

ESSENCE OF MIND

An Approach to
DZOGCHEN

Jes Bertelsen

“Essence of Mind offers a practical map for those drawn to explore the far reaches of our human potential.”

—DANIEL GOLEMAN
author of *Emotional Intelligence*



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“Let your rigpa be vast as the open sky.”

—TULKU URGYEN TO THE AUTHOR

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Foreword

Jes Bertelsen and Dzogchen



Jes Bertelsen, DPhil, has, since 1982, dedicated himself fully to the study, practice, and teaching of meditation and spiritual development. In the same year, together with Hanne Kizach and a group of students, he established *Vækstcenteret for arbejde, udvikling og meditation* (the Center for Work, Growth, and Meditation), a thriving spiritual community that he continues to guide today.

In 1989, during a vacation in Nepal, Jes Bertelsen was introduced to Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche. This encounter proved to be of crucial significance to Bertelsen's life and work. From that first visit until Tulku Urgyen's passing in 1996, Bertelsen visited Nepal regularly to receive further instructions, transmissions, and empowerments. Importantly, Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche not only authorized him to teach all aspects of Dzogchen but also instructed him to present Dzogchen in a way that was suitable for his own culture and time. Jes Bertelsen's life project is to realize this vision, and to add his voice to those of other teachers striving to establish authentic wisdom traditions in contemporary societies.

One of Jes Bertelsen's concerns has been to promote a scientific and undogmatic approach to the study and practice of spiritual training systems and of Dzogchen in particular. He insists that it is not only possible but also necessary to distill the essential, universally valid aspects of spiritual training systems from their cultural and historical framings. To support that goal, Bertelsen and a group of his students have been active participants in collaborative projects with researchers at Aarhus University, not only serving as subjects for neuroscientific measurements, but also taking an active part in the development of experiments, data analysis, and the publication of results.

Jes Bertelsen teaches a few four-day courses each year, introducing students to Dzogchen. In addition, advanced training is offered to qualified students at Vækstcenteret's retreat facility in the north of Jutland, beautifully situated overlooking the Lim-fjord, including longer retreats (one to six months most commonly, individual as well as group retreats). Bertelsen himself spends more than half of every year there, much of it on retreat, writing, and guiding individual students.

Since 1974, Jes Bertelsen has published twenty-four books covering a wide range of topics related to spiritual development, meditation, and Dzogchen. Beginning with *Bevidsthedens inderste* (*The Heart of Consciousness*, 1999), his books have primarily been concerned with Dzogchen, presented in a uniquely direct and accessible manner for contemporary Western audiences. Retrospectively, he considers that six of his books published between 1983 and 2008 form a single series dealing specifically with consciousness and its development through spiritual training.

The present book, *Essence of Mind*, is one of these. It can be seen as an open introduction to Jes Bertelsen's perspective on the path from ordinary mind to the nondual, enlightened essence. The text discusses training in meditation and wordless prayer, in a language familiar to most Western readers. This distinguishes it from his subsequent books that deal more explicitly with Dzogchen. Through its undogmatic, open approach, based on the author's own experience, the text sheds light on foundational meditation practices that can uncover the source of consciousness: the essence of mind.

A more extensive biography and description of Jes Bertelsen's vision for a contemporary spirituality can be found in the appendix, which is based on a series of interviews with the author.

MARTIJN VAN BEEK AND JENS-ERIK RISOM

June, 2013

Preface



The following text is about the use of mind training—that is, wordless prayer and meditation—to realize the nature and essence of consciousness. This is a practical handbook of spirituality.

The subject matter is divided into three main sections. The first section describes different methods for discovering the essence of consciousness and the techniques related to them. The second part seeks to describe the key principles of a training system that can lead to realization. The final section outlines the significance of continuous exercises, and more generally describes the way spiritual practice slowly permeates daily life, dreams, sleep, and death.

This book is not about self-development or psychotherapy or ego formation. Not because these three subjects are not extremely important—quite the opposite. In our culture today, psychotherapy and self-development practices offer central tools for increasing our capacity for mature personal processing. From the vantage point of many years' experience of working with many different people, I am convinced that the tools of psychotherapy and self-development are important. They promote proper self-care, help people come to terms with unfinished and traumatic life experiences, and reclaim projected qualities or feelings such as power, anger, sexuality, and the development of creative expression. It is a prerequisite for a secure and sober process of spiritual training that these areas have been thoroughly developed and are consistently tended and balanced.

The emphasis of this book, however, is on the dimension of spirituality itself.

The original title of the English translation was *Vast as the Sky*, a poetic description of the presence and openness of the realized state of transdual consciousness.

A person can be present in the here and now or absent from it in many ways.

An ordinary state of consciousness—an ego—either is or is not in the present moment. Most often the ego is not fully present. Most frequently the mind is caught up in the past or lost in the future. The busy to-and-fro in consciousness is unceasing, and as a rule the mind is either filled with past memories or looking ahead with worries and plans, with hope and longing. When the mind finally becomes more focused on the here and now, it is usually busy thinking and commenting on whatever is happening at that moment.

Nonetheless, it is possible for the ego to be fully present in the here and now. This means that the attention is focused on the sensations of the body and the stream of emotions and feelings. The sense-portals to the outer world are open and receptive, and the ego is ready to express, communicate, listen, or act. This could be a fair description of a state of ordinary ego consciousness that is present at this moment, in this situation. It is a fairly sharp and intense state of being.

A person with a lot of life experience and personal processing from psychotherapy and self-development will bring an even wider range of him-or herself to the here-and-now and will be even more fully present. This person will have a deeper, more integrated, and expanded presence—the sense of connectedness with the world and the people around him will be richer, the centeredness clearer. This kind of presence is more whole, more restful, and yet attentively transparent. It is a fairly satisfying and pervasive state of wakefulness and coherence.

Finally, there is the open now of transdual consciousness. This state of presence is qualitatively different, since it is based on the entirely different perspective of unity consciousness. This is an almost ecstatic state of completion, a luminous, blissful wakefulness in which consciousness is also fully relaxed, not holding on to the bliss, not desiring the ecstasy, just an open transparency. It is a wondrous and heavenly state. The transdual presence is like the open sky, and this open sky is present here on earth at this moment.

Meister Eckhart describes this heavenly state in this way:

The now in which God created the first human, and the now in which the last human perishes, and this now in which I speak:

they are equal in God and they are nothing other than one single now.

And Master Tilopa:

Do not pursue the past
do not invite the future
Do not think about the present
And do not meditate with the intellect.
Avoid all logical thought
And completely relax the mind.

The main reason I have found the courage to add yet another text on spiritual awareness training to the vast number of books already published in the field in English is the surprising and encouraging response over the years to my books about consciousness training published in Denmark. The fact that numerous individuals have absorbed this difficult material in an existentially convincing manner has been heartening. This response has been particularly evident in the context of the many longer retreats, where I have trained small groups in the forms of wordless prayer and bidirectional consciousness described in this book.

More advanced forms of consciousness training can only take place in a face-to-face exchange. It is indisputably possible to use books as sources of inspiration, and in particular to review one's insights and refresh one's practice, but unfortunately it is not possible to obtain the subtle practical adjustments and individual corrections required to avoid getting stuck or losing one's way in the unimaginable abundance of states and pathways of consciousness. In my experience, this kind of teaching can only take place in an existential, individually responsible, and deeply engaged mutual process.

