification with the mind, a false sense of self—the ego—came into existence. The density of the ego depends on the degree to which you—the consciousness—are identified with your mind, with thinking. Thinking is no more than a tiny aspect of the totality of consciousness, the totality of who you are.

The degree of identification with the mind differs from person to person. Some people enjoy periods of freedom from it, however brief, and the peace, joy, and aliveness they experience in those moments make life worth living. These are also the moments when creativity, love, and compassion arise. Others are constantly trapped in the egoic state. They are alienated from themselves, as well as from others and the world around them. When you look at them, you may see the tension in their face, perhaps the furrowed brow, or the absent or staring expression in their eyes. Most of their attention is absorbed by thinking, and so they don't really see you, and they are not really listening to you. They are not present in any situation, their attention being either in the past or future which, of course, exist only in the mind as thought forms. Or they relate to you through some kind of role they play and so are not themselves. Most people are alienated from who they are, and some

are alienated to such a degree that the way they behave and interact is recognized as "phony" by almost everyone, except those who are equally phony, equally alienated from who they are.

Alienation means you don't feel at ease in any situation, any place, or with any person, not even with yourself. You are always trying to get "home" but never feel at home. Some of the greatest writers of the twentieth century, such as Franz Kafka, Albert Camus, T. S. Eliot, and James Joyce, recognized alienation as the universal dilemma of human existence, probably felt it deeply within themselves and so were able to express it brilliantly in their works. They don't offer a solution. Their contribution is to show us a reflection of the human predicament so that we can see it more clearly. To see one's predicament clearly is a first step toward going beyond it.

THE BIRTH OF EMOTION

In addition to the movement of thought, although not entirely separate from it, there is another dimension to the ego: emotion. This is not to say that all thinking and all emotion are of the ego. They turn into ego only when you identify with them and they take you over completely, that is to say, when they become "I."

The physical organism, your body, has its own intelligence, as does the organism of every other life-form. And that intelligence reacts to what your mind is saying, reacts to your thoughts. So emotion is the body's reaction to your mind. The body's intelligence is, of course, an inseparable part of universal intelligence, one of its countless manifestations. It gives temporary cohesion to the atoms and molecules that make up your physical organism. It is the organizing principle behind the workings of all the organs of the body, the conversion of oxygen and food into energy, the heartbeat and circulation of the blood, the immune system that protects the body from invaders, the translation of sensory input into nerve impulses that are sent to the brain, decoded there, and reassembled into a coherent inner picture of outer reality. All these, as well as thousands of other simultaneously occurring functions, are coordinated perfectly by that intelligence. You don't run your body. The intelligence does. It also is in charge of the organism's responses to its environment.

This is true for any life-form. It is the same intelligence that brought the plant into physical form and then manifests as the flower that comes out of the plant, the flower that opens its petals in the morning to receive the rays of the sun and closes them at nighttime. It is the same intelligence that manifests as Gaia, the complex living being that is planet earth.

This intelligence gives rise to instinctive reactions of the organism to any threat or challenge. It produces responses in animals that appear to be akin to human emotions: anger, fear, pleasure. These instinctive responses could be considered primordial forms of emotion. In certain situations, human beings experience instinctive responses in the same way that animals do. In the face of danger, when the survival of the organism is threatened, the heart beats faster, the muscles contract, breathing becomes rapid in preparation for fight or flight. Primordial fear. When being cornered, a sudden flare-up of intense

energy gives strength to the body that it didn't have before. Primordial anger. These instinctive responses appear akin to emotions, but are not emotions in the true sense of the word. The fundamental difference between an instinctive response and an emotion is this: An instinctive response is the body's direct response to some external situation. An emotion, on the other hand, is the body's response to a thought.

Indirectly, an emotion can also be a response to an actual situation or event, but it will be a response to the event seen through the filter of a mental interpretation, the filter of thought, that is to say, through the mental concepts of good and bad, like and dislike, me and mine. For example, it is likely you won't feel any emotion when you are told that someone's car has been stolen, but when it is *your* car, you will probably feel upset. It is amazing how much emotion a little mental concept like "my" can generate.

Although the body is very intelligent, it cannot tell the difference between an actual situation and a thought. It reacts to every thought as if it were a reality. It doesn't know it is just a thought. To the body, a worrisome, fearful thought means "I am in danger," and it responds accordingly, even though you may be lying in a warm and comfortable bed at night. The heart beats faster, muscles contract, breathing becomes rapid. There is a buildup of energy, but since the danger is only a mental fiction, the energy has no outlet. Part of it is fed back to the mind and generates even more anxious thought. The rest of the energy turns toxic and interferes with the harmonious functioning of the body.

EMOTIONS AND THE EGO

The ego is not only the unobserved mind, the voice in the head which pretends to be you, but also the unobserved emotions that are the body's reaction to what the voice in the head is saying.

We have already seen what kind of thinking the egoic voice engages in most of the time and the dysfunction inherent in the structure of its thought processes, regardless of content. This dysfunctional thinking is what the body reacts to with negative emotion.

The voice in the head tells a story that the body believes in and reacts to. Those reactions are the emotions. The emotions, in turn, feed energy back to the thoughts that created the emotion in the first place. This is the vicious circle between unexamined thoughts and emotions, giving rise to emotional thinking and emotional story-making.

The emotional component of ego differs from person to person. In some egos, it is greater than in others. Thoughts that trigger emotional responses in the body may sometimes come so fast that before the mind has had time to voice them, the body has already responded with an emotion, and the emotion has turned into a reaction. Those thoughts exist at a preverbal stage and could be called unspoken, unconscious assumptions. They have their origin in a person's past conditioning, usually from early childhood. "People cannot be trusted" would be an example of such an unconscious assumption in a person whose primordial relationships, that is to say, with parents or siblings, were not supportive and did not inspire trust. Here are a few more common

unconscious assumptions: "Nobody respects and appreciates me. I need to fight to survive. There is never enough money. Life always lets you down. I don't deserve abundance. I don't deserve love." Unconscious assumptions create emotions in the body which in turn generate mind activity and/or instant reactions. In this way, they create your personal reality.

The voice of the ego continuously disrupts the body's natural state of well-being. Almost every human body is under a great deal of strain and stress, not because it is threatened by some external factor but from within the mind. The body has an ego attached to it, and it cannot but respond to all the dysfunctional thought patterns that make up the ego. Thus, a stream of negative emotion accompanies the stream of incessant and compulsive thinking.

What is a negative emotion? An emotion that is toxic to the body and interferes with its balance and harmonious functioning. Fear, anxiety, anger, bearing a grudge, sadness, hatred or intense dislike, jealousy, envy—all disrupt the energy flow through the body, affect the heart, the immune system, digestion, production of hormones, and so on. Even mainstream medicine, although it knows very little about how the ego operates yet, is beginning to recognize the connection between negative emotional states and physical disease. An emotion that does harm to the body also infects the people you come into contact with and indirectly, through a process of chain reaction, countless others you never meet. There is a generic term for all negative emotions: unhappiness.

Do positive emotions then have the opposite effect on the physical body? Do they strengthen the immune system, invigorate and heal the body? They do, indeed, but we need to differentiate between positive emotions that are ego-generated and deeper emotions that emanate from your natural state of connectedness with Being.

Positive emotions generated by the ego already contain within themselves their opposite into which they can quickly turn. Here are some examples: What the ego calls love is possessiveness and addictive clinging that can turn into hate within a second. Anticipation about an upcoming event, which is the ego's overvaluation of future, easily turns into its opposite—letdown or disappointment—when the event is over or doesn't fulfill the ego's expectations. Praise and recognition make you feel alive and happy one day; being criticized or ignored make you dejected and unhappy the next. The pleasure of a wild party turns into bleakness and a hangover the next morning. There is not good without bad, no high without low.

Ego-generated emotions are derived from the mind's identification with external factors which are, of course, all unstable and liable to change at any moment. The deeper emotions are not really emotions at all but states of Being. Emotions exist within the realm of opposites. States of Being can be obscured, but they have no opposite. They emanate from within you as the love, joy, and peace that are aspects of your true nature.

THE DUCK WITH A HUMAN MIND

In *The Power of Now*, I mentioned my observation that after two ducks get into

a fight, which never lasts long, they will separate and float off in opposite directions. Then each duck will flap its wings vigorously a few times, thus releasing the surplus energy that built up during the fight. After they flap their wings, they float on peacefully, as if nothing had ever happened.

If the duck had a human mind, it would keep the fight alive by thinking, by story-making. This would probably be the duck's story: "I don't believe what he just did. He came to within five inches of me. He thinks he owns this pond. He has no consideration for my private space. I'll never trust him again. Next time he'll try something else just to annoy me. I'm sure he's plotting something already. But I'm not going to stand for this. I'll teach him a lesson he won't forget." And on and on the mind spins its tales, still thinking and talking about it days, months, or years later. As far as the body is concerned, the fight is still continuing, and the energy it generates in response to all those thoughts is emotion, which in turn generates more thinking. This becomes the emotional thinking of the ego. You can see how problematic the duck's life would become if it had a human mind. But this is how most humans live all the time. No situation or event is ever really finished. The mind and the mind-made "me and my story" keep it going.

We are a species that has lost its way. Everything natural, every flower or tree, and every animal have important lessons to teach us if we would only stop, look, and listen. Our duck's lesson is this: Flap your wings—which translates as "let go of the story"—and return to the only place of power: the present moment.

CARRYING THE PAST

The inability or rather unwillingness of the human mind to let go of the past is beautifully illustrated in the story of two Zen monks, Tanzan and Ekido, who were walking along a country road that had become extremely muddy after heavy rains. Near a village, they came upon a young woman who was trying to cross the road, but the mud was so deep it would have ruined the silk kimono she was wearing. Tanzan at once picked her up and carried her to the other side.

The monks walked on in silence. Five hours later, as they were approaching the lodging temple, Ekido couldn't restrain himself any longer. "Why did you carry that girl across the road?" he asked. "We monks are not supposed to do things like that."

"I put the girl down hours ago," said Tanzan. "Are you still carrying her?"

Now imagine what life would be like for someone who lived like Ekido all the time, unable or unwilling to let go internally of situations, accumulating more and more "stuff" inside, and you get a sense of what life is like for the majority of people on our planet. What a heavy burden of past they carry around with them in their minds.

The past lives in you as memories, but memories in themselves are not a problem. In fact, it is through memory that we learn from the past and from past mistakes. It is only when memories, that is to say, thoughts about the past, take you over completely that they turn into a burden, turn problematic, and become part of your sense of self. Your personality, which is conditioned

by the past, then becomes your prison. Your memories are invested with a sense of self, and your story becomes who you perceive yourself to be. This "little me" is an illusion that obscures your true identity as timeless and formless Presence.

Your story, however, consists not only of mental but also of emotional memory—old emotion that is being revived continuously. As in the case of the monk who carried the burden of his resentment for five hours by feeding it with his thoughts, most people carry a large amount of unnecessary baggage, both mental and emotional, throughout their lives. They limit themselves through grievances, regret, hostility, guilt. Their emotional thinking has become their self, and so they hang on to the old emotion because it strengthens their identity.

Because of the human tendency to perpetuate old emotion, almost everyone carries in his or her energy field an accumulation of old emotional pain, which I call "the pain-body."

We can, however, stop adding to the pain-body that we already have. We can learn to break the habit of accumulating and perpetuating old emotion by flapping our wings, metaphorically speaking, and refrain from mentally dwelling on the past, regardless of whether something happened yesterday or thirty years ago. We can learn not to keep situations or events alive in our minds, but to return our attention continuously to the pristine, timeless present moment rather than be caught up in mental movie-making. Our very Presence then becomes our identity, rather than our thoughts and emotions.

Nothing ever happened in the past that can prevent you from being present now; and if the past cannot prevent you from being present now, what power does it have?

INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE

Any negative emotion that is not fully faced and seen for what it is in the moment it arises does not completely dissolve. It leaves behind a remnant of pain.

Children in particular find strong negative emotions too overwhelming to cope with and tend to try not to feel them. In the absence of a fully conscious adult who guides them with love and compassionate understanding into facing the emotion directly, choosing not to feel it is indeed the only option for the child at that time. Unfortunately, that early defense mechanism usually remains in place when the child becomes an adult. The emotion still lives in him or her unrecognized and manifests indirectly, for example, as anxiety, anger, outbursts of violence, a mood, or even as a physical illness. In some cases, it interferes with or sabotages every intimate relationship. Most psychotherapists have met patients who claimed initially to have had a totally happy childhood, and later the opposite turned out to be the case. Those may be the more extreme cases, but nobody can go through childhood without suffering emotional pain. Even if both of your parents were enlightened, you would still find yourself growing up in a largely unconscious world.

The remnants of pain left behind by every strong negative emotion that is not fully faced, accepted, and then let go of join together to form an energy

field that lives in the very cells of your body. It consists not just of childhood pain, but also painful emotions that were added to it later in adolescence and during your adult life, much of it created by the voice of the ego. It is the emotional pain that is your unavoidable companion when a false sense of self is the basis of your life.

This energy field of old but still very-much-alive emotion that lives in almost every human being is the pain-body.

The pain-body, however, is not just individual in nature. It also partakes of the pain suffered by countless humans throughout the history of humanity, which is a history of continuous tribal warfare, of enslavement, pillage, rape, torture, and other forms of violence. This pain still lives in the collective psyche of humanity and is being added to on a daily basis, as you can verify when you watch the news tonight or look at the drama in people's relationships. The collective pain-body is probably encoded within every human's DNA, although we haven't discovered it there yet.

Every newborn who comes into this world already carries an emotional pain-body. In some it is heavier, more dense than in others. Some babies are quite happy most of the time. Others seem to carry an enormous amount of unhappiness within them. It is true that some babies cry a great deal because they are not given enough love and attention, but others cry for no apparent reason, almost as if they were trying to make everyone around them as unhappy as they are—and often they succeed. They have come into this world with a heavy share of human pain. Other babies may cry frequently because they can sense the emanation of their mother's and father's negative emotion, and it causes them pain and also causes their pain-body to grow already by absorbing energy from the parents' pain-bodies. Whatever the case may be, as the baby's physical body grows, so does the pain-body.

An infant with only a light pain-body is not necessarily going to be a spiritually "more advanced" man or woman than somebody with a dense one. In fact, the opposite is often the case. People with heavy pain-bodies usually have a better chance to awaken spiritually than those with a relatively light one. Whereas some of them do remain trapped in their heavy pain-bodies, many others reach a point where they cannot live with their unhappiness any longer, and so their motivation to awaken becomes strong.

Why is the suffering body of Christ, his face distorted in agony and his body bleeding from countless wounds, such a significant image in the collective consciousness of humanity? Millions of people, particularly in medieval times, would not have related to it as deeply as they did if something within themselves had not resonated with it, if they had not unconsciously recognized it as an outer representation of their own inner reality—the pain-body. They were not yet conscious enough to recognize it directly within themselves, but it was the beginning of their becoming aware of it. Christ can be seen as the archetypal human, embodying both the pain and the possibility of transcendence.

HOW THE PAIN-BODY RENEWS ITSELF

The pain-body is a semiautonomous energy-form that lives within most

human beings, an entity made up of emotion. It has its own primitive intelligence, not unlike a cunning animal, and its intelligence is directed primarily at survival. Like all life-forms, it periodically needs to feed—to take in new energy—and the food it requires to replenish itself consists of energy that is compatible with its own, which is to say, energy that vibrates at a similar frequency. Any emotionally painful experience can be used as food by the pain-body. That's why it thrives on negative thinking as well as drama in relationships. The pain-body is an addiction to unhappiness.

It may be shocking when you realize for the first time that there is something within you that periodically seeks emotional negativity, seeks unhappiness. You need even more awareness to see it in yourself than to recognize it in another person. Once the unhappiness has taken you over, not only do you not want an end to it, but you want to make others just as miserable as you are in order to feed on their negative emotional reactions.

In most people, the pain-body has a dormant and an active stage. When it is dormant, you easily forget that you carry a heavy dark cloud or a dormant volcano inside you, depending on the energy field of your particular pain-body. How long it remains dormant varies from person to person: A few weeks is the most common, but it can be a few days or months. In rare cases the pain-body can lie in hibernation for years before it gets triggered by some event.

HOW THE PAIN-BODY FEEDS ON YOUR THOUGHTS

The pain-body awakens from its dormancy when it gets hungry, when it is time to replenish itself. Alternatively, it may get triggered by an event at any time. The pain-body that is ready to feed can use the most insignificant event as a trigger, something somebody says or does, or even a thought. If you live alone or there is nobody around at the time, the pain-body will feed on your thoughts. Suddenly, your thinking becomes deeply negative. You were most likely unaware that just prior to the influx of negative thinking a wave of emotion invaded your mind—as a dark and heavy mood, as anxiety or fiery anger. All thought is energy and the pain-body is now feeding on the energy of your thoughts. But it cannot feed on any thought. You don't need to be particularly sensitive to notice that a positive thought has a totally different feeling-tone than a negative one. It is the same energy, but it vibrates at a different frequency. A happy, positive thought is indigestible to the pain-body. It can only feed on negative thoughts because only those thoughts are compatible with its own energy field.

All things are vibrating energy fields in ceaseless motion. The chair you sit on, the book you are holding in your hands appear solid and motionless only because that is how your senses perceive their vibrational frequency, that is to say, the incessant movement of the molecules, atoms, electrons, and subatomic particles that together create what you perceive as a chair, a book, a tree, or a body. What we perceive as physical matter is energy vibrating (moving) at a particular range of frequencies. Thoughts consist of the same energy vibrating at a higher frequency than matter, which is why they cannot be seen or touched. Thoughts have their own range of frequencies, with negative

thoughts at the lower end of the scale and positive thoughts at the higher. The vibrational frequency of the pain-body resonates with that of negative thoughts, which is why only those thoughts can feed the pain-body.

The usual pattern of thought creating emotion is reversed in the case of the pain-body, at least initially. Emotion from the pain-body quickly gains control of your thinking, and once your mind has been taken over by the pain-body, your thinking becomes negative. The voice in your head will be telling sad, anxious, or angry stories about yourself or your life, about other people, about past, future, or imaginary events. The voice will be blaming, accusing, complaining, imagining. And you are totally identified with whatever the voice says, believe all its distorted thoughts. At that point, the addiction to unhappiness has set in.

It is not so much that you cannot stop your train of negative thoughts, but that you don't want to. This is because the pain-body at that time is living through you, pretending to be you. And to the pain-body, pain is pleasure. It eagerly devours every negative thought. In fact, the usual voice in your head has now become the voice of the pain-body. It has taken over the internal dialogue. A vicious circle becomes established between the pain-body and your thinking. Every thought feeds the pain-body and in turn the pain-body generates more thoughts. At some point, after a few hours or even a few days, it has replenished itself and returns to its dormant stage, leaving behind a depleted organism and a body that is much more susceptible to illness. If that sounds to you like a psychic parasite, you are right. That's exactly what it is.

HOW THE PAIN-BODY FEEDS ON DRAMA

If there are other people around, preferably your partner or a close family member, the pain-body will attempt to provoke them—push their buttons, as the expression goes—so it can feed on the ensuing drama. Pain-bodies love intimate relationships and families because that is where they get most of their food. It is hard to resist another person's pain-body that is determined to draw you into a reaction. Instinctively it knows your weakest, most vulnerable points. If it doesn't succeed the first time, it will try again and again. It is raw emotion looking for more emotion. The other person's pain-body wants to awaken yours so that both pain-bodies can mutually energize each other.

Many relationships go through violent and destructive pain-body episodes at regular intervals. It is almost unbearably painful for a young child to have to witness the emotional violence of their parents' pain-bodies, and yet that is the fate of millions of children all over the world, the nightmare of their daily existence. That is also one of the main ways in which the human pain-body is passed on from generation to generation. After each episode, the partners make up, and there is an interval of relative peace, to the limited extent that the ego allows it.

Excessive consumption of alcohol will often activate the pain-body, particularly in men, but also in some women. When a person becomes drunk, he goes through a complete personality change as the pain-body takes him over. A deeply unconscious person whose pain-body habitually replenishes itself through physical violence often directs it toward his spouse or children.

When he becomes sober, he is truly sorry and may say he will never do this again, and he means it. The person who is talking and making promises, however, is not the entity that commits the violence, and so you can be sure that it will happen again and again unless he becomes present, recognizes the pain-body within himself, and thus disidentifies from it. In some cases, counseling can help him do that.

Most pain-bodies want to both inflict and suffer pain, but some are predominately either perpetrators or victims. In either case, they feed on violence, whether emotional or physical. Some couples who may think they have "fallen in love" are actually feeling drawn to each other because their respective pain-bodies complement each other. Sometimes the roles of perpetrator and victim are already clearly prescribed the first time they meet. Some marriages that are thought to be made in heaven are actually made in hell.

If you have ever lived with a cat, you will know that even when the cat seems to be asleep, it still knows what is going on, because at the slightest unusual noise, its ears will move toward it, and its eyes may open slightly. Dormant pain-bodies are the same. On some level, they are still awake, ready to jump into action when an appropriate trigger presents itself.

In intimate relationships, pain-bodies are often clever enough to lie low until you start living together and preferably have signed a contract committing yourself to be with this person for the rest of your life. You don't just marry your wife or husband, you also marry her or his pain-body—and your spouse marries yours. It can be quite a shock when, perhaps not long after moving in together or after the honeymoon, you find suddenly one day there is a complete personality change in your partner. Her voice becomes harsh or shrill as she accuses you, blames you, or shouts at you, most likely over a relatively trivial matter. Or she becomes totally withdrawn. "What's wrong?" you ask. "Nothing is wrong," she says. But the intensely hostile energy she emanates is saying, "Everything is wrong." When you look into her eyes, there is no light in them anymore; it is as if a heavy veil has descended, and the being you know and love which before was able to shine through her ego, is now totally obscured. A complete stranger seems to be looking back at you, and in her eyes there is hatred, hostility, bitterness, or anger. When she speaks to you, it is not your spouse or partner who is speaking but the pain-body speaking through them. Whatever she is saying is the pain-body's version of reality, a reality completely distorted by fear, hostility, anger, and a desire to inflict and receive more pain.

At this point you may wonder whether this is your partner's real face that you had never seen before and whether you made a dreadful mistake in choosing this person. It is, of course, not the real face, just the pain-body that temporarily has taken possession. It would be hard to find a partner who does not carry a pain-body, but it would perhaps be wise to choose someone whose pain-body is not excessively dense.

DENSE PAIN-BODIES

Some people carry dense pain-bodies that are never completely dormant. They

may be smiling and making polite conversation, but you do not need to be psychic to sense that seething ball of unhappy emotion in them just underneath the surface, waiting for the next event to react to, the next person to blame or confront, the next thing to be unhappy about. Their pain-bodies can never get enough, are always hungry. They magnify the ego's need for enemies.

Through their reactivity, relatively insignificant matters are blown up out of all proportion as they try to pull other people into their drama by getting them to react. Some get involved in protracted and ultimately pointless battles or court cases with organizations or individuals. Others are consumed by obsessive hatred toward an ex-spouse or partner. Unaware of the pain they carry inside, by their reaction, they project the pain into events and situations. Due to a complete lack of self-awareness, they cannot tell the difference between an event and their reaction to the event. To them, the unhappiness and even the pain itself is out there in the event or situation. Being unconscious of their inner state, they don't even know that they are deeply unhappy, that they are suffering.

Sometimes people with such dense pain-bodies become activists fighting for a cause. The cause may indeed be worthy, and they are sometimes successful at first in getting things done; however, the negative energy that flows into what they say and do and their unconscious need for enemies and conflict tend to generate increasing opposition to their cause. Usually they also end up creating enemies within their own organization, because wherever they go, they find reasons for feeling bad, and so their pain-body continues to find exactly what it is looking for.

ENTERTAINMENT, THE MEDIA, AND THE PAIN-BODY

If you were not familiar with our contemporary civilization, if you had come here from another age or another planet, one of the things that would amaze you is that millions of people love and pay money to watch humans kill and inflict pain on each other and call it "entertainment."

Why do violent films attract such large audiences? There is an entire industry, a large part of which fuels the human addiction to unhappiness. People obviously watch those films because they want to feel bad. What is it in humans that loves to feel bad and calls it good? The pain-body, of course. A large part of the entertainment industry caters to it. So, in addition to reactivity, negative thinking, and personal drama, the pain-body also renews itself vicariously through the cinema and television screen. Pain-bodies write and produce these films, and pain-bodies pay to watch them.

Is it always "wrong" to show and watch violence on television and the cinema screen? Does all such violence cater to the pain-body? At the current evolutionary stage of humanity, violence is still not only all-pervasive but even on the increase, as the old egoic consciousness, amplified by the collective pain-body, intensifies prior to its inevitable demise. If films show violence in its wider context, if they show its origin and its consequences, show what it does to the victim as well as the perpetrator, show the collective unconsciousness that lies behind it and is passed on from generation to

generation (the anger and hatred that lives in humans as the pain-body), then those films can fulfill a vital function in the awakening of humanity. They can act as a mirror in which humanity sees its own insanity. That in you which recognizes madness as madness (even if it is your own) is sanity, is the arising awareness, is the end of insanity.

Such films do exist and they do not fuel the pain-body. Some of the best antiwar films are films that show the reality of war rather than a glamorized version of it. The pain-body can only feed on films in which violence is portrayed as normal or even desirable human behavior, or that glorify violence with the sole purpose of generating negative emotion in the viewer and so become a "fix" for the pain-addicted pain-body.

The popular tabloid press does not primarily sell news but negative emotion—food for the pain-body. "Outrage" screams the three-inch headline, or "Bastards." The British tabloid press excels at this. They know that negative emotion sells far more papers than news does.

There is a tendency in the news media in general, including television, to thrive on negative news. The worse things get, the more excited the presenters become, and often the negative excitement is generated by the media itself. Pain-bodies just love it.

THE COLLECTIVE FEMALE PAIN-BODY

The collective dimension of the pain-body has different strands in it. Tribes, nations, races, all have their own collective pain-body, some heavier than others, and most members of that tribe, nation, or race have a share in it to a greater or lesser degree.

Almost every woman has her share in the collective female pain-body, which tends to become activated particularly just prior to the time of menstruation. At that time many women become over whelmed by intense negative emotion.

The suppression of the feminine principle especially over the past two thousand years has enabled the ego to gain absolute supremacy in the collective human psyche. Although women have egos, of course, the ego can take root and grow more easily in the male form than in the female. This is because women are less mind-identified than men. They are more in touch with the inner body and the intelligence of the organism where the intuitive faculties originate. The female form is less rigidly encapsulated than the male, has greater openness and sensitivity toward other life-forms, and is more attuned to the natural world.

If the balance between male and female energies had not been destroyed on our planet, the ego's growth would have been greatly curtailed. We would not have declared war on nature, and we would not be so completely alienated from our Being.

Nobody knows the exact figure because records were not kept, but it seems certain that during a three-hundred-year period between three and five million women were tortured and killed by the "Holy Inquisition," an institution founded by the Roman Catholic Church to suppress heresy. This surely ranks together with the Holocaust as one of the darkest chapters in

human history. It was enough for a woman to show a love for animals, walk alone in the fields or woods, or gather medicinal plants to be branded a witch, then tortured and burned at the stake. The sacred feminine was declared demonic, and an entire dimension largely disappeared from human experience. Other cultures and religions, such as Judaism, Islam, and even Buddhism, also suppressed the female dimension, although in a less violent way. Women's status was reduced to being child bearers and men's property. Males who denied the feminine even within themselves were now running the world, a world that was totally out of balance. The rest is history or rather a case history of insanity.

Who was responsible for this fear of the feminine that could only be described as acute collective paranoia? We could say: Of course, men were responsible. But then why in many ancient pre-Christian civilizations such as the Sumerian, Egyptian, and Celtic were women respected and the feminine principle not feared but revered? What is it that suddenly made men feel threatened by the female? The evolving ego in them. It knew it could gain full control of our planet only through the male form, and to do so, it had to render the female powerless.

In time, the ego also took over most women, although it could never become as deeply entrenched in them as in men.

We now have a situation in which the suppression of the feminine has become internalized, even in most women. The sacred feminine, because it is suppressed, is felt by many women as emotional pain. In fact, it has become part of their pain-body, together with the accumulated pain suffered by women over millennia through childbirth, rape, slavery, torture, and violent death.

But things are changing rapidly now. With many people becoming more conscious, the ego is losing its hold on the human mind. Because the ego was never as deeply rooted in woman, it is losing its hold on women more quickly than on men.

NATIONAL AND RACIAL PAIN-BODIES

Certain countries in which many acts of collective violence were suffered or perpetrated have a heavier collective pain-body than others. This is why older nations tend to have stronger pain-bodies. It is also why younger countries, such as Canada or Australia, and those that have remained more sheltered from the surrounding madness, such as Switzerland, tend to have lighter collective pain-bodies. Of course, in those countries, people still have their personal pain-body to deal with. If you are sensitive enough, you can feel a heaviness in the energy field of certain countries as soon as you step off the plane. In other countries, one can sense an energy field of latent violence just underneath the surface of everyday life. In some nations, for example, in the Middle East, the collective pain-body is so acute that a significant part of the population finds itself forced to act it out in an endless and insane cycle of perpetration and retribution through which the pain-body renews itself continuously.

In countries where the pain-body is heavy but no longer acute, there has

been a tendency for people to try and desensitize themselves to the collective emotional pain: in Germany and Japan through work, in some other countries through widespread indulgence in alcohol (which, however, can also have the opposite effect of stimulating the pain-body, particularly if consumed in excess). China's heavy pain-body is to some extent mitigated by the widespread practice of t'ai chi, which amazingly was not declared illegal by the Communist government that otherwise feels threatened by anything it cannot control. Every day in the streets and city parks, millions practice this movement meditation that stills the mind. This makes a considerable difference to the collective energy field and goes some way toward diminishing the pain-body by reducing thinking and generating Presence.

Spiritual practices that involve the physical body, such as t'ai chi, qigong, and yoga, are also increasingly being embraced in the Western world. These practices do not create a separation between body and spirit and are helpful in weakening the pain-body. They will play an important role in the global awakening.

The collective racial pain-body is pronounced in Jewish people, who have suffered persecution over many centuries. Not surprisingly, it is strong as well in Native Americans, whose numbers were decimated and whose culture all but destroyed by the European settlers. In Black Americans too the collective pain-body is pronounced. Their ancestors were violently uprooted, beaten into submission, and sold into slavery. The foundation of American economic prosperity rested on the labor of four to five million black slaves. In fact, the suffering inflicted on Native and Black Americans has not remained confined to those two races, but has become part of the collective American pain-body. It is always the case that both victim and perpetrator suffer the consequences of any acts of violence, oppression, or brutality. For what you do to others, you do to yourself.

It doesn't really matter what proportion of your pain-body belongs to your nation or race and what proportion is personal. In either case, you can only go beyond it by taking responsibility for your inner state now. Even if blame seems more than justified, as long as you blame others, you keep feeding the pain-body with your thoughts and remain trapped in your ego. There is only one perpetrator of evil on the planet: human unconsciousness. That realization is true forgiveness. With forgiveness, your victim identity dissolves, and your true power emerges—the power of Presence. Instead of blaming the darkness, you bring in the light.

CHAPTER SIX

Breaking Free

The beginning of freedom from the pain-body lies first of all in the realization that you *have* a pain-body. Then, more important, in your ability to stay present enough, alert enough, to notice the pain-body in yourself as a heavy influx of negative emotion when it becomes active. When it is recognized, it can no longer pretend to be you and live and renew itself through you.

It is your conscious Presence that breaks the identification with the pain-body. When you don't identify with it, the pain-body can no longer control your thinking and so cannot renew itself anymore by feeding on your thoughts. The pain-body in most cases does not dissolve immediately, but once you have severed the link between it and your thinking, the pain-body begins to lose energy. Your thinking ceases to be clouded by emotion; your present perceptions are no longer distorted by the past. The energy that was trapped in the pain-body then changes its vibrational frequency and is transmuted into Presence. In this way, the pain-body becomes fuel for consciousness. This is why many of the wisest, most enlightened men and women on our planet once had a heavy pain-body.

Regardless of what you say or do or what face you show to the world, your mental-emotional state cannot be concealed. Every human being emanates an energy field that corresponds to his or her inner state, and most people can sense it, although they may feel someone else's energy emanation only subliminally. That is to say, they don't know that they sense it, yet it determines to a large extent how they feel about and react to that person. Some people are most clearly aware of it when they first meet someone, even before any words are exchanged. A little later, however, words take over the relationship and with words come the roles that most people play. Attention then moves to the realm of mind, and the ability to sense the other person's energy field becomes greatly diminished. Nevertheless, it is still felt on an unconscious level.

When you realize that pain-bodies unconsciously seek more pain, that is to say, that they want something bad to happen, you will understand that many traffic accidents are caused by drivers whose pain-bodies are active at the time. When two drivers with active pain-bodies arrive at an intersection at the same time, the likelihood of an accident is many times greater than under normal circumstances. Unconsciously they both want the accident to happen.

The role of pain-bodies in traffic accidents is most obvious in the phenomenon called "road rage," when drivers become physically violent often over a trivial matter such as someone in front of them driving too slowly.

Many acts of violence are committed by "normal" people who temporarily turn into maniacs. All over the world at court proceedings you hear the defense lawyers say, "This is totally out of character," and the accused, "I don't know what came over me." To my knowledge so far, no defense lawyer has said to the judge—although the day may not be far off—"This is a case of diminished responsibility. My client's pain-body was activated, and he did not know what he was doing. In fact, he didn't do it. His pain-body did."

Does this mean that people are not responsible for what they do when possessed by the pain-body? My answer is: How can they be? How can you be responsible when you are unconscious, when you don't know what you are doing? However, in the greater scheme of things, human beings are meant to evolve into conscious beings, and those who don't will suffer the consequences of their unconsciousness. They are out of alignment with the evolutionary impulse of the universe.

And even that is only relatively true. From a higher perspective, it is not possible to be out of alignment with the evolution of the universe, and even human unconsciousness and the suffering it generates is part of that evolution. When you can't stand the endless cycle of suffering anymore, you begin to awaken. So the pain-body too has its necessary place in the larger picture.

PRESENCE

A woman in her thirties came to see me. As she greeted me, I could sense the pain behind her polite and superficial smile. She started telling me her story, and within one second her smile changed into a grimace of pain. Then, she began to sob uncontrollably. She said she felt lonely and unfulfilled. There was much anger and sadness. As a child she had been abused by a physically violent father. I saw quickly that her pain was not caused by her present life circumstances but by an extraordinarily heavy pain-body. Her pain-body had become the filter through which she viewed her life situation. She was not yet able to see the link between the emotional pain and her thoughts, being completely identified with both. She could not yet see that she was feeding the pain-body with her thoughts. In other words, she lived with the burden of a deeply unhappy self. At some level, however, she must have realized that her pain originated within herself, that she was a burden to herself. She was ready to awaken, and this is why she had come.

I directed the focus of her attention to what she was feeling inside her body and asked her to sense the emotion directly, instead of through the filter of her unhappy thoughts, her unhappy story. She said she had come expecting me to show her the way out of her unhappiness, not into it. Reluctantly, however, she did what I asked her to do. Tears were rolling down her face, her whole body was shaking. "At this moment, this is what you feel," I said. "There is nothing you can do about the fact that *at this moment* this is what you feel. Now, instead of wanting this moment to be different from the way it is, which adds more pain to the pain that is already there, is it possible for you to

completely accept that this is what you feel right now?"

She was quiet for a moment. Suddenly she looked impatient, as if she was about to get up, and said angrily, "No, I don't want to accept this." "Who is speaking?" I asked her. "You or the unhappiness in you? Can you see that your unhappiness about being unhappy is just another layer of unhappiness?" She became quiet again. "I am not asking you to *do* anything. All I'm asking is that you find out whether it is possible for you to allow those feelings to be there. In other words, and this may sound strange, if you don't mind being unhappy, what happens to the unhappiness? Don't you want to find out?"

She looked puzzled briefly, and after a minute or so of sitting silently, I suddenly noticed a significant shift in her energy field. She said, "This is weird. I'm still unhappy, but now there is space around it. It seems to matter less." This was the first time I heard somebody put it like that: There is space around my unhappiness. That space, of course, comes when there is inner acceptance of whatever you are experiencing in the present moment.

I didn't say much else, allowing her to be with the experience. Later she came to understand that the moment she stopped identifying with the feeling, the old painful emotion that lived in her, the moment she put her attention on it directly without trying to resist it, it could no longer control her thinking and so become mixed up with a mentally constructed story called "The Unhappy Me." Another dimension had come into her life that transcended her personal past—the dimension of Presence. Since you cannot be unhappy without an unhappy story, this was the end of her unhappiness. It was also the beginning of the end of her pain-body. Emotion in itself is not unhappiness. Only emotion plus an unhappy story is unhappiness.

When our session came to an end, it was fulfilling to know that I had just witnessed the arising of Presence in another human being. The very reason for our existence in human form is to bring that dimension of consciousness into this world. I had also witnessed a diminishment of the pain-body, not through fighting it but through bringing the light of consciousness to it.

A few minutes after my visitor left, a friend arrived to drop something off. As soon as she came into the room she said, "What happened here? The energy feels heavy and murky. It almost makes me feel sick. You need to open the windows, burn some incense." I explained that I had just witnessed a major release in someone with a very dense pain-body and that what she felt must be some of the energy that was released during our session. My friend, however, didn't want to stay and listen. She wanted to get away as soon as possible.

I opened the windows and went out to have dinner at a small Indian restaurant nearby. What happened there was a clear, further confirmation of what I already knew: That on some level, all seemingly individual human pain-bodies are connected. Although the form this particular confirmation took did come as a shock.

THE RETURN OF THE PAIN-BODY

I sat down at a table and ordered a meal. There were a few other guests. At a nearby table, there was a middle-aged man in a wheelchair who was just

finishing his meal. He glanced at me once, briefly but intensely. A few minutes passed. Suddenly he became restless, agitated, his body began twitching. The waiter came to take his plate. The man started arguing with him. "The food was no good. It was dreadful." "Then why did you eat it?" asked the waiter. And that really set him off. He started shouting, became abusive. Vile words were coming out of his mouth; intense, violent hatred filled the room. One could feel that energy entering the cells of one's body looking for something to latch on to. Now he was shouting at the other guests too, but for some strange reason ignoring me completely as I sat in intense Presence. I suspected that the universal human pain-body had come back to tell me, "You thought you defeated me. Look, I'm still here." I also considered the possibility that the released energy field left behind after our session followed me to the restaurant and attached itself to the one person in whom it found a compatible vibrational frequency, that is to say, a heavy pain-body.

The manager opened the door, "Just leave. Just leave." The man zoomed out in his electric wheelchair, leaving everyone stunned. One minute later he returned. His pain-body wasn't finished yet. It needed more. He pushed open the door with his wheelchair, shouting obscenities. A waitress tried to stop him from coming in. He put his chair in fast-forward and pinned her against the wall. Other guests jumped up and tried to pull him away. Shouting, screaming, pandemonium. A little later a policeman arrived, the man became quiet, was asked to leave and not return. The waitress fortunately was not hurt, except for bruises on her legs. When it was all over, the manager came to my table and asked me, half joking but perhaps feeling intuitively that there was some connection, "Did you cause all this?"

THE PAIN-BODY IN CHILDREN

Children's pain-bodies sometimes manifest as moodiness or withdrawal. The child becomes sullen, refuses to interact, and may sit in a corner, hugging a doll or sucking a thumb. They can also manifest as weeping fits or temper tantrums. The child screams, may throw him or herself on the floor, or become destructive. Thwarted wanting can easily trigger the pain-body, and in a developing ego, the force of wanting can be intense. Parents may watch helplessly in incomprehension and disbelief as their little angel becomes transformed within a few seconds into a little monster. "Where does all that unhappiness come from?" they wonder. To a greater or lesser extent, it is the child's share of the collective pain-body of humanity which goes back to the very origin of the human ego.

But the child may also already have taken on pain from his or her parents' pain-bodies, and so the parents may see in the child a reflection of what is also in them. Highly sensitive children are particularly affected by their parents' pain-bodies. Having to witness their parents' insane drama causes almost unbearable emotional pain, and so it is often these sensitive children who grow into adults with heavy pain-bodies. Children are not fooled by parents who try to hide their pain-body from them, who say to each other, "We mustn't fight in front of the children." This usually means while the parents make polite conversation, the home is pervaded with negative energy.

Suppressed pain-bodies are extremely toxic, even more so than openly active ones, and that psychic toxicity is absorbed by the children and contributes to the development of their own pain-body.

Some children learn subliminally about ego and pain-body simply by living with very unconscious parents. A woman whose parents both had strong egos and heavy pain-bodies told me that often when her parents were shouting and screaming at each other, she would look at them and although she loved them, would say to herself, "These people are nuts. How did I ever end up here?" There was already an awareness in her of the insanity of living in such a way. That awareness helped reduce the amount of pain she absorbed from her parents.

Parents often wonder how to deal with their child's pain-body. The primary question is, of course, are they dealing with their own? Do they recognize it within themselves? Are they able to stay present enough when it becomes activated so that they can be aware of the emotion on the feeling level before it gets a chance to turn into thinking and thus into an "unhappy person"?

While the child is having a pain-body attack, there isn't much you can do except to stay present so that you are not drawn into an emotional reaction. The child's pain-body would only feed on it. Pain-bodies can be extremely dramatic. Don't buy into the drama. Don't take it too seriously. If the pain-body was triggered by thwarted wanting, don't give in now to its demands. Otherwise, the child will learn: "The more unhappy I become, the more likely I am to get what I want." This is a recipe for dysfunction in later life. The pain-body will be frustrated by your nonreaction and may briefly act up even more before it subsides. Fortunately, pain-body episodes in children are usually more short-lived than in adults.

A little while after it has subsided, or perhaps the next day, you can talk to the child about what happened. But don't *tell* the child about the pain-body. Ask questions instead. For example: "What was it that came over you yesterday when you wouldn't stop screaming? Do you remember? What did it feel like? Was it a good feeling? That thing that came over you, does it have a name? No? If it had a name, what would it be called? If you could see it, what would it look like? Can you paint a picture of what it would look like? What happened to it when it went away? Did it go to sleep? Do you think it may come back?"

These are just a few suggested questions. All these questions are designed to awaken the witnessing faculty in the child, which is Presence. They will help the child to disidentify from the pain-body. You may also want to talk to the child about your own pain-body using the child's terminology. The next time the child gets taken over by the pain-body, you can say, "It's come back, hasn't it?" Use whatever words the child used when you talked about it. Direct the child's attention to what it *feels* like. Let your attitude be one of interest or curiosity rather than one of criticism or condemnation.

It is unlikely that this will stop the pain-body in its tracks, and it may appear that the child will not even be hearing you, yet some awareness will remain in the background of the child's consciousness even while the pain-body is active. After a few times, the awareness will have grown stronger and

the pain-body will have weakened. The child is growing in Presence. One day you may find that the child is the one to point out to you that your own pain-body has taken control of you.

UNHAPPINESS

Not all unhappiness is of the pain-body. Some of it is new unhappiness, created whenever you are out of alignment with the present moment, when the Now is denied in one way or another. When you recognize that the present moment is always already the case and therefore inevitable, you can bring an uncompromising inner "yes" to it and so not only create no further unhappiness, but, with inner resistance gone, find yourself empowered by Life itself.

The pain-body's unhappiness is always clearly out of proportion to the apparent cause. In other words, it is an overreaction. This is how it is recognized, although not usually by the sufferer, the person possessed. Someone with a heavy pain-body easily finds reasons for being upset, angry, hurt, sad, or fearful. Relatively insignificant things that someone else would shrug off with a smile or not even notice become the apparent cause of intense unhappiness. They are, of course, not the true cause but only act as a trigger. They bring back to life the old accumulated emotion. The emotion then moves into the head and amplifies and energizes the egoic mind structures.

Pain-body and ego are close relatives. They need each other. The triggering event or situation is then interpreted and reacted to through the screen of a heavily emotional ego. This is to say, its significance becomes completely distorted. You look at the present through the eyes of the emotional past within you. In other words, what you see and experience is not in the event or situation but in you. Or in some cases, it may be there in the event or situation, but you amplify it through your reaction. This reaction, this amplification, is what the pain-body wants and needs, what it feeds on.

For someone possessed by a heavy pain-body, it is often impossible to step outside his or her distorted interpretation, the heavily emotional "story." The more negative emotion there is in a story, the heavier and more impenetrable it becomes. And so the story is not recognized as such but is taken to be reality. When you are completely trapped in the movement of thought and the accompanying emotion, stepping outside is not possible because you don't even know that there is an outside. You are trapped in your own movie or dream, trapped in your own hell. To you it is reality and no other reality is possible. And as far as you are concerned, your reaction is the only possible reaction.

BREAKING IDENTIFICATION WITH THE PAIN-BODY

A person with a strong, active pain-body has a particular energy emanation that other people perceive as extremely unpleasant. When they meet such a person, some people will immediately want to remove themselves or reduce interaction with him or her to a minimum. They feel repulsed by the person's energy field. Others will feel a wave of aggression toward this person, and

they will be rude or attack him or her verbally and in some cases, even physically. This means there is something within them that resonates with the other person's pain-body. What they react to so strongly is also in them. It is their own pain-body.

Not surprisingly, people with heavy and frequently active pain-bodies often find themselves in conflict situations. Sometimes, of course, they actively provoke them. But at other times, they may not actually do anything. The negativity they emanate is enough to attract hostility and generate conflict. It requires a high degree of Presence to avoid reacting when confronted by someone with such an active pain-body. If you are able to stay present, it sometimes happens that your Presence enables the other person to disidentify from his or her own pain-body and thus experience the miracle of a sudden awakening. Although the awakening may be short-lived, the awakening process will have become initiated.

One of the first such awakenings that I witnessed happened many years ago. My doorbell rang close to eleven o'clock at night. My neighbor Ethel's anxiety-laden voice came through the intercom. "We need to talk. This is very important. Please let me in." Ethel was middle-aged, intelligent, and highly educated. She also had a strong ego and a heavy pain-body. She escaped from Nazi Germany when she was an adolescent, and many of her family members perished in the concentration camps.

Ethel sat down on my sofa, agitated, her hands trembling. She took letters and documents out of the file she carried with her and spread them out all over the sofa and floor. At once I had the strange sensation as if a dimmer switch had turned the inside of my entire body to maximum power. There was nothing to do other than remain open, alert, intensely present—present with every cell of the body. I looked at her with no thought and no judgment and listened in stillness without any mental commentary. A torrent of words came out of her mouth. "They sent me another disturbing letter today. They are conducting a vendetta against me. You must help. We need to fight them together. Their crooked lawyers will stop at nothing. I will lose my home. They are threatening me with dispossession."

It transpired that she refused to pay the service charge because the property managers had failed to carry out some repairs. They in turn threatened to take her to court.

She talked for ten minutes or so. I sat, looked, and listened. Suddenly she stopped talking, looked at the papers all around her as if she had just woken up from a dream. She became calm and gentle. Her entire energy field changed. Then she looked at me and said, "This isn't important at all, is it?" "No, it isn't," I said. She sat quietly for a couple more minutes, then picked up her papers and left. The next morning she stopped me in the street, looking at me somewhat suspiciously. "What did you do to me? Last night was the first night in years that I slept well. In fact, I slept like a baby."

She believed I had "done something" to her, but I had done nothing. Instead of asking what I had done to her, perhaps she should have asked what I had not done. I had not reacted, not confirmed the reality of her story, not fed her mind with more thought and her pain-body with more emotion. I had allowed her to experience whatever she was experiencing at that moment, and

the power of allowing lies in noninterference, nondoing. Being present is always infinitely more powerful than anything one could say or do, although sometimes being present can give rise to words or actions.

What happened to her was not yet a permanent shift, but a glimpse of what is possible, a glimpse of what was already within her. In Zen, such a glimpse is called *satori.* Satori is a moment of Presence, a brief stepping out of the voice in your head, the thought processes, and their reflection in the body as emotion. It is the arising of inner spaciousness where before there was the clutter of thought and the turmoil of emotion.

The thinking mind cannot understand Presence and so will often misinterpret it. It will say that you are uncaring, distant, have no compassion, are not relating. The truth is, you are relating but at a level deeper than thought and emotion. In fact, at that level there is a true coming together, a true joining that goes far beyond relating. In the stillness of Presence, you can sense the formless essence in yourself and in the other as one. Knowing the oneness of yourself and the other is true love, true care, true compassion.

"TRIGGERS"

Some pain-bodies react to only one particular kind of trigger or situation, which is usually one that resonates with a certain kind of emotional pain suffered in the past. For example, if a child grows up with parents for whom financial issues are the source of frequent drama and conflict, he or she may absorb the parents' fear around money and develop a pain-body that is triggered whenever financial issues are involved. The child as adult gets upset or angry even over insignificant amounts of money. Behind the upset or anger lies issues of survival and intense fear. I have seen spiritual, that is to say, relatively conscious, people who started to shout, blame, and make accusations the moment they picked up the phone to talk to their stockbroker or realtor. Just as there is a health warning on every package of cigarettes, perhaps there should be similar warnings on every banknote and bank statement: "Money can activate the pain-body and cause complete unconsciousness."

Someone who in childhood was neglected or abandoned by one or both parents will likely develop a pain-body that becomes triggered in any situation that resonates even remotely with their primordial pain of abandonment. A friend arriving a few minutes late to pick them up at the airport or a spouse coming home late can trigger a major pain-body attack. If their partner or spouse leaves them or dies, the emotional pain they experience goes far beyond the pain that is natural in such a situation. It may be intense anguish, long-lasting, incapacitating depression, or obsessive anger.

A woman who in childhood was physically abused by her father may find that her pain-body becomes easily activated in any close relationship with a man. Alternatively, the emotion that makes up her pain-body may draw her to a man whose pain-body is similar to that of her father. Her pain-body may feel a magnetic pull to someone who it senses will give it more of the same pain. That pain is sometimes misinterpreted as falling in love.

A man who had been an unwanted child and was given no love and a

minimum of care and attention by his mother developed a heavy ambivalent pain-body that consisted of unfulfilled intense longing for his mother's love and attention and at the same time intense hatred toward her for withholding what he so desperately needed. When he became an adult, almost every woman would trigger his pain-body's neediness—a form of emotional pain—and this would manifest as an addictive compulsion to "conquer and seduce" almost every woman he met and in this way get the female love and attention that the pain-body craved. He became quite an expert on seduction, but as soon as a relationship turned intimate or his advances were rejected, the pain-body's anger toward his mother would come up and sabotage the relationship.

When you recognize your own pain-body as it arises, you will also quickly learn what the most common triggers are that activate it, whether it be situations or certain things other people do or say. When those triggers occur, you will immediately see them for what they are and enter a heightened state of alertness. Within a second or two, you will also notice the emotional reaction that is the arising pain-body, but in that state of alert Presence, you won't identify with it, which means the pain-body cannot take you over and become the voice in your head. If you are with your partner at the time, you may tell him or her: "What you just said (or did) triggered my pain-body." Have an agreement with your partner that whenever either of you says or does something that triggers the other person's pain-body, you will immediately mention it. In this way, the pain-body can no longer renew itself through drama in the relationship and instead of pulling you into unconsciousness, will help you become fully present.

Every time you are present when the pain-body arises, some of the pain-body's negative emotional energy will burn up, as it were, and become transmuted into Presence. The rest of the pain-body will quickly withdraw and wait for a better opportunity to arise again, that is to say, when you are less conscious. A better opportunity for the pain-body to arise may come whenever you lose Presence, perhaps after you have had a few drinks or while watching a violent film. The tiniest negative emotion, such as being irritated or anxious, can also serve as a doorway through which the pain-body can return. The pain-body needs your unconsciousness. It cannot tolerate the light of Presence.

THE PAIN-BODY AS AN AWAKENER

At first sight, it may seem that the pain-body is the greatest obstacle to the arising of a new consciousness in humanity. It occupies your mind, controls and distorts your thinking, disrupts your relationships, and feels like a dark cloud that occupies your entire energy field. It tends to make you unconscious, spiritually speaking, which means totally identified with mind and emotion. It makes you reactive, makes you say and do things that are designed to increase the unhappiness within yourself and the world.

As unhappiness increases, however, it also causes increasing disruption in your life. Perhaps the body can't take the stress anymore and develops an illness or some dysfunction. Perhaps you become involved in an accident,

some huge conflict situation or drama that was caused by the pain-body's desire for something bad to happen, or you become the perpetrator of physical violence. Or it all becomes too much and you cannot live with your unhappy self anymore. The pain-body, of course, is part of that false self.

Whenever you get taken over by the pain-body, whenever you don't recognize it for what it is, it becomes part of your ego. Whatever you identify with turns into ego. The pain-body is one of the most powerful things the ego can identify with, just as the pain-body needs the ego to renew itself through it. That unholy alliance, however, eventually breaks down in those cases where the pain-body is so heavy that the egoic mind structures, instead of being strengthened by it, are becoming eroded by the continuous onslaught of the pain-body's energy charge, in the same way that an electronic device can be empowered by an electric current but also destroyed by it if the voltage is too high.

People with strong pain-bodies often reach a point where they feel their life is becoming unbearable, where they can't take any more pain, any more drama. One person expressed this by saying plainly and simply that she was "fed up with being unhappy." Some people may feel, as I did, that they cannot live with themselves anymore. Inner peace then becomes their first priority. Their acute emotional pain forces them to disidentify from the content of their minds and the mental-emotional structures that give birth to and perpetuate the unhappy me. They then know that neither their unhappy story nor the emotion they feel is who they are. They realize they are the knowing, not the known. Rather than pulling them into unconsciousness, the pain-body becomes their awakener, the decisive factor that forces them into a state of Presence.

However, due to the unprecedented influx of consciousness we are witnessing on the planet now, many people no longer need to go through the depth of acute suffering to be able to disidentify from the pain-body. Whenever they notice they have slipped back into a dysfunctional state, they are able to *choose* to step out of identification with thinking and emotion and enter the state of Presence. They relinquish resistance, become still and alert, one with what is, within and without.

The next step in human evolution is not inevitable, but for the first time in the history of our planet, it can be a conscious choice. Who is making that choice? You are. And who are you? Consciousness that has become conscious of itself.

BREAKING FREE OF THE PAIN-BODY

A question people frequently ask is, "How long does it take to become free of the pain-body?" The answer is, of course, that it depends both on the density of an individual's pain-body as well as the degree or intensity of that individual's arising Presence. But it is not the pain-body, but identification with it that causes the suffering that you inflict on yourself and others. It is not the pain-body but identification with the pain-body that forces you to relive the past again and again and keeps you in a state of unconsciousness. So a more important question to ask would be this: "How long does it take to

become free of identification with the pain-body?"

And the answer to that question is: It takes no time at all. When the pain-body is activated, know that what you are feeling is the pain-body in you. This knowing is all that is needed to break your identification with it. And when identification with it ceases, the transmutation begins. The knowing prevents the old emotion from rising up into your head and taking over not only the internal dialogue, but also your actions as well as interactions with other people. This means the pain-body cannot use you anymore and renew itself through you. The old emotion may then still live in you for a while and come up periodically. It may also still occasionally trick you into identifying with it again and thus obscure the knowing, but not for long. Not projecting the old emotion into situations means facing it directly within yourself. It may not be pleasant, but it won't kill you. Your Presence is more than capable of containing it. The emotion is not who you are.

When you feel the pain-body, don't fall into the error of thinking there is something wrong with you. Making yourself into a problem—the ego loves that. The knowing needs to be followed by accepting. Anything else will obscure it again. Accepting means you allow yourself to feel whatever it is you are feeling at that moment. It is part of the is-ness of the Now. You can't argue with *what is*. Well, you can, but if you do, you suffer. Through allowing, you become what you are: vast, spacious. You become whole. You are not a fragment anymore, which is how the ego perceives itself. Your true nature emerges, which is one with the nature of God.

Jesus points to this when he says, "Be ye whole, even as your Father in Heaven is whole."[1] The New Testament's "Be ye perfect" is a mistranslation of the original Greek word, which means whole. This is to say, you don't need to become whole, but *be* what you already are—with or without the pain-body.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Finding Who You Truly Are

Gnothi Seauton—Know Thyself. These words were inscribed above the entrance to the temple of Apollo at Delphi, site of the sacred Oracle. In ancient Greece, people would visit the Oracle hoping to find out what destiny had in store for them or what course of action to take in a particular situation. It is likely that most visitors read those words as they entered the building without realizing that they pointed to a deeper truth than anything the Oracle could possibly tell them. They may not have realized either that, no matter how great a revelation or how accurate the information they received, it would ultimately prove to be of no avail, would not save them from further unhappiness and self-created suffering, if they failed to find the truth that is concealed in that injunction—Know Thyself. What those words imply is this: Before you ask any other question, first ask the most fundamental question of your life: Who am I?

Unconscious people—and many remain unconscious, trapped in their egos throughout their lives—will quickly tell you who they are: their name, their occupation, their personal history, the shape or state of their body, and whatever else they identify with. Others may appear to be more evolved because they think of themselves as an immortal soul or divine spirit. But do they really know themselves, or have they just added some spiritual-sounding concepts to the content of their mind? Knowing yourself goes far deeper than the adoption of a set of ideas or beliefs. Spiritual ideas and beliefs may at best be helpful pointers, but in themselves they rarely have the power to dislodge the more firmly established core concepts of who you think you are, which are part of the conditioning of the human mind. Knowing yourself deeply has nothing to do with whatever ideas are floating around in your mind. Knowing yourself is to be rooted in Being, instead of lost in your mind.

WHO YOU THINK YOU ARE

Your sense of who you are determines what you perceive as your needs and what matters to you in life—and whatever matters to you will have the power to upset and disturb you. You can use this as a criterion to find out how deeply you know yourself. What matters to you is not necessarily what you say or believe, but what your actions and reactions reveal as important and

serious to you. So you may want to ask yourself the question: What are the things that upset and disturb me? If small things have the power to disturb you, then who you think you are is exactly that: small. That will be your unconscious belief. What are the small things? Ultimately all things are small things because all things are transient.

