



EXPERIENCING NO-SELF

SELF-GUIDED STUDY COURSE



Q&A

ADYASHANTI



The Experiencing No-Self complete self-guided study course
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Week 1 - Q&A

No-Self and No Center

Q: Could the falling away of the self be described as a “no center” dimension of living?

The experience of awakening has been a gradual process for me:

The falling away of the ego was experienced as psychological suffering whenever the ego state would re-emerge.

The falling away of the self has been experienced as the self-reflection movement being too much; the gravitational pull within would fade away, and everything would just “Be”—a cessation of movement, in and out. Along with this process, the “where I am coming from” reflection would subside, and presence, calm, quietude, and contentment would be prevalent more and more. Sometimes even a thought would weigh too much.

At some point there was no “coming from” sense, the “I” sense disappeared. Energetically, at the top of the head an opening was happening. Within that vortex of energy, there was no longer any “I” reference point of view. This is what I am trying to describe as the “no center” living—another dimension.

Since then, different things have been recreating themselves for a while with less and less impact. And whenever the head opens up, there is no longer any “I” in it. But life stays vivid in any circumstances.

A: Thank you for your email. Yes, I have described some aspects of the no-self experience as “having no center.” I would also add no smallness or bigness, no contraction or expansion, no inside or outside, no form or formlessness, no being or not being, no I sense, me sense, or we sense. All of these are forms of self-consciousness. It is a non-relative state. I could go on but it would only be redundant.

Although we can experience moments of no-self, rarely does the self fall away all at once. Generally one vacillates somewhat between moments of the no-self state, followed by self attempting to reconstruct itself to some extent. But with each taste of no-self, the self loses more and more of its ability to reconstruct itself, until it finally falls way altogether.

Going Sane or Insane?

Q: Your teaching last night has put a light on my fear of becoming “crazy.” As you were speaking about the falling away of ego so clearly and concretely, I was able to stay in the fear without fighting it. And as it was decreasing, I could feel inner peace and calmness.

Could you comment on the fear of being deceived/mislead by the resemblance between the falling away of ego and the falling away from reality (madness/insanity)? This has been a big source of resistance for me.

A: Thank you for your question. You make a very important distinction between the falling away of ego and the falling away of reality, which leads to insanity. The ego is often afraid that if it falls away you will go insane. But insanity is the falling away of reality (metaphorically) not the falling away of ego. The ego falling away is a “return” to sanity.

The ego cannot ever know what is beyond itself, and so it projects all manner of scary scenarios in anticipation of its demise. This is just the ego’s unconscious fears rushing to the surface. These simply need to be met, but not grasped onto, nor run away from. See the ego’s antics from a place of love and understanding, then courageously open to what is beyond them.

The Message of Parkinson’s Disease

Q: About ten years ago, I was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease, however, according to the medical tests, my body was/is 100% OK. I live a normal life. It seems that only my “software” is partially out of order.

You said in the first session that spiritual evolution could temporarily disrupt the physical equilibrium. Until now, I thought that my problem was a matter strictly related to the environment or to the mismanagement of my life. Could it be part of a spiritual process? In other words, is God talking to me via my failing (or evolving) nervous system? If so, what is the best attitude to catch the message and to avoid any delusion?

A: Thank you for your email, and I wish you great peace and happiness amongst your physical challenges. Everything is a spiritual process, my friend. Everything can serve our awakening, and every moment is a wake-up call. See and experience what is untouched by the effects of the Parkinson’s disease. Remember that you are more an unseen presence than a person, a field of alive awareness permeating the body and beyond. Dwell on this, contemplate it, and sense into it.

Does Sexuality Drop Away?

Q: Over the past several years my experience of sexuality has changed profoundly. I know you generally prefer not to answer questions related to sexuality, but I have a feeling that I speak for many others out there when I ask: After the dropping away of ego or then later, of self, does the compelling urge to unite oneself sexually with another specific person drop away?

Intellectually, this urge to unite would seem to be related to grasping and survival of ego states—or perhaps more accurately, survival of the sense of the self as One. When there is no experience of inside or outside, does sexuality disappear? Is this another one of those risks of waking up we ought to know about?

A: Sexual urges may fall away with the falling away of ego and self. For some, it works out this way while for others it does not. But what most assuredly falls away is sexuality being used as a compensation for feelings of separation. Nor is it viewed as anyone else’s responsibility to fulfill one’s own sexual impulses. The more profound and mature one’s awakening is, the more sexuality falls into its natural, non-egoic expression, which differs from one person to the next. And for some it may cease altogether.

Sense Yourself As Awareness

Q: Is the self/self looking at ego the same as what other teachings refer to as the watcher or observer? And, if so, is paying attention to the self/watcher an integral part of the waking up process?

A: Thank you for your question. In truth there is no self, watcher, or observer. There is only watching and/or observing. There is awareness but no owner of awareness, no someone who is aware. So don't be the watcher, be the watching. Don't be aware, be the awareness itself. By "be" I mean to feel and sense yourself as awareness. "Feel" and "sense" yourself as awareness and that will take you beyond all experience. All else will unfold from this simple instruction.

Please don't turn this into some non-dual philosophy, as so many do. Instead "do" it, and practice it. You will see the results for yourself. And please enjoy yourself.

No-Self and the Material World

Q: Why do I seem to lose touch with memory and time management as I move closer to a no-self state? My ability to stay personally responsible on a material level is affected greatly by my continuing to let go of ego and self. I'm finding it challenging to pursue this path while also pursuing more complex earthbound goals.

Am I limited to becoming a spiritual teacher by pursuing this path, or is it possible to successfully "surrender into life," as you said recently, and to use this no-self flow to live simply and thoughtfully through the material, everyday world? How am I grasping here?

A: Thank you for your question. The trajectory that moves toward the falling away of self can be very disorienting at times. It can lead one to wonder whether the state beyond self is made for this world at all. But I can assure you that no-self "eventually" becomes a very functional state and functions quite well in life in its mature expression. If one retreats too much from life it can actually impede the no-self state from coming into mature expression and functioning.

When it is all said and done (in retrospect), all other states of consciousness seem quite altered and strange when compared to the no-self state. No-self is in no way an altered state of consciousness; it is completely and absolutely unaltered. It is simply the One, seen from the One's point of view.

It is a single drop of rain, a cloud passing, the fall of your own breath.

Subside into the Wholeness

Q: I woke up nearly 3 years ago, and since then things have been gradually dropping away. A month ago, I had an experience that needs clarification:

I was doing my yoga stretches when the duality of witness/witnessed became palpable. I was moved to cross my legs and close my eyes right there, and immediately was surrounded by a golden light. There appeared a portal about where you would hold out your right hand. My whole being said "yes." Instantaneously, there was no witness—only what is. Now there doesn't seem

to be a feeling of unbounded vastness, it's more a feeling of wholeness, and sometimes I seem transparent (although there is no difficulty in functioning normally). Is this a version of dropping the self, or more ego dissolution? I still have the experience of ego several times a day—could be more, but I catch it several times a day—judging or desiring or rejecting or something.

A: Thank you for your email. It seems as though you transcended your ego, which is quite transformative and reflects a quality of awakening that is quite wonderful. Just rest into the sense of transparent wholeness and the movements of ego will subside into the wholeness of being with greater and greater ease.

Being completely true to your own unfolding is of much more importance than fitting it into a model. Only do so when it serves your unfolding and eases your mind.

Ego vs. the Movement of Life

Q: You describe ego as the action of movement toward or away from what I want for myself. I have noticed movement “toward or away from” / “drawn to do this or that” that appears without preference or story about what I would like and without understanding any goal, where it will go, or why. I have called this “being moved by Life or the flow.” Is this just the ego in disguise?

A: What you are describing is not simple egoic attachment or aversion. It is simply the way Life moves through you. Ego has an energetic quality of attachment to its preferences, while Life simply is inclined toward or away from, with no energetic intensity. It is, as you say, being moved by life. Enjoy the movement.

Undulating of Experience

Q: My question is about having experiences early on (several months back). These were very intense momentary shifts and energy experiences. But now those direct experiences have stopped. I am feeling like things are still being revealed to me (including a split-second no-self experience), but nothing feels visceral. I have been having some physical issues as well: headaches, feeling out of it, feeling off balance, etc. I am aware that grasping at the more exciting experiences is only ego, so when I see that I let it go.

Is it normal to start off so strong and then have things be less intense and feel so run down, etc.?

A: Thank you for your question. There are many peak moments in spiritual unfolding, followed by a normalizing of those peak moments. This undulating of experience often comes in almost predictable waves of incoming and outgoing experience, as new revelations occur and the body and mind gradually reorient around them. The energetic fallout of shifts in consciousness can be trying for the body as it tries to adapt to new energetic patterns set in motion by these shifts.

The quality of the breath is deeply tied to the energetic patterns in the body, and sometimes by simply attending to the breathing down in the lower belly it helps to soften the energy. In some people however, it can exacerbate the problem, so you have to experiment and find what is supportive to allowing your body to harmonize the energy over time. Softness is the key—never straining against or indulging in the energy.

You are doing quite fine. Just allow the undulating currents of your unfolding to occur naturally and with as much ease as possible.

Discerning Healthy Relationships

Q: I feel the falling away of self happening very gradually, leaving me with an ever-increasing need for stillness, gentleness, and simpleness.

I live in a very negative, hectic, chaotic, and verbally violent environment, with a person who is in constant emotional pain. He yells a lot, and is almost always angry.

I feel like I'm suffocating, and I just want to leave, to walk out. I just want silence. I accept him for where he's at. But my partner says that if I were truly feeling the falling away of self, that none of this negativity would bother me. Is this true?

When you transcend the ego, or when the self falls away, does this mean nothing bothers you anymore? Is the desire to be away from negative environments, an egoic desire?

A: Thank you for your question. Let me start by saying that your partner is wrong in assuming that if you were liberated you would feel fine in any situation. The more free you are, the more you can discern what are healthy and unhealthy conditions and relationships, and the more you feel free to take the appropriate action. Freedom is not stupid, nor is it a doormat for others' dysfunction. It is the freedom to act as life dictates.

Please do not let anyone use these teachings to disempower or dehumanize you. They are meant to serve the liberation of all.

Will I Still Love My Children?

Q: What is our "personal" life like once we experience no-self? If we no longer have an ego, and our "self" has fallen away, how do we manage in the day-to-day of our lives? Do we still love our children, enjoy our friends, like to laugh, watch TV, care about what is happening in the world, enjoy a book, and go out for dinner? Or are we beyond all of those everyday human experiences? I don't want my family to feel that I have abandoned them. But I want to reach this state before I die, if I can. What is our new life like?

A: Thank you for your question. After the falling away of self, life goes on very much as it always had, unless it doesn't. One never knows how life will unfold. However, your love for your children will of course remain. Although the sense of them belonging to you will be gone, but you will still love and care for them as if it had not gone. Life can be lived very well from the no-self state—in fact, a whole lot better than before. But you will undergo a profound change, one that you could never have imagined or anticipated.

It is the simplicity of all of this that is most astounding—the utter, utter, shocking simplicity of it. Be without worries.

There Was Only Seeing

Q: Many experiences have arisen since the urge to know my true nature. Spaciousness, peace beyond understanding, and a causeless joy have come and gone. At the beginning, when these beautiful experiences passed, they left absolute dismay. However, now, even they are seen as occurrences in consciousness that are no more or less spectacular than anguish or suffering. In some way these “opposite” experiences are responses to each other. A sense of boundlessness gives way to a sense of boundedness, etc.

However, during a meditation on the inquiry “Who is watching this?” something dropped, leaving a seeing. I have no way to describe this. I, as I have known myself to be, was not there. It was as though there was only seeing. The seer did not “know” anything. It was not calculating, contemplating, judging, or even experiencing. It was as though it was not seeing as an action but was Seeing itself. It was as though it was a noun, yet it wasn’t alive like an entity. As I type this, it is clear that this is impossible to articulate.

The outcome of this non event/event is that whatever used to strive has lost much of its juice. Seeking has taken on a softer quality somehow, a quietness that brings its own pleasure too. Gentle love.

Please guide me. As I write this, it is known that it is grace who would both ask and answer this question.

A: Thank you for your wonderful email. The answer to your request to guide you is actually the email that you wrote.

No questioner, no response, only what has always been.

As we say in Zen,

On a withered branch

A flower blooms.

And still this endless love.

The Sense of Inside and Outside

Q: When self dies, do you completely lose the ability to look inside, or is it that you rest in the “state” of no-self and consciousness is still able to manifest the “bubble of self” to look inside of if you choose to do so? Since self is a functioning, do you lose that functioning of self-reflection?

A: Without self there is no sense of either an inside or an outside. A practical thought may arise but there is no place or sense of an inner or outer place that it arises within. This is because self-consciousness creates all sense of an inside or an outside, as well as a subject who has experiences that it imagines relate to an inner ego or self. Everything arises in sheer obviousness, and what to do or not do is obvious, unless of course it is obvious to take no action yet.

The difficulty with describing the no-self state is that it sounds similar to other transient perspective shifts, but it is of a completely different dimension altogether. I don’t mean to

make it sound extraordinary, just to draw a necessary distinction. It is really of little use trying to understand the no-self state too abstractly, for none of us can understand what we have not yet experienced, and we tend to translate everything we hear to reflect our own past experience. However, having a more clear context for the falling away of self may serve a useful purpose if it is not held too tightly or definitively. My intention with this course is not to overly define things in the mind but to open the mind to unknown vistas and possibilities. Be without worries.

I Couldn't Understand a Thing You Said

Q: I was so looking forward to the first session on No-Self. I prepared for it according to your instructions. Then, the broadcast began and the ego went on “extreme defense mode!” If I didn’t know better, I would swear you were talking in tongues! Couldn’t understand a thing you said. Then I entered into some sort of trance, which lasted until the session was over. My question: How do I deal with such resistance?

A: Thank you for your email. Your reaction is not uncommon. What I am speaking is not good news to the ego. But then again, you are not the ego. Just be kind to yourself, and patient with the egoic mind. It is only afraid after all. Who is afraid? Only a thought. What then are you?

Failing at Letting Go

Q: Like a thorn used to remove another thorn stuck in the skin, your teaching digs away at my illusions. But I translate even the simplest wisdom into egoic terms (placing your mere thorn on a pedestal). I live with a nearly constant sense of spiritual failure for not succeeding at letting go of the need to succeed (i.e. striving). Your teaching has become a thorn in my side! What is the way out of (or through) this contradiction?

A: Thank you for your question. When in doubt, simply be still. Stop, breathe, inwardly listen. Repeat this many times every day. Being still and quiet is the ultimate spiritual practice. Keep it this simple and you will see the results for yourself. But you must actually do it, not just think about it. Stop, breath, and inwardly listen to the listening. Repeat this many times every day.

A Question About Prayer

Q: For years now, my primary practice has been resting in and occasionally as awareness, but in part through your Resurrecting Jesus course, I’ve recently been exploring my Christian roots. Does prayer arise from no-self? I have glimpses, moments, of ego dissolution. Sometimes, personal, devotional prayer to Jesus, for example, seems to evoke or even require ego. I’m quite confused, because at other times personal words of prayer seem to spontaneously arise from my heart. I feel quite lost, as my experience is so inconsistent.

A: Thank you for your question. My advice is to follow the inward draw of spirit within you without trying to conform it to any outward model. For now, just attend to the inward pull of the divine. If that includes prayer then pray without any other concern, and open to the silent source from which all prayers arise. There is nothing to rush after; all comes in its own time.

What Is Awakening?

Q: I have heard you make the distinction between awakening and other profound spiritual experiences by saying that awakening always involves a shift in identity. I understand this because I have experienced it (briefly).

Now you are using different language (different to me anyway) that makes a distinction between transcending self and the falling away of self.

How do these terms fit together? In other words, is an awakening experience the transcending of self? Or is it the falling away of self, or both?

(By the way, it was a paragraph in *The Way of Liberation* that startled “me” awake. Thank you.)

A: Thank you for your email. Transcending ego, transcending self, as well as the falling away of both ego and self, can come under the term of awakening. That is why I say that there are different levels of awakening. The common element in awakening that distinguishes it from the infinite variety of spiritual experiences is that any real awakening will entail an existential shift in identity. The final falling away of self however is not so much a shift in identity as a falling away of it into the Absolute.

Now let's let go of all these words.

Who Is Asking this Question?

Q: I have been practicing with the Kwan Um School of Zen for over a decade, and recently moved to New Zealand where I am practicing with a Maezumi Roshi lineage Sangha.

There have been plenty of questions over the years, and in the past 6 months something has changed: The question, “Who is asking this question?” comes up every time a question appears, which in turn makes the question disappear.