In many ways this text is a systematization of the experiences that have grown out of this mutual process. I am very grateful to the many people who have participated in these long training processes. It is only because of these very lively and interesting groups that it has been possible to refine, correct, and clarify the training methods described in this text. While the individual participants in these groups have been

very diverse, they have had a number of things in common: plenty of ego satisfaction as well as life experience, deep and thorough therapeutic processing, and, finally, years of personal development combined with a daily practice of inner exercises, meditation, and prayer. Generally, in one way or another most of these people have also been professionally engaged with other people (as nurses, social workers, doctors, psychologists, and psychotherapists), and they have deep occupational roots in Danish society.

It is my hope that this little book might inspire a few people in the English-speaking world in their spiritual search and perhaps in their practice. Hopefully, the material is presented in a form that will spark some recognition. I have tried to avoid the language and general attire of the honorable old masters, while at the same time remaining faithful to what I have learned from spiritual teachers of the past. If anything of merit ensues from this text, the honor is definitely due the old masters—and the responsibility for any mistakes or imprecision will be mine.

I am indebted to Neel Fasting for transcribing the original Danish handwritten manuscript, and I am deeply grateful to Marianne Walther for the inspirational space in which the writing process could unfold.

PART I



Fingers Pointing at the Moon



The Purpose of Prayer and Meditation

The core intention of an individual who absorbs him-or herself in prayer and meditation can be described in many ways. The classic interpretation is that this person is seeking union with the divine. To put it more vaguely: The object of spiritual longing and striving is some sort of not-quite-definable ultimate fulfillment. The vagueness stems from the fact that the state or goal that the individual is seeking and yearning for is unfamiliar to him. His longing springs from a sense of dissatisfaction. The mind senses that somewhere there must be some profoundly and ultimately fulfilling state of being. When glimpses of deeper satisfaction of the soul and spirit are experienced, they are neither long enough nor clear enough to convey an accurate image of the goal of the spiritual quest.

Union with the divine or ultimate realization is often described as a state of mind. It is described as consciousness arriving at its essence. Consciousness realizes itself in its nakedness, unveiled, fully open. Naked awareness is identical with enlightened consciousness. And enlightened consciousness is one with the source of love.

The following list of expressions can be understood as different aspects of the same, ultimately indescribable basic realization—the very realization that prayer and meditation seek to reach: union with the divine, ultimate fulfillment, naked awareness, the essence of consciousness, the source of love.

Throughout the ages, many individuals have attained this basic

realization, and they all seem to agree that what they were seeking—and ultimately found—could not, and cannot, be found outside the seeker. Somehow, you already have this something that you feel is missing. And yet, human beings do feel that they have lost—or that they never had, but still need—this crucial something.

If it is true that enlightened consciousness is present in every human being, even the most ordinary, then it must be hidden in such a way that ordinary consciousness cannot easily find this divine consciousness. After all, we do not usually feel the least bit enlightened. This sets us the theoretical task of explaining how the enlightened consciousness can be camouflaged so well that we fail to recognize it. And the corresponding practical task is to formulate a training system that can help to find the treasure that is hidden inside the seeker. A person searching passionately for the meaning of life, who is suffering because he does not know the answer to the riddle—he is like a poor man living in a shabby hut and suffering the pangs of starvation, unaware that there is a royal treasure in gold buried under the fireplace.

In prayer, the suppliant seeks to uncover the place where God is hiding. The meditator seeks to find the place in consciousness where the enlightened state is camouflaged. The mystics and spiritual teachers all say the same thing: enlightened consciousness dwells in the innermost heart of every human being.

To me, it is deeply satisfying that everyone equally possesses the key to ultimate fulfillment. I would find it totally meaningless if only a few specially chosen or talented people could hope to realize enlightened consciousness. No matter whether a person is rich or poor, talented or untalented, good or bad—in the essence of our being we are all equally close to the divine unity of consciousness.

Most people live their whole lives without realizing the essence of consciousness. Only a few people, after many years of toil, reach this basic realization. And the cosmic joke is that this difference between knowing and not knowing one's own essence is vanishingly small compared to the fundamental equality that we all share: that we always have possessed this essence and can never lose it, whether we recognize it or not.



Naked Awareness

Somewhere in ordinary everyday consciousness, enlightened consciousness lies hidden. The consciousness that is reading these lines right now simultaneously masks naked awareness. Our everyday consciousness is fully clothed, as it were, hidden behind layers of veils and robes. This hiddenness is fundamental. Water might serve as a good analogy. Ordinary water is a compound of oxygen and hydrogen. In a way, the oxygen is hidden in the water—as is the hydrogen. Oxygen is flammable, and hydrogen is explosive. Both are gases. In their chemical composition of H_2O , water, the properties of these basic elements are so deeply disguised that they are unrecognizable. After all, water extinguishes fire, while oxygen is essential to fire.

If we use this image, we can compare our ordinary state of consciousness with water. The basic element of consciousness—the naked state—is like oxygen. Some of the key functions of mind and consciousness are like hydrogen. The essence of consciousness is comprehensively hidden in our ordinary consciousness, and it is hidden because naked awareness has fused with other functions to form a whole, which is this ordinary consciousness that we all know and use.

Following you will find one possible description of these functions, here seen as four layers or aspects that are fundamentally attached to the naked awareness. It is the “chemical binding” between naked awareness and these four modifying basic functions that leads to our universally recognized experience of ordinary consciousness—the experience that in

its fundamental complexity hides the naked awareness.

1. The first function is the way that consciousness or the mind automatically makes judgments, the fact that consciousness is constantly either saying yes or saying no to its contents. When something is found in awareness (an external perception, a feeling of pain, a thought, a memory), our consciousness responds immediately with acceptance or rejection. This function or ability seems to be deeply ingrained in our instinctive nature. When a mouse sees a cat, it immediately responds to this input with rejection and flees. If the mouse begins a philosophical consideration of whether the cat is friendly or hostile, that consideration will probably be its last in this life.

Knowing immediately whether a given sensory input is useful or harmful appears to be an evolutionary survival strategy. It is necessary to learn whether whatever shows up (from the outer world and then from the inner) is useful or harmful.

Our ordinary consciousness constantly applies this automatic classification and judgment to all the contents that stream through the mind. Immediately, the mind knows whether a memory is pleasant. Immediately, you absorb yourself in the pleasant experience. Immediately, you reject pain, move your hand away from the fire, move your attention away from a shock. This judging function is the first cover over the naked awareness. Because the essence of consciousness is automatically coupled with this saying yes and no, naked awareness is hidden.

It is possible to teach oneself to separate these two (naked awareness and the judging function) by practicing something we could call “neutral observation.” In neutral observation you let the contents in the mind and awareness eddy as they wish, without judging them, without prioritizing, without accepting some things and refusing others. The training consists of sitting quietly and practicing nonjudgment over and over again, refraining from saying yes or no to everything that emerges in your awareness.

To be more precise, this practice consists of discovering over and over again that you already said yes or no quite some time ago. The point is to realize this fact for yourself, and to calmly and repeatedly

disengage from this automatic value judgment.

You practice being a witness to the stream of consciousness. Neutral observation is like a mirror: the mirror is impassive, whether it mirrors Beauty or the Beast, Romeo or Juliet, a devil or an angel.

Neutral observation is the electrolytic separation of the chemical binding between naked awareness and the function of instinctive judgment.

2. The essence of consciousness is merged into a complex of functions. The first of these is judgment. Training in neutral observation or witnessing removes this first layer. You might say that it dismantles the first component of the complex.

The next layer, or the next component, is the ability to focus. Ordinary consciousness is almost always focused. Our attention dwells on something, a sound, a picture, an inner perception, a thought, and so on.