You might say, "I know I am an immortal spirit," or "I am tired of this mad world, and peace is all I want"—until the phone rings. Bad news: The stock market has collapsed; the deal may fall through; the car has been stolen; your mother-in-law has arrived; the trip is cancelled, the contract has been broken; your partner has left you; they demand more money; they say it's your fault. Suddenly there is a surge of anger, of anxiety. A harshness comes into your voice; "I can't take any more of this." You accuse and blame, attack, defend, or justify yourself, and it's all happening on autopilot. Something is obviously much more important to you now than the inner peace that a moment ago you said was all you wanted, and you're not an immortal spirit anymore either. The deal, the money, the contract, the loss or threat of loss are more important. To whom? To the immortal spirit that you said you are? No, to me. The small me that seeks security or fulfillment in things that are transient and gets anxious or angry because it fails to find it. Well, at least now you know who you really think you are.

If peace is really what you want, then you will choose peace. If peace mattered to you more than anything else and if you truly knew yourself to be spirit rather than a little me, you would remain nonreactive and absolutely alert when confronted with challenging people or situations. You would immediately accept the situation and thus become one with it rather than separate yourself from it. Then out of your alertness would come a response. Who you are (consciousness), not who you think you are (a small me), would be responding. It would be powerful and effective and would make no person or situation into an enemy.

The world always makes sure that you cannot fool yourself for long about who you really think you are by showing you what truly matters to you. How you react to people and situations, especially when challenges arise, is the best indicator of how deeply you know yourself.

The more limited, the more narrowly egoic the view of yourself, the more you will see, focus on, and react to the egoic limitations, the unconsciousness in others. Their "faults" or what you perceive as their faults become to you their identity. This means you will see only the ego in them and thus strengthen the ego in yourself. Instead of looking "through" the ego in others, you are looking "at" the ego. Who is looking at the ego? The ego in you.

Very unconscious people experience their own ego through its reflection in others. When you realize that what you react to in others is also in you (and sometimes only in you), you begin to become aware of your own ego. At that stage, you may also realize that you were doing to others what you thought others were doing to you. You cease seeing yourself as a victim.

You are not the ego, so when you become aware of the ego in you, it does not mean you know who you are—it means you know who you are *not*. But it is through knowing who you are not that the greatest obstacle to truly knowing yourself is removed.

Nobody can tell you who you are. It would just be another concept, so it would not change you. *Who you are* requires no belief. In fact, every belief is an obstacle. It does not even require your realization, since you already are who you are. But without realization, who you are does not shine forth into this world. It remains in the unmanifested which is, of course, your true home. You are then like an apparently poor person who does not know he has a bank account with $100 million in it and so his wealth remains an unexpressed potential.

ABUNDANCE

Who you think you are is also intimately connected with how you see yourself treated by others. Many people complain that others do not treat them well enough. "I don't get any respect, attention, recognition, acknowledgment," they say. "I'm being taken for granted." When people are kind, they suspect hidden motives. "Others want to manipulate me, take advantage of me. Nobody loves me."

Who they think they are is this: "I am a needy 'little me' whose needs are not being met." This basic misperception of who they are creates dysfunction in all their relationships. They believe they have nothing to give and that the world or other people are withholding from them what they need. Their entire reality is based on an illusory sense of who they are. It sabotages situations, mars all relationships. If the thought of lack—whether it be money, recognition, or love—has become part of who you think you are, you will always experience lack. Rather than acknowledge the good that is already in your life, all you see is lack. Acknowledging the good that is already in your life is the foundation for all abundance. The fact is: Whatever you think the world is withholding from you, you are withholding from the world. You are withholding it because deep down you think you are small and that you have nothing to give.

Try this for a couple of weeks and see how it changes your reality: Whatever you think people are withholding from you—praise, appreciation, assistance, loving care, and so on—give it to them. You don't have it? Just act as if you had it, and it will come. Then, soon after you start giving, you will start receiving. You cannot receive what you don't give. Outflow determines inflow. Whatever you think the world is withholding from you, you already have, but unless you allow it to flow out, you won't even know that you have it. This includes abundance. The law that outflow determines inflow is expressed by Jesus in this powerful image: "Give and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap."[1]

The source of all abundance is not outside you. It is part of who you are. However, start by acknowledging and recognizing abundance without. See the fullness of life all around you. The warmth of the sun on your skin, the display of magnificent flowers outside a florist's shop, biting into a succulent fruit, or getting soaked in an abundance of water falling from the sky. The fullness of life is there at every step. The acknowledgment of that abundance that is all around you awakens the dormant abundance within. Then let it flow

out. When you smile at a stranger, there is already a minute outflow of energy. You become a giver. Ask yourself often: "What can I give here; how can I be of service to this person, this situation?" You don't need to own anything to feel abundant, although if you feel abundant consistently things will almost certainly come to you. Abundance comes only to those who already have it. It sounds almost unfair, but of course it isn't. It is a universal law. Both abundance and scarcity are inner states that manifest as your reality. Jesus puts it like this: "For to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away."[2]

KNOWING YOURSELF AND KNOWING *ABOUT* YOURSELF

You may not want to know yourself because you are afraid of what you may find out. Many people have a secret fear that they are bad. But nothing you can find out about yourself is you. Nothing you can know *about* you is you.

While some people do not want to know who they are because of fear, others have an insatiable curiosity about themselves and want to find out more and more. You may be so fascinated with yourself that you spend years in psychoanalysis, delve into every aspect of your childhood, uncover secret fears and desires, and find layers upon layers of complexity in the makeup of your personality and character. After ten years, the therapist may get tired of you and your story and tell you that your analysis is now complete. Perhaps he sends you away with a five-thousand-page dossier. "This is all about you. This is who you are." As you carry the heavy file home, the initial satisfaction of at last knowing yourself gives way quickly to a feeling of incompleteness and a lurking suspicion that there must be more to who you are than this. And indeed there is more—not perhaps in quantitative terms of more facts but in the qualitative dimension of depth.

There is nothing wrong with psychoanalysis or finding out about your past as long as you don't confuse knowing *about* yourself with knowing yourself. The five-thousand-page dossier is *about* yourself: the content of your mind which is conditioned by the past. Whatever you learn through psychoanalysis or self-observation is *about* you. It is not you. It is content, not essence. Going beyond ego is stepping out of content. Knowing yourself is being yourself, and being yourself is ceasing to identify with content.

Most people define themselves through the content of their lives. Whatever you perceive, experience, do, think, or feel is content. Content is what absorbs most people's attention entirely, and it is what they identify with. When you think or say, "my life," you are not referring to the life that you *are* but the life that you *have*, or seem to have. You are referring to content —your age, health, relationships, finances, work and living situation, as well as your mental-emotional state. The inner and outer circumstances of your life, your past and your future, all belong to the realm of content—as do events, that is to say, anything that happens.

What is there other than content? That which enables the content to be—the inner space of consciousness.

CHAOS AND HIGHER ORDER

When you know yourself only through content, you will also think you know what is good or bad for you. You differentiate between events that are "good for me" and those that are "bad." This is a fragmented perception of the wholeness of life in which everything is interconnected, in which every event has its necessary place and function within the totality. The totality, however, is more than the surface appearance of things, more than the sum total of its parts, more than whatever your life or the world contains.

Behind the sometimes seemingly random or even chaotic succession of events in our lives as well as in the world lies concealed the unfolding of a higher order and purpose. This is beautifully expressed in the Zen saying "The snow falls, each flake in its appropriate place." We can never understand this higher order through thinking about it because whatever we think about is content; whereas, the higher order emanates from the formless realm of consciousness, from universal intelligence. But we can glimpse it, and more than that, align ourselves with it, which means be conscious participants in the unfolding of that higher purpose.

When we go into a forest that has not been interfered with by man, our thinking mind will see only disorder and chaos all around us. It won't even be able to differentiate between life (good) and death (bad) anymore since everywhere new life grows out of rotting and decaying matter. Only if we are still enough inside and the noise of thinking subsides can we become aware that there is a hidden harmony here, a sacredness, a higher order in which everything has its perfect place and could not be other than what it is and the way it is.

The mind is more comfortable in a landscaped park because it has been planned through thought; it has not grown organically. There is an order here that the mind can understand. In the forest, there is an incomprehensible order that to the mind looks like chaos. It is beyond the mental categories of good and bad. You cannot understand it through thought, but you can sense it when you let go of thought, become still and alert, and don't try to understand or explain. Only then can you be aware of the sacredness of the forest. As soon as you sense that hidden harmony, that sacredness, you realize you are not separate from it, and when you realize that, you become a conscious participant in it. In this way, nature can help you become realigned with the wholeness of life.

GOOD AND BAD

At some point in their lives, most people become aware that there is not only birth, growth, success, good health, pleasure, and winning, but also loss, failure, sickness, old age, decay, pain, and death. Conventionally these are labeled "good" and "bad," order and disorder. The "meaning" of people's lives is usually associated with what they term the "good," but the good is continually threatened by collapse, breakdown, disorder; threatened by meaninglessness and the "bad," when explanations fail and life ceases to make sense. Sooner or later, disorder will irrupt into everyone's life no matter how many insurance policies he or she has. It may come in the form of loss or accident, sickness, disability, old age, death. However, the irruption of

disorder into a person's life, and the resultant collapse of a mentally defined meaning, can become the opening into a higher order.

"The wisdom of this world is folly with God," says the Bible.[3] What is the wisdom of this world? The movement of thought, and meaning that is defined exclusively by thought.

Thinking isolates a situation or event and calls it good or bad, as if it had a separate existence. Through excessive reliance on thinking, reality becomes fragmented. This fragmentation is an illusion, but it seems very real while you are trapped in it. And yet the universe is an indivisible whole in which all things are interconnected, in which nothing exists in isolation.

The deeper interconnectedness of all things and events implies that the mental labels of "good" and "bad" are ultimately illusory. They always imply a limited perspective and so are true only relatively and temporarily. This is illustrated in the story of a wise man who won an expensive car in a lottery. His family and friends were very happy for him and came to celebrate. "Isn't it great!" they said. "You are so lucky." The man smiled and said, "Maybe." For a few weeks he enjoyed driving the car. Then one day a drunken driver crashed into his new car at an intersection and he ended up in the hospital, with multiple injuries. His family and friends came to see him and said, "That was really unfortunate." Again the man smiled and said, "Maybe." While he was still in the hospital, one night there was a landslide and his house fell into the sea. Again his friends came the next day and said, "Weren't you lucky to have been here in hospital." Again he said, "Maybe."

The wise man's "maybe" signifies a refusal to judge anything that happens. Instead of judging what is, he accepts it and so enters into conscious alignment with the higher order. He knows that often it is impossible for the mind to understand what place or purpose a seemingly random event has in the tapestry of the whole. But there are no random events, nor are there events or things that exist by and for themselves, in isolation. The atoms that make up your body were once forged inside stars, and the causes of even the smallest event are virtually infinite and connected with the whole in incomprehensible ways. If you wanted to trace back the cause of any event, you would have to go back all the way to the beginning of creation. The cosmos is not chaotic. The very word *cosmos* means order. But this is not an order the human mind can ever comprehend, although it can sometimes glimpse it.

NOT MINDING WHAT HAPPENS

J. Krishnamurti, the great Indian philosopher and spiritual teacher, spoke and traveled almost continuously all over the world for more than fifty years attempting to convey through words—which are content—that which is beyond words, beyond content. At one of his talks in the later part of his life, he surprised his audience by asking, "Do you want to know my secret?" Everyone became very alert. Many people in the audience had been coming to listen to him for twenty or thirty years and still failed to grasp the essence of his teaching. Finally, after all these years, the master would give them the key to understanding. "This is my secret," he said. "I don't mind what happens."

He did not elaborate, and so I suspect most of his audience were even

more perplexed than before. The implications of this simple statement, however, are profound.

When I don't mind what happens, what does that imply? It implies that internally I am in alignment with what happens. "What happens," of course, refers to the suchness of this moment, which always already is as it is. It refers to content, the form that this moment—the only moment there ever is—takes. To be in alignment with *what is* means to be in a relationship of inner nonresistance with what happens. It means not to label it mentally as good or bad, but to let it be. Does this mean you can no longer take action to bring about change in your life? On the contrary. When the basis for your actions is inner alignment with the present moment, your actions become empowered by the intelligence of Life itself.

IS THAT SO?

The Zen Master Hakuin lived in a town in Japan. He was held in high regard and many people came to him for spiritual teaching. Then it happened that the teenage daughter of his next-door neighbor became pregnant. When being questioned by her angry and scolding parents as to the identity of the father, she finally told them that he was Hakuin, the Zen Master. In great anger the parents rushed over to Hakuin and told him with much shouting and accusing that their daughter had confessed that he was the father. All he replied was, "Is that so?"

News of the scandal spread throughout the town and beyond. The Master lost his reputation. This did not trouble him. Nobody came to see him anymore. He remained unmoved. When the child was born, the parents brought the baby to Hakuin. "You are the father, so you look after him." The Master took loving care of the child. A year later, the mother remorsefully confessed to her parents that the real father of the child was the young man who worked at the butcher shop. In great distress they went to see Hakuin to apologize and ask for forgiveness. "We are really sorry. We have come to take the baby back. Our daughter confessed that you are not the father." "Is that so?" is all he would say as he handed the baby over to them.

The Master responds to falsehood and truth, bad news and good news, in exactly the same way: "Is that so?" He allows the form of the moment, good or bad, to be as it is and so does not become a participant in human drama. To him there is only this moment, and this moment is as it is. Events are not personalized. He is nobody's victim. He is so completely at one with what happens that what happens has no power over him anymore. Only if you resist what happens are you at the mercy of what happens, and the world will determine your happiness and unhappiness.

The baby is looked after with loving care. Bad turns into good through the power of nonresistance. Always responding to what the present moment requires, he lets go of the baby when it is time to do so.

Imagine briefly how the ego would have reacted during the various stages of the unfolding of these events.

THE EGO AND THE PRESENT MOMENT

The most important, the primordial relationship in your life is your relationship with the Now, or rather with whatever form the Now takes, that is to say, what is or what happens. If your relationship with the Now is dysfunctional, that dysfunction will be reflected in every relationship and every situation you encounter. The ego could be defined simply in this way: a dysfunctional relationship with the present moment. It is at this moment that you can decide what kind of relationship you want to have with the present moment.

Once you have reached a certain level of consciousness, (and if you are reading this, you almost certainly have), you are able to decide what kind of a relationship you want to have with the present moment. Do I want the present moment to be my friend or my enemy? The present moment is inseparable from life, so you are really deciding what kind of a relationship you want to have with life. Once you have decided you want the present moment to be your friend, it is up to you to make the first move: Become friendly toward it, welcome it no matter in what disguise it comes, and soon you will see the results. Life becomes friendly toward you; people become helpful, circumstances cooperative. One decision changes your entire reality. But that one decision you have to make again and again and again—until it becomes natural to live in such a way.

The decision to make the present moment into your friend is the end of the ego. The ego can never be in alignment with the present moment, which is to say, aligned with life, since its very nature compels it to ignore, resist, or devalue the Now. Time is what the ego lives on. The stronger the ego, the more time takes over your life. Almost every thought you think is then concerned with past or future, and your sense of self depends on the past for your identity and on the future for its fulfillment. Fear, anxiety, expectation, regret, guilt, anger are the dysfunctions of the time-bound state of consciousness.

There are three ways in which the ego will treat the present moment: as a means to an end, as an obstacle, or as an enemy. Let us look at them in turn, so that when this pattern operates in you, you can recognize it and—decide again.

To the ego, the present moment is, at best, only useful as a means to an end. It gets you to some future moment that is considered more important, even though the future never comes except as the present moment and is therefore never more than a thought in your head. In other words, you are never fully here because you are always busy trying to get elsewhere.

When this pattern becomes more pronounced, and this is very common, the present moment is regarded and treated as if it were an obstacle to be overcome. This is where impatience, frustration, and stress arise, and in our culture, it is many people's everyday reality, their normal state. Life, which is now, is seen as a "problem," and you come to inhabit a world of problems that all need to be solved before you can be happy, fulfilled, or really start living—or so you think. The problem is: For every problem that is solved, another one pops up. As long as the present moment is seen as an obstacle, there can be no end to problems. "I'll be whatever you want me to be," says Life or the Now. "I'll treat you the way you treat me. If you see me as a problem, I will be a

problem to you. If you treat me as an obstacle, I will be an obstacle."

At worst, and this is also very common, the present moment is treated as if it were an enemy. When you hate what you are doing, complain about your surroundings, curse things that are happening or have happened, or when your internal dialogue consists of shoulds and shouldn'ts, of blaming and accusing, then you are arguing with what *is*, arguing with that which is always already the case. You are making Life into an enemy and Life says, "War is what you want, and war is what you get." External reality, which always reflects back to you your inner state, is then experienced as hostile.

A vital question to ask yourself frequently is: What is my relationship with the present moment? Then become alert to find out the answer. Am I treating the Now as no more than a means to an end? Do I see it as an obstacle? Am I making it into an enemy? Since the present moment is all you ever have, since Life is inseparable from the Now, what the question really means is: What is my relationship with Life? This question is an excellent way of unmasking the ego in you and bringing you into the state of Presence. Although the question doesn't embody the absolute truth (ultimately, I and the present moment are one), it is a useful pointer in the right direction. Ask yourself it often until you don't need it anymore.

How do you go beyond a dysfunctional relationship with the present moment? The most important thing is to see it in yourself, in your thoughts and actions. In the moment of seeing, of noticing that your relationship with the Now is dysfunctional, you are present. The seeing is the arising Presence. The moment you see the dysfunction, it begins to dissolve. Some people laugh out loud when they see this. With the seeing comes the power of choice—the choice of saying yes to the Now, of making it into your friend.

THE PARADOX OF TIME

On the surface, the present moment is "what happens." Since what happens changes continuously, it seems that every day of your life consists of thousands of moments in which different things happen. Time is seen as the endless succession of moments, some "good," some "bad." Yet, if you look more closely, that is to say, through your own immediate experience, you find that there are not many moments at all. You discover that there is only ever *this moment*. Life is always now. Your entire life unfolds in this constant Now. Even past or future moments only exist when you remember or anticipate them, and you do so by thinking about them in the only moment there is: this one.

Why does it appear then as if there were many moments? Because the present moment is confused with what happens, confused with content. The space of Now is confused with what happens in that space. The confusion of the present moment with content gives rise not only to the illusion of time, but also to the illusion of ego.

There is a paradox here. On the one hand, how can we deny the reality of time? You need it to go from here to there, to prepare a meal, build a house, read this book. You need time to grow up, to learn new things. Whatever you do seems to take time. Everything is subject to it and eventually "this bloody

tyrant time," as Shakespeare calls it, is going to kill you. You could compare it to a raging river that drags you along with it, or a fire in which everything is consumed.

I recently met some old friends, a family I had not seen in a long time, and I was shocked when I saw them. I almost asked, "Are you ill? What happened? Who did this to you?" The mother, who walked with a cane, seemed to have shrunk in size, her face shriveled like an old apple. The daughter, who had been full of energy, enthusiasm, and the expectations of youth when I last saw her, seemed worn out, tired after bringing up three children. Then I remembered: Almost thirty years had passed since we last met. Time had done this to them. And I'm sure they were just as shocked when they saw me.

Everything seems to be subject to time, yet it all happens in the Now. That is the paradox. Wherever you look, there is plenty of *circumstantial* evidence for the reality of time—a rotting apple, your face in the bathroom mirror compared to your face in a photo taken thirty years ago—yet you never find any *direct* evidence, you never experience time itself. You only ever experience the present moment, or rather what happens in it. If you go by direct evidence only, then there is no time, and the Now is all there ever is.

ELIMINATING TIME

You cannot make the egoless state into a future goal and then work toward it. All you get is more dissatisfaction, more inner conflict, because it will always seem that you have not arrived yet, have not "attained" that state yet. When freedom from ego is your goal for the future, you give yourself more time, and more time means more ego. Look carefully to find out if your spiritual search is a disguised form of ego. Even trying to get rid of your "self" can be a disguised search for more if the getting rid of your "self" is made into a future goal. Giving yourself more time is precisely this: giving your "self" more time. Time, that is to say, past and future, is what the false mind-made self, the ego, lives on, and time is in your mind. It isn't something that has an objective existence "out there." It is a mind-structure needed for sensory perception, indispensable for practical purposes, but the greatest hindrance to knowing yourself. Time is the horizontal dimension of life, the surface layer of reality. Then there is the vertical dimension of depth, accessible to you only through the portal of the present moment.

So instead of adding time to yourself, remove time. The elimination of time from your consciousness is the elimination of ego. It is the only true spiritual practice.

When we speak of the elimination of time, we are, of course, not referring to clock time, which is the use of time for practical purposes, such as making an appointment or planning a trip. It would be almost impossible to function in this world without clock time. What we are speaking of is the elimination of psychological time, which is the egoic mind's endless preoccupation with past and future and its unwillingness to be one with life by living in alignment with the inevitable *isness* of the present moment.

Whenever a habitual no to life turns into a yes, whenever you allow this

moment to be as it is, you dissolve time as well as ego. For the ego to survive, it must make time—past and future—more important than the present moment. The ego cannot tolerate becoming friendly with the present moment, except briefly just after it got what it wanted. But nothing can satisfy the ego for long. As long as it runs your life, there are two ways of being unhappy. Not getting what you want is one. Getting what you want is the other.

Whatever is or happens is the form that the Now takes. As long as you resist it internally, form, that is to say, the world, is an impenetrable barrier that separates you from who you are beyond form, separates you from the formless one Life that you are. When you bring an inner yes to the form the Now takes, that very form becomes a doorway into the formless. The separation between the world and God dissolves.

When you react against the form that Life takes at this moment, when you treat the Now as a means, an obstacle, or an enemy, you strengthen your own form identity, the ego. Hence the ego's reactivity. What is reactivity? Becoming addicted to reaction. The more reactive you are, the more entangled you become with form. The more identified with form, the stronger the ego. Your Being then does not shine through form anymore—or only barely.

Through nonresistance to form, that in you which is beyond form emerges as an all-encompassing Presence, a silent power far greater than your short-lived form identity, the person. It is more deeply who you are than anything in the world of form.

THE DREAMER AND THE DREAM

Nonresistance is the key to the greatest power in the universe. Through it, consciousness (spirit) is freed from its imprisonment in form. Inner nonresistance to form whatever is or happens—is a denial of the absolute reality of form. Resistance makes the world and the things of the world appear more real, more solid, and more lasting than they are, including your own form identity, the ego. It endows the world and the ego with a heaviness and an absolute importance that makes you take yourself and the world very seriously. The play of form is then misperceived as a struggle for survival, and when that is your perception, it becomes your reality.

The many things that happen, the many forms that life takes on, are of an ephemeral nature. They are all fleeting. Things, bodies and egos, events, situations, thoughts, emotions, desires, ambitions, fears, drama…they come, pretend to be all-important, and before you know it they are gone, dissolved into the no-thingness out of which they came. Were they ever real? Were they ever more than a dream, the dream of form?

When we wake up in the morning, the night's dream dissolves, and we say, "Oh, it was only a dream. It wasn't real." But something in the dream must have been real otherwise it could not be. When death approaches, we may look back on our life and wonder if it was just another dream. Even now you may look back on last year's vacation or yesterday's drama and see that it is very similar to last night's dream.

There is the dream, and there is the dreamer of the dream. The dream is a short-lived play of forms. It is the world—relatively real but not absolutely

real. Then there is the dreamer, the absolute reality in which the forms come and go. The dreamer is not the person. The person is part of the dream. The dreamer is the substratum in which the dream appears, that which makes the dream possible. It is the absolute behind the relative, the timeless behind time, the consciousness in and behind form. The dreamer is consciousness itself—who you are.

To awaken within the dream is our purpose now. When we are awake within the dream, the ego-created earth-drama comes to an end and a more benign and wondrous dream arises. This is the new earth.

GOING BEYOND LIMITATION

In each person's life there comes a time when he or she pursues growth and expansion on the level of form. This is when you strive to overcome limitation such as physical weakness or financial scarcity, when you acquire new skills and knowledge, or through creative action bring something new into this world that is life-enhancing for yourself as well as others. This may be a piece of music or a work of art, a book, a service you provide, a function you perform, a business or organization that you set up or make a vital contribution to.

When you are present, when your attention is fully in the Now, that Presence will flow into and transform what you do. There will be quality and power in it. You are present when what you are doing is not primarily a means to an end (money, prestige, winning) but fulfilling in itself, when there is joy and aliveness in what you do. And, of course, you cannot be present unless you become friendly with the present moment. That is the basis for effective action, uncontaminated by negativity.

Form means limitation. We are here not only to experience limitation, but also to grow in consciousness by going beyond limitation. Some limitations can be overcome on an external level. There may be other limitations in your life that you have to learn to live with. They can only be overcome internally. Everyone will encounter them sooner or later. Those limitations either keep you trapped in egoic reaction, which means intense unhappiness, or you rise above them internally by uncompromising surrender to what is. That is what they are here to teach. The surrendered state of consciousness opens up the vertical dimension in your life, the dimension of depth. Something will then come forth from that dimension into this world, something of infinite value that otherwise would have remained unmanifested. Some people who surrendered to severe limitation become healers or spiritual teachers. Others work selflessly to lessen human suffering or bring some creative gift into this world.

In the late seventies, I would have lunch every day with one or two friends in the cafeteria of the graduate center at Cambridge University, where I was studying. A man in a wheelchair would sometimes sit at a nearby table, usually accompanied by three or four people. One day, when he was sitting at a table directly opposite me, I could not help but look at him more closely, and I was shocked by what I saw. He seemed almost totally paralyzed. His body was emaciated, his head permanently slumped forward. One of the people

accompanying him was carefully putting food in his mouth, a great deal of which would fall out again and be caught on a small plate another man was holding under his chin. Occasionally the wheelchair-bound man would produce unintelligible croaking sounds, and someone would hold an ear close to his mouth and then amazingly would interpret what he was trying to say.

Later I asked my friend whether he knew who he was. "Of course," he said, "he is a professor of mathematics, and the people with him are his graduate students. He has motor neuron disease that progressively paralyzes every part of the body. He has been given five years at the most. It must be the most dreadful fate that can befall a human being."

A few weeks later, as I was leaving the building, he was coming in, and when I held the door open for his electric wheelchair to come through, our eyes met. With surprise I saw that his eyes were clear. There was no trace in them of unhappiness. I knew immediately he had relinquished resistance; he was living in surrender.

A number of years later when buying a newspaper at a kiosk, I was amazed to see him on the front page of a popular international news magazine. Not only was he still alive, but he had by then become the world's most famous theoretical physicist, Stephen Hawking. There was a beautiful line in the article that confirmed what I had sensed when I had looked into his eyes many years earlier. Commenting upon his life, he said (now with the help of the voice synthesizer), "Who could have wished for more?"

THE JOY OF BEING

Unhappiness or negativity is a disease on our planet. What pollution is on the outer level is negativity on the inner. It is everywhere, not just in places where people don't have enough, but even more so where they have more than enough. Is that surprising? No. The affluent world is even more deeply identified with form, more lost in content, more trapped in ego.

People believe themselves to be dependent on what happens for their happiness, that is to say, dependent on form. They don't realize that what happens is the most unstable thing in the universe. It changes constantly. They look upon the present moment as either marred by something that has happened and shouldn't have or as deficient because of something that has not happened but should have. And so they miss the deeper perfection that is inherent in life itself, a perfection that is always already here, that lies beyond what is happening or not happening, beyond form. Accept the present moment and find the perfection that is deeper than any form and untouched by time.

The joy of Being, which is the only true happiness, cannot come to you through any form, possession, achievement, person, or event—through anything that happens. That joy cannot *come* to you—ever. It emanates from the formless dimension within you, from consciousness itself and thus is one with who you are.

ALLOWING THE DIMINISHMENT OF THE EGO

The ego is always on guard against any kind of perceived diminishment. Automatic ego-repair mechanisms come into effect to restore the mental form of "me." When someone blames or criticizes me, that to the ego is a diminishment of self, and it will immediately attempt to repair its diminished sense of self through self-justification, defense, or blaming. Whether the other person is right or wrong is irrelevant to the ego. It is much more interested in self-preservation than in the truth. This is the preservation of the psychological form of "me." Even such a normal thing as shouting something back when another driver calls you "idiot" is an automatic and unconscious ego-repair mechanism. One of the most common ego-repair mechanisms is anger, which causes a temporary but huge ego inflation. All repair mechanisms make perfect sense to the ego but are actually dysfunctional. Those that are most extreme in their dysfunction are physical violence and self-delusion in the form of grandiose fantasies.

A powerful spiritual practice is consciously to allow the diminishment of ego when it happens without attempting to restore it. I recommend that you experiment with this from time to time. For example, when someone criticizes you, blames you, or calls you names, instead of immediately retaliating or defending yourself—do nothing. Allow the self-image to remain diminished and become alert to what that feels like deep inside you. For a few seconds, it may feel uncomfortable, as if you had shrunk in size. Then you may sense an inner spaciousness that feels intensely alive. You haven't been diminished at all. In fact, you have expanded. You may then come to an amazing realization: When you are seemingly diminished in some way and remain in absolute nonreaction, not just externally but also internally, you realize that nothing real has been diminished, that through becoming "less," you become more. When you no longer defend or attempt to strengthen the form of yourself, you step out of identification with form, with mental self-image. Through becoming less (in the ego's perception), you in fact undergo an expansion and make room for Being to come forward. True power, who you are beyond form, can then shine through the apparently weakened form. This is what Jesus means when he says, "Deny yourself" or "Turn the other cheek."

This does not mean, of course, that you invite abuse or turn yourself into a victim of unconscious people. Sometimes a situation may demand that you tell someone to "back off" in no uncertain terms. Without egoic defensiveness, there will be power behind your words, yet no reactive force. If necessary, you can also say no to someone firmly and clearly, and it will be what I call a "high-quality no" that is free of all negativity.

If you are content with being nobody in particular, content not to stand out, you align yourself with the power of the universe. What looks like weakness to the ego is in fact the only true strength. This spiritual truth is diametrically opposed to the values of our contemporary culture and the way it conditions people to behave.

Instead of trying to be a mountain, teaches the ancient *Tao Te Ching*, "Be the valley of the universe."[4] In this way, you are restored to wholeness and so "all things will come to you."[5]

Similarly, Jesus, in one of his parables, teaches that "When you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place so that when your host comes, he may say to

you, friend, move up higher. Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."[6]

Another aspect of this practice is to refrain from attempting to strengthen the self by showing off, wanting to stand out, be special, make an impression, or demand attention. It may include occasionally refraining from expressing your opinion when everybody is expressing his or hers, and seeing what that feels like.

AS WITHOUT, SO WITHIN

When you look up at the clear sky at night, you may easily realize a truth at once utterly simple and extraordinarily profound. What is it that you see? The moon, planets, stars, the luminous band of the Milky Way, perhaps a comet or even the neighboring Andromeda Galaxy two million light years away. Yes, but if you simplify even more, what do you see? Objects floating in space. So what does the universe consist of ? Objects and space.

If you don't become speechless when looking out into space on a clear night, you are not really looking, not aware of the totality of what is there. You are probably only looking at the objects and perhaps seeking to name them. If you have ever experienced a sense of awe when looking into space, perhaps even felt a deep reverence in the face of this incomprehensible mystery, it means you must have relinquished for a moment your desire to explain and label and have become aware not only of the objects in space but of the infinite depth of space itself. You must have become still enough inside to notice the vastness in which these countless worlds exist. The feeling of awe is not derived from the fact that there are billions of worlds out there, but the depth that contains them all.

You cannot see space, of course, nor can you hear, touch, taste, or smell it, so how do you even know it exists? This logical-sounding question already contains a fundamental error. The essence of space is no-thingness, so it doesn't "exist" in the normal sense of the word. Only things—forms—exist. Even calling it space can be misleading because by naming it, you make it into an object.

Let us put it like this: There is something within you that has an affinity with space; that is why you can be aware of it. Aware of it? That's not totally true either because how can you be aware of space if there is nothing there to be aware of ?

The answer is both simple and profound. When you are aware of space, you are not really aware of anything, except awareness itself—the inner space of consciousness. Through you, the universe is becoming aware of itself!

When the eye finds nothing to see, that no-thingness is perceived as space. When the ear finds nothing to hear, that no-thingness is perceived as stillness. When the senses, which are designed to perceive form, meet an absence of form, the formless consciousness that lies behind perception and makes all perception, all experience, possible, is no longer obscured by form. When you contemplate the unfathomable depth of space or listen to the silence in the early hours just before sunrise, something within you resonates with it as if in

recognition. You then sense the vast depth of space as your own depth, and you know that precious stillness that has no form to be more deeply who you are than any of the things that make up the content of your life.

The Upanishads, the ancient scriptures of India, point to the same truth with these words:

> What cannot be seen with the eye, but that whereby the eye can see: know that alone to be Brahman the Spirit and not what people here adore. What cannot be heard with the ear but that whereby the ear can hear: know that alone to be Brahman the Spirit and not what people here adore…. What cannot be thought with the mind, but that whereby the mind can think: know that alone to be Brahman the Spirit and not what people here adore.[7]

God, the scripture is saying, is formless consciousness and the essence of who you are. Everything else is form, is "what people here adore."

The twofold reality of the universe, which consists of things and space—thingness and no-thingness—is also your own. A sane, balanced, and fruitful human life is a dance between the two dimensions that make up reality: form and space. Most people are so identified with the dimension of form, with sense perceptions, thoughts, and emotion, that the vital hidden half is missing from their lives. Their identification with form keeps them trapped in ego.

What you see, hear, feel, touch, or think about is only one half of reality, so to speak. It is form. In the teaching of Jesus, it is simply called "the world," and the other dimension is "the kingdom of heaven" or "eternal life."

Just as space enables all things to exist and just as without silence there could be no sound, you would not exist without the vital formless dimension that is the essence of who you are. We could say "God" if the word had not been so misused. I prefer to call it Being. Being is prior to existence. Existence is form, content, "what happens." Existence is the foreground of life; Being is the background, as it were.

The collective disease of humanity is that people are so engrossed in what happens, so hypnotized by the world of fluctuating forms, so absorbed in the content of their lives, they have forgotten the essence, that which is beyond content, beyond form, beyond thought. They are so consumed by time that they have forgotten eternity, which is their origin, their home, their destiny. Eternity is the living reality of who you are.

Some years ago when visiting China, I came upon a stupa on a mountaintop near Guilin. It had writing embossed in gold on it, and I asked my Chinese host what it meant. "It means 'Buddha,'" he said. "Why are there two characters rather than one?" I asked. "One," he explained, means 'man.' The other means 'no.' And the two together means 'Buddha.'" I stood there in awe. The character for Buddha already contained the whole teaching of the Buddha, and for those who have eyes to see, the secret of life. Here are the two dimensions that make up reality, thingness and no-thingness, form and the denial of form, which is the recognition that form is not who you are.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Discovery of Inner Space

According to an ancient Sufi story, there lived a king in some Middle Eastern land who was continuously torn between happiness and despondency. The slightest thing would cause him great upset or provoke an intense reaction, and his happiness would quickly turn into disappointment and despair. A time came when the king finally got tired of himself and of life, and he began to seek a way out. He sent for a wise man who lived in his kingdom and who was reputed to be enlightened. When the wise man came, the king said to him, "I want to be like you. Can you give me something that will bring balance, serenity, and wisdom into my life? I will pay any price you ask."

The wise man said, "I may be able to help you. But the price is so great that your entire kingdom would not be sufficient payment for it. Therefore it will be a gift to you if you will honor it." The king gave his assurances, and the wise man left.

A few weeks later, he returned and handed the king an ornate box carved in jade. The king opened the box and found a simple gold ring inside. Some letters were inscribed on the ring. The inscription read: *This, too, will pass.* "What is the meaning of this?" asked the king. The wise man said, "Wear this ring always. Whatever happens, before you call it good or bad, touch this ring and read the inscription. That way, you will always be at peace."

This, too, will pass. What is it about these simple words that makes them so powerful? Looking at it superficially, it would seem while those words may provide some comfort in a bad situation, they would also diminish the enjoyment of the good things in life. "Don't be too happy, because it won't last." This seems to be what they are saying when applied in a situation that is perceived as good.

The full import of these words becomes clear when we consider them in the context of two other stories that we encountered earlier. The story of the Zen Master whose only response was always "Is that so?" shows the good that comes through inner nonresistance to events, that is to say, being at one with what happens. The story of the man whose comment was invariably a laconic "Maybe" illustrates the wisdom of nonjudgment, and the story of the ring points to the fact of impermanence which, when recognized, leads to nonattachment. Nonresistance, nonjudgment, and nonattachment are the three aspects of true freedom and enlightened living.

Those words inscribed on the ring are not telling you that you should not enjoy the good in your life, nor are they merely meant to provide some comfort in times of suffering. They have a deeper purpose: to make you aware of the fleetingness of every situation, which is due to the transience of all forms—good or bad. When you become aware of the transience of all forms, your attachment to them lessens, and you disidentify from them to some extent. Being detached does not mean that you cannot enjoy the good that the world has to offer. In fact, you enjoy it more. Once you see and accept the transience of all things and the inevitability of change, you can enjoy the pleasures of the world while they last without fear of loss or anxiety about the future. When you are detached, you gain a higher vantage point from which to view the events in your life instead of being trapped inside them. You become like an astronaut who sees the planet Earth surrounded by the vastness of space and realizes a paradoxical truth: The earth is precious and at the same time insignificant. The recognition that *This, too, will pass* brings detachment and with detachment another dimension comes into your life—inner space. Through detachment, as well as nonjudgment and inner nonresistance, you gain access to that dimension.

When you are no longer totally identified with forms, consciousness—who you are—becomes freed from its imprisonment in form. This freedom is the arising of inner space. It comes as a stillness, a subtle peace deep within you, even in the face of something seemingly bad. *This, too, will pass.* Suddenly, there is space around the event. There is also space around the emotional highs and lows, even around pain. And above all, there is space between your thoughts. And from that space emanates a peace that is not "of this world," because this world is form, and the peace is space. This is the peace of God.

Now you can enjoy and honor the things of this world without giving them an importance and significance they don't have. You can participate in the dance of creation and be active without attachment to outcome and without placing unreasonable demands upon the world: Fulfill me, make me happy, make me feel safe, tell me who I am. The world cannot give you those things, and when you no longer have such expectations, all self-created suffering comes to an end. All such suffering is due to an overvaluation of form and an unawareness of the dimension of inner space. When that dimension is present in your life, you can enjoy things, experiences, and the pleasures of the senses without losing yourself in them, without inner attachment to them, that is to say, without becoming addicted to the world.

The words *This, too, will pass* are pointers toward reality. In pointing to the impermanence of all forms, by implication, they are also pointing to the eternal. Only the eternal in you can recognize the impermanent as impermanent.

When the dimension of space is lost or rather not known, the things of the world assume an absolute importance, a seriousness and heaviness that in truth they do not have. When the world is not viewed from the perspective of the formless, it becomes a threatening place, and ultimately a place of despair. The Old Testament prophet must have felt this when he wrote, "All things are full of weariness. A man cannot utter it."[1]

OBJECT CONSCIOUSNESS AND SPACE CONSCIOUSNESS

Most people's lives are cluttered up with things: material things, things to do, things to think about. Their lives are like the history of humanity, which Winston Churchill defined as "one damn thing after another." Their minds are filled up with the clutter of thoughts, one thought after another. This is the dimension of object consciousness that is many people's predominant reality, and that is why their lives are so out of balance. Object consciousness needs to be balanced by space consciousness for sanity to return to our planet and for humanity to fulfill its destiny. The arising of space consciousness is the next stage in the evolution of humanity.

Space consciousness means that in addition to being conscious of things—which always comes down to sense perceptions, thoughts, and emotions—there is an undercurrent of awareness. Awareness implies that you are not only conscious of things (objects), but you are also conscious of being conscious. If you can sense an alert inner stillness in the background while things happen in the foreground—that's it! This dimension is there in everyone, but most people are completely unaware of it. Sometimes I point to it by saying, "Can you feel your own Presence?"

Space consciousness represents not only freedom from ego, but also from dependency on the things of this world, from materialism and materiality. It is the spiritual dimension which alone can give transcendent and true meaning to this world.

Whenever you are upset about an event, a person, or a situation, the real cause is not the event, person, or situation but a loss of true perspective that only space can provide. You are trapped in object consciousness, unaware of the timeless inner space of consciousness itself. The words *This, too, will pass* when used as a pointer can restore awareness of that dimension to you.

Another pointer to the truth in you is contained in the following statement: "I am never upset for the reason I think."[2]

FALLING BELOW AND RISING ABOVE THOUGHT

When you are very tired, you may become more peaceful, more relaxed, than in your usual state. This is because thinking is subsiding, and so you can't remember your mind-made problematic self anymore. You are moving toward sleep. When you drink alcohol or take certain drugs (provided they don't trigger your pain-body), you may also feel more relaxed, more carefree, and perhaps more alive for a while. You may start singing and dancing, which since ancient times are expressions of the joy of life. Because you are less burdened by your mind, you can glimpse the joy of Being. Perhaps this is the reason alcohol is also called "spirit." But there is a high price to pay: unconsciousness. Instead of rising above thought, you have fallen below it. A few more drinks, and you will have regressed to the vegetable realm.

Space consciousness has little to do with being "spaced out." Both states are beyond thought. This they have in common. The fundamental difference, however, is that in the former, you rise above thought; in the latter, you fall below it. One is the next step in the evolution of human consciousness, the

other a regression to a stage we left behind eons ago.

TELEVISION

Watching television is the favorite leisure activity or rather nonactivity for millions of people around the world. The average American, by the time he is sixty years old, will have spent fifteen years staring at the TV screen. In many other countries the figures are similar.

Many people find watching TV "relaxing." Observe yourself closely and you will find that the longer the screen remains the focus of your attention, the more your thought activity becomes suspended, and for long periods you are watching the talk show, game show, sitcom, or even commercials with almost no thought being generated by your mind. Not only do you not remember your problems anymore, but you become temporarily free of yourself—and what could be more relaxing than that?

So does TV watching create inner space? Does it cause you to be present? Unfortunately, it does not. Although for long periods your mind may not be generating any thoughts, it has linked into the thought activity of the television show. It has linked up with the TV version of the collective mind, and is thinking its thoughts. Your mind is inactive only in the sense that it is not producing thoughts. It is, however, continuously absorbing thoughts and images that come through the TV screen. This induces a trancelike passive state of heightened susceptibility, not unlike hypnosis. That is why it lends itself to manipulation of "public opinion," as politicians and special-interest groups as well as advertisers know and will pay millions of dollars to catch you in that state of receptive unawareness. They want their thoughts to become your thoughts, and usually they succeed.

So when watching television, the tendency is for you to fall below thought, not rise above it. Television has this in common with alcohol and certain other drugs. While it provides some relief from your mind, you again pay a high price: loss of consciousness. Like those drugs, it too has a strong addictive quality. You reach for the remote control to switch off and instead find yourself going through all the channels. Half an hour or an hour later, you are still watching, still going through the channels. The off button is the only one your finger seems unable to press. You are still watching, usually not because anything of interest has caught your attention, but precisely because there is nothing of interest to watch. Once you are hooked, the more trivial, the more meaningless, it is, the more addictive it becomes. If it were interesting, thought provoking, it would stimulate your mind into thinking for itself again, which is more conscious and therefore preferable to a TV-induced trance. Your attention would, therefore, no longer be totally held captive by the images on the screen.

The content of the program, if there is a certain quality to it, can to some extent counteract and sometimes even undo the hypnotic, mind-numbing effect of the medium of TV. There are some programs that have been extremely helpful to many people; have changed their lives for the better, opened their heart, made them more conscious. Even some comedy shows, although they may be about nothing in particular, can be unintentionally

spiritual by showing a caricature version of human folly and the ego. They teach us not to take anything too seriously, to approach life in a lighthearted way, and above all, they teach by making us laugh. Laughter is extraordinarily liberating as well as healing. Most of television, however, is as yet controlled by people who are totally controlled by the ego, and so the TV's hidden agenda becomes control of you by putting you to sleep, that is to say, making you unconscious. Yet there is enormous and still largely unexplored potential in the medium of television.

Avoid watching programs and commercials that assault you with a rapid succession of images that change every two or three seconds or less. Excessive TV watching and those programs in particular are largely responsible for attention deficit disorder, a mental dysfunction now affecting millions of children worldwide. A short attention span makes all your perceptions and relationships shallow and unsatisfying. Whatever you do, whatever action you perform in that state, lacks quality, because quality requires attention.

Frequent and prolonged TV watching not only makes you unconscious, it also induces passivity and drains you of energy. Therefore, rather than watching at random, choose the programs you want to see. Whenever you remember to do so, feel the aliveness inside your body as you watch. Alternatively, be aware of your breathing from time to time. Look away from the screen at regular intervals so that it does not completely take possession of your visual sense. Don't turn up the volume any higher than necessary so that the TV doesn't overwhelm you on the auditory level. Use the mute button during commercials. Make sure you don't go to sleep immediately after switching off the set or, even worse, fall asleep with the set still on.

RECOGNIZING INNER SPACE

Space between thoughts is probably already arising sporadically in your life, and you may not even know it. A consciousness mesmerized by experiences and conditioned to identify exclusively with form, that is to say, object consciousness, finds it at first almost impossible to become aware of space. This ultimately means that you cannot become aware of yourself, because you are always aware of something else. You are continuously distracted by form. Even when you seem to be aware of yourself, you have made yourself into an object, a thought form, and so what you are aware of is a thought, not yourself.

When you hear of inner space, you may start seeking it, and, because you are seeking it as if you were looking for an object or for an experience, you cannot find it. This is the dilemma of all those who are seeking spiritual realization or enlightenment. Hence, Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, 'Lo, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you."[3]

If you are not spending all of your waking life in discontent, worry, anxiety, depression, despair, or consumed by other negative states; if you are able to enjoy simple things like listening to the sound of the rain or the wind; if you can see the beauty of clouds moving across the sky or be alone at times without feeling lonely or needing the mental stimulus of entertainment; if you

find yourself treating a complete stranger with heartfelt kindness without wanting anything from him or her…it means that a space has opened up, no matter how briefly, in the otherwise incessant stream of thinking that is the human mind. When this happens, there is a sense of well-being, of alive peace, even though it may be subtle. The intensity will vary from a perhaps barely noticeable background sense of contentment to what the ancient sages of India called *ananda*—the bliss of Being. Because you have been conditioned to pay attention only to form, you are probably not aware of it except indirectly. For example, there is a common element in the ability to see beauty, to appreciate simple things, to enjoy your own company, or to relate to other people with loving kindness. This common element is a sense of contentment, peace, and aliveness that is the invisible background without which these experiences would not be possible.

Whenever there is beauty, kindness, the recognition of the goodness of simple things in your life, look for the background to that experience within yourself. But don't look for it as if you were looking for something. You cannot pin it down and say, "Now I have it," or grasp it mentally and define it in some way. It is like the cloudless sky. It has no form. It is space; it is stillness, the sweetness of Being and infinitely more than these words, which are only pointers. When you are able to sense it directly within yourself, it deepens. So when you appreciate something simple—a sound, a sight, a touch—when you see beauty, when you feel loving kindness toward another, sense the inner spaciousness that is the source and background to that experience.

Many poets and sages throughout the ages have observed that true happiness—I call it the joy of Being—is found in simple, seemingly unremarkable things. Most people, in their restless search for something significant to happen to them, continuously miss the insignificant, which may not be insignificant at all. The philosopher Nietzsche, in a rare moment of deep stillness, wrote, "For happiness, how little suffices for happiness!…the least thing precisely, the gentlest thing, the lightest thing, a lizard's rustling, a breath, a wisk, an eye glance—little maketh up the best happiness. Be still."[4]

Why is it the "least thing" that makes up "the best happiness"? Because true happiness is not *caused* by the thing or event, although this is how it first appears. The thing or event is so subtle, so unobtrusive, that it takes up only a small part of your consciousness—and the rest is inner space, consciousness itself unobstructed by form. Inner space consciousness and who you are in your essence are one and the same. In other words, the form of little things leaves room for inner space. And it is from inner space, the unconditioned consciousness itself, that true happiness, the joy of Being, emanates. To be aware of little, quiet things, however, you need to be quiet inside. A high degree of alertness is required. Be still. Look. Listen. Be present.

Here is another way of finding inner space: Become conscious of being conscious. Say or think "I Am" and add nothing to it. Be aware of the stillness that follows the I Am. Sense your presence, the naked, unveiled, unclothed beingness. It is untouched by young or old, rich or poor, good or bad, or any other attributes. It is the spacious womb of all creation, all form.

CAN YOU HEAR THE MOUNTAIN STREAM?

A Zen Master was walking in silence with one of his disciples along a mountain trail. When they came to an ancient cedar tree, they sat down under it for a simple meal of some rice and vegetables. After the meal, the disciple, a young monk who had not yet found the key to the mystery of Zen, broke the silence by asking the Master, "Master, how do I enter Zen?"

He was, of course, inquiring how to enter the state of consciousness which is Zen.

The Master remained silent. Almost five minutes passed while the disciple anxiously waited for an answer. He was about to ask another question when the Master suddenly spoke. "Do you hear the sound of that mountain stream?"

The disciple had not been aware of any mountain stream. He had been too busy thinking about the meaning of Zen. Now, as he began to listen for the sound, his noisy mind subsided. At first he heard nothing. Then, his thinking gave way to heightened alertness, and suddenly he did hear the hardly perceptible murmur of a small stream in the far distance.

"Yes, I can hear it now," he said.

The Master raised his finger and, with a look in his eyes that in some way was both fierce and gentle, said, "Enter Zen from there."

The disciple was stunned. It was his first satori—a flash of enlightenment. He knew what Zen was without knowing what it was that he knew!

They continued on their journey in silence. The disciple was amazed at the aliveness of the world around him. He experienced everything as if for the first time. Gradually, however, he started thinking again. The alert stillness became covered up again by mental noise, and before long he had another question. "Master," he said, "I have been thinking. What would you have said if I hadn't been able to hear the mountain stream?" The Master stopped, looked at him, raised his finger and said, "Enter Zen from there."

RIGHT ACTION

The ego asks, How can I make this situation fulfill my needs or how can I get to some other situation that *will* fulfill my needs?

Presence is a state of inner spaciousness. When you are present, you ask: How do I respond to the needs of this situation, of this moment? In fact, you don't even need to ask the question. You are still, alert, open to what *is*. You bring a new dimension into the situation: space. Then you look and you listen. Thus you become one with the situation. When instead of reacting against a situation, you merge with it, the solution arises out of the situation itself. Actually, it is not you, the person, who is looking and listening, but the alert stillness itself. Then, if action is possible or necessary, you take action or rather right action happens through you. Right action is action that is appropriate to the whole. When the action is accomplished, the alert, spacious stillness remains. There is nobody who raises his arms in a gesture of triumph shouting a defiant "Yeah!" There is no one who says, "Look, I did that."

All creativity comes out of inner spaciousness. Once the creation has happened and something has come into form, you have to be vigilant so that the notion of "me" or "mine" does not arise. If you take credit for what you

accomplished, the ego has returned, and the spaciousness has become obscured.

PERCEIVING WITHOUT NAMING

Most people are only peripherally aware of the world that surrounds them, especially if their surroundings are familiar. The voice in the head absorbs the greater part of their attention. Some people feel more alive when they travel and visit unfamiliar places or foreign countries because at those times sense perception—experiencing—takes up more of their consciousness than thinking. They become more present. Others remain completely possessed by the voice in the head even then. Their perceptions and experiences are distorted by instant judgments. They haven't really gone anywhere. Only their body is traveling, while they remain where they have always been: in their head.

This is most people's reality: As soon as something is perceived, it is named, interpreted, compared with something else, liked, disliked, or called good or bad by the phantom self, the ego. They are imprisoned in thought forms, in object consciousness.

You do not awaken spiritually until the compulsive and unconscious naming ceases, or at least you become aware of it and thus are able to observe it as it happens. It is through this constant naming that the ego remains in place as the unobserved mind. Whenever it ceases and even when you just become aware of it, there is inner space, and you are not possessed by the mind anymore.

Choose an object close to you—a pen, a chair, a cup, a plant—and explore it visually, that is to say, look at it with great interest, almost curiosity. Avoid any objects with strong personal associations that remind you of the past, such as where you bought it, who gave it to you, and so on. Also avoid anything that has writing on it such as a book or a bottle. It would stimulate thought. Without straining, relaxed but alert, give your complete attention to the object, every detail of it. If thoughts arise, don't get involved in them. It is not the thoughts you are interested in, but the act of perception itself. Can you take the thinking out of the perceiving? Can you look without the voice in your head commenting, drawing conclusions, comparing, or trying to figure something out? After a couple of minutes or so, let your gaze wander around the room or wherever you are, your alert attention lighting up each thing that it rests upon.

Then, listen to any sounds that may be present. Listen to them in the same way as you looked at the things around you. Some sounds may be natural—water, wind, birds—while others are man-made. Some may be pleasant, others unpleasant. However, don't differentiate between good and bad. Allow each sound to be as it is, without interpretation. Here too, relaxed but alert attention is the key.

When you look and listen in this way, you may become aware of a subtle and at first perhaps hardly noticeable sense of calm. Some people feel it as a stillness in the background. Others call it peace. When consciousness is no longer totally absorbed by thinking, some of it remains in its formless,

unconditioned, original state. This is inner space.

WHO IS THE EXPERIENCER?

What you see and hear, taste, touch, and smell are, of course, sense objects. They are what you experience. But who is the subject, the experiencer? If you now say, for example, "Well, of course, I, Jane Smith, senior accountant, forty-five years old, divorced, mother of two, American, am the subject, the experiencer," you are mistaken. Jane Smith and whatever else becomes identified with the mental concept of Jane Smith are all objects of experience, not the experiencing subject.

Every experience has three possible ingredients: sense perceptions, thoughts or mental images, and emotions. Jane Smith, senior accountant, forty-five years old, mother of two, divorced, American—these are all thoughts and therefore part of what you experience the moment you think these thoughts. They and whatever else you can say and think about yourself are objects, not the subject. They are experience, not the experiencer. You can add a thousand more definitions (thoughts) of who you are and by doing so will certainly increase the complexity of the experience of yourself (as well as your psychiatrist's income) but, in this way, you will not end up with the subject, the experiencer who is prior to all experience but without whom there would be no experience.

So who is the experiencer? You are. And who are you? Consciousness. And what is consciousness? This question cannot be answered. The moment you answer it, you have falsified it, made it into another object. Consciousness, the traditional word for which is *spirit,* cannot be known in the normal sense of the word, and seeking it is futile. All knowing is within the realm of duality —subject and object, the knower and the known. The subject, the I, the knower without which nothing could be known, perceived, thought, or felt, must remain forever unknowable. This is because the I has no form. Only forms can be known, and yet without the formless dimension, the world of form could not be. It is the luminous space in which the world arises and subsides. That space is the life that I Am. It is timeless. I Am timeless, eternal. What happens in that space is relative and temporary: pleasure and pain, gain and loss, birth and death.

The greatest impediment to the discovery of inner space, the greatest impediment to finding the experiencer, is to become so enthralled by the experience that you lose yourself in it. It means consciousness is lost in its own dream. You get taken in by every thought, every emotion, and every experience to such a degree that you are in fact in a dreamlike state. This has been the normal state of humanity for thousands of years.

Although you cannot know consciousness, you can become conscious of it as yourself. You can sense it directly in any situation, no matter where you are. You can sense it here and now as your very Presence, the inner space in which the words on this page are perceived and become thoughts. It is the underlying I Am. The words you are reading and thinking are the foreground, and the I Am is the substratum, the underlying background to every experience, thought, feeling.

Discover inner space by creating gaps in the stream of thinking. Without those gaps, your thinking becomes repetitive, uninspired, devoid of any creative spark, which is how it still is for most people on the planet. You don't need to be concerned with the duration of those gaps. A few seconds is good enough. Gradually, they will lengthen by themselves, without any effort on your part. More important than their length is to bring them in frequently so that your daily activities and your stream of thinking become interspersed with space.

Someone recently showed me the annual prospectus of a large spiritual organization. When I looked through it, I was impressed by the wide choice of interesting seminars and workshops. It reminded me of a smorgasbord, one of those Scandinavian buffets where you can take your pick from a huge variety of enticing dishes. The person asked me whether I could recommend one or two courses. "I don't know," I said. "They all look so interesting. But I do know this," I added. "Be aware of your breathing as often as you are able, whenever you remember. Do that for one year, and it will be more powerfully transformative than attending all of these courses. And it's free."

Being aware of your breathing takes attention away from thinking and creates space. It is one way of generating consciousness. Although the fullness of consciousness is already there as the unmanifested, we are here to bring consciousness into this dimension.

Be aware of your breathing. Notice the sensation of the breath. Feel the air moving in and out of your body. Notice how the chest and abdomen expand and contract slightly with the in- and outbreath. One conscious breath is enough to make some space where before there was the uninterrupted succession of one thought after another. One conscious breath (two or three would be even better), taken many times a day, is an excellent way of bringing space into your life. Even if you meditated on your breathing for two hours or more, which some people do, one breath is all you ever need to be aware of, indeed ever can be aware of. The rest is memory or anticipation, which is to say, thought. Breathing isn't really something that you do but something that you witness as it happens. Breathing happens by itself. The intelligence within the body is doing it. All you have to do is watch it happening. There is no strain or effort involved. Also, notice the brief cessation of the breath, particularly the still point at the end of the outbreath, before you start breathing in again.

Many people's breath is unnaturally shallow. The more you are aware of the breath, the more its natural depth will reestablish itself.

Because breath has no form as such, it has since ancient times been equated with spirit—the formless one Life. "God formed man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the man became a living creature."[5] The German word for breathing—*atmen*—is derived from the ancient Indian (Sanskrit) word *Atman*, meaning the indwelling divine spirit or God within.

The fact that breath has no form is one of the reasons why breath awareness is an extremely effective way of bringing space into your life, of generating consciousness. It is an excellent meditation object precisely because

it is not an object, has no shape or form. The other reason is that breath is one of the most subtle and seemingly insignificant phenomena, the "least thing" that according to Nietzsche makes up the "best happiness." Whether or not you practice breath awareness as an actual formal meditation is up to you. Formal meditation, however, is no substitute for bringing space consciousness into everyday life.