I am a little hesitant in asking this, but here it goes:

On the one hand, everything happens by itself; there is only life, there is nobody who lives a life; everything is as it should be. (By the way this line of thinking, if not checked, can lead to a depressed state, i.e. what's the point of living?, which I have experienced.) On the other hand, you are the captain of your destiny; the power of the subconscious mind can be used for happiness, health, wealth, etc. (I have also experienced this state.)

In my mind these two are complete opposites, and I almost feel guilty in thinking “I” am healthy, “I” am happy, etc. because the “I” doesn't exist.

So by following this line of thought, would “I” be deluding myself even more? Do I simply return to “Who is asking this question?” as the answer is a paradox anyway?

I feel so close to you right now, that I don't want to end this email. It's like I can almost touch you.

A: Just stay with, “Who is asking this question?” Any dualistic idea or conclusion is limited at best. Remember that all teachings (as far as I am concerned) are medicines for various states of

spiritual dis-at-easement. No teaching or statement, including my own, is the Truth. That being so, it is best to view teachings as strategies for awakening. And sometimes they can provide a helpful context within which to view your experience.

But the question is always more powerful than any conceptual answer. Who indeed asks the questions? Who is reading these words? Who imagines that he or she is a who, a someone? Stay with the question in stillness, don't think about, be still with it. That is enough if you can stay focused on it.

Oneness vs. No-Self

Q: You speak about oneness, as in “awakening at the level of the gut.” Is experiencing oneness the same as experiencing no-self?

A: Thank you for your question. Oneness is experienced at the level that I call the heart. While the experience of oneness is transformational and profound, it is not itself the experience of no-self, it is the experience of unified, or universal self—self as everything and everyone. The falling away of self is a falling away of even oneness into what is prior to unity. The trajectory is from self experiencing itself as ego, to self experiencing itself as oneness, to self dropping away altogether. What is left cannot be described, because all descriptions are only relevant in terms of their opposites. And beyond self there is no opposite, not even unity or oneness, silence or presence. There is nothing that can be said about it, not even that it is freedom. Where all words fail, that's where it exists. It is the Pearl beyond price, and it is the only thing that is ever happening or ever could happen. I am not being purposely obscure, I am actually being as direct and concrete as I can.

How to Make Decisions

Q: In the first study course I participated, I called in and asked you a question about the via negativa. While I was talking with you, and as you explained the limitations of that approach, I began to understand. In fact, on the other end of the line I was shaking. At the time of the course, I was getting ready to retire. Since then, I have retired. My father has died, and my wife and I became grandparents—one role for the other. That seems to be how it goes.

[portion of letter removed for brevity]

In the midst of all of this, it speaks to me, without using words. What does that mean? It comes down to this: When I stand still and listen, I know what to do, no matter what role I'm in at the moment. Often what to do is nothing, just stand there, sit there, be still and wait, watch, and let things develop as they will.

A: Thank for your email. As you can see I only posted a portion of it here, because I think that what you say at the end of it about making decisions is a great answer to the many, many questions I get regarding how to make decisions. You put it all very simply and clearly, and I am a big fan of both simplicity and clarity of expression. I hope that others will read it and derive benefit from it.

A Classic Journey of No-Self

Q: There was an awakening 9 years ago, in the wake of which there were roller-coaster cycles of intense spiritual experiences and “dark night” phases. Two years later, there was a very intense energetic awakening, succeeded by years of an even more stormy rollercoaster of physical and emotional upheaval.

Just over 3 years ago, there was a brief phase (a week or two) of no-self, where the self-reflective mechanism went out of commission, no inside/outside. Time, space, and dualities made no sense anymore, etc. I wasn't expecting this at all! It was not anything I could possibly have anticipated, nothing like the many spiritual experiences that had occurred over the years. It was also completely different from the stable sense of “the divine within” which had been ever-present for some years. This felt like freedom, peace. As there was no longer a mechanism which allowed me to “look back” at experience which had previously been experienced as negative or painful and assess or judge it. It was very difficult to find a way to suffer! But it was still possible to “know” directly: “Ah, yes, this is the emotion called ‘X,’ which is regarded as undesirable,” (as it were).

That too-brief phase of no-self ended abruptly and was immediately succeeded by a phase of fear/terror/dread, which has, essentially, persisted to this day (though within that there have been short-lived feelings of peace and joy, as well as an underlying trust/appreciation of the process which makes it endurable). A sort of radical deconstruction process also started to happen. I stopped the intensive retreat-going I'd been doing for years, with a resultant loss of meaning and motivation in life, I left my spiritual community, etc. There are also physical pains and illnesses (for which no medical cause could ever be found), which had been an often challenging part of my process since the energetic awakening became much more intense.

If I could press a button and bring about no-self as an abiding way of being, then I would not hesitate. The intense fear isn't a holding back in the sense of having any sort of conscious ambivalence, for no-self has been glimpsed and I know there's nothing to fear. The terror is like a sort of primal, somatic/energetic contraction. It feels as though the body is automatically contracting against the tremendous love and compassion that want to manifest through it. It is as though a primitive survival instinct has kicked in. It feels as though I am about to die physically, or am dying or have died. There is almost always a background sense of danger (feeling as though there are snipers everywhere, hidden from view, out to kill me). Sometimes this past year there have been panic attacks, often triggered off by perceiving deterioration in the outside world (a strong and repeating trigger has been perceiving evidence of deterioration in the fabric of the building I live in (and even sometimes the deterioration of random buildings – slipped slates on roofs, etc). Although the terror is frequently triggered by reminders of death and decay, the fear is there pretty much continuously, at some level, as far as I can tell, and is prior to any of the triggers.

I have been drawn to spend a lot of time in solitude and silence at home during this “terror” phase. (I am retired, so it is possible to do this.) I am troubled frequently by thoughts that I should be out in the world contributing in some way, which I suspect may be getting in the way of letting go completely into what I'm being called to do, which is to stop: stop being concerned with contributing and be fully with what is going on, what wants to happen right now, which

seems to be to stop and let myself be undone. However, seeing how self-deception becomes ever more subtle in this process, there is some concern that the withdrawal into silence and solitude is some sort of egoic hiding out (given that there is fear of life, with all its perceived dangers, as well as fear of death). However, the pull into solitude and silence is so strong, that it doesn't feel as though there is any choice but to simply stop, which, as I said, is what it seems to be asking of me.

A: Thank you for sharing your email and for the questions, I will address them below as you stated them at the end of your letter.

1. Does the fact that I have been in this “dark night of the soul” phase for so long (over 3 years) mean that there is something that I’m actively doing to resist letting go into no-self in an abiding way, which I’m unaware of? My sense is that the resistance is automatic and somatic/energetic, and that all that can be done is to let that resistance be there until it lets go spontaneously.

These things have a timing of their own and I would not conclude that you are resisting letting go—at least not in any way that you can control. Three years or more is not uncommon for this particular phase.

2. This question is related to the first: Does it sound to you as though I’m “hiding out” in this phase without realizing it? Although I’ve been so strongly pulled into silence and solitude in recent years, going with that pull and doing nothing except being with what’s going on isn’t at all pleasant at this point (it means, essentially, being with intense fear), so it doesn’t feel like hiding out. I know that you normally emphasize the value of engagement with ordinary life during the spiritual process rather than withdrawing into retreat. I heard you say to someone else that in the sort of phase that I seem to be in, people in Zen monasteries are usually set to work in the garden. But it simply doesn’t feel possible to benefit anyone else in any meaningful way at the moment and it feels as though the most useful thing I can do for the world is to complete this process. There is very little motivation to do anything, and my intuition is that the motivation will come from Love, once the contraction against it has been let go of. Though perhaps the way to complete it is to go against the pull of what seems to want to happen (silence/solitude) and engage more fully in the world.

At the point you are at, I agree that being in silence would serve you best right now. You are not hiding out but feeling the inward pull of the Infinite. There are some deeply fearful associations that your unconscious has with death and love which is not at all uncommon for human beings, and the story of your journey is quite a classic one on the way to the permanent falling away of self.

As I said on the first program of the course, the falling away of self is so little understood and so often misunderstood, that it all leads to much confusion. Much of what people think is the falling away of self is actually ego transcendence, and by mistaking one for the other the spiritual evolution effectively stalls out.

In your case however, what you have been and are experiencing, is all in the trajectory of self falling away. It may be helpful to contemplate where this fear of love comes from. By contemplate I mean to bring the question into silence and hold it there without analyzing it. Also, a fear of death is almost always associated with both a fear of being fully alive as well as a fear of being dead. Often when there is long standing fear, there is some unresolved shock or trauma that was experienced at some point in life that has yet to be made fully conscious and moved

through. I will leave it to you to explore whether or not this applies to you.

Eventually, an instinct arises within the physical body that is deeper than the instinct to survive. The survival instinct is not the deepest of the physical instincts of the body. There are two other instincts that are deeper than survival: The instinct toward self-less love, and the instinct toward letting go of self. These are not only spiritual instincts but also physical ones that become activated when we access something deeper than the instinct to survive. These instincts are there but not activated without complete courage, complete trust, or complete desperation. Any one will do.

Another of the great unconscious fears of the permanent falling away of self is that the self-oriented life is over. This does not mean that you become other oriented, or even God oriented, but rather a simple expression of the Reality beyond self—which is what allows Life to move as Itself with great abandon and simplicity. It is happening all the time, all around us—only we do not see it, until we do.

Self-consciousness is the last form of identity to go, and what goes with it is all the spiritual states of consciousness as well. One of the main reasons why so few people fully make this transition is that they will not let go of all forms of self-consciousness and the wonderful forms of expanded experience and identity that go with them. When the “divine within” falls away forever, the movement toward the permanent falling away of self has begun. We only let go completely when we are completely ready to, with no qualifications.

I hope that this response will be in some small way helpful.

Sensing a Me

Q: About a year ago, when I was doing my first retreat with you, you said “May you receive the transmission of . . .” I can’t remember what you said next, but within a few days, my meditation changed markedly, and it has stayed changed. Now, when I sit in meditation, I easily slip into profound stillness, with very few thoughts. However, there’s no self-transcendence or falling away of self. I just sense “me” as a separate self pervaded by deep stillness and silence. Along with this comes some pretty intense sensations—a kind of coruscating, pulsing energy at the back of my head. I try to do inquiry sometimes, but to no avail: everything flows into the stillness, and all I can do is sit there. I’m wondering whether I’m on the right track. Any suggestions would be very much appreciated.

A: Thank you for your question. You say that you sense a me. I sense a me. There cannot be two selves, one I and one me. Look very precisely and very closely. All identity and identifications are imposed by thought. What are you without referring to a single thought or feeling to tell you what you are? Be quiet and look. Don’t think about it. And don’t think about it. Be quiet.

The me and the I collapse in this inquiry.

So simply let everything flow into, and out of, stillness. Just that, and nothing more. The rest will happen of its own accord. Keep it simple. Silence is its own transmission.

Who Is Getting Snagged?

Q: Thank you for the clarity of your teachings. I have been doing the investigation you suggest in your supplemental teachings for this week. There is the experience of spacious awareness that is always present without effort, and then there are the thoughts/feelings that come and go. And then, there are some thoughts/feelings that snag “me,” but who or what is the “me” that is being snagged?

A: There is no “who” that gets snagged by thought, there is only awareness identifying with thought, or not. The me is nothing more than a familiar pattern of conditioned thinking that awareness identifies with. Self is the movement of self consciousness. In truth, there is no abiding me, ego, or self. Beyond all of these identifications lies the Infinite Absolute— not experienced by the ego or self, but by itself. The Infinite is known and experienced by itself, and itself alone.

Death of Self vs. Death of Body

Q: In the first 48 hours since the Session 1 of the study course, all is confusion. Not as in “I am confused,” and not confusion in a bad way—more in the sense that all of my previous thoughts, ideas, and beliefs have been shaken up! It is like drowning in the void.

You said something casually, “. . . looking back on a personal history that didn’t even seem to have happened.” Holy shamoley! That sent my personal self for a loop! From the perspective of infinity, of what significance is my 60 odd years on planet earth? My whole life story is just a story, told by infinity to infinity. Not unlike a good movie—very real, until it isn’t.

And yet, “God so loved the world . . .” and here I am!

Paradoxically, as an inner life falls away, the ordinary world of walking around being a human is so much richer. The grass is greener, the sky is bluer, laughing is deeper.

So my question is: When you say “dying to self,” or “permanently transcending ego,” do you mean living with an absence of self but not actual death of the body? Is all of this “no-self” happening in the context of existing as a human being on planet earth?

Please say yes. That would take a load off my mind. I have died accidentally twice—once by intention (a la Ramana). I am just starting to really enjoy life, I am in no hurry to leave now. Of course the body will die. What I truly am exists, both in the present and for infinity; just not as an ego or a self.

Clearly, I am still quite confused. But that’s okay.

A: Thank you for your email and for sharing your experience. You will be happy to know that the death of self is not the death of the body, it is the death of self. It is True Life; it is Unity; it is Perfection. You have touched the waters of True Life, now be a bold swimmer.

Imagine, this very life is the Kingdom of Heaven. That is, when ego and self give way to Infinite Delight. Quick now—give way. The void is waiting to break out into a smile!

Will I Ever Really Get It?

Q: I feel like I have been seeking for a long time now, and when I found your teachings through your books and via the internet my reality really started to change. So much of what you talk about resonates to my very core being and I have had a few of those “Ah ha” moments. Even so, it feels like I can understand at a conceptual level but not at an experiential one, and I wonder sometimes whether I will ever really get it!

Some days I look out into the world and feel my connection, but then it becomes lost so quickly and I fall back into that trance state. It is like I know at a very deep level of my being but then I wonder whether this is just all an idea.

So my question is: How do you become immersed in that oneness of your being at an experiential level, not just conceptual?

A: Thank you for question. Simply rest in the felt sense of being. Don't think about it—do it. That is the key. Grasp at nothing, push nothing away. Simply rest in the felt sense of being. Practice it every day. By abiding in being you are taken beyond it to the absolute. It may sound simple but that is where its power lies, in its straightforward simplicity.

Habitual Emotional Contractions

Q: As I observe my thoughts and look for the sense of “me” what I see is a series of habitual, energetic contractions in response to thoughts that create sensations/feelings in the body that I identify as me. “They feel like me.”

The mind thinks about past events, and through these memories an energetic impression is created in the body that is “my reaction.” It thinks about future events/relationships and again a charge is experienced in the body as emotion, anticipation, which I feel as “me.” I can see it as an energy, but I bring a strong, habitual identification to these sensations.

Can you help me learn to become free of these patterns?

A: Thank you for your question. As you said, “I observe my thoughts.” The I is awareness, the thoughts make up the me. Don't fight with the me thoughts or try to get rid of them. Feel into the sense of the I, which is awareness. Feel into the awareness that is looking at the thoughts. The key is to shift your focus from thoughts and what to do with them, to the felt sense of awareness. At first this felt sense may last but a brief moment, but with practice during the day these brief moments will lengthen and expand and become more spacious.

Keep it simple, be patient, and apply this practice many times during each day. You will see the result.

A Very Effective Practice

Q: In tracing my thoughts of self, I seem to be running into a feeling tone of self, an overall sense of self that feels somewhat solid and deep.

I'm curious as to how to penetrate and dissolve it? Is it best to work with it in the way you have described in the weekly exercise?

Also, while living within this spectrum of awakening, is there a more beneficial focus to keep throughout? The focus of abiding in awareness perhaps?

Is there a focus that you found in your unfolding that helped it to mature?

A: Thank you for your email. To abide in the feeling tone, or sense of being, is a very effective and direct spiritual practice. The sense of being is intuitively felt; it is not something that can be approached by thought. Abide in the felt sense of being, or felt sense of awareness, and you will be taken beyond it. Your true being is universal, and the universal will open to the absolute in due time. Don't force anything or try to dissolve anything. Simply abide as universal being with an open mind and open heart.

You are doing wonderfully.

Directing Energy to Serve Truth

Q: Like you, I grew up in Northern California racing bikes and truth seeking. It sounds like you took your cycling to an elite level as did I. I ended up racing in Europe professionally in the 90s. My search for truth started at an early age and has led me to years of Zen practice, spending time with Thich Nhat Hanh in France, Ramana Maharshi, Nisargadatta, and your teachings.

Experiencing no-self I still find an intense energy arising that I have channeled into bike racing for 25 years. I now observe this intense energy that arises from nothingness and find myself back on my bike, training like I'm headed for the Olympics even though I'm 43 now. I know that you had some injuries that stopped you from bike racing. For me, I keep finding myself drawn back even though I feel like I could find a better way to serve humanity with this energy.

My question: I still naturally experience the arising of strong energy. How can I direct this energy to better serve truth, transformation, and expression of no self?

A: Thank you for your email and your question. The energy is seeking to sustain an old identity that no longer fits you. Notice when you are riding for the simple joy of doing so and when the old energy starts to try and take hold and form or sustain an old identity; an identity that you once probably quite enjoyed, but no longer reflects your deeper wisdom or experience. It is a leaving behind of the old and familiar and embracing the unknown and unfamiliar.