Ordinary consciousness actually believes that consciousness as such is naturally focused. However, deeper experience and training show that this is not correct. Just as the naked awareness does not judge, the essential awareness is not focused.

Ordinary consciousness, on the other hand, says yes and says no and is focused. Naked awareness is hidden behind these two fundamental functions, among others. To focus is to divide the given content of consciousness into figure and ground. Certain things are emphasized in awareness and by awareness. And these things become focal. Consciousness has focus points.

If you investigate your own consciousness, you will discover that even states that we call defocused fundamentally are somewhat focused, just more loosely or lightly than the sharper focus of full attention.

Focusing is a kind of automatic choice. Attention is almost always dwelling on something. And this something is highlighted against a background abundance of less strongly emphasized data. At this point the training consists of separating the focusing consciousness—the focus itself—from the essential unfocused consciousness.

The more neutral observation a person has practiced, the closer

his consciousness will get to its open, unfocused way of being. The elements of this training are the same as in neutral observation, but adding a kind of loose or floating state of defocusing. The mental state does not become sleepy or dull or fuzzy. It is clear and awake, vigilant, and also floating, open and loose. It is an inclusive consciousness. It is not constricted or exclusive. If we refer to the awareness that dismantles automatic judgment as “neutral observation,” you might call this deeper practice that aims at dismantling focus “choiceless awareness.” Choiceless awareness is looser, more inclusive and open than neutral observation.

In its openness, this training approaches bidirectional consciousness. Bidirectional consciousness means that consciousness remembers itself, remembers the thinker while observing a thought, remembers the observer during the observation. Bidirectional consciousness means being open to the source of consciousness, aware of both magnetic poles in the field of subject-object experience.

Neutral observation and defocusing reduce the hypnotic attraction that consciousness feels toward the object pole. When the mirroring and defocusing practices reach a certain level of stability, the whole atmosphere in the deepening stream of consciousness and in wordless prayer begins to change.

Softly, the person’s heart and consciousness begin to bloom. Behind the objects and experiences of ordinary consciousness a delicate openness gradually begins to emerge. Judgment and focusing are like the green sepals enclosing a flower bud. When they part, they make space for the unfolding of petals of a completely different nature: stillness, openness, vulnerability. Hints of the essence of the heart and awareness spread throughout the person like a radiant fragrance. A fragrance that already carries within itself the first notes of the compassion and friendliness that are the hallmarks of all true spirituality.

3. Action is the next aspect of consciousness to show up. The activity of consciousness is deeply connected to consciousness itself. This activity veils the naked awareness, which is still. Consciousness and the mind are in constant motion. Thoughts, feelings, sensations,

events—consciousness always has something in mind. The mind is always active, changing, planning, commenting, remembering, and imagining. The agitated or creative unrest of consciousness and of the mind is so pervasive that very few people ever spontaneously experience that the mind can be completely still without falling asleep or fainting.

All these basic characteristics of the function of consciousness—judgment, focusing, and activity—are interrelated. It is difficult to determine which of these functions might be easier to separate from essential consciousness than the others. After all, focusing is a kind of automatic or self-initiated choice, and as such a form of activity. In judgment there is both choice and activity. Experience has shown that it is most constructive to begin with training in the skill of neutral observation, the intention of separating and dismantling the identification with acceptance and rejection.

The practice of wordless prayer and the deepening of consciousness indicate that the next thing that can be differentiated and controlled is the tendency to focus. Experience has also shown that this next step is difficult, and may be the deepest intervention in these three interwoven functions: While remaining wakeful and relaxed, you practice differentiating consciousness from any kind of activity.

The task is to realize that consciousness itself, its naked essence, is not identical with activity and movement. The practice—whenever you find yourself in a state of neutral observation that is open to choiceless awareness—is to stop doing and wanting this, that, and the other thing. The practice—the basic structure of wordless prayer and deepening of consciousness—is to let consciousness remain, relaxed and effortless, in nonaction.

Ordinary consciousness is a fusion of naked awareness and a number of complex functions. It is exactly this complexity that hides the actual essence of consciousness. It is garbed and veiled in the basic functions of judgment, focusing, activity.

Neutral observation is the practice that works to separate out naked awareness and to dismantle the automatic identification with judgment, with saying yes and saying no. In neutral observation, consciousness disrobes itself of the function of judgment. In

nondiscriminating awareness, consciousness practices dismantling the automatic identification with focusing. In choiceless awareness, consciousness frees itself of the focusing function.

Accordingly, in wordless prayer and consciousness-deepening practices, awareness becomes more and more open and naked, less and less restless and active.

In prayer and meditation, consciousness approaches the realization of naked awareness, the core essence and the innermost heart of the consciousness and nature of every human being.

4. The fourth and final basic function of consciousness is language. Consciousness seems to be inseparably connected with language, largely naming and shaping its contents automatically. When you are walking along the seaside and see a dot on the horizon, the mind immediately attempts to decode this unknown something. Is it a boat? Is it a person sitting on the beach? Is it red, or kind of long? Consciousness spontaneously attempts to map, to understand, to describe, and to name everything that draws near from the outside through the senses, or from the inside through the inner senses, or that approaches from the subconscious or from the intuitive horizons. Consciousness attempts to name all that is new with names of the known.

This aspect of the function of ordinary consciousness is just as elementary and familiar as the three aspects already described. Everybody knows these things. They are simple. If they sound complicated, my description is to blame. In the consciousness routines of everyday reality, these things are obvious.

Consciousness says yes or no to its content. It accepts pleasure; it tries to get rid of discomfort or to forget it. Consciousness is always focused on something. Consciousness is like the beam of a flashlight: it lights up whatever it points at. In other words, consciousness is focused.

And there is always movement in the mind. A constant to-and-fro of thoughts, plans, associations, sensory impressions. A constant stream. Consciousness is active.

And finally, consciousness is verbal. It speaks in words or in images, a language of symbols or thought-glimpses that incline toward names and shapes.

Wordless prayer and meditative deepening of consciousness aim at uncovering and finding nothing less than the divine essence of consciousness. And ordinary consciousness hides this naked awareness in elementary and vital basic functions.

Prayer and meditation are a process. Step by step, there is a deeper and deeper release of all the familiar functions, without falling asleep.

Consciousness discovers that it can be mirroring and neutral. It does not say yes. It does not say no. No denial. No invitation. And consciousness deepens in the direction of its own essence by defocusing. By being loose and open, awake and clear. Consciousness and the mind discover that by not getting involved, by not doing anything, in a process of relaxation, transparency and stillness arise.

It is like muddy water. If you get involved, if you stir it up, it never clears. By leaving it to itself and by not acting, the water clears by itself.

The final aspect is language. Consciousness is unfamiliar with letting the unknown be, without baptizing it. First the mind must realize the power of this naming habit. It happens on a large scale and up front, and it happens behind the scenes, in a sly and subtle manner. Before you realize what you have done, you have baptized the unknown. We shape and name as instinctively as we draw breath.

This whole training process has one direction, which is toward the essence or source of consciousness—not toward objects or experiences. The path does not go by way of judgment, does not pass through focus. And meditation is neither an action nor a form of language. Wordless prayer is swimming the backstroke into eternity, in the direction of God. Away from yes, and away from no. Away from focus. No action and no language. In the description of the path of consciousness-deepening, certain navigation points are used, but these navigation points are not the goal, they only indicate the things you must let go of.

You use acceptance and refusal only to navigate, by keeping the same distance to them both. We swim away from both buoys. Neither yes nor no.