Being aware of your breath forces you into the present moment—the key to all inner transformation. Whenever you are conscious of the breath, you are absolutely present. You may also notice that you cannot think *and* be aware of your breathing. Conscious breathing stops your mind. But far from being in a trance or half asleep, you are fully awake and highly alert. You are not falling below thinking, but rising above it. And if you look more closely, you will find that those two things—coming fully into the present moment and ceasing thinking without loss of consciousness—are actually one and the same: the arising of space consciousness.

ADDICTIONS

A long-standing compulsive behavior pattern may be called an addiction, and an addiction lives inside you as a quasientity or subpersonality, an energy field that periodically takes you over completely. It even takes over your mind, the voice in your head, which then becomes the voice of the addiction. It may be saying, "You've had a rough day. You deserve a treat. Why deny yourself the only pleasure that is left in your life?" And so, if you are identified with the internal voice due to lack of awareness, you find yourself walking to the fridge and reaching for that rich chocolate cake. At other times, the addiction may bypass the thinking mind completely and you suddenly find yourself puffing on a cigarette or holding a drink. "How did that get into my hand?" Taking the cigarette out of the packet and lighting it, or pouring yourself a drink were actions performed in complete unconsciousness.

If you have a compulsive behavior pattern such as smoking, overeating, drinking, TV watching, Internet addiction, or whatever it may be, this is what you can do: When you notice the compulsive need arising in you, stop and take three conscious breaths. This generates awareness. Then for a few minutes be aware of the compulsive urge itself as an energy field inside you. Consciously feel that need to physically or mentally ingest or consume a certain substance or the desire to act out some form of compulsive behavior. Then take a few more conscious breaths. After that you may find that the compulsive urge has disappeared—for the time being. Or you may find that it still overpowers you, and you cannot help but indulge or act it out again. Don't make it into a problem. Make the addiction part of your awareness practice in the way described above. As awareness grows, addictive patterns will weaken and eventually dissolve. Remember, however, to catch any thoughts that justify the addictive behavior, sometimes with clever arguments, as they arise in your mind. Ask yourself, Who is talking here? And you will realize the addiction is talking. As long as you know that, as long as you are present as the observer of your mind, it is less likely to trick you into doing what it wants.

INNER BODY AWARENESS

Another simple but highly effective way of finding space in your life is closely linked to the breath. You will find that by feeling the subtle flow of air in and out of the body as well as the rise and fall of your chest and abdomen, you are also becoming aware of the inner body. Your attention may then shift from the breath to that felt aliveness within you, diffused throughout the body.

Most people are so distracted by their thoughts, so identified with the voices in their heads, they can no longer feel the aliveness within them. To be unable to feel the life that animates the physical body, the very life that you are, is the greatest deprivation that can happen to you. You then begin to look not only for substitutes for that natural state of well-being within, but also for something to cover up the continuous unease that you feel when you are not in touch with the aliveness that is always there but usually overlooked. Some of the substitutes people seek out are drug-induced highs, sensory overstimulation such as excessively loud music, thrills or dangerous activities, or an obsession with sex. Even drama in relationships is used as a substitute for that genuine sense of aliveness. The most sought-after cover-up for the continuous background unease are intimate relationships: a man or a woman who is going to "make me happy." It is, of course, also one of the most frequently experienced of all the "letdowns." And when the unease surfaces again, people will usually blame their partner for it.

Take two or three conscious breaths. Now see if you can detect a subtle sense of aliveness that pervades your entire inner body. Can you feel your body from within, so to speak? Sense briefly specific parts of your body. Feel your hands, then your arms, feet, and legs. Can you feel your abdomen, chest, neck, and head? What about your lips? Is there life in them? Then become aware again of the inner body as a whole. You may want to close your eyes initially for this practice, and once you can feel your body, open your eyes, look around, and continue to feel your body at the same time. Some readers may find there is no need to close their eyes; they can in fact feel their inner body as they read this.

INNER AND OUTER SPACE

Your inner body is not solid but spacious. It is not your physical form but the life that animates the physical form. It is the intelligence that created and sustains the body, simultaneously coordinating hundreds of different functions of such extraordinary complexity that the human mind can only understand a tiny fraction of it. When you become aware of it, what is really happening is that the intelligence is becoming aware of itself. It is the elusive "life" that no scientist has ever found because the consciousness that is looking for it *is it*.

Physicists have discovered that the apparent solidity of matter is an illusion created by our senses. This includes the physical body, which we perceive and think of as form, but 99.99 % of which is actually empty space. This is how vast the space is between the atoms compared to their size, and there is as much space again within each atom. The physical body is no more

than a misperception of who you are. In many ways, it is a microcosmic version of outer space. To give you an idea of how vast the space is between celestial bodies, consider this: Light traveling at a constant speed of 186,000 miles (300,000 kilometers) per second takes just over one second to travel between the earth and the moon; light from the sun takes about eight minutes to reach the earth. Light from our nearest neighbor in space, a star called Proxima Centauri, which is the sun that is closest to our own sun, travels for 4.5 years before it reaches the earth. This is how vast the space is that surrounds us. And then there is the intergalactic space, whose vastness defies all comprehension. Light from the galaxy closest to our own, the Andromeda Galaxy, takes 2.4 million years to reach us. Isn't it amazing that your body is just as spacious as the universe?

So your physical body, which is form, reveals itself as essentially formless when you go deeper into it. It becomes a doorway into inner space. Although inner space has no form, it is intensely alive. That "empty space" is life in its fullness, the unmanifested Source out of which all manifestation flows. The traditional word for that Source is God.

Thoughts and words belong to the world of form; they cannot express the formless. So when you say, "I can feel my inner body" that is a misperception created by thought. What is really happening is that the consciousness that appears as the body—the consciousness that I Am—is becoming conscious of itself. When I no longer confuse who I am with a temporary form of "me," then the dimension of the limitless and the eternal—God—can express itself through "me" and guide "me." It also frees me from dependency on form. However, a purely intellectual recognition or belief that "I am not this form" does not help. The all-important question is: At this moment, can I sense the presence of inner space, which really means, can I sense my own Presence, or rather, the Presence that I Am?

Or we can approach this truth using a different pointer. Ask yourself, "Am I aware not only of what is happening at this moment, but also of the Now itself as the living timeless inner space in which everything happens?" Although this question seems to have nothing to do with the inner body, you may be surprised that by becoming aware of the space of Now, you suddenly feel more alive inside. You are feeling the aliveness of the inner body—the aliveness that is an intrinsic part of the joy of Being. We have to enter the body to go beyond it and find out that we are not that.

As much as possible in everyday life, use awareness of the inner body to create space. When waiting, when listening to someone, when pausing to look at the sky, a tree, a flower, your partner, or child, feel the aliveness within at the same time. This means part of your attention or consciousness remains formless, and the rest is available for the outer world of form. Whenever you "inhabit" your body in this way, it serves as an anchor for staying present in the Now. It prevents you from losing yourself in thinking, in emotions, or in external situations.

When you think, feel, perceive, and experience, consciousness is born into form. It is reincarnating—into a thought, a feeling, a sense perception, an experience. The cycle of rebirths that Buddhists hope to get out of eventually is happening continuously, and it is only at this moment—through the power of

Now—that you can get out of it. Through complete acceptance of the form of the Now, you become internally aligned with space, which is the essence of Now. Through acceptance, you become spacious inside. Aligned with space instead of form: That brings true perspective and balance into your life.

NOTICING THE GAPS

Throughout the day, there is a continuously changing succession of things that you see and hear. In the first moment of seeing something or hearing a sound —and more so if it is unfamiliar—before the mind names or interprets what you see or hear, there is usually a gap of alert attention in which the perception occurs. That is the inner space. Its duration differs from person to person. It is easy to miss because in many people those spaces are extremely short, perhaps only a second or less.

This is what happens: A new sight or sound arises, and in the first moment of perception, there is a brief cessation in the habitual stream of thinking. Consciousness is diverted away from thought because it is required for sense perception. A very unusual sight or sound may leave you "speechless"—even inside, that is to say, bring about a longer gap.

The frequency and duration of those spaces determine your ability to enjoy life, to feel an inner connectedness with other human beings as well as nature. It also determines the degree to which you are free of ego because ego implies complete unawareness of the dimension of space.

When you become conscious of these brief spaces as they happen naturally, they will lengthen, and as they do, you will experience with increasing frequency the joy of perceiving with little or no interference of thinking. The world around you then feels fresh, new, and alive. The more you perceive life through a mental screen of abstraction and conceptualization, the more lifeless and flat the world around you becomes.

LOSE YOURSELF TO FIND YOURSELF

Inner space also arises whenever you let go of the need to emphasize your form-identity. That need is of the ego. It is not a true need. We have already touched briefly upon this. Whenever you relinquish one of these behavior patterns, inner space emerges. You become more truly yourself. To the ego it will seem as if you were losing yourself, but the opposite is the case. Jesus already taught that you need to lose yourself to find yourself. Whenever you let go of one of these patterns, you de-emphasize who you are on the level of form and who you are beyond form emerges more fully. You become less, so you can be more.

Here are some ways in which people unconsciously try to emphasize their form-identity. If you are alert enough, you may be able to detect some of these unconscious patterns within yourself: demanding recognition for something you did and getting angry or upset if you don't get it; trying to get attention by talking about your problems, the story of your illnesses, or making a scene; giving your opinion when nobody has asked for it and it makes no difference to the situation; being more concerned with how the other person sees you

than with the other person, which is to say, using other people for egoic reflection or as ego enhancers; trying to make an impression on others through possessions, knowledge, good looks, status, physical strength, and so on; bringing about temporary ego inflation through angry reaction against something or someone; taking things personally, feeling offended; making yourself right and others wrong through futile mental or verbal complaining; wanting to be seen, or to appear important.

Once you have detected such a pattern within yourself, I suggest that you conduct an experiment. Find out what it feels like and what happens if you let go of that pattern. Just drop it and see what happens.

De-emphasizing who you are on the level of form is another way of generating consciousness. Discover the enormous power that flows through you into the world when you stop emphasizing your form-identity.

STILLNESS

It has been said: "Stillness is the language God speaks, and everything else is a bad translation." Stillness is really another word for space. Becoming conscious of stillness whenever we encounter it in our lives will connect us with the formless and timeless dimension within ourselves, that which is beyond thought, beyond ego. It may be the stillness that pervades the world of nature, or the stillness in your room in the early hours of the morning, or the silent gaps in between sounds. Stillness has no form—that is why through thinking we cannot become aware of it. Thought is form. Being aware of stillness means to be still. To be still is to be conscious without thought. You are never more essentially, more deeply, yourself than when you are still. When you are still, you are who you were before you temporarily assumed this physical and mental form called a person. You are also who you will be when the form dissolves. When you are still, you are who you are beyond your temporal existence: consciousness—unconditioned, formless, eternal.

CHAPTER NINE

Your Inner Purpose

As soon as you rise above mere survival, the question of meaning and purpose becomes of paramount importance in your life. Many people feel caught up in the routines of daily living that seem to deprive their life of significance. Some believe life is passing them by or has passed them by already. Others feel severely restricted by the demands of their job and supporting a family or by their financial or living situation. Some are consumed by acute stress, others by acute boredom. Some are lost in frantic doing; others are lost in stagnation. Many people long for the freedom and expansion that prosperity promises. Others already enjoy the relative freedom that comes with prosperity and discover that even that is not enough to endow their lives with meaning. There is no substitute for finding true purpose. But the true or primary purpose of your life cannot be found on the outer level. It does not concern what you do but what you are—that is to say, your state of consciousness.

So the most important thing to realize is this: Your life has an inner purpose and an outer purpose. Inner purpose concerns Being and is primary. Outer purpose concerns doing and is secondary. While this book speaks mainly of your inner purpose, this chapter and the next will also address the question of how to align outer purpose and inner purpose in your life. Inner and outer, however, are so intertwined that it is almost impossible to speak of one without referring to the other.

Your inner purpose is to awaken. It is as simple as that. You share that purpose with every other person on the planet—because it is the purpose of humanity. Your inner purpose is an essential part of the purpose of the whole, the universe and its emerging intelligence. Your outer purpose can change over time. It varies greatly from person to person. Finding and living in alignment with the inner purpose is the foundation for fulfilling your outer purpose. It is the basis for true success. Without that alignment, you can still achieve certain things through effort, struggle, determination, and sheer hard work or cunning. But there is no joy in such endeavor, and it invariably ends in some form of suffering.

AWAKENING

Awakening is a shift in consciousness in which thinking and awareness

separate. For most people it is not an event but a process they undergo. Even those rare beings who experience a sudden, dramatic, and seemingly irreversible awakening will still go through a process in which the new state of consciousness gradually flows into and transforms everything they do and so becomes integrated into their lives.

Instead of being lost in your thinking, when you are awake you recognize yourself as the awareness behind it. Thinking then ceases to be a self-serving autonomous activity that takes possession of you and runs your life. Awareness takes over from thinking. Instead of being in charge of your life, thinking becomes the servant of awareness. Awareness is conscious connection with universal intelligence. Another word for it is Presence: consciousness without thought.

The initiation of the awakening process is an act of grace. You cannot make it happen nor can you prepare yourself for it or accumulate credits toward it. There isn't a tidy sequence of logical steps that leads toward it, although the mind would love that. You don't have to become worthy first. It may come to the sinner before it comes to the saint, but not necessarily. That's why Jesus associated with all kinds of people, not just the respectable ones. There is nothing you can do about awakening. Whatever you do will be the ego trying to add awakening or enlightenment to itself as its most prized possession and thereby making itself more important and bigger. Instead of awakening, you add the *concept* of awakening to your mind, or the mental image of what an awakened or enlightened person is like, and then try to live up to that image. Living up to an image that you have of yourself or that other people have of you is inauthentic living—another unconscious role the ego plays.

So if there is nothing you can do about awakening, if it has either already happened or not yet happened, how can it be the primary purpose of your life? Does not purpose imply that you can do something about it?

Only the first awakening, the first glimpse of consciousness without thought, happens by grace, without any doing on your part. If you find this book incomprehensible or meaningless, it has not yet happened to you. If something within you responds to it, however, if you somehow recognize the truth in it, it means the process of awakening has begun. Once it has done so, it cannot be reversed, although it can be delayed by the ego. For some people, the reading of this book will initiate the awakening process. For others, the function of this book is to help them recognize that they have already begun to awaken and to intensify and accelerate the process. Another function of this book is to help people recognize the ego within them whenever it tries to regain control and obscure the arising awareness. For some, the awakening happens as they suddenly become aware of the kinds of thoughts they habitually think, especially persistent negative thoughts that they may have been identified with all of their lives. Suddenly there is an awareness that is aware of thought but is not part of it.

What is the relationship between awareness and thinking? Awareness is the space in which thoughts exist when that space has become conscious of itself.

Once you have had a glimpse of awareness or Presence, you know it

firsthand. It is no longer just a concept in your mind. You can then make a conscious choice to be present rather than to indulge in useless thinking. You can invite Presence into your life, that is to say, make space. With the grace of awakening comes responsibility. You can either try to go on as if nothing has happened, or you can see its significance and recognize the arising of awareness as the most important thing that *can* happen to you. Opening yourself to the emerging consciousness and bringing its light into this world then becomes the primary purpose of your life.

"I want to know the mind of God," Einstein said. "The rest are details." What is the mind of God? Consciousness. What does it mean to know the mind of God? To be aware. What are the details? Your outer purpose, and whatever happens outwardly.

So while you are perhaps still waiting for something significant to happen in your life, you may not realize that the most significant thing that can happen to a human being has already happened within you: the beginning of the separation process of thinking and awareness.

Many people who are going through the early stages of the awakening process are no longer certain what their outer purpose is. What drives the world no longer drives them. Seeing the madness of our civilization so clearly, they may feel somewhat alienated from the culture around them. Some feel that they inhabit a no-man's-land between two worlds. They are no longer run by the ego, yet the arising awareness has not yet become fully integrated into their lives. Inner and outer purpose have not merged.

A DIALOGUE ON INNER PURPOSE

The following dialogue condenses numerous conversations I have had with people who were looking for their true life purpose. Something is true when it resonates with and expresses your innermost Being, when it is in alignment with your inner purpose. This is why I am directing their attention to their inner and primary purpose first.

I don't know exactly what it is, but I want some change in my life. I want expansion; I want to be doing something meaningful and, yes, I want prosperity and the freedom that comes with it. I want to do something significant, something that makes a difference in the world. But if you asked me what exactly I want, I would have to say that I don't know. Can you help me find my life purpose?

Your purpose is to sit here and talk to me, because that's where you are and that's what you are doing. Until you get up and do something else. Then, that becomes your purpose.

So my purpose is to sit in my office for the next thirty years until I retire or get laid off?

You are not in your office now, so that's not your purpose. When you do sit in your office and do whatever you do, then that is your purpose. Not for the next thirty years, but for now.

I think there is some misunderstanding here. For you, purpose means what you are doing now; for me it means having an overall aim in life, something big and

significant that gives meaning to what I do, something that makes a difference. Shuffling papers in the office is not it. I know that.

As long as you are unaware of Being, you will seek meaning only within the dimension of doing and of future, that is to say, the dimension of time. And whatever meaning or fulfillment you find will dissolve or turn out to have been a deception. Invariably, it will be destroyed by time. Any meaning we find on that level is true only relatively and temporarily.

For example, if caring for your children gives meaning to your life, what happens to that meaning when they don't need you and perhaps don't even listen to you anymore? If helping others gives meaning to your life, you depend on others being worse off than yourself so that your life can continue to be meaningful and you can feel good about yourself. If the desire to excel, win, or succeed at this or that activity provides you with meaning, what if you never win or your winning streak comes to an end one day, as it will? You would then have to look to your imagination or memories—a very unsatisfactory place to bring some meager meaning into your life. "Making it" in whatever field is only meaningful as long as there are thousands or millions of others who don't make it, so you need other human beings to "fail" so that your life can have meaning.

I am not saying here that helping others, caring for your children, or striving for excellence in whatever field are not worthwhile things to do. For many people, they are an important part of their outer purpose, but outer purpose alone is always relative, unstable, and impermanent. This does not mean that you should not be engaged in those activities. It means you should connect them to your inner, primary purpose, so that a deeper meaning flows into what you do.

Without living in alignment with your primary purpose, whatever purpose you come up with, even if it is to create heaven on earth, will be of the ego or become destroyed by time. Sooner or later, it will lead to suffering. If you ignore your inner purpose, no matter what you do, even if it looks spiritual, the ego will creep into *how* you do it, and so the means will corrupt the end. The common saying "The road to hell is paved with good intentions" points to this truth. In other words, not your aims or your actions are primary, but the state of consciousness out of which they come. Fulfilling your primary purpose is laying the foundation for a new reality, a new earth. Once that foundation is there, your external purpose becomes charged with spiritual power because your aims and intentions will be one with the evolutionary impulse of the universe.

The separation of thinking and awareness, which lies at the core of your primary purpose, happens through the negation of time. We are not speaking here, of course, of the use of time for practical purposes, such as making an appointment or planning a trip. We are not speaking of clock time, but of psychological time, which is the mind's deep-seated habit of seeking the fullness of life in the future where it cannot be found and ignoring the only point of access to it: the present moment.

When you look upon what you do or where you are as the main purpose of your life, you negate time. This is enormously empowering. The negation of time in what you do also provides the link between your inner and outer

purposes, between Being and doing. When you negate time, you negate the ego. Whatever you do, you will be doing extraordinarily well, because the doing itself becomes the focal point of your attention. Your doing then becomes a channel through which consciousness enters this world. This means there is quality in what you do, even in the most simple action, like turning the pages in the phone book or walking across the room. The main purpose for turning the pages is to turn the pages; the secondary purpose is to find a phone number. The main purpose for walking across the room is to walk across the room; the secondary purpose is to pick up a book at the other end, and the moment you pick up the book, that becomes your main purpose.

You may remember the paradox of time we mentioned earlier: Whatever you do takes time, and yet it is always now. So while your inner purpose is to negate time, your outer purpose necessarily involves future and so could not exist without time. But it is always secondary. Whenever you become anxious or stressed, outer purpose has taken over, and you lost sight of your inner purpose. You have forgotten that your state of consciousness is primary, all else secondary.

Would living like this not stop me from looking to achieve something great? My fear is that I will remain stuck with doing little things for the rest of my life, things that are of no consequence. I'm afraid of never rising above mediocrity, never daring to achieve anything great, not fulfilling my potential.

The great arises out of small things that are honored and cared for. Everybody's life really consists of small things. Greatness is a mental abstraction and a favorite fantasy of the ego. The paradox is that the foundation for greatness is honoring the small things of the present moment instead of pursuing the idea of greatness. The present moment is always small in the sense that it is always simple, but concealed within it lies the greatest power. Like the atom, it is one of the smallest things yet contains enormous power. Only when you align yourself with the present moment do you have access to that power. Or it may be more true to say that *it* then has access to you and through you to this world. Jesus was referring to this power when he said, "It is not I but the Father within me who does the works." And "I can of my own self do nothing."[1] Anxiety, stress, and negativity cut you off from that power. The illusion that you are separate from the power that runs the universe returns. You feel yourself to be alone again, struggling against something or trying to achieve this or that. But why did anxiety, stress, or negativity arise? Because you turned away from the present moment. And why did you do that? You thought something else was more important. You forgot your main purpose. One small error, one misperception, creates a world of suffering.

Through the present moment, you have access to the power of life itself, that which has traditionally been called "God." As soon as you turn away from it, God ceases to be a reality in your life, and all you are left with is the mental *concept* of God, which some people believe in and others deny. Even belief in God is only a poor substitute for the living reality of God manifesting every moment of your life.

Would complete harmony with the present moment not imply the cessation of all movement? Doesn't the existence of any goal imply that there is a temporary

disruption in that harmony with the present moment and perhaps a reestablishment of harmony at a higher or more complex level once the goal has been attained? I imagine that the sapling that pushes its way through the soil can't be in total harmony with the present moment either because it has a goal: It wants to become a big tree. Maybe once it has reached maturity it will live in harmony with the present moment.

The sapling doesn't want anything because it is at one with the totality, and the totality acts through it. "Look at the lilies of the field, how they grow" said Jesus, "they toil not, neither do they spin. Yet even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these."[2] We could say that the totality—Life—*wants* the sapling to become a tree, but the sapling doesn't see itself as separate from life and so wants nothing for itself. It is one with what Life wants. That's why it isn't worried or stressed. And if it has to die prematurely, it dies with ease. It is as surrendered in death as it is in life. It senses, no matter how obscurely, its rootedness in Being, the formless and eternal one Life.

Like the Taoist sages of ancient China, Jesus likes to draw our attention to nature because he sees a power at work in it that humans have lost touch with. It is the creative power of the universe. Jesus goes on to say that if God clothes simple flowers in such beauty, how much more will God clothe you. That is to say, that while nature is a beautiful expression of the evolutionary impulse of the universe, when humans become aligned with the intelligence that underlies it, they will express that same impulse on a higher, more wondrous level.

So be true to life by being true to your inner purpose. As you become present and thereby total in what you do, your actions become charged with spiritual power. At first there may be no noticeable change in *what* you do—only the *how* changes. Your primary purpose is now to enable consciousness to flow into what you do. The secondary purpose is whatever you want to achieve through the doing. Whereas the notion of purpose before was always associated with future, there is now a deeper purpose that can only be found in the present, through the denial of time.

When you meet with people, at work or wherever it may be, give them your fullest attention. You are no longer there primarily as a person, but as a field of awareness, of alert Presence. The original reason for interacting with the other person—buying or selling something, requesting or giving information, and so on—now becomes secondary. The field of awareness that arises between you becomes the primary purpose for the interaction. That space of awareness becomes more important than what you may be talking about, more important than physical or thought objects. The human *Being* becomes more important than the things of this world. It does not mean you neglect whatever needs to be done on a practical level. In fact, the doing unfolds not only more easily, but more powerfully when the dimension of Being is acknowledged and so becomes primary. The arising of that unifying field of awareness between human beings is the most essential factor in relationships on the new earth.

Is the notion of success just an egoic illusion? How do we measure true success?

The world will tell you that success is achieving what you set out to do. It will tell you that success is winning, that finding recognition and/or prosperity are essential ingredients in any success. All or some of the above

are usually by-products of success, but they are not success. The conventional notion of success is concerned with the outcome of what you do. Some say that success is the result of a combination of hard work and luck, or determination and talent, or being in the right place at the right time. While any of these may be determinants of success, they are not its essence. What the world doesn't tell you—because it doesn't know—is that you cannot *become* successful. You can only *be* successful. Don't let a mad world tell you that success is anything other than a successful present moment. And what is that? There is a sense of quality in what you do, even the most simple action. Quality implies care and attention, which come with awareness. Quality requires your Presence.

Let's say that you are a businessperson and after two years of intense stress and strain you finally manage to come out with a product or service that sells well and makes money. Success? In conventional terms, yes. In reality, you spent two years polluting your body as well as the earth with negative energy, made yourself and those around you miserable, and affected many others you never even met. The unconscious assumption behind all such action is that success is a future event, and that the end justifies the means. But the end and the means are one. And if the means did not contribute to human happiness, neither will the end. The outcome, which is inseparable from the actions that led to it, is already contaminated by those actions and so will create further unhappiness. This is karmic action, which is the unconscious perpetuation of unhappiness.

As you already know, your secondary or outer purpose lies within the dimension of time, while your main purpose is inseparable from the Now and therefore requires the negation of time. How are they reconciled? By realizing that your entire life journey ultimately consists of the step you are taking at this moment. There is always only this one step, and so you give it your fullest attention. This doesn't mean you don't know where you are going; it just means this step is primary, the destination secondary. And what you encounter at your destination once you get there depends on the quality of this one step. Another way of putting it: What the future holds for you depends on your state of consciousness now.

When doing becomes infused with the timeless quality of Being, *that* is success. Unless Being flows into doing, unless you are present, you lose yourself in whatever you do. You also lose yourself in thinking, as well as in your reactions to what happens externally.

What exactly do you mean when you say, "You lose yourself"?

The essence of who you are is consciousness. When consciousness (you) becomes completely identified with thinking and thus forgets its essential nature, it loses itself in thought. When it becomes identified with mental-emotional formations such as wanting and fearing—the primary motivating forces of the ego—it loses itself in those formations. Consciousness also loses itself when it identifies with acting and reacting to what happens. Every thought, every desire or fear, every action or reaction, is then infused with a false sense of self that is incapable of sensing the simple joy of Being and so seeks pleasure, and sometimes even pain, as substitutes for it. This is living in forgetfulness of Being. In that state of forgetfulness of who you are, every

success is no more than a passing delusion. Whatever you achieve, soon you will be unhappy again, or some new problem or dilemma will draw your attention in completely.

How do I go from realizing what my inner purpose is to finding out what I am supposed to do on the outer level?

The outer purpose varies greatly from person to person, and no outer purpose lasts forever. It is subject to time and then replaced by some other purpose. The extent to which dedication to the inner purpose of awakening changes the external circumstances of your life also varies greatly. For some people, there is a sudden or gradual break with their past: their work, living situation, relationships—everything undergoes profound change. Some of the change may be initiated by themselves, not through an agonizing decision-making process but by a sudden realization or recognition: This is what I have to do. The decision arrives ready-made, so to speak. It comes through awareness, not through thinking. You wake up one morning and you know what to do. Some people find themselves walking out of an insane work environment or living situation. So before you discover what is right for you on the external level, before you discover what works, what is compatible with the awakening consciousness, you may have to find out what is not right, what no longer works, what is incompatible with your inner purpose.

Other kinds of change may suddenly come to you from without. A chance meeting brings new opportunity and expansion into your life. A long-standing obstacle or conflict dissolves. Your friends either go through this inner transformation with you or drift out of your life. Some relationships dissolve, others deepen. You may get laid off from your job, or you become an agent for positive change at your workplace. Your spouse leaves you, or you reach a new level of intimacy. Some changes may look negative on the surface but you will soon realize that space is being created in your life for something new to emerge.

There may be a period of insecurity and uncertainty. What should I do? As the ego is no longer running your life, the psychological need for external security, which is illusory anyway, lessens. You are able to live with uncertainty, even enjoy it. When you become comfortable with uncertainty, infinite possibilities open up in your life. It means fear is no longer a dominant factor in what you do and no longer prevents you from taking action to initiate change. The Roman philosopher Tacitus rightly observed that "the desire for safety stands against every great and noble enterprise." If uncertainty is unacceptable to you, it turns into fear. If it is perfectly acceptable, it turns into increased aliveness, alertness, and creativity.

Many years ago, as a result of a strong inner impulse, I walked out of an academic career that the world would have called "promising," stepping into complete uncertainty; and out of that, after several years, emerged my new incarnation as a spiritual teacher. Much later, something similar happened again. The impulse came to give up my home in England and move to the West Coast of North America. I obeyed that impulse, although I didn't know the reason for it. Out of that move into uncertainty came *The Power of Now*, most of which was written in California and British Columbia while I didn't have a home of my own. I had virtually no income and lived on my savings,

which were quickly running out. In fact, everything fell into place beautifully. I ran out of money just when I was getting close to finishing writing. I bought a lottery ticket and won $1,000, which kept me going for another month.

Not everybody, however, will have to go through drastic change in their external circumstances. At the other end of the spectrum you have people who stay exactly where they are and keep doing whatever they are doing. For them, only the *how* changes, not the *what*. This is not due to fear or inertia. What they are doing already is a perfect vehicle for consciousness to come into this world, and it needs no other. They too bring into manifestation the new earth.

Shouldn't this be the case for everybody? If fulfilling your inner purpose is being at one with the present moment, why should anybody feel the need to remove themselves from their current work or living situation?

Being at one with what *is* doesn't mean you no longer initiate change or become incapable of taking action. But the motivation to take action comes from a deeper level, not from egoic wanting or fearing. Inner alignment with the present moment opens your consciousness and brings it into alignment with the whole, of which the present moment is an integral part. The whole, the totality of life, then acts through you.

What do you mean by the whole?

On the one hand, the whole comprises all that exists. It is the world or the cosmos. But all things in existence, from microbes to human beings to galaxies, are not really separate things or entities, but form part of a web of interconnected multidimensional processes.

There are two reasons why we don't see this unity, why we see things as separate. One is perception, which reduces reality to what is accessible to us through the small range of our senses: what we can see, hear, smell, taste, and touch. But when we perceive without interpreting or mental labeling, which means without adding thought to our perceptions, we can actually still sense the deeper connectedness underneath our perception of seemingly separate things.

The other more serious reason for the illusion of separateness is compulsive thinking. It is when we are trapped in incessant streams of compulsive thinking that the universe really disintegrates for us, and we lose the ability to sense the interconnectedness of all that exists. Thinking cuts reality up into lifeless fragments. Extremely unintelligent and destructive action arises out of such a fragmented view of reality.

However, there is an even deeper level to the whole than the interconnectedness of everything in existence. At that deeper level, all things are one. It is the Source, the unmanifested one Life. It is the timeless intelligence that manifests as a universe unfolding in time.

The whole is made up of existence and Being, the manifested and the unmanifested, the world and God. So when you become aligned with the whole, you become a conscious part of the interconnectedness of the whole and its purpose: the emergence of consciousness into this world. As a result, spontaneous helpful occurrences, chance encounters, coincidences, and synchronistic events happen much more frequently. Carl Jung called synchronicity an "acausal connecting principle." This means there is no causal

connection between synchronistic events on our surface level of reality. It is an outer manifestation of an underlying intelligence behind the world of appearances and a deeper connectedness that our mind cannot understand. But we can be conscious participants in the unfolding of that intelligence, the flowering consciousness.

Nature exists in a state of unconscious oneness with the whole. This, for example, is why virtually no wild animals were killed in the tsunami disaster of 2004. Being more in touch with the totality than humans, they could sense the tsunami's approach long before it could be seen or heard and so had time to withdraw to higher terrain. Perhaps even that is looking at it from a human perspective. They probably just found themselves moving to higher terrain. Doing *this* because of *that* is the mind's way of cutting up reality; whereas nature lives in unconscious oneness with the whole. It is our purpose and destiny to bring a new dimension into this world by living in conscious oneness with the totality and conscious alignment with universal intelligence.

Can the whole use the human mind to create things or bring about situations that are in alignment with its purpose?

Yes, whenever there is inspiration, which translates as "in spirit," and enthusiasm, which means "in God," there is a creative empowerment that goes far beyond what a mere person is capable of.

CHAPTER TEN

A New Earth

Astronomers have discovered evidence to suggest that the universe came into existence fifteen billion years ago in a gigantic explosion and has been expanding ever since. Not only has it been expanding, but it is also growing in complexity and becoming more and more differentiated. Some scientists also postulate that this movement from unity to multiplicity will eventually become reversed. The universe will then stop expanding and begin to contract again and finally return to the unmanifested, the inconceivable nothingness out of which it came—and perhaps repeat the cycles of birth, expansion, contraction, and death again and again. For what purpose? "Why does the universe go to all the bother of existing?" asks physicist Stephen Hawking, realizing at the same time that no mathematical model could ever supply the answer.

If you look within rather than only without, however, you discover that you have an inner and an outer purpose, and since you are a microcosmic reflection of the macrocosm, it follows that the universe too has an inner and outer purpose inseparable from yours. The outer purpose of the universe is to create form and experience the interaction of forms—the play, the dream, the drama, or whatever you choose to call it. Its inner purpose is to awaken to its formless essence. Then comes the reconciliation of outer and inner purpose: to bring that essence—consciousness—into the world of form and thereby transform the world. The ultimate purpose of that transformation goes far beyond anything the human mind can imagine or comprehend. And yet, on this planet at this time, that transformation is the task allotted us. That is the reconciliation of outer and inner purpose, the reconciliation of the world and God.

Before we look at what relevance the expansion and contraction of the universe has to your own life, we need to bear in mind here that nothing we say about the nature of the universe should be taken as an absolute truth. Neither concepts nor mathematical formulae can explain the infinite. No thought can encapsulate the vastness of the totality. Reality is a unified whole, but thought cuts it up into fragments. This gives rise to fundamental misperceptions, for example, that there are separate things and events, or that *this* is the cause of *that*. Every thought implies a perspective, and every perspective, by its very nature, implies limitation, which ultimately means that

it is not true, at least not absolutely. Only the whole is true, but the whole cannot be spoken or thought. Seen from beyond the limitations of thinking and therefore incomprehensible to the human mind, everything is happening now. All that ever has been or will be is now, outside of time, which is a mental construct.

As an illustration of relative and absolute truth, consider the sunrise and sunset. When we say the sun rises in the morning and sets in the evening, that is true, but only relatively. In absolute terms, it is false. Only from the limited perspective of an observer on or near the planet's surface does the sun rise and set. If you were far out in space, you would see that the sun neither rises nor sets, but that it shines continuously. And yet, even after realizing that, we can continue to speak of the sunrise or sunset, still see its beauty, paint it, write poems about it, even though we now know that it is a relative rather than an absolute truth.

So let us continue to speak for a moment of another relative truth: the coming into form of the universe and its return to the formless, which implies the limited perspective of time, and see what relevance this has to your own life. The notion of "my own life" is, of course, another limited perspective created by thought, another relative truth. There is ultimately no such thing as "your" life, since you and life are not two, but one.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF YOUR LIFE

The coming into manifestation of the world as well as its return to the unmanifested—its expansion and contraction—are two universal movements that we could call the outgoing and the return home. Those two movements are reflected throughout the universe in many ways, such as in the incessant expansion and contraction of your heart, as well as in the inhalation and exhalation of your breath. They are also reflected in the cycles of sleep and wakefulness. Each night, without knowing it, you return to the unmanifested Source of all life when you enter the stage of deep, dreamless sleep, and then reemerge again in the morning, replenished.

Those two movements, the outgoing and the return, are also reflected in each person's life cycles. Out of nowhere, so to speak, "you" suddenly appear in this world. Birth is followed by expansion. There is not only physical growth, but also growth of knowledge, activities, possessions, experiences. Your sphere of influence expands and life becomes increasingly complex. This is a time when you are mainly concerned with finding or pursuing your outer purpose. Usually there is also a corresponding growth of the ego, which is identification with all the above things, and so your form identity becomes more and more defined. This is also the time when outer purpose—growth—tends to becomes usurped by the ego, which unlike nature does not know when to stop in its pursuit of expansion and has a voracious appetite for *more.*

And then, just when you thought you made it or that you belong here, the return movement begins. Perhaps people close to you begin to die, people who were a part of your world. Then your physical form weakens; your sphere of influence shrinks. Instead of becoming more, you now become less, and the ego reacts to this with increasing anxiety or depression. Your world is

beginning to contract, and you may find you are not in control anymore. Instead of acting upon life, life now acts upon you by slowly reducing your world. The consciousness that identified with form is now experiencing the sunset, the dissolution of form. And then one day, you too disappear. Your armchair is still there. But instead of you sitting in it, there is just an empty space. You went back to where you came from just a few years ago.

Each person's life—each life-form, in fact—represents a world, a unique way in which the universe experiences itself. And when your form dissolves, a world comes to an end—one of countless worlds.

AWAKENING AND THE RETURN MOVEMENT

The return movement in a person's life, the weakening or dissolution of form, whether through old age, illness, disability, loss, or some kind of personal tragedy, carries great potential for spiritual awakening—the dis-identification of consciousness from form. Since there is very little spiritual truth in our contemporary culture, not many people recognize this as an opportunity, and so when it happens to them or to someone close to them, they think there is something dreadfully wrong, something that should not be happening.

There is in our civilization a great deal of ignorance about the human condition, and the more spiritually ignorant you are, the more you suffer. For many people, particularly in the West, death is no more than an abstract concept, and so they have no idea what happens to the human form when it approaches dissolution. Most decrepit and old people are shut away in nursing homes. Dead bodies, which in some older cultures are on open display for all to see, are hidden away. Try to see a dead body, and you will find that it is virtually illegal, except if the deceased is a close family member. In funeral homes, they even apply makeup to the face. You are only allowed to see a sanitized version of death.

Since death is only an abstract concept to them, most people are totally unprepared for the dissolution of form that awaits them. When it approaches, there is shock, incomprehension, despair, and great fear. Nothing makes sense anymore, because all the meaning and purpose that life had for them was associated with accumulating, succeeding, building, protecting, and sense gratification. It was associated with the outward movement and identification with form, that is to say, ego. Most people cannot conceive of any meaning when their life, their world, is being demolished. And yet, potentially, there is even deeper meaning here than in the outward movement.

It is precisely through the onset of old age, through loss or personal tragedy, that the spiritual dimension would traditionally come into people's lives. This is to say, their inner purpose would emerge only as their outer purpose collapsed and the shell of the ego would begin to crack open. Such events represent the beginning of the return movement toward the dissolution of form. In most ancient cultures, there must have been an intuitive understanding of this process, which is why old people were respected and revered. They were the repositories of wisdom and provided the dimension of depth without which no civilization can survive for long. In our civilization, which is totally identified with the outer and ignorant of the inner dimension

of spirit, the word *old* has mainly negative connotations. It equals useless and so we regard it as almost an insult to refer to someone as old. To avoid the word, we use euphemisms such as elderly and senior. The First Nation's "grandmother" is a figure of great dignity. Today's "granny" is at best cute. Why is old considered useless? Because in old age, the emphasis shifts from doing to Being, and our civilization, which is lost in doing, knows nothing of Being. It asks: Being? What do you do with it?

In some people, the outward movement of growth and expansion gets severely disrupted by a seemingly premature onset of the return movement, the dissolving of form. In some cases, it is a temporary disruption; in others a permanent one. We believe that a young child should not have to face death, but the fact is that some children do have to face the death of one or both parents through illness or accident—or even the possibility of their own death. Some children are born with disabilities that severely restrict the natural expansion of their lives. Or some severe limitation comes into a person's life at a relatively young age.

The disruption of the outward movement at a time when it is "not meant to be happening" can also potentially bring forth an early spiritual awakening in a person. Ultimately, nothing happens that is not meant to happen, which is to say, nothing happens that is not part of the greater whole and its purpose. Thus, destruction or disruption of outer purpose can lead to finding your inner purpose and subsequently the arising of a deeper outer purpose that is aligned with the inner. Children who have suffered greatly often grow into young adults who are mature beyond their years.

What is lost on the level of form is gained on the level of essence. In the traditional figure of the "blind seer" or the "wounded healer" of ancient cultures and legend, some great loss or disability on the level of form has become an opening into spirit. When you have had a direct experience of the unstable nature of all forms, you will likely never overvalue form again and thus lose yourself by blindly pursuing it or attaching yourself to it.

The opportunity that the dissolution of form, and in particular, old age, represents is only just beginning to be recognized in our contemporary culture. In the majority of people, that opportunity is still tragically missed, because the ego identifies with the return movement just as it identified with the outward movement. This results in a hardening of the egoic shell, a contraction rather than an opening. The diminished ego then spends the rest of its days whining or complaining, trapped in fear or anger, self-pity, guilt, blame, or other negative mental-emotional states or avoidance strategies, such as attachment to memories and thinking and talking about the past.

When the ego is no longer identified with the return movement in a person's life, old age or approaching death becomes what it is meant to be: an opening into the realm of spirit. I have met old people who were living embodiments of this process. They had become radiant. Their weakening forms had become transparent to the light of consciousness.

On the new earth, old age will be universally recognized and highly valued as a time for the flowering of consciousness. For those who are still lost in the outer circumstances of their lives, it will be a time of a late homecoming, when they awaken to their inner purpose. For many others, it will represent

an intensification and a culmination of the awakening process.

AWAKENING AND THE OUTGOING MOVEMENT

The natural expansion of one's life that comes with the outward movement has traditionally been usurped by the ego and used for its own expansion. "Look what *I* can do. I bet *you* can't do that," says the small child to another as he discovers the increasing strength and abilities of his body. That is one of the ego's first attempts to enhance itself through identification with the outward movement and the concept of "more than you" and to strengthen itself by diminishing others. It is, of course, only the beginning of the ego's many misperceptions.

However, as your awareness increases and the ego is no longer running your life, you don't have to wait for your world to shrink or collapse through old age or personal tragedy in order for you to awaken to your inner purpose. As the new consciousness is beginning to emerge on the planet, an increasing number of people no longer need to be shaken to have an awakening. They embrace the awakening process voluntarily even while still engaged in the outward cycle of growth and expansion. When that cycle is no longer usurped by the ego, the spiritual dimension will come into this world through the outward movement—thought, speech, action, creation—as powerfully as through the return movement—stillness, Being, and dissolution of form.

Until now, human intelligence, which is no more than a minute aspect of universal intelligence, has been distorted and misused by the ego. I call that "intelligence in the service of madness." Splitting the atom requires great intelligence. Using that intelligence for building and stockpiling atom bombs is insane or at best extremely unintelligent. Stupidity is relatively harmless, but intelligent stupidity is highly dangerous. This intelligent stupidity, for which one could find countless obvious examples, is threatening our survival as a species.

Without the impairment of egoic dysfunction, our intelligence comes into full alignment with the outgoing cycle of universal intelligence and its impulse to create. We become conscious participants in the creation of form. It is not we who create, but universal intelligence that creates through us. We don't identify with what we create and so don't lose ourselves in what we do. We are learning that the act of creation may involve energy of the highest intensity, but that is not "hard work" or stressful. We need to understand the difference between stress and intensity, as we shall see. Struggle or stress is a sign that the ego has returned, as are negative reactions when we encounter obstacles.

The force behind the ego's wanting creates "enemies," that is to say, reaction in the form of an opposing force equal in intensity. The stronger the ego, the stronger the sense of separateness between people. The only actions that do not cause opposing reactions are those that are aimed at the good of all. They are inclusive, not exclusive. They join; they don't separate. They are not for "my" country but for all of humanity, not for "my" religion but the emergence of consciousness in all human beings, not for "my" species but for all sentient beings and all of nature.

We are also learning that action, although necessary, is only a secondary factor in manifesting our external reality. The primary factor in creation is consciousness. No matter how active we are, how much effort we make, our state of consciousness creates our world, and if there is no change on that inner level, no amount of action will make any difference. We would only re-create modified versions of the same world again and again, a world that is an external reflection of the ego.

CONSCIOUSNESS

Consciousness is already conscious. It is the unmanifested, the eternal. The universe, however, is only gradually becoming conscious. Consciousness itself is timeless and therefore does not evolve. It was never born and does not die. When consciousness becomes the manifested universe, it appears to be subject to time and to undergo an evolutionary process. No human mind is capable of comprehending fully the reason for this process. But we can glimpse it within ourselves and become a conscious participant in it.

Consciousness is the intelligence, the organizing principle behind the arising of form. Consciousness has been preparing forms for millions of years so that it can express itself through them in the manifested.

Although the unmanifested realm of pure consciousness could be considered another dimension, it is not separate from this dimension of form. Form and formlessness interpenetrate. The unmanifested flows into this dimension as awareness, inner space, Presence. How does it do that? Through the human form that becomes conscious and thus fulfills its destiny. The human form was created for this higher purpose, and millions of other forms prepared the ground for it.

Consciousness incarnates into the manifested dimension, that is to say, it becomes form. When it does so, it enters a dreamlike state. Intelligence remains, but consciousness becomes unconscious of itself. It loses itself in form, becomes identified with forms. This could be described as the descent of the divine into matter. At that stage in the evolution of the universe, the entire outgoing movement takes place in that dreamlike state. Glimpses of awakening come only at the moment of the dissolution of an individual form, that is to say, death. And then begins the next incarnation, the next identification with form, the next individual dream that is part of the collective dream. When the lion tears apart the body of the zebra, the consciousness that incarnated into the zebra-form detaches itself from the dissolving form and for a brief moment awakens to its essential immortal nature as consciousness; and then immediately falls back into sleep and reincarnates into another form. When the lion becomes old and cannot hunt anymore, as it draws its last breath, there is again the briefest of glimpses of an awakening, followed by another dream of form.

On our planet, the human ego represents the final stage of universal sleep, the identification of consciousness with form. It was a necessary stage in the evolution of consciousness.

The human brain is a highly differentiated form through which consciousness enters this dimension. It contains approximately one hundred

billion nerve cells (called neurons), about the same number as there are stars in our galaxy, which could be seen as a macrocosmic brain. The brain does not create consciousness, but consciousness created the brain, the most complex physical form on earth, for its expression. When the brain gets damaged, it does not mean you lose consciousness. It means consciousness can no longer use that form to enter this dimension. You cannot lose consciousness because it is, in essence, who you are. You can only lose something that you have, but you cannot lose something that you are.

AWAKENED DOING

Awakened doing is the outer aspect of the next stage in the evolution of consciousness on our planet. The closer we get to the end of our present evolutionary stage, the more dysfunctional the ego becomes, in the same way that a caterpillar becomes dysfunctional just before it transforms into a butterfly. But the new consciousness is arising even as the old dissolves.

We are in the midst of a momentous event in the evolution of human consciousness, but they won't be talking about it in the news tonight. On our planet, and perhaps simultaneously in many parts of our galaxy and beyond, consciousness is awakening from the dream of form. This does not mean all forms (the world) are going to dissolve, although quite a few almost certainly will. It means consciousness can now begin to create form without losing itself in it. It can remain conscious of itself, even while it creates and experiences form. Why should it continue to create and experience form? For the enjoyment of it. How does consciousness do that? Through awakened humans who have learned the meaning of *awakened doing*.

Awakened doing is the alignment of your outer purpose—what you do—with your inner purpose—awakening and staying awake. Through awakened doing, you become one with the outgoing purpose of the universe. Consciousness flows through you into this world. It flows into your thoughts and inspires them. It flows into what you do and guides and empowers it.

Not *what* you do, but *how* you do what you do determines whether you are fulfilling your destiny. And how you do what you do is determined by your state of consciousness.

A reversal of your priorities comes about when the main purpose for doing what you do becomes the doing itself, or rather, the current of consciousness that flows into what you do. That current of consciousness is what determines quality. Another way of putting it: In any situation and in whatever you do, your state of consciousness is the primary factor; the situation and what you do is secondary. "Future" success is dependent upon and inseparable from the consciousness out of which the actions emanate. That can be either the reactive force of the ego or the alert attention of awakened consciousness. All truly successful action comes out of that field of alert attention, rather than from ego and conditioned, unconscious thinking.

THE THREE MODALITIES OF AWAKENED DOING

There are three ways in which consciousness can flow into what you do and

thus through you into this world, three modalities in which you can align your life with the creative power of the universe. Modality means the underlying energy-frequency that flows into what you do and connects your actions with the awakened consciousness that is emerging into this world. What you do will be dysfunctional and of the ego unless it arises out of one of these three modalities. They may change during the course of a day, although one of them may be dominant during a certain stage in your life. Each modality is appropriate to certain situations.

The modalities of awakened doing are acceptance, enjoyment, and enthusiasm. Each one represents a certain vibrational frequency of consciousness. You need to be vigilant to make sure that one of them operates whenever you are engaged in doing anything at all—from the most simple task to the most complex. If you are not in the state of either acceptance, enjoyment, or enthusiasm, look closely and you will find that you are creating suffering for yourself and others.

ACCEPTANCE

Whatever you cannot enjoy doing, you can at least accept that this is what you have to do. Acceptance means: For now, this is what this situation, this moment, requires me to do, and so I do it willingly. We already spoke at length about the importance of inner acceptance of what *happens*, and acceptance of what you have to *do* is just another aspect of it. For example, you probably won't be able to enjoy changing the flat tire on your car at night in the middle of nowhere and in pouring rain, let alone be enthusiastic about it, but you can bring acceptance to it. Performing an action in the state of acceptance means you are at peace while you do it. That peace is a subtle energy vibration which then flows into what you do. On the surface, acceptance looks like a passive state, but in reality it is active and creative because it brings something entirely new into this world. That peace, that subtle energy vibration, is consciousness, and one of the ways in which it enters this world is through surrendered action, one aspect of which is acceptance.

If you can neither enjoy or bring acceptance to what you do—stop. Otherwise, you are not taking responsibility for the only thing you can really take responsibility for, which also happens to be one thing that really matters: your state of consciousness. And if you are not taking responsibility for your state of consciousness, you are not taking responsibility for life.

ENJOYMENT

The peace that comes with surrendered action turns to a sense of aliveness when you actually enjoy what you are doing. Enjoyment is the second modality of awakened doing. On the new earth, enjoyment will replace wanting as the motivating power behind people's actions. Wanting arises from the ego's delusion that you are a separate fragment that is disconnected from the power that lies behind all creation. Through enjoyment, you link into that universal creative power itself.

When you make the present moment, instead of past and future, the focal point of your life, your ability to enjoy what you do—and with it the quality of your life—increases dramatically. Joy is the dynamic aspect of Being. When the creative power of the universe becomes conscious of itself, it manifests as joy. You don't have to wait for something "meaningful" to come into your life so that you can finally enjoy what you do. There is more meaning in joy than you will ever need. The "waiting to start living" syndrome is one of the most common delusions of the unconscious state. Expansion and positive change on the outer level is much more likely to come into your life if you can enjoy what you are doing already, instead of waiting for some change so that you can start enjoying what you do. Don't ask your mind for permission to enjoy what you do. All you will get is plenty of reasons why you can't enjoy it. "Not now," the mind will say. "Can't you see I'm busy? There's no time. Maybe tomorrow you can start enjoying…." That tomorrow will never come unless you begin enjoying what you are doing now.

When you say, I enjoy doing this or that, it is really a misperception. It makes it appear that the joy comes from what you do, but that is not the case. Joy does not come from what you do, it flows into what you do and thus into this world from deep within you. The misperception that joy comes from what you do is normal, and it is also dangerous, because it creates the belief that joy is something that can be derived from something else, such as an activity or thing. You then look to the world to bring you joy, happiness. But it cannot do that. This is why many people live in constant frustration. The world is not giving them what they think they need.

Then what is the relationship between something that you do and the state of joy? You will enjoy any activity in which you are fully present, any activity that is not just a means to an end. It isn't the action you perform that you really enjoy, but the deep sense of aliveness that flows into it. That aliveness is one with who you are. This means that when you enjoy doing something, you are really experiencing the joy of Being in its dynamic aspect. That's why anything you enjoy doing connects you with the power behind all creation.

Here is a spiritual practice that will bring empowerment and creative expansion into your life. Make a list of a number of everyday routine activities that you perform frequently. Include activities that you may consider uninteresting, boring, tedious, irritating, or stressful. But don't include anything that you hate or detest doing. That's a case either for acceptance or for stopping what you do. The list may include traveling to and from work, buying groceries, doing your laundry, or anything that you find tedious or stressful in your daily work. Then, whenever you are engaged in those activities, let them be a vehicle for alertness. Be absolutely present in what you do and sense the alert, alive stillness within you in the background of the activity. You will soon find that what you do in such a state of heightened awareness, instead of being stressful, tedious, or irritating, is actually becoming enjoyable. To be more precise, what you are enjoying is not really the outward action but the inner dimension of consciousness that flows into the action. This is finding the joy of Being in what you are doing. If you feel your life lacks significance or is too stressful or tedious, it is because you haven't brought that dimension into your life yet. Being conscious in what you

do has not yet become your main aim.

The new earth arises as more and more people discover that their main purpose in life is to bring the light of consciousness into this world and so use whatever they do as a vehicle for consciousness.

The joy of Being is the joy of being conscious.

Awakened consciousness then takes over from ego and begins to run your life. You may then find that an activity that you have been engaged in for a long time naturally begins to expand into something much bigger when it becomes empowered by consciousness.

Some of those people who, through creative action, enrich the lives of many others simply do what they enjoy doing most without wanting to achieve or become anything through that activity. They may be musicians, artists, writers, scientists, teachers, or builders, or they may bring into manifestation new social or business structures (enlightened businesses). Sometimes for a few years their sphere of influence remains small; and then it can happen that suddenly or gradually a wave of creative empowerment flows into what they do, and their activity expands beyond anything they could have imagined and touches countless others. In addition to enjoyment, an intensity is now added to what they do and with it comes a creativity that goes beyond anything an ordinary human could accomplish.

But don't let it go to your head, because up there is where a remnant of ego may be hiding. You are still an ordinary human. What is extraordinary is what comes through you into this world. But that essence you share with all beings. The fourteenth-century Persian poet and Sufi master Hafiz expresses this truth beautifully: "I am a hole in a flute that the Christ's breath moves through. Listen to this music."[1]

ENTHUSIASM

Then there is another way of creative manifestation that may come to those who remain true to their inner purpose of awakening. Suddenly one day they know what their outer purpose is. They have a great vision, a goal, and from then on they work toward implementing that goal. Their goal or vision is usually connected in some way to something that on a smaller scale they are doing and enjoy doing already. This is where the third modality of awakened doing arises: enthusiasm.

Enthusiasm means there is deep enjoyment in what you do plus the added element of a goal or a vision that you work toward. When you add a goal to the enjoyment of what you do, the energy-field or vibrational frequency changes. A certain degree of what we might call structural tension is now added to enjoyment, and so it turns into enthusiasm. At the height of creative activity fueled by enthusiasm, there will be enormous intensity and energy behind what you do. You will feel like an arrow that is moving toward the target—and enjoying the journey.

To an onlooker, it may appear that you are under stress, but the intensity of enthusiasm has nothing to do with stress. When you want to arrive at your goal more than you want to be doing what you are doing, you become stressed. The balance between enjoyment and structural tension is lost, and the

latter has won. When there is stress, it is usually a sign that the ego has returned, and you are cutting yourself off from the creative power of the universe. Instead, there is only the force and strain of egoic wanting, and so you have to struggle and "work hard" to make it. Stress always diminishes both the quality and effectiveness of what you do under its influence. There is also a strong link between stress and negative emotions, such as anxiety and anger. It is toxic to the body and is now becoming recognized as one of the main causes of the so-called degenerative diseases such as cancer and heart disease.

Unlike stress, enthusiasm has a high energy frequency and so resonates with the creative power of the universe. This is why Ralph Waldo Emerson said that, "Nothing great has ever been achieved without enthusiasm."[2] The word *enthusiasm* comes from ancient Greek—*en* and *theos*, meaning God. And the related word *enthousiazein* means "to be possessed by a god." With enthusiasm you will find that you don't have to do it all by yourself. In fact, there is nothing of significance that you *can* do by yourself. Sustained enthusiasm brings into existence a wave of creative energy, and all you have to do then is "ride the wave."

Enthusiasm brings an enormous empowerment into what you do, so that all those who have not accessed that power would look upon "your" achievements in awe and may equate them with who you are. You, however, know the truth that Jesus pointed to when he said, "I can of my own self do nothing."[3] Unlike egoic wanting, which creates opposition in direct proportion to the intensity of its wanting, enthusiasm never opposes. It is non-confrontational. Its activity does not create winners and losers. It is based on inclusion, not exclusion, of others. It does not need to use and manipulate people, because it is the power of creation itself and so does not need to take energy from some secondary source. The ego's wanting always tries to take from something or someone; enthusiasm gives out of its own abundance. When enthusiasm encounters obstacles in the form of adverse situations or uncooperative people, it never attacks but walks around them or by yielding or embracing turns the opposing energy into a helpful one, the foe into a friend.

Enthusiasm and the ego cannot coexist. One implies the absence of the other. Enthusiasm knows where it is going, but at the same time, it is deeply at one with the present moment, the source of its aliveness, its joy, and its power. Enthusiasm "wants" nothing because it lacks nothing. It is at one with life and no matter how dynamic the enthusiasm-inspired activities are, you don't lose yourself in them. And there remains always a still but intensely alive space at the center of the wheel, a core of peace in the midst of activity that is both the source of all and untouched by it all.

Through enthusiasm you enter into full alignment with the outgoing creative principle of the universe, but without identifying with its creations, that is to say, without ego. Where there is no identification, there is no attachment—one of the great sources of suffering. Once a wave of creative energy has passed, structural tension diminishes again and joy in what you are doing remains. Nobody can live in enthusiasm all the time. A new wave of creative energy may come later and lead to renewed enthusiasm.

When the return movement toward the dissolution of form sets in, enthusiasm no longer serves you. Enthusiasm belongs to the outgoing cycle of life. It is only through surrender that you can align yourself with the return movement—the journey home.