When you feel the surge of the energy going outward to become or sustain an old conditioned way of being, pause so that you become aware that you are making a choice of what you engage with. What do you really want? Feel that. Pause, be patient. Feel into the source of the energy, into the energy-less source of the personal will. What is prior to the personal will?

Find ways of expressing that energy in selfless ways. Don't form a new identity around being a selfless or even compassionate person; just express the unity that you have tasted, in daily living moment to moment. Exercise your insight in the world. Serve it. Give this innate energy new forms of expression by selflessly living it out. This is an important step in your evolution, don't underestimate it.

The Ego Plays a Part

Q: That which is doing the Week 1 Exercise—looking at the thoughts and trying to pinpoint an actual “I”—also seems to be the self, also just a thought. So is this a hermetically sealed process of thought looking at thought? It feels as though there is no way that I (the person who is taking this course) can contribute to the self falling away, because thought, or self, is both the looker and what is being looked at, and the exercise reinforces the aspect of self that is looking. It seems that no-self can only be due to grace or just the luck of the draw. I would appreciate your clarity on this.

A: Thank you for your question. Isn't it interesting how thought derails anything that could threaten its dominance? I have referred to spiritual teachings as “applied folly.” This means that one is using illusion to remove illusion, much as you could use a thorn to remove a thorn caught under your skin. The ego can contribute to the ego's falling away, it just cannot force or control the outcome. But because it cannot force the outcome does not mean that it plays no part in it.

Language (thought) is very tricky. It talks itself into all manner of circular thinking. Better to pay attention to what you value beyond all else, and let a deeper intuition be your guide.

How to Be with Stressful Thoughts

Q: As you suggest in the Week 1 Exercise, I am attempting to remind myself that thoughts are just thoughts, feelings are just feelings, and they are not my true Self. However, when I am feeling stressed or anxious about practical things like financial obligations (i.e. paying the mortgage and our monthly bills) I feel stuck. While I know the associated fear is not my true Self, I am still responsible for these very real obligations. Any suggestions on how to manage these types of feelings and thoughts around practical issues?

A: Thank you for your question.

1. When you are “doing practical things,” pause in the midst of the reaction, breathe, notice that the stressful “thoughts” are creating the stress, not whatever needs to be done.
2. See how the moment is experienced when you put aside the stressful thinking for a moment. Feel the difference in your body between when the moment is experienced while entertaining the stressful thoughts, and when you put the thoughts aside. Feel your breath, or feel the space of awareness, instead of feeling your thoughts.
3. Make the choice in the small moments whenever you feel stress and your life will change.

Is No-Self Divine Love?

Q: As I spoke about my devotion at the recent Australia retreat, you said it was part of how I was made up. Spirituality for me is also about Divine Love. So my mind is rather disturbed by the descriptions of losing the self as “bland” and “blankness.” My mind is asking: Why would I want no-self when having a self means that I can experience or be Love and Devotion? I suppose I'm hoping you will reassure me that no-self is also Divine love and not just blankness!

A: Thank you for your email. The no-self state is not a bland or simple blankness, although it can sound that way because it cannot be described in positive terms. It is much easier, and more instructive, to describe what reality is not than what it is—although neither positive nor negative descriptions of absolute reality can ever convey its reality. Always remember that the ego and the self's experience of God (absolute reality) is not God's experience of God.

Self experiences everything through the medium of itself. To go beyond self is to go beyond experiencing life through the medium of self, in the same way that going beyond the ego is to no longer experience life through the medium of ego.

Absolute reality (the Godhead beyond God) is the source and substance of all, but it cannot be described as any particular expression it may take, not even love or bliss or being or any other expression of the Divine. That is why I say that no one can desire what the Absolute actually is, only what they think or imagine that it is.

Nonetheless, at the very depth of our being we are inescapably drawn to the Absolute, even though there is nothing for either the ego or the self in it. That is why I say that the true impulse for Liberation is an irrational impulse—irrational to both the ego and self, because it will eventually mean the end of both of them. Of course, this all sounds quite negative until you remember that Liberation is to experience Life, Reality, and the true nature of God, without any medium. Strictly speaking this cannot be described, it must be lived. But I can assure you that nothing else holds a candle to life lived beyond self.

So follow your desire for Divine Love all the way until it takes you completely beyond ego, self, and even love, where all that is left is the Divine itself.

A Helpful Reminder

Q: I just want to share that the Week 1 Exercise video is a very helpful reminder about the nature of thought.

I keep forgetting and mistaking the thoughts for who I am. It's amazing how much I can forget—get lost, emotional, and fearful. And then apparently from nowhere—remembering is there. Peace, space.

Something is and has been dying. This is a strong process to go through also because there are not many people I can share this with; they all want to cure me.

I am happy I can share with you.

A: I am happy that the exercises in the video are helpful, and that you can share your experience with me here. To have companions now and then, in the vastness of being, is a blessing that we can all both give and receive. Whenever you can, choose peace, choose space, choose love. When you forget, well you forget. Forgive the forgetting, have love for human imperfection. We all have endless opportunities for forgiveness and love.

None of us needs to be cured as much as we need to be the cure.

The Dark and Lonely Void

Q: I find that when I acknowledge oneness, there is a stillness followed immediately by a feeling of plunging into deep cold, dark, loneliness, a fear devoid of love. My first experience of “falling into the absolute” was brief and occurred 3 months after beginning to meditate, though I had never heard of any of this stuff beforehand. My Ego’s immediate interpretation (after the profanities) was fear, a feeling of cold, dark, loneliness, devoid of love and a desperate desire to run like hell and never sit still to meditate again!

Although logically I have been made aware through listening to your teachings that this feeling/interpretation is not the experience of oneness, I cannot shake off Ego’s imprint. I have had no other “void” reference, and I know not to go chasing after it anyway. My question is: How do I work with this?

A: Thank you for your email. Let me emphasize that the ego’s experience and interpretation of the absolute is the “ego’s” reaction to something that it cannot directly know or understand. The ego stays on the periphery of the absolute by focusing on its fearful imaginings and interpretations. The only way beyond this fear and desperation is “through” it.

Meet this fear without being intimidated into running away from it or thinking about it (which is another way of running away). But do not simply stay in the middle of it either—go through it. It is sort of like meeting a nightmare your mind is creating so that you can awaken from it. And how do you do that? Be still. Still in body and still in mind.

It is only a waking nightmare; nothing is actually happening. You already are the absolute. You can only lose what you never were, not what you are.

What Will Abiding Feel Like?

Q: This past September at the silent retreat in New York, I experienced transcending my ego for the longest period of time yet. It lasted for most of a day, and then gradually lessened. It was lovely and peaceful, spacious and timeless, and felt absolutely natural with an ease to it. My question is about the falling away of the ego, and whether or not the experience feels the same (albeit abiding)? In other words, once one has experienced transcending one’s ego a number of times, will the experience of the ego falling completely away feel very similar and familiar, or might it be a completely different experience?

A: Thank you for your question. Moments of transcending the ego are very similar to the falling away of ego, with one exception; as one becomes accustomed to the non-ego state it is no longer experienced as extraordinary or as a peak experience but simply the way things are. Any new perspective becomes normalized as we become accustomed to it. Of course, the vacillating between the ego and non-ego state comes to an end as well, and this gives rise to a feeling of being psychologically unified and unconflicted.

A Shift of Perspective

Q: After having what I felt was an experience of no-self, the strong sense was that this state meant a complete “game over.” Later, the question arose: “Is this what I signed up for?” It felt like I was a computer program that had lost its operating system, I had been wiped. Eerie.

The fallout from this experience has left me with an overwhelming feeling of blankness. Over the years of studying with you, it has felt as if the me is slowly and quietly being whittled away. And particularly, after this experience of no-self which leaves me with more blankness, I wonder what will be there to take “my” place, as it does not feel like anything is rushing in. I wonder if maybe I needed to have more of a strong egoic self or personality in order to lose my self? Will this blankness be replaced by something more—a reboot of some sort? The more the mind tries to reflect on what happened, the more blankness or a sense of being lost is there.

A: Thank you for your email. The falling away, or wiping out of self is quite startling, especially if it happens very quickly as it did in your case. There is a subtle way that the mind can keep reflecting back on what is no longer there that keeps one focused on the absence of—well just about everything you ever thought was real and true. This reflecting of the mind on the absence keeps you from seeing the fuller part of the picture. What that is, is hard to explain. Essentially, it is perceiving life from the viewpoint of the Infinite, what I sometimes call eternity. What that is like can never be explained or put into words, not because it is obscure (in fact it is quite concrete) but because it is beyond the mind’s capacity to reflect on.

The question here for you is, what exists in the absence of self? Not simply in the conceptual absence, as we hear so much silly talk about in modern spirituality, but in the actual lived absence. The absence or emptiness of literally everything reveals the true nature of everything. And the true nature of everything is not only its emptiness but also the true nature of its form, of its existence. From eternity’s point of view, everything is itself; nothing is perceived as either emptiness or form, as existing or not existing. Each moment IS eternity, each thing IS eternity. From the human point of view, this may sound nice but it can in fact be quite stark and shocking. But seen from eternity’s eyes, it all looks quite different.

I hope that this clarifies things a bit for you. But we must not settle for what the mind imagines these descriptions to mean or imply, which is done all too often, but rather leave behind all imagined knowing and “see” from the eyes that they are coming from.

A Split-Personality

Q: At the Omega Retreat we spoke about non-abiding awakening and how one remains in delusion even though one has seen the truth of one’s being. After this talk with you, and later in that week, the situation changed somewhat. Previously, I would “look inside in meditation” in order for this “peace, presence, vastness, awareness” to be “found” or manifested. Suddenly the situation shifted and now it is this “peace, presence, vastness, awareness” that is “looking out” and experiencing life through this body-mind. While I can be just as deluded as ever in the non-abiding awareness, there now is a constant “awareness,” the Real Self, which is also present.

This “peace, presence, vastness, awareness” is both inward in meditation and looking outward. Talk about having almost a split personality! During the course it would be beneficial to me and much appreciated if you would address this kind of situation. Obviously I do not discuss this with anyone as no doubt that would lead to people believing I was having a psychological disability and in need of schizophrenic drugs. I thought that this situation would pass in time, but it persists. Yet I continue in my own delusional fantasies too. Egads.

A: Thank you for your question. Your email speaks for itself and is a wonderful deepening in your experience of being. Simply meet each delusion, each moment of identification, with patient love. Really embrace it in silent watching; allow it to unfold and release itself. Be patient and very still. Allow a greater wisdom and love than your own to remove all the clouds for you. Such wisdom and love lies within utter stillness and heartfelt surrender.

Fear of Losing the Self

Q: Is it natural to be a little afraid of “losing self” considering that we identify with so many aspects of ourselves that aren’t really our true selves? That is how I am feeling now, a little scared. Is that unusual for one to feel?

A: To be afraid of losing the self that you have identified yourself with is quite natural. But remember, you cannot lose what you truly are, only what you are not. Who is afraid? Only a thought, and you are not a thought. You are what the thought occurs in. Be that vast empty space and all else will unfold quite naturally and spontaneously.

How Does Emptiness Move?

Q: My question is how do you ever really know what the truth is? Every time I read your book “The Way of Liberation” and I ask myself “What do I truly want?” when I go into my heart, my heart doesn’t want a single thing. The only wanting seems to come from the idea of myself that the mind is continually creating and that I all too often identify with.

All I know is that when I ask myself “What is the experience of being?” and I just feel into this being, it feels like there is nothing but this vast empty presence that has no intention or direction and is utterly at peace simply being. It feels like in order to function I have to create a story of a separate me who makes decisions and follows thoughts. I have no idea if that is true or not. The minute I follow a thought it feels like I have entered the imagined world, and without thought I don’t know anything. So how does one have wanting or intention or direction in life from this pure silent being?

A: Simply rest in the experience of Being, in the “vast empty presence” as you wonderfully put it. As far as taking action goes, contemplate how that presence acts and how it moves from an unknown emptiness. All actions and relating can arise directly from presence in an intuitive and spontaneous way.

Walk down the sidewalk and notice the difference between when you walk from the mind and

when you walk from presence. You will immediately feel the difference. Then do it with all activities. Then try talking from presence. Bit by bit, you will get the hang of it.

I Am at a Dead End

Q: The seeking has been really intense the last five years (meditate an hour or more each day, constantly doing self-inquiry, praying, attending retreats, and reading book after book after book about enlightenment).

The intensity was always guided by this very strong desire to cut to the chase and know what the direct realization of “no-self” is. But as nothing has worked to bring that about, I have become very tired, and almost apathetic about the search (even becoming very depressed at times), feeling like the big shift in perception just isn’t going to happen. Or if it does, it won’t be because I “did” anything in the realm of Time. I still sit every day but I can’t bring myself to do any more techniques or to pick up a book. I’ll be really honest—it is hard to even log onto this course and participate.

My question is just that I feel like I am at a dead end. I am not seeing the light, and I don’t know where else to turn. Should I just give this up for a while? The only thing I haven’t tried is to stop doing anything spiritual whatsoever.

A: Thank you for your question. It may be hard to understand this, but spirituality is the process of stripping away every layer of yourself that is false. This is neither pleasant nor easy, and the whole point is to get you to a point of surrender. Not the ego trying to surrender but the ego realizing and experiencing its own limitations.

I have said many times that my own spiritual path was the path of failure. It’s not the path I chose, expected or wanted, but it was the path that chose me. And it brought me to the point of absolute surrender again and again, until there was nothing left to surrender; and then that was surrendered as well. Simply be still with no expectation.

You see, it is all a very convincing dream that you are bound. But all the while, even as you read these words, you are completely free. You are not a person, but a presence—and not even that. Cast aside all the teachings and simply open yourself to the silent beyond. That, my friend, is my simple advice for now.

Non-personal Motivation

Q: I was a disabled man with serious health issues; bipolar and multiple sclerosis. I needed to take a lot of pills a day and needed a cane on occasion.

I discovered meditation, and saw thoughts for what they were. Illusion. I came out of meditation and I knew that “all is well.” I just knew that I no longer needed medicine, and over a year got myself off all of it. During that time I had a Kundalini experience which felt as if I was being aggressively rewired. That lasted several months. Now I no longer show any signs of disease, and no longer need a cane.

It’s been around a year since the Kundalini stopped; when it stopped I was merged with it all.

Wherever I looked, I was that. Today, it's not uncommon for me to see everything as energy, and for people to shimmer.

I am still a bit disoriented at times. How does one find the personal will for work or anything that requires doing when you know it's all meaningless?

A: Thank you for your question. Your story is quite compelling and beautiful. As for your question regarding finding the personal will for “work or anything when you know that it is all meaningless,” let me suggest that the perspective that everything is meaningless is somewhat true but not complete. When you go a little deeper you will also see that every event and action is both without meaning and also deeply significant. Always remember that every dualistic view is incomplete. The absolute Truth is beyond all opposing views and perspectives.

What moves you and motivates you from a non-personal view is Love. Not a personal love but God's Love, a universal Love. This Love is beyond any personal motivation or energy. It is not a motivation nor an agenda, but rather the movement of that which is beyond self. It happens almost unconsciously in the sense that it is non-self-reflective and non-self-motivated, but rather spontaneous and unselfconscious. It is not a feeling either, but pure action arising from emptiness.

Meeting People at Eye-Level

Q: How do I communicate with people from the perspective of no-self? For example, if a friend tells about a difficult relationship and believes very much in her accusations. Besides listening from an empty space, how can I respond and be faithful to truth, not go into/confirming the story and still meet this person at eye-level? (I know that this question dissolves as soon as the silent intelligence has completely taken over this body-mind.)

A: My answer is very simple. LOVE. Love completely, love selflessly, love unreservedly. I will leave it to you to figure out what this means for you.

Feeling Blandness as the Self Falls Away

Q: I have been experiencing the stripping away of self for the past 4 or more years. Sometimes the falling away happens easily and spontaneously, as insight penetrates the illusions of who I thought myself to be. Other times, my sense of self is unceremoniously torn away from me, piece by piece.

So sometimes it is painful as I resist, and other times it is more a state of surrender or grace. Either way, there is always a great sense of peace and stillness that pervades the falling away. However, I do not feel this as inspiring, or as great connection, as I often do at a time of great insight or revelation. It is actually free of all emotional states and usually more of a bottoming out into nothingness.

The self that remains can find this quite bland and somewhat depressing. Well, the self is extremely depressed to find that it is a phantom and doesn't exist! It is no longer the self or I

that feels joy, peace, or contentment. Joy is just joy, peace is just peace universally, as there is less and less self left to experience or identify with an emotional state. I experience deep peace and stillness as the highs and lows seem to fall away along with the self.