You abandon the hypnotic attraction of focusing. And you do not fall into the opposite extreme either, which is falling asleep, a defocused state of consciousness.

You give up all editing and control, all involvement and action. The last thing you abandon is the action of wordless prayer, or the action of

meditative absorption itself.

And finally you give up language.

This process leads into openness. Everything is new. Unnamed. Unshaped. Consciousness is awake and the heart is open, and the two are one. Training in wordless prayer and meditative consciousness begins with practicing neutral observation. This takes time. Everybody can do it, but it takes practice and time. I've observed that proficient practitioners have usually practiced at least one to two hours a day for five to ten years.

In time, the mirroring observation that does not say yes or no spontaneously expands into a state of nondiscriminating awareness. Bidirectional consciousness gradually becomes clearer and clearer. One direction is the ordinary form and direction of consciousness: judging, focusing, being active and verbal. The other direction is toward the naked essence of consciousness. Bidirectional consciousness is a way to describe this openness.

The openness that prayer and meditation lead to is an unreserved inclusiveness. It is an existential attitude of practicing—in all circumstances, in pleasure as well as in pain—being grateful to the divine. This openness results from the ego letting go of its judgments and opinions. *This is good for me. This is bad for me.* The outlook and livelihood of the ego dissolve in the equality of the divine dimension. Everything is of God, not only the pleasant things but the unpleasant things, too.

In the practice of prayer and in the practice of deepening consciousness, this all-encompassing inclusive openness is trained through neutral and nondiscriminating awareness. This openness points directly toward the essence of the human being, the divine source that springs in the innermost heart space of consciousness.

In the realization of the naked essence of consciousness there is fulfillment. From this space the most delightful compassion emerges. And the most delectable recognition of home.

Clearly, the spiritual longing of human beings holds a premonition that the cosmos has given every person the possibility of this realization.

To avoid any misunderstandings of the framework behind these four points, it might be useful to add a few comments.

These four aspects of function, and the corresponding methods for

dismantling the automatic identification of consciousness with them, have been mapped out in this way:

1. judgment (acceptance/rejection) → neutral observation
2. focusing → choiceless awareness (defocusing)
3. activity → nonactivity (nondoing)
4. language → languagelessness (transverbal awareness)

You might get the impression that this is a model with two poles or two directions, one pointing into the world (judgment, focusing, activity, language—samsara) and one pointing away from the world toward the divine (neutral observation, defocusing, etc.—nirvana). However, this is not the idea. That kind of polar, dualistic model would be a classic example of a prioritized and focused use of ordinary consciousness.

Transcendence—the realization of naked awareness—is equidistant from both poles. Put differently: the two descriptive columns are equally valid expressions of naked nondual consciousness. Just as the ocean is not more oceanlike in the waves than it is in a calm surface, so essential consciousness is not closer to neutral observation or bidirectional consciousness than to the focused and choosing consciousness. However, it is usually not possible for us human beings to realize nondual consciousness, just like that, directly from and with the focused, choosing, active, verbal consciousness. Only the slow process of many years of wordless prayer and meditative deepening at different levels creates the practical reality for this realization to bloom and mature.

The divine presence is no closer in the quiet bidirectional consciousness than in the busy focused consciousness. But it is extremely unlikely that the busy, focused, and restless consciousness can awaken. On the other hand, it is much more likely that the quiet, well-trained, and open consciousness, with a crucial bit of help from on high, can awaken to a nondual realization. The cosmos, so to speak, cannot get through to the busy, active consciousness.

There is one final barrier around the description of wordless prayer and meditative devotion. This barrier is deeply rooted in the very nature of the subject, and it is related to the difficulty in communicating the substance of training one's consciousness toward the nondual. We are

trying to use language for something that by its very nature evades language. Using words, images, and symbols, we attempt to describe an attitude that is completely beyond words, beyond images, and beyond symbols.

It is like asking a person to go into a richly outfitted house of mirrors to see the true face of his consciousness. When the seeker is in the house, he will naturally search among all the artistic mirrors for the one that reflects his true naked face. But the search itself is one of the disguises. One metaphor, and an exceedingly accurate one, is that the seeker is wearing a robe that covers him completely, with only two small eyeholes. Large letters and beautiful symbols cover this robe, spelling the words "searching," "longing for," "looking for." And what does this person see in the mirror? He sees his costume, his search.

Thus, the activities that let the praying and meditating person concentrate his or her attention on one mirror and choose the right one can be seen as three costumes that are added on. On the first robe it says "choice." The second reads "focus." And the third robe reads "activity." So what can the person possibly see, besides these garments? The chooser meets the choice. The person collecting him-or herself meets the collection in the mirror. The person who is active in prayer and practice meets the activity of prayer and practice in the mirror.

How can any language describe how a human being, without using language, without focus and choice, can get to this magical but true house of mirrors?

Søren Kierkegaard took note of this type of communication problem. In his view, the remedy was an indirect message. For instance, Kierkegaard says (in "Concluding Unscientific Postscript") that if one wishes to announce the truth that spirit is a passion of inwardness, saying or writing it directly won't be of much help. It might have the effect that others can mimic one's words or learn the sentence by heart. But the whole idea of the message is the assimilation of existential inwardness. So, according to Kierkegaard, this kind of existential statement can only be communicated in a Socratic manner, that is, indirectly.

The paradox is that we attempt—and we must attempt—to describe the essence of consciousness by using language, and by describing it as a result of a technique. Yet the essence of consciousness is without

language, and it is not a technique, and it cannot be reached by means of any technique.

The difference between self-development on the one hand, and wordless prayer and meditative deepening on the other, can be compared to the difference between two types of boat. Self-development is like a wooden boat, propelled by a coal-fired steam engine. You travel in the boat of self-development from one country to another, from experience to experience, and in port after port you load more fuel for your journey. Prayer and meditation, understood as a true spiritual training process, is also a wooden boat. It is also propelled by a steam engine, but the fuel here is wood. And since the journey goes out onto the endless ocean, you can only carry a limited amount of wood along. Finally—in the middle of this endless ocean—you must begin to feed the engine with the boat itself to keep moving. Naturally, you start with the less essential woodwork, but soon it becomes clear that the journey ahead is still long, and you must resign yourself to dismantling more and more vital parts of your wooden ship. One day, when there is no more wood left to burn, if you are to stay afloat, consciousness is open, bidirectionally oriented, and nearing transcendence. At that exact moment, when the last board is put into the firebox, with no land in sight, when it is far too late to turn back, when the boat is beginning to sink, at that very moment the individual can awaken.

In this image, if this person does not drown or die, but awakens, he or she will discover at the moment of realization that there never was a boat, no engine, no ocean, no journey. The person was always in the divine essence, had always been there, and would never lose it.

Self-development is the process of expanding, integrating, and balancing your personality in an ecological, cyclical interconnection with other human beings and with the planet. Spiritual development is a renunciation of one's ego and personality. The individual renounces experiences and identity. The price of oneness is the ego itself. The feeling of personality is replaced by a compassionate sense of interconnectedness with one's fellow human beings.



Falling Asleep

In the previous pages the practice of prayer and meditation has been described as an existential process directed toward realizing the essence of consciousness. The process is divided into several stages through which the ordinary consciousness slowly approaches the possibility of realizing its own inner essence in the course of life and practice. These stages are: neutral observation, nondiscriminating awareness, nonddoing as bidirectional openness, trans-verbalness, realization of the nondual essence of consciousness.