To sum up: Enjoyment of what you are doing, combined with a goal or vision that you work toward, becomes enthusiasm. Even though you have a goal, what you are doing in the present moment needs to remain the focal point of your attention; otherwise, you will fall out of alignment with universal purpose. Make sure your vision or goal is not an inflated image of yourself and therefore a concealed form of ego, such as wanting to become a movie star, a famous writer, or a wealthy entrepreneur. Also make sure your goal is not focused on *having* this or that, such as a mansion by the sea, your own company, or ten million dollars in the bank. An enlarged image of yourself or a vision of yourself *having* this or that are all static goals and therefore don't empower you. Instead, make sure your goals are dynamic, that is to say, point toward an *activity* that you are engaged in and through which you are connected to other human beings as well as to the whole. Instead of seeing yourself as a famous actor and writer and so on, see yourself inspiring countless people with your work and enriching their lives. Feel how that activity enriches or deepens not only your life but that of countless others. Feel yourself being an opening through which energy flows from the unmanifested Source of all life through you for the benefit of all.

All this implies that your goal or vision is then already a reality within you, on the level of mind and of feeling. Enthusiasm is the power that transfers the mental blueprint into the physical dimension. That is the creative use of mind, and that is why there is no wanting involved. You cannot manifest what you want; you can only manifest what you already have. You may get what you want through hard work and stress, but that is not the way of the new earth. Jesus gave the key to the creative use of mind and to the conscious manifestation of form when he said, "Whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours."[4]

THE FREQUENCY-HOLDERS

The outward movement into form does not express itself with equal intensity in all people. Some feel a strong urge to build, create, become involved, achieve, make an impact upon the world. If they are unconscious, their ego will, of course, take over and use the energy of the outgoing cycle for its own purposes. This, however, also greatly reduces the flow of creative energy available to them and increasingly they need to rely on "efforting" to get what they want. If they are conscious, those people in whom the outward movement is strong will be highly creative. Others, after the natural expansion that comes with growing up has run its course, lead an outwardly unremarkable, seemingly more passive and relatively uneventful existence.

They are more inward looking by nature, and for them the outward movement into form is minimal. They would rather return home than go out. They have no desire to get strongly involved in or change the world. If they have any ambitions, they usually don't go beyond finding something to do

that gives them a degree of independence. Some of them find it hard to fit into this world. Some are lucky enough to find a protective niche where they can lead a relatively sheltered life, a job that provides them with a regular income or a small business of their own. Some may feel drawn toward living in a spiritual community or monastery. Others may become dropouts and live on the margins of a society they feel they have little in common with. Some turn to drugs because they find living in this world too painful. Others eventually become healers or spiritual teachers, that is to say, teachers of Being.

In past ages, they would probably have been called contemplatives. There is no place for them, it seems, in our contemporary civilization. On the arising new earth, however, their role is just as vital as that of the creators, the doers, the reformers. Their function is to anchor the frequency of the new consciousness on this planet. I call them the frequency-holders. They are here to generate consciousness through the activities of daily life, through their interactions with others as well as through "just being."

In this way, they endow the seemingly insignificant with profound meaning. Their task is to bring spacious stillness into this world by being absolutely present in whatever they do. There is consciousness and therefore quality in what they do, even the simplest task. Their purpose is to do everything in a sacred manner. As each human being is an integral part of the collective human consciousness, they affect the world much more deeply than is visible on the surface of their lives.

THE NEW EARTH IS NO UTOPIA

Is the notion of a new earth not just another utopian vision? Not at all. All utopian visions have this in common: the mental projection of a future time when all will be well, we will be saved, there will be peace and harmony and the end of our problems. There have been many such utopian visions. Some ended in disappointment, others in disaster.

At the core of all utopian visions lies one of the main structural dysfunctions of the old consciousness: looking to the future for salvation. The only existence the future actually has is as a thought form in your mind, so when you look to the future for salvation, you are unconsciously looking to your own mind for salvation. You are trapped in form, and that is ego.

"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth,"[5] writes the biblical prophet. The foundation for a new earth is a new heaven—the awakened consciousness. The earth—external reality—is only its outer reflection. The arising of a new heaven and by implication a new earth are not future events that are going to make us free. Nothing is *going to* make us free because only the present moment can make us free. That realization is the awakening. Awakening as a future event has no meaning because awakening is the realization of Presence. So the new heaven, the awakened consciousness, is not a future state to be achieved. A new heaven and a new earth are arising within you at this moment, and if they are not arising at this moment, they are no more than a thought in your head and therefore not arising at all. What did Jesus tell his disciples? "Heaven is right here in the midst of you."[6]

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus makes a prediction that to this day few

people have understood. He says, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”[7] In modern versions of the Bible, “meek” is translated as humble. Who are the meek or the humble, and what does it mean that they shall inherit the earth?

The meek are the egoless. They are those who have awakened to their essential true nature as consciousness and recognize that essence in all “others,” all life-forms. They live in the surrendered state and so feel their oneness with the whole and the Source. They embody the awakened consciousness that is changing all aspects of life on our planet, including nature, because life on earth is inseparable from the human consciousness that perceives and interacts with it. That is the sense in which the meek will inherit the earth.

A new species is arising on the planet. It is arising now, and you are it!

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3 John 5:30 (New Revised Standard Version)
4 Mark 11:24 (New Revised Standard Version)
5 Revelation 21:1 (New Revised Standard Version)
6 Luke 17:21 (New Revised Standard Version)
7 Matthew 5:5 (New Revised Standard Version)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Eckhart Tolle is a contemporary spiritual teacher who is not aligned with any particular religion or tradition. In his writing and seminars, he conveys a simple yet profound message with the timeless and uncomplicated clarity of the ancient spiritual masters: There is a way out of suffering and into peace. Tolle travels extensively, taking his teachings throughout the world. He lives in Vancouver, British Columbia.

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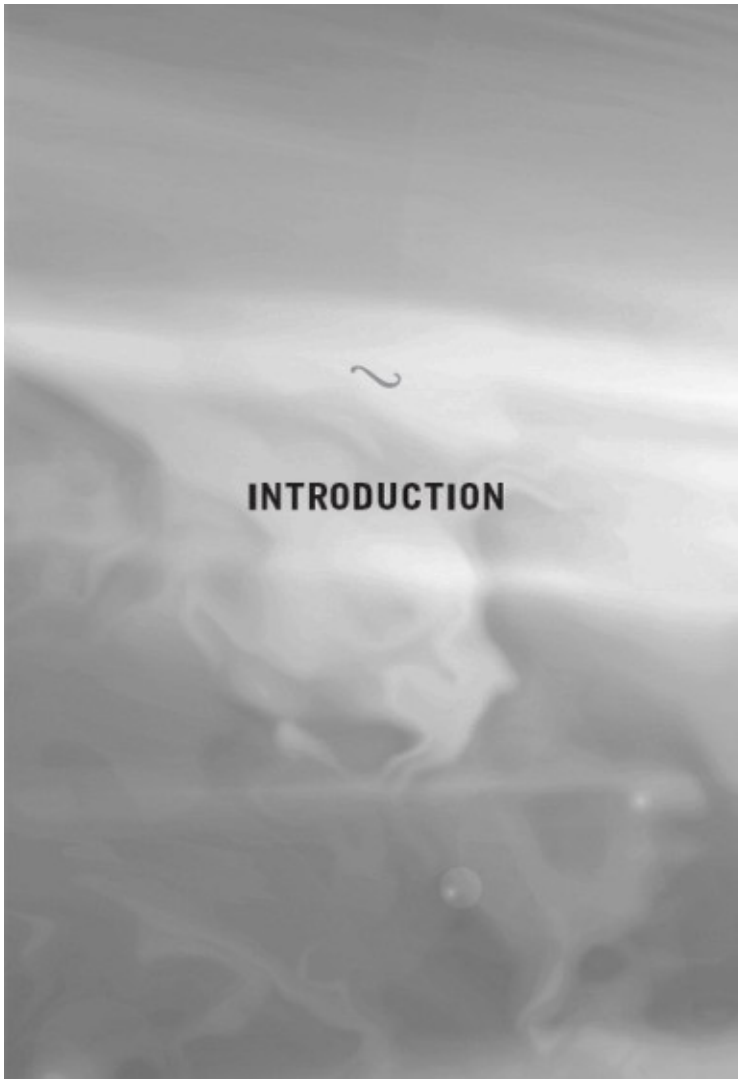


A true spiritual teacher does not have anything to teach in the conventional sense of the word, does not have anything to give or add to you, such as new information, beliefs, or rules of conduct. The only function of such a teacher is to help you remove that which separates you from the truth of who you already are and what you already know in the depth of your being. The spiritual teacher is there to uncover and reveal to you that dimension of inner depth that is also peace.

If you come to a spiritual teacher — or this book — looking for stimulating ideas, theories, beliefs, intellectual discussions, then you will be disappointed. In other words, if you are looking for food for thought, you won't find it, and you will miss the very essence of the teaching, the essence of this book, which is not in the words but within yourself. It is good to remember that, to feel that, as you read. The words are no more than signposts. That to which they point is not to be found within the realm of thought, but a dimension within yourself that is deeper and infinitely vaster than thought. A vibrantly alive peace is one of the characteristics of that dimension, so whenever you feel inner peace arising as you read, the book is doing its work and fulfilling its

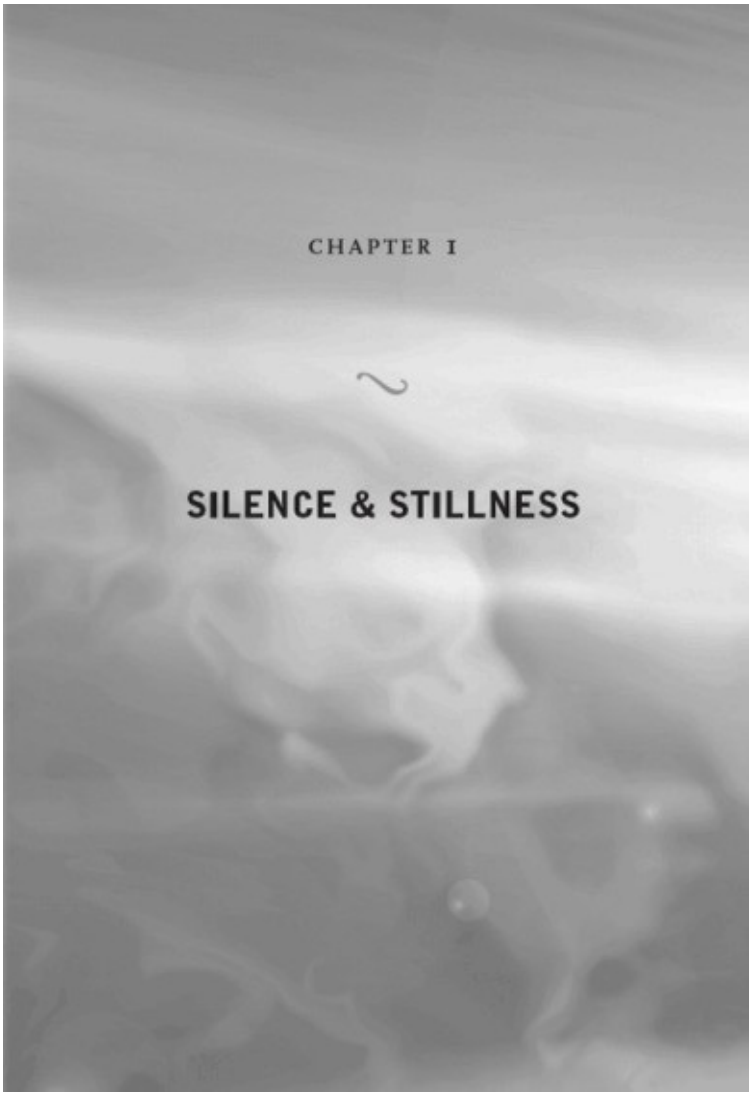
function as your teacher: it is reminding you of who you are and pointing the way back home.

This is not a book to be read from cover to cover and then put away. Live with it, pick it up frequently, and, more importantly, put it down frequently, or spend more time holding it than reading it. Many readers will feel naturally inclined to stop reading after each entry, to pause, reflect, become still. It is always more helpful and more important to stop reading than to continue reading. Allow the book to do its work, to awaken you from the old grooves of your repetitive and conditioned thinking.

The form of this book can be seen as a revival for the present age of the oldest form of recorded spiritual teachings: the sutras of ancient India. Sutras are powerful pointers to the truth in the form of aphorisms or short sayings, with little conceptual elaboration. The Vedas and Upanishads are the early sacred teachings recorded in the form of sutras, as are the words of the Buddha. The sayings and parables of Jesus, too, when taken out of their narrative context, could be regarded as sutras, as well as the profound teachings contained in the *Ta o Te Ching*, the ancient Chinese book of wisdom. The advantage of the sutra form lies in its brevity. It does not engage the thinking mind more than is necessary. What it doesn't say — but only points to — is more important than what it says. The sutra-like character of the writings in this book is particularly marked in chapter 1 ("Silence & Stillness"), which contains only the briefest of entries. This chapter contains the essence of the entire book and may be all that some readers require. The other chapters are there for those who need a few more signposts.

Just like the ancient sutras, the writings contained within this book are sacred and have come out of a state of consciousness we may call stillness. Unlike those ancient sutras, however, they don't belong to any one religion or spiritual tradition, but are immediately accessible to the whole of humanity. There is also an added sense of urgency here. The transformation of human consciousness is no longer a luxury, so to speak, available only to a few isolated individuals, but a necessity if humankind is not to destroy itself. At the present time, the dysfunction of the old consciousness and the arising of the new are both accelerating. Paradoxically, things are getting worse and better at the same time, although the worse is more apparent because it makes so much "noise."

This book, of course, uses words that in the act of reading become thoughts in your mind. But those are not ordinary thoughts — repetitive, noisy, self-serving, clamoring for attention. Just like every true spiritual teacher, just like the ancient sutras, the thoughts within this book don't say, "Look at me," but "Look beyond me." Because the thoughts came out of stillness, they have power — the power to take you back into the same stillness from which they arose. That stillness is also inner peace, and that stillness and peace are the essence of your Being. It is inner stillness that will save and transform the world.



When you lose touch with inner stillness, you lose touch with yourself. When you lose touch with yourself, you lose yourself in the world.
Your innermost sense of self, of who you are, is inseparable from stillness. This is the *I Am* that is deeper than name and form.

Stillness is your essential nature. What is stillness? The inner space or awareness in which the words on this page are being perceived and become thoughts. Without that awareness, there would be no perception, no thoughts, no world.
You are that awareness, disguised as a person.

The equivalent of external noise is the inner noise of thinking. The equivalent of external silence is inner stillness.
Whenever there is some silence around you — listen to it. That means just notice it. Pay attention to it. Listening to silence awakens the dimension of stillness within yourself, because it is only through stillness that you can be aware of silence.
See that in the moment of noticing the silence around you, you are not thinking. You are aware, but not thinking.

When you become aware of silence, immediately there is that state of inner still alertness. You are present. You have stepped out of thousands of years of collective human conditioning.

Look at a tree, a flower, a plant. Let your awareness rest upon it. How still they are, how deeply rooted in Being. Allow nature to teach you stillness.

When you look at a tree and perceive its stillness, you become still yourself. You connect with it at a very deep level. You feel a oneness with whatever you perceive in and through stillness. Feeling the oneness of yourself with all things is true love.

Silence is helpful, but you don't need it in order to find stillness. Even when there is noise, you can be aware of the stillness underneath the noise, of the space in which the noise arises. That is the inner space of pure awareness, consciousness itself.
You can become aware of awareness as the background to all your sense perceptions, all your thinking. Becoming aware of awareness is the arising of inner stillness.

Any disturbing noise can be as helpful as silence. How? By dropping your inner resistance to the noise, by allowing it to be as it is, this acceptance also takes you into that realm of inner peace that is stillness.
Whenever you deeply accept this moment as it is — no matter what form it takes — you are still, you are at peace.

Pay attention to the gap — the gap between two thoughts, the brief, silent space between words in a conversation, between the notes of a piano or flute, or the gap between the in-breath and out-breath.
When you pay attention to those gaps, awareness of "something" becomes — just awareness. The formless dimension of pure consciousness arises from within you and replaces identification with form.

True intelligence operates silently. Stillness is where creativity and solutions to problems are found.

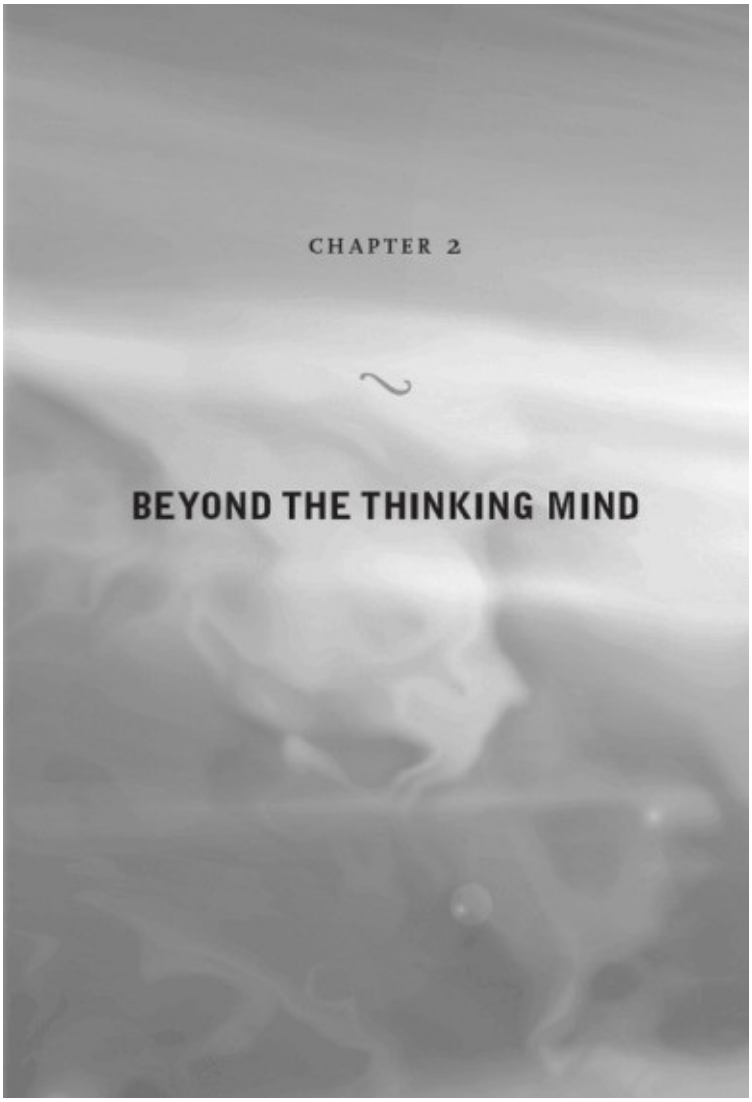
Is stillness just the absence of noise and content? No, it is intelligence itself — the underlying consciousness out of which every form is born. And how could that be separate from who you are?
The form that you think you are came out of that and is being sustained by it. It is the essence of all galaxies and blades of grass; of all flowers, trees, birds, and all other forms.

Stillness is the only thing in this world that has no form. But then, it is not really a thing, and it is not of this world.

When you look at a tree or a human being in stillness, who is looking? Something deeper than the person. Consciousness is looking at its creation.
In the Bible, it says that God created the world and saw that it was good. That

is what you see when you look from stillness without thought.

Do you need more knowledge? Is more information going to save the world, or faster computers, more scientific or intellectual analysis? Is it not wisdom that humanity needs most at this time?
But what is wisdom and where is it to be found? Wisdom comes with the ability to be still. Just look and just listen. No more is needed. Being still, looking, and listening activates the non-conceptual intelligence within you. Let stillness direct your words and actions.



The human condition: lost in thought.

Most people spend their entire life imprisoned within the confines of their own thoughts. They never go beyond a narrow, mind-made, personalized sense of self that is conditioned by the past.

In you, as in each human being, there is a dimension of consciousness far deeper than thought. It is the very essence of who you are. We may call it presence, awareness, the unconditioned consciousness. In the ancient teachings, it is the Christ within, or your Buddha nature.

Finding that dimension frees you and the world from the suffering you inflict on yourself and others when the mind-made "little me" is all you know and runs your life. Love, joy, creative expansion, and lasting inner peace cannot

come into your life except through that unconditioned dimension of consciousness.
If you can recognize, even occasionally, the thoughts that go through your mind as simply thoughts, if you can witness your own mentalemotional reactive patterns as they happen, then that dimension is already emerging in you as the awareness in which thoughts and emotions happen — the timeless inner space in which the content of your life unfolds.

The stream of thinking has enormous momentum that can easily drag you along with it. Every thought pretends that it matters so much. It wants to draw your attention in completely.
Here is a new spiritual practice for you: don't take your thoughts too seriously.

How easy it is for people to become trapped in their conceptual prisons.
The human mind, in its desire to know, understand, and control, mistakes its opinions and viewpoints for the truth. It says: this is how it is. You have to be larger than thought to realize that however you interpret "your life" or someone else's life or behavior, however you judge any situation, it is no more than a viewpoint, one of many possible perspectives. It is no more than a bundle of thoughts. But reality is one unified whole, in which all things are interwoven, where nothing exists in and by itself. Thinking fragments reality — it cuts it up into conceptual bits and pieces.
The thinking mind is a useful and powerful tool, but it is also very limiting when it takes over your life completely, when you don't realize that it is only a small aspect of the consciousness that you are.

Wisdom is not a product of thought. The deep *knowing* that is wisdom arises through the simple act of giving someone or something your full attention. Attention is primordial intelligence, consciousness itself. It dissolves the barriers created by conceptual thought, and with this comes the recognition that nothing exists in and by itself. It joins the perceiver and the perceived in a unifying field of awareness. It is the healer of separation.

Whenever you are immersed in compulsive thinking, you are avoiding what is. You don't want to be where you are. Here, Now.

Dogmas — religious, political, scientific — arise out of the erroneous belief that thought can encapsulate reality or the truth. Dogmas are collective conceptual prisons. And the strange thing is that people love their prison cells because they give them a sense of security and a false sense of "I know."
Nothing has inflicted more suffering on humanity than its dogmas. It is true that every dogma crumbles sooner or later, because reality will eventually disclose its falseness; however, unless the basic delusion of it is seen for what it is, it will be replaced by others.
What is this basic delusion? Identification with thought.

Spiritual awakening is awakening from the dream of thought.

The realm of consciousness is much vaster than thought can grasp. When you no longer believe everything you think, you step out of thought and see clearly that the thinker is not who you are.

The mind exists in a state of "not enough" and so is always greedy for more. When you are identified with mind, you get bored and restless very easily. Boredom means the mind is hungry for more stimulus, more food for thought, and its hunger is not being satisfied.
When you feel bored, you can satisfy the mind's hunger by picking up a magazine, making a phone call, switching on the TV, surfing the web, going shopping, or — and this is not uncommon — transferring the mental sense of lack and its need for *more* to the body and satisfy it briefly by ingesting more food.
Or you can stay bored and restless and observe what it feels like to be bored and restless. As you bring awareness to the feeling, there is suddenly some space and stillness around it, as it were. A little at first, but as the sense of inner space grows, the feeling of boredom will begin to diminish in intensity and significance. So even boredom can teach you who you are and who you

are not.
You discover that a “bored person” is not who you are. Boredom is simply a conditioned energy movement within you. Neither are you an angry, sad, or fearful person. Boredom, anger, sadness, or fear are not “yours,” not personal. They are conditions of the human mind. They come and go.
Nothing that comes and goes is you.
“I am bored.” Who knows this?
“I am angry, sad, afraid.” Who knows this?
You are the knowing, not the condition that is known.

Prejudice of any kind implies that you are identified with the thinking mind. It means you don't see the other human being anymore, but only your own concept of that human being. To reduce the aliveness of another human being to a concept is already a form of violence.

Thinking that is not rooted in awareness becomes self-serving and dysfunctional. Cleverness devoid of wisdom is extremely dangerous and destructive. That is the current state of most of humanity. The amplification of thought as science and technology, although intrinsically neither good nor bad, has also become destructive because so often the thinking out of which it comes has no roots in awareness.
The next step in human evolution is to transcend thought. This is now our urgent task. It doesn't mean not to think anymore, but simply not to be completely identified with thought, possessed by thought.

Feel the energy of your inner body. Immediately mental noise slows down or ceases. Feel it in your hands, your feet, your abdomen, your chest. Feel the life that you are, the life that animates the body.
The body then becomes a doorway, so to speak, into a deeper sense of aliveness underneath the fluctuating emotions and underneath your thinking.

There is an aliveness in you that you can feel with your entire Being, not just in the head. Every cell is alive in that presence in which you don't need to

think. Yet, in that state, if thought is required for some practical purpose, it is there. The mind can still operate, and it operates beautifully when the greater intelligence that you *are* uses it and expresses itself through it.

You may have overlooked that brief periods in which you are "conscious without thought" are already occurring naturally and spontaneously in your life. You may be engaged in some manual activity, or walking across the room, or waiting at the airline counter, and be so completely present that the usual mental static of thought subsides and is replaced by an aware presence. Or you may find yourself looking at the sky or listening to someone without any inner mental commentary. Your perceptions become crystal clear, unclouded by thought.
To the mind, all this is not significant, because it has "more important" things to think about. It is also not memorable, and that's why you may have overlooked that it is already happening.
The truth is that it is the most significant thing that *can* happen to you. It is the beginning of a shift from thinking to aware presence.

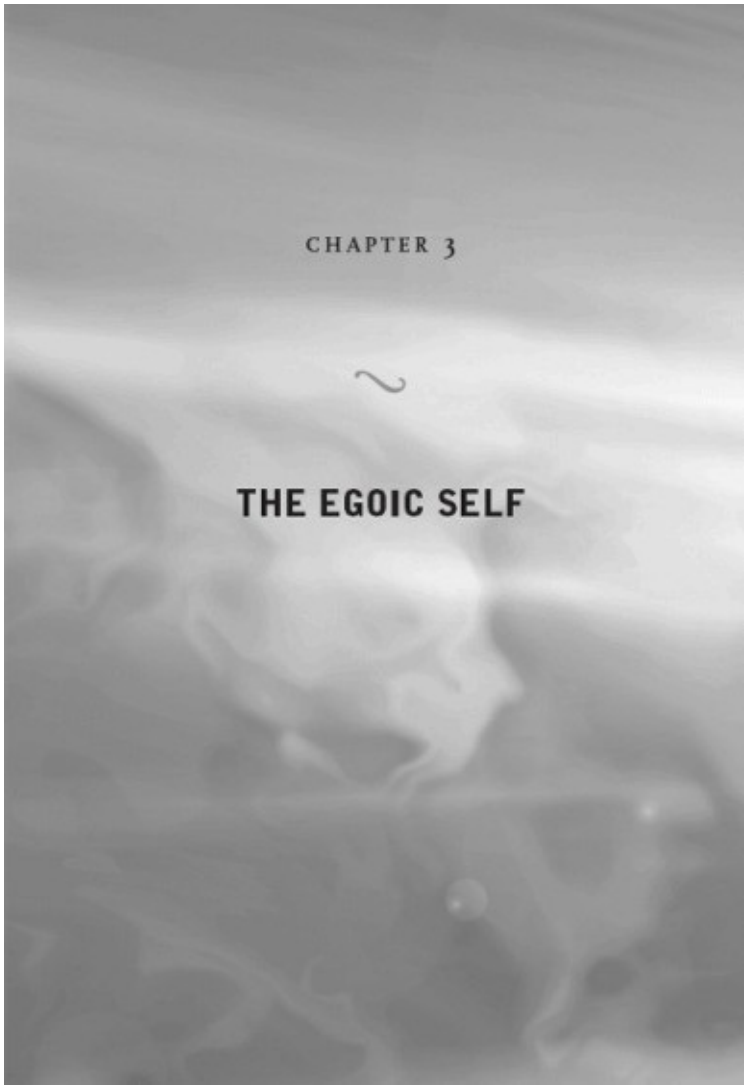
Become at ease with the state of "not knowing." This takes you beyond mind because the mind is always trying to conclude and interpret. It is afraid of not knowing. So, when you can be at ease with not knowing, you have already gone beyond the mind. A deeper knowing that is non-conceptual then arises out of that state.

Artistic creation, sports, dance, teaching, counseling — mastery in any field of endeavor implies that the thinking mind is either no longer involved at all or at least is taking second place. A power and intelligence greater than you and yet one with you in essence takes over. There is no decision-making process anymore; spontaneous right action happens, and "you" are not doing it. Mastery of life is the opposite of control. You become aligned with the greater consciousness. *It* acts, speaks, does the works.

A moment of danger can bring about a temporary cessation of the stream of

thinking and thus give you a taste of what it means to be present, alert, aware.

The Truth is far more all-encompassing than the mind could ever comprehend. No thought can encapsulate the Truth. At best, it can point to it. For example, it can say: "All things are intrinsically one." That is a pointer, not an explanation. Understanding these words means *feeling* deep within you the truth to which they point.



The mind is incessantly looking not only for food for thought; it is looking for food for its identity, its sense of self. This is how the ego comes into existence and continuously re-creates itself.

When you think or speak about yourself, when you say, "I," what you usually refer to is "me and my story." This is the "I" of your likes and dislikes, fears and desires, the "I" that is never satisfied for long. It is a mind-made sense of who you are, conditioned by the past and seeking to find its fulfillment in the future.

Can you see that this "I" is fleeting, a temporary formation, like a wave pattern on the surface of the water?

Who is it that sees this? Who is it that is *aware* of the fleetingness of your physical and psychological form? I Am. This is the deeper "I" that has nothing

to do with past and future.

What will be left of all the fearing and wanting associated with your problematic life situation that every day takes up most of your attention? A dash — one or two inches long, between the date of birth and date of death on your gravestone.
To the egoic self, this is a depressing thought. To you, it is liberating.

When each thought absorbs your attention completely, it means you identify with the voice in your head. Thought then becomes invested with a sense of self. This is the ego, a mind-made "me." That mentally constructed self feels incomplete and precarious. That's why fearing and wanting are its predominant emotions and motivating forces.
When you recognize that there is a voice in your head that pretends to be you and never stops speaking, you are awakening out of your unconscious identification with the stream of thinking. When you notice that voice, you realize that who you are is not the voice — the thinker — but the one who is aware of it.
Knowing yourself as the awareness behind the voice is freedom.

The egoic self is always engaged in seeking. It is seeking more of this or that to add to itself, to make itself feel more complete. This explains the ego's compulsive preoccupation with future.
Whenever you become aware of yourself "living for the next moment," you have already stepped out of that egoic mind pattern, and the possibility of choosing to give your full attention to this moment arises simultaneously.
By giving your full attention to this moment, an intelligence far greater than the egoic mind enters your life.

When you live through the ego, you always reduce the present moment to a means to an end. You live for the future, and when you achieve your goals, they don't satisfy you, at least not for long.
When you give more attention to the doing than to the future result that you

want to achieve through it, you break the old egoic conditioning.
Your doing then becomes not only a great deal more effective, but infinitely more fulfilling and joyful.

Almost every ego contains at least an element of what we might call "victim identity." Some people have such a strong victim image of themselves that it becomes the central core of their ego. Resentment and grievances form an essential part of their sense of self.
Even if your grievances are completely "justified," you have constructed an identity for yourself that is much like a prison whose bars are made of thought forms. See what you are doing to yourself, or rather what your mind is doing to you. Feel the emotional attachment you have to your victim story and become aware of the compulsion to think or talk about it. Be there as the witnessing presence of your inner state. You don't have to *do* anything. With awareness comes transformation and freedom.

Complaining and reactivity are favorite mind patterns through which the ego strengthens itself. For many people, a large part of their mentalemotional activity consists of complaining and reacting against this or that. By doing this, you make others or a situation "wrong" and yourself "right." Through being "right," you feel superior, and through feeling superior, you strengthen your sense of self. In reality, of course, you are only strengthening the illusion of ego.
Can you observe those patterns within yourself and recognize the complaining voice in your head for what it is?

The egoic sense of self needs conflict because its sense of a separate identity gets strengthened in fighting against this or that, and in demonstrating that this is "me" and that is not "me."
Not infrequently, tribes, nations, and religions derive a strengthened sense of collective identity from having enemies. Who would the "believer" be without the "unbeliever"?

In your dealings with people, can you detect subtle feelings of either superiority or inferiority toward them? You are looking at the ego, which lives through comparison.
Envy is a by-product of the ego, which feels diminished if something good happens to someone else, or someone has more, knows more, or can do more than you. The ego's identity depends on comparison and feeds on *more*. It will grasp at anything. If all else fails, you can strengthen your fictitious sense of self through seeing yourself as *more* unfairly treated by life or *more* ill than someone else.
What are the stories, the fictions from which you derive your sense of self?

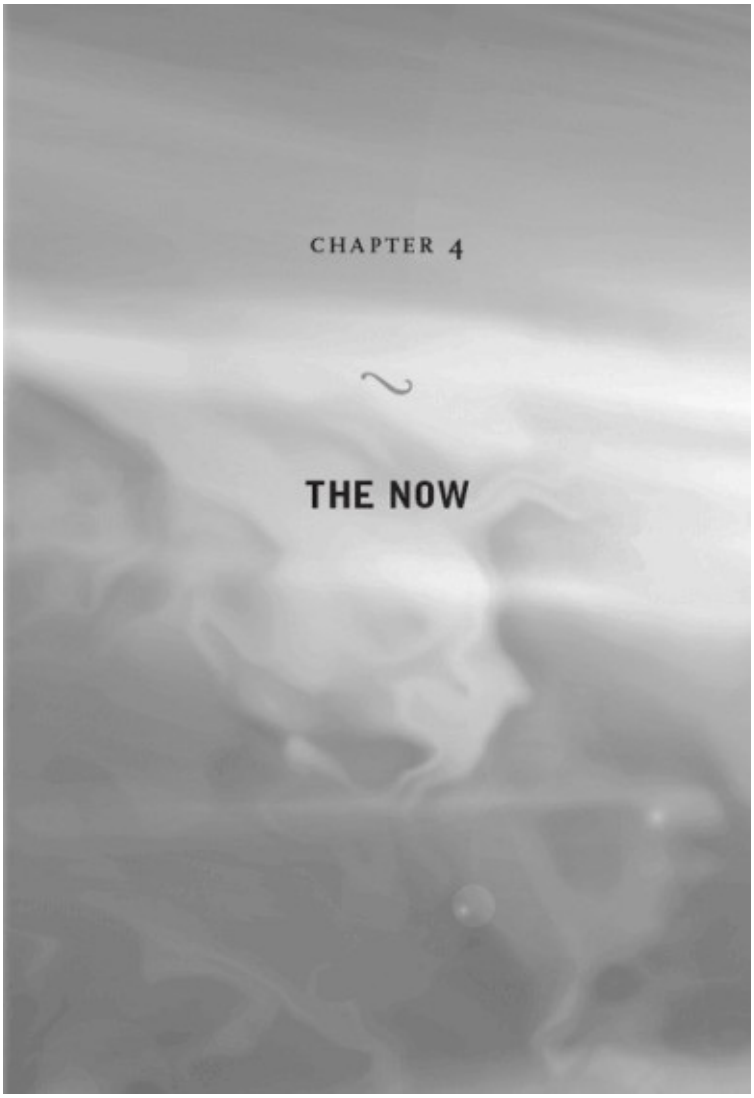
Built into the very structure of the egoic self is a need to oppose, resist, and exclude to maintain the sense of separateness on which its continued survival depends. So there is “me” against the “other,” “us” against “them.”
The ego needs to be in conflict with something or someone. That explains why you are looking for peace and joy and love but cannot tolerate them for very long. You say you want happiness but are addicted to your unhappiness.
Your unhappiness ultimately arises not from the circumstances of your life but from the conditioning of your mind.

Do you carry feelings of guilt about something you did — or failed to do — in the past? This much is certain: you acted according to your level of consciousness or rather unconsciousness at that time. If you had been more aware, more conscious, you would have acted differently.
Guilt is another attempt by the ego to create an identity, a sense of self. To the ego, it doesn't matter whether that self is positive or negative. What you did or failed to do was a manifestation of unconsciousness — human unconsciousness. The ego, however, personalizes it and says, “I did that,” and so you carry a mental image of yourself as “bad.”
Throughout history humans have inflicted countless violent, cruel, and hurtful acts on each other, and continue to do so. Are they all to be condemned; are they all guilty? Or are those acts simply expressions of unconsciousness, an evolutionary stage that we are now growing out of?
Jesus' words, “Forgive them for they know not what they do,” also apply to yourself.

If you set egoic goals for the purpose of freeing yourself, enhancing yourself or

your sense of importance, even if you achieve them, they will not satisfy you. Set goals, but know that the arriving is not all that important. When anything arises out of presence, it means this moment is not a means to an end: the doing is fulfilling in itself every moment. You are no longer reducing the Now to a means to an end, which is the egoic consciousness.

"No self. No problem," said the Buddhist Master when asked to explain the deeper meaning of Buddhism.



On the surface it seems that the present moment is only one of many, many moments. Each day of your life appears to consist of thousands of moments where different things happen. Yet if you look more deeply, is there not only one moment, ever? Is life ever not “this moment”?
This one moment — Now — is the only thing you can never escape from, the one constant factor in your life. No matter what happens, no matter how much your life changes, one thing is certain: it's always Now.
Since there is no escape from the Now, why not welcome it, become friendly with it?

When you make friends with the present moment, you feel at home no matter where you are. When you don't feel at home in the Now, no matter where you

go, you will carry unease with you.

The present moment is as it is. Always. Can you let it be?

The division of life into past, present, and future is mind-made and ultimately illusory. Past and future are thought forms, mental abstractions. The past can only be remembered Now. What you remember is an event that took place in the Now, and you remember it Now. The future, when it comes, is the Now. So the only thing that is real, the only thing there ever is *is* the Now.

To have your attention in the Now is not a denial of what is needed in your life. It is recognizing what is primary. Then you can deal with what is secondary with great ease. It is not saying, "I'm not dealing with things anymore because there is only the Now." No. Find what is primary first, and make the Now into your friend, not your enemy. Acknowledge it, honor it. When the Now is the foundation and primary focus of your life, then your life unfolds with ease.

Putting away the dishes, drawing up a business strategy, planning a trip — what is more important: the doing or the result that you want to achieve through the doing? This moment or some future moment?
Do you treat *this moment* as if it were an obstacle to be overcome? Do you feel you have a future moment to get to that is more important?
Almost everyone lives like this most of the time. Since the future never arrives, except *as* the present, it is a dysfunctional way to live. It generates a constant undercurrent of unease, tension, and discontent. It does not honor life, which is Now and never not Now.

Feel the aliveness within your body. That anchors you in the Now.

Ultimately you are not taking responsibility for life until you take responsibility for *this moment* — Now. This is because Now is the only place where life can be found.
Taking responsibility for this moment means not to oppose internally the "suchness" of Now, not to argue with what is. It means to be in alignment with life.
The Now is as it is because it cannot be otherwise. What Buddhists have always known, physicists now confirm: there are no isolated things or events. Underneath the surface appearance, all things are interconnected, are part of the totality of the cosmos that has brought about the form that this moment takes.
When you say "yes" to what is, you become aligned with the power and intelligence of Life itself. Only then can you become an agent for positive change in the world.

A simple but radical spiritual practice is to accept whatever arises in the Now — within and without.

When your attention moves into the Now, there is an alertness. It is as if you were waking up from a dream, the dream of thought, the dream of past and future. Such clarity, such simplicity. No room for problem-making. Just this moment as it is.

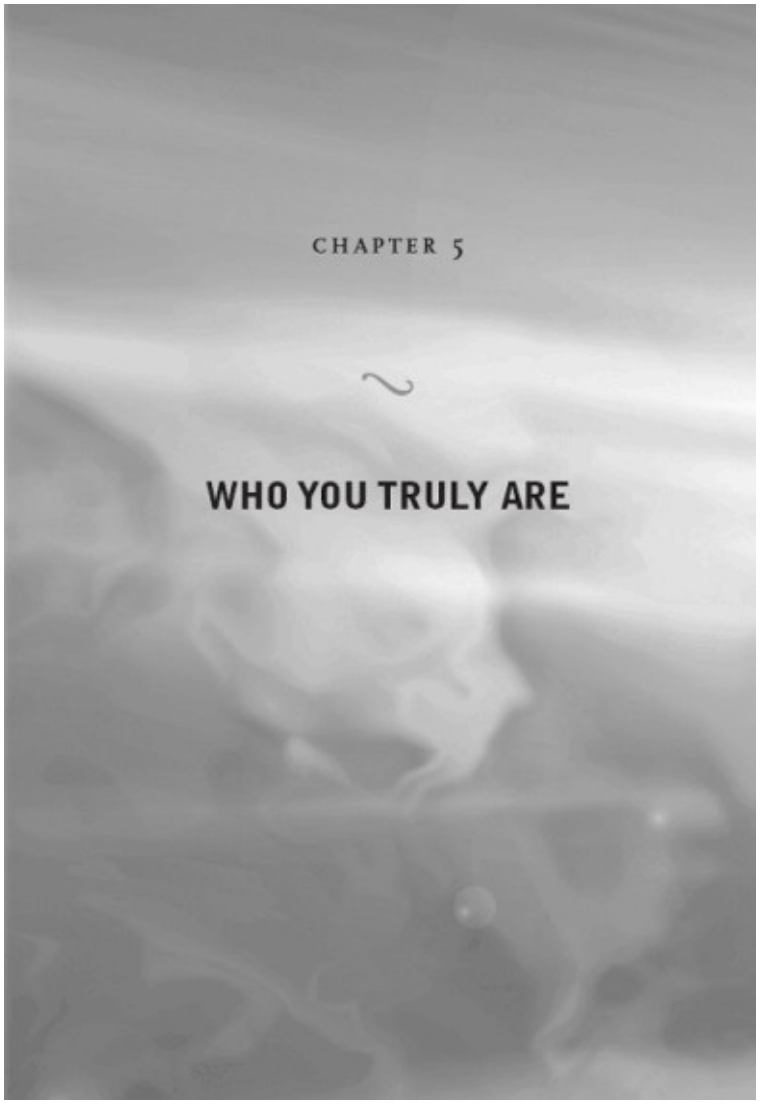
The moment you enter the Now with your attention, you realize that life is sacred. There is a sacredness to everything you perceive when you are present. The more you live in the Now, the more you sense the simple yet profound joy of Being and the sacredness of all life.

Most people confuse the Now with *what happens* in the Now, but that's not what it is. The Now is deeper than what happens in it. It is the space in which

it happens.
So do not confuse the content of this moment with the Now. The Now is deeper than any content that arises in it.

When you step into the Now, you step out of the content of your mind. The incessant stream of thinking slows down. Thoughts don't absorb all your attention anymore, don't draw you in totally. Gaps arise in between thoughts — spaciousness, stillness. You begin to realize how much vaster and deeper you are than your thoughts.

Thoughts, emotions, sense perceptions, and whatever you experience make up the content of your life. "My life" is what you derive your sense of self from, and "my life" is content, or so you believe.
You continuously overlook the most obvious fact: your innermost sense of *I Am* has nothing to do with what *happens* in your life, nothing to do with content. That sense of *I Am* is one with the Now. It always remains the same. In childhood and old age, in health or sickness, in success or failure, the *I Am* — the space of Now — remains unchanged at its deepest level. It usually gets confused with content, and so you experience *I Am* or the Now only faintly and indirectly, *through* the content of your life. In other words: your sense of Being becomes obscured by circumstances, your stream of thinking, and the many things of this world. The Now becomes obscured by time.
And so you forget your rootedness in Being, your divine reality, and lose yourself in the world. Confusion, anger, depression, violence, and conflict arise when humans forget who they are.
Yet how easy it is to remember the truth and thus return home:
I am not my thoughts, emotions, sense perceptions, and experiences. I am not the content of my life. I am Life. I am the space in which all things happen. I am consciousness. I am the Now. I Am.



The Now is inseparable from who you are at the deepest level.

Many things in your life matter, but only one thing matters absolutely.
It matters whether you succeed or fail in the eyes of the world. It matters whether you are healthy or not healthy, whether you are educated or not educated. It matters whether you are rich or poor — it certainly makes a difference in your life. Yes, all these things matter, relatively speaking, but they don't matter absolutely.
There is something that matters more than any of those things and that is finding the essence of who you are beyond that short-lived entity, that short-lived personalized sense of self.
You find peace not by rearranging the circumstances of your life, but by

realizing who you are at the deepest level.

Reincarnation doesn't help you if in your next incarnation you still don't know who you are.

All the misery on the planet arises due to a personalized sense of “me” or “us.” That covers up the essence of who you are. When you are unaware of that inner essence, in the end you always create misery. It's as simple as that. When you don't know who you are, you create a mind-made self as a substitute for your beautiful divine being and cling to that fearful and needy self.
Protecting and enhancing that false sense of self then becomes your primary motivating force.

Many expressions that are in common usage, and sometimes the structure of language itself, reveal the fact that people don't know who they are. You say: “He lost his life” or “my life,” as if life were something that you can possess or lose. The truth is: you don't *have* a life, you *are* life. The One Life, the one consciousness that pervades the entire universe and takes temporary form to experience itself as a stone or a blade of grass, as an animal, a person, a star or a galaxy.
Can you sense deep within that you already know that? Can you sense that you already are That?

For most things in life, you need time: to learn a new skill, build a house, become an expert, make a cup of tea. . . . Time is useless, however, for the most essential thing in life, the one thing that really matters: self-realization, which means knowing who you are beyond the surface self — beyond your name, your physical form, your history, your story.
You cannot find yourself in the past or future. The only place where you can find yourself is in the Now.
Spiritual seekers look for self-realization or enlightenment in the future. To be a seeker implies that you need the future. If this is what you believe, it

becomes true for you: you *will* need time until you realize that you don't need time to be who you are.

When you look at a tree, you are aware of the tree. When you have a thought or feeling, you are aware of that thought or feeling. When you have a pleasurable or painful experience, you are aware of that experience.
These seem to be true and obvious statements, yet if you look at them very closely, you will find that in a subtle way their very structure contains a fundamental illusion, an illusion that is unavoidable when you use language. Thought and language create an apparent duality and a separate person where there is none. The truth is: you are not somebody who is aware of the tree, the thought, feeling, or experience. You are the awareness or consciousness in and by which those things appear.
As you go about your life, can you be aware of yourself as the awareness in which the entire content of your life unfolds?

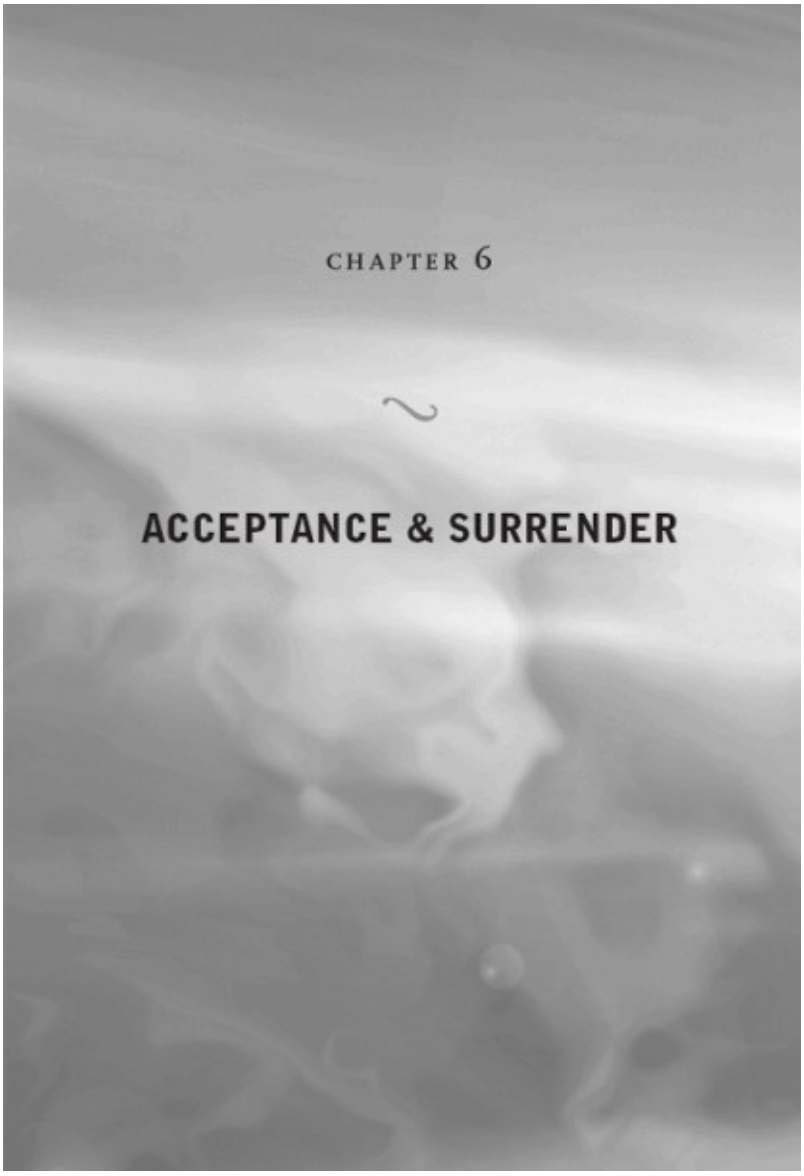
You say, "I want to know myself." You *are* the "I." You *are* the Knowing. You *are* the consciousness through which everything is known. And that cannot *know* itself; it *is* itself.
There is nothing to know beyond that, and yet all knowing arises out of it. The "I" cannot make itself into an object of knowledge, of consciousness.
So you cannot become an object to yourself. That is the very reason the illusion of egoic identity arose — because mentally you made yourself into an object. "That's me," you say. And then you begin to have a relationship with yourself, and tell others and yourself your story.

By knowing yourself as the awareness in which phenomenal existence happens, you become free of dependency on phenomena and free of self-seeking in situations, places, and conditions. In other words: what happens or doesn't happen is not that important anymore. Things lose their heaviness, their seriousness. A playfulness comes into your life. You recognize this world as a cosmic dance, the dance of form — no more and no less.

When you know who you truly are, there is an abiding alive sense of peace. You could call it joy because that's what joy is: vibrantly alive peace. It is the joy of knowing yourself as the very life essence before life takes on form. That is the joy of Being — of being who you truly are.

Just as water can be solid, liquid, or gaseous, consciousness can be seen to be "frozen" as physical matter, "liquid" as mind and thought, or formless as pure consciousness.
Pure consciousness is Life before it comes into manifestation, and that Life looks at the world of form through "your" eyes because consciousness is who you are. When you know yourself as That, then you recognize yourself in everything. It is a state of complete clarity of perception. You are no longer an entity with a heavy past that becomes a screen of concepts through which every experience is interpreted.
When you perceive without interpretation, you can then sense what it is that is perceiving. The most we can say in language is that there is a field of alert stillness in which the perception happens.
Through "you," formless consciousness has become aware of itself.

Most people's lives are run by desire and fear.
Desire is the need to *add* something to yourself in order to *be* yourself more fully. All fear is the fear of *losing* something and thereby becoming diminished and *being* less.
These two movements obscure the fact that Being cannot be given or taken away. Being in its fullness is already within you, Now.



Whenever you are able, have a "look" inside yourself to see whether you are unconsciously creating conflict between the inner and the outer, between your external circumstances at that moment — where you are, who you are with, or what you are doing — and your thoughts and feelings. Can you feel how painful it is to internally stand in opposition to what *is?*
When you recognize this, you also realize that you are now free to give up this futile conflict, this inner state of war.

How often each day, if you were to verbalize your inner reality at that moment, would you have to say, "I don't want to be where I am"? What does

it feel like when you don't want to be where you are — the traffic jam, your place of work, the airport lounge, the people you are with?
It is true, of course, that some places are good places to walk out of — and sometimes that may well be the most appropriate thing for you to do. In many cases, however, walking out is not an option. In all those cases, the "I don't want to be here" is not only useless but also dysfunctional. It makes you and others unhappy.
It has been said: wherever you go, there you are. In other words: you are here. Always. Is it so hard to accept that?

Do you really need to mentally label every sense perception and experience? Do you really need to have a reactive like/dislike relationship with life where you are in almost continuous conflict with situations and people? Or is that just a deep-seated mental habit that can be broken? Not by doing anything, but by allowing this moment to be as it is.

The habitual and reactive "no" strengthens the ego. "Yes" weakens it. Your form identity, the ego, cannot survive surrender.

"I have so much to do." Yes, but what is the quality of your doing? Driving to work, speaking to clients, working on the computer, running errands, dealing with the countless things that make up your daily life — how total are you in what you do? Is your doing surrendered or non-surrendered? This is what determines your success in life, not how much effort you make. Effort implies stress and strain, *needing* to reach a certain point in the future or accomplish a certain result.
Can you detect even the slightest element within yourself of *not wanting* to be doing what you are doing? That is a denial of life, and so a truly successful outcome is not possible.
If you can detect this within yourself, can you also drop it and be total in what you do?

"Doing one thing at a time" is how one Zen Master defined the essence of Zen.

Doing one thing at a time means to be total in what you do, to give it your complete attention. This is surrendered action — empowered action.

Your acceptance of what *is* takes you to a deeper level where your inner state as well as your sense of self no longer depend on the mind's judgments of "good" or "bad."
When you say "yes" to the "isness" of life, when you accept this moment as it is, you can feel a sense of spaciousness within you that is deeply peaceful.
On the surface, you may still be happy when it's sunny and not so happy when it's rainy; you may be happy at winning a million dollars and unhappy at losing all your possessions. Neither happiness nor unhappiness, however, go all that deep anymore. They are ripples on the surface of your Being. The background peace within you remains undisturbed regardless of the nature of the outside condition.
The "yes" to what *is* reveals a dimension of depth within you that is dependent neither on external conditions nor on the internal conditions of constantly fluctuating thoughts and emotions.

Surrender becomes so much easier when you realize the fleeting nature of all experiences and that the world cannot give you anything of lasting value. You then continue to meet people, to be involved in experiences and activities, but without the wants and fears of the egoic self. That is to say, you no longer demand that a situation, person, place, or event should satisfy you or make you happy. Its passing and imperfect nature is allowed to be.
And the miracle is that when you are no longer placing an impossible demand on it, every situation, person, place, or event becomes not only satisfying but also more harmonious, more peaceful.

When you completely accept this moment, when you no longer argue with what *is,* the compulsion to think lessens and is replaced by an alert stillness. You are fully conscious, yet the mind is not labeling this moment in any way. This state of inner nonresistance opens you to the unconditioned consciousness that is infinitely greater than the human mind. This vast intelligence can then express itself through you and assist you, both from within and from without. That is why, by letting go of inner resistance, you often find circumstances change for the better.

Am I saying, “Enjoy this moment. Be happy”? No.
Allow the “suchness” of this moment. That's enough.

Surrender is surrender to *this moment*, not to a story through which you *interpret* this moment and then try to resign yourself to it.
For instance, you may have a disability and can't walk anymore. The condition is as it is.
Perhaps your mind is now creating a story that says, “This is what my life has come to. I have ended up in a wheelchair. Life has treated me harshly and unfairly. I don't deserve this.”
Can you accept the *isness* of this moment and not confuse it with a story the mind has created around it?

Surrender comes when you no longer ask, “Why is this happening to me?”

Even within the seemingly most unacceptable and painful situation is concealed a deeper good, and within every disaster is contained the seed of grace.
Throughout history, there have been women and men who, in the face of great loss, illness, imprisonment, or impending death, accepted the seemingly unacceptable and thus found “the peace that passeth all understanding.”
Acceptance of the unacceptable is the greatest source of grace in this world.

There are situations where all answers and explanations fail. Life does not make sense anymore. Or someone in distress comes to you for help, and you don't know what to do or say.
When you fully accept that you don't know, you give up struggling to find answers with the limited thinking mind, and that is when a greater intelligence can operate through you. And even thought can then benefit from that, since the greater intelligence can flow into it and inspire it.

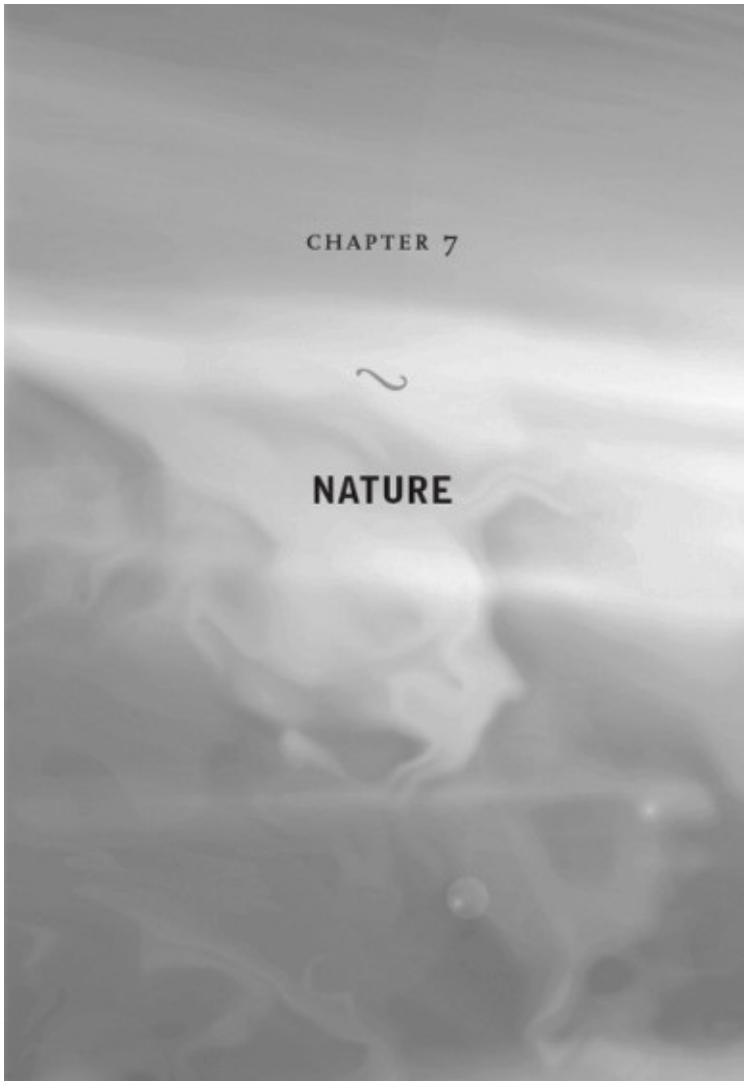
Sometimes surrender means giving up trying to understand and becoming comfortable with not knowing.