Is this normal to feel a blandness—as the self falls away and emotional states fall away with it

A: It is common that the initial falling away of the ego or self can leave one feeling rather bland—bland as far as ego is concerned. This is because one is going beyond experience and the ego's desire for experience. This leaves the ego in a rather bland state. But as the last remnants of the ego fall away, the underlying peace and stillness that you mentioned will become your default condition and will become quite immovable. In one sense, the divine pull inward will take one beyond the ego and its addiction to all manner of experience, eventually including spiritual experiences as well. This leads to a kind of extraordinary ordinariness that cannot be understood until it is being lived.

The Purpose of Seeking

Q: As many of us have, I've experienced profound glimpses of the eternal, from which I return to what is temporal and transitory. I know on one level that what I see and feel, as this named person longing for freedom, is a lie. But it is enormously challenging to keep hold of the faith that this mask will eventually (at some future date) completely and permanently fall, as it did (or appeared to) in your case.

How is it that what you teach—and what so many others teach now, that has been written about for centuries—is not just playing into the game of the longing self? I just don't understand how this longing can be let go of—and yet from all that is said and written, it seems to be the only thing between the one longing and the longed for “thing.” Are they one and the same, these two?

A: Thank you for your question. The seeking is there, it is part of what propels along one's evolution. But even though wonderful things may happen along the way, the seeking is frustrated again and again. It cannot make happen what it wants to happen, and it cannot hold onto moments of revelation. In a certain sense the Infinite (or God if you prefer) uses the seeking instinct to wear down the seeker, to frustrate all of its grasping impulses. Thus, the seeking does indeed have a purpose, and a very important one, just not the one that the seeker has in mind. The highest form that seeking can take is to desire to let go of the seeker, to surrender into silence, into the abyss of stillness.

Quite apart from all the complicated questions, answers, and teachings, spirituality is about letting go into the still point within until there is nothing left to let go of, and nothing to let go into. All other considerations are really beside the point.

Week 2 - Q&A

Money and Motivation

Q: I'm aligning with what you have been saying, and have experienced intermittent periods of no ego and no self. However, I feel like I have to live a double life as in some areas, such as making money through speculation or investing; the functions of grasping and aversion are critical to being successful.

When I've talked to others about awakening and making money, I generally get two types of responses: 1) I am told not to worry about it—usually by people who don't need to worry about money. 2) I am met with empathy—by those also needing to ensure they have enough financial resources coming in each month.

I've also found that when I do have financial security, it's a lot easier to drop into non-egoic states because my sense of security isn't threatened. And, I have enough experience to know that the answer isn't in becoming totally passive and letting my house go, not feeding my son, etc.

So, how does the unfolding of non-motivation relate to issues, like earning money, that need motivation and desire to manifest?

A: The making of money is a necessary part of life and can be motivated by many drives. Among them, the drive to succeed, to acquire wealth beyond what is needed, to feel worthy, to have power, etc. However, the need to earn money to support your life, and possibly the life of your family, is a simple necessity. That is the motivation. And as such, it is an act of love.

Your job in speculation and investing may require quick action and commitment, but not aversion and grasping. I know people who do investing and speculation and they do not do it from an emotional space of aversion and greedy desire but from wisdom and experience. Of course you must make money in ways that feel in integrity for you, but the underlying emotions are brought to the job by each of us, they do not exist in the job itself, as long as the job embodies basic moral principles and can be carried out with integrity. If not, it is time to look for something else to do.

You see, as we drop the ego and all of the egoic motivations, what we are left with is acting from love. We do what we do out of love. Love for life, love for family, love for humanity. And love transcends all egoic motivations. Love is liberation in action.

Self-Cognizant Wisdom

Q: My practice has always been seeing directly and thereby understanding what I see, and this has lead pretty much to the dismantling of the ego. But now I think you are taking us out of this wisdom-based process. The falling away of the self, as you describe it, seems to feel more like a natural and organic falling away than a seeing and releasing from wisdom. Am I correct that there is nothing to see or release after the falling away of ego to encourage the falling away of self?

A: Thank you for your question. You are quite right that wisdom helps to dismantle the ego. But self, or self-consciousness, cannot dismantle itself in the same way as it can dismantle the ego because that would be like your feet trying to outrun themselves. However, it would also be untrue to say that wisdom does not play a part in the self falling away.

Self, having the quality of pure awareness, naturally possesses a self-cognizant wisdom. While not being capable of removing itself, it can nonetheless intuit the subtle limitations of its perspective and remain open to something that lies beyond its capacity to know. Furthermore, within the very depths of self lies the Unreserved Desire for Truth. This Unreserved Desire for Truth transcends all other spiritual desires that the self possesses—even the desire for God and unity. And it is this desire that allows self to transcend all other desires (including the survival instinct), finally break through all of the spiritual forms of self, and come to rest in The Ever Abiding Ground Beyond All Distinction—seeing as It sees, with Its eyes, and none other.

Hold these Teachings with Lightness

Q: When I woke up some years ago, after a diagnosis of AIDS and lymphoma, I was given 3-6 months to live. I woke up instead.

The shift of identity and experience, from dying with AIDS, to a Self beyond the body and mind, has sustained me to this day. That was in 1984. With Zen training, as I woke, I would find myself walking and not knowing who was walking. Was it the natural surrounding walking, or me? There was no me there walking. There was instead an unseen invisible essentialness without form. This was walking—is this the dropping away of the Self?

A: Thank you for your email. As your story wonderfully illustrates, we never know what will contribute to our awakening. Some of the experiences that you mentioned are indicative of either the transcending of self or the falling away of self. It is hard to tell which has happened to you given the brevity of your email. And I do appreciate the brevity and clarity of what you shared. Please remember that my intention in giving this course is to help people navigate through some of the deeper realms of awakening, and less to categorize where they are in the model that I am using (although I fully understand the desire to do so).

The “invisible essentialness without form” that you mentioned is itself pure form as well. I call it formless form. And I could also add, empty emptiness.

So, may we all hold these teachings with a lightness of mind and an openness of heart that will allow them to shine light and clarity upon our experience and not remove us from it.

Transcending vs. Awakening

Q: I have had glimpses of awakening that were wonderful and swift. A few days ago, I woke up in the middle of the night terrified that I would lose my “self” and all that it encompasses. I did not like it at all. For the first time I feel like I know what surrender is, and what it takes. The stakes seem incredibly high. I’m not ready for it, yet I feel as though I could really let go into it if only I had the courage. Can one transcend the ego without first awakening? Or is there a normal progression to the process?

A: Thank you for your question. Transcending experiences may or may not lead to awakening. Remember awakening is characterized by an existential shift of identity from ego to self (awareness, presence, unity), or from self to no-self. Also remember that not all awakenings are the same. There are various levels and depths of awakening which I have tried to make clear during this course.

In a sense, every form of spiritual unfolding is preparation for the ultimate surrender of self. It does take great courage because it is the death of not only the psychological self but the spiritual self as well. However, this death of self opens the way for the revelation of life seen and experienced through the eyes of eternity. *The Pearl Beyond Any Price*.

No True Light Should Remain Hidden

Q: I was deeply triggered by the Session 2 last night. Right in the middle, I had a moment when your words suddenly made no-self clear in a way I have missed all this time and it felt truly dreadful! I sobbed for an hour after the course, couldn't sleep, and then basically cried all morning.

As I sit with this pain, it's showing me that there's a way I have always been and still am hiding and repressing myself. And there's no way that part could bear the thought of the self dropping away while it's still locked away in un-expression.

This feels so remedial—like I have to take a big detour and go back and learn something so basic as expressing myself. But then I think maybe this is still on the way; maybe it's healing the ways that I'm blocking Life from flowing through me.

A: Thank you for your email. Your question is a very important one. In theory, one can move beyond ego and even beyond self without also coming into a more integrated and healthy functioning. However, theory is rarely reflective of actual daily living and almost always misses the subtleties of the human experience. Although there are exceptions to this rule, it has certainly been my observation that it is much easier to let go of a relatively healthy ego structure than a very divided one. Both healthy and unhealthy egos can be transcended at any moment. In fact, it is more often the case that one lets go of ego identity when the ego is in a state of suffering than when everything is going well for it. In the long run however, unresolved ego conflict will often pull consciousness back into identification until some degree of resolution is achieved.

So it will probably be important for you to let go of repressing yourself and begin to express your more authentic selfhood. The higher form of ego is quite empowering, loving, allowing and functional. It feels itself to be essentially worthy, loving, and altruistic. Allowing this aspect of yourself to begin to flower will ultimately allow you to move beyond it when the time is right.

Always remember that every one of us is a unique spark of the divine, a light unto this world. And no true light should remain hidden under a cloak of fear and denial. Allow your true being to step out in love and courage, and embrace the full measure of your life. All the rest happens in its own good time.

No-Self Embodied In Relationship

Q: Thank you for your discourse at the beginning of Session 2. It was literally the most profound teaching that I've ever heard. I feel that this discourse in and of itself was worth the entire course fee. The way that you so clearly laid out the distinctions between ego and self; identified the specific drives and impulses of self, particularly Higher Self; spoke to the deeper drives of the body beyond the survival instinct; and shared your own experiences was so incredibly clarifying and helpful. Your words have allowed something very deep within me to relax, and have grounded my own unfoldment in a very deep and embodied way. Listening to your words and getting more used to the way you speak about this level of the unfoldment has also allowed me to be aware of aspects of the realization that I had recognized but didn't even realize were there, as I'd never heard them spoken about before. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for this course.

I have a question about awakened relationship. Although I know many people who have realized their True Nature to varying degrees, I find that most people's ability to embody this recognition in relationship in a consistent way is still quite limited. In much the same way that I've noticed that most people tend to remain fixated on the experiential by-products and insights of their spiritual awakening, I feel that when it comes to relating, most people also tend to fixate and be orientated towards the experiential by-products of the bliss of oneness, the passionate aliveness and energy of communion, and the almost ungrounded quality of a "merging" type of love. My intuitive sense is that the only time we can truly meet in no-self is when both people are deeply grounded in their spiritual and interpersonal autonomy. I've glimpsed and tasted moments of this with others, but also see how easily this openness can collapse the moment some old conditioning gets triggered. But besides there being relatively few people who are deeply abiding in their True Nature, it also seems to me that one of the challenges for this type of relationship to emerge is that the rules of engagement are unknown, and because of this we only know how to fall back into our "normal" ways of being. I'd really appreciate if you could offer some guidance of how to embody no-self in the context of relationship.

A: Thank you for your question. Well, you have certainly opened up Pandora's box here. The mysterious realm of human relationship is an extremely vast subject, and so I will have to focus on only a few points here as it relates to no-self. As you mentioned in your email, "the only way we can truly meet in no-self is when both people are deeply grounded in their spiritual and interpersonal autonomy."

Yes, it has certainly been my experience that any relationship grounded in the reality of no-self requires great spiritual and interpersonal autonomy. And to be honest, you will rarely find this high degree of spiritual and interpersonal autonomy in another human being. It may come along from time to time, but one should not expect it all that often. And when it does, "the rules of engagement" as you so wonderfully put it, are unknown because we do not grow up with models of how to relate from a place beyond self. And beyond that, the experience of no-self in no way guarantees that one knows how to be in healthy selfless relationship, it only makes it a possibility. No-self is not a cure-all for all that confounds human beings. In fact, the falling away of self can be quite confounding in and of itself, and often takes years to fully integrate into one's humanity.

This will likely sound somewhat cliché but it just happens to be true: All true and healthy forms of relationship are outgrowths of love. Now that's easy to say, but to live it unreservedly from moment to moment is what relationship beyond self is all about. I have said many times that the greatest expression of love that I ever received was when my wife Mukti had a deep awakening during the first retreat I ever taught. As we were just getting home she turned to me and said, "I don't need you anymore." I knew exactly where it was coming from, and it was pure selfless love and joy. I literally wept with happiness for her. Never had I experienced such Love. I did not need her to awaken to love her, but when she did, love instantly redefined itself between us. Selflessness became the core of our relationship and a new quality of love became our standard to embody.

The falling away of self redefines one's experience of love in a profound way. And it challenges everything "other" than that love to conform to Love's standard. Beyond self, Love and Truth are one; they are indistinct. And selfless relationship functions only when mutual spiritual autonomy is embodied and valued above all else. The implications of this are profound and far reaching, and far more than I could even begin to address here (perhaps during another course).

This form of Love cannot be known or understood until self has fallen away. And even when self has fallen away, it is a journey that requires the greatest sincerity and commitment to live out in daily life. It is an unfolding without end that necessitates great humility and patience, and above all else, Love.

Residues of the Wounded Will

Q: My question relates to your wonderfully clarifying talk in Session 2. Here is some background:

Over the last few years I have experienced some very deep and impactful shifts in/as the Ground-of-Being, dimensionless space of non-objective Awareness. I see these as corresponding to what you spoke about as "transcending ego-personality, and various dimensions of Self-recognition." These shifts include the ecstatically luminous recognition of the inherent inseparability of empty-awareness-as-pure-subjectivity with the seamless display of all empty inner and outer appearances.

This unfolding recognition seems to have had various stages or phases continuing on up to a "glimpse of no-Self." In this case it occurred as an almost featureless but very distinct tacit recognition of/as that which is already prior to Being/non-being, prior to Pure-Subjective-Awareness/object-of-awareness—that formless, identityless indescribability which I and all cannot not be (to put it very crudely). That "moment" of recognition also reconfigured the experience of empty-Self Awareness, etc.

One of the side effects that became increasingly noticeable over time was the deflation and loss of intention, force, or endurance of personal will and the preferences or the impulse to have things turn out "my way." Increasingly, there was even a loss of interest and motive for spiritual/Dharma study and practice, which had been based on my intention to escape fate as endless experiential continuum.

So far, so good—I guess.

In Session 2 you drew an important distinction between the loss of personal will, on one hand, and the experience of the wounded will with its flavor of despair and resignation. This seemed very important to me. Maybe both of these have some part in what's happening to me now. Could that be true? Because although I do seem to recognize your descriptions of falling away of personal will, and even Self-will, as apparently operative here, I can also often see signs of some deep residue that is more like a deeply wounded personal will. This sometimes seems like the deep residue of a kind of trauma to the core will of my embodied person, and has a flavor of resignation to fate—as a disempowered, disheartened, disemboweled, castrated loss of life-power. Well, it probably doesn't show up to most others that way, but tuning in to the residues of deep despair of life usually seems to have that flavor now: the absurd and meaningless hopelessness that “my life” is anything worth devoting energy and time to.

So, given that both these processes seem to be happening in my particular life stream, my question is about the relationship between them.

Is the apparently ongoing process of the falling away of personal will, and what seems to be the familiar ease of access to no-Self recognition (even briefly), something that is impeded in its full development by any residues of the wounded will and its despair? Or does that whole dream of there even being a wounded will, just slowly fade away with the empty, impermanent personal embodied being?

Does anything need to be done about this, or does it just naturally do itself without any strategic intervention?

A: Thank you for your email. I appreciate the time and consideration you gave to expressing yourself so openly and clearly. Your description of your experience between the loss of personal will and the wounded will is not all that uncommon. Please keep in mind that we are multi-dimensional beings and can exist within, and have experiences of, different realities simultaneously. Absolute and relative realities (relatively real in the sense that we can experience them) exist together, and while being different are not ultimately distinct. We cannot simply cast out relative realities as a dream (which from the absolute view they are), because in doing so we would be making distinctions where there are in fact none to be found.

Many if not most old patterns of conflict and traumas fall away when self falls away, but it is not uncommon for there to be some need of further healing and resolution of residual conflicts within the body-mind. This is not the same as the self-improvement endeavors undertaken by the ego, but rather it is a bringing of great Love and awareness to, in your case, the wounded will, to awaken it from its unconscious spinning within its whirlpool of misunderstanding and mistranslated experience.

This is a natural and spontaneous act of Love upwelling from the ground of being. The ever-abiding ground beyond all distinction leaves nothing behind but rather gathers everything up within its loving embrace of liberation.

Consciously exposing all of our humanity to the unified field of liberation, and holding it within that field as an act of love, allows it to unravel itself into the recognition of indistinct wholeness.

While this requires a deeply intuitive capacity that many have not developed, (and will therefore need to employ other means) I sense that you will be able to feel into where my words are pointing and allow the spirit that they convey to unravel and heal the innocent places where the will was wounded. May it merge back into the ground beyond distinction and rediscover the natural sovereignty and dignity of being.

When to Put the Teachings Aside

Q: Other than work and some recovery meetings, most of my time is spent listening and watching the various teachings on awakening, presence, and the truth of one's being. I'm wondering if one eventually needs to put these teachings aside, even though the desire to keep doing it burns fervently within.

A: Thank you for your email. When it is time to put the various spiritual teachings aside, you will know it. Quite suddenly what once inspired you will repel you and you will be drawn more and more into silence. When this time comes you may be confused and wonder what happened to your enthusiasm, but rest assured that nothing has gone wrong, it is simply time to give your attention to silence. You may in fact go back and forth several times between being immersed in a teaching and then drawn to silence. Each phase has its own value and time.