These steps in the training process have been described in relationship to basic and generally recognized aspects of the ordinary daily function of consciousness. This path and these steps have been described again and again, in different ways, by mystics and spiritual teachers, in different traditions and different ages. If a person chooses to begin an existential process of transformation through wordless prayer and meditation, and if this person receives decent guidance, preferably from a living and knowledgeable individual, then any patient person will be able to experience the described stages and transformations of heart feeling and consciousness in his or her daily practice (between one and three hours daily) during a span of years (between five and twenty years).

As I mentioned in the preface, the foundation for this work is an adequate and wide-ranging amount of ego-expression, a thorough process of therapeutic integration, and a sensible and broad process of

self-development.

It would be reasonable to assume that these stages, and the transformation of consciousness that is related to them, only become a genuinely lived experience for a few people. Seen from one viewpoint, this is of course true, but seen from another it is just the opposite.

You see, strictly speaking, everyone experiences these steps at least once a day. Every time we fall asleep, consciousness moves through these same stages until it arrives—albeit unconsciously—at the nondual state.

Spiritual teachers have known this for countless ages. As early as in the *Upanishads* we find it described in the following principle: the enlightened nondual state is related to deep, dreamless sleep. If a person is completely awake while all other functions except the wakefulness of naked awareness are asleep, then that person is in the enlightened state.

In the following pages the process of falling asleep and its specific steps will be described in more detail and compared to the meditative deepening of consciousness. To understand this, it is important to realize that two processes occur simultaneously as you fall asleep. One is that the light of consciousness gets dimmer. Slowly, wakefulness is turned down. The second is that consciousness disrobes itself of its everyday functions, and approaches naked awareness.

These two processes are very tightly bound together. They are so profoundly interwoven that it only becomes possible to separate them after many years of practice. Actually, it is my belief that only people with a lifelong practice of prayer and meditation have any realistic chance of tangibly experiencing the different shades of awareness that consciousness passes through as it is falling asleep.

With a bit of patience, however, it should be possible to track the initial stages, if the description of them is sufficiently clear.

The first condition for falling asleep is that both body and mind are relaxed. If the body is tense, or the mind is vigilant, falling asleep is impossible. Likewise with prayer and meditation. The first elementary step is to relax the body. Technically, this is a question of balancing muscular tension, but for our current purpose the simple description will do: in prayer and meditation, the body and mind must be relaxed.

The body is now at rest, you are relaxed and about to fall asleep. The first state that consciousness drifts into is neutral awareness. The mind

lets go of the focus points that have the most energy. If I keep thinking about my vacation plans or hold on to some concern or problem, I won't fall asleep. This experience is absolutely basic, and everyone is familiar with it. The mind has to let go of its attachments and its problems. Even if there is some pain in the body, sooner or later the mind and consciousness manage to let go of this focus. If the mind holds on to some content (a thought, a memory, a plan), accepting it, saying "yes" to it, this will prevent the sleep process from starting. Likewise, if consciousness is struggling with a "no" (a problem, a concern), the sleep process will also be disturbed.

Most people hardly think about this. You may not even notice it; but if you think back and look a bit more closely at your own falling-asleep process, you will discover this amazing state that consciousness is so familiar with: letting go of yes and no; renouncing problem-solving and action. Slowly, the awareness that is falling asleep loses interest in all its contents.

As mentioned above, two things are happening at the same time: one is the dimming of the light of consciousness, the other is the undressing of consciousness. The more consciousness disrobes from its basic functions, the dimmer the light or wakefulness gets.

This is exactly what does not happen in prayer and meditation. Here the wakefulness of consciousness is not dimmed while consciousness sets aside the disguise of its basic functions.

So the first two steps in the process of falling asleep, the steps known to everyone, are: relaxing the mind and the body, letting go of the involvement in the contents of consciousness and the mind. This is neutral observation.

The next step in the sleep process is the nondiscriminating, defocused consciousness.

Many people might recognize the following type of experience: You are falling asleep. You are not asleep yet. There is a sound. Is it a door slamming? Is it a dog barking? Is it someone calling? Did the phone ring? You wake up a bit more and discover that it was your little son John calling.

This state, where consciousness registers the sound but cannot identify it, is exactly like the choiceless, defocused consciousness in wordless prayer and meditation. It is the same state. Consciousness has released

so much of its focus that very dissimilar perceptions and contents are becoming identical. There is no difference between a dog barking, a door slamming, a voice calling. It is all just sound. The details created by clear focus, discernment, and choice falter and fade.

From this point on it is quite rare to be at all familiar with the steps in the falling-asleep process.

The relaxation in body and mind, as well as the disengagement and looser focus, now lead consciousness through the activity function. An overwhelming inactivity (tiredness, rest, relaxation) sets in. In this inactivity, consciousness opens inward toward the source. The outer world, the world of the body and the world of the mind, are now so distant, have so little libido, that consciousness involuntarily falls through the openness toward the source. This is the actual “fall” in falling asleep. It only takes a split second. Where the early stages of the process of falling asleep (relaxation, neutral observation, defocusing) can take minutes or hours, the fall itself is momentary. And when the fall into sleep occurs, consciousness is bidirectional; it is open to its naked essence. Sometimes we experience this opening inward as a startling fall and jerk awake.

Deep sleep, the final step, corresponds to the nondual state. But unfortunately the light of consciousness is now completely turned off. Already in the phase of inactivity and during the fall itself, our waking awareness is usually lost.

I find it captivating that this most common of all conditions, the act of falling asleep, shows us the path that ordinary consciousness must follow to realize its own divine and enlightened essence.

It makes sense that deep, dreamless sleep is so healing. It is actually a fulfilled and happy state. It is the same state that an enlightened person is in. Being asleep, the sleeper does not know it. This is the only difference.

A person who is able to travel consciously along the same path that all people travel when falling asleep feels a deeper bond to other people. There is a joy in this bond, in that the cosmos has given this experience equally to everyone. But there is also a feeling of compassion with the longing and suffering that comes from not being able to reach the divine source consciously.

When a person is in deep, dreamless sleep she is not in her identity.

The sleeping person has forgotten her name, and is not aware of herself. Likewise, consciousness sets aside the identification with the ego and the extended personality when the meditative process moves from bidirectional openness through wordlessness to the nondual essence. This shedding of the identity is not permanent. Nonetheless, it is activating. For however long or short a time consciousness remains in the realized state, the interest and involvement in identity and personality is suspended.

The state of deep, dreamless sleep is preconscious and predual. The awakened nondual state of realization is transdual and beyond the functional sphere of ordinary consciousness.

Deep sleep is a state that is largely closed to the outer world, the world of the body and the inner world. The awakened nondual state is open to the world, to the body, and to inner experience, although these three regions are not bounded or defined in the way ordinary consciousness perceives them.

In the predual state people are asleep. In the transdual state the person is wide awake.

The same path and the same doors lead the ordinary consciousness either to deep sleep or to the enlightened state.

It is such a relief that there is this equality, that the path and the access to the greatest good has been given to all human beings; and such a lovely overabundance that every single day when falling asleep, every human being, indeed every living creature, travels this direct path from the most ordinary and basically suffering state of consciousness all the way to the state of total fulfillment. Isn't it remarkable that the cosmos has hidden the greatest of gifts in the most ordinary and anonymous place you can imagine: in the process of falling asleep?

Spirituality is not a talent or the privilege of an elite. Spirituality belongs equally to all of us. Perhaps it is this very ordinary and anonymous quality that makes the spiritual state so difficult to realize. It does not lead to a more radiant ego. It does not lead to an original personality or to creative genius. Spiritual life leads to joy because it opens us to gratitude. And it leads to compassion because it opens us to our interconnectedness with other human beings, as well as with our humanity.