Do you know of someone whose main function in life seems to be to make themselves and others miserable, to spread unhappiness? Forgive them, for they too are part of the awakening of humanity. The role they play represents an intensification of the nightmare of egoic consciousness, the state of non-surrender. There is nothing personal in all this. It is not who they are.

Surrender, one could say, is the inner transition from resistance to acceptance, from "no" to "yes."
When you surrender, your sense of self shifts from being identified with a reaction or mental judgment to being the *space around* the reaction or judgment. It is a shift from identification with form — the thought or the emotion — to being and recognizing yourself as that which has no form — spacious awareness.

Whatever you accept completely will take you to peace, including the acceptance that you cannot accept, that you are in resistance.

Leave Life alone. Let it be.



We depend on nature not only for our physical survival. We also need nature to show us the way home, the way out of the prison of our own minds. We got lost in doing, thinking, remembering, anticipating — lost in a maze of complexity and a world of problems.
We have forgotten what rocks, plants, and animals still know. We have forgotten how to *be* — to be still, to be ourselves, to be where life is: Here and Now.

Whenever you bring your attention to anything natural, anything that has come into existence without human intervention, you step out of the prison of conceptualized thinking and, to some extent, participate in the state of connectedness with Being in which everything natural still exists.
To bring your attention to a stone, a tree, or an animal does not mean to *think*

about it, but simply to perceive it, to hold it in your awareness.
Something of its essence then transmits itself to you. You can sense how still it is, and in doing so the same stillness arises within you. You sense how deeply it rests in Being — completely at one with what it is and where it is. In realizing this, you too come to a place of rest deep within yourself.

When walking or resting in nature, honor that realm by being there fully. Be still. Look. Listen. See how every animal and every plant is completely itself. Unlike humans, they have not split themselves in two. They do not live through mental images of themselves, so they do not need to be concerned with trying to protect and enhance those images. The deer *is* itself. The daffodil *is* itself.
All things in nature are not only one with themselves but also one with the totality. They haven't removed themselves from the fabric of the whole by claiming a separate existence: “me” and the rest of the universe.
The contemplation of nature can free you of that “me,” the great troublemaker.

Bring awareness to the many subtle sounds of nature — the rustling of leaves in the wind, raindrops falling, the humming of an insect, the first birdsong at dawn. Give yourself completely to the act of listening. Beyond the sounds there is something greater: a sacredness that cannot be understood through thought.

You didn't create your body, nor are you able to control the body's functions. An intelligence greater than the human mind is at work. It is the same intelligence that sustains all of nature. You cannot get any closer to that intelligence than by being aware of your own inner energy field — by feeling the aliveness, the animating presence within the body.

The playfulness and joy of a dog, its unconditional love and readiness to celebrate life at any moment often contrast sharply with the inner state of the dog's owner — depressed, anxious, burdened by problems, lost in thought,

not present in the only place and only time there is: Here and Now. One wonders: living with this person, how does the dog manage to remain so sane, so joyous?

When you perceive nature only through the mind, through thinking, you cannot sense its aliveness, its beingness. You see the form only and are unaware of the life within the form — the sacred mystery. Thought reduces nature to a commodity to be used in the pursuit of profit or knowledge or some other utilitarian purpose. The ancient forest becomes timber, the bird a research project, the mountain something to be mined or conquered.
When you perceive nature, let there be spaces of no thought, no mind. When you approach nature in this way, it will respond to you and participate in the evolution of human and planetary consciousness.

Notice how present a flower is, how surrendered to life.

The plant that you have in your home — have you ever truly looked at it? Have you allowed that familiar yet mysterious being we call *plant* to teach you its secrets? Have you noticed how deeply peaceful it is? How it is surrounded by a field of stillness? The moment you become aware of a plant's emanation of stillness and peace, that plant becomes your teacher.

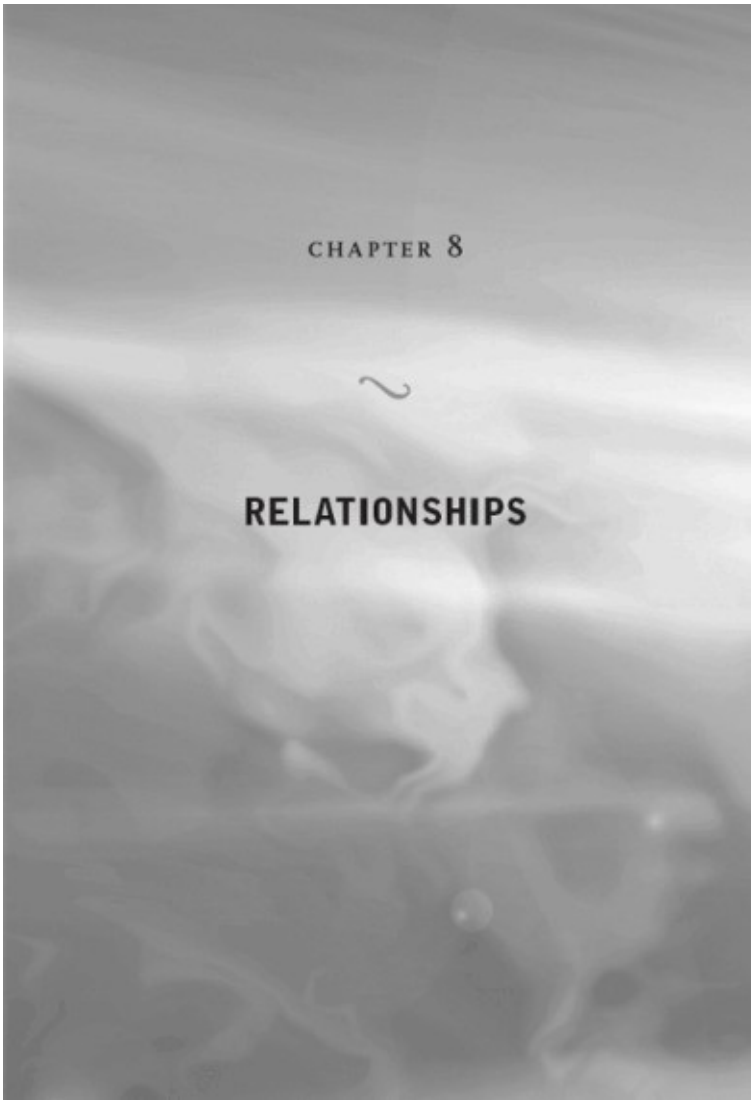
Watch an animal, a flower, a tree, and see how it rests in Being. It *is* itself. It has enormous dignity, innocence, and holiness. However, for you to see that, you need to go beyond the mental habit of naming and labeling. The moment you look beyond mental labels, you feel that ineffable dimension of nature that cannot be understood by thought or perceived through the senses. It is a harmony, a sacredness that permeates not only the whole of nature but is also within you.

The air that you breathe is nature, as is the breathing process itself.
Bring your attention to your breathing and realize that you are not doing it. It is the breath of nature. If you had to remember to breathe, you would soon die, and if you tried to stop breathing, nature would prevail.
You reconnect with nature in the most intimate and powerful way by becoming aware of your breathing and learning to hold your attention there. This is a healing and deeply empowering thing to do. It brings about a shift in consciousness from the conceptual world of thought to the inner realm of unconditioned consciousness.

You need nature as your teacher to help you reconnect with Being. But not only do you need nature, it also needs you.
You are not separate from nature. We are all part of the One Life that manifests itself in countless forms throughout the universe, forms that are all completely interconnected. When you recognize the sacredness, the beauty, the incredible stillness and dignity in which a flower or a tree exists, you add something to the flower or the tree. Through your recognition, your awareness, nature too comes to know itself. It comes to know its own beauty and sacredness through you!

A great silent space holds all of nature in its embrace. It also holds you.

Only when you are still inside do you have access to the realm of stillness that rocks, plants, and animals inhabit. Only when your noisy mind subsides can you connect with nature at a deep level and go beyond the sense of separation created by excessive thinking.
Thinking is a stage in the evolution of life. Nature exists in innocent stillness that is prior to the arising of thought. The tree, the flower, the bird, the rock are unaware of their own beauty and sacredness. When human beings become still, they go beyond thought. There is an added dimension of knowing, of awareness, in the stillness that is beyond thought.
Nature can bring you to stillness. That is its gift to you. When you perceive and join with nature in the field of stillness, that field becomes permeated with your awareness. That is your gift to nature.
Through you nature becomes aware of itself. Nature has been waiting for you, as it were, for millions of years.



How quick we are to form an opinion of a person, to come to a conclusion about them. It is satisfying to the egoic mind to label another human being, to give them a conceptual identity, to pronounce righteous judgment upon them.
Every human being has been conditioned to think and behave in certain ways — conditioned genetically as well as by their childhood experiences and their cultural environment.
That is not who they are, but that is who they appear to be. When you pronounce judgment upon someone, you confuse those conditioned mind patterns with who they are. To do that is in itself a deeply conditioned and unconscious pattern. You give them a conceptual identity, and that false identity becomes a prison not only for the other person but also for yourself.
To let go of judgment does not mean that you don't see what they do. It means that you recognize their behavior as a form of conditioning, and you see it and accept it as that. You don't construct an identity out of it for that person.
That liberates you as well as the other person from identification with conditioning, with form, with mind. The ego then no longer runs your

relationships.

As long as the ego runs your life, most of your thoughts, emotions, and actions arise from desire and fear. In relationships you then either want or fear something from the other person.
What you want from them may be pleasure or material gain, recognition, praise or attention, or a strengthening of your sense of self through comparison and through establishing that you are, have, or know more than they. What you fear is that the opposite may be the case, and they may diminish your sense of self in some way.
When you make the present moment the focal point of your attention — instead of using it as a means to an end — you go beyond the ego and beyond the unconscious compulsion to use people as a means to an end, the end being self-enhancement at the cost of others. When you give your fullest attention to whoever you are interacting with, you take past and future out of the relationship, except for practical matters. When you are fully present with everyone you meet, you relinquish the conceptual identity you made for them — your interpretation of who they are and what they did in the past — and are able to interact without the egoic movements of desire and fear. Attention, which is alert stillness, is the key.
How wonderful to go beyond wanting and fearing in your relationships. Love does not want or fear anything.

If her past were your past, her pain your pain, her level of consciousness your level of consciousness, you would think and act exactly as she does. With this realization comes forgiveness, compassion, peace.
The ego doesn't like to hear this, because if it cannot be reactive and righteous anymore, it will lose strength.

When you receive whoever comes into the space of Now as a noble guest, when you allow each person to be as they are, they begin to change.

To know another human being in their essence, you don't really need to know

anything *about* them — their past, their history, their story. We confuse knowing *about* with a deeper knowing that is non-conceptual. Knowing *about* and knowing are totally different modalities. One is concerned with form, the other with the formless. One operates through thought, the other through stillness.
Knowing *about* is helpful for practical purposes. On that level, we cannot do without it. When it is the predominant modality in relationships, however, it becomes very limiting, even destructive. Thoughts and concepts create an artificial barrier, a separation between human beings. Your interactions are then not rooted in Being, but become mind-based. Without the conceptual barriers, love is naturally present in all human interactions.

Most human interactions are confined to the exchange of words — the realm of thought. It is essential to bring some stillness, particularly into your close relationships.
No relationship can thrive without the sense of spaciousness that comes with stillness. Meditate or spend silent time in nature together. When going for a walk or sitting in the car or at home, become comfortable with being in stillness together. Stillness cannot and need not be created. Just be receptive to the stillness that is already there, but is usually obscured by mental noise.
If spacious stillness is missing, the relationship will be dominated by the mind and can easily be taken over by problems and conflict. If stillness is there, it can contain anything.

True listening is another way of bringing stillness into the relationship. When you truly listen to someone, the dimension of stillness arises and becomes an essential part of the relationship. But true listening is a rare skill. Usually, the greater part of a person's attention is taken up by their thinking. At best, they may be evaluating your words or preparing the next thing to say. Or they may not be listening at all, lost in their own thoughts.
True listening goes far beyond auditory perception. It is the arising of alert attention, a space of presence in which the words are being received. The words now become secondary. They may be meaningful or they may not make sense. Far more important than *what* you are listening to is the act of listening itself, the space of conscious presence that arises as you listen. That space is a unifying field of awareness in which you meet the other person without the separative barriers created by conceptual thinking. And now the other person is no longer "other." In that space, you are joined together as one awareness, one consciousness.

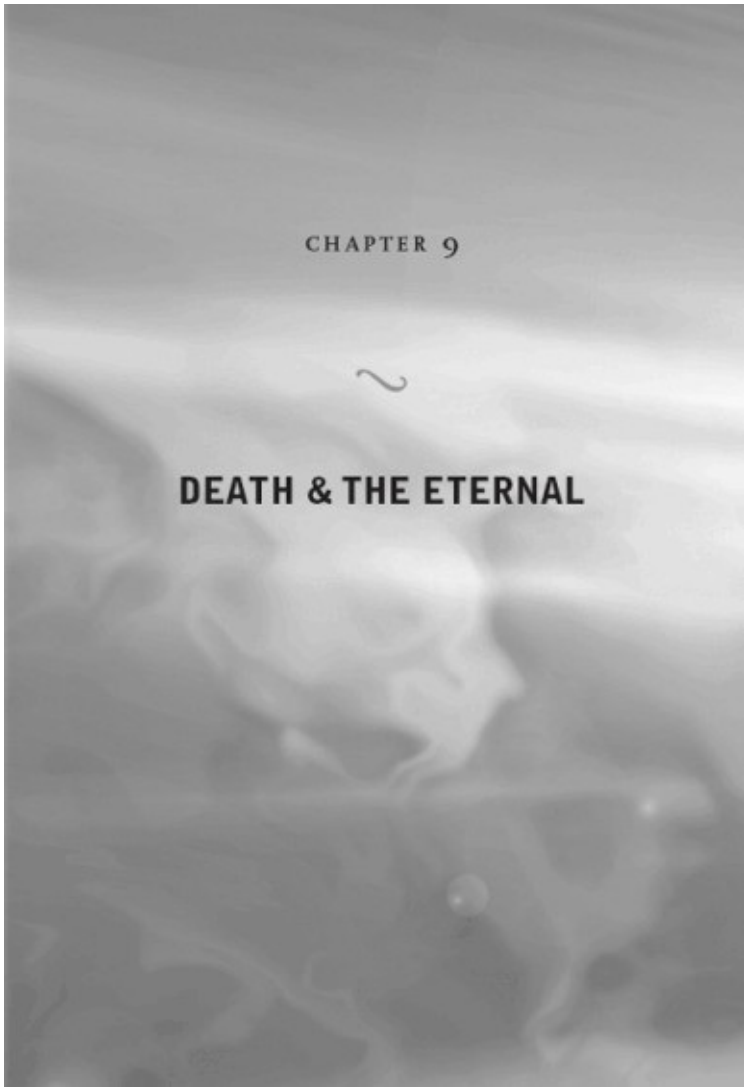
Do you experience frequent and repetitive drama in your close relationships? Do relatively insignificant disagreements often trigger violent arguments and emotional pain?
At the root of such experiences lie the basic egoic patterns: the need to be right and, of course, for someone else to be wrong; that is to say, identification with mental positions. There is also the ego's need to be periodically in conflict with something or someone in order to strengthen its sense of separation between "me" and the "other" without which it cannot survive.
In addition, there is the accumulated emotional pain from the past that you and each human being carries within, both from your personal past as well as the collective pain of humanity that goes back a long, long time. This "pain-body" is an energy field within you that sporadically takes you over because it needs to experience more emotional pain for it to feed on and replenish itself. It will try to control your thinking and make it deeply negative. It loves your negative thoughts, since it resonates with their frequency and so can feed on them. It will also provoke negative emotional reactions in people close to you, especially your partner, in order to feed on the ensuing drama and emotional pain.
How can you free yourself from this deep-seated unconscious identification with pain that creates so much misery in your life?
Become aware of it. Realize that it is not who you are, and recognize it for what it is: past pain. Witness it as it happens in your partner or in yourself. When your unconscious identification with it is broken, when you are able to observe it within yourself, you don't feed it anymore, and it will gradually lose its energy charge.

Human interaction can be hell. Or it can be a great spiritual practice.

When you look upon another human being and feel great love toward them, or when you contemplate beauty in nature and something within you responds deeply to it, close your eyes for a moment and feel the essence of that love or that beauty within you, inseparable from who you are, your true nature. The outer form is a temporary reflection of what you are within, in your essence. That is why love and beauty can never leave you, although all outer forms will.

What is your relationship with the world of objects, the countless things that surround you and that you handle every day? The chair you sit on, the pen, the car, the cup? Are they to you merely a means to an end, or do you occasionally acknowledge their existence, their being, no matter how briefly, by noticing them and giving them your attention?
When you get attached to objects, when you are using them to enhance your worth in your own eyes and in the eyes of others, concern about things can easily take over your whole life. When there is self-identification with things, you don't appreciate them for what they are because you are looking for yourself in them.
When you appreciate an object for what it is, when you acknowledge its being without mental projection, you cannot *not* feel grateful for its existence. You may also sense that it is not really inanimate, that it only appears so to the senses. Physicists will confirm that on a molecular level it is indeed a pulsating energy field.
Through selfless appreciation of the realm of things, the world around you will come alive in ways that you cannot even begin to comprehend with the mind.

Whenever you meet anyone, no matter how briefly, do you acknowledge their being by giving them your full attention? Or are you reducing them to a means to an end, a mere function or role?
What is the quality of your relationship with the cashier at the supermarket, the parking attendant, the repairman, the "customer"?
A moment of attention is enough. As you look at them or listen to them, there is an alert stillness — perhaps only two or three seconds, perhaps longer. That is enough for something more real to emerge than the roles we usually play and identify with. All roles are part of the conditioned consciousness that is the human mind. That which emerges through the act of attention is the unconditioned — who you are in your essence, underneath your name and form. You are no longer acting out a script; you become real. When that dimension emerges from within you, it also draws it forth from within the other person.
Ultimately, of course, there is no other, and you are always meeting yourself.



When you walk through a forest that has not been tamed and interfered with by man, you will see not only abundant life all around you, but you will also encounter fallen trees and decaying trunks, rotting leaves and decomposing matter at every step. Wherever you look, you will find death as well as life.
Upon closer scrutiny, however, you will discover that the decomposing tree trunk and rotting leaves not only give birth to new life, but are full of life themselves. Microorganisms are at work. Molecules are rearranging themselves. So death isn't to be found anywhere. There is only the metamorphosis of life forms. What can you learn from this?
Death is not the opposite of life. Life has no opposite. The opposite of death is birth. Life is eternal.

Sages and poets throughout the ages have recognized the dreamlike quality of

human existence — seemingly so solid and real and yet so fleeting that it could dissolve at any moment.
At the hour of your death, the story of your life may, indeed, appear to you like a dream that is coming to an end. Yet even in a dream there must be an essence that is real. There must be a consciousness in which the dream happens; otherwise, it would not be.
That consciousness — does the body create it or does consciousness create the dream of body, the dream of somebody?
Why have most of those who went through a near-death experience lost their fear of death? Reflect upon this.

Of course you know you are going to die, but that remains a mere mental concept until you meet death "in person" for the first time: through a serious illness or an accident that happens to you or someone close to you, or through the passing away of a loved one, death enters your life as the awareness of your own mortality.
Most people turn away from it in fear, but if you do not flinch and face the fact that your body is fleeting and could dissolve at any moment, there is some degree of disidentification, however slight, from your own physical and psychological form, the "me." When you see and accept the impermanent nature of all life forms, a strange sense of peace comes upon you.
Through facing death, your consciousness is freed to some extent from identification with form. This is why in some Buddhist traditions, the monks regularly visit the morgue to sit and meditate among the dead bodies.
There is still a widespread denial of death in Western cultures. Even old people try not to speak or think about it, and dead bodies are hidden away. A culture that denies death inevitably becomes shallow and superficial, concerned only with the external form of things. When death is denied, life loses its depth. The possibility of knowing who we are beyond name and form, the dimension of the transcendent, disappears from our lives because death is the opening into that dimension.

People tend to be uncomfortable with endings, because every ending is a little death. That's why in many languages, the word for "good-bye" means "see you again."
Whenever an experience comes to an end — a gathering of friends, a vacation, your children leaving home — you die a little death. A "form" that appeared in your consciousness as that experience dissolves. Often this leaves behind a feeling of emptiness that most people try hard not to feel, not to face.
If you can learn to accept and even welcome the endings in your life, you may find that the feeling of emptiness that initially felt uncomfortable turns into a

sense of inner spaciousness that is deeply peaceful.
By learning to die daily in this way, you open yourself to Life.

Most people feel that their identity, their sense of self, is something incredibly precious that they don't want to lose. That is why they have such fear of death. It seems unimaginable and frightening that "I" could cease to exist. But you confuse that precious "I" with your name and form and a story associated with it. That "I" is no more than a temporary formation in the field of consciousness.
As long as that form identity is all you know, you are not aware that this preciousness is your own essence, your innermost sense of *I Am,* which is consciousness itself. It is the eternal in you — and that's the only thing you *cannot* lose.

Whenever any kind of deep loss occurs in your life — such as loss of possessions, your home, a close relationship; or loss of your reputation, job, or physical abilities — something inside you dies. You feel diminished in your sense of who you are. There may also be a certain disorientation. "Without this...who am I?"
When a form that you had unconsciously identified with as part of yourself leaves you or dissolves, that can be extremely painful. It leaves a hole, so to speak, in the fabric of your existence.
When this happens, don't deny or ignore the pain or the sadness that you feel. Accept that it is there. Beware of your mind's tendency to construct a story around that loss in which you are assigned the role of victim. Fear, anger, resentment, or self-pity are the emotions that go with that role. Then become aware of what lies behind those emotions as well as behind the mind-made story: that hole, that empty space. Can you face and accept that strange sense of emptiness? If you do, you may find that it is no longer a fearful place. You may be surprised to find peace emanating from it.
Whenever death occurs, whenever a life form dissolves, God, the formless and unmanifested, shines through the opening left by the dissolving form. That is why the most sacred thing in life is death. That is why the peace of God can come to you through the contemplation and acceptance of death.

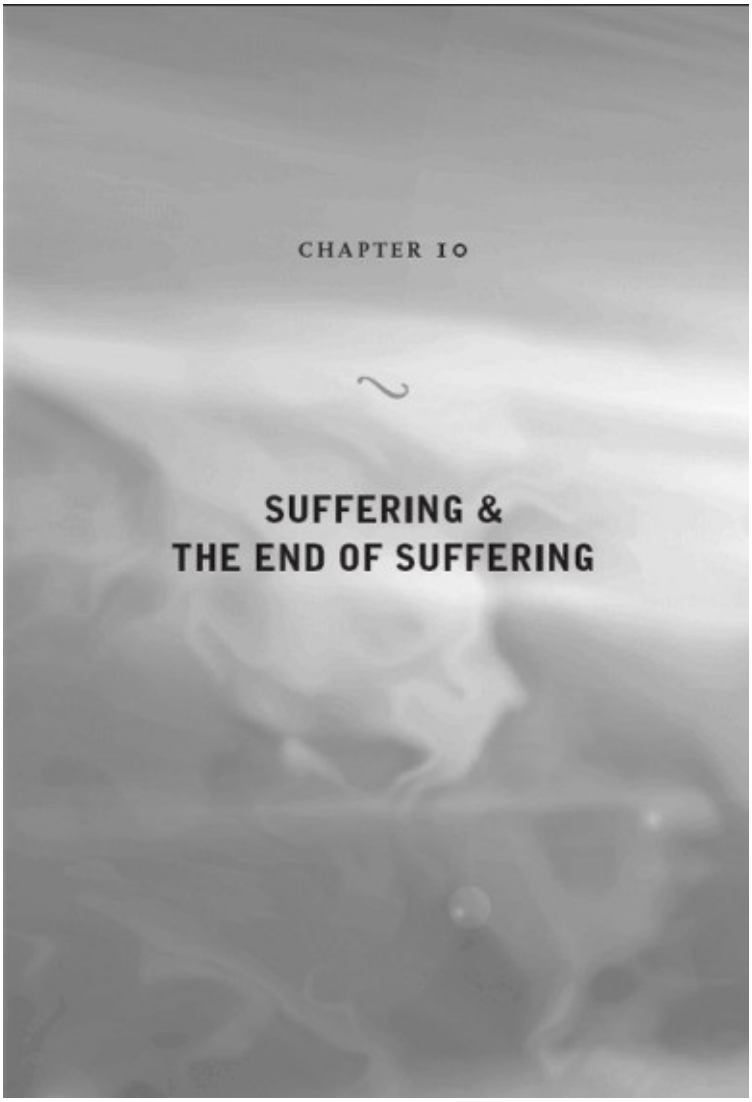
How short-lived every human experience is, how fleeting our lives. Is there anything that is not subject to birth and death, anything that is eternal?

Consider this: if there were only one color, let us say blue, and the entire world and everything in it were blue, then there would be no blue. There needs to be something that is not blue so that blue can be recognized; otherwise, it would not "stand out," would not exist.
In the same way, does it not require something that is not fleeting and impermanent for the fleetingness of all things to be recognized? In other words: if everything, including yourself, were impermanent, would you even know it? Does the fact that you are aware of and can witness the short-lived nature of all forms, including your own, not mean that there is something in you that is not subject to decay?
When you are twenty, you are aware of your body as strong and vigorous; sixty years later, you are aware of your body as weakened and old. Your thinking too may have changed from when you were twenty, but the awareness that knows that your body is young or old or that your thinking has changed has undergone no change. That awareness is the eternal in you — consciousness itself. It is the formless One Life. Can you lose It? No, because you are It.

Some people become deeply peaceful and almost luminous just before they die, as if something is shining through the dissolving form.
Sometimes it happens that very ill or old people become almost transparent, so to speak, in the last few weeks, months, or even years of their lives. As they look at you, you may see a light shining through their eyes. There is no psychological suffering left. They have surrendered and so the person, the mind-made egoic "me," has already dissolved. They have "died before they died" and found the deep inner peace that is the realization of the deathless within themselves.

To every accident and disaster there is a potentially redemptive dimension that we are usually unaware of.
The tremendous shock of totally unexpected, imminent death can have the effect of forcing your consciousness completely out of identification with form. In the last few moments before physical death, and as you die, you then experience yourself as consciousness free of form. Suddenly, there is no more fear, just peace and a knowing that "all is well" and that death is only a form dissolving. Death is then recognized as ultimately illusory — as illusory as the form you had identified with as yourself.

Death is not an anomaly or the most dreadful of all events as modern culture would have you believe, but the most natural thing in the world, inseparable from and just as natural as its polarity — birth. Remind yourself of this when you sit with a dying person.
It is a great privilege and a sacred act to be present at a person's death as a witness and companion.
When you sit with a dying person, do not deny any aspect of that experience. Do not deny what is happening and do not deny your feelings. The recognition that there is nothing you can do may make you feel helpless, sad, or angry. Accept what you feel. Then go one step further: accept that there is nothing you can do, and accept it completely. You are not in control. Deeply surrender to every aspect of that experience, your feelings as well as any pain or discomfort the dying person may be experiencing. Your surrendered state of consciousness and the stillness that comes with it will greatly assist the dying person and ease their transition. If words are called for, they will come out of the stillness within you. But they will be secondary.
With the stillness comes the benediction: peace.



The interconnectedness of all things: Buddhists have always known it, and physicists now confirm it. Nothing that happens is an isolated event; it only appears to be. The more we judge and label it, the more we isolate it. The wholeness of life becomes fragmented through our thinking. Yet the totality of life has brought this event about. It is part of the web of interconnectedness that is the cosmos.

This means: whatever *is* could not be otherwise.

In most cases, we cannot begin to understand what role a seemingly senseless event may have within the totality of the cosmos, but recognizing its inevitability within the vastness of the whole can be the beginning of an inner acceptance of what *is* and thus a realignment with the wholeness of life.

True freedom and the end of suffering is living in such a way as if you had completely chosen whatever you feel or experience at this moment.
This inner alignment with Now is the end of suffering.

Is suffering really necessary? Yes and no.
If you had not suffered as you have, there would be no depth to you as a human being, no humility, no compassion. You would not be reading this now. Suffering cracks open the shell of ego, and then comes a point when it has served its purpose. Suffering is necessary until you realize it is unnecessary.

Unhappiness needs a mind-made "me" with a story, a conceptual identity. It needs time — past and future. When you remove time from your unhappiness, what is it that remains? The "such-ness" of this moment remains.
It may be a feeling of heaviness, agitation, tightness, anger, or even nausea. That is not unhappiness, and it is not a personal problem. There is nothing personal in human pain. It is simply an intense pressure or intense energy that you feel somewhere in the body. By giving it attention, the feeling doesn't turn into thinking and thus reactivate the unhappy "me."
See what happens when you just allow a feeling to be.

Much suffering, much unhappiness arises when you take each thought that comes into your head for the truth. Situations don't make you unhappy. They may cause you physical pain, but they don't make you unhappy. Your thoughts make you unhappy. Your interpretations, the stories you tell yourself make you unhappy.
"The thoughts I am thinking right now are making me unhappy." This realization breaks your unconscious identification with those thoughts.

What a miserable day.
He didn't have the decency to return my call.
She let me down.

Little stories we tell ourselves and others, often in the form of complaints. They are unconsciously designed to enhance our always deficient sense of self through being "right" and making something or someone "wrong." Being "right" places us in a position of imagined superiority and so strengthens our false sense of self, the ego. This also creates some kind of enemy: yes, the ego needs enemies to define its boundary, and even the weather can serve that function.
Through habitual mental judgment and emotional contraction, you have a personalized, reactive relationship to people and events in your life. These are all forms of self-created suffering, but they are not recognized as such because to the ego they are satisfying. The ego enhances itself through reactivity and conflict.
How simple life would be without those stories.
It is raining.
He did not call.
I was there. She was not.

When you are suffering, when you are unhappy, stay totally with what is Now. Unhappiness or problems cannot survive in the Now.

Suffering begins when you mentally name or label a situation in some way as undesirable or bad. You resent a situation and that resentment personalizes it and brings in a reactive "me."
Naming and labeling are habitual, but that habit can be broken. Start practicing "not naming" with small things. If you miss the plane, drop and break a cup, or slip and fall in the mud, can you refrain from naming the experience as bad or painful? Can you immediately accept the "isness" of that moment?
Naming something as bad causes an emotional contraction within you. When you let it be, without naming it, enormous power is suddenly available to you. The contraction cuts you off from that power, the power of life itself.

They ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
Go beyond good and bad by refraining from mentally labeling anything as good or bad. When you go beyond the habitual naming, the power of the universe moves through you. When you are in a nonreactive relationship to experiences, what you would have called "bad" before often turns around

quickly, if not immediately, through the power of life itself.
Watch what happens when you don't name an experience as "bad" and instead bring an inner acceptance, an inner "yes" to it, and so let it be as it is.

Whatever your life situation is, how would you feel if you completely accepted it as it is — right Now?

There are many subtle and not so subtle forms of suffering that are so "normal" they are usually not recognized as suffering and may even feel satisfying to the ego — irritation, impatience, anger, having an issue with something or someone, resentment, complaining.
You can learn to recognize all those forms of suffering as they happen and know: at this moment, I am creating suffering for myself.
If you are in the habit of creating suffering for yourself, you are probably creating suffering for others too. These unconscious mind patterns tend to come to an end simply by making them conscious, by becoming aware of them as they happen.
You cannot be conscious *and* create suffering for yourself.

This is the miracle: behind every condition, person, or situation that appears "bad" or "evil" lies concealed a deeper good. That deeper good reveals itself to you — both within and without — through inner acceptance of what *is.*
"Resist not evil" is one of the highest truths of humanity.

A dialogue:
Accept what is.
I truly cannot. I'm agitated and angry about this.
Then accept what is.
Accept that I'm agitated and angry? Accept that I cannot accept?
Yes. Bring acceptance into your nonacceptance. Bring surrender into your nonsurrender. Then see what happens.

Chronic physical pain is one of the harshest teachers you can have. “Resistance is futile” is its teaching.
Nothing could be more normal than an unwillingness to suffer. Yet if you can let go of that unwillingness, and instead allow the pain to be there, you may notice a subtle inner separation from the pain, a space between you and the pain, as it were. This means to suffer consciously, willingly. When you suffer consciously, physical pain can quickly burn up the ego in you, since ego consists largely of resistance. The same is true of extreme physical disability.
You “offer up your suffering to God” is another way of saying this.

You don't need to be a Christian to understand the deep universal truth that is contained in symbolic form in the image of the cross.
The cross is a torture instrument. It stands for the most extreme suffering, limitation, and helplessness a human being can encounter. Then suddenly that human being surrenders, suffers willingly, consciously, expressed through the words, “Not my will but Thy will be done.” At that moment, the cross, the torture instrument, shows its hidden face: it is also a sacred symbol, a symbol for the divine.
That which seemed to deny the existence of any transcendental dimension to life, through surrender becomes an opening into that dimension.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Spiritual teacher and author Eckhart Tolle was born in Germany and educated at the Universities of London and Cambridge. When he was twenty-nine, a profound inner transformation radically changed the course of his life. He devoted the next few years to understanding, integrating, and deepening that transformation, which marked the beginning of an intense inward journey. Later, he began to work in London with individuals and small groups as a counselor and spiritual teacher. Since 1995 he has lived in Vancouver, Canada.

Eckhart is the author of the #1 *New York Times* bestseller *The Power of Now* (translated into thirty-three languages) and the highly acclaimed follow-up, *A New Earth*, which are widely regarded as two of the most influential spiritual books of our time. Eckhart's other works include *Stillness Speaks*, a book designed for meditative reading, and *Practicing the Power of Now*, which consists of selections from *The Power of Now*.

Eckhart's profound yet simple teachings have already helped countless people throughout the world find inner peace and greater fulfillment in their lives. At the core of the teachings lies the transformation of consciousness, a spiritual awakening that he sees as the next step in human evolution. An essential aspect of this awakening consists in transcending our ego-based state of consciousness. This is a prerequisite not only for personal happiness but also for ending the violent conflict endemic on our planet.

Eckhart is a sought-after public speaker who teaches and travels extensively throughout the world. Many of his talks, intensives, and retreats are published on CD and DVD. Most of the teachings are given in English, but occasionally Eckhart also gives talks in German and Spanish.

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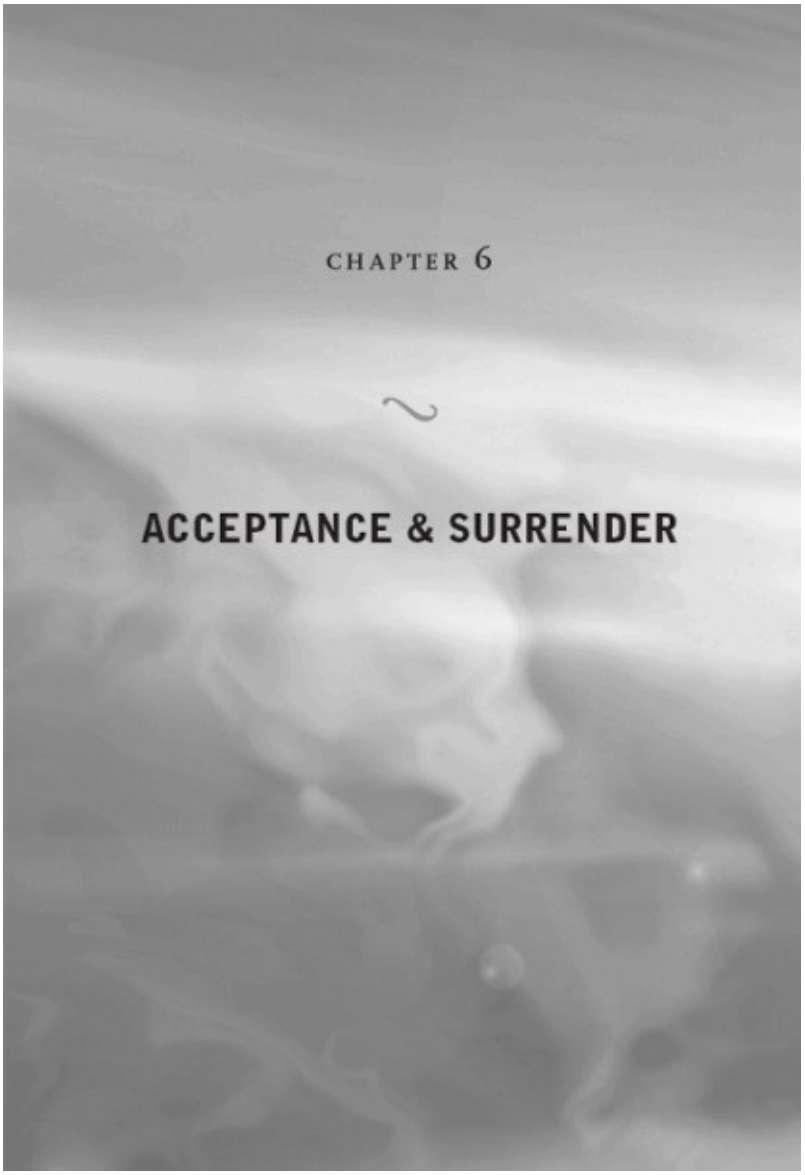
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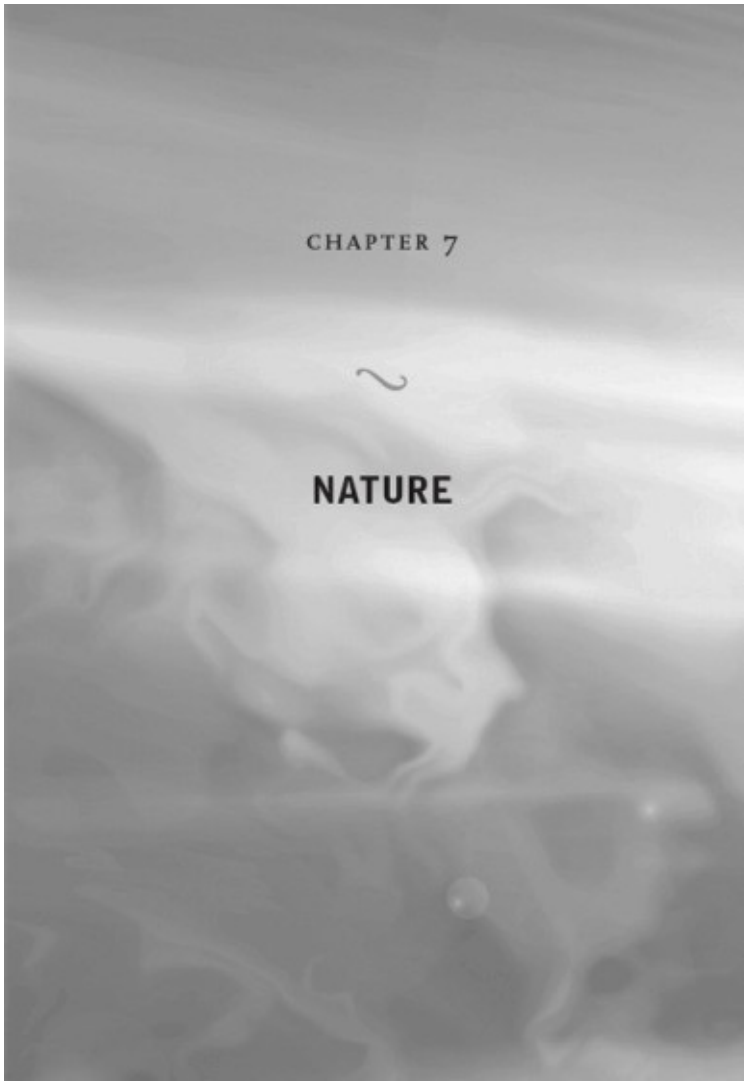
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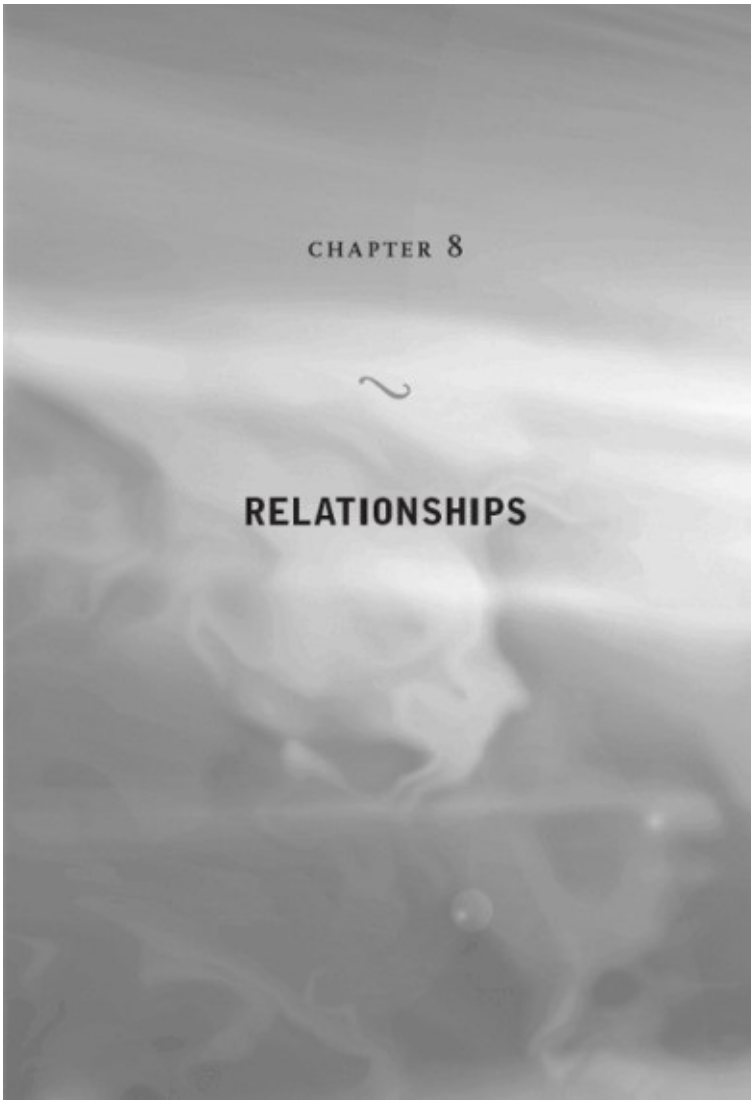
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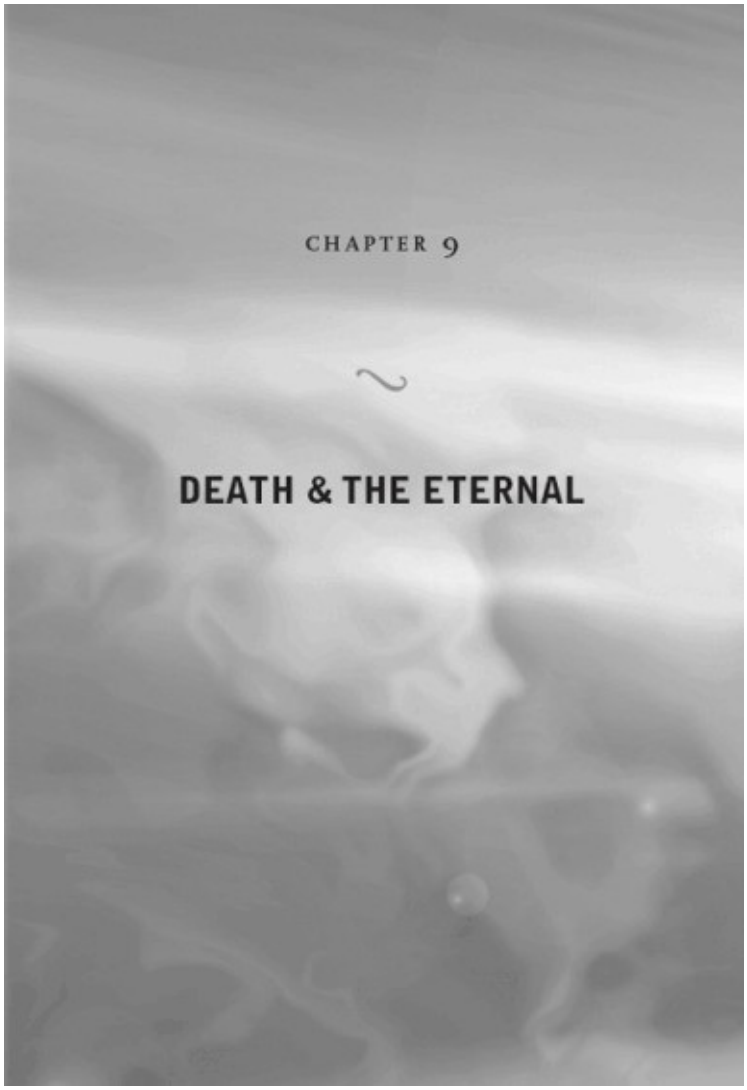
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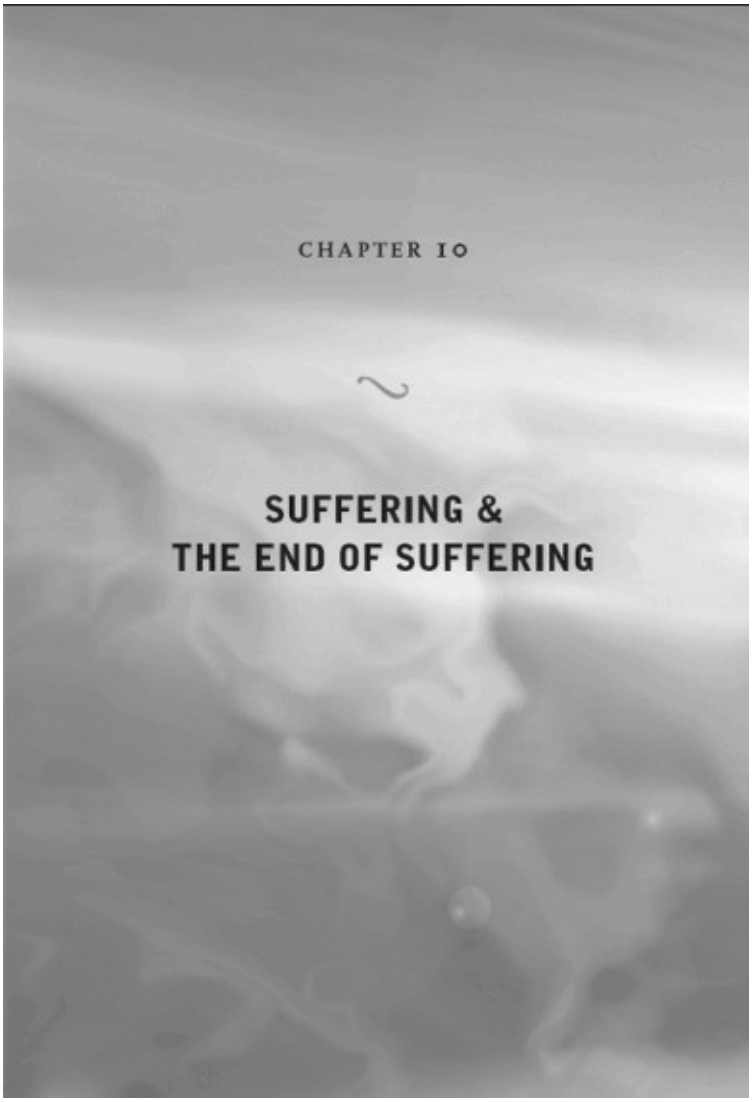
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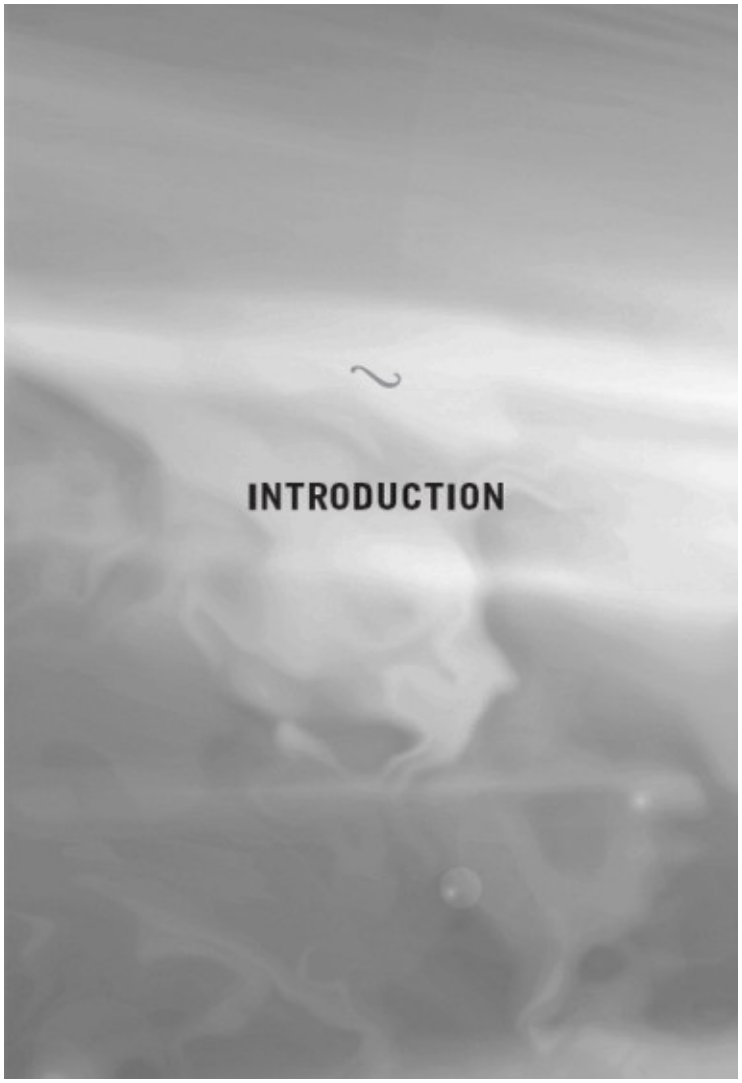
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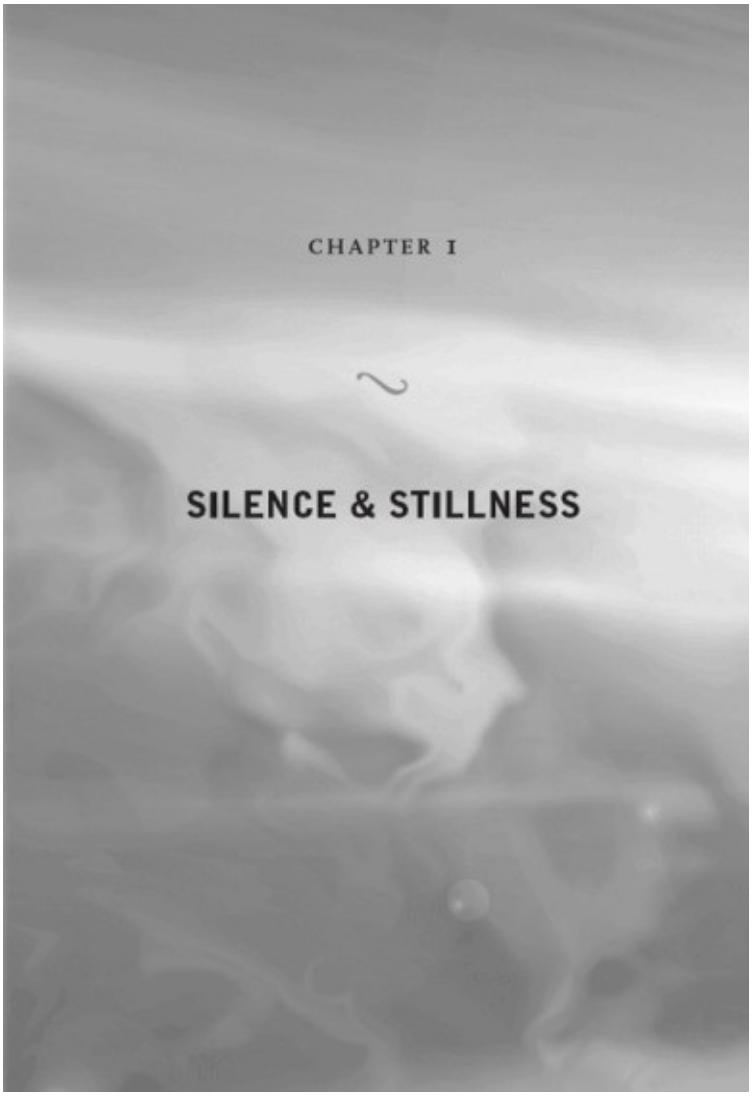
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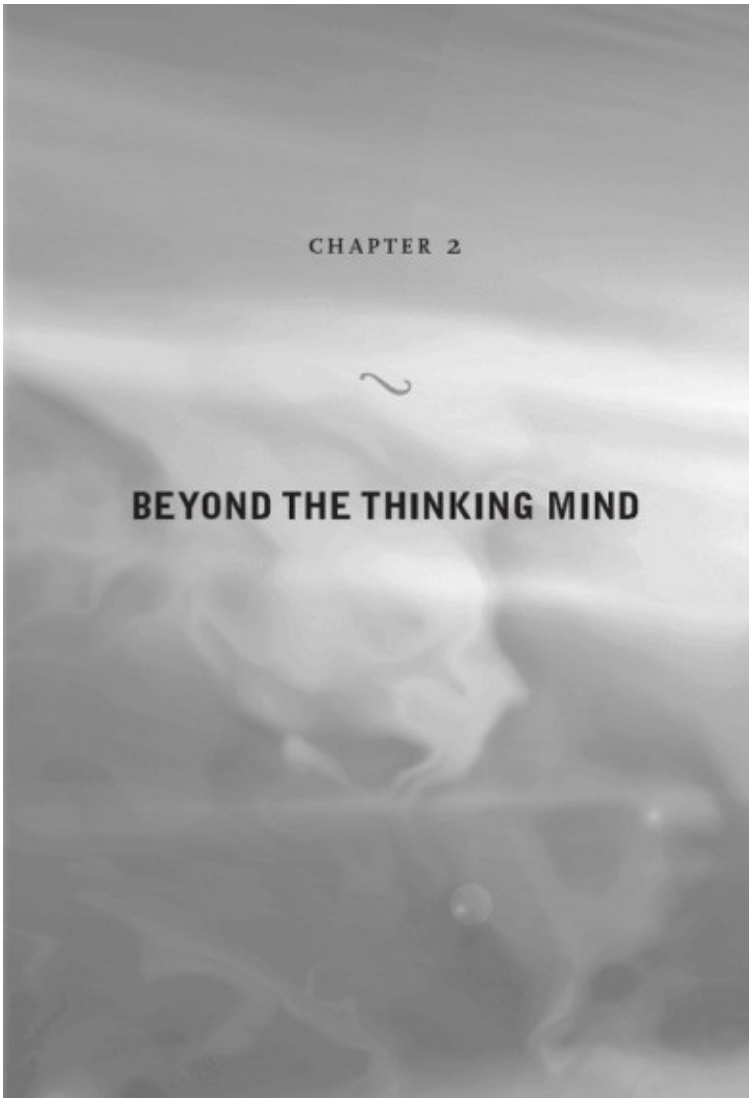
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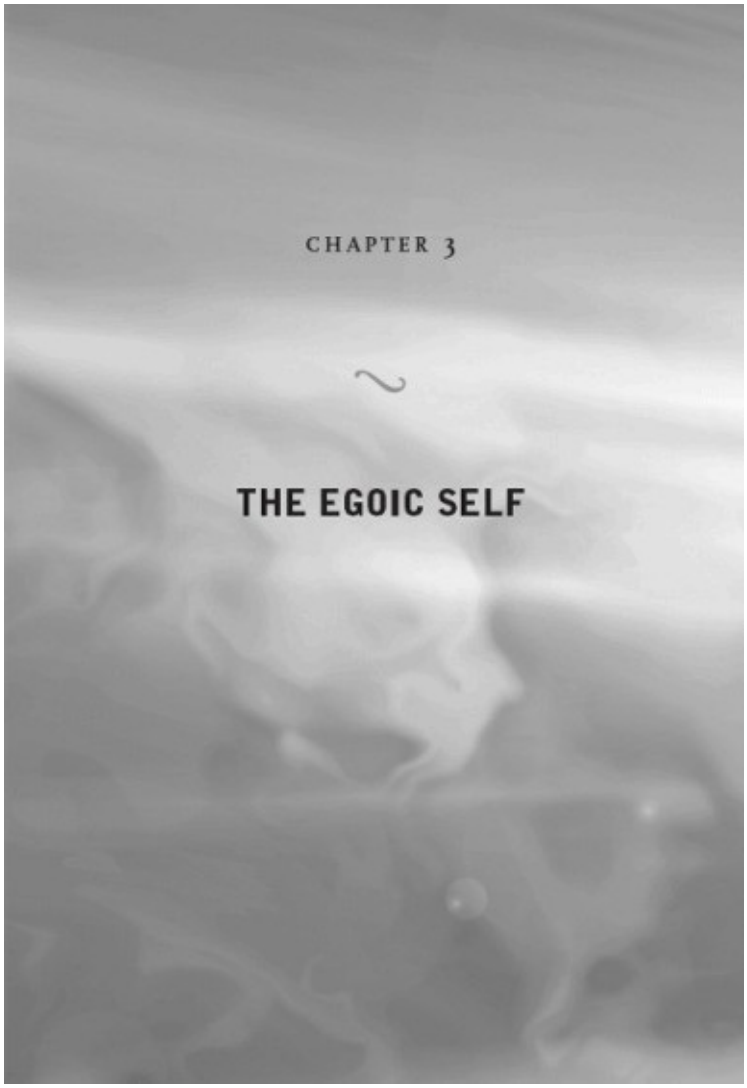
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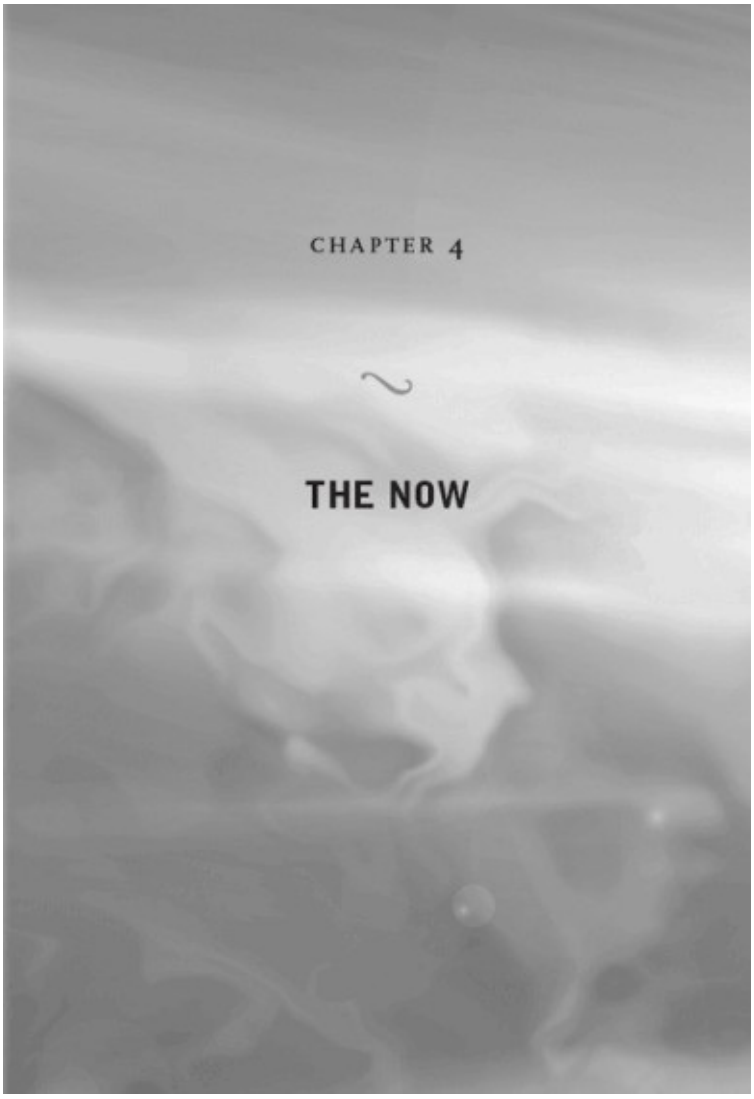
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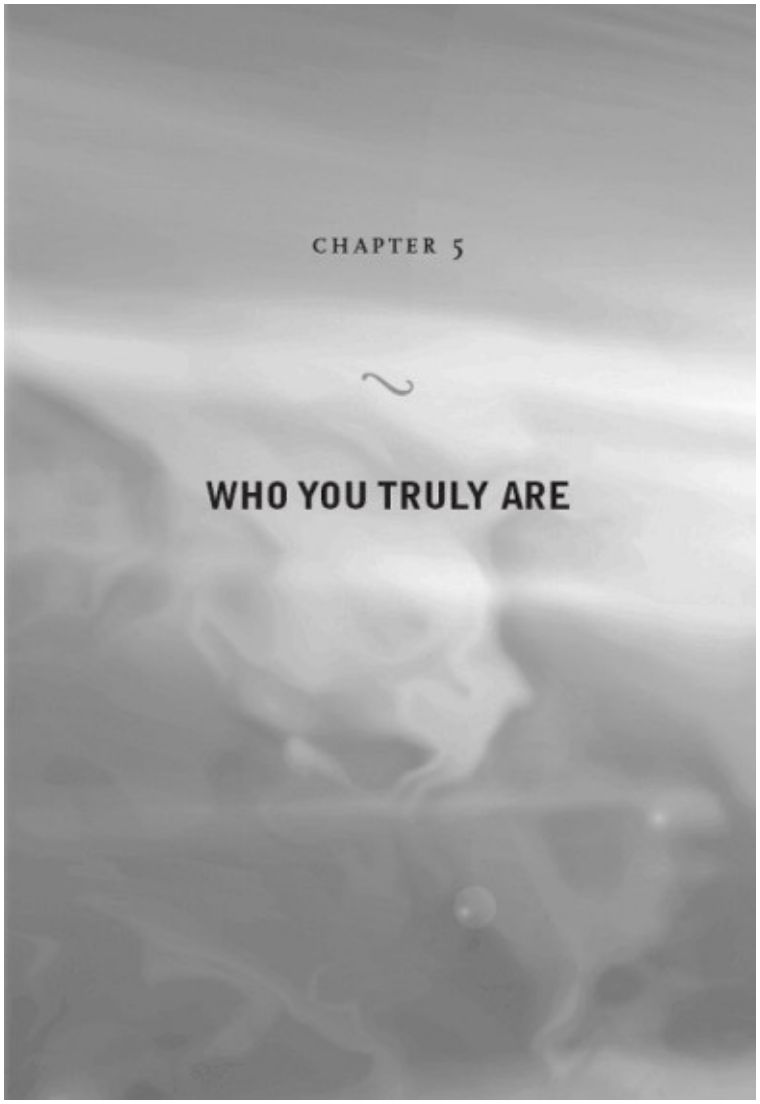
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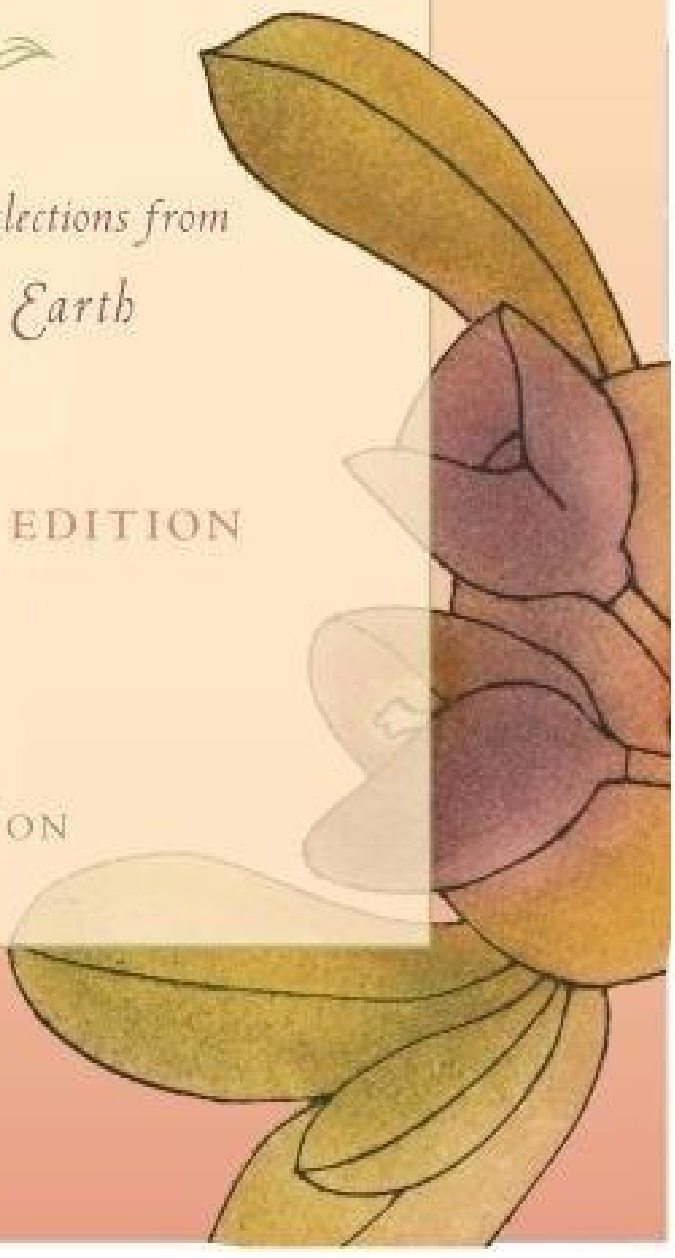