I would suggest to always have some time being spent in silence as part of your spiritual life. Otherwise you may start to use spiritual teaching to avoid silence. But for now follow your inspiration and attend to the inner stillness as well.

Failing Well with Words

As I read these responses and from my own feeble attempts to describe this work, it seems like there is a tendency to adopt your and others' frameworks in describing personal experiences and to start conceiving some of these notions (e.g., ego/collective ego, falling away of certain parts of your being, etc.) as real things. While I understand the need for some sort of language to convey the teachings, it seems instructive to realize that these notions are no more real than thoughts. Does that make sense?

A: Thank you for your email. Words can conceal and confuse, or they can reveal and illuminate. We all need to handle language very carefully, as I have said many times during this course already, in order that it may serve us instead of confuse us. This course does have its dangers because what we are exploring is trans-logical and transcendent of conceptual understanding. And yet if we can hold the language lightly, but not causally, we may find that it can bring clarity and point the way to further insights and understandings.

Many years ago I made it a habit when listening to someone speak or reading what they wrote, to not try to understand it from my point of view, but from theirs. This requires us to engage with language from a much more challenging and counterintuitive point of view. But in the end, it leads to far more real understanding and far less confusion.

Admittedly, part of my teaching role is to speak about the unspeakable. That's why I always aspire to fail well. May we all fail well in all of our conceptual endeavors.

The World Wants Me to Be Somebody

Q: I am listening to your talks from our yurt in the Alps in Switzerland, with deer silently walking around the Mongolian tent. I think they want to listen to you too.

Here are my questions:

Everything you say about living no-self is so natural, easy and beautiful while living in nature, meditating or being with spiritual friends. But how to be nobody when the whole world wants you to be somebody? People or colleagues ask for a way of relating that fits inside their own frame of reference—and it takes a lot of energy to adapt and adjust to it. Being just empty and transparent seems to frighten others.

The way to our own nature is clear. But what about the second phase after enlightenment, embodying the Light and Vastness into daily lives?

A: Thank you for your email. I understand the thrust of your question regarding how to live and embody what one has realized. First we always must look very closely at how we project “our” beliefs onto other people. Is it really true that, “the whole world wants you to be someone?” I have not found this to be true in my life either as a teacher or in my everyday life outside of teaching. We may not always be agreed with or appreciated, but who is? It can be very tricky to completely own our projections, because we tend to see whatever supports our beliefs and disregard whatever does not.

As long as we are focused on how others see us, or if they understand us, we will miss the deeper issue. The deeper issue is not what the world wants us to be, but what we contribute to the world. No-self moves as love in the world. I have found that what everyone wants is love, whether they will admit to it or not. No one can stop me from loving, no one. No situation can stop me from loving. The world has absolutely no power to stop me from being what I am. In fact, it wants me to be what I am, even when it pretends not to.

When you change your beliefs about people in the world, the world will look very different to you. Although I understand that your question opens a subject of vast and significant inquiry, the resolution ends up being very simple. Love others as your own self (because they are), and do not stop loving them simply because they do not understand. As soon as you stop loving for any reason, everything becomes unnecessarily complicated.

Be True and Loving.

Always.

That’s the how.

A Journey to Absolute Intimacy

Q: I had the ego drop away two years ago and I was literally swept off my feet by profound grace. Divine love eclipsed everything.

It was last January that the self fell away quite quickly. At the time, I thought I had had a Kundalini emergency. During my peak experience, I found myself “held captive” in a space

that was radically alive and still and silent. I was held there for about a week and it felt like being burned spiritually, everything I had learned was unlearned by experiencing this silent space, I was erased. I wrote to you about it last spring.

The new unfolding ruined the previous profound grace experience for me by revealing that I was one with my divine and that we both were this radical silent nothing. After that, the old way of relating to grace felt phony and pretend, like I was talking to myself in a mirror. As much as I tried, I couldn't unknow the truth, I had to surrender to the fact that everything as it was before—was gone.

In September I began to notice that I felt very grounded and actually burned with love for earth. I began to have a new experience of being human. Life feels very organic and I am just another ordinary organism going about my part in living life force. There is nothing but this moment and then the next moment and then the next. Time-keeping has not lost its usefulness but the concept of time has dropped away. Life moves through me and to me very spontaneously, in this wonderful light way. I feel it physically touching me and moving, it feels like being touched by a sunrise or something very soft but powerful beyond all.

The whole process was like if you imagine that I am a boat that uses mechanics to move, steer and guide by. Quite suddenly, the system became inoperable and I am set adrift in a vast ocean. Each day at sea feels timeless and it's horribly disorienting because I am so alone. Slowly I adjust to the feeling of being at sea—the rolling of the waves, the way the sun crosses the sky. Slowly I discover through experience how to feel the wind's movement and notice the currents' directions. I find I am not alone at all, but am actually so close to it all that I couldn't see it. I find now that I'm moved through life, by life, as life.

I'm so thankful for this course, and look forward to what you have to say about living life.

My question is: Will there come a day when this too will drop away and I will have to start from scratch again?

A: Thank you for sharing your experience in your email. The authenticity of your experience is bright and clear. Of course we can never know what tomorrow may bring, what new vistas of insight or forms of understanding the Infinite may reveal to itself.

Your sharing of your deepening experience of aloneness is very instructive. What a grace that you had the trust not to panic but to allow the aloneness to unfold its deeper truth. What a lovely paradox that absolute aloneness reveals itself to be absolute intimacy with all things, an intimacy closer than unity or even oneness. Truly it cannot be put into words but must reveal itself from the very heart of aloneness.

Your instinct to trust and allow things to find their own way will continue to serve you very well. This living beyond self is never an end point, how could there be ends? Always the infinite reveals itself to itself without end, and yet there is no anticipation, no seeking, no becoming. Only revealing, unfolding, and awe.

Unresolved Issues of My Past

Q: I had an awakening about 2 years ago. Shortly thereafter, the life I knew changed drastically. The identities that once defined who I was started dropping away. These days, I find myself with very little motivation and feel scared and hopeless. Things in life that I once enjoyed (watching a movie or TV show) trigger me, bringing up unresolved issues of my past. I also find a deep longing to go back to my old life. But, there is an even deeper knowing that will never be able to happen now. There is immense fear and anxiety in life for me right now. There is a part of me that just wants to know all is okay.

A: Thank you for your email. Certain phases of spiritual unfolding can really open you to encountering any unresolved psychological issues that have been lurking in the unconscious. I encourage you to find a good therapist that can help you to work through these unresolved issues and allow you to move on beyond them. There is no going back, only forward. And it is all for the best.

Having a moment of transcending the ego, while freeing and uplifting, can also bring to light unresolved psychological issues that will be necessary to work through in order to live and embody the freedom of your true being.

Everything is ordained to help wake us up from the dreams of separation. Embrace the full measure of your life and even the painful episodes of life can serve your liberation.

What Has Happened to Me?

Q: Last month during a retreat, in an instant of dropping everything I ever thought I was or experienced since birth, my life flashed before my eyes and the “person” called “Joseph” was seen to be non-existent. Even a “thought” about the “person” Joseph could not be found. Memories of events remain without a sense of a personal I having done them. In a matter of just 2 to 3 seconds, it was seen that Joseph only existed as an extremely elaborate and complex interplay of thoughts based upon lifelong conditioning and belief systems. There is no “person.”

Today, when I ask myself “Who Am I?” words like Awareness, Presence, and Now describe my experience of Self. Otherwise, things are rather ordinary and I see what is now the character Joseph going about his daily life, and in fact, this character has similarities to the dissolved Joseph. In other words, the apparent person Joseph liked vanilla ice-cream and this character also likes vanilla ice-cream. However, I feel I have no ownership of either of them. I feel that the character is just spontaneously acting. What am I experiencing? I don’t know how to interpret what has happened to me.

A: Thank you for your email. Your experience is obviously a profound awakening from the Joseph identity. You have certainly experienced a dropping away of ego (whether or not it will be permanent cannot be known). I cannot say if it is the falling away of self given what you shared in your email, but rest assured time will tell. I wouldn’t get too hung up on how to classify your experience beyond this right now. Doing so can put your attention back in the mind which would be counterproductive.

Suffice it to say that you have experienced a profound shift and transformation of what you know yourself to be, and you will be best served by resting in/as aware presence, and getting accustomed to this new perspective.

The Challenge of Pain

Q: I have a lot of chronic pain. Because the pain is so great, I can do almost nothing and experience anxiety. Both my ego and self (most of the time) perceive this as a huge obstacle to my awakening. I really appreciated your response to the question in “The Message in Parkinson’s Disease,” and have a follow-up question. You wrote “Everything can serve in our awakening.” Can you please help me understand: How can physical pain and anxiety (the opposite of stillness) serve in our awakening?

A: Thank you for your email. Chronic physical pain can be very challenging indeed. While you cannot simply make pain go away through any state of realization, you can intimately look at the difference between pain and suffering. You can look at what the mind does with pain that causes psychological suffering, anxiety, and despair. Notice what kind of thoughts turn pain into suffering. Notice how any future oriented thoughts create fear and despair.

The challenge with pain is to not get lost in the mind’s resistance to it. It takes a quality of vigilance to choose to not energize painful thinking. In this sense, it is a profound spiritual practice that demands the highest order of attention.

Pain also calls upon the heart to open in loving surrender to what is. Deep surrender of resistance opens the heart so that love begins to embrace your deepest sense of being. To soften the heart in the face of pain is one of life’s greatest challenges and it stretches our capacity to love without qualification.

A Story from the Mountains

Q: For reasons I won’t explain, I cannot live in the world of people. I am a Park Ranger in the Cascade Mountains in Oregon. I need to be here among the evergreens, eagles, elk, and deer, with my Siberian huskies. Sometimes I feel very alone, almost abandoned. Yet, most of the time, it feels as if the eyes of god are looking down on her creation through my eyes.

This brings me to the topic of this email: My mother, bless her soul, endured many sorrows throughout her short life. An hour never goes by without something reminding me of her.

One thing I recall is her walking through our ramshackle house singing. In the toughest times she would sing, “Que sera, sera. Whatever will be, will be. The future is not ours to see. Que sera, sera.” My mother had many weaknesses, many inadequacies, and yet, it can truly be said, she always had a selfless love for her creator, her husband, and her children. Not necessarily in that order. At age 62, (the age I am now), her heart simply stopped beating. She was in her own kitchen making lasagna for a church function. She called out for our dad, who was washing windows outside. Before he could reach her, she was gone. The wonder was not that her heart stopped, it is how it had been beating for so long.

There is a yearling cougar passing through the park this fall. For the last couple months I have been searching day and night, hoping to see her. The night of the first session of the study course all was confusion. (You really rocked my world!) I was way too caught up in it to sleep, so I went for a run into the night. About 4 miles into the run, I realized, “Now what have I done?” Be careful what you ask for. Alone in the middle of the forest, way past sundown, no flashlight, no stars, no moon, it was just me and the imagined cougar. Talk about surrender! Talk about no self! Talk about no separation!

I was so afraid I could taste it in my mouth, and yet, it occurred to me: It was my will, my seeking, that had put me here; it is silence, the truth, the void, the unmanifest which resolves all things in the unborn.

Of course, the cougar was off occupied with more important things than this terrified human. And at some point, I realized what I was most afraid of was my own fear. I didn’t think to sing Que Sera at the time, but when I got back to my Winnebago the whole misadventure became just one more story told by infinity to infinity.

I thought I might share it with you.

I don’t drive on overpasses in Los Gatos or attend retreats with great teachers. And yet 10,000 moments each day, being no self, with no fear, is just enough!

A: Thanks for the email. I really enjoyed it. I too live in the mountains and have always regarded the Sierra Mountains as my church. Earlier this year a mountain lion killed a deer on our property just down the hill from our home. Life flows on into infinity. Enjoy your life amongst the beautiful wild things of life.

The Energy You Are Experiencing

Q: I have not heard of anyone having the experiences that I’ve been having:

It started with a feeling of energy running up from my right foot/ankle—running up the right side of my body, out through my right arm, and up in my head. Then I felt like I might pass out. This happened while I was driving, and I had it checked out in the emergency room. They could find nothing. It kept happening intermittently.

I was then at a workshop, and the teacher was doing a demo on “The felt sense of the Intention for Mutuality” and I had so much energy run up through both of my feet and into my body that I had to go and lie down. I felt like I was exploding with emotion and energy. I found my friend and sat with her. We looked into each other’s eyes, reality melted away, and I saw/experienced something indescribable.

I have had more of these experiences here and there. Now, at any given moment I can put my attention on some kind of internal Presence (I’m trying to find words) and I can feel/access/sense something that vibrates, yet is still.

It’s still most intensely in my legs, but if I let it flow, it reaches the rest of my body. It’s actually like it’s always there, but my attention is still often elsewhere. It’s like it has no point of reference and is so alive. It’s like I tap into one heart that beats in us all like a fountain of grace/love.

I can access the Presence as I write this. It's almost like it wants to be "seen" or trusted—words don't describe it. Maybe it is the self in me that is falling away that wants to trust this.

Do you recognize this? There's a part of me that wants to know if this is something that I foster. Is it real or am I imagining it?

When I access this in my life there is nothing that I fear. I seem to instinctively bring fears, beliefs, interpretations, opinions, judgments, etc. to this transformative compassion.

A: Thank you for your wonderful email. It is worthy of a long and involved commentary, for it contains much and varied spiritual experience. First, let me say that I would encourage you to put your attention on this Presence and allow it to grow and flourish—but only to the extent that you can remain somewhat grounded and not get overly disoriented.

The energy you are experiencing is a very common symptom of spiritual transformation, and need not be feared or resisted. But also do not indulge in it, just allow it to find its way and open the body up to its higher potential. To abide in silence and stillness is the greatest response to such openings. I wish you much peace and contentment.

Beyond All Distinctions

Q: I have listened to the Session 1 recording several times and wonder if you will please clarify something for me. When you talk about no-self, do you also mean no-Self? I have experienced a sort of shedding of (what felt like) weight that resulted in a sense of weightlessness. Still, with that shift, there was a sense of "something." But then that fell away, too. And then there was just nothing, no "thing."

I mean, there was something but it was beyond characterization or categorization. I wouldn't even call it a "thing" or an "it." There was no (sense of) weight or no weightlessness. No boundaries, no distinction of anything "other than," nothing to call or be called "self" or even "Self."

Am I mistaken in my understanding that this is what you mean when you say "no identity, no claims, no description?"

It is challenging to not long for that "experience" again—to want to live there, to be a pure expression of That. It's pretty clear the longing is an obstacle, but seeing that hasn't resulted in the falling away of the longing to permanently reveal what's behind it.

A: Thank you for your question. The falling away of self means both the falling away of self and Self, as in True Self. It is beyond both individual self and universal self. And yes, it is beyond all distinctions, categorizations, and descriptions.

One cannot open the door to no-self by any means, but one can stop holding the door closed. That is all that is required.

Ego and Personality

Q: Can you briefly explain the difference between ego and personality?

A: Thank you for your question. I have defined ego throughout this program so I will simply focus on personality. While ego can and does form around the personality and identify with it, personality in its pure sense is simply the unique way life manifests through a given individual. Even infants have very unique personalities from birth, well before the ego forms.

Of course as the ego develops it will add to and mold the personality, but there is a pure personality that you were born with which is not a creation of the ego. Pure personality is a beautiful and unique expression of the diversity of Life.

The Perfume of Self

Q: You mentioned that there can be a sense of self that is almost like a perfume. That is not the total falling away of self, right? Would the total falling away of self mean the falling away of that subtle sense that is like a perfume? Any clarification on this would be great.

A: Thank you for your question. Yes, even the sense of self falls away, and yet somehow, mysteriously, life can still orient itself within a human form. It can be quite a transition to find orientation beyond the senses, but it eventually happens as the transition into no-self matures.

Giving Up Love

Q: For much of my 70 years, I forgot why we're all here on earth; I got lost in not only being in the world but also of it. Yet, maybe not. Maybe it's just an expression of presence.

With help from you, Krishnamurti, Nisargadatta, Seng-Ts'an, Chodron, Dogan, etc., I surrendered to the mystery of not knowing, not grasping. Trees, people, animals, houses, etc. often have a glow about them and seem to shimmer. I used to buck having to work in the corporate world at my age. But a late bloomer throughout this life, I feel blessed that living from that infinite peaceful joy of silence is a way for spirit to manifest love in a world that may not otherwise feel that energy.

Question: I woke up in the middle of the night a couple of weeks ago hearing that the love I felt in my heart was my heaven. Was I willing to give it up for the Infinite? The answer was "Yes, whatever it takes." But truthfully I'm not all in yet. Would the No-Self Infinite really require giving up love?