Holidays and Hazards

Endless modifications are available to consciousness and to the mind. An inconceivable number of different inner states and attitudes are available to every human being. Because of this, the mind resembles nothing more than a labyrinth with thousands of paths and doors leading to a multitude of colorful experiences. If you start to explore the mind without guidance, with the intention of finding the divine essence, it is very difficult to avoid getting lost. Even with good guidance, consciousness can easily seduce itself into taking endless sidetracks through fascinating but, spiritually speaking, unproductive experiences and states.

Take the act of observing the process of falling asleep. Such a practice will relatively quickly lead to a greater awareness emerging during the natural sleep process. This opens to a long line of interesting and unfamiliar areas of experience. Perhaps you discover hypnagogic dream activity, the consciousness that occurs before you fall asleep. Everyone passes this door when falling asleep, but only a few open it up and begin to explore this world. Or you may stumble upon the door to the astral dimension, which normally remains unnoticed, but is actually slightly ajar during the process of falling asleep. In this space consciousness discovers a certain kind of clairvoyant astral perception, spaces, symbols, figures, and so on. All very interesting, but spiritually speaking quite irrelevant. Or perhaps, closer to the border of actual sleep, consciousness finds a path out into the energy field, into the so-called “out-of-body

experiences.” This state allows consciousness to float out into the space that the body is in and experience all kinds of things. Or perhaps, in the fall itself into sleep proper—in this momentary and normally completely darkened passage inward, toward the source—consciousness brushes against the so-called Bardo states, states that normally are only open and active as we approach death. These, too, are very fascinating, but not particularly useful in a spiritually clear process of reorganization.

The great spiritual training systems (Christian mysticism, Sufism, yoga, tantra, Zen, Taoism, Vedanta, Buddhism, the Kabbalah) are different maps of the mind and of consciousness, each with their particular paths marked to help the seeker on his journey home to the essence of consciousness.

Naturally enough, the various spiritual teaching systems reflect the culture and the time of their formation and development. Each new age rephrases and adjusts the spiritual teachings to fit the circumstances of its own time.

To a large degree, wordless prayer and meditation is a matter of having the right kind of existential attitude. The determining factor of the spiritual quality in prayer or in meditation is in the way that consciousness, or the mind, relates to itself.

In an attempt to describe the most suitable sort of attitude, it might be helpful to consider a type of experience that most of us recognize. A description of something that is already familiar, some general and largely identical experiences, might accurately portray the best internal attitude for a person to find the right path and direction in his or her prayer and meditation.

People today are busy with many things, and the object of our fascination changes. But we have a reasonably large and constant interest in two things: holidays and hazards. Ocean cruises, sightseeing, sunbathing, vacation. Action movies, parachute jumps, bungee-jumping, and the breaking news.

So at last you are at the beach. The water isn't too cold, the sun is shining, you've been in the water, you're lying in the sand, drying in the sun, Hanne is resting, Thomas is playing at the water's edge. You hear the cry of a seagull amidst the rhythmic surge of the ocean. All is well. You don't have any plans. Don't want anything. Just being. No disturbing thoughts, no worries. Sun. Warmth. The murmur of the ocean

and the wind. Holiday.

Most people probably know this state. If we are thinking of the same thing, we all know that it is fairly brief. Either you fall asleep, or daydreams and fantasies emerge. Or you begin to want an ice cream, a beer, or a walk along the beach.

Nonetheless, they do exist, these brief moments of presence and fulfillment, these moments where you have nothing in mind. Moments of happiness. Actually, in a golden moment like this, the ego is suspended. And it truly is a remarkably anonymous and unpretentious event. In a way, the ego has gone off behind a sand dune for a while. It isn't creating a disturbance. It isn't throwing its weight around. It isn't making demands, isn't demanding entertainment, isn't demanding something new. Even so, you are not asleep. You're awake.

This state is actually very, very close to the state of wordless prayer and meditative deepening.

The following features are identical in the holiday mood and in consciousness-deepening:

- ✧ The body and the mind are relaxed.
- ✧ Thoughts are significantly reduced, perhaps completely gone, which means three things: 1) You are not thinking of the past, there are no memories, good or bad. 2) You are not (yet) thinking of the future: no demands, no desires, no plans, and no worries. 3) Accordingly, consciousness and the mind are joined in the present.
- ✧ The level of activity is extremely low. Your heart is beating. Your breath is breathing itself. You have nothing in mind. Nothing in mind! No restlessness in the body. Warmth, peace, sun, happiness!

This is a state where the feminine aspect, yin, is in the foreground and flowering. This state easily slips into sleep. It is remarkably anonymous. Nobody is sounding off about anything.

This is exactly the right spiritual attitude in wordless prayer and meditation. And while probably everybody knows this experience, most people wouldn't get the idea that this was the attitude, the exact attitude, of prayer and meditation in the more advanced stages of the practice.

The difference between the holiday fulfillment and the spiritual

one are as follows:

- ❖ In the mindset of the holiday mood the perspective is: holiday. The project is: holiday. In prayer and meditation the perspective and the basic project are: the divine. Or: realizing the essence of consciousness, reaching the source of love. The motivational perspective is different.
- ❖ In the anonymous golden moment of the holiday, consciousness has lost itself in the experience. The person feeling this way is unaware of her feeling during the very moment that this fulfillment blooms. Think back. In this situation there is no awareness of the experiencer. The experience was there. But the experiencer was forgotten. Consciousness is open and receptive, outward into the experience, away from the subject, away from the experiencer. Consciousness itself is hidden. The awareness is not open in the direction of awareness itself. Consciousness is not aware of its own consciousness, of its cognizant presence.

In wordless prayer and meditation, the idea is to be open toward the consciousness that is praying, during the openness of the prayer toward the divine.

Meditative consciousness is bidirectional. In this analogy, the object, the experience, is stillness, relaxation, peace. This is the openness to the mind's content, to the inner state. But it is also necessary to be open in the direction of the consciousness experiencing the stillness. What experiences the stillness? Where is the consciousness that is at peace? Who meditates? These questions are not buzzing around in your head as mental sentences. They are a wordless openness in the direction of the source and essence of consciousness.

During that anonymous golden vacation moment, in the midst of the experience without words, if you remember the experiencer even once, even without words, you will either disturb the pleasure and everything will be back to normal, or consciousness will transform into an unbounded spiritual openness.

If the consciousness of the peaceful sunbather with nothing on her mind becomes bidirectional, the golden moment will turn into a sacred one, and for a split second consciousness will be nondual. God is. In a

glimpse of enlightenment, the open sky is present.

The person who walks away from a moment like that is not the same person who arrived at it.

There are almost certainly several good reasons that this rarely if ever happens on holiday trips. The individual must have prepared for this kind of meeting with eternity. The preparation for it usually takes many years of practice and a burning motivation.

In the specific situation, the experience, and the whole personality, is in a feminine adaptation. Everything in a relaxed holiday moment like this is yin, close to falling asleep. But a masculine mind factor is also needed, to balance the situation enough that transcendence can occur. The masculine factor is precisely that clarity of consciousness that spontaneously remembers the bidirectional awareness. It is a crisp freshness, and its clarity opens this otherwise perfect yin-situation toward the essence and source of consciousness.