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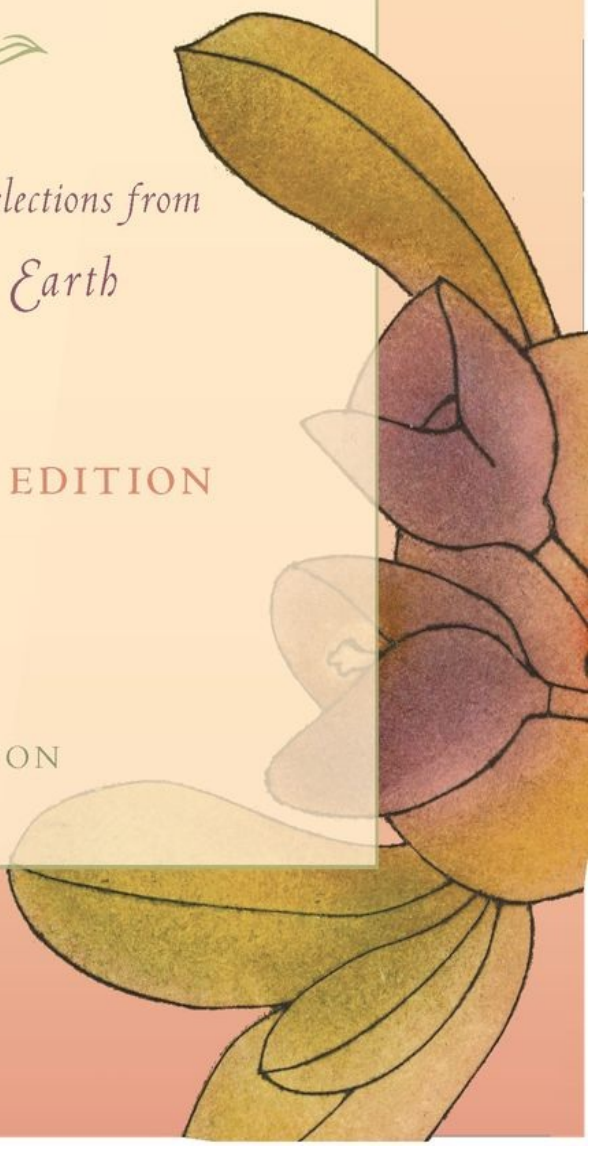

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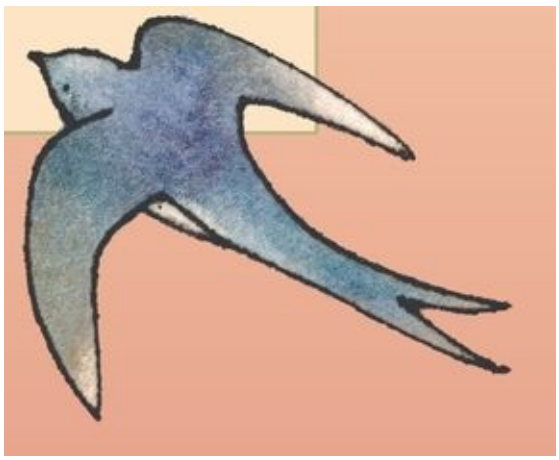
INTRODUCTION

For this companion volume to *A New Earth,* I selected passages from the original book that felt particularly suitable for inspirational or meditative reading. For this reason I do not recommend that you read this book straight through from cover to cover. It would be far more beneficial to read, at the most, one chapter at a time, stopping at and perhaps rereading whatever passages elicit an inner response. Then let the words sink in and sense the truth to which they point, which is, of course, already within you. It can also be helpful to open the book at random occasionally, read one page or just one passage and let the words point the way to that dimension deep within that is beyond words, beyond thought. The truth to which the words point, the timeless dimension of consciousness, cannot be arrived at through discursive thought and conceptual understanding.



This book is not a condensed version of *A New Earth.* Although it contains some of the most powerful pointers from the original book, there is relatively little here about the ego and nothing about the pain-body. In other words: If you want to understand and thus be able to detect those mental-emotional patterns within you that block the arising of a new consciousness, you have to go to the original book.

This book will be of greatest benefit to those who have already read *A New Earth*—perhaps more than once—responded to it deeply, and experienced some degree of inner transformation through it. The informational content of this book is of relatively little importance. You read it not so much to learn

something new, but to go deeper, become more present, awaken out of the stream of incessant and compulsive thinking. If there is no inner recognition, however distant or fleeting, of that to which the words point, then the words will be quite meaningless and remain no more than abstract concepts. If there is such a recognition, however, it means that the awakened consciousness is beginning to emerge from within you and the words you are reading help to draw it out. If you come across passages in this book that you feel are powerful, I want you to realize that what you are feeling is your own spiritual power, that is to say who you are in your essence. Only Spirit can recognize Spirit.

Chapter 1

GOING BEYOND THOUGHT

*T*hinking is no more than a tiny aspect of the totality of consciousness, the totality of who you are.

*W*hat is arising now is not a new belief system, a new religion, spiritual ideology, or mythology. We are coming to the end not only of mythologies but also of ideologies and belief systems. The change goes deeper than the content of your mind, deeper than your thoughts. In fact, at the heart of the new consciousness lies the transcendence of thought, the newfound ability of rising above thought, of realizing a dimension within yourself that is infinitely more vast than thought.

You then no longer derive your identity, your sense of who you are, from the incessant stream of thinking that in the old consciousness you take to be yourself. What a liberation to realize that the "voice in my head" is not who I am.

Who am I then? The one who sees that. The awareness that is prior to thought, the space in which the thought—or the emotion or sense perception—happens.

*T*he primary cause of unhappiness is never the situation but your thoughts about it.

*B*e aware of the thoughts you are thinking. Separate them from the situation, which is always neutral, which always is as it is. There is the situation or the fact, and here are my thoughts about it. Instead of making up stories, stay with the facts. For example, "I am ruined" is a story. It limits you and prevents you from taking effective action. "I have fifty cents left in my bank account" is a fact. Facing facts is always empowering. Be aware that what you think, to a large extent, creates the emotions that you feel. See the link between your thinking and your emotions. Rather than being your thoughts and emotions,

be the awareness behind them.

"The wisdom of this world is folly with God," says the Bible.[1] What is the wisdom of this world? The movement of thought, and meaning that is defined exclusively by thought.

Thinking isolates a situation or event and calls it good or bad, as if it had a separate existence. Through excessive reliance on thinking, reality becomes fragmented. This fragmentation is an illusion, but it seems very real while you are trapped in it. And yet the universe is an indivisible whole in which all things are interconnected, in which nothing exists in isolation. The deeper interconnectedness of all things and events implies that the mental labels of "good" and "bad" are ultimately illusory. They always imply a limited perspective and so are true only relatively and temporarily.

There are no random events, nor are there events or things that exist by and for themselves, in isolation. The atoms that make up your body were once forged inside stars, and the causes of even the smallest event are virtually infinite and connected with the whole in incomprehensible ways.

If you wanted to trace back the cause of any event, you would have to go back all the way to the beginning of creation. The cosmos is not chaotic. The very word *cosmos* means order. But this is not an order the human mind can ever comprehend, although it can sometimes glimpse it.

When we go into a forest that has not been interfered with by man, our thinking mind will see only disorder and chaos all around us. It won't even be able to differentiate between life (good) and death (bad) anymore since everywhere new life grows out of rotting and decaying matter. Only if we are still enough inside and the noise of thinking subsides can we become aware that there is a hidden harmony here, a sacredness, a higher order in which everything has its perfect place and could not be other than what it is and the way it is.

The mind is more comfortable in a landscaped park because it has been planned through thought; it has not grown organically. There is an order here that the mind can understand. In the forest, there is an incomprehensible order that to the mind looks like chaos. It is beyond the mental categories of good and bad. You cannot understand it through thought, but you can sense it when you let go of thought, become still and alert, and don't try to understand

or explain. Only then can you be aware of the sacredness of the forest. As soon as you sense that hidden harmony, that sacredness, you realize you are not separate from it, and when you realize that, you become a conscious participant in it. In this way, nature can help you become realigned with the wholeness of life.

*T*his is most people's reality: As soon as something is perceived, it is named, interpreted, compared with something else, liked, disliked, or called good or bad by the phantom self, the ego. They are imprisoned in thought forms, in object consciousness.

*Y*ou do not awaken spiritually until the compulsive and unconscious naming ceases, or at least you become aware of it and thus are able to observe it as it happens. It is through this constant naming that the ego remains in place as the unobserved mind. Whenever it ceases and even when you just become aware of it, there is inner space, and you are not possessed by the mind anymore.

*C*hoose an object close to you—a pen, a chair, a cup, a plant—and explore it visually, that is to say, look at it with great interest, almost curiosity. Avoid any objects with strong personal associations that remind you of the past, such as where you bought it, who gave it to you, and so on. Also avoid anything that has writing on it such as a book or a bottle. It would stimulate thought. Without straining, relaxed but alert, give your complete attention to the object, every detail of it. If thoughts arise, don't get involved in them. It is not the thoughts you are interested in, but the act of perception itself. Can you take the thinking out of the perceiving? Can you look without the voice in your head commenting, drawing conclusions, comparing, or trying to figure something out? After a couple of minutes or so, let your gaze wander around the room or wherever you are, your alert attention lighting up each thing that it rests upon.

Then, listen to any sounds that may be present. Listen to them in the same way as you looked at the things around you. Some sounds may be natural—water, wind, birds—while others are man-made. Some may be pleasant, others unpleasant. However, don't differentiate between good and bad. Allow each sound to be as it is, without interpretation. Here too, relaxed but alert attention is the key.

*W*hen we perceive without interpreting or mental labeling, which means without adding thought to our perceptions, we can still sense the deeper connectedness underneath our perception of seemingly separate things.

*S*ee if you can catch, that is to say, notice, the voice in the head, perhaps in the very moment it complains about something, and recognize it for what it is: the voice of the ego, no more than a conditioned mind-pattern, a thought. Whenever you notice that voice, you will also realize that you are not the voice, but the one who is aware of it.

In fact, you *are* the awareness that is aware of the voice. In the background, there is the awareness. In the foreground, there is the voice, the thinker. In this way you are becoming free of the ego, free of the unobserved mind.

*N*either concepts nor mathematical formulae can explain the infinite. No thought can encapsulate the vastness of the totality. Reality is a unified whole, but thought cuts it up into fragments. This gives rise to fundamental misperceptions, for example, that there are separate things and events, or that *this* is the cause of *that*. Every thought implies a perspective, and every perspective, by its very nature, implies limitation, which ultimately means that it is not true, at least not absolutely. Only the whole is true, but the whole cannot be spoken or thought. Seen from beyond the limitations of thinking and therefore incomprehensible to the human mind, everything is happening now. All that ever has been or will be is now, outside of time, which is a mental construct.

*W*hen you don't cover up the world with words and labels, a sense of the miraculous returns to your life that was lost a long time ago when humanity, instead of using thought, became possessed by thought. A depth returns to your life. Things regain their newness, their freshness. And the greatest miracle is the experiencing of your essential self as prior to any words, thoughts, mental labels, and images. For this to happen, you need to disentangle your sense of I, of Beingness, from all the things it has become mixed up with, that is to say, identified with.

*I*s it possible to let go of the belief that you should or need to know who you are? In other words, can you cease looking to conceptual definitions to give you a sense of self ? Can you cease looking to *thought* for an identity?

*T*he more you make your thoughts into your identity, the more cut off you are from the spiritual dimension within yourself.

*D*efining yourself through thought is limiting yourself. When you fully accept that you don't know, you actually enter a state of peace and clarity that is

closer to who you truly are than thought could ever be.

*D*on't seek happiness. If you seek it, you won't find it, because seeking is the antithesis of happiness. Happiness is ever elusive, but freedom from unhappiness is attainable now, by facing what is rather than making up stories about it. Unhappiness covers up your natural state of well-being and inner peace, the source of true happiness.

Chapter 2

THE POWER OF THE PRESENT MOMENT

*T*he ego's greatest enemy is the present moment, which is to say, life itself.

*T*ime is seen as the endless succession of moments, some "good," some "bad." Yet, if you look more closely, that is to say, through your own immediate experience, you find that there are not many moments at all. You discover that there is only ever *this moment.* Life is always now. Your entire life unfolds in this constant Now. Even past or future moments only exist when you remember or anticipate them, and you do so by thinking about them in the only moment there is: this one.

Why does it appear then as if there were many moments? Because the present moment is confused with what happens, confused with content. The space of Now is confused with what happens in that space. The confusion of the present moment with content gives rise not only to the illusion of time, but also the illusion of ego.

*E*verything seems to be subject to time, yet it all happens in the Now. That is the paradox. Wherever you look, there is plenty of *circumstantial* evidence for the reality of time—a rotting apple, your face in the bathroom mirror compared to your face in a photo taken thirty years ago—yet you never find any *direct* evidence, you never experience time itself. You only ever experience the present moment, or rather what happens in it. If you go by direct evidence only, there is no time, and the Now is all there ever is.

*W*hatever is or happens is the form that the Now takes. As long as you resist it internally, form, that is to say, the world, is an impenetrable barrier that separates you from who you are beyond form, separates you from the formless one Life that you are. When you bring an inner yes to the form the Now takes, that very form becomes a doorway into the formless. The separation between the world and God dissolves.

If you resist what happens, you are at the mercy of what happens, and the world will determine your happiness and unhappiness.

*M*ost egos have conflicting wants. They want different things at different times or may not even know what they want except that they don't want what is: the present moment.

*T*o be in alignment with *what is* means to be in a relationship of inner nonresistance with what happens. It means not to label it mentally as good or bad, but to let it be. Does this mean you can no longer take action to bring about change in your life? On the contrary. When the basis for your actions is inner alignment with the present moment, your actions become empowered by the intelligence of Life itself.

*W*henever you become anxious or stressed, outer purpose has taken over, and you lost sight of your inner purpose. You have forgotten that your state of consciousness is primary, all else secondary.

*W*hy do anxiety, stress, or negativity arise? Because you turned away from the present moment. And why did you do that? You thought something else was more important. You forgot your main purpose. One small error, one misperception, creates a world of suffering.

*T*here are three ways in which the ego will treat the present moment: as a means to and end, as an obstacle, or as an enemy.

*W*hen you react against the form that Life takes at this moment, when you treat the Now as a means, an obstacle, or an enemy, you strengthen your own form identity, the ego. Hence the ego's reactivity. What is reactivity? Becoming addicted to reaction. The more reactive you are, the more entangled you become with form. The more identified with form, the stronger the ego. Your Being then does not shine through form anymore—or only barely.

*P*eople believe themselves to be dependent on what happens for their happiness, that is to say, dependent on form. They don't realize that what happens is the most unstable thing in the universe. It changes constantly. They look upon the present moment as either marred by something that has happened and shouldn't have or as deficient because of something that has not happened but should have. And so they miss the deeper perfection that is

inherent in life itself, a perfection that is always already here, that lies beyond what is happening or not happening, beyond form.

Accept the present moment and find the perfection that is deeper than any form and untouched by time.

*T*he most important, the primordial relationship in your life is your relationship with the Now, or rather with whatever form the Now takes, that is to say, what is or what happens. If your relationship with the Now is dysfunctional, that dysfunction will be reflected in every relationship and every situation you encounter. The ego could be defined simply in this way: a dysfunctional relationship with the present moment. It is at this moment that you can decide what kind of relationship you want to have with the present moment.

"Do I want the present moment to be my friend or my enemy?" The present moment is inseparable from life, so you are really deciding what kind of relationship you want to have with life. Once you have decided you want the present moment to be your friend, it is up to you to make the first move: Become friendly toward it, welcome it no matter in what disguise it comes, and soon you will see the results. Life becomes friendly toward you; people become helpful, circumstances cooperative. One decision changes your entire reality. But that one decision you have to make again and again and again—until it becomes natural to live in such a way.

*T*he elimination of time from your consciousness is the elimination of ego. It is the only true spiritual practice. . . . What we are speaking of is the elimination of *psychological* time, which is the egoic mind's endless preoccupation with past and future and its unwillingness to be one with life by living in alignment with the inevitable *isness* of the present moment.

*W*henever a habitual no to life turns into a yes, whenever you allow this moment to be as it is, you dissolve time as well as ego. For the ego to survive, it must make time—past and future—more important than the present moment.

*T*ime is the horizontal dimension of life, the surface layer of reality. Then there is the vertical dimension of depth, accessible to you only through the portal of the present moment.

A wareness is the power that is concealed within the present moment. This is why we may also call it Presence.

The ultimate purpose of human existence, which is to say, your purpose, is to bring that power into this world.

*Y*our primary purpose is to enable consciousness to flow into what you do. The secondary purpose is whatever you want to achieve through the doing. Whereas the notion of purpose before was always associated with future, there is now a deeper purpose that can only be found in the present, through the denial of time.

*Y*our secondary or outer purpose lies within the dimension of time, while your main purpose is inseparable from the Now and therefore requires the negation of time. How are they reconciled? By realizing that your entire life journey ultimately consists of the step your are taking at this moment. There is always only this one step, and you give it your fullest attention. This doesn't mean you don't know where you are going; it just means this step is primary, the destination secondary. And what you encounter at your destination once you get there depends on the quality of this one step. Another way of putting it: What the future holds for you depends on your state of consciousness now.

*T*hrough the present moment, you have access to the power of life itself, that which has traditionally been called "God." As soon as you turn away from it, God ceases to be a reality in your life, and all you are left with is the mental *concept* of God, which some people believe in and others deny. Even belief in God is only a poor substitute for the living reality of God manifesting every moment of your life.

Chapter 3

WHO AM I?

*T*he ultimate truth of who you are is not I am this or I am that, but I Am.

*E*quating the physical sense-perceived body with "I," the body that is destined to grow old, wither, and die, always leads to suffering sooner or later. To refrain from identifying with the body doesn't mean that you neglect, despise, or no longer care for it. If it is strong, beautiful, or vigorous, you can enjoy and appreciate those attributes—while they last. You can also improve the body's condition through right nutrition and exercise. If you don't equate the body with who you are, when beauty fades, vigor diminishes, or the body becomes incapacitated, this will not affect your sense of worth or identity in any way. In fact, as the body begins to weaken, the formless dimension, the light of consciousness, can shine more easily through the fading form.

E go arises when your sense of Beingness, of "I Am," which is formless consciousness, gets mixed up with form. This is the meaning of identification. This is forgetfulness of Being, the primary error, the illusion of absolute separateness that turns reality into a nightmare.

E go is always identification with form, seeking yourself and thereby losing yourself in some form. Forms are not just material objects and physical bodies. More fundamental than the external forms—things and bodies—are the thought forms that continuously arise in the field of consciousness.

*Y*ou are a human being. What does that mean? Mastery of life is not a question of control, but of finding a balance between human and Being. Mother, father, husband, wife, young, old, the roles you play, the functions you fulfill, whatever you do—all that belongs to the human dimension. It has its place and needs to be honored, but in itself it is not enough for a fulfilled, truly meaningful relationship or life. Human alone is never enough, no matter how

hard you try or what you achieve. Then there is Being. It is found in the still, alert presence of Consciousness itself, the Consciousness that you are. Human is form. Being is formless. Human and Being are not separate but interwoven.

*W*hen you become aware of the transience of all forms, your attachment to them lessens, and you disidentify from them to some extent. Being detached does not mean that you cannot enjoy the good that the world has to offer. In fact, you enjoy it more. Once you see and accept the transience of all things and the inevitability of change, you can enjoy the pleasures of the world while they last without fear of loss or anxiety about the future. When you are detached, you gain a higher vantage point from which to view the events in your life instead of being trapped inside them.

"*B*lessed are the poor in spirit," Jesus said, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." [2] What does "poor in spirit" mean? No inner baggage, no identifications. Not with things, nor with any mental concepts that have a sense of self in them. And what is the "kingdom of heaven"? The simple but profound joy of Being that is there when you let go of identifications and so become "poor in spirit."

*H*ow do you let go of attachment to things? Don't even try. It's impossible. Attachment to things drops away by itself when you no longer seek to find yourself in them. In the meantime, just be aware of your attachment to things. Sometimes you may not know that you are attached to something, which is to say, identified, until you lose it or there is the threat of loss. If you then become upset, anxious, and so on, it means you are attached. If you are aware that you are identified with a thing, the identification is no longer total. "I am the awareness that is aware that there is attachment." That's the beginning of the transformation of consciousness.

*W*hen you contemplate the unfathomable depth of space or listen to the silence in the early hours just before sunrise, something within you resonates with it as if in recognition. You then sense the vast depth of space as your own depth, and you know that precious stillness that has no form to be more deeply who you are than any of the things that make up the content of your life.

*T*he twofold reality of the universe, which consists of things and space—thingness and no-thingness—is also your own. A sane, balanced, and fruitful human life is a dance between the two dimensions that make up reality: form and space. Most people are so identified with the dimension of form, with sense perceptions, thoughts, and emotions, that the vital hidden half is

missing from their lives. Their identification with form keeps them trapped in ego.

*J*ust as space enables all things to exist and just as without silence there could be no sound, you would not exist without the vital formless dimension that is the essence of who you are. We could say "God" if the word had not been so misused. I prefer to call it Being. Being is prior to existence. Existence is form, content, "what happens." Existence is the foreground of life; Being is the background, as it were.

*T*he collective disease of humanity is that people are so engrossed in what happens, so hypnotized by the world of fluctuating forms, so absorbed in the content of their lives, they have forgotten the essence, that which is beyond content, beyond form, beyond thought. They are so consumed by time that they have forgotten eternity, which is their origin, their home, their destiny. Eternity is the living reality of who you are.

*S*eeing beauty in a flower can awaken you, however briefly, to the beauty that is an essential part of your own innermost being, your true nature. Joy and love are intrinsically connected to that recognition. Flowers can become for us an expression in form of that which is most high, most sacred, and ultimately formless within ourselves. Flowers, more fleeting, more ethereal, and more delicate than the plants out of which they emerge, are like messengers from another realm, like a bridge between the world of physical forms and the formless. They not only have a scent that is delicate and pleasing, but also bring a fragrance from the realm of spirit.

*W*hen you are alert and contemplate a flower without naming it mentally, it becomes a window for you into the formless. There is an inner opening, however slight, into the spiritual dimension.

*W*hen you don't play roles, it means there is no self (ego) in what you do. There is no secondary agenda: protection or strengthening of your self. As a result, your actions have far greater power. You are totally focused on the situation. You become one with it. You don't try to be anybody in particular. You are most powerful, most effective, when you are completely yourself.

*"H*ow can I be myself ?" is, however, the wrong question. It implies you have to do something to be yourself. But how doesn't apply here because you are yourself already. Just stop adding unnecessary baggage to who you already

are. "But I don't know who I am. I don't know what it means to be myself." If you can be absolutely comfortable with not knowing who you are, then what's left is who you are—the Being behind the human, a field of pure potentiality rather than something that is already defined.

*G*ive up defining yourself—to yourself or to others. You won't die. You will come to life. And don't be concerned with how others define you. When they define you, they are limiting themselves, so it's their problem. Whenever you interact with people, don't be there primarily as a function or a role, but as a field of conscious Presence.

*W*hen you react against the form that Life takes at this moment, when you treat the Now as a means, an obstacle, or an enemy, you strengthen your own form identity, the ego. Hence the ego's reactivity. What is reactivity? Becoming addicted to reaction. The more reactive you are, the more entangled you become with form. The more identified with form, the stronger the ego. Your Being then does not shine through form anymore—or only barely.

*T*hrough nonresistance to form, that in you which is beyond form emerges as an all-encompassing Presence, a silent power far greater than your short-lived form identity, the person. It is more deeply who you are than anything in the world of form.

*W*hen you think, feel, perceive, and experience, consciousness is born into form. It is reincarnating—into a thought, a feeling, a sense perception, an experience. The cycle of rebirths that Buddhists hope to get out of eventually is happening continuously, and it is only at this moment—through the power of Now—that you can get out of it. Through complete acceptance of the form of the Now, you become internally aligned with space, which is the essence of Now. Through acceptance, you become spacious inside. Aligned with space instead of form: That brings true perspective and balance into your life.

*P*eople believe themselves to be dependent on what happens for their happiness, that is to say, dependent on form. They don't realize that what happens is the most unstable thing in the universe. It changes constantly. They look upon the present moment as either marred by something that has happened and shouldn't have or as deficient because of something that has not happened but should have. And so they miss the deeper perfection that is inherent in life itself, a perfection that is always already here, that lies beyond what is happening or not happening, beyond form. Accept the present moment and find the perfection that is deeper than any form and untouched

by time.

*T*he joy of Being, which is the only true happiness, cannot come to you through any form, possession, achievement, person, or event—through anything that happens. That joy cannot *come* to you—ever. It emanates from the formless dimension within you, from consciousness itself and thus is one with who you are.

Chapter 4

AWAKENING

*O*nly by awakening can you know the true meaning of that word.

*I*nstead of being lost in your thinking, when you awaken you recognize yourself as the awareness behind it. Thinking then ceases to be a self-serving autonomous activity that takes possession of you and runs your life. Awareness takes over from thinking. Instead of being in charge of your life, thinking becomes the servant of awareness. Awareness is conscious connection with universal intelligence. Another word for it is Presence: consciousness without thought.

*W*hat is the relationship between awareness and thinking? Awareness is the space in which thoughts exist when that space has become conscious of itself.

*Y*our inner purpose is to awaken. It is as simple as that. You share that purpose with every other person on the planet—because it is the purpose of humanity. Your inner purpose is an essential part of the purpose of the whole, the universe and its emerging intelligence. Your outer purpose can change over time. It varies greatly from person to person. Finding and living in alignment with the inner purpose is the foundation for fulfilling your outer purpose. It is the basis for true success.

*H*umanity is destined to go beyond suffering, but not in the way the ego thinks. One of the ego's many erroneous assumptions, one of its many deluded thoughts is "I should not have to suffer." That thought itself lies at the root of suffering. Suffering has a noble purpose: the evolution of consciousness (the awakening) and the burning up of the ego. The man on the cross is an archetypal image. He is every man and every woman. As long as you resist suffering, it is a slow process because the resistance creates more

ego to burn up. When you accept suffering, however, there is an acceleration of that process which is brought about by the fact that you suffer consciously. You can accept suffering for yourself, or you can accept it for someone else, such as your child or parent. In the midst of conscious suffering, there is already the transmutation. The fire of suffering becomes the light of consciousness.

*T*he ego says, "I shouldn't have to suffer," and that thought makes you suffer so much more. It is a distortion of the truth, which is always paradoxical. The truth is that you need to say yes to suffering before you can transcend it.

*I*f the egoic earth drama has any purpose at all, it is an indirect one: It creates more and more suffering on the planet, and suffering, although largely ego-created, is in the end also ego-destructive. It is the fire in which the ego burns itself up.

"*O*ne day I will be free of the ego: I will awaken." Who is talking? The ego. To become free of the ego is not really a big job but a very small one. All you need to do is be aware of your thoughts and emotions—as they happen. This is not really a "doing," but an alert "seeing." In that sense, it is true that there is nothing you can do to become free of the ego. When that shift happens, which is the shift from thinking to awareness, an intelligence far greater than the ego's cleverness begins to operate in your life.

*Y*ou do not become good by trying to be good, but by finding the goodness that is already within you, and allowing that goodness to emerge. But it can only emerge if something fundamental changes in your state of consciousness.

*I*n Zen they say: "Don't seek the truth. Just cease to cherish opinions." What does that mean? Let go of identification with your mind. Who you are beyond the mind then emerges by itself.

*A*n essential part of awakening is the recognition of the unawakened you, the ego as it thinks, speaks, and acts. When you recognize the unconsciousness in you, that which makes the recognition possible *is* the arising consciousness, *is* awakening. You cannot fight against the ego and win, just as you cannot fight against darkness. The light of consciousness is all that is necessary. You are that light.

A large part of many people's lives is consumed by an obsessive preoccupation with things. Whatever the ego seeks and gets attached to are substitutes for the Being that it cannot feel. You can value and care for things, but whenever you get attached to them, you will know it's the ego. And you are never really attached to a thing but to a thought that has "I," "me," or "mine" in it. Whenever you completely accept a loss, you go beyond ego, and who you are, the I Am which is consciousness itself, emerges.

*M*any people don't realize until they are on their deathbed and everything external falls away that *no thing* ever had anything to do with who they are. In the proximity of death, the whole concept of ownership stands revealed as ultimately meaningless. In the last moments of their life, they then also realize that while they were looking throughout their lives for a more complete sense of self, what they were really looking for, their Being, had actually always already been there, but had been largely obscured by their identification with things, which ultimately means identification with their mind.

*F*or some, the awakening happens as they suddenly become aware of the kinds of thoughts they habitually think, especially persistent negative thoughts that they may have been identified with all of their lives. Suddenly there is an awareness that is aware of the thought but is not part of it.

*T*he return movement in a person's life, the weakening or dissolution of form, whether through old age, illness, disability, loss, or some kind of personal tragedy, carries great potential for spiritual awakening—the dis-identification of consciousness from form.

*O*n the new earth, old age will be universally recognized and highly valued as a time for the flowering of consciousness. For those who are still lost in the outer circumstances of their lives, it will be a time of a late homecoming, when they awaken to their inner purpose. For many others, it will represent an intensification and a culmination of the awakening process.

*H*owever, as your awareness increases and the ego is no longer running your life, you don't have to wait for your world to shrink or collapse through old age or personal tragedy in order for you to awaken to your inner purpose. As the new consciousness is beginning to emerge on the planet, an increasing number of people no longer need to be shaken to have an awakening. They embrace the awakening process voluntarily even while still engaged in the outward cycle of growth and expansion. When that cycle is no longer usurped by the ego, the spiritual dimension will come into this world through the

outward movement—thought, speech, action, creation—as powerfully as through the return movement—stillness, Being, and the dissolution of form.

*T*o love is to recognize yourself in another. The other's "otherness" then stands revealed as an illusion pertaining to the purely human realm, the realm of form.

*W*hen another recognizes you, that recognition draws the dimension of Being more fully into this world through both of you. That is the love that redeems the world.

Chapter 5

INNER SPACE

*W*hen consciousness is no longer totally absorbed by thinking, some of it remains in its formless, unconditioned, original state. This is inner space.

*M*ost people's lives are cluttered up with things: material things, things to do, things to think about. Their lives are like the history of humanity, which Winston Churchill defined as "one damn thing after another." Their minds are filled up with the clutter of thoughts, one thought after another. This is the dimension of object consciousness that is many people's predominant reality, and that is why their lives are so out of balance. Object consciousness needs to be balanced by space consciousness for sanity to return to our planet and for humanity to fulfill its destiny. The arising of space consciousness is the next stage in the evolution of humanity.

*S*pace consciousness means that in addition to being conscious of things—which always comes down to sense perceptions, thoughts, and emotions—there is an undercurrent of awareness. Awareness implies that you are not only conscious of things (objects), but you are also conscious of being conscious. If you can sense an alert inner stillness in the background while things happen in the foreground—that's it! This dimension is there in everyone, but most people are completely unaware of it. Sometimes I point to it by saying, "Can you feel your own Presence?"

*S*pace consciousness represents not only freedom from ego, but also from dependency on the things of this world, from materialism and materiality. It is the spiritual dimension which alone can give transcendent and true meaning to this world.

*W*hen you are no longer totally identified with forms, consciousness—who

you are—becomes freed from its imprisonment in form. This freedom is the arising of inner space. It comes as a stillness, a subtle peace deep within you, even in the face of something seemingly bad. Suddenly, there is space around the event. There is also space around the emotional highs and lows, even around pain. And above all, there is space between your thoughts. And from that space emanates a peace that is not "of this world," because this world is form, and the peace is space. This is the peace of God.

*N*ow you can enjoy and honor the things of this world without giving them an importance and significance they don't have. You can participate in the dance of creation and be active without attachment to outcome and without placing unreasonable demands upon the world: Fulfill me, make me happy, make me feel safe, tell me who I am. The world cannot give you those things, and when you no longer have such expectations, all self-created suffering comes to an end. All such suffering is due to an overvaluation of form and an unawareness of the dimension of inner space. When that dimension is present in your life, you can enjoy things, experiences, and the pleasures of the senses without losing yourself in them, without inner attachment to them, that is to say, without becoming addicted to the world.

*W*hen the dimension of space is lost or rather not known, the things of the world assume an absolute importance, a seriousness and heaviness that in truth they do not have. When the world is not viewed from the perspective of the formless, it becomes a threatening place, and ultimately a place of despair. The Old Testament prophet must have felt this when he wrote, "All things are full of weariness. A man cannot utter it." [3]

*D*iscover inner space by creating gaps in the stream of thinking. Without those gaps, your thinking becomes repetitive, uninspired, devoid of any creative spark, which is how it still is for most people on the planet. You don't need to be concerned with the duration of those gaps. A few seconds is good enough. Gradually, they will lengthen by themselves, without any effort on your part. More important than their length is to bring them in frequently so that your daily activities and your stream of thinking become interspersed with space.

*B*e aware of your breathing. Notice how this takes attention away from your thinking and creates space.

*N*otice the sensation of the breath. Feel the air moving in and out of your body. Notice how the chest and abdomen expand and contract slightly with the in- and outbreath. One conscious breath is enough to make some space where

before there was the uninterrupted succession of one thought after another. One conscious breath (two or three would be even better), taken many times a day, is an excellent way of bringing space into your life. Even if you meditated on your breathing for two hours or more, which some people do, one breath is all you ever need to be aware of, indeed ever can be aware of. The rest is memory or anticipation, which is to say, thought. Breathing isn't really something that you do but something that you witness as it happens. Breathing happens by itself. The intelligence within the body is doing it. All you have to do is watch it happening. There is no strain or effort involved. Also, notice the brief cessation of the breath, particularly the still point at the end of the out-breath, before you start breathing in again.

*W*henever you are upset about an event, a person, or a situation, the real cause is not the event, person, or situation but a loss of true perspective that only space can provide. You are trapped in object consciousness, unaware of the timeless inner space of consciousness itself.

*S*pace consciousness has little to do with being "spaced out." Both states are beyond thought. This they have in common. The fundamental difference, however, is that in the former, you rise above thought; in the latter, you fall below it. One is the next step in the evolution of human consciousness, the other a regression to a stage we left behind eons ago.

*T*he greatest impediment to the discovery of inner space, the greatest impediment to finding the experiencer, the formless I Am, is to become so enthralled by the experience that you lose yourself in it. It means consciousness is lost in its own dream. You get taken in by every thought, every emotion, and every experience to such a degree that you are in fact in a dreamlike state. This has been the normal state of humanity for thousands of years.

*W*hen you hear of inner space, you may start seeking it, and, because you are seeking it as if you were looking for an object or for an experience, you cannot find it. This is the dilemma of all those who are seeking spiritual realization or enlightenment. Hence, Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, 'Lo, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you." [4]

*I*f you are not spending all of your waking life in discontent, worry, anxiety, depression, despair, or consumed by other negative states; if you are able to enjoy simple things like listening to the sound of the rain or the wind; if you

can see the beauty of clouds moving across the sky or be alone at times without feeling lonely or needing the mental stimulus of entertainment; if you find yourself treating a complete stranger with heartfelt kindness without wanting anything from him or her . . . it means that a space has opened up, no matter how briefly, in the otherwise incessant stream of thinking that is the human mind. When this happens, there is a sense of well-being, of alive peace, even though it may be subtle. The intensity will vary from a perhaps barely noticeable background sense of contentment to what the ancient sages of India called *ananda*—the bliss of Being. Because you have been conditioned to pay attention only to form, you are probably not aware of it except indirectly. For example, there is a common element in the ability to see beauty, to appreciate simple things, to enjoy your own company, or to relate to other people with loving kindness. This common element is a sense of contentment, peace, and aliveness that is the invisible background without which these experiences would not be possible.

*W*henever there is beauty, kindness, the recognition of the goodness of simple things in your life, look for the background to that experience within yourself. But don't look for it as if you were looking for something. You cannot pin it down and say, "Now I have it," or grasp it mentally and define it in some way. It is like the cloudless sky. It has no form. It is space; it is stillness, the sweetness of Being and infinitely more than these words, which are only pointers. When you are able to sense it directly within yourself, it deepens. So when you appreciate something simple—a sound, a sight, a touch—when you see beauty, when you feel loving kindness toward another, sense the inner spaciousness that is the source and background to that experience.

*H*ere is another way of finding inner space: Become conscious of being conscious. Say or think "I Am" and add nothing to it. Be aware of the stillness that follows the I Am. Sense your presence, the naked, unveiled, unclothed beingness. It is untouched by young or old, rich or poor, good or bad, or any other attributes.

Chapter 6

YOUR LIFE PURPOSE

*Y*our life has an inner purpose and an outer purpose. Inner purpose concerns Being and is primary. Outer purpose concerns doing and is secondary.

*T*he true or primary purpose of your life cannot be found on the outer level. It does not concern what you do but what you are—that is to say, your state of consciousness.

*A*ction, although necessary, is only a secondary factor in manifesting our external reality. The primary factor in creation is consciousness. No matter how active we are, how much effort we make, our state of consciousness creates our world, and if there is no change on that inner level, no amount of action will make any difference. We would only re-create modified versions of the same world again and again, a world that is an external reflection of the ego.

*O*nce you have had a glimpse of awareness or Presence, you know it firsthand. It is no longer just a concept in your mind. You can then make a conscious choice to be present rather than to indulge in useless thinking. You can invite Presence into your life, that is to say, make space. With the grace of awakening comes responsibility. You can either try to go on as if nothing has happened, or you can see its significance and recognize the arising of awareness as the most important thing that *can* happen to you. Opening yourself to the emerging consciousness and bringing its light into this world then becomes the primary purpose of your life.

A wakened doing is the alignment of your outer purpose—what you do—with your inner purpose—awakening and staying awake. Through awakened doing, you become one with the outgoing purpose of the universe.

Consciousness flows through you into this world. It flows into your thoughts and inspires them. It flows into what you do and guides and empowers it.

*T*he modalities of awakened doing are acceptance, enjoyment, and enthusiasm. Each one represents a certain vibrational frequency of consciousness. You need to be vigilant to make sure that one of them operates whenever you are engaged in doing anything at all—from the most simple task to the most complex. If you are not in the state of either acceptance, enjoyment, or enthusiasm, look closely and you will find that you are creating suffering for yourself and others.

*W*hatever you cannot enjoy doing, you can at least accept that this is what you have to do. Acceptance means: For now, this is what this situation, this moment requires me to do, and so I do it willingly.

*I*f you can neither enjoy nor bring acceptance to what you do—stop. Otherwise, you are not taking responsibility for the only thing you can really take responsibility for, which also happens to be the one thing that really matters: your state of consciousness. And if you are not taking responsibility for your state of consciousness, you are not taking responsibility for life.

*O*n the new earth, enjoyment will replace wanting as the motivating power behind people's actions. Wanting arises from the ego's delusion that you are a separate fragment that is disconnected from the power that lies behind all creation. Through enjoyment, you link into that universal creative power itself.

*E*xpansion and positive change on the outer level is much more likely to come into your life if you can enjoy what you are doing already, instead of waiting for some change so that you can start enjoying what you do.

*W*hen you make the present moment, instead of past and future, the focal point of your life, your ability to enjoy what you do—and with it the quality of your life—increases dramatically.

*J*oy does not come from what you do, it flows into what you do and thus into this world from deep within you.

*Y*ou will enjoy any activity in which you are fully present, any activity that is not just a means to an end. It isn't the action you perform that you really enjoy, but the deep sense of aliveness that flows into it. That aliveness is one with who you are. This means that when you enjoy doing something, you are really experiencing the joy of Being in its dynamic aspect. That's why anything you enjoy doing connects you with the power behind all creation.

*H*ere is a spiritual practice that will bring empowerment and creative expansion into your life. Make a list of a number of everyday routine activities that you perform frequently. Include activities that you may consider uninteresting, boring, tedious, irritating, or stressful. But don't include anything that you hate or detest doing. That's a case either for acceptance or for stopping what you do. The list may include traveling to and from work, buying groceries, doing your laundry, or anything that you find tedious or stressful in your daily work. Then, whenever you are engaged in those activities, let them be a vehicle for alertness. Be absolutely present in what you do and sense the alert, alive stillness within you in the background of the activity. You will soon find that what you do in such a state of heightened awareness, instead of being stressful, tedious, or irritating, is actually becoming enjoyable. To be more precise, what you are enjoying is not really the outward action but the inner dimension of consciousness that flows into the action. This is finding the joy of Being in what you are doing. If you feel your life lacks significance or is too stressful or tedious, it is because you haven't brought that dimension into your life yet. Being conscious in what you do has not yet become your main aim.

*E*nthusiasm means there is deep enjoyment in what you do plus the added element of a goal or vision that you work toward. When you add a goal to the enjoyment of what you do, the energy-field or vibrational frequency changes. A certain degree of what we might call structural tension is now added to enjoyment, and so it turns into enthusiasm. At the height of creative activity fueled by enthusiasm, there will be enormous intensity and energy behind what you do. You will feel like an arrow that is moving toward the target—and enjoying the journey.

To an onlooker, it may appear that you are under stress, but the intensity of enthusiasm has nothing to do with stress. When you want to arrive at your goal more than you want to be doing what you are doing, you become stressed. The balance between enjoyment and structural tension is lost, and the latter has won.

Stress always diminishes both the quality and effectiveness of what you do under its influence. There is also a strong link between stress and negative emotions, such as anxiety and anger. Stress is also toxic to the body.

*U*nlike stress, enthusiasm has a high energy frequency and so resonates with the creative power of the universe. This is why Ralph Waldo Emerson said that, "Nothing great has ever been achieved without enthusiasm." [5]

*E*nthusiasm knows where it is going, but at the same time, it is deeply at one with the present moment, the source of aliveness, its joy, and its power. Enthusiasm "wants" nothing because it lacks nothing. It is at one with life and no matter how dynamic the enthusiasm-inspired activities are, you don't lose yourself in them. And there remains always a still but intensely alive space at the center of the wheel, a core of peace in the midst of activity that is both the source of all and untouched by it all.

*W*e are in the midst of a momentous event in the evolution of human consciousness. On our planet, and perhaps simultaneously in many parts of our galaxy and beyond, consciousness is awakening from the dream of form. This does not mean all forms (the world) are going to dissolve, although quite a few almost certainly will. It means consciousness can now begin to create form without losing itself in it. It can remain conscious of itself, even while it creates and experiences form. Why should it continue to create and experience form? For the enjoyment of it. How does consciousness do that? Through awakened humans who have learned the meaning of *awakened doing*.

A new species is arising on the planet. It is arising now, and you are it!

Chapter 7

BECOMING PRESENT

*W*e can learn not to keep situations or events alive in our minds, but to return our attention continuously to the pristine, timeless present moment rather than be caught up in mental movie-making. Our very Presence then becomes our identity, rather than our thoughts and emotions.

*O*nly Presence can free you of the ego, and you can only be present Now, not yesterday or tomorrow. Only Presence can undo the past in you and thus transform your state of consciousness.

*B*e alert. If there is awareness in you, you will be able to recognize the voice in your head for what it is: an old thought, conditioned by the past. If there is awareness in you, you no longer need to believe in every thought you think. It's an old thought, no more. Awareness means Presence, and only Presence can dissolve the unconscious past in you.

*W*hat in Zen is called *satori* is a moment of Presence, a brief stepping out of the voice in your head, the thought processes, and their reflection in the body as emotion. It is the arising of inner spaciousness where before there was the clutter of thought and the turmoil of emotion.

*T*o end the misery that has afflicted the human condition for thousands of years, you have to start with yourself and take responsibility for your inner state at any given moment. That means now. Ask yourself, "Is there negativity in me at this moment?" Then, become alert, attentive to your thoughts as well as your emotions. Watch out for the low-level unhappiness in whatever form, such as discontent, nervousness, being "fed up," and so on. Watch out for thoughts that appear to justify or explain this unhappiness but in reality cause it. The moment you become aware of a negative state within yourself, it does

not mean you have failed. It means that you have succeeded. Until that awareness happens, there is identification with inner states, and such identification is ego.

*W*ith awareness comes disidentification from thoughts, emotions, and reactions. This is not to be confused with denial. The thoughts, emotions, or reactions are recognized, and in the moment of recognizing, disidentification happens automatically. Your sense of self, of who you are, then undergoes a shift: Before you were the thoughts, emotions, and reactions; now you are the awareness, the conscious Presence that witnesses those states.

*E*motions and even thoughts become depersonalized through awareness. Their impersonal nature is recognized. There is no longer a self in them. They are just human emotions, human thoughts. Your entire personal history, which is ultimately no more than a story, a bundle of thoughts and emotions, becomes of secondary importance and no longer occupies the forefront of your consciousness. It no longer forms the basis for your sense of identity. You are the light of Presence, the awareness that is prior to and deeper than any thoughts and emotions.

*N*egativity is not intelligent. It is always of the ego.

Whenever you are in a negative state, there is something in you that wants the negativity, that perceives it as pleasurable, or that believes it will get you what you want. Otherwise, who would want to hang on to negativity, make themselves and others miserable, and create disease in the body? So, whenever there is negativity in you, if you can be aware at that moment that there is something in you that takes pleasure in it or believes it has a useful purpose, you are becoming aware of the ego directly. The moment this happens, your identity has shifted from ego to awareness. This means the ego is shrinking and awareness is growing.

*I*f in the midst of negativity you are able to realize "At this moment I am creating suffering for myself " it will be enough to raise you above the limitations of conditioned egoic states and reactions. It will open up infinite possibilities which come to you when there is awareness—other vastly more intelligent ways of dealing with any situation. You will be free to let go of your unhappiness the moment you recognize it as unintelligent.

*T*he more shared past there is in a relationship, the more present you need to be; otherwise, you will be forced to relive the past again and again.

A genuine relationship is one that is not dominated by the ego with its image-making and self-seeking. In a genuine relationship, there is an outward flow of open, alert attention toward the other person in which there is no wanting whatsoever. That alert attention is Presence. It is the prerequisite for any authentic relationship.

*A*s you look at, listen to, touch, or help your child with this or that, you are alert, still, completely present, not wanting anything other than that moment as it is. In this way, you make room for Being. In that moment, if you are present, you are not a father or mother. You are the alertness, the stillness, the Presence that is listening, looking, touching, even speaking. You are the Being behind the doing.

I have been speaking of this with specific reference to the relationship with your child, but it equally applies, of course, to all relationships.

*D*oing is never enough if you neglect Being.

*M*ost humans see only the outer forms, unaware of the inner essence, just as they are unaware of their own essence and identify only with their own physical and psychological form. Once there is a certain degree of Presence, of still and alert attention in your perceptions, however, you can sense the divine life essence, the one indwelling consciousness or spirit in every creature, every life-form, recognize it as one with your own essence and so love it as yourself.

*W*hen you meet with people, at work or wherever it may be, give them your fullest attention. You are no longer there primarily as a person, but as a field of awareness, of alert Presence. The original reason for interacting with the other person—buying or selling something, requesting or giving information, and so on—now becomes secondary. The field of awareness that arises between you becomes the primary purpose for the interaction. That space of awareness becomes more important than what you may be talking about, more important than physical or thought objects. The human *Being* becomes more important than the things of this world. It does not mean you neglect whatever needs to be done on a practical level. In fact, the doing unfolds not only more easily, but more powerfully when the dimension of Being is acknowledged and so becomes primary. The arising of that unifying field of awareness between human beings is the most essential factor in relationships on the new earth.

*F*orgiveness happens naturally when you see that your grievances have no purpose other than to strengthen a false sense of self, to keep the ego in place. The seeing is freeing. Jesus' teaching to "Forgive your enemies" is essentially about the undoing of one of the main egoic structures in the human mind.

*T*here is only one perpetrator of evil on the planet: human unconsciousness. That realization is true forgiveness. With forgiveness, your victim identity dissolves, and your true power emerges—the power of Presence. Instead of blaming the darkness, you bring in the light.

*P*resence is a state of inner spaciousness. When you are present, you ask: How do I respond to the needs of this situation, of this moment? In fact, you don't even need to ask the question. You are still, alert, open to what is. You bring a new dimension into the situation: space. Then you look and you listen. Thus you become one with the situation. When instead of reacting against a situation, you merge with it, the solution arises out of the situation itself. Actually, it is not you, the person, who is looking and listening, but the alert stillness itself. Then, if action is possible or necessary, you take action or rather right action happens through you. Right action is action that is appropriate to the whole. When the action is accomplished, the alert, spacious stillness remains. There is nobody who raises his arms in a gesture of triumph shouting a defiant "Yeah!" There is no one who says, "Look, I did that."

*W*hen you are present, when your attention is fully in the Now, that Presence will flow into and transform what you do. There will be quality and power in it. You are present when what you are doing is not primarily a means to an end (money, prestige, winning) but fulfilling in itself, when there is joy and aliveness in what you do. And, of course, you cannot be present unless you become friendly with the present moment. That is the basis for effective action, uncontaminated by negativity.

Chapter 8

CONSCIOUSNESS

*T*he joy of Being is the joy of being conscious.

*C*onsciousness is already conscious. It is the unmanifested, the eternal. The universe, however, is only gradually becoming conscious. Consciousness itself is timeless and therefore does not evolve. It was never born and does not die. When consciousness becomes the manifested universe, it appears to be subject to time and to undergo an evolutionary process. No human mind is capable of comprehending fully the reason for this process. But we can glimpse it within ourselves and become a conscious participant in it.

*C*onsciousness is the intelligence, the organizing principle behind the arising of form. Consciousness has been preparing forms for millions of years so that it can express itself through them in the manifested.

*A*lthough the unmanifested realm of pure consciousness could be considered another dimension, it is not separate from this dimension of form. Form and formlessness interpenetrate. The unmanifested flows into this dimension as awareness, inner space, Presence. How does it do that? Through the human form that becomes conscious and thus fulfills its destiny.

*C*onsciousness incarnates into the manifested dimension, that is to say, it becomes form. When it does so, it enters a dreamlike state. Intelligence remains, but consciousness becomes unconscious of itself. It loses itself in form, becomes identified with forms. This could be described as the descent of the divine into matter.

*O*n our planet, the human ego represents the final stage of universal sleep, the

identification of consciousness with form. It was a necessary stage in the evolution of consciousness.

*T*he next step in human evolution is not inevitable, but for the first time in the history of our planet, it can be a conscious choice. Who is making that choice? You are. And who are you? Consciousness that has become conscious of itself.