A: Thank you for your email and your question. We either go to the Infinite completely empty handed or not at all. Everything, meaning everything is left behind as we let go into the Infinite. This includes the most sublime experiences of love and grace. We enter into the Infinite in absolute spiritual poverty as an act of trust and devotion. This ultimate act of devotion is the highest form of Grace.

Some of the Hardest Work I've Ever Done

Q: Shortly after an awakening to no-self about 2 ½ years ago, I was dropped squarely into the world as we know it—into being absolutely ordinary. It was delightful because I had previously

felt as if I were looking into life from the outside, as if I were separate from life. I thoroughly enjoyed (and still do) being part of life whether the times are up or down.

I was also, almost immediately, brought face to face with my dysfunctional/illusion-based habit patterns, and I knew I had to challenge them or I would feel absolutely miserable. I had developed these habits in childhood as strategies for survival. However, as an adult who wants to be free, they are obstacles. Confronting the assumptions on which they were based and refraining from engaging in those patterns was, literally, some of the hardest work I've ever done. Examples: not being an enabler, not trying to please everyone, not being quiet when I need to speak up.

Now I see that these self-preservation habits preserve and perpetuate the ego. Letting go of these habits feels freeing. It feels like an eroding of the ego-identities and a deepening awareness that these manufactured artifacts are not necessary or real.

Is this part of the falling away of the self?

A: Thank you for your email. All seeing through of illusion contributes to self falling away. Your intuition and willingness to meet these remaining points of conditioned momentum is both instructive and inspiring. Self-preservation takes many dysfunctional forms and habits that cause suffering to both oneself and others. Seeing through these patterns and being willing to let them go opens the channels through which Spirit flows into human expression and activity, free of being tainted by any self-reflective idea of attainment.

I wish you great peace.

The Loving Voice

Q: Can that which I am speak to Lilly?

For a very long time I have this totally non-judgmental voice which speaks to Lilly like: "It's OK," or "I love you."

A: So nice to hear from you. Yes, what you are is what sees and knows the ego. And it sees it with great love, for it knows that ultimately nothing is separate or other. Great Love pervades the whole universe, even amongst its great chaos. Non-otherness pervades all.

What Is the Soul?

Q: Is that which is aware of the self falling away totally impersonal?

Would someone who is abiding in the no-self reality view the "soul" as not a reality but a misconception?

A: From the no-self perspective the soul is not real or unreal, it is simply not fundamentally what one is, it is not eternal.

No-Self vs. Samadhi

Q: I am trying to correlate the information from the class to my Buddhist understanding of the

different meditative states. Is there any correlation to the experiences of the falling away of ego and the falling away of self, to the various samadhis (salvikalpa, nirvikalpa and sahaja) described in Buddhist/yogic texts?

A: Thank you for your question. The closest samadhi to no-self would be sahaja. Although, looking at this in the context of samadhi states can be very misleading because doing so leaves one with many false impressions about what the no-self state is as a living reality. It is like describing the taste of peanut butter by speaking in Latin. The language may sound profound but will never produce the taste in your mouth.

While I could talk about no-self in terms of samadhi states, I think that this would produce more misconceptions than using ordinary language in an everyday context. But then again, that's just my view. Suffice it to say that the falling away of self is not a meditative state. It's the falling away of meditative states. There is more no-self in a stone than in all of the meditative states put together.

Being Stalked by My Ego

Q: About 15 years ago, I had a shift in perception and in an instant found myself sitting in a quiet still place beyond my mind. I had found the freedom I had sought for more than 20 years as I discovered that my mind and personality were an illusion. I was not them. I was Nothing.

It took a while to acclimate myself mentally to working, being married and raising three children. Now so many years later, I still move through this “relatively real” life from this place beyond the mind. But, unfortunately, at the same time, the ego is chattering away on and off throughout the day. It is like living with someone else in my head.

The ego can be fearful and arrogant. I feel like I am being stalked by it. It wants me back! Nature, meditation, yoga, and like-minded people help keep it under control, but it is always lurking.

What is happening here?

A: Thank you for your email. I will keep it very simple because that is the best way to communicate what I want to say to you:

Meet the ego with absolute love, compassion and patience. Do not indulge it or resist its appearance. Hold it in a loving embrace and let it unravel itself in the stillness of the heart. Let it show you what needs to be healed, the hurt underneath the turmoil. Your presence is the healing agent, your love what allows it to dissolve.

No-Self and Doing Good

Q: I am fortunate to be in a situation that enables me to be at a “mature” stage of ego development—concerned about how our society functions and major issues for humanity. I am actively seeking to positively contribute my time and resources to the same.

While I have had some success with these altruistic efforts, I have not had impact on a large scale. I (and my ego) do believe that I have the abilities and resources to make a difference. But, unlike

during my earlier ego-centered life when desire for money, things, image, respect, etc. was strong, the ego-drive now does not seem to be enough to make me as motivated as I need to be. But in my inquiry on a future egoless existence, the ego's defense is that I will need the ego rewards to motivate me to do good.

What can you tell me about the impact of evolution to no-ego and no-self states on individual's effectiveness doing good? Perhaps you have some examples. I heard you say this type of concern is in itself an egoic idea. But hearing about others' experiences may help to get this defense to fall away.

A: Thank you for your email. Having a well functioning ego is quite useful and beneficial in life. The higher forms of ego are quite altruistic and loving. However, one eventually evolves beyond even the higher forms of ego and its good motivations—and when doing so you will feel the draining away of egoic personal will and motivation. This readies you for the falling away of ego and the awakening to what you are beyond ego.

Remember that self is a higher state than ego and can function from a higher form of love, Divine Love. So one should not be concerned with moving beyond even the higher ego state. Compared to ego, self has almost unimaginable capabilities, because it is rooted in infinite Love and Power. Of course, the power and love that self has access to can be quite tempting and even dangerous when misused. That is a subject for another time. But know that self is the realm of direct contact with, and ultimately identity as, divinity—along with truly egoless and loving motivations.

The falling away of self is something else altogether. It is not “better” or “more loving” or more anything other than more true. It is ultimate Reality, and ultimate Truth. That's why I say that if you want all the good stuff spirituality has to offer, go for Self Realization. But we are all destined for the state of no-self, for it is where we all came from and where we will all return to.

I never try to sell anyone on the state of no-self because it cannot be sold. Nor should it be. When it is our time we will simply be inclined towards it, whether we want it or not. We will finally let go without reservation, and for no self-serving reasons, into the Infinite Void. It will be a death more real than physical death, and resurrection into a new life, True Life. And when it is all said and done we will wonder why we ever avoided it. We will not have attained anything, nor achieved a better status on earth or in Heaven. But we will know the only thing worth knowing, and see from the eyes that created God.

And oh yes, we will lose the ability to not be in love with everything and everyone. None-
otherness will be all that we know.

Until Boredom Gives Way

Q: Could you say that the witness disappearing is the dissolution of the self? All that is left is just “what is.” There is no other, no God, no witness. So far (3 weeks) it is a bit boring. There is no vast, divine stillness to enjoy and life is just “what is” and no more. Will the character of “all that is” change?

A: Thank you for your question. My advice is to completely rest in the “what is-ness” of What Is. By completely I mean completely. Who is it that is bored? I do not mean to ask this question in a cliché or flippant way, but in a deep and serious way.

The no-self state is not boring, except to some remnant of self that is reflecting upon it, or what it thinks is the no-self state.

Just a Little Deeper. Look a Little Closer. Until Boredom Gives Way to . . .

That’s up to you to find.

Down-and-In vs. Falling Away

Q: I was at your Jesus retreat last March and found it really transformative. You made the point that the movement of spirit in our time is down-and-in (as exemplified by Jesus’ life) as opposed to up-and-out (which was Buddha’s path.) For me, this was transformative because I realized that I had been thinking that the point of the spiritual path had to do with minimizing or getting rid of one’s humanity.

Now I have instead been embracing my humanity and looking into how consciousness wants to express itself through me, my body, and my life. Interestingly, this change of focus has made my connection with spirit much, much stronger and more present in my life (whether I’m sitting or not).

Could you explain how the movement of spirit “down and in” connects with the falling away of the self?

A: Thank you for your email. I am happy to hear that the “down and in” movement of spirit is very alive for you right now. This is itself a wonderful grace. Strictly speaking, the falling away of self is neither the transcendent nor the immanent movement of spirit. Both of these transformative spiritual experiences are movements within self-consciousness and show the extraordinarily dynamic and creative potential of self-consciousness. They are both transformations in the subject, the self; whereas no-self is the falling away of self.

One of the clues to understanding (intellectually) the no-self perspective is that it is not an experience of any kind, nor is it a realization. Although one can have the realization of no-self, the realization is not the same as the no-self state; it is more like realizing that the no-self state exists (which can be quite a shock) than having self completely fall away. Realizations can come and go, the falling away of self is as permanent as death and as real as Life.

As an example: in the Jesus story the birth of Christ symbolizes the descent of spirit, the death on the cross symbolizes the sacrificial death of self, and resurrection symbolizes the living state of no-self. The resurrected state is the no-self state. One can glimpse, taste, and experience the resurrected state before self falls, but one can only be in the resurrected state when self has died, or fallen away. It is important to understand that the death of self is a sacrificial act of love. That’s how one lets go—not out of self interest or any form of spiritual ambition, but as an act of selfless (literally) love. One sacrifices self in all its forms as an act of love, which is itself a grace, and in so doing becomes grace itself.

Yet we must always remember that as long as we are living and breathing we will (also) be manifest as simple ordinary human beings.

As the poet Walt Whitman said, “Do I contradict myself? Very well then, I contradict myself. I am vast; I contain multitudes.”

Flow Out from Yourself Completely

Q: 1. My question is: How does one relinquish the Seer who has seen? How does one come to surrender the Knower who now knows the unknown?

I have come to pinpoint the experience of egoic transcendence that occurred in my life 3 years ago. After being egoically destroyed limb by limb, aversion by aversion, concept by concept in an intuitive inward process—the effortlessness, the flow as you say, the miracle that life just is in all its perfection was revealed. It lasted 7 days.

Through profound relentless seeking, for I knew no other way, the “falling away of ego” happened 1 year later.

This falling or flying or dying away of egoic consciousness, abided for 6 months. Within the first few days of this 6-month period, a very brief taste of “transcendence of Self” was revealed as well.

I seem to be one of those who are wired in such a way that the Bliss and the innate Beauty or Perfection behind all life was nearly unbearable to my Being. My body recalibrated and I went through an intense yet brief illness that seemed very serious to doctors yet was experienced as pure joy to me. I was shown the entire spectrum of egoic consciousness and overnight I was thrust into the spiritual limelight, healing and revealing, pointing the way to liberation for others. It was not wanted or unwanted, it’s just what awakening seems to have done to me. Discernment became spontaneous and naturally occurring, guided by what I can only call The Loving Truth or compassionate wisdom.

The maturing of this nondualistic perception over the last year is emerging and settling, even after thrashing about (what I call the rally of the ego) on several occasions since.

Reidentification of the old roles I played in my life attempted to cling again. This was deeply painful due to the liberation I had come to know, and the contraction in contrast was devastating. In all that appears to happen to me or around me, there is a witness with an orientation towards emptiness or centeredness that abides, calmly, usually. This witness however, can’t stop commenting on its own Knowing.

2. There is a subtle sense of self that is afraid to die from the knowing that it has died.

In each experience of egoic liberation, both transcendence and falling away, there was a death that took place. I faced that intense fear, and here I stand quietly smiling.

I know now what cannot be unknown. It’s beautiful and beneficial and the byproducts of this liberation are of no importance to me, used only for the benefit of “others” as Infinity so chooses.

3. I reside, yet still seek to abide fully, in the questionless, choiceless state that has changed m.e. (manifested enlightenment) forever. I need help in the surrender of this remaining self that

continuously comments on itself, to keep its place as perceiver of the all.

What I'm asking of you is about when I touch the edge, seemingly, of the death beyond all self-perception, the final outer realm of the spectrum. When I come up against this moment, I pull back. It feels as if my entire being and world will separate and shatter its own self into a trillion billion pieces and nothing, nothing recognizable to any perception or witness at all will remain. Can awareness, trust, and surrender continue to help me at this point? Can you give me courage or coaching as to what to do when this rare and amazing opportunity arises within me again and how to abide in egoic liberation in the mean time?

A: Thank you for your email and for the honesty of your heart. What allows this ultimate letting go, this unreserved surrender? Of course there can be no formula, no way to let go. I am sitting here in my living room late at night writing this response to you. You are here with me as I am there with you, and I can feel that in the deepest place within you is the complete willingness to let go completely; it has already let go from before the beginning of time. Yet, here you are wondering what can bring about this letting go. Such is the final paradox.

You cannot do it because it has already been done, but you must still find this letting go within yourself, allow it to bloom and flower completely.

What a divine paradox, to find a letting go that has let go from before the beginning of time. We do not do the letting go as much as we embrace it, give everything without reserve to it. It is a matter of love, is it not? And the courage to die for what we love, to give everything without holding back, without reserve. Without expecting anything in return, not even a better life or a better experience.

Our deepest desire is for Truth or God, is it not? And not just for how God can be experienced by self, but how God is experienced by God—something neither ego nor self can ever know. The Infinity of the Infinite will always be experienced as annihilation to self when self comes to its own boundary and imagines what is beyond it.

Love Truth, Love the Infinite, Love God, with all your heart. Do not love your experiences of Truth, but rather love Truth as it is within itself. Take leave of yourself, flow out from yourself completely in all things. We all must die into Life out of love, and thus embrace life lived beyond all self. We must become what we already are, and let go into what has never held on.

How do you breathe? You just breathe.

How do you embrace this letting go? You just embrace it.

Listening and Following

Q: You described no-self as the experience of the self no longer looking back at itself—it stops reflecting about what it is experiencing. If I understand you, it appears to be arising as a natural result of deep listening and a willingness to follow. It seems that as I nurture the listening and following it is becoming less compelling to check back in on how the personal self feels about any of it because an innate, natural trust is there. I am following a higher frequency and the motivation is beyond the personal. Is this a pathway to the no-self or is this a prior stage of the

discovery? For now, when I am able to be more fully this awareness of listening and following, I also notice that I am usually still aware of my personality as being nearer the surface, helping me to express whatever needs to be expressed and often fumbling with words.

When I am less engaged with the listening and following, the struggle returns and that is my cue to return to the silence, to ground and re-establish the listening.

A: Thank you for your email. I love the way that you are following spirit with great trust, and not looking back to see how your self feels about it. To listen and follow with no reference to self is a very direct approach to spirituality. As I often say, “keep it simple.”

Endless Downward Fall

Q: About 14 months ago, I jumped off a cliff into truth. At first there was a sense of wonder, but once the bliss wore out, I realized that I had jumped into a bottomless pit.

Resistance to the free-fall arises, but it feels rather confused and useless. I mean really—how can one un-know what one has seen?

So it is a process of watching the resistance work through its feeble attempts to stop it all as chunks of beliefs, ideas, and “truths” wear away on the endless downward fall.

Old held emotions rise up to be witnessed and felt so they, too, can be released.

Understanding that choice was left back on the top of the ledge, makes the fall much smoother.

Your and Mukti’s teachings have resonated deeply with me and I want to thank the both of you for your sharing of them.

Hope to meet you on the way down.

A: Thank you for your email. Enjoy the fall. And remember, nothing is really happening. Except of course, whatever is. As we say in Zen, “on a withered branch, a flower blooms.”

What Exactly Is the Me?

Q: Things seemed to be going according to plan as I did the prescribed exercise from Week 1 of the course. I stopped to notice thoughts and then asked, “Is there a self in these thoughts or not?” There did not seem to be a self present in the thoughts. Then, I experienced a thought charged with attraction and interest toward another human being and when I asked “Is there a self here?” I had the feeling in my heart in that moment that there was a self there. What do you think about that experience of believing while doing the exercise that there might be a self? Is it more common to believe in a self when personal attraction is in the mix?

A: Thank you for your question. While there may be a sense of a “me” in your thoughts or feelings, the key is to be very precise in identifying exactly what this “me” is. Although you may feel that there is a me, what exactly is the me? There are “me” thoughts but is there actually a me that those thoughts refer to? One’s “me” thoughts and feelings are very tricky because we generally refer to our thoughts and/or feelings to tell us what is true. But when we look very

closely and precisely we come to see that “me” thoughts only refer to other “me” thoughts, not to an actual abiding “me.” When we get very precise in our observation we cannot ever find a me within our “me” thoughts and feelings, just a sense of me.

And the deeper question is, “Who is the me that notices me?” There cannot be two me’s, and perhaps not even one. Perhaps you are not a me at all. Perhaps you are something else altogether.

Body-Centered Awareness

Q: I’ve felt only partially successful doing that portion of the Week 1 exercise that involves noticing that I can’t seem to locate my self as a separate entity.

I do notice how I can feel my hand or foot but can’t feel a separate self in the same way. I can even notice that the “I” thought/feeling is being witnessed by something else—no telling what that is—so that seems about right, as I understand it?