The reverse is true of hazardous situations in which this wordless clarity is spontaneously present. When one's life is threatened, consciousness bursts into flame. At the physical and chemical level an adrenaline rush is triggered. Consciousness is intensely present. If you do not get stuck in the immobility response or some other traumatic activation, the clarity of consciousness increases. There is no time for thought. The present expands. The oncoming car is approaching with dizzying speed. It feels as if world and time stop. At this moment the organism is fully in yang, tightened almost to a crystalline state of consciousness. This is the masculine extreme that corresponds to the yin of the holiday mood.

In hazardous situations, when there is nothing more that can be done, if you then have enough feminine presence to open yourself in complete trust, consciousness will be led into transcendence. At the moment of danger, beyond any possibility of action, total surrender, Thy Will Be Done—this will lead directly to the divine. In its crystallized intense clarity, consciousness is stripped bare through total surrender. The hazard has thrown off all ordinary functions (judgment, choice, action). And in this surrender the last veils fall away. Consciousness is realized in its essence.

If you analyze the rich literature on mystical breakthroughs, you will find that many of the spontaneous experiences described as peak

experiences are similar to the two types outlined here.

It is the soft yin of relaxation that is understandably missing at the moment of hazard, which, if present, would transform the experience of hazard into meditation. In prayer and meditation this exact heightened alertness is needed. Deeply relaxed, without words, you pray as if your life depended on it. Regrettably, this is the paradox that describes the correct attitude in prayer and meditation.

And when a person in despair or resignation exclaims, "But that's impossible!" The answer is, "Yes, that's exactly what it is—but do it anyway!"

You can use death to intensify your sense of presence and existential impact. Meditating and praying with the clear sense that death is my nearest neighbor adds the salt needed to balance the peaceful relaxation that has nothing else in mind.

Consciousness training lies at the point of equilibrium between holidays and hazards. A vegetative, purposeless, feminine openness with an erect and alert masculine clarity of consciousness. Wordless prayer and meditation rest in this paradoxical attitude. Trust at the edge of the abyss. Falling asleep wide-awake.



The Face of Consciousness

One image used by teachers to indicate the path to the seeker is that he must search for his true face (Zen, Meister Eckhart). There are many descriptions of this strategy, and one of them is to search for the face of awareness. We can unfold and understand this by relating it to the physical face.

Unaided, your eyes cannot see your own face. You can see the faces of other people, but you cannot see your own. Nonetheless, your own face is always very near—in fact, it is the basis for being able to see anything at all.

An anthropologist once described a meeting with an aboriginal tribe that had never seen photographs before. When pictures were taken of the group everyone could recognize all the others, but not themselves.

If you do not have anything that can be used as a mirror you cannot see your own face. Even when you look in a mirror for the first time, the process of recognition requires another person to tell you that what you are seeing in the mirror, or in the picture, is actually you.

If we apply this image to consciousness, we have the following situation: We are now describing consciousness as having a face. This is self-consciousness. Its essence. The disrobed, naked awareness.

The task in wordless prayer and meditation is to see the face of consciousness, to know yourself. You become aware of every single thing by means of the face of consciousness. Everything that meets me meets my consciousness, everything is seen by consciousness.

It is even more difficult for consciousness to see itself than it is for the physical face to see itself. Nonetheless, the face of consciousness is closest to us, in an even more heartfelt and important sense. Closer than the relationship between me and my physical face.

Consciousness itself is so close that it becomes an automatic, and not directly perceived, condition for all inner experience. Once language really gets hold of this situation and tries to describe the mechanism, it turns out that the logical, dualistic structure makes it impossible, purely and simply impossible, for consciousness to see itself. With duality and logic, consciousness is unable to see its own face.

This is because language and logic require that this situation be divided in two to be able to see: into a subject that sees and an object that I see. When I try to see my I, or when the seeing consciousness tries to see itself, I keep presuming the apprehending and seeing subject. If consciousness wants to see itself, it first has to split into two parts: the part I'm looking for—the object—and the part that is looking—the subject. At which point what I am not looking at is precisely the presumed and therefore undiscovered subject. The seeing consciousness evasively remains an undiscoverable and indivisible subject. This is as far as language, logic, and philosophy can take us.

So either the task of seeing the face of consciousness is impossible and cannot be resolved, or else there has to be another way of doing it. This other way cannot go through language, logic, or philosophy. So there must be a wordless, illogical, and unphilosophical way to look for this task to be completed.

Actually, there must be two ways that consciousness can function. One is dual, divisive, verbal—logical and philosophical. The other way that consciousness can function must be nondual and hence wordless, as well as beyond logic and philosophy. Nondual can mean pre-logical and pre-verbal. A newborn infant looks out into the world with a cosmic gaze. It cannot yet speak or use logic. It is awake and conscious. It looks out from its cosmic eyes. It is pre-verbal, pre-logical.

Nondual can also mean translogical and transverbal. Then consciousness is functioning beyond language and logic. It is this transverbal, nondual awareness alone that can complete the task that wordless prayer and meditation assign to us human beings.

This is why the path is so slow and takes such an enormous amount of

training. It is only through practice that consciousness can learn to free itself from its own language habits.

The nondual atomic core of consciousness is bound into the functional molecule of ordinary consciousness. The basic functions (such as judgment, focusing, activity, language) are fused with the nondual naked awareness. And the product or synthesis is our ordinary everyday consciousness. So first this complex of functions must be taken apart. To that end we can use consciousness training, such as neutral observation, nondiscriminating awareness, bidirectional openness.

The immediate everyday, verbal consciousness is right: consciousness cannot see itself. But the consciousness that is transformed by existential practice can enter into an attitude where the miracle can happen, and consciousness, with help from another human being and, importantly, from on high, is transformed in the realization of its own essence: consciousness sees its own true face in a nondual event.

Let us suppose that consciousness, among the thousands of states and mirrors and modifications and intuitions, suddenly, one day, for a single moment, sees its own true face. Will the individual even realize this? Would you sense this as something special? Would you overlook it? It actually seems that way. It looks as if people by themselves are unable to identify what they see. If and when a person accidentally meets or manifests his essence, he or she is not able to recognize it.

It seems to be the same as with the physical face. If you have never seen it before, you do not recognize it. Another person has to help you confirm that what you see is yourself.

A true spiritual teacher is a person that can help you confirm that what you see, when you see the true face of your consciousness, is yourself.

A few individuals do seem able to reach the moment of realization without the help of a teacher. But they are very few, compared with the many who have realized the nondual consciousness with the help of a teacher.

Besides—this is what they say in the East—the only people who arrive alone, without a teacher, are the ones that have already reached the goal in some earlier training with the help of a teacher, and are actually already proficient. However, even the majority of these people still need a teacher to remind them of what they already know and are able to do.

And all of us have this in common, that every night when we fall asleep, consciousness disrobes from all its disguises and sleeps naked in its divine truth.

It is this that gives sleep its revitalizing quality.

If you do not look for your true face, you won't find it. If you look for the face of consciousness, but search for it as a thing, as an object, you won't find it. You're looking for the searcher. Searching itself is the point. Every time you find something, you just took the wrong turn. You have swung away from the direction of the absolute subject (the essence of consciousness) to the direction of an object (a state, an experience, a vision, a feeling, an emptiness, light, "something").

So what you actually need is to search without wanting to find. As soon as the emphasis shifts toward the goal, the soaring quality of the search process loses height and threatens to land on an experience, or an object.

This search is without language and it is existential. You're looking for the thinker; who experiences this? The person experiencing pain is searching for the observer, looking for consciousness itself. Who am I, what is consciousness, where is it?

This search does not end with finding something, it ends when searching and finding collapse into each other. The searcher as well as the sought-for vanishes. The subject and the object are both gone, and in their stead the awakened, radiant, open, and nondual consciousness emerges.