*T*he human brain is a highly differentiated form through which consciousness enters this dimension. It contains approximately one hundred billion nerve cells (called neurons), about the same number as there are stars in our galaxy, which could be seen as a macrocosmic brain. The brain does not create consciousness, but consciousness created the brain, the most complex physical form on earth, for its expression. When the brain gets damaged, it does not mean you lose consciousness. It means consciousness can no longer use that form to enter this dimension. You cannot lose consciousness because it is, in essence, who you are. You can only lose something that you have, but you cannot lose something that you are.

*A*lthough you cannot know consciousness, you can become conscious of it as yourself. You can sense it directly in any situation, no matter where you are. You can sense it here and now as your very Presence, the inner space in which the words on this page are perceived and become thoughts. It is the underlying I Am. The words you are reading and thinking are the foreground, and the I Am is the substratum, the underlying background to every experience, thought, feeling.

*S*piritual realization is to see clearly that what I perceive, experience, think, or feel is ultimately not who I am, that I cannot find myself in all those things that continuously pass away.

The Buddha was probably the first human being to see this clearly, and so *anata* (no self) became one of the central points of his teaching. And when Jesus said, "Deny thyself," what he meant was: Negate (and thus undo) the illusion of self. If the self—ego—were truly who I am, it would be absurd to "deny" it.

*W*hat remains is the light of consciousness in which perceptions, experiences, thoughts, and feelings come and go. That is Being, that is the deeper, true I. When I know myself as that, whatever happens in my life is no longer of absolute but only of relative importance. I honor it, but it loses its absolute seriousness, its heaviness.

*T*he only thing that ultimately matters is this: Can I sense my essential Beingness, the I Am, in the background of my life at all times? To be more accurate, can I sense the I Am that I Am at this moment? Can I sense my essential identity as consciousness itself ? Or am I losing myself in what happens, losing myself in the mind, in the world?

*W*hen forms that you had identified with, that gave you your sense of self, collapse or are taken away, it can lead to a collapse of the ego, since ego is identification with form. When there is nothing to identify with anymore, who are you? When forms around you die or death approaches, your sense of Beingness, of I Am, is freed from its entanglement with form: Spirit is released from its imprisonment in matter. You realize your essential identity as formless, as an all-pervasive Presence, of Being prior to all forms, all identifications. You realize your true identity as consciousness itself, rather than what consciousness had identified with. That is the peace of God.

"I want to know the mind of God," Einstein said. "The rest are details." What is the mind of God? Consciousness. What does it mean to know the mind of God? To be aware. What are the details? Your outer purpose, and whatever happens outwardly.

*I*t has been said: "Stillness is the language God speaks, and everything else is a bad translation." Becoming conscious of stillness whenever we encounter it in our lives will connect us with the formless and timeless dimension within ourselves, that which is beyond thought, beyond ego. It may be the stillness that pervades the world of nature, or the stillness in your room in the early hours of the morning, or the silent gaps in between sounds. Stillness has no form—that is why through thinking we cannot become aware of it. Thought is form. Being aware of stillness means to be still. To be still is to be conscious without thought. You are never more essentially, more deeply, yourself than when you are still. When you are still, you are who you were before you temporarily assumed this physical and mental form called a person. You are also who you will be when the form dissolves. When you are still, you are who you are beyond your temporal existence: consciousness—unconditioned, formless, eternal.

Chapter 9

THE INNER BODY

*W*e have to enter the body to go beyond it and find out that we are not that.

*E*quating the physical sense-perceived body that is destined to grow old, wither, and die with "I" always leads to suffering sooner or later. To refrain from identifying with the body doesn't mean that you neglect, despise, or no longer care for it. If it is strong, beautiful, or vigorous, you can enjoy and appreciate those attributes—while they last. You can also improve the body's condition through right nutrition and exercise. If you don't equate the body with who you are, when beauty fades, vigor diminishes, or the body becomes incapacitated, this will not affect your sense of worth or identity in any way. In fact, as the body begins to weaken, the formless dimension, the light of consciousness, can shine more easily through the fading form.

E go arises when your sense of Beingness, of "I Am," which is formless consciousness, gets mixed up with form. This is the meaning of identification. This is forgetfulness of Being, the primary error.

*A*lthough body-identification is one of the most basic forms of ego, the good news is that it is also the one that you can most easily go beyond. This is done not by trying to convince yourself that you are not your body, but by shifting your attention from the external form of your body and from thoughts about your body—beautiful, ugly, strong, weak, too fat, too thin—to the feeling of aliveness inside it. No matter what your body's appearance is on the outer level, beyond the outer form it is an intensely alive energy field.

*T*ake two or three conscious breaths. Now see if you can detect a subtle sense of aliveness that pervades your entire inner body. Can you feel your body from within, so to speak? Sense briefly specific parts of your body. Feel your hands, then your arms, feet, and legs. Can you feel your abdomen, chest, neck, and head? What about your lips? Is there life in them? Then become aware again of the inner body as a whole. You may want to close your eyes initially for this practice, and once you can feel your body, open your eyes, look

around, and continue to feel your body at the same time. You may find there is no need to close your eyes, that you can, in fact, feel your inner body as you read this.

*Y*our inner body is not solid but spacious. It is not your physical form but the life that animates the physical form. It is the intelligence that created and sustains the body, simultaneously coordinating hundreds of different functions of such extraordinary complexity that the human mind can only understand a tiny fraction of it. When you become aware of it, what is really happening is that the intelligence is becoming aware of itself. It is the elusive "life" that no scientist has ever found because the consciousness that is looking for it *is it*.

*I*f you are not familiar with "inner body" awareness, close your eyes for a moment and find out if there is life inside your hands. Don't ask your mind. It will say, "I can't feel anything." Probably it will also say, "Give me something more interesting to think about." So instead of asking your mind, go to the hands directly. By this I mean become aware of the subtle feeling of aliveness inside them. It is there. You just have to go there with your attention to notice it. You may get a slight tingling sensation at first, then a feeling of energy or aliveness. If you hold your attention in your hands for a while, the sense of aliveness will intensify. Some people won't even have to close their eyes. They will be able to feel their "inner hands" at the same time as they read this. Then go to your feet, keep your attention there for a minute or so, and begin to feel your hands and feet at the same time. Then incorporate other parts of the body —legs, arms, abdomen, chest, and so on—into that feeling until you are aware of the inner body as a global sense of aliveness, diffused throughout the body.

*W*hat I call the "inner body" isn't really the body anymore but life energy, the bridge between form and formlessness. Make it a habit to feel the inner body as often as you can. After a while, you won't need to close your eyes anymore to feel it. For example, see if you can feel the inner body whenever you listen to someone. It almost seems like a paradox: When you are in touch with the inner body, you are not identified with your body anymore, nor are you identified with your mind. This is to say, you are no longer identified with form but moving away from form-identification toward formlessness, which we may also call Being. It is your essence identity. Body awareness not only anchors you in the present moment, it is a doorway out of the prison that is the ego. It also strengthens the immune system and the body's ability to heal itself.

*A*s much as possible in everyday life, use awareness of the inner body to create space. When waiting, when listening to someone, when pausing to look at the

sky, a tree, a flower, your partner, or child, feel the aliveness within at the same time. This means part of your attention or consciousness remains formless, and the rest is available for the outer world of form. Whenever you "inhabit" your body in this way, it serves as an anchor for staying present in the Now. It prevents you from losing yourself in thinking, in emotions, or in external situations.

*Y*our physical body, which is form, reveals itself as essentially formless when you go deeper into it. It becomes a doorway into inner space. Although inner space has no form, it is intensely alive. That "empty space" is life in its fullness, the unmanifested Source out of which all manifestation flows. The traditional word for that Source is God.

Chapter 10

ONENESS WITH ALL LIFE

*U*nderneath the surface appearance, everything is not only connected with everything else, but also with the Source of all life out of which it came. Even a stone, and more easily a flower or a bird, could show you the way back to God, to the Source, to yourself. When you look at it or hold it and *let it be* without imposing a word or mental label on it, a sense of awe, of wonder, arises within you. Its essence silently communicates itself to you and reflects your own essence back to you.

*W*hy does the ego play roles? Because of one unexamined assumption, one fundamental error, one unconscious thought. That thought is: I am not enough. Other unconscious thoughts follow: I need to play a role in order to get what I need to be fully myself; I need to get more so that I can be more. But you cannot be more than you are because underneath your physical and psychological form, you are one with Life itself, one with Being. In form, you are and will always be inferior to some, superior to others. In essence, you are neither inferior nor superior to anyone. True self-esteem and true humility arise out of that realization. In the eyes of the ego, self-esteem and humility are contradictory. In truth, they are one and the same.

*W*hat "I" could there be apart from life, apart from Being? It is utterly impossible. So there is no such thing as "my life," and I don't *have* a life. I *am* life. I and life are one. It cannot be otherwise. So how could I lose my life? How can I lose something that I don't have in the first place? How can I lose something that I Am? It is impossible.

*T*he Truth is inseparable from who you are. Yes, you *are* the Truth. The very Being that you are is Truth. Jesus tried to convey that when he said, "I am the way and the truth and the life." [6] These words are one of the most powerful and direct pointers to the Truth, if understood correctly. Jesus speaks of the

innermost I Am, the essence identity of every man and woman, every life-form, in fact. He speaks of the life that you are. Some Christian mystics have called it the Christ within; Buddhists call it your Buddha nature; for Hindus, it is Atman, the indwelling God. When you are in touch with that dimension within yourself—and being in touch with it is your natural state, not some miraculous achievement—all your actions and relationships will reflect the oneness with all life that you sense deep within. This is love.

*A*cknowledging the good that is already in your life is the foundation for all abundance.

*T*he source of all abundance is not outside you. It is part of who you are. However, start by acknowledging and recognizing abundance without. See the fullness of life all around you. The warmth of the sun on your skin, the display of magnificent flowers outside a florist's shop, biting into a succulent fruit, or getting soaked in an abundance of water falling from the sky. The fullness of life is there at every step. The acknowledgment of that abundance that is all around you awakens the dormant abundance within. Then let it flow out. When you smile at a stranger, there is already a minute outflow of energy. You become a giver. Ask yourself often: "What can I give here; how can I be of service to this person, this situation?" You don't need to own anything to feel abundant, although if you feel abundant consistently things will almost certainly come to you. Abundance comes only to those who already have it.

*T*he sapling doesn't want anything because it is at one with the totality, and the totality acts through it. "Look at the lilies of the field, how they grow" said Jesus, "they toil not, neither do they spin. Yet even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." [7] We could say that the totality—Life—wants the sapling to become a tree, but the sapling doesn't see itself as separate from life and so wants nothing for itself. It is one with what Life wants. That's why it isn't worried or stressed. And if it has to die prematurely, it dies with ease. It is as surrendered in death as it is in life. It senses, no matter how obscurely, its rootedness in Being, the formless and eternal one Life.

*W*henever tragic loss occurs, you either resist or you yield. Some people become bitter or deeply resentful; others become compassionate, wise, and loving. Resistance is an inner contraction, a hardening of the shell of the ego. You are closed. Yielding means inner acceptance of what is. You are open to life.

*W*hen you yield internally, when you surrender, a new dimension of

consciousness opens up. If action is possible or necessary, your action will be in alignment with the whole and supported by creative intelligence, the unconditioned consciousness. Circumstances and people then become helpful, cooperative. Coincidences happen. If no action is possible, you rest in the peace and inner stillness that come with surrender. You rest in God.

*W*hen I no longer confuse who I am with a temporary form of "me," then the dimension of the limitless and the eternal—God—can express itself through "me" and guide "me." It also frees me from dependency on form. However, a purely intellectual recognition or belief that "I am not this form" does not help. The all-important question is: At this moment, can I sense the presence of inner space, which really means, can I sense my own Presence, or rather, the Presence that I Am?

*A*sk yourself, "Am I aware not only of what is happening at this moment, but also of the Now itself as the living timeless inner space in which everything happens?"

*I*f peace is really what you want, then you will choose peace. If peace mattered to you more than anything else and if you truly knew yourself to be spirit rather than a little me, you would remain nonreactive and absolutely alert when confronted with challenging people or situations. You would immediately accept the situation and thus become one with it rather than separate yourself from it. Then out of your alertness would come a response. Who you are (consciousness), not who you think you are (a small me), would be responding. It would be powerful and effective and would make no person or situation into an enemy.

B eing at one with what *is,* at one with the present moment, doesn't mean you no longer initiate change or become incapable of taking action. But the motivation to take action comes from a deeper level, not from egoic wanting or fearing. Inner alignment with the present moment opens your consciousness and brings it into alignment with the whole, of which the present moment is an integral part. The whole, the totality of life, then acts through you.

*L*ife will give you whatever experience is most helpful for the evolution of your consciousness. How do you know this is the experience you need? Because this is the experience you are having at this moment.

*H*ow to be at peace now? By making peace with the present moment. The present moment is the field on which the game of life happens. It cannot happen anywhere else. Once you have made peace with the present moment, see what happens, what you can do or choose to do, or rather what life does through you.

*T*here are three words that convey the secret of the art of living, the secret of all success and happiness: One With Life. Being one with life is being one with Now. You then realize that you don't live your life, but life lives you. Life is the dancer, and you are the dance.

*G*od is the One Life in and beyond the countless forms of life. Love implies duality: lover and beloved, subject and object. So love is the recognition of oneness in the world of duality. This is the birth of God into the world of form. Love makes the world less worldly, less dense, more transparent to the divine dimension, the light of consciousness itself.

NOTES

1 I Corinthians 3:19 (New Revised Standard Version)

2 Matthew 5:3 (New Revised Standard Version)

3 Ecclesiastes 1:8 (New Revised Standard Version)

4 Luke 17:20-21 (New Revised Standard Version)

5 Emerson, Ralph Waldo, "Circles," in *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Selected Lectures, Essays, and Poems* (New York: Bantam Classics).

6 John 14:6 (New Revised Standard Version)

7 Matthew 6:28-29 (New Revised Standard Version)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*S*piritual teacher and author ECKHART TOLLE was born in Germany and was educated at the universities of London and Cambridge. At the age of twenty-nine, a profound inner transformation radically changed the course of his life. The next few years were devoted to understanding, integrating, and deepening that transformation, which marked the beginning of an intense inward journey. Later, he began to work in London with individuals and small groups, as a counselor and spiritual teacher. Since 1995 he has lived in Vancouver, Canada.

Eckhart Tolle is the author of the #1 *New York Times* bestseller *The Power of Now* (translated into thirty-three languages) and the highly acclaimed follow-up, *A New Earth*, which are widely regarded as two of the most influential spiritual books of our time.

Eckhart's profound yet simple teachings have already helped countless people throughout the world find inner peace and greater fulfillment in their lives. At the core of the teachings lies the transformation of consciousness, a spiritual awakening that he sees as the next step in human evolution. An essential aspect of this awakening consists in transcending our ego-based state of consciousness. This is a prerequisite not only for personal happiness but also for the ending of violent conflict endemic on our planet.

Eckhart is a sought-after public speaker and teaches and travels extensively throughout the world. Many of his talks, intensives, and retreats are published on CD and DVD. Most of the teachings are given in English, but occasionally Eckhart also gives talks in German and Spanish. In addition to *The Power of Now* and *A New Earth*, Eckhart has written a book designed for meditative reading titled *Stillness Speaks.* A book consisting of selections from *The Power of Now* is also available, titled *Practicing the Power of Now*.

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tiny aspect of that intelligence.
You also realize that all the things that truly matter —
beauty, love, creativity, joy, inner peace —
arise from beyond the mind.

You begin to awaken.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

INTRODUCTION

BY ECKHART TOLLE

Since it was first published in 1997, *The Power of Now* has already had an impact on the collective consciousness of the planet far beyond anything I could have imagined. It has been translated into fifteen languages, and I receive mail from around the globe every day from readers who tell me that their lives have been changed through coming into contact with the teaching embodied in the book.

Although the effects of the insanity of the egoic mind are still visible everywhere, something new *is* emerging. Never before have so many people been ready to break out of collective mind-patterns that have kept humanity in bondage to suffering since time immemorial. A new state of consciousness is emerging. We have suffered enough! Even at this moment it is emerging from within you, as you hold this book in your hands and read these lines that speak of the possibility of living the liberated life, in which you no longer inflict suffering on yourself or others.

Many of the readers who wrote to me expressed a wish to have the practical aspects of the teachings contained in *The Power of Now* presented in a more readily accessible format, to be used in their daily practice. That request became the impetus for this book.

In addition to the exercises and practices, however, this book also contains some shorter passages from the original work that can serve as a reminder of some of the ideas and concepts and can become a primer for incorporating those concepts daily.

Many of those passages are particularly suitable for meditative reading. When you practice meditative reading, you do not read primarily to gather new information, but to enter a different state of consciousness as you read. This is why you can re-read the same passage many times, and every time it feels fresh and new. Only words that were written or spoken in a state of presence have this transformative power, which is the power to awaken presence in the reader.

These passages are best read slowly. Many times you may want to pause and allow for a moment of quiet reflection, or stillness. At other times, you may just open the book at random and read a few lines.

For those readers who felt daunted or overwhelmed by *The Power of Now,* this book can also serve as an introduction.

— Eckhart Tolle

July 9, 2001

PART ONE

ACCESSING
THE POWER OF NOW

When your consciousness
is directed outward,
mind and world arise.
When it is directed inward,
it realizes its own Source
and returns home into the Unmanifested.

CHAPTER ONE

BEING AND ENLIGHTENMENT

There is an eternal, ever-present One Life beyond the myriad forms of life that are subject to birth and death. Many people use the word God to describe it; I often call it Being. The word Being explains nothing, but nor does God. Being, however, has the advantage that it is an open concept. It does not reduce the infinite invisible to a finite entity. It is impossible to form a mental image of it. Nobody can claim exclusive possession of Being. It is your very presence, and it is immediately accessible to you as the feeling of your own presence. So it is only a small step from the word Being to the experience of Being.

> **BEING IS NOT ONLY BEYOND BUT ALSO DEEP WITHIN** every form as its innermost invisible and indestructible essence. This means that it is accessible to you now as your own deepest self, your true nature. But don't seek to grasp it with your mind. Don't try to understand it.
>
> You can know it only when the mind is still. When you are present, when your attention is fully and intensely in the Now, Being can be felt, but it can never be understood mentally.

To regain awareness of Being and to abide in that state of "feeling-realization" is enlightenment.

The word *enlightenment* conjures up the idea of some superhuman accomplishment, and the ego likes to keep it that way, but it is simply your natural state of felt oneness with Being. It is a state of connectedness with something immeasurable and indestructible, something that, almost paradoxically, is essentially you and yet is much greater than you. It is finding your true nature beyond name and form.

The inability to feel this connectedness gives rise to the illusion of separation, from yourself and from the world around you. You then perceive yourself, consciously or unconsciously, as an isolated fragment. Fear arises, and conflicts within and without become the norm.

The greatest obstacle to experiencing the reality of your connectedness is identification with your mind, which causes thought to become compulsive. Not to be able to stop thinking is a dreadful affliction, but we don't realize this because almost everybody is suffering from it, so it is considered normal. This incessant mental noise prevents you from finding that realm of inner stillness that is inseparable from Being. It also creates a false mind-made self that casts a shadow of fear and suffering.

Identification with your mind creates an opaque screen of concepts, labels, images, words, judgments, and definitions that blocks all true relationship. It comes between you and yourself, between you and your fellow man and woman, between you and nature, between you and God. It is this screen of thought that creates the illusion of separateness, the illusion that there is you and a totally separate "other." You then

forget the essential fact that, underneath the level of physical appearances and separate forms, you are one with all that is.

The mind is a superb instrument if used rightly. Used wrongly, however, it becomes very destructive. To put it more accurately, it is not so much that you use your mind wrongly — you usually don't use it at all. It uses you. This is the disease. You believe that you are your mind. This is the delusion. The instrument has taken you over.

It's almost as if you were possessed without knowing it, and so you take the possessing entity to be yourself.

> **THE BEGINNING OF FREEDOM** is the realization that you are not the possessing entity — the thinker. Knowing this enables you to observe the entity. The moment you start watching the thinker, a higher level of consciousness becomes activated.

You then begin to realize that there is a vast realm of intelligence beyond thought, that thought is only a tiny aspect of that intelligence. You also realize that all the things that truly matter — beauty, love, creativity, joy, inner peace — arise from beyond the mind.

You begin to awaken.

FREEING YOURSELF FROM YOUR MIND

The good news is that you can free yourself from your mind. This is the only true liberation. You can take the first step right now.

> **START LISTENING TO THE VOICE IN YOUR HEAD** as often as you can. Pay particular attention to any repetitive thought patterns, those old audiotapes that have been playing in your head perhaps for many years.
>
> This is what I mean by "watching the thinker," which is another way of saying: Listen to the voice in your head, be there as the witnessing presence.
>
> When you listen to that voice, listen to it impartially. That is to say, do not judge. Do not judge or condemn what you hear, for doing so would mean that the same voice has come in again through the back door. You'll soon realize: There is the voice, and here I am listening to it, watching it. This *I am* realization, this sense of your own presence, is not a thought. It arises from beyond the mind.

So when you listen to a thought, you are aware not only of the thought but also of yourself as the witness of the thought. A new dimension of consciousness has come in.

> **AS YOU LISTEN TO THE THOUGHT,** you feel a conscious presence — your deeper self — behind or underneath the thought, as it were. The thought then loses its power over you and quickly subsides, because you are no longer energizing the mind through identification with it. This is the beginning of the end of involuntary and compulsive thinking.

When a thought subsides, you experience a discontinuity in the mental stream — a gap of "no-mind." At first, the gaps will be short, a few seconds perhaps, but gradually they will become longer. When these gaps occur, you feel a certain stillness and peace inside you. This is the beginning of your natural state of felt oneness with Being, which is usually obscured by the mind.

With practice, the sense of stillness and peace will deepen. In fact, there is no end to its depth. You will also feel a subtle emanation of joy arising from deep within: the joy of Being.

In this state of inner connectedness, you are much more alert, more awake than in the mind-identified state. You are fully present. It also raises the vibrational frequency of the energy field that gives life to the physical body.

As you go more deeply into this realm of no-mind, as it is sometimes called in the East, you realize the state of pure consciousness. In that state, you feel your own presence with such intensity and such joy that all thinking, all emotions, your physical body, as well as the whole external world become relatively insignificant in comparison to it. And yet this is not a selfish but a selfless state. It takes you beyond what you previously thought of as "your self." That presence is essentially you and at the same time inconceivably greater than you.

INSTEAD OF "WATCHING THE THINKER," you can also create a gap in the mind stream simply by directing the focus of your attention into the Now. Just become intensely conscious of the present moment.

This is a deeply satisfying thing to do. In this way, you draw consciousness away from mind activity and create a gap of no-mind in which you are highly alert and aware but not thinking. This is the essence of meditation.

IN YOUR EVERYDAY LIFE, you can practice this by taking any routine activity that normally is only a means to an end and giving it your fullest attention, so that it becomes an end in itself. For example, every time you walk up and down the stairs in your house or place of work, pay close attention to every step, every movement, even your breathing. Be totally present.

Or when you wash your hands, pay attention to all the sense perceptions associated with the activity: the sound and feel of the water, the movement of your hands, the scent of the soap, and so on.

Or when you get into your car, after you close the door, pause for a few seconds and observe the flow of your breath. Become aware of a silent but powerful sense of presence.

There is one certain criterion by which you can measure your success in this practice: the degree of peace that you feel within.

The single most vital step on your journey toward enlightenment is this: Learn to disidentify from your mind. Every time you create a gap in the stream of mind, the light of your consciousness grows stronger.

One day you may catch yourself smiling at the voice in your head, as you would smile at the antics of a child. This means that you no longer take the content of your mind all that seriously, as your sense of self does not depend on it.

ENLIGHTENMENT: RISING ABOVE THOUGHT

As you grow up, you form a mental image of who you are, based on your personal and cultural conditioning. We may call this phantom self the ego. It consists of mind activity and can only be kept going through constant thinking. The term *ego* means different things to different people, but when I use it here it means a false self, created by unconscious identification with the mind.

To the ego, the present moment hardly exists. Only past and future are considered important. This total reversal of the truth accounts for the fact that in the ego mode the mind is so dysfunctional. It is always concerned with keeping the past alive, because without it — who are you? It constantly projects itself into the future to ensure its continued survival and to seek some kind of release or fulfillment there. It says: "One day, when this, that, or the other happens, I am going to be okay, happy, at peace."

Even when the ego seems to be concerned with the present, it is not the present that it sees: It misperceives it completely because it looks at it through the eyes of the past. Or it reduces the present to a means to an end, an end that always lies in the mind-projected future. Observe your mind and you'll see that this is how it works.

The present moment holds the key to liberation. But you cannot find the present moment as long as you are your mind.

Enlightenment means rising above thought. In the enlightened state, you still use your thinking mind when needed, but in a much more focused and effective way than before. You use it mostly for practical purposes, but you are free of the involuntary internal dialogue, and there is inner stillness.

When you do use your mind, and particularly when a creative solution is needed, you oscillate every few minutes or so between thought and stillness, between mind and no-mind. No-mind is consciousness without thought. Only in that way is it possible to think creatively, because only in that way does thought have any real power. Thought alone, when it is no longer connected with the much vaster realm of consciousness quickly becomes barren, insane, destructive.

EMOTION: THE BODY'S REACTION TO YOUR MIND

Mind, in the way I use the word, is not just thought. It includes your emotions as well as all unconscious mental-emotional reactive patterns. Emotion arises at the place where mind and body meet. It is the body's reaction to your mind — or you might say

a reflection of your mind in the body.

The more you are identified with your thinking, your likes and dislikes, judgments and interpretations, which is to say the less present you are as the watching consciousness, the stronger the emotional energy charge will be, whether you are aware of it or not. If you cannot feel your emotions, if you are cut off from them, you will eventually experience them on a purely physical level, as a physical problem or symptom.

IF YOU HAVE DIFFICULTY FEELING YOUR EMOTIONS, start by focusing attention on the inner energy field of your body. Feel the body from within. This will also put you in touch with your emotions.

If you really want to know your mind, the body will always give you a truthful reflection, so look at the emotion, or rather feel it in your body. If there is an apparent conflict between them, the thought will be the lie, the emotion will be the truth. Not the ultimate truth of who you are, but the relative truth of your state of mind at that time.

You may not yet be able to bring your unconscious mind activity into awareness as thoughts, but it will always be reflected in the body as an emotion, and of this you can become aware.

To watch an emotion in this way is basically the same as listening to or watching a thought, which I described earlier. The only difference is that, while a thought is in your head, an emotion has a strong physical component and so is primarily felt in the body. You can then allow the emotion to be there without being controlled by it. You no longer are the emotion; you are the watcher, the observing presence.

If you practice this, all that is unconscious in you will be brought into the light of consciousness.

MAKE IT A HABIT TO ASK YOURSELF: What's going on inside me at this moment? That question will point you in the right direction. But don't analyze, just watch. Focus your attention within. Feel the energy of the emotion.

If there is no emotion present, take your attention more deeply into the inner energy field of your body. It is the doorway into Being.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ORIGIN OF FEAR

The psychological condition of fear is divorced from any concrete and true immediate danger. It comes in many forms: unease, worry, anxiety, nervousness, tension, dread, phobia, and so on. This kind of psychological fear is always of something that might happen, not of something that is happening now. You are in the here and now, while your mind is in the future. This creates an anxiety gap. And if you are identified with your mind and have lost touch with the power and simplicity of the Now, that anxiety gap will be your constant companion. You can always cope with the present moment, but you cannot cope with something that is only a mind projection — you cannot cope with the future.

Moreover, as long as you are identified with your mind, the ego runs your life. Because of its phantom nature, and despite elaborate defense mechanisms, the ego is very vulnerable and insecure, and it sees itself as constantly under threat. This, by the way, is the case even if the ego is outwardly very confident. Now remember that an emotion is the body's reaction to your mind. What message is the body receiving continuously from the ego, the false, mind-made self? Danger, I am under threat. And what is the emotion generated by this continuous message? Fear, of course.

Fear seems to have many causes. Fear of loss, fear of failure, fear of being hurt, and so on, but ultimately all fear is the ego's fear of death, of annihilation. To the ego, death is always just around the corner. In this mind-identified state, fear of death affects every aspect of your life.

For example, even such a seemingly trivial and "normal" thing as the compulsive need to be right in an argument and make the other person wrong — defending the mental position with which you have identified — is due to the fear of death. If you identify with a mental position, then if you are wrong, your mind-based sense of self is seriously threatened with annihilation. So you as the ego cannot afford to be wrong. To be wrong is to die. Wars have been fought over this, and countless relationships have broken down.

Once you have disidentified from your mind, whether you are right or wrong makes no difference to your sense of self at all, so the forcefully compulsive and deeply unconscious need to be right, which is a form of violence, will no longer be there. You can state clearly and firmly how you feel or what you think, but there will be no aggressiveness or defensiveness about it. Your sense of self is then derived from a deeper and truer place within yourself, not from the mind.

> **WATCH OUT FOR ANY KIND OF DEFENSIVENESS** within yourself. What are you defending? An illusory identity, an image in your mind, a fictitious entity. By making this pattern conscious, by witnessing it, you disidentify from it. In the light of your consciousness, the unconscious pattern will then quickly dissolve.

This is the end of all arguments and power games, which are so corrosive to relationships. Power over others is weakness disguised as strength. True power is within, and it is available to you now.

The mind always seeks to deny the Now and to escape from it. In other words, the more you are identified with your mind, the more you suffer. Or you may put it like this: The more you are able to honor and accept the Now, the more you are free of pain, of suffering — and free of the egoic mind.

If you no longer want to create pain for yourself and others, if you no longer want to add to the residue of past pain that still lives on in you, then don't create any more time, or at least no more than is necessary to deal with the practical aspects of your life. How to stop creating time?

REALIZE DEEPLY THAT THE PRESENT MOMENT is all you ever have. Make the Now the primary focus of your life.

Whereas before you dwelt in time and paid brief visits to the Now, have your dwelling place in the Now and pay brief visits to past and future when required to deal with the practical aspects of your life situation.

Always say "yes" to the present moment.

END THE DELUSION OF TIME

Here is the key: End the delusion of time. Time and mind are inseparable. Remove time from the mind and it stops — unless you choose to use it.

To be identified with your mind is to be trapped in time: the compulsion to live almost exclusively through memory and anticipation. This creates an endless preoccupation with past and future and an unwillingness to honor and acknowledge the present moment and allow it to be. The compulsion arises because the past gives you an identity and the future holds the promise of salvation, of fulfillment in whatever form. Both are illusions.

The more you are focused on time — past and future — the more you miss the Now, the most precious thing there is.

Why is it the most precious thing? Firstly, because it is the only thing. It's all there is. The eternal present is the space within which your whole life unfolds, the one factor that remains constant. Life is now. There was never a time when your life was not now, nor will there ever be.

Secondly, the Now is the only point that can take you beyond the limited confines of the mind. It is your only point of access into the timeless and formless realm of Being.

Have you ever experienced, done, thought, or felt anything outside the Now? Do you think you ever will? Is it possible for anything to happen or be outside the Now? The answer is obvious, is it not?

Nothing ever happened in the past; it happened in the Now. Nothing will ever happen in the future; it will happen in the Now.

The essence of what I am saying here cannot be understood by the mind. The moment you grasp it, there is a shift in consciousness from mind to Being, from time to presence. Suddenly, everything feels alive, radiates energy, emanates Being.

CHAPTER THREE

ENTERING THE NOW

With the timeless dimension comes a different kind of knowing, one that does not "kill" the spirit that lives within every creature and every thing. A knowing that does not destroy the sacredness and mystery of life but contains a deep love and reverence for all that is. A knowing of which the mind knows nothing.

BREAK THE OLD PATTERN of present-moment denial and present-moment resistance. Make it your practice to withdraw attention from past and future whenever they are not needed. Step out of the time dimension as much as possible in everyday life.

If you find it hard to enter the Now directly, start by observing the habitual tendency of your mind to want to escape from the Now. You will observe that the future is usually imagined as either better or worse than the present. If the imagined future is better, it gives you hope or pleasurable anticipation. If it is worse, it creates anxiety. Both are illusory.

Through self-observation, more presence comes into your life automatically. The moment you realize you are not present, you are present. Whenever you are able to observe your mind, you are no longer trapped in it. Another factor has come in, something that is not of the mind: the witnessing presence.

Be present as the watcher of your mind — of your thoughts and emotions as well as your reactions in various situations. Be at least as interested in your reactions as in the situation or person that causes you to react.

Notice also how often your attention is in the past or future. Don't judge or analyze what you observe. Watch the thought, feel the emotion, observe the reaction. Don't make a personal problem out of them. You will then feel something more powerful than any of those things that you observe: the still, observing presence itself behind the content of your mind, the silent watcher.

Intense presence is needed when certain situations trigger a reaction with a strong emotional charge, such as when your self-image is threatened, a challenge comes into your life that triggers fear, things "go wrong," or an emotional complex from the past is brought up. In those instances, the tendency is for you to become "unconscious." The reaction or emotion takes you over — you "become" it. You act it out. You justify, make wrong, attack, defend. . . except that it isn't you, it's the reactive pattern, the mind in its habitual survival mode.

Identification with the mind gives it more energy; observation of the mind withdraws energy from it. Identification with the mind creates more time; observation of the mind opens up the dimension of the timeless. The energy that is withdrawn from the mind turns into presence. Once you can feel what it means to be present, it

becomes much easier to simply choose to step out of the time dimension whenever time is not needed for practical purposes and move more deeply into the Now.

This does not impair your ability to use time — past or future — when you need to refer to it for practical matters. Nor does it impair your ability to use your mind. In fact, it enhances it. When you do use your mind, it will be sharper, more focused.

The enlightened person's main focus of attention is always the Now, but they are still peripherally aware of time. In other words, they continue to use clock time but are free of psychological time.

LETTING GO OF PSYCHOLOGICAL TIME

Learn to use time in the practical aspects of your life — we may call this "clock time" — but immediately return to present-moment awareness when those practical matters have been dealt with. In this way, there will be no buildup of "psychological time," which is identification with the past and continuous compulsive projection into the future.

If you set yourself a goal and work toward it, you are using clock time. You are aware of where you want to go, but you honor and give your fullest attention to the step that you are taking at this moment. If you then become excessively focused on the goal, perhaps because you are seeking happiness, fulfillment, or a more complete sense of self in it, the Now is no longer honored. It becomes reduced to a mere stepping-stone to the future, with no intrinsic value. Clock time then turns into psychological time. Your life's journey is no longer an adventure, just an obsessive need to arrive, to attain, to "make it." You no longer see or smell the flowers by the wayside either, nor are you aware of the beauty and the miracle of life that unfolds all around you when you are present in the Now.

Are you always trying to get somewhere other than where you are? Is most of your doing just a means to an end? Is fulfillment always just around the corner or confined to short-lived pleasures, such as sex, food, drink, drugs, or thrills and excitement? Are you always focused on becoming, achieving, and attaining, or alternatively chasing some new thrill or pleasure? Do you believe that if you acquire more things you will become more fulfilled, good enough, or psychologically complete? Are you waiting for a man or woman to give meaning to your life?

In the normal, mind-identified or unenlightened state of consciousness, the power and infinite creative potential that lie concealed in the Now are completely obscured by psychological time. Your life then loses its vibrancy, its freshness, its sense of wonder. The old patterns of thought, emotion, behavior, reaction, and desire are acted out in endless repeat performances, a script in your mind that gives you an identity of sorts but distorts or covers up the reality of the Now. The mind then creates an obsession with the future as an escape from the unsatisfactory present.

What you perceive as future is an intrinsic part of your state of consciousness now. If your mind carries a heavy burden of past, you will experience more of the same. The

past perpetuates itself through lack of presence. The quality of your consciousness at this moment is what shapes the future — which, of course, can only be experienced as the Now.

If it is the quality of your consciousness at this moment that determines the future, then what is it that determines the quality of your consciousness? Your degree of presence. So the only place where true change can occur and where the past can be dissolved is the Now.

You may find it hard to recognize that time is the cause of your suffering or your problems. You believe that they are caused by specific situations in your life, and seen from a conventional viewpoint, this is true. But until you have dealt with the basic problem-making dysfunction of the mind — its attachment to past and future and denial of the Now — problems are actually interchangeable.

If all your problems or perceived causes of suffering or unhappiness were miraculously removed for you today, but you had not become more present, more conscious, you would soon find yourself with a similar set of problems or causes of suffering, like a shadow that follows you wherever you go. Ultimately, there is only one problem: the time-bound mind itself.

There is no salvation in time. You cannot be free in the future.

PRESENCE IS THE KEY to freedom, so you can only be free now.

FINDING THE LIFE UNDERNEATH YOUR LIFE SITUATION

What you refer to as your "life" should more accurately be called your "life situation." It is psychological time: past and future. Certain things in the past didn't go the way you wanted them to go. You are still resisting what happened in the past, and now you are resisting what is. Hope is what keeps you going, but hope keeps you focused on the future, and this continued focus perpetuates your denial of the Now and therefore your unhappiness.

FORGET ABOUT YOUR LIFE SITUATION for a while and pay attention to your life.

Your life situation exists in time. Your life is now.

Your life situation is mind-stuff. Your life is real.

Find the "narrow gate that leads to life." It is called the Now. Narrow your life down to this moment. Your life situation may be full of problems — most life situations are — but find out if you have any problem at this moment. Not tomorrow or in ten minutes, but now. Do you have a problem now?

When you are full of problems, there is no room for anything new to enter, no room for a solution. So whenever you can, make some room, create some space, so that you find the life underneath your life situation.

USE YOUR SENSES FULLY. Be where you are. Look around. Just look, don't interpret. See the light, shapes, colors, textures. Be aware of the silent

presence of each thing. Be aware of the space that allows everything to be.

Listen to the sounds; don't judge them. Listen to the silence underneath the sounds.

Touch something — anything — and feel and acknowledge its Being.

Observe the rhythm of your breathing; feel the air flowing in and out, feel the life energy inside your body. Allow everything to be, within and without. Allow the "isness" of all things. Move deeply into the Now.

You are leaving behind the deadening world of mental abstraction, of time. You are getting out of the insane mind that is draining you of life energy, just as it is slowly poisoning and destroying the Earth. You are awakening out of the dream of time into the present.

ALL PROBLEMS ARE ILLUSIONS OF THE MIND

FOCUS YOUR ATTENTION ON THE NOW and tell me what problem you have at this moment.

I am not getting any answer because it is impossible to have a problem when your attention is fully in the Now. A situation needs to be either dealt with or accepted. Why make it into a problem?

The mind unconsciously loves problems because they give you an identity of sorts. This is normal, and it is insane. "Problem" means that you are dwelling on a situation mentally without there being a true intention or possibility of taking action now and that you are unconsciously making it part of your sense of self. You become so overwhelmed by your life situation that you lose your sense of life, of Being. Or you are carrying in your mind the insane burden of a hundred things that you will or may have to do in the future instead of focusing your attention on the one thing that you can do now.

WHEN YOU CREATE A PROBLEM, you create pain. All it takes is a simple choice, a simple decision: No matter what happens, I will create no more pain for myself. I will create no more problems.

Although it is a simple choice, it is also very radical. You won't make that choice unless you are truly fed up with suffering, unless you have truly had enough. And you won't be able to go through with it unless you access the power of the Now. If you create no more pain for yourself, then you create no more pain for others. You also no longer contaminate the beautiful Earth, your inner space, and the collective human psyche with the negativity of problem making.

Should a situation arise that you need to deal with now, your action will be clear and incisive if it arises out of present-moment awareness. It is also more likely to be effective. It will not be a reaction coming from the past conditioning of your mind but an intuitive response to the situation. In other instances, when the time-bound mind

would have reacted, you will find it more effective to do nothing — just stay centered in the Now.

THE JOY OF BEING

To alert you that you have allowed yourself to be taken over by psychological time, you can use a simple criterion.

> **ASK YOURSELF:** Is there joy, ease, and lightness in what I am doing? If there isn't, then time is covering up the present moment, and life is perceived as a burden or a struggle.
>
> If there is no joy, ease, or lightness in what you are doing, it does not necessarily mean that you need to change what you are doing. It may be sufficient to change the how. "How" is always more important than "what." See if you can give much more attention to the doing than to the result that you want to achieve through it. Give your fullest attention to whatever the moment presents. This implies that you also completely accept what is, because you cannot give your full attention to something and at the same time resist it.

As soon as you honor the present moment, all unhappiness and struggle dissolve, and life begins to flow with joy and ease. When you act out of present-moment awareness, whatever you do becomes imbued with a sense of quality, care, and love — even the most simple action.

> **DO NOT BE CONCERNED WITH THE FRUIT OF YOUR ACTION** — just give attention to the action itself. The fruit will come of its own accord. This is a powerful spiritual practice.

When the compulsive striving away from the Now ceases, the joy of Being flows into everything you do. The moment your attention turns to the Now, you feel a presence, a stillness, a peace. You no longer depend on the future for fulfillment and satisfaction — you don't look to it for salvation. Therefore, you are not attached to the results. Neither failure nor success has the power to change your inner state of Being. You have found the life underneath your life situation.

In the absence of psychological time, your sense of self is derived from Being, not from your personal past. Therefore, the psychological need to become anything other than who you are already is no longer there. In the world, on the level of your life situation, you may indeed become wealthy, knowledgeable, successful, free of this or that, but in the deeper dimension of Being you are complete and whole now.

THE TIMELESS STATE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

When every cell of your body is so present that it feels vibrant with life, and when you

can feel that life every moment as the joy of Being, then it can be said that you are free of time. To be free of time is to be free of the psychological need of the past for your identity and the future for your fulfillment. It represents the most profound transformation of consciousness that you can imagine.

WHEN YOU HAVE HAD YOUR FIRST FEW GLIMPSES OF THE TIMELESS STATE OF CONSCIOUSNESS, you begin to move back and forth between the dimensions of time and presence. First you become aware of just how rarely your attention is truly in the Now. But to know that you are not present is a great success: That knowing is presence — even if initially it only lasts for a couple of seconds of clock time before it is lost again.

Then, with increasing frequency, you choose to have the focus of your consciousness in the present moment rather than in the past or future, and whenever you realize that you had lost the Now, you are able to stay in it not just for a couple of seconds, but for longer periods as perceived from the external perspective of clock time.

So before you are firmly established in the state of presence, which is to say, before you are fully conscious, you shift back and forth for a while between consciousness and unconsciousness, between the state of presence and the state of mind identification. You lose the Now, and you return to it, again and again. Eventually, presence becomes your predominant state.

CHAPTER FOUR

DISSOLVING UNCONSCIOUSNESS

It is essential to bring more consciousness into your life in ordinary situations when everything is going relatively smoothly. In this way, you grow in presence power. It generates an energy field in you and around you of a high vibrational frequency. No unconsciousness, no negativity, no discord or violence can enter that field and survive, just as darkness cannot survive in the presence of light.

When you learn to be the witness of your thoughts and emotions, which is an essential part of being present, you may be surprised when you first become aware of the background "static" of ordinary unconsciousness and realize how rarely, if ever, you are truly at ease within yourself.

On the level of your thinking, you will find a great deal of resistance in the form of judgment, discontent, and mental projection away from the Now. On the emotional level, there will be an undercurrent of unease, tension, boredom, or nervousness. Both are aspects of the mind in its habitual resistance mode.

OBSERVE THE MANY WAYS IN WHICH UNEASE, discontent, and tension arise within you through unnecessary judgment, resistance to what is, and denial of the Now.

Anything unconscious dissolves when you shine the light of consciousness on it.

Once you know how to dissolve ordinary unconsciousness, the light of your presence will shine brightly, and it will be much easier to deal with deep unconsciousness whenever you feel its gravitational pull. However, ordinary unconsciousness may not be easy to detect initially because it is so normal.

MAKE IT A HABIT TO MONITOR YOUR MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL STATE through self-observation.

"Am I at ease at this moment?" is a good question to ask yourself frequently.

Or you can ask: "What's going on inside me at this moment?"

Be at least as interested in what goes on inside you as what happens outside. If you get the inside right, the outside will fall into place. Primary reality is within, secondary reality without.

BUT DON'T ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS IMMEDIATELY. Direct your attention inward. Have a look inside yourself.

What kind of thoughts is your mind producing?

What do you feel?

Direct your attention into the body. Is there any tension?

Once you detect that there is a low level of unease, the background static, see in what way you are avoiding, resisting, or denying life — by denying the Now.

There are many ways in which people unconsciously resist the present moment. With practice, your power of self-observation, of monitoring your inner state, will become sharpened.

WHEREVER YOU ARE, BE THERE TOTALLY

Are you stressed? Are you so busy getting to the future that the present is reduced to a means of getting there? Stress is caused by being "here" but wanting to be "there," or being in the present but wanting to be in the future. It's a split that tears you apart inside.

Does the past take up a great deal of your attention? Do you frequently talk and think about it, either positively or negatively? The great things that you have achieved, your adventures or experiences, or your victim story and the dreadful things that were done to you, or maybe what you did to someone else?

Are your thought processes creating guilt, pride, resentment, anger, regret, or self-pity? Then you are not only reinforcing a false sense of self but also helping to accelerate your body's aging process by creating an accumulation of past in your psyche. Verify this for yourself by observing those around you who have a strong tendency to hold on to the past.

DIE TO THE PAST EVERY MOMENT. You don't need it. Only refer to it when it is absolutely relevant to the present. Feel the power of this moment and the fullness of Being. Feel your presence.

Are you worried? Do you have many "what if " thoughts? You are identified with your mind, which is projecting itself into an imaginary future situation and creating fear. There is no way that you can cope with such a situation, because it doesn't exist. It's a mental phantom.

You can stop this health- and life-corroding insanity simply by acknowledging the present moment.

BECOME AWARE OF YOUR BREATHING. Feel the air flowing in and out of your body. Feel your inner energy field. All that you ever have to deal with, cope with, in real life — as opposed to imaginary mind projections — is this moment.

Ask yourself what "problem" you have right now, not next year, tomorrow, or five minutes from now. What is wrong with this moment?

You can always cope with the Now, but you can never cope with the future — nor do you have to. The answer, the strength, the right action, or the resource will be there when you need it, not before, not after.

Are you a habitual "waiter"? How much of your life do you spend waiting? What I call "small-scale waiting" is waiting in line at the post office, in a traffic jam, at the airport, or waiting for someone to arrive, to finish work, and so on. "Large-scale waiting" is waiting for the next vacation, for a better job, for the children to grow up, for a truly meaningful relationship, for success, to make money, to be important, to become enlightened. It is not uncommon for people to spend their whole life waiting to start living.

Waiting is a state of mind. Basically, it means that you want the future; you don't want the present. You don't want what you've got, and you want what you haven't got. With every kind of waiting, you unconsciously create inner conflict between your here and now, where you don't want to be, and the projected future, where you want to be. This greatly reduces the quality of your life by making you lose the present.

For example, many people are waiting for prosperity. It cannot come in the future. When you honor, acknowledge, and fully accept your present reality — where you are, who you are, what you are doing right now — when you fully accept what you have got, you are grateful for what you have got, grateful for what is, grateful for Being. Gratitude for the present moment and the fullness of life now is true prosperity. It cannot come in the future. Then, in time, that prosperity manifests for you in various ways.

If you are dissatisfied with what you have got, or even frustrated or angry about your present lack, that may motivate you to become rich, but even if you do make millions, you will continue to experience the inner condition of lack, and deep down you will continue to feel unfulfilled. You may have many exciting experiences that money can buy, but they will come and go and always leave you with an empty feeling and the need for further physical or psychological gratification. You won't abide in Being and so feel the fullness of life now that alone is true prosperity.

> **GIVE UP WAITING AS A STATE OF MIND.** When you catch yourself slipping into waiting . . . snap out of it. Come into the present moment. Just be, and enjoy being. If you are present, there is never any need for you to wait for anything.
>
> So next time somebody says, "Sorry to have kept you waiting," you can reply, "That's all right, I wasn't waiting. I was just standing here enjoying myself — in joy in my self."

These are just a few of the habitual mind strategies for denying the present moment that are part of ordinary unconsciousness. They are easy to overlook because they are so much a part of normal living: the background static of perpetual discontent. But the more you practice monitoring your inner mental-emotional state, the easier it will be to know when you have been trapped in past or future, which is to say unconscious, and to awaken out of the dream of time into the present.

But beware: The false, unhappy self, based on mind identification, lives on time. It knows that the present moment is its own death and so feels very threatened by it. It will do all it can to take you out of it. It will try to keep you trapped in time.

In a sense, the state of presence could be compared to waiting. It is a qualitatively

different kind of waiting, one that requires your total alertness. Something could happen at any moment, and if you are not absolutely awake, absolutely still, you will miss it. In that state, all your attention is in the Now. There is none left for daydreaming, thinking, remembering, anticipating. There is no tension in it, no fear, just alert presence. You are present with your whole Being, with every cell of your body.

In that state, the "you" that has a past and a future, the personality if you like, is hardly there anymore. And yet nothing of value is lost. You are still essentially yourself. In fact, you are more fully yourself than you ever were before, or rather it is only now that you are truly yourself.

THE PAST CANNOT SURVIVE IN YOUR PRESENCE

Whatever you need to know about the unconscious past in you, the challenges of the present will bring it out. If you delve into the past, it will become a bottomless pit: There is always more. You may think that you need more time to understand the past or become free of it, in other words, that the future will eventually free you of the past. This is a delusion. Only the present can free you of the past. More time cannot free you of time.

Access the power of Now. That is the key. The power of Now is none other than the power of your presence, your consciousness liberated from thought forms. So deal with the past on the level of the present. The more attention you give to the past, the more you energize it, and the more likely you are to make a "self " out of it.

Don't misunderstand: Attention is essential, but not to the past as past. Give attention to the present; give attention to your behavior, to your reactions, moods, thoughts, emotions, fears, and desires as they occur in the present. There's the past in you. If you can be present enough to watch all those things, not critically or analytically but nonjudgmentally, then you are dealing with the past and dissolving it through the power of your presence.

You cannot find yourself by going into the past. You find yourself by coming into the present.

CHAPTER FIVE

BEAUTY ARISES IN THE TILLNESS OF YOUR PRESENCE

Presence is needed to become aware of the beauty, the majesty, the sacredness of nature. Have you ever gazed up into the infinity of space on a clear night, awestruck by the absolute stillness and inconceivable vastness of it? Have you listened, truly listened, to the sound of a mountain stream in the forest? Or to the song of a blackbird at dusk on a quiet summer evening?

To become aware of such things, the mind needs to be still. You have to put down for a moment your personal baggage of problems, of past and future, as well as all your knowledge; otherwise, you will see but not see, hear but not hear. Your total presence is required.

BEYOND THE BEAUTY OF THE EXTERNAL FORMS, there is more here: something that cannot be named, something ineffable, some deep, inner, holy essence. Whenever and wherever there is beauty, this inner essence shines through somehow. It only reveals itself to you when you are present.

Could it be that this nameless essence and your presence are one and the same?

Would it be there without your presence?

Go deeply into it. Find out for yourself.

REALIZING PURE CONSCIOUSNESS

Whenever you watch the mind, you withdraw consciousness from mind forms, which then becomes what we call the watcher or the witness. Consequently, the watcher — pure consciousness beyond form — becomes stronger, and the mental formations become weaker.

When we talk about watching the mind, we are personalizing an event that is truly of cosmic significance: Through you, consciousness is awakening out of its dream of identification with form and withdrawing from form. This foreshadows, but is already part of, an event that is probably still in the distant future as far as chronological time is concerned. The event is called — the end of the world.

TO STAY PRESENT IN EVERYDAY LIFE, it helps to be deeply rooted within yourself; otherwise, the mind, which has incredible momentum, will drag you along like a wild river.

It means to inhabit your body fully. To always have some of your attention

in the inner energy field of your body. To feel the body from within, so to speak. Body awareness keeps you present. It anchors you in the Now.

The body that you can see and touch cannot take you into Being. But that visible and tangible body is only an outer shell, or rather a limited and distorted perception of a deeper reality. In your natural state of connectedness with Being, this deeper reality can be felt every moment as the invisible inner body, the animating presence within you. So to "inhabit the body" is to feel the body from within, to feel the life inside the body and thereby come to know that you are beyond the outer form.

You are cut off from Being as long as your mind takes up all your attention. When this happens — and it happens continuously for most people — you are not in your body. The mind absorbs all your consciousness and transforms it into mind stuff. You cannot stop thinking.

To become conscious of Being, you need to reclaim consciousness from the mind. This is one of the most essential tasks on your spiritual journey. It will free vast amounts of consciousness that previously had been trapped in useless and compulsive thinking. A very effective way of doing this is simply to take the focus of your attention away from thinking and direct it into the body, where Being can be felt in the first instance as the invisible energy field that gives life to what you perceive as the physical body.

CONNECTING WITH THE INNER BODY

Please try it now. You may find it helpful to close your eyes for this practice. Later on, when "being in the body" has become natural and easy, this will no longer be necessary.

DIRECT YOUR ATTENTION INTO THE BODY. Feel it from within. Is it alive? Is there life in your hands, arms, legs, and feet — in your abdomen, your chest?

Can you feel the subtle energy field that pervades the entire body and gives vibrant life to every organ and every cell? Can you feel it simultaneously in all parts of the body as a single field of energy?

Keep focusing on the feeling of your inner body for a few moments. Do not start to think about it. Feel it.

The more attention you give it, the clearer and stronger this feeling will become. It will feel as if every cell is becoming more alive, and if you have a strong visual sense, you may get an image of your body becoming luminous. Although such an image can help you temporarily, pay more attention to the feeling than to any image that may arise. An image, no matter how beautiful or powerful, is already defined in form, so there is less scope for penetrating more deeply.

GOING DEEPLY INTO THE BODY

To go even more deeply into the body, try the following meditation. Ten to fifteen minutes of clock time should be sufficient.

MAKE SURE FIRST THAT THERE ARE NO EXTERNAL DISTRACTIONS such as telephones or people who are likely to interrupt you. Sit on a chair, but don't lean back. Keep the spine erect. Doing so will help you to stay alert. Alternatively, choose your own favorite position for meditation.

Make sure the body is relaxed. Close your eyes. Take a few deep breaths. Feel yourself breathing into the lower abdomen, as it were. Observe how it expands and contracts slightly with each in and out breath.

Then become aware of the entire inner energy field of the body. Don't think about it — feel it. By doing this, you reclaim consciousness from the mind. If you find it helpful, use the "light" visualization I just described.

When you can feel the inner body clearly as a single field of energy, let go, if possible, of any visual image and focus exclusively on the feeling. If you can, also drop any mental image you may still have of the physical body. All that is left then is an all-encompassing sense of presence or "beingness," and the inner body is felt to be without a boundary.

Then take your attention even more deeply into that feeling. Become one with it. Merge with the energy field, so that there is no longer a perceived duality of the observer and the observed, of you and your body. The distinction between inner and outer also dissolves now, so there is no inner body anymore. By going deeply into the body, you have transcended the body.

Stay in this realm of pure Being for as long as feels comfortable; then become aware again of the physical body, your breathing and physical senses, and open your eyes. Look at your surroundings for a few minutes in a meditative way — that is, without labeling them mentally — and continue to feel the inner body as you do so.

Having access to that formless realm is truly liberating. It frees you from bondage to form and identification with form. We may call it the Unmanifested, the invisible Source of all things, the Being within all beings. It is a realm of deep stillness and peace, but also of joy and intense aliveness. Whenever you are present, you become "transparent" to some extent to the light, the pure consciousness that emanates from this Source. You also realize that the light is not separate from who you are but constitutes your very essence.

When your consciousness is directed outward, mind and world arise. When it is directed inward, it realizes its own Source and returns home into the Unmanifested.

Then, when your consciousness comes back to the manifested world, you reassume the form identity that you temporarily relinquished. You have a name, a past, a life situation, a future. But in one essential respect, you are not the same person you were

before: You will have glimpsed a reality within yourself that is not "of this world," although it isn't separate from it, just as it isn't separate from you.

Now let your spiritual practice be this:

AS YOU GO ABOUT YOUR LIFE, don't give 100 percent of your attention to the external world and to your mind. Keep some within.

Feel the inner body even when engaged in everyday activities, especially when engaged in relationships or when you are relating with nature. Feel the stillness deep inside it. Keep the portal open.

It is quite possible to be conscious of the Unmanifested throughout your life. You feel it as a deep sense of peace somewhere in the background, a stillness that never leaves you, no matter what happens out here. You become a bridge between the Unmanifested and the manifested, between God and the world.

This is the state of connectedness with the Source that we call enlightenment.

HAVE DEEP ROOTS WITHIN

The key is to be in a state of permanent connectedness with your inner body — to feel it at all times. This will rapidly deepen and transform your life. The more consciousness you direct into the inner body, the higher its vibrational frequency becomes, much like a light that grows brighter as you turn up the dimmer switch and so increase the flow of electricity. At this higher energy level, negativity cannot affect you anymore, and you tend to attract new circumstances that reflect this higher frequency.

If you keep your attention in the body as much as possible, you will be anchored in the Now. You won't lose yourself in the external world, and you won't lose yourself in your mind. Thoughts and emotions, fears and desires may still be there to some extent, but they won't take you over.

PLEASE EXAMINE WHERE YOUR ATTENTION IS at this moment. You are listening to me, or you are reading these words in a book. That is the focus of your attention. You are also peripherally aware of your surroundings, other people, and so on. Furthermore, there may be some mind activity around what you are hearing or reading, some mental commentary.

Yet there is no need for any of this to absorb all your attention. See if you can be in touch with your inner body at the same time. Keep some of your attention within. Don't let it all flow out. Feel your whole body from within, as a single field of energy. It is almost as if you were listening or reading with your whole body. Let this be your practice in the days and weeks to come.

Do not give all your attention away to the mind and the external world. By

all means focus on what you are doing, but feel the inner body at the same time whenever possible. Stay rooted within. Then observe how this changes your state of consciousness and the quality of what you are doing.

Please don't just accept or reject what I am saying. Put it to the test.