I think part of what’s confusing me is that, even when I’m noticing more spaciousness and alertness, there is still a general sense that awareness is centered in my body. In other words, wherever I go, there I am—with my body-mind still at the geographic center of “my” awareness.

Intellectually I understand that’s a limited view, but the persistent visceral sense that my body and mind are constantly at the center of my awareness seems to trump the fact that I can’t locate a self as a separate entity.

A: Thank you for your question. Feel into that awareness which notices the body-centered awareness. The key here is to be absolutely still when doing this inquiry. You are sensing into a very subtle form of awareness. Just say to yourself “I” and then feel into the field of awareness that the I arises within. Take it slow, be patient, and don’t think about it too much. Just dwell in the I sense.

The Body Is a Doorway

Q: When asking, “Where is the me?” the body presented itself. It was not just the body—not just the skin envelope but rather this that could not be separated from the environment. Going deeper inside, beyond concepts, I felt contractions throughout the physical body. It was as if the tensions themselves were constituting a me by attempting to separate from the vastness of life. Going deeper into these tight sensations, I ask, “Where is the me in this?” The contractions opened up dissolving any hint of separate identity, and all that was left was spacious silence. Clearly the body is not just the body but rather the doorway to presence.

A: Thank you for your email. Your inquiry into the me using the body as your guide is beautiful and well put. I hope that others will benefit by reading it. The body is indeed a wonderful doorway to presence.

Fear Is Not a Requirement

Q: I have experienced the falling away of ego but never experienced that feeling of fear that

most people experience. Does that mean maybe I really haven't experienced the falling away? I know what it is to quiet my mind and fall into emptiness. What does it mean that the fear doesn't come? Sometimes I wonder if I just have an understanding conceptually and not experientially—where am I on that spectrum? Or does it even matter?

A: Thank you for your question. Fear is not a requirement of any form of awakening. I wouldn't be concerned with not having experienced fear when transcending the ego. Be happy for your lack of fear.

It is not so important to place yourself on the spectrum of awakening. Best to be true to where you are and to the intuitive promptings of the Divine.

Waking Up from the Collective Dream

Q: I've become accustomed to experiencing the dissolving of ego as the simultaneous disappearance of a combination of emotion and belief that has something to do with 1) something I've experienced in my own life, 2) something that has happened in my ancestry, or 3) something mysterious that still seems to be personally related to me. Lately I've been experiencing an unhooking from belief/emotion combinations that don't seem to be created by "me" alone. They seem to be culturally held assumptions that I bought into for whatever reason. My unhooking from these assumptions doesn't feel like it makes them disappear from existence (like I'm used to), but it does free me from living enclosed by them.

When I've heard you talk about ego and no-self, I've heard you speak from the perspective of an individual's experience. This doesn't seem to relate to what I'm asking about. Are these culturally-held assumptions ego? How do they relate to no-self?

A: Thank you for your email. There certainly is a cultural or collective ego. There is the personal dream state and the collective dream state. So, one is not just waking up from the personal dream but the collective dream as well. These assumed cultural beliefs form the consensus reality that we live in and navigate day to day. This is why deep awakening requires us to wake up not only from the content of one's personal consciousness but from the totality of human consciousness as well. When self finally falls away altogether, one's consciousness empties itself of this personal and collective content. One no longer views life through the filter of the known, but directly as the unknown.

What's left of the conditioning then, is the conditioning of Life, the nonconceptual imprinting of however Life manifests itself as you. There is no particular way that no-self looks or appears. It takes as many diverse forms as there are grains of sand on all the beaches on earth. Any image of holiness or specialness does not apply, nor does any other of image of how this state will appear.

The Falling Away of the Divine State

Q: I can go in and out of what you call no-self (what I call the Emptiness Level) at will. But I find that there is no motivation there—no reason to do anything as everything is the same. I find that I have to "drop back" to what I call Radiance (Love flowing through this me-thing) in

order to have any motivation/will to function in the world. This is how I've come to integrate the Emptiness with the Fullness (Unity with Separation paradox), but I'm wondering if this is normal or if maybe I'm missing something?

A: Thank you for your email and for the book you sent some time back. The book was wonderful. Emptiness as you described in your email is a perfect example of the non-ego state. The non-ego state has two sides to it. One is emptiness as you described it, no ego drive or motivation or anxiety because you are beyond the ego there. The flip side of the non-ego state is the Radiance of boundless Love. This emptiness and fullness comprises the non-ego state. It is beautiful, transformational, loving and freeing. It is quite profound in its own right. And it is desirable. By that I mean it is what spiritual seekers want to experience and live.

As I have explained in some of my other posts here, the non-ego state sounds a lot like the no-self state when it is described. One of the differences, though, is that in the non-ego state you can go back and forth between the emptiness and full (or boundlessly loving) aspects of the non-ego state—while in the no-self state there are absolutely no empty or full states to go back and forth between. In fact, it is the no-ego state (and its empty and full aspects) that falls away with the falling away of self. The falling away of self is the falling away of the non-ego, or divine state of being.

It probably sounds pretty bad to have the divine state fall away, and it can be experienced as quite a profound loss. But such a loss is necessary in order for self to fall away and what is beyond self to reveal itself. The problem with the word “self” is that it is often associated with ego, which it is not. Self as I am using the term is not the ego at all. Self is what enables you to experience the ego state, and the non-ego state alike—as well as divinity, inwardness, outwardness, separation, and unity. All of these experiences happen within, to, and because of self. Self can go from being experienced as profound separation to being experienced as the universal “I am.” It can experience itself as either a separate ego or as God. So self is quite an amazing function.

But self does have its limits and it does come to an end. What comes after self is what I am attempting to clarify through this course. Not in order to set up something more to chase, but because more people will be going through this transition in the near future. No-self is not simply an insight after all, and my hope is that this course will be a helpful companion along the way.

Adapting to a New Way of Being

Q: There have been experiences of no-self—some momentary, some lasting a week or more. With each occurrence there follows increasingly less interest in being involved in the worldly drama, less outward ambition, and a strong inward pull to the silence. Added to a personality that was already strongly introverted, a sort of inertia sets in.

This is problematic regarding work and the practicalities of physical life. How can one function well and responsibly in the physical realm while simultaneously giving up into the silence? One's attention is irresistibly pulled inward.

A: Thank you for your question. There is a phase where we transition from a “personal”

viewpoint—with all its personal will, motivations, and driving energy—to a way of being moved by the wholeness of Life which lacks the personal will, personal motivations, and personal energy. This is a massive transition, and part of this transition involves going through a plateau phase where the personal viewpoint is mostly dead and the wholeness of Life has not yet started to function through/as you in an obvious way.

During this plateau phase it can be very challenging to engage in life in the ways that are necessary. However, it is important to do the things that are necessary even though there is no personal energy or motivation to draw upon. As strange as this may sound, you function from a place of no energy and no drive. You simply do what you truly need to do without drawing upon any inner source of will or motivation. During this phase you are literally being weaned off of all forms of self-consciousness and the various forms of motivation and energy that self sustains itself with.

The danger is that some people become stuck in this no-man's-land. They keep reaching back for something that is no longer there, and never learn to function from a place beyond self. They have unknowingly grasped onto and become stuck in the limbo state between self hollowed-out and self fallen-away. Either that happens, or what is left of self can hide away in a false rejection of society and life as a subtle means of sustaining itself.

While it is important to give yourself time to be still and silent (and unproductive) during this phase, it is also important not to become stuck in a non-functional state. The key is to stop looking at what is no longer there, which is a subtle form of self-consciousness, and experience Life from Life's point of view, which is neither an "inner" experience nor an outer expression, but a non-relative knowing of Eternity here and now. This is of course, completely nonconceptual, nongraspable, and nonunderstandable until it has taken place—and self in all its subtle manifestations has fallen away

Then there is an adaptation to a new way of being, and life goes on with great simplicity and beauty, and is lived by a totality that the mind can never know. While this may not sound compelling to the ego, it is quite literally, Eternity experiencing itself—timelessly.

And still, one is as unimpressive as they ever were.

Sitting here at home in a faded T-shirt,
typing words into an empty screen
in a world where nothing ever happened.
Strange how we keep meeting like this.
And still such joy,
Such joy.

Week 3 - Q&A

The Suchness Beyond All Words

Q: The first week's practice confirmed through my own observations: self-obsession (ego) and self-reflection (self) are not inherent in the arising of thoughts and feelings and perceptions. This is an understanding more than a realization.

The second week's practice, noticing and then stepping back from the interpreter and evaluator, is amazing! After a couple of days of holding this practice in mind and heart, everything changed. Walking in the woods, a grey-green piece of lichen lying on the leaves caught my eye. As I bent to pick it up, all words (and even the impulse and capacity for words) were blown away, and I began crying. Not sorrow, but not exactly joy, either (that word falls short). In the absence of self-talk, my whole body seemed to open up. Walking on, it was as if I could see and smell each leaf. Words that came later (openness, beauty, love, joy) seem applicable, but they don't encompass the actual moment (much less define it). Is this what you mean when you speak of "suchness?"

A: Thank you for sharing your experience in this wonderful email. The stepping back from the interpreter and evaluator that the week 2 exercise suggested can open up an entirely different view of life, as your email described. The key, as always, is to actually do the exercise rather than simply think about it.

What you have described is the beginning of experiencing "suchness"—although I would remind you that your direct experience is always more important than classifying it. But I fully understand your curiosity. I encourage you to continue to abide in the suchness of all forms of life, including your own self.

Self and the Godhead

Q: I've been following your teachings for about 12 years now and want to take this opportunity to let you know how deeply I value your teachings. Thank you for this immensely clarifying course and your wonderful talk last week.

The distinctions you made between the ego, self, and no-self were profoundly illuminating, in particular your clarification about the Self. They've provided me with a very helpful map for interpreting and locating my own experiences of going beyond ego into the expansiveness, stillness, and radiance of Self. They have also helped me understand the place of teachings that focus more on the dimension of Self.

You referred to the Self as consciousness and how the Self can identify with ego. I'm curious to know whether the Self's experiences of radiance, love, bliss, etc., are a higher-level form of identification and if so, whether that is the Self identifying with the Godhead.

A: Thank you for your email. I am going to quote your question here because the answer is expressed in the question itself. You wrote, "You referred to the Self as consciousness and how

the Self can identify with ego. I'm curious to know whether the Self's experiences of radiance, love, bliss etc., are a higher-level form of identification and if so, whether that is the Self identifying with the Godhead."

Yes, Elaine, that is exactly what they are. Another way of saying it is that it is Self experiencing the Godhead through the medium of Self. This in no way diminishes these experiences, it only clarifies that there is a great difference between Self's experience of the Godhead and the Godhead's experience of itself. The latter is what the falling away of self makes possible.

A True Story of Falling Away

Q: It has been so very reassuring to hear you speak! This isn't really a question you need to answer, I just wanted to express my gratitude and take the opportunity to share.

Much of this past year was spent in the great ecstatic (you called it "exalted" I think) self that is the great "All." And that was indeed a beautiful experience! Yet all the time I was enjoying this state, there was a tiny voice crying "False! False!" Not knowing what to do with that, I sat back and waited for it to show me. It showed me during meditation in the summer by burning up this transparent filmy coating of false-self-ness that covered absolutely everything.

Since then, it's been downright confusing—to say the least! Part of this has been getting comfortable with maneuvering through the world with absolutely no reference point of orientation whatsoever. As the ecstasy phases out and the incredibly simple existence of consciousness phases in, I've been confused and almost dumbfounded by how irrelevant I've been finding that ecstatic state now, and how utterly indifferent consciousness is towards it. The movement of life is so much more gentle and subtle, and the little voice crying "False!" fades away just as the ecstatic energy does. There's less and less overlap of the two "systems" and more and more just existing so simply. In fact, this feels like coming closest to truth yet. (Doesn't it always though?) Though it's all been confusing, it really does feel lovely!

I really was experiencing this solely in trust, and I had no decent reference for what was going on until your talk last night. Thank you for this gift of connecting those of us going through this! It truly is so comforting to hear someone talking about it! I doubt I would have found words for it for months otherwise!

A: Thank you for your email. Although you have no question for me to respond to I am posting your email because it may be instructive for others who are, or will be, going through something similar. So little comprehensible material is available on the falling away of self. The more true examples of it the better.

Christian Text on No-Self

Q: Fragment from a 14th century text:

"Yea, Christ's human nature was so utterly bereft of Self, and apart from all creatures, as no man's ever was, and was nothing else but 'a house and habitation of God.' Neither of that in Him which belonged to God, nor of that which was a living human nature and a habitation of

God, did He, as man, claim anything for His own. His human nature did not even take unto itself the Godhead, whose dwelling it was, nor anything that this same Godhead willed, or did or left undone in Him, nor yet anything of all that His human nature did or suffered; but in Christ's human nature there was no claiming of anything, nor seeking nor desire, saving that what was due might be rendered to the Godhead, and He did not call this very desire His own.

Of this matter no more can be said, or written here, for it is unspeakable, and was never yet and never will be fully uttered; for it can neither be spoken nor written but by Him who is and knows its ground; that is, God Himself, who can do all things well.”

~ Theologia Germanica, Chapter XV

A: Thank you for the email. I would say that this ancient Christian text explains what no self is all about as clearly as it can be stated. Beautiful. Thank you for sending it.

The Spell of Conditioned Illusion

Q: When I go out of thought, walking around outside I have some wordless discoveries like the incredible beauty of the spaces around me. But when I see that (“this is so beautiful, but so weird”), my sense of a fixed reality starts to fray and with it up comes a background fear that I will die and spend eternity alone without all the familiar reality (like the lovely space I was experiencing) that is so comforting.

It's destabilizing. It's frightening to ego self-identification that even the apparently physical reality of countryside, of fields and mountains and mists and horses grazing, is not graspable or even understandable. The strong tendency is to stay with what's known and familiar.

There was then the related realization that there is a momentum to conditioning. It is much like an addiction to the attraction of identification that attaches to the whole structure of thinking and roles and work, etc. How to break it? That's the question.

The default position is to return to the “thinking ‘I am this and that’ reality” where the no-self becomes just another momentary experience against a background of various self-definitions.

A: Thank you for your email. We break free from the bonds of conditioned illusion when we no longer value them. It really is ultimately that simple. The moment you see the conditioned known, and know that it is only sorrow and nothing else, and do not desire the cause of sorrow (as most do), then there is nothing to confine you. Indeed, the only thing that ever confines us in the endless cycle of sorrow is our allegiance to it. We can drop it all at once (because it is after all created entirely in our own minds) but only when the unknown is our true and only desire without conditions or reservations.

Fighting ones conditioned illusions is like trying to remove the waves in order to find the ocean. Unreservedly commit to Truth, and ask for nothing in return, and the spell of conditioned illusion will be broken.

Ten thousand thoughts are not as good as one intelligent action.

The Indispensable Element

Q: Is it all nothing more than having the intent to know truth and being devoted to that until my last breath?

A: To put it quite simply, yes. To intend toward and love Truth, in all its forms, both ultimate and relative, in every aspect of the human experience, is the indispensable element in coming to the realization of divine knowledge and its expression in time and space. Love Truth always, in every situation, in every form, never denying the indistinct ground of your being.

Intuitive Wisdom vs. Interpretation

Q: I am experiencing some resistance to the homework assignment for week 2 and I am wondering if you could help me decipher intuitive insights from our homework on withholding meaning in our experiences? I understand that my mind attempts to concretize my body's intuitive experiences and I am trying to learn how to trust and follow my intuition without acting from my mind's interpretation. However, if "a feeling is just a feeling" and "a thought is just a thought," then I don't know what to do with my body's physical sensations and knowings. Any tips?

A: Thank you for your question. There are mental overlays of experience and there is direct experience. To experience things directly is not simply an end in itself but the ground from which a new form of intuitive wisdom can arise. Such intuitive wisdom is not an overlay but a direct upwelling of clarity and understanding that may have its imprint in the mind but does not arise from the mind.

Follow these threads of insight (but never hold onto them) as they lead you deeper into the truth of your being. Follow them to the very edge of the unknown, where the divine ground reveals itself in the darkness of radiant silence.

The Silent Thread of Knowing

Q: Something within my human experience feels that it "knows" its source. Then again, there is a voice that says "You cannot know that; you have not worked hard enough!"

Is it possible to be aware and witness this human overlay, and at the same time sense and exist as the infinite? If so, do the human overlay and responses ultimately fall away completely? I don't want to continually feel like an imposter, which I have felt ever since I can remember.

A: Thank you for your question. There is always some form of "knowing" of our deepest nature, whether it be a whisper or a yell. And it is that silent and quiet knowing that is the thread along which we return to what we most intimately are. Nothing in our human experience can ever extinguish that light, or is proof that it does not exist. Trust in your most intimate knowing, give it your full heart and attention until it blooms into the fullness of living experience.

The Fierce Grace of Grief

Q: After the news of my son taking his own life this summer, I experienced naturally intense pain yet did not suffer. It was as if I was held in the vastness of life with all its joys and sorrows and experienced a sweetness. However, 4 months later there seems to be more suffering and anxiety seeping in. There seems to be less energy available to stay in this vastness because the grief seems to want to have its way. Could you speak to staying present when pain is so great?

A: My heart goes out to you for the loss of your dear son. Such a profound transition stretches the capacity of the heart to embrace the full measure of such an experience. What a blessing that you were held in such vastness for four months after the loss of your son. You are now ready for the purifying pain of grief to release itself from the depths of your heart.

To stay present for the fierce grace of grief you must open your heart to the fullness of its energy and power without getting lost in the mind's imagination. This necessitates an open-hearted vigilance and a willingness to meet the sorrow of loss as it moves through your body and releases itself. Now is not the time to remain distant from this grief but to open your heart to its coming and going throughout the day—like weather systems moving through the sky.

To stay present to grief means to stay present to the bodily experience of it rather than being consumed by the thoughts and images that the mind produces to move attention away from direct experience. But the thoughts are always more painful than the direct experience of grief and impede its natural flow and release.

The more open your heart is to the fierce grace of grief releasing itself, the more you will experience the underlying vastness of your being to be ever-present, and holding you in its loving embrace.

The Grip in the Gut

Q: Could you perhaps talk about no-self on the level of the gut? This is something I cannot get clear, and it keeps attracting my attention.

Here's my perspective:

The head: During one of your retreats a sort of “energetic lightning bolt” struck me. The “I-movement” (which I was unaware of until that moment) stopped right in the center of my brain, and the I was seen to be empty, nothing more than an assumption. Many strong side-effects followed, and identification just does not seem appropriate anymore. To say that “I am awareness” now seems as untrue as to say that “I am a man.”

The heart: Last summer during an unusually deep meditation, something opened in my heart area after months of feeling somewhat superficial. Since then an “energy/awareness/presence” quite often moves through my system, especially when I am at work with others (as an energy-therapist). This Presence seems to want to reach out towards the other, as if it wants to be shared. In the experienced Silence, Gratitude, and Compassion there is no room for egoic activity or I-sense.

The belly-area is different: It often feels quite contracted and painful, to an extent that I sometimes cannot function properly. Some years ago during a retreat this contraction was seen to be God, and the movement stopped. And then it started again, on and off. Experientially, it seems to have the power to “un-enlighten” me quite effectively.

Any pointer would be greatly appreciated.

A: Thank you for your question. At the level of the physical gut lies the most rudimentary sense of separate self. It is not conceptual as in self-image, nor is it emotionally based. It is experienced as an existential grasping in the gut. It is self—defending itself against death as well as life. It is an energetic, existential, “No.” This grip in the gut is how self, which at this level is only a grip, instinctually contracts away from the selfless void of infinity.

This grip, or self, will do nearly anything to avoid the void—including experiencing itself as isolated or separate, or conversely, being unified with God, being the universal I AM, etc. But because self cannot ultimately be separate from the absolute Truth, it contains within it an unreserved yearning for Truth which transcends the survival instinct as well as the pleasure principle, which only wants to feel better (preferably much, much better).

Accessing this unreserved yearning for Truth is what life helps to bring about. Finally, through much life experience, we realize that nothing but Truth will satisfy this yearning. When this realization comes to maturity within us, the letting go of self happens by grace. And a new life begins.

Working with the Energies of Awakening

Q: The context of my question is regarding energy, which is something that you have touched briefly on in the course. Having said that, paradoxically, in my experience, this energy is also everything that you speak about. It breathes this body, it quiets the thinking mind, it permeates right through the old, physiologically stuck, emotional energy. It even breathes this breathing. Everything, inside and out—even skin becomes no barrier.

I experienced this first during a 10-day meditation retreat some years ago as a physical pulsing of the entire body when sitting. It actually physically moved the body in little pulses completely unintentionally, seemingly in all directions at the same time. This lasted for two years, with all kinds of investigation and watching it, before I finally stopped seeing it as separate and spent another period just accepting it. Only then did the pulsing finally ease as it seemed to free up what I perceived as ever subtler energetic blockages in the body.

As it is experienced since, often “I” (just using the pronoun here) perceive it as spirit, life-force moving through. I know to be kind and gentle with whatever blockage in the body (ever subtler) might be whispering for release and allow a further deepening. Giving it attention demands that all egoic concepts, ideas, and posturing about it not be entertained for an instant. Then the experience almost always unfolds into a sense of great stillness and silence of everything—all experience within and without, even thinking by this ever busy mind, even and often also with the wind, trees, and ocean, intensifying the sense of this energy.

My question is whether this sense of working with and experiencing this as energy is just another

means by which to be stuck in a concept or separateness that may not yet be seen through—or is resting in this just simply okay?

I have intentionally not used the word “self” here as am not sure of how to relate this to self-transcendent moments or falling away of self.

A: Thank you for your email. All awakenings have an energetic component. For some it is rather subtle, for others it is quite overwhelming; for most it is something in between. Your description of how you worked with this energy over time is both beautiful and instructive. It can be a fine balance between not resisting the energy and not getting obsessed with it either.

On a more general note: for some people, given one’s genetic and psychological makeup, it can be very important not to entertain the wide spectrum of thoughts, visions, and imaginings that this energy can induce when it flows into the mind. Getting too mentally involved with it can be very destabilizing and even dangerous if gone unchecked. It is always best to rest attention in the silence beyond all of the mind’s creations.

However, patiently allowing this energy to unwind both mental and physical blocks can be quite liberating, and it opens the channels for spirit to flow and express itself with greater and greater clarity, wisdom, and love.

In the end, we return by grace to the infinite ground beyond all distinction. That ground is the energy-less, space-less, time-less, absolute truth.

Allowing a Deeper Understanding

Q: My question is about some comments you made in Session 2 in the context of the supplemental exercise. In the session you suggested to a caller that in looking and listening closely, in seeing what needs to be seen, an egoic stickiness can release. I have experienced this myself, many times. In the supplemental exercise you suggested that we do not make interpretations or try to create meaning of such egoic stickiness or whatever life is putting in front of us.

At first these comments seemed contradictory. How do we open the door to see clearly without asking “What is going on here?” Also, behind such an inquiry seems to be a desire to know, to create meaning.

As I sat with this for a while, the question seemed to resolve itself! There seems to be a distinct difference between overlaying meaning and allowing it to naturally arise. In behavioral terms, there seems to be a difference between thinking and actively going after a meaning or explanation, versus being aware that something is there to be seen, bringing awareness to it, holding it in stillness and silence, and allowing meaning to arise.

Could you comment please?

A: Thank you for your email. The last paragraph of your email is a concise example of the difference between getting lost in the mind’s overlaying of meaning, and allowing a deeper understanding to arise on its own—by bringing awareness and presence to a contraction and abiding in a receptive stillness.

The mind’s overlay of meaning and interpretation is what holds suffering in place and sustains

conflict and division. If this one truth is clearly understood, the mind begins to relax and becomes open to the liberating wisdom that arises from the quietness of the heart. The mind can receive wisdom, it cannot create it.

Beyond Personal Will

Q: You read my question on your radio program, “Opening to the Void” at the beginning of October. At the time I didn’t know what was happening. Somewhere between your description of a rock, and talking about the lack of motivation (and the suggestion to act regardless of this lack), something clicked into place. I felt how a rock is simply “rocking,” and that this body here is simply “humaning,” and then I could see only one thing happening.

There is only one sort of “stuff” and it streams forth as everything. Its all-encompassing-ness completely demolishes life as I knew it. I am stunned, actually. The implications are massive. It is a breathtaking simplicity, ordinariness and joy, and I wonder how I could have ever missed it. The lack of motivation evaporated, and it feels like this body is moved with transparency and naturalness that is an incredible relief. It seems as though prior to this, all the searching was looking in the wrong way somehow. I now understand the difference between Unity and Oneness.

There is still bewilderment. At the moment I am wondering where the capital-letter stuff of Self has gone. Where has God gone? What was God? I’m not sure I know any more. The words God and Truth are so often used interchangeably (I used them interchangeably), and yet now I see only Truth, and it is completely different from what I termed God. Do God and the qualities of the Divine (Love, Compassion, Will, Strength, etc.) still figure into this? And why was living from Self so very driven, so profound, and so compelling? Why was it all so necessary?

A: Thank you for sharing your email. I know that you have already found resolution to the questions at the end of this email, so I will not address them. But I feel that your experience of realizing what it is to act from beyond personal will and motivation will be very instructive to many others who are exactly where you were before wisdom opened its doors within you.

Of course what you realized cannot be “applied” by any mind that is reading about your experience, but perhaps it can open the door of wisdom to reveal itself with some of those who read it.

Week 4 - Q&A

Doing Absolutely Nothing About Fear

Q: When self-concern arises in me, for example, if I lose a client and my income drops, I used to go into great fear and panic. I had a period of time when I couldn't find work for a couple years and that became a time of deep surrender to what was happening and dis-identifying with external forms to gain a sense of security. I think it was St. John of the Cross who wrote: "Swiftly, with nothing spared, I am being completely dismantled." And that is exactly how I felt.

Then my experience of myself became more and more a sense of emptiness/void/stillness and I began to see and feel the silence in everything. At some point, I began experiencing myself as silence and stillness, and saw it in everything. Now I experience all of the states of consciousness you talk about, sometimes all in one day or less!

My question is, when this deep survival fear arises again and "self-concern" rears its head, is simply allowing myself to lovingly feel it all in my body without judgment a good way to meet it and embrace it? I'm also confused about whether when one enters the no-self state on a permanent basis, if these feelings can arise still but are just embraced fearlessly also?

A: Thank you for your question. When the survival fear arises turn your attention to what it is that is trying to survive. It will always be some aspect of yourself that sees itself in some measure separate from life. My advice may sound somewhat strange, but when this fear arises do absolutely nothing about it. The key is to contemplate what it means to do absolutely nothing. You will know when you are doing absolutely nothing because the fear will be gone.

I am not suggesting that you ignore, deny, evade, repress, or bypass the fear, for all of these are ways of doing something with it. I am suggesting that you do absolutely nothing at all. Contemplate this "doing absolutely nothing" and the reality of it will dawn on you. This "doing nothing" is itself liberation.

It Felt Like I Would Disappear

Q: I have had moments this summer in meditation when it felt like there was an deep opportunity to let go of everything, the sense that I had to leave everything known behind. Doubt arose, (whether this is the right thing to do) then thoughts about what I like (family etc), and I pulled back. Then, like you talked about, there was a sense of regret afterwards. It left me in a detached witness state which felt good.

Last week, after spending time in silence and listening to the course tapes, in the middle of interacting with my family, another deep letting go happened. It felt different. I went with it at first. Then it felt like my body was literally shutting down. It felt like the physical body would stop working and that it would fall dead on the floor. It felt wrong and there was almost a panic where I managed to fight back into control. It still creeps me out thinking about it. Should I let go into this if it happens again?

Yesterday, very different, there was a strong feeling that I would disappear, that I would no longer be here. Everything was going. It brought out sadness and also a doubt if this is the right thing to do.

Even though somehow I know that it is the right thing to do, still I wanted to run away from it and did. I don't think running is possible for long. Is trust and courage what I need? Or maybe a sales pitch for what is to come?

A: Thank you for your email. Deep letting go can be experienced in an almost infinite variety of ways. But always remember that we are simply letting go of an imagined self, not something that has any objective reality or agency. We are simply letting go into the reality of Life, into what we truly are.

We are Eternity pure and simple. And Eternity takes an infinite variety of forms, including these human forms. The letting go into Eternity may require courage, but even more it requires the deepest relaxation—the relaxation of a lover relaxing into the arms of her beloved. In this sense it is an act of love. Simply be still, that is quite enough. When the time is right it will happen, you can be assured of this.

This Love Totally Consumed Me

Q: I am so drawn to “the flame”—loving and wanting this awareness, but when I start to come close I feel like I am dying and I don't know what is happening to me. I get so scared, and yet I cry and cry for this awareness. I cried the whole time you gave a talk on Jesus in Tustin; this love for Jesus totally consumed me. I never knew I loved Jesus so much and that Jesus was so much a part of me.

Can this only be approached to by “fear” of the self falling away?

A: Thank you for your question. The journey to no-self does not have to be a fearful one. All of the fear is created by the ego's imagination and is not inherent in any way to the no-self state. However some amount of fear is common to experience along the way. Even Jesus experienced fear and sorrow in his humanity, but his Love of God was always what he acted from, and was his key message to all of us.

Love is the strongest force in life, much stronger than courage and all the other human characteristics combined. We will do things for the sake of Love that we will not otherwise be able to do. Saint John of the Cross called Love “the flame that burns me up but gives me no pain.” The Love that awakened within you for Jesus is reflective of something very deep within the human heart. Like Jesus we are all both human and divine, and his life story is the story of the universal experience of the death of both ego and self, and the resurrected Life that emerges from the letting go into the Mystery of Eternity.

Do not rely only on “your” Love for God (or Truth) but rely on God's Love of you. Allow That Love to draw you toward itself. All Grace is pure gift. Trust and let go; trust and allow God to let go through you.

We are all Eternity from the very beginning.

When the Psyche Needs Healing

Q: In your view, is it possible to have regular access to no-self without the ego (divided will) having fallen away?

Do different practices apply to different levels of being? Could it be most effective to apply devotion and inquiry practices to fractured will, and simple surrender, contact and allowing of non-conceptual holding? These distinctions are somewhat arbitrary, but I am asking on a practical, experiential level here.

Is it useful to unify that which feels separate so that it might be released in a more thorough way?

A: Thank you for your email. Anyone at anytime, with or without ego identification can temporarily slip into a foretaste of the no-self state, although what they are usually slipping into is the no-ego state and mistaking it for the no-self state. These temporary, or nonabiding foretastes of no-self are not the same as the falling away of self. The falling away of self is irreversible while a foretaste is a momentary (a second, a day, a week, etc.) transcendence of self. To go on vacation somewhere is a very different from permanently living there.

You asked about the fractured will, which admittedly is not my area of expertise. However, a fractured or wounded will needs a type of redemptive love (which I have talked about fairly recently but cannot go into here) to heal and uplift the will from a state of fear and despair to a state of love and well-being. It is always hard to say whether or not one part of the psyche needs healing before it can let go because for every generalized statement that could be made there are countless examples to the contrary. So, one is left to the authority of one's own experience. If one aspect of the psyche continues again and again to hold one in a state of division or sorrow no matter the state of one's insight or realization, it obviously needs more direct attention paid to it. My motto is very simple, do what works. And let your experience guide the way.

Ego, Self, and the Impulse to Love

Q: After 40 years of seeking and searching and practicing and cul-de-sacs and dead ends and moments of enlightening grace, your message is bringing it all together and dismantling it. Amazing that it comes to this.

The question: I come from a long legacy of Methodist ministers, and being "good" seems to have been the whole point of that and most religious teachings. Now I find myself struggling with not knowing whether my impulse to love and serve is more "good ego" or if it is coming from beyond that. My awareness of "ego" and uncovering and dismantling it is becoming quite constant, yet this confusion seems to be yet another of its tricks. How can I tell?

A: Thank you for your email. Of course there is nothing wrong (and much that is relatively right) with being a good and loving person, unless it becomes an identity. Good and loving "acts" are a virtue, but being identified with those acts easily becomes a vice. In truth, you are not a good or bad person, you are spirit itself. And although spirit usually gets associated with the good it is actually far beyond being relatively good or bad.

All relative identities belong to the ego, as in “I am Good.” But spirit is simply I Am—not “I am this or that.” Abide in the felt sense of “I” with no conceptual overlay. True love springs forth from spirit, which is pure I Am. The I Am is naturally loving and egoless. Meditate on the sense of I and it will lead you into that state which is the source of I Am.

Ego is “I am this or that,” while the pure I is beyond ego and all definitions. It is without form, either physical or conceptual. It is pure consciousness and presence. By attending to your absolute subjectivity you awaken as the unseen subject to all experience. The personal sense of the unseen subject is the personal self—not the ego, but the personal and unseen witness of the ego. The universal sense of the unseen Self is the universal I Am, which is all-encompassing unity and oneness.

And as I have tried to clarify during this course, when both self and Self fall away in the experience of no self, (as in the crucifixion), the ultimate Ground of existence is realized and a new, (resurrected) life begins.

So the impulse to love and be of service can be coming from your higher nature, or self. But it could also be coming from the ego which easily forms an identity around being “a good person.” If it is coming from your higher nature it will flow from a natural abundance of well-being and you will feel no attachment to being viewed as a good or helpful person. If it is tinged with ego it will be a way that you like to be seen by others, as well as an identity that you like to see yourself as.