STRENGTHENING THE IMMUNE SYSTEM

There is a simple but powerful self-healing meditation that you can do whenever you feel the need to boost your immune system. It is particularly effective if used when you feel the first symptoms of an illness, but it also works with illnesses that are already entrenched if you use it at frequent intervals and with an intense focus. It will also counteract any disruption of your energy field by some form of negativity.

It is not a substitute, however, for the moment-to-moment practice of being in the body; otherwise, its effect will only be temporary. Here it is.

WHEN YOU ARE UNOCCUPIED FOR A FEW MINUTES, and especially last thing at night before falling asleep and first thing in the morning before getting up, "flood" your body with consciousness. Close your eyes. Lie flat on your back. Choose different parts of your body to focus your attention on briefly at first: hands, feet, arms, legs, abdomen, chest, head, and so on. Feel the life energy inside those parts as intensely as you can. Stay with each part for fifteen seconds or so.

Then let your attention run through the body like a wave a few times, from feet to head and back again. This need only take a minute or so. After that, feel the inner body in its totality, as a single field of energy. Hold that feeling for a few minutes.

Be intensely present during that time, present in every cell of your body.

Don't be concerned if the mind occasionally succeeds in drawing your attention out of the body and you lose yourself in some thought. As soon as you notice that this has happened, just return your attention to the inner body.

CREATIVE USE OF MIND

If you need to use your mind for a specific purpose, use it in conjunction with your inner body. Only if you are able to be conscious without thought can you use your mind creatively, and the easiest way to enter that state is through your body.

WHENEVER AN ANSWER, A SOLUTION, OR A CREATIVE IDEA IS NEEDED, stop thinking for a moment by focusing attention on your inner energy field. Become aware of the stillness.

When you resume thinking, it will be fresh and creative. In any thought

activity, make it a habit to go back and forth every few minutes or so between thinking and an inner kind of listening, an inner stillness.

We could say: Don't just think with your head, think with your whole body.

LET THE BREATH TAKE YOU INTO THE BODY

If at any time you are finding it hard to get in touch with the inner body, it is usually easier to focus on your breathing first. Conscious breathing, which is a powerful meditation in its own right, will gradually put you in touch with the body.

FOLLOW THE BREATH WITH YOUR ATTENTION as it moves in and out of your body. Breathe into the body, and feel your abdomen expanding and contracting slightly with each inhalation and exhalation.

If you find it easy to visualize, close your eyes and see yourself surrounded by light or immersed in a luminous substance — a sea of consciousness. Then breathe in that light. Feel that luminous substance filling up your body and making it luminous also.

Then gradually focus more on the feeling. Don't get attached to any visual image. You are now in your body. You have accessed the power of Now.

PART TWO

RELATIONSHIP AS SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Love is a state of Being.
Your love is not outside; it is deep within you.
You can never lose it, and it cannot leave you.
It is not dependent on some other body,
some external form.

CHAPTER SIX

DISSOLVING THE PAIN-BODY

The greater part of human pain is unnecessary. It is self-created as long as the unobserved mind runs your life. The pain that you create now is always some form of nonacceptance, some form of unconscious resistance to what is.

On the level of thought, the resistance is some form of judgment. On the emotional level, it is some form of negativity. The intensity of the pain depends on the degree of resistance to the present moment, and this in turn depends on how strongly you are identified with your mind. The mind always seeks to deny the Now and to escape from it.

In other words, the more you are identified with your mind, the more you suffer. Or you may put it like this: The more you are able to honor and accept the Now, the more you are free of pain, of suffering — and free of the egoic mind.

Some spiritual teachings state that all pain is ultimately an illusion, and this is true. The question is: Is it true for you? A mere belief doesn't make it true. Do you want to experience pain for the rest of your life and keep saying that it is an illusion? Does that free you from the pain? What we are concerned with here is how you can realize this truth — that is, make it real in your own experience.

Pain is inevitable as long as you are identified with your mind, which is to say as long as you are unconscious, spiritually speaking. I am talking here primarily of emotional pain, which is also the main cause of physical pain and physical disease. Resentment, hatred, self-pity, guilt, anger, depression, jealousy, and so on, even the slightest irritation, are all forms of pain. And every pleasure or emotional high contains within itself the seed of pain: its inseparable opposite, which will manifest in time.

Anybody who has ever taken drugs to get "high" will know that the high eventually turns into a low, that the pleasure turns into some form of pain. Many people also know from their own experience how easily and quickly an intimate relationship can turn from a source of pleasure to a source of pain. Seen from a higher perspective, both the negative and the positive polarities are faces of the same coin, are part of the underlying pain that is inseparable from the mind-identified egoic state of consciousness.

There are two levels to your pain: the pain that you create now, and the pain from the past that still lives on in your mind and body.

As long as you are unable to access the power of the Now, every emotional pain that you experience leaves behind a residue of pain that lives on in you. It merges with the pain from the past, which was already there, and becomes lodged in your mind and body. This, of course, includes the pain you suffered as a child, caused by the unconsciousness of the world into which you were born.

This accumulated pain is a negative energy field that occupies your body and mind.

If you look on it as an invisible entity in its own right, you are getting quite close to the truth. It's the emotional pain-body.

The pain-body has two modes of being: dormant and active. It may be dormant 90 percent of the time; in a deeply unhappy person, though, it may be active up to 100 percent of the time. Some people live almost entirely through their pain-body, while others may experience it only in certain situations, such as intimate relationships, or situations linked with past loss or abandonment, physical or emotional hurt, and so on.

Anything can trigger it, particularly if it resonates with a pain pattern from your past. When it is ready to awaken from its dormant stage, even a thought or an innocent remark made by someone close to you can activate it.

BREAKING IDENTIFICATION WITH THE PAIN-BODY

THE PAIN-BODY DOESN'T WANT YOU TO OBSERVE IT DIRECTLY and see it for what it is. The moment you observe the pain-body, feel its energy field within you, and take your attention into it, the identification is broken.

A higher dimension of consciousness has come in. I call it presence. You are now the witness or the watcher of the pain-body. This means that it cannot use you anymore by pretending to be you, and it can no longer replenish itself through you. You have found your own innermost strength.

Some pain-bodies are obnoxious but relatively harmless, for example, like a child who won't stop whining. Others are vicious and destructive monsters, true demons. Some are physically violent; many more are emotionally violent. Some will attack people around you or close to you, while others may attack you, their host. Thoughts and feelings you have about your life then become deeply negative and self-destructive. Illnesses and accidents are often created in this way. Some pain-bodies drive their hosts to suicide.

When you thought you knew a person and then you are suddenly confronted with this alien, nasty creature for the first time, you are in for quite a shock. It is more important, however, to observe it in yourself than in someone else.

WATCH OUT FOR ANY SIGN OF UNHAPPINESS IN YOURSELF, in whatever form — it may be the awakening pain-body. This can take the form of irritation, impatience, a somber mood, a desire to hurt, anger, rage, depression, a need to have some drama in your relationship, and so on. Catch it the moment it awakens from its dormant state.

The pain-body wants to survive, just like every other entity in existence, and it can only survive if it gets you to unconsciously identify with it. It can then rise up, take you over, "become you," and live through you.

It needs to get its "food" through you. It will feed on any experience that resonates with its own kind of energy, anything that creates further pain in whatever form: anger, destructiveness, hatred, grief, emotional drama, violence, and even illness. So the pain-body, when it has taken you over, will create a situation in your life that reflects back its own energy frequency for it to feed on. Pain can only feed on pain. Pain cannot feed on joy. It finds it quite indigestible.

Once the pain-body has taken you over, you want more pain. You become a victim or a perpetrator. You want to inflict pain, or you want to suffer pain, or both. There isn't really much difference between the two. You are not conscious of this, of course, and will vehemently claim that you do not want pain. But look closely and you will find that your thinking and behavior are designed to keep the pain going, for yourself and others. If you were truly conscious of it, the pattern would dissolve, for to want more pain is insanity, and nobody is consciously insane.

The pain-body, which is the dark shadow cast by the ego, is actually afraid of the light of your consciousness. It is afraid of being found out. Its survival depends on your unconscious identification with it, as well as on your unconscious fear of facing the pain that lives in you. But if you don't face it, if you don't bring the light of your consciousness into the pain, you will be forced to relive it again and again.

The pain-body may seem to you like a dangerous monster that you cannot bear to look at, but I assure you that it is an insubstantial phantom that cannot prevail against the power of your presence.

> **WHEN YOU BECOME THE WATCHER** and start to disidentify, the pain-body will continue to operate for a while and will try to trick you into identifying with it again. Although you are no longer energizing it through your identification, it has a certain momentum, just like a spinning wheel that will keep turning for a while even when it is no longer being propelled. At this stage, it may also create physical aches and pains in different parts of the body, but they won't last.
>
> Stay present, stay conscious. Be the ever-alert guardian of your inner space. You need to be present enough to be able to watch the pain-body directly and feel its energy. It then cannot control your thinking.

The moment your thinking is aligned with the energy field of the pain-body, you are identified with it and again feeding it with your thoughts. For example, if anger is the predominant energy vibration of the pain-body and you think angry thoughts, dwelling on what someone did to you or what you are going to do to him or her, then you have become unconscious, and the pain-body has become "you." Where there is anger, there is always pain underneath.

Or when a dark mood comes upon you and you start getting into a negative mind-pattern and thinking how dreadful your life is, your thinking has become aligned with the pain-body, and you have become unconscious and vulnerable to the pain-body's attack.

"Unconscious," the way that I use the word here, means to be identified with some mental or emotional pattern. It implies a complete absence of the watcher.

TRANSMUTING SUFFERING INTO CONSCIOUSNESS

Sustained conscious attention severs the link between the pain-body and your thought processes and brings about the process of transmutation. It is as if the pain becomes fuel for the flame of your consciousness, which then burns more brightly as a result.

This is the esoteric meaning of the ancient art of alchemy: the transmutation of base metal into gold, of suffering into consciousness. The split within is healed, and you become whole again. Your responsibility then is not to create further pain.

FOCUS ATTENTION ON THE FEELING INSIDE YOU. Know that it is the pain-body. Accept that it is there. Don't think about it — don't let the feeling turn into thinking. Don't judge or analyze. Don't make an identity for yourself out of it. Stay present, and continue to be the observer of what is happening inside you.

Become aware not only of the emotional pain but also of "the one who observes," the silent watcher. This is the power of the Now, the power of your own conscious presence. Then see what happens.

EGO IDENTIFICATION WITH THE PAIN-BODY

The process that I have just described is profoundly powerful yet simple. It could be taught to a child, and hopefully one day it will be one of the first things children learn in school. Once you have understood the basic principle of being present as the watcher of what happens inside you — and you "understand" it by experiencing it — you have at your disposal the most potent transformational tool.

This is not to deny that you may encounter intense inner resistance to disidentifying from your pain. This will be the case particularly if you have lived closely identified with your emotional pain-body for most of your life and the whole or a large part of your sense of self is invested in it. What this means is that you have made an unhappy self out of your pain-body and believe that this mind-made fiction is who you are. In that case, unconscious fear of losing your identity will create strong resistance to any disidentification. In other words, you would rather be in pain — be the pain-body — than take a leap into the unknown and risk losing the familiar unhappy self.

OBSERVE THE RESISTANCE WITHIN YOURSELF. Observe the attachment to your pain. Be very alert. Observe the peculiar pleasure you derive from being unhappy. Observe the compulsion to talk or think about it. The resistance will cease if you make it conscious.

You can then take your attention into the pain-body, stay present as the witness, and so initiate its transmutation.

Only you can do this. Nobody can do it for you. But if you are fortunate enough to find someone who is intensely conscious, if you can be with them and join them in the state of presence, that can be helpful and will accelerate things. In this way, your own light will quickly grow stronger.

When a log that has only just started to burn is placed next to one that is burning fiercely, and after a while they are separated again, the first log will be burning with much greater intensity. After all, it is the same fire. To be such a fire is one of the functions of a spiritual teacher. Some therapists may also be able to fulfill that function, provided that they have gone beyond the level of mind and can create and sustain a state of intense conscious presence while they are working with you.

The first thing to remember is this: As long as you make an identity for yourself out of the pain, you cannot become free of it. As long as part of your sense of self is invested in your emotional pain, you will unconsciously resist or sabotage every attempt that you make to heal that pain.

Why? Quite simply because you want to keep yourself intact, and the pain has become an essential part of you. This is an unconscious process, and the only way to overcome it is to make it conscious.

THE POWER OF YOUR PRESENCE

> **TO SUDDENLY SEE** that you are or have been attached to your pain can be quite a shocking realization. The moment you realize this, you have broken the attachment.

The pain-body is an energy field, almost like an entity, that has become temporarily lodged in your inner space. It is life energy that has become trapped, energy that is no longer flowing.

Of course, the pain-body is there because of certain things that happened in the past. It is the living past in you, and if you identify with it, you identify with the past. A victim identity is the belief that the past is more powerful than the present, which is the opposite of the truth. It is the belief that other people and what they did to you are responsible for who you are now, for your emotional pain or your inability to be your true self.

The truth is that the only power there is, is contained within this moment: It is the power of your presence. Once you know that, you also realize that you are responsible for your inner space now — nobody else is — and that the past cannot prevail against the power of the Now.

Unconsciousness creates it; consciousness transmutes it into itself. St. Paul expressed this universal principle beautifully: "Everything is shown up by being exposed to the light, and whatever is exposed to the light itself becomes light."

Just as you cannot fight the darkness, you cannot fight the pain-body. Trying to do so would create inner conflict and thus further pain. Watching it is enough. Watching it implies accepting it as part of what is at that moment.

CHAPTER SEVEN

FROM ADDICTIVE TO ENLIGHTENED RELATIONSHIPS

LOVE/HATE RELATIONSHIPS

Unless and until you access the consciousness frequency of presence, all relationships, and particularly intimate relationships, are deeply flawed and ultimately dysfunctional. They may seem perfect for a while, such as when you are "in love," but invariably that apparent perfection gets disrupted as arguments, conflicts, dissatisfaction, and emotional or even physical violence occur with increasing frequency.

It seems that most "love relationships" become love/hate relationships before long. Love can then turn into savage attack, feelings of hostility, or complete withdrawal of affection at the flick of a switch. This is considered normal.

If in your relationships you experience both "love" and the opposite of love — attack, emotional violence, and so on — then it is likely that you are confusing ego attachment and addictive clinging with love. You cannot love your partner one moment and attack him or her the next. True love has no opposite. If your "love" has an opposite, then it is not love but a strong ego-need for a more complete and deeper sense of self, a need that the other person temporarily meets. It is the ego's substitute for salvation, and for a short time it almost does feel like salvation.

But there comes a point when your partner behaves in ways that fail to meet your needs, or rather those of your ego. The feelings of fear, pain, and lack that are an intrinsic part of egoic consciousness but had been covered up by the "love relationship" now resurface.

Just as with every other addiction, you are on a high when the drug is available, but invariably there comes a time when the drug no longer works for you.

When those painful feelings reappear, you feel them even more strongly than before, and what is more, you now perceive your partner as the cause of those feelings. This means that you project them outward and attack the other with all the savage violence that is part of your pain.

This attack may awaken the partner's own pain, and he or she may counter your attack. At this point, the ego is still unconsciously hoping that its attack or its attempts at manipulation will be sufficient punishment to induce your partner to change their behavior, so that it can use them again as a cover-up for your pain.

Every addiction arises from an unconscious refusal to face and move through your own pain. Every addiction starts with pain and ends with pain. Whatever the substance you are addicted to — alcohol, food, legal or illegal drugs, or a person — you are using something or somebody to cover up your pain.

That is why, after the initial euphoria has passed, there is so much unhappiness, so

much pain in intimate relationships. They do not cause pain and unhappiness. They bring out the pain and unhappiness that is already in you. Every addiction does that. Every addiction reaches a point where it does not work for you anymore, and then you feel the pain more intensely than ever.

This is one reason why most people are always trying to escape from the present moment and are seeking some kind of salvation in the future. The first thing that they might encounter if they focused their attention on the Now is their own pain, and this is what they fear. If they only knew how easy it is to access in the Now the power of presence that dissolves the past and its pain, the reality that dissolves the illusion. If they only knew how close they are to their own reality, how close to God.

Avoidance of relationships in an attempt to avoid pain is not the answer either. The pain is there anyway. Three failed relationships in as many years are more likely to force you into awakening than three years on a desert island or shut away in your room. But if you could bring intense presence into your aloneness, that would work for you too.

FROM ADDICTIVE TO ENLIGHTENED RELATIONSHIPS

WHETHER YOU ARE LIVING ALONE OR WITH A PARTNER, this remains the key: being present and intensifying your presence by taking your attention ever more deeply into the Now.

For love to flourish, the light of your presence needs to be strong enough so that you no longer get taken over by the thinker or the pain-body and mistake them for who you are.

To know yourself as the Being underneath the thinker, the stillness underneath the mental noise, the love and joy underneath the pain, is freedom, salvation, enlightenment.

To disidentify from the pain-body is to bring presence into the pain and thus transmute it. To disidentify from thinking is to be the silent watcher of your thoughts and behavior, especially the repetitive patterns of your mind and the roles played by the ego.

If you stop investing it with "selfness," the mind loses its compulsive quality, which basically is the compulsion to judge, and so to resist what is, which creates conflict, drama, and new pain. In fact, the moment that judgment stops through acceptance of what is, you are free of the mind. You have made room for love, for joy, for peace.

FIRST YOU STOP JUDGING YOURSELF; then you stop judging your partner. The greatest catalyst for change in a relationship is complete acceptance of your partner as he or she is, without needing to judge or change them in any way.

That immediately takes you beyond ego. All mind games and all addictive

clinging are then over. There are no victims and no perpetrators anymore, no accuser and accused.

This is also the end of all codependency, of being drawn into somebody else's unconscious pattern and thereby enabling it to continue. You will then either separate — in love — or move ever more deeply into the Now together, into Being. Can it be that simple? Yes, it is that simple.

Love is a state of Being. Your love is not outside; it is deep within you. You can never lose it, and it cannot leave you. It is not dependent on some other body, some external form.

IN THE STILLNESS OF YOUR PRESENCE, you can feel your own formless and timeless reality as the unmanifested life that animates your physical form. You can then feel the same life deep within every other human and every other creature. You look beyond the veil of form and separation. This is the realization of oneness. This is love.

Although brief glimpses are possible, love cannot flourish unless you are permanently free of mind identification and your presence is intense enough to have dissolved the pain-body — or you can at least remain present as the watcher. The pain-body cannot then take you over and so become destructive of love.

RELATIONSHIPS AS SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

As humans have become increasingly identified with their mind, most relationships are not rooted in Being and so turn into a source of pain and become dominated by problems and conflict.

If relationships energize and magnify egoic mind patterns and activate the pain-body, as they do at this time, why not accept this fact rather than try to escape from it? Why not cooperate with it instead of avoiding relationships or continuing to pursue the phantom of an ideal partner as an answer to your problems or a means of feeling fulfilled?

With the acknowledgment and acceptance of the facts also comes a degree of freedom from them.

For example, when you *know* there is disharmony and you hold that "knowing," through your knowing a new factor has come in, and the disharmony cannot remain unchanged.

WHEN YOU KNOW YOU ARE NOT AT PEACE, your knowing creates a still space that surrounds your nonpeace in a loving and tender embrace and then transmutes your nonpeace into peace.

As far as inner transformation is concerned, there is nothing you can *do* about it. You cannot transform yourself, and you certainly cannot transform your partner or anybody else. All you *can* do is create a space for transformation to happen, for grace and love to enter.

So whenever your relationship is not working, whenever it brings out the "madness" in you and in your partner, be glad. What was unconscious is being brought up to the light. It is an opportunity for salvation.

> **EVERY MOMENT, HOLD THE KNOWING OF THAT MOMENT,** particularly of your inner state. If there is anger, know that there is anger. If there is jealousy, defensiveness, the urge to argue, the need to be right, an inner child demanding love and attention, or emotional pain of any kind — whatever it is, know the reality of that moment and hold the knowing.

The relationship then becomes your sadhana, your spiritual practice. If you observe unconscious behavior in your partner, hold it in the loving embrace of your knowing so that you won't react.

Unconsciousness and knowing cannot coexist for long — even if the knowing is only in the other person and not in the one who is acting out the unconsciousness. The energy form that lies behind hostility and attack finds the presence of love absolutely intolerable. If you react at all to your partner's unconsciousness, you become unconscious yourself. But if you then remember to know your reaction, nothing is lost.

Never before have relationships been as problematic and conflict ridden as they are now. As you may have noticed, they are not here to make you happy or fulfilled. If you continue to pursue the goal of salvation through a relationship, you will be disillusioned again and again. But if you accept that the relationship is here to make you conscious instead of happy, then the relationship will offer you salvation, and you will be aligning yourself with the higher consciousness that wants to be born into this world.

For those who hold on to the old patterns, there will be increasing pain, violence, confusion, and madness.

How many people does it take to make your life into a spiritual practice? Never mind if your partner will not cooperate. Sanity — consciousness — can only come into this world through you. You do not need to wait for the world to become sane, or for somebody else to become conscious, before you can be enlightened. You may wait forever.

Do not accuse each other of being unconscious. The moment you start to argue, you have identified with a mental position and are now defending not only that position but also your sense of self. The ego is in charge. You have become unconscious. At times, it may be appropriate to point out certain aspects of your partner's behavior. If you are very alert, very present, you can do so without ego involvement — without blaming, accusing, or making the other wrong.

When your partner behaves unconsciously, relinquish all judgment. Judgment is either to confuse someone's unconscious behavior with who they are or to project your own unconsciousness onto another person and mistake that for who they are.

To relinquish judgment does not mean that you do not recognize dysfunction and unconsciousness when you see it. It means "being the knowing" rather than "being the reaction" and the judge. You will then either be totally free of reaction or you may react and still be the knowing, the space in which the reaction is watched and allowed

to be. Instead of fighting the darkness, you bring in the light. Instead of reacting to delusion, you see the delusion yet at the same time look through it.

Being the knowing creates a clear space of loving presence that allows all things and all people to be as they are. No greater catalyst for transformation exists. If you practice this, your partner cannot stay with you and remain unconscious.

If you both agree that the relationship will be your spiritual practice, so much the better. You can then express your thoughts and feelings to each other as soon as they occur, or as soon as a reaction comes up, so that you do not create a time gap in which an unexpressed or unacknowledged emotion or grievance can fester and grow.

> **LEARN TO GIVE EXPRESSION** to what you feel without blaming. Learn to listen to your partner in an open, nondefensive way.
>
> Give your partner space for expressing himself or herself. Be present. Accusing, defending, attacking — all those patterns that are designed to strengthen or protect the ego or to get its needs met will then become redundant. Giving space to others — and to yourself — is vital. Love cannot flourish without it.

When you have removed the two factors that are destructive of relationships — when the pain-body has been transmuted and you are no longer identified with mind and mental positions — and if your partner has done the same, you will experience the bliss of the flowering of relationship. Instead of mirroring to each other your pain and your unconsciousness, instead of satisfying your mutual addictive ego needs, you will reflect back to each other the love that you feel deep within, the love that comes with the realization of your oneness with all that is.

This is the love that has no opposite.

If your partner is still identified with the mind and the pain-body while you are already free, this will represent a major challenge — not to you but to your partner. It is not easy to live with an enlightened person, or rather it is so easy that the ego finds it extremely threatening.

Remember that the ego needs problems, conflict, and "enemies" to strengthen the sense of separateness on which its identity depends. The unenlightened partner's mind will be deeply frustrated because its fixed positions are not resisted, which means they will become shaky and weak, and there is even the "danger" that they may collapse altogether, resulting in loss of self.

The pain-body is demanding feedback and not getting it. The need for argument, drama, and conflict is not being met.

GIVE UP THE RELATIONSHIP WITH YOURSELF

Enlightened or not, you are either a man or a woman, so on the level of your form identity you are not complete. You are one-half of the whole. This incompleteness is

felt as male-female attraction, the pull toward the opposite energy polarity, no matter how conscious you are. But in that state of inner connectedness, you feel this pull somewhere on the surface or periphery of your life.

This does not mean that you don't relate deeply to other people or to your partner. In fact, you can relate deeply only if you are conscious of Being. Coming from Being, you are able to focus beyond the veil of form. In Being, male and female are one. Your form may continue to have certain needs, but Being has none. It is already complete and whole. If those needs are met, that is beautiful, but whether or not they are met makes no difference to your deep inner state.

So it is perfectly possible for an enlightened person, if the need for the male or female polarity is not met, to feel a sense of lack or incompleteness on the outer level of his or her being, yet at the same time be totally complete, fulfilled, and at peace within.

If you cannot be at ease with yourself when you are alone, you will seek a relationship to cover up your unease. You can be sure that the unease will then reappear in some other form within the relationship, and you will probably hold your partner responsible for it.

ALL YOU REALLY NEED TO DO IS ACCEPT THIS MOMENT FULLY.
You are then at ease in the here and now and at ease with yourself.

But do you need to have a relationship with yourself at all? Why can't you just be yourself? When you have a relationship with yourself, you have split yourself into two: "I" and "myself," subject and object. That mind-created duality is the root cause of all unnecessary complexity, of all problems and conflict in your life.

In the state of enlightenment, you are yourself — "you" and "yourself " merge into one. You do not judge yourself, you do not feel sorry for yourself, you are not proud of yourself, you do not love yourself, you do not hate yourself, and so on. The split caused by self-reflective consciousness is healed, its curse removed. There is no "self " that you need to protect, defend, or feed anymore.

When you are enlightened, there is one relationship that you no longer have: the relationship with yourself. Once you have given that up, all your other relationships will be love relationships.

PART THREE

ACCEPTANCE AND SURRENDER

When you surrender to what is
and so become fully present,
the past ceases to have any power.
The realm of Being, which had been obscured by
the mind, then opens up.
Suddenly, a great stillness arises within you,
an unfathomable sense of peace.
And within that peace, there is great joy.
And within that joy, there is love.
And at the innermost core, there is the sacred,
the immeasurable, That which cannot be named.

CHAPTER EIGHT

ACCEPTANCE OF THE NOW

IMPERMANENCE AND THE CYCLES OF LIFE

There are cycles of success, when things come to you and thrive, and cycles of failure, when they wither or disintegrate, and you have to let them go in order to make room for new things to arise, or for transformation to happen.

If you cling and resist at that point, it means you are refusing to go with the flow of life, and you will suffer. Dissolution is needed for new growth to happen. One cycle cannot exist without the other.

The down cycle is absolutely essential for spiritual realization. You must have failed deeply on some level or experienced some deep loss or pain to be drawn to the spiritual dimension. Or perhaps your very success became empty and meaningless and so turned out to be failure.

Failure lies concealed in every success, and success in every failure. In this world, which is to say on the level of form, everybody "fails" sooner or later, of course, and every achievement eventually comes to naught. All forms are impermanent.

You can still be active and enjoy manifesting and creating new forms and circumstances, but you won't be identified with them. You do not need them to give you a sense of self. They are not your life — only your life situation.

A cycle can last for anything from a few hours to a few years. There are large cycles and small cycles within these large ones. Many illnesses are created through fighting against the cycles of low energy, which are vital for regeneration. The compulsion to do, and the tendency to derive your sense of self-worth and identity from external factors such as achievement, is an inevitable illusion as long as you are identified with the mind.

This makes it hard or impossible for you to accept the low cycles and allow them to be. Thus, the intelligence of the organism may take over as a self-protective measure and create an illness in order to force you to stop, so that the necessary regeneration can take place.

As long as a condition is judged as "good" by your mind, whether it be a relationship, a possession, a social role, a place, or your physical body, the mind attaches itself to it and identifies with it. It makes you happy, makes you feel good about yourself, and it may become part of who you are or think you are.

But nothing lasts in this dimension where moth and rust consume. Either it ends or it changes, or it may undergo a polarity shift: The same condition that was good yesterday or last year has suddenly or gradually turned into bad. The same condition that made you happy then makes you unhappy. The prosperity of today becomes the empty consumerism of tomorrow. The happy wedding and honeymoon become the unhappy divorce or the unhappy coexistence.

Or a condition disappears, so its absence makes you unhappy. When a condition or situation that the mind has attached itself to and identified with changes or disappears, the mind cannot accept it. It will cling to the disappearing condition and resist the change. It is almost as if a limb were being torn off your body.

This means that your happiness and unhappiness are in fact one. Only the illusion of time separates them.

> **TO OFFER NO RESISTANCE TO LIFE** is to be in a state of grace, ease, and lightness. This state is then no longer dependent upon things being in a certain way, good or bad.

It seems almost paradoxical, yet when your inner dependency on form is gone, the general conditions of your life, the outer forms, tend to improve greatly. Things, people, or conditions that you thought you needed for your happiness now come to you with no struggle or effort on your part, and you are free to enjoy and appreciate them — while they last.

All those things, of course, will still pass away, cycles will come and go, but with dependency gone there is no fear of loss anymore. Life flows with ease.

The happiness that is derived from some secondary source is never very deep. It is only a pale reflection of the joy of Being, the vibrant peace that you find within as you enter the state of nonresistance. Being takes you beyond the polar opposites of the mind and frees you from dependency on form. Even if everything were to collapse and crumble all around you, you would still feel a deep inner core of peace. You may not be happy, but you will be at peace.

USING AND RELINQUISHING NEGATIVITY

All inner resistance is experienced as negativity in one form or another. All negativity is resistance. In this context, the two words are almost synonymous.

Negativity ranges from irritation or impatience to fierce anger, from a depressed mood or sullen resentment to suicidal despair. Sometimes the resistance triggers the emotional pain-body, in which case even a minor situation may produce intense negativity, such as anger, depression, or deep grief.

The ego believes that through negativity it can manipulate reality and get what it wants. It believes that through it, it can attract a desirable condition or dissolve an undesirable one.

If "you" — the mind — did not believe that unhappiness works, why would you create it? The fact is, of course, that negativity does not work. Instead of attracting a desirable condition, it stops it from arising. Instead of dissolving an undesirable one, it keeps it in place. Its only "useful" function is that it strengthens the ego, and that is why the ego loves it.

Once you have identified with some form of negativity, you do not want to let go, and on a deeply unconscious level, you do not want positive change. It would threaten

your identity as a depressed, angry, or hard-done-by person. You will then ignore, deny, or sabotage the positive in your life. This is a common phenomenon. It is also insane.

WATCH ANY PLANT OR ANIMAL AND LET IT TEACH YOU acceptance of what is, surrender to the Now.

Let it teach you Being.

Let it teach you integrity — which means to be one, to be yourself, to be real.

Let it teach you how to live and how to die, and how not to make living and dying into a problem.

Recurring negative emotions do sometimes contain a message, as do illnesses. But any changes that you make, whether they have to do with your work, your relationships, or your surroundings, are ultimately only cosmetic unless they arise out of a change in your level of consciousness. And as far as that is concerned, it can only mean one thing: becoming more present. When you have reached a certain degree of presence, you don't need negativity anymore to tell you what is needed in your life situation.

But as long as negativity is there, use it. Use it as a kind of signal that reminds you to be more present.

WHENEVER YOU FEEL NEGATIVITY ARISING WITHIN YOU, whether caused by an external factor, a thought, or even nothing in particular that you are aware of, look on it as a voice saying, "Attention. Here and Now. Wake up. Get out of your mind. Be present."

Even the slightest irritation is significant and needs to be acknowledged and looked at; otherwise, there will be a cumulative buildup of unobserved reactions.

You may be able to just drop it once you realize that you don't want to have this energy field inside you and that it serves no purpose. But then make sure that you drop it completely. If you cannot drop it, just accept that it is there and take your attention into the feeling.

AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO DROPPING A NEGATIVE REACTION, you can make it disappear by imagining yourself becoming transparent to the external cause of the reaction.

I recommend that you practice this with little, even trivial, things first. Let's say that you are sitting quietly at home. Suddenly, there is the penetrating sound of a car alarm from across the street. Irritation arises. What is the purpose of the irritation? None whatsoever. Why did you create it? You didn't. The mind did. It was totally automatic, totally unconscious.

Why did the mind create it? Because it holds the unconscious belief that its resistance, which you experience as negativity or unhappiness in some form, will somehow dissolve the undesirable condition. This, of course, is a delusion. The resistance that it creates, the irritation or anger in this case, is far more disturbing than

the original cause that it is attempting to dissolve.

All this can be transformed into spiritual practice.

> **FEEL YOURSELF BECOMING TRANSPARENT,** as it were, without the solidity of a material body. Now allow the noise, or whatever causes a negative reaction, to pass right through you. It is no longer hitting a solid "wall" inside you.

As I said, practice with little things first. The car alarm, the dog barking, the children screaming, the traffic jam. Instead of having a wall of resistance inside you that gets constantly and painfully hit by things that "should not be happening," let everything pass through you.

Somebody says something to you that is rude or designed to hurt. Instead of going into unconscious reaction and negativity, such as attack, defense, or withdrawal, you let it pass right through you. Offer no resistance. It is as if there is nobody there to get hurt anymore. That is forgiveness. In this way, you become invulnerable.

You can still tell that person that his or her behavior is unacceptable, if that is what you choose to do. But that person no longer has the power to control your inner state. You are then in your power — not in someone else's, nor are you run by your mind. Whether it is a car alarm, a rude person, a flood, an earthquake, or the loss of all your possessions, the resistance mechanism is the same.

You are still seeking outside, and you cannot get out of the seeking mode. Maybe the next workshop will have the answer, maybe that new technique. To you I would say:

> **DON'T LOOK FOR PEACE.** Don't look for any other state than the one you are in now; otherwise, you will set up inner conflict and unconscious resistance.
>
> Forgive yourself for not being at peace. The moment you completely accept your non-peace, your non-peace becomes transmuted into peace. Anything you accept fully will get you there, will take you into peace. This is the miracle of surrender.
>
> When you accept what is, every moment is the best moment. That is enlightenment.

THE NATURE OF COMPASSION

> **HAVING GONE BEYOND THE MIND-MADE OPPOSITES,** you become like a deep lake. The outer situation of your life, whatever happens there, is the surface of the lake. Sometimes calm, sometimes windy and rough, according to the cycles and seasons. Deep down, however, the lake is always undisturbed. You are the whole lake, not just the surface, and you are in touch with your own depth, which remains absolutely still.

You don't resist change by mentally clinging to any situation. Your inner peace does not depend on it. You abide in Being — unchanging, timeless, deathless — and you are

no longer dependent for fulfillment or happiness on the outer world of constantly fluctuating forms. You can enjoy them, play with them, create new forms, appreciate the beauty of it all. But there will be no need to attach yourself to any of it.

As long as you are unaware of Being, the reality of other humans will elude you, because you have not found your own. Your mind will like or dislike their form, which is not just their body but includes their mind as well. True relationship becomes possible only when there is an awareness of Being.

Coming from Being, you will perceive another person's body and mind as just a screen, as it were, behind which you can feel their true reality, as you feel yours. So, when confronted with someone else's suffering or unconscious behavior, you stay present and in touch with Being and are thus able to look beyond the form and feel the other person's radiant and pure Being through your own.

At the level of Being, all suffering is recognized as an illusion. Suffering is due to identification with form. Miracles of healing sometimes occur through this realization, by awakening Being-consciousness in others — if they are ready.

Compassion is the awareness of a deep bond between yourself and all creatures. Next time you say, "I have nothing in common with this person," remember that you have a great deal in common: A few years from now — two years or seventy years, it doesn't make much difference — both of you will have become rotting corpses, then piles of dust, then nothing at all. This is a sobering and humbling realization that leaves little room for pride.

Is this a negative thought? No, it is a fact. Why close your eyes to it? In that sense, there is total equality between you and every other creature.

> **ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL SPIRITUAL PRACTICES** is to meditate deeply on the mortality of physical forms, including your own. This is called: Die before you die.
>
> Go into it deeply. Your physical form is dissolving, is no more. Then a moment comes when all mind-forms or thoughts also die. Yet you are still there — the divine presence that you are. Radiant, fully awake.
>
> Nothing that was real ever died, only names, forms, and illusions.
>
> At this deep level, compassion becomes healing in the widest sense. In that state, your healing influence is primarily based not on doing but on being. Everybody you come in contact with will be touched by your presence and affected by the peace that you emanate, whether they are conscious of it or not.

When you are fully present and people around you manifest unconscious behavior, you won't feel the need to react to it, so you don't give it any reality. Your peace is so vast and deep that anything that is not peace disappears into it as if it had never existed. This breaks the karmic cycle of action and reaction.

Animals, trees, flowers will feel your peace and respond to it. You teach through being, through demonstrating the peace of God.

You become the "light of the world," an emanation of pure consciousness, and so

you eliminate suffering on the level of cause. You eliminate unconsciousness from the world.

THE WISDOM OF SURRENDER

It is the quality of your consciousness at this moment that is the main determinant of what kind of future you will experience, so to surrender is the most important thing you can do to bring about positive change. Any action you take is secondary. No truly positive action can arise out of an unsurrendered state of consciousness.

To some people, surrender may have negative connotations, implying defeat, giving up, failing to rise to the challenges of life, becoming lethargic, and so on. True surrender, however, is something entirely different. It does not mean to passively put up with whatever situation you find yourself in and to do nothing about it. Nor does it mean to cease making plans or initiating positive action.

> **SURRENDER IS THE SIMPLE** but profound wisdom of yielding to rather than opposing the flow of life. The only place where you can experience the flow of life is the Now, so to surrender is to accept the present moment unconditionally and without reservation.
>
> It is to relinquish inner resistance to what is.

Inner resistance is to say "no" to what is, through mental judgment and emotional negativity. It becomes particularly pronounced when things "go wrong," which means that there is a gap between the demands or rigid expectations of your mind and what is. That is the pain gap.

If you have lived long enough, you will know that things "go wrong" quite often. It is precisely at those times that surrender needs to be practiced if you want to eliminate pain and sorrow from your life. Acceptance of what is immediately frees you from mind identification and thus reconnects you with Being. Resistance is the mind.

Surrender is a purely inner phenomenon. It does not mean that on the outer level you cannot take action and change the situation.

In fact, it is not the overall situation that you need to accept when you surrender, but just the tiny segment called the Now. For example, if you were stuck in the mud somewhere, you wouldn't say: "Okay, I resign myself to being stuck in the mud." Resignation is not surrender.

> **YOU DON'T NEED TO ACCEPT AN UNDESIRABLE OR UNPLEASANT LIFE SITUATION.** Nor do you need to deceive yourself and say that there is nothing wrong with it. No. You recognize fully that you want to get out of it. You then narrow your attention down to the present moment without mentally labeling it in any way.
>
> This means that there is no judgment of the Now. Therefore, there is no resistance, no emotional negativity. You accept the "isness" of this moment.

Then you take action and do all that you can to get out of the situation.

Such action I call positive action. It is far more effective than negative action, which arises out of anger, despair, or frustration. Until you achieve the desired result, you continue to practice surrender by refraining from labeling the Now

Let me give you a visual analogy to illustrate the point I am making. You are walking along a path at night, surrounded by a thick fog. But you have a powerful flashlight that cuts through the fog and creates a narrow, clear space in front of you. The fog is your life situation, which includes past and future; the flashlight is your conscious presence; the clear space is the Now.

Non-surrender hardens your psychological form, the shell of the ego, and so creates a strong sense of separateness. The world around you and people in particular come to be perceived as threatening. The unconscious compulsion to destroy others through judgment arises, as does the need to compete and dominate. Even nature becomes your enemy and your perceptions and interpretations are governed by fear. The mental disease that we call paranoia is only a slightly more acute form of this normal but dysfunctional state of consciousness.

Not only your psychological form but also your physical form — your body — becomes hard and rigid through resistance. Tension arises in different parts of the body, and the body as a whole contracts. The free flow of life energy through the body, which is essential for its healthy functioning, is greatly restricted.

Bodywork and certain forms of physical therapy can be helpful in restoring this flow, but unless you practice surrender in your everyday life, those things can only give temporary symptom relief since the cause — the resistance pattern — has not been dissolved.

There is something within you that remains unaffected by the transient circumstances that make up your life situation, and only through surrender do you have access to it. It is your life, your very Being — which exists eternally in the timeless realm of the present.

> **IF YOU FIND YOUR LIFE SITUATION UNSATISFACTORY** or even intolerable, it is only by surrendering first that you can break the unconscious resistance pattern that perpetuates that situation.

Surrender is perfectly compatible with taking action, initiating change or achieving goals. But in the surrendered state a totally different energy, a different quality, flows into your doing. Surrender reconnects you with the source-energy of Being, and if your doing is infused with Being, it becomes a joyful celebration of life energy that takes you more deeply into the Now.

Through nonresistance, the quality of your consciousness and, therefore, the quality of whatever you are doing or creating is enhanced immeasurably. The results will then look after themselves and reflect that quality. We could call this “surrendered action.”

> **IN THE STATE OF SURRENDER,** you see very clearly what needs to be done, and you take action, doing one thing at a time and focusing on one thing at a time.

Learn from nature: See how everything gets accomplished and how the miracle of life unfolds without dissatisfaction or unhappiness.

That's why Jesus said: "Look at the lilies, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin."

IF YOUR OVERALL SITUATION IS UNSATISFACTORY or unpleasant, separate out this instant and surrender to what is. That's the flashlight cutting through the fog. Your state of consciousness then ceases to be controlled by external conditions. You are no longer coming from reaction and resistance.

Then look at the specifics of the situation. Ask yourself, "Is there anything I can do to change the situation, improve it, or remove myself from it?" If so, take appropriate action.

Focus not on the hundred things that you will or may have to do at some future time but on the one thing that you can do now. This doesn't mean you should not do any planning. It may well be that planning is the one thing you can do now. But make sure you don't keep running "mental movies" that continually project yourself into the future, and so lose the Now. Any action you take may not bear fruit immediately. Until it does — do not resist what is.

IF THERE IS NO ACTION YOU CAN TAKE, and you cannot remove yourself from the situation either, then use the situation to make you go more deeply into surrender, more deeply into the Now, more deeply into Being.

When you enter this timeless dimension of the present, change often comes about in strange ways without the need for a great deal of doing on your part. Life becomes helpful and cooperative. If inner factors such as fear, guilt, or inertia prevented you from taking action, they will dissolve in the light of your conscious presence.

Do not confuse surrender with an attitude of "I can't be bothered anymore" or "I just don't care anymore." If you look at it closely, you will find that such an attitude is tainted with negativity in the form of hidden resentment and so is not surrender at all but masked resistance.

As you surrender, direct your attention inward to check if there is any trace of resistance left inside you. Be very alert when you do so; otherwise, a pocket of resistance may continue to hide in some dark corner in the form of a thought or an unacknowledged emotion.

FROM MIND ENERGY TO SPIRITUAL ENERGY

START BY ACKNOWLEDGING THAT THERE IS RESISTANCE. Be there when it happens, when the resistance arises. Observe how your mind creates it, how it labels the situation, yourself, or others. Look at the thought process involved. Feel the energy of the emotion.

By witnessing the resistance, you will see that it serves no purpose. By focusing all your attention on the Now, the unconscious resistance is made conscious, and that is the end of it.

You cannot be conscious and unhappy, conscious and in negativity. Negativity, unhappiness, or suffering in whatever form means that there is resistance, and resistance is always unconscious,

Would you choose unhappiness? If you did not choose it, how did it arise? What is its purpose? Who is keeping it alive?

Even if you are conscious of your unhappy feelings, the truth is that you are identified with them and keep the process alive through compulsive thinking. All that is unconscious. If you were conscious, that is to say totally present in the Now, all negativity would dissolve almost instantly. It could not survive in your presence. It can only survive in your absence.

Even the pain-body cannot survive for long in your presence. You keep your unhappiness alive by giving it time. That is its lifeblood. Remove time through intense present-moment awareness and it dies. But do you want it to die? Have you truly had enough? Who would you be without it?

Until you practice surrender, the spiritual dimension is something you read about, talk about, get excited about, write books about, think about, believe in — or don't, as the case may be. It makes no difference.

NOT UNTIL YOU SURRENDER does the spiritual dimension become a living reality in your life.

When you do, the energy that you emanate and which then runs your life is of a much higher vibrational frequency than the mind energy that still runs our world.

Through surrender, spiritual energy comes into this world. It creates no suffering for yourself, for other humans, or any other life form on the planet.

SURRENDER IN PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

It is true that only an unconscious person will try to use or manipulate others, but it is equally true that only an unconscious person can be used and manipulated. If you resist or fight unconscious behavior in others, you become unconscious yourself.

But surrender doesn't mean that you allow yourself to be used by unconscious people. Not at all. It is perfectly possible to say "no" firmly and clearly to a person or to walk away from a situation and be in a state of complete inner nonresistance at the same time.

WHEN YOU SAY "NO" to a person or a situation, let it come not from reaction but from insight, from a clear realization of what is right or not right for you at that moment.

Let it be a nonreactive "no," a high-quality "no," a "no" that is free of all negativity and so creates no further suffering.

If you cannot surrender, take action immediately: Speak up or do something to bring about a change in the situation — or remove yourself from it. Take responsibility for your life.

Do not pollute your beautiful, radiant inner Being nor the Earth with negativity. Do not give unhappiness in any form whatsoever a dwelling place inside you.

IF YOU CANNOT TAKE ACTION — if you are in prison, for example — then you have two choices left: resistance or surrender. Bondage or inner freedom from external conditions. Suffering or inner peace.

Your relationships will be changed profoundly by surrender. If you can never accept what is, by implication you will not be able to accept anybody the way they are. You will judge, criticize, label, reject, or attempt to change people.

Furthermore, if you continuously make the Now into a means to an end in the future, you will also make every person you encounter or relate with into a means to an end. The relationship — the human being — is then of secondary importance to you, or of no importance at all. What you can get out of the relationship is primary — be it material gain, a sense of power, physical pleasure, or some form of ego gratification.

Let me illustrate how surrender can work in relationships.

WHEN YOU BECOME INVOLVED IN AN ARGUMENT or some conflict situation, perhaps with a partner or someone close to you, start by observing how defensive you become as your own position is attacked, or feel the force of your own aggression as you attack the other person's position.

Observe the attachment to your views and opinions. Feel the mental-emotional energy behind your need to be right and make the other person wrong. That's the energy of the egoic mind. You make it conscious by acknowledging it, by feeling it as fully as possible.

Then one day, in the middle of an argument, you will suddenly realize that you have a choice, and you may decide to drop your own reaction — just to see what happens. You surrender.

I don't mean dropping the reaction just verbally by saying "Okay, you are right," with a look on your face that says, "I am above all this childish unconsciousness." That's just displacing the resistance to another level, with the egoic mind still in charge, claiming superiority. I am speaking of letting go of the entire mental-emotional energy field inside you that was fighting for power.

The ego is cunning, so you have to be very alert, very present, and totally honest with yourself to see whether you have truly relinquished your identification with a mental position and so freed yourself from your mind.

IF YOU SUDDENLY FEEL VERY LIGHT, CLEAR, AND DEEPLY AT PEACE, that is an unmistakable sign that you have truly surrendered. Then observe what happens to the other person's mental position as you no longer energize it through resistance. When identification with mental positions is out of the way, true communication begins.

Nonresistance doesn't necessarily mean doing nothing. All it means is that any "doing" becomes nonreactive. Remember the deep wisdom underlying the practice of Eastern martial arts: don't resist the opponent's force. Yield to overcome.

Having said that, "doing nothing" when you are in a state of intense presence is a very powerful transformer and healer of situations and people.

It is radically different from inactivity in the ordinary state of consciousness, or rather unconsciousness, which stems from fear, inertia, or indecision. The real "doing nothing" implies inner nonresistance and intense alertness.

On the other hand, if action is required, you will no longer react from your conditioned mind, but you will respond to the situation out of your conscious presence. In that state, your mind is free of concepts, including the concept of nonviolence. So who can predict what you will do?

The ego believes that in your resistance lies your strength, whereas in truth resistance cuts you off from Being, the only place of true power. Resistance is weakness and fear masquerading as strength. What the ego sees as weakness is your Being in its purity, innocence, and power. What it sees as strength is weakness. So the ego exists in a continuous resistance-mode and plays counterfeit roles to cover up your "weakness," which in truth is your power.

Until there is surrender, unconscious role-playing constitutes a large part of human interaction. In surrender, you no longer need ego defenses and false masks. You become very simple, very real. "That's dangerous," says the ego. "You'll get hurt. You'll become vulnerable."

What the ego doesn't know, of course, is that only through the letting go of resistance, through becoming "vulnerable," can you discover your true and essential invulnerability.

CHAPTER NINE

TRANSFORMING ILLNESS AND SUFFERING

TRANSFORMING ILLNESS INTO ENLIGHTENMENT

Surrender is inner acceptance of what is without any reservations. We are talking about your life — this instant — not the conditions or circumstances of your life, not what I call your life situation.

Illness is part of your life situation. As such, it has a past and a future. Past and future form an uninterrupted continuum, unless the redeeming power of the Now is activated through your conscious presence. As you know, underneath the various conditions that make up your life situation, which exists in time, there is something deeper, more essential: your Life, your very Being in the timeless Now.

As there are no problems in the Now, there is no illness either. The belief in a label that someone attaches to your condition keeps the condition in place, empowers it, and makes a seemingly solid reality out of a temporary imbalance. It gives it not only reality and solidity but also continuity in time that it did not have before.

> **BY FOCUSING ON THIS INSTANT** and refraining from labeling it mentally, illness is reduced to one or several of these factors: physical pain, weakness, discomfort, or disability. That is what you surrender to — now. You do not surrender to the idea of "illness."
>
> Allow the suffering to force you into the present moment, into a state of intense conscious presence. Use it for enlightenment.

Surrender does not transform what is, at least not directly. Surrender transforms you. When you are transformed, your whole world is transformed, because the world is only a reflection.

Illness is not the problem. You are the problem — as long as the egoic mind is in control.

> **WHEN YOU ARE ILL OR DISABLED,** do not feel that you have failed in some way, do not feel guilty. Do not blame life for treating you unfairly, but do not blame yourself either. All that is resistance.
>
> If you have a major illness, use it for enlightenment. Anything "bad" that happens in your life — use it for enlightenment.
>
> Withdraw time from the illness. Do not give it any past or future. Let it force you into intense present-moment awareness — and see what happens.

Become an alchemist. Transmute base metal into gold, suffering into consciousness, disaster into enlightenment.

Are you seriously ill and feeling angry now about what I have just said? Then that is a clear sign that the illness has become part of your sense of self and that you are now protecting your identity — as well as protecting the illness.

The condition that is labeled "illness" has nothing to do with who you truly are.

Whenever any kind of disaster strikes, or something goes seriously "wrong" — illness, disability, loss of home or fortune or of a socially defined identity, break-up of a close relationship, death or suffering of a loved one, or your own impending death — know that there is another side to it, that you are just one step away from something incredible: a complete alchemical transmutation of the base metal of pain and suffering into gold. That one step is called surrender.

I do not mean to say that you will become happy in such a situation. You will not. But fear and pain will become transmuted into an inner peace and serenity that come from a very deep place — from the Unmanifested itself. It is "the peace of God, which passes all understanding." Compared to that, happiness is quite a shallow thing.

With this radiant peace comes the realization — not on the level of mind but within the depth of your Being — that you are indestructible, immortal. This is not a belief. It is absolute certainty that needs no external evidence or proof from some secondary source.

TRANSFORMING SUFFERING INTO PEACE

In certain extreme situations, it may still be impossible for you to accept the Now. But you always get a second chance at surrender.

> **YOUR FIRST CHANCE IS TO SURRENDER** each moment to the reality of that moment. Knowing that what is cannot be undone — because it already is — you say yes to what is or accept what isn't.
>
> Then you do what you have to do, whatever the situation requires.
>
> If you abide in this state of acceptance, you create no more negativity, no more suffering, no more unhappiness. You then live in a state of nonresistance, a state of grace and lightness, free of struggle.

Whenever you are unable to do that, whenever you miss that chance — either because you are not generating enough conscious presence to prevent some habitual and unconscious resistance pattern from arising, or because the condition is so extreme as to be absolutely unacceptable to you — then you are creating some form of pain, some form of suffering.

It may look as if the situation is creating the suffering, but ultimately this is not so — your resistance is.

> **NOW HERE IS YOUR SECOND CHANCE AT SURRENDER:** If you cannot accept what is outside, then accept what is inside. If you cannot accept the external condition, accept the internal condition.

This means: Do not resist the pain. Allow it to be there. Surrender to the grief, despair, fear, loneliness, or whatever form the suffering takes. Witness it without labeling it mentally. Embrace it.

Then see how the miracle of surrender transmutes deep suffering into deep peace. This is your crucifixion. Let it become your resurrection and ascension.

When your pain is deep, all talk of surrender will probably seem futile and meaningless anyway. When your pain is deep, you will likely have a strong urge to escape from it rather than surrender to it. You don't want to feel what you feel. What could be more normal? But there is no escape, no way out.

There are many pseudo escapes — work, drink, drugs, anger, projection, suppression, and so on — but they don't free you from the pain. Suffering does not diminish in intensity when you make it unconscious. When you deny emotional pain, everything you do or think as well as your relationships become contaminated with it. You broadcast it, so to speak, as the energy you emanate, and others will pick it up subliminally.

If they are unconscious, they may even feel compelled to attack or hurt you in some way, or you may hurt them in an unconscious projection of your pain.

You attract and manifest whatever corresponds to your inner state.

WHEN THERE IS NO WAY OUT, THERE IS STILL ALWAYS A WAY THROUGH. So don't turn away from the pain. Face it. Feel it fully. Feel it — don't think about it! Express it if necessary, but don't create a script in your mind around it. Give all your attention to the feeling, not to the person, event, or situation that seems to have caused it.

Don't let the mind use the pain to create a victim identity for yourself out of it. Feeling sorry for yourself and telling others your story will keep you stuck in suffering.

Since it is impossible to get away from the feeling, the only possibility of change is to move into it; otherwise, nothing will shift.

So give your complete attention to what you feel, and refrain from mentally labeling it. As you go into the feeling, be intensely alert.

At first, it may seem like a dark and terrifying place, and when the urge to turn away from it comes, observe it but don't act on it. Keep putting your attention on the pain, keep feeling the grief, the fear, the dread, the loneliness, whatever it is.

Stay alert, stay present — present with your whole Being, with every cell of your body. As you do so, you are bringing a light into this darkness. This is the flame of your consciousness.

At this stage, you don't need to be concerned with surrender anymore. It has happened already. How? Full attention is full acceptance, is surrender. By giving full attention, you use the power of the Now, which is the power of your presence.

No hidden pocket of resistance can survive in it. Presence removes time. Without

time, no suffering, no negativity, can survive.

THE ACCEPTANCE OF SUFFERING is a journey into death. Facing deep pain, allowing it to be, taking your attention into it, is to enter death consciously. When you have died this death, you realize that there is no death — and there is nothing to fear. Only the ego dies.

Imagine a ray of sunlight that has forgotten it is an inseparable part of the sun and deludes itself into believing it has to fight for survival and create and cling to an identity other than the sun. Would the death of this delusion not be incredibly liberating?

DO YOU WANT AN EASY DEATH? Would you rather die without pain, without agony? Then die to the past every moment, and let the light of your presence shine away the heavy, time-bound self you thought of as "you."

ENLIGHTENMENT THROUGH SUFFERING — THE WAY OF THE CROSS

The way of the cross is the old way to enlightenment, and until recently it was the only way. But don't dismiss it or underestimate its efficacy. It still works.

The way of the cross is a complete reversal. It means that the worst thing in your life, your cross, turns into the best thing that ever happened to you, by forcing you into surrender, into "death," forcing you to become as nothing, to become as God — because God, too, is no-thing.

Enlightenment through suffering — the way of the cross — means to be forced into the kingdom of heaven kicking and screaming. You finally surrender because you can't stand the pain anymore, but the pain could go on for a long time until this happens.

ENLIGHTENMENT CONSCIOUSLY CHOSEN means to relinquish your attachment to past and future and to make the Now the main focus of your life.

It means choosing to dwell in the state of presence rather than in time.

It means saying yes to what is.

You then don't need pain anymore.

How much more time do you think you will need before you are able to say, "I will create no more pain, no more suffering?" How much more pain do you need before you can make that choice?

If you think that you need more time, you will get more time — and more pain. Time and pain are inseparable.

THE POWER TO CHOOSE

Choice implies consciousness — a high degree of consciousness. Without it, you have no choice. Choice begins the moment you disidentify from the mind and its conditioned patterns, the moment you become present.

Until you reach that point, you are unconscious, spiritually speaking. This means that you are compelled to think, feel, and act in certain ways according to the conditioning of your mind.

Nobody chooses dysfunction, conflict, pain. Nobody chooses insanity. They happen because there is not enough presence in you to dissolve the past, not enough light to dispel the darkness. You are not fully here. You have not quite woken up yet. In the meantime, the conditioned mind is running your life.

Similarly, if you are one of the many people who have an issue with their parents, if you still harbor resentment about something they did or did not do, then you still believe that they had a choice — that they could have acted differently. It always looks as if people had a choice, but that is an illusion. As long as your mind with its conditioned patterns runs your life, as long as you are your mind, what choice do you have? None. You are not even there. The mind-identified state is severely dysfunctional. It is a form of insanity.

Almost everyone is suffering from this illness in varying degrees. The moment you realize this, there can be no more resentment. How can you resent someone's illness? The only appropriate response is compassion.

If you are run by your mind, although you have no choice you will still suffer the consequences of your unconsciousness, and you will create further suffering. You will bear the burden of fear, conflict, problems, and pain. The suffering thus created will eventually force you out of your unconscious state.

> **YOU CANNOT TRULY FORGIVE YOURSELF** or others as long as you derive your sense of self from the past. Only through accessing the power of the Now, which is your own power, can there be true forgiveness. This renders the past powerless, and you realize deeply that nothing you ever did or that was ever done to you could touch even in the slightest the radiant essence of who you are.
>
> When you surrender to what is and so become fully present, the past ceases to have any power. You do not need it anymore. Presence is the key. The Now is the key.

Since resistance is inseparable from the mind, relinquishment of resistance — surrender — is the end of the mind as your master, the impostor pretending to be "you," the false god. All judgment and all negativity dissolve.

The realm of Being, which had been obscured by the mind, then opens up.

Suddenly, a great stillness arises within you, an unfathomable sense of peace.

And within that peace, there is great joy.

And within that joy, there is love.

And at the innermost core, there is the sacred, the immeasurable, That which cannot

be named.

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