If you do not search for the truth, you won't find it. If you do search for the truth, you still won't find it. Because when you search for the truth as an object, you cannot find it, if and when the truth is subjectivity. You must truly seek the ultimate, the genuine, the subject at the heart of everything. And for this, the very act of searching is crucial.

If you search with language, your search is dual. And anything you find or don't find in this search will also be dual. You cannot find transduality, because it is beyond language.

Searching without language. A silent, heartfelt searching. Searching for the face of consciousness, you are soaring, an albatross hovering over the ocean, under the sky, between the polarities.



The Natural Heart

Prayer and meditation are not accomplished with the intellect. They are not thought processes, and they are not in your head. Since an astonishing number of people have taken up residence in their heads and are occupied with thinking, these people must of course begin there. After all, you have to start where you are. This is why the prerequisite for true spiritual training is this: first of all, to unfold the ego, and then through psychotherapy and self-development to create a center in your personality that is not in the head and the intellect, but that includes emotion, feeling, love, and intuition. If you have to choose, or if you need a center for prayer and meditation, the heart is most suitable.

The ordinary dualistic consciousness lives in a world that has a center—which is me—and a horizon around it. When you start your spiritual training you bring this dualistic map with you. This is why most people need a center. That being the case, the heart is definitely the best place to center. Having the heart as the center does not mean that I am in my head thinking of the heart. Being centered in the heart is not thinking that the heart is the center. Nor is keeping an eye on the heart from the head the same thing as being centered in the heart.

In the beginning you need to use your breathing and, later, the inner sense of your heartbeat as ways of actually centering your consciousness in the heart. Once the felt connection is there, you can use a symbol in the heart (candle, a flower, a yantra) and add, or use instead, a mantric heart prayer, which you coordinate either with your breathing or, better,

with your heartbeat (*La-illah-il-allah; Aum; Kyrie eleison; Om mani padme hum*). All the great spiritual training systems have had to develop a mantric heart prayer to help consciousness to continuously remember the divinity of the heart.

To the everyday dualistic consciousness and the life experience that it gives us, suffering is a pervasive and fundamental structure. Problems, suffering, illness, old age, and death are the bottom lines of life. To the everyday dualistic consciousness there is a separation following every meeting. Everything you have gathered (wealth, possessions, power, health, and energy) is dispersed in the end. All life ends in death. Nothing lasts, all things pass away. Everything succumbs, nothing has any stability or sustained substance.

The heart knows this, and accordingly the heart feels compassion for everything that lives and suffers. This is the response of the natural heart. All human beings seem to be born with this kind of open and compassionate heart. However, most people experience so much hurt, rejection, abandonment, and abuse already in childhood that the naturally open heart closes, as a form of protection. This closing down may be experienced as psychosomatic blocks in the muscles and tendons, in the sheaths and fibers around and in the heart itself. A lengthy and arduous process in psychotherapy and self-development is usually required to become aware of all these closures and blocks. The heart contains quantities of unshed tears, quantities of unhealed wounds in the soul and the emotions. Every time the heart lacked the nourishment of love, it contracted. Every time the love streaming outward was not accepted, the heart suffered. It usually takes a long time and requires a lot of work to reestablish the natural heart.

The true and natural basis of prayer and meditation is the actual streaming feeling of the heart, such as trust, surrender, gratitude, and compassion—all the shades of love.

To prevent a possible misunderstanding: it is quite possible to pray with words and meditate from the head. It is also quite possible to meditate without open, streaming, empathic feelings in the heart.

The assertion made here is only that the source of more advanced forms of wordless prayer and meditation originates in the heart rather than in the brain. And these forms are found in a continuum of feeling rather than thought.

The whole question of centering is only relevant during the first many years of the spiritual practice. Gradually, the practitioner discovers that it is only the object-oriented and object-creating direction in consciousness (and thus in prayer and meditation) that can be centered.

The subject-oriented part of meditative openness isn't centered or focused, and is in fact incapable of doing these things.

Wordless prayer is to open bidirectional consciousness to the empathic feelings of the heart. Centering in the heart means having the focus of consciousness in the heart and in feelings, if any are present. But at the same time, the very task is to defocus, which means not relating to a center. Not searching for a center. And of course, also not searching for or creating a periphery, or anything like a horizon or a sphere. After all, this is just the other necessary aspect of a center. The two are one and the same duality.

To take an example, let's remember a feeling of gratitude. When we experience it in our daily dualistic consciousness, it is spontaneously centered in the heart. So consciousness experiences gratitude in the heart and with the heart. This could be gratitude toward a friend or a loved one. Or the gratitude might be directed toward a teacher, or perhaps toward life itself or the divine aspect of life.

The meditation or wordless prayer in this feeling of gratitude consists of opening, not just toward the feeling of gratitude and its object but also—not instead of, but also—in the direction of the source of the gratitude. Not just being open in the direction that the gratitude is streaming (toward the object, toward the teacher, toward God, toward a loved one), but also being open in the direction that the gratitude is coming from.

Bidirectional means to be wordlessly open both to the content of consciousness (the gratitude and its object) and at the same time being open to the very consciousness that is aware of the feeling. From where does this feeling arise? Who is it, actually, that is feeling the feeling? Where is the consciousness that is aware of the feeling? Where does it come from? In this context these questions must be put in words, but prayer and meditation require us to be open to exactly these questions—without using words for them, and at the same time that the feeling of gratitude is unfolding.

The direction or dimension of the openness toward the essence or

source of consciousness is not and cannot be focused or centered. As soon as a focus or center sneaks in, consciousness begins to develop an object (or a state, or an experience). When people begin to train in this profound form of meditation and prayer in their practice, they often experience that the attention on the bidirectional consciousness (defocusing, unconstrained openness) in a way extinguishes the feelings. Which, of course, is not the idea. This is exactly one of the subtle points of wordless prayer and meditation. The mind is never closer to the possibility of transcendence than during moments of open, empathic feeling. So if the person simultaneously can maintain an open awareness toward the essence and source of consciousness, transcendence might actually occur. But at this boundary our ego and our whole ordinary dualistic consciousness get scared, because what if I become irrelevant? If consciousness really did open to the divine, would I vanish, and could I ever find myself again?

The fastest and most immediate way to nondual consciousness consists of opening the bidirectional consciousness in the feeling of gratitude toward a spirit, a teacher, or a loved one. Seek the essence and source of consciousness in the streaming feeling of gratitude itself.

During moments of compassion, remember the source of compassion and consciousness, allow the openness to be unconstrained.

During surrender, let the openness spread in the direction of nonfocus.

PART II



The Open Sky



The Process of Enlightenment

The foundation and prerequisite for the process of enlightenment are: sufficient unfolding of the ego, a thorough therapeutic processing of one's biographical issues, and some creative self-development. The process of self-development without direct spiritual practice approaches transcendence without ever actually reaching it. Jung has described in detail how the process of individuation spirals around the self without ever reaching it. And the self is a step on the way toward unconstrained openness.

On the basis of a rich and fruitful ego life, in-depth psychotherapy, and ongoing self-development, an actual spiritual process can be said to begin when the individual initiates a daily, extensive practice of consciousness exercises, prayer, and meditation.

In the course of life and development processes, most people have a series of glimpses and experiences that can be perceived as spiritual images and openings. These experiences include glimpses of light, feelings of streaming bliss, overwhelming experiences of encompassing love. Glimpses of healing, of grace; revelations and visions; transpersonal experiences and openings to the divine. Feelings of ultimate meaning.

Most spiritual training systems distinguish between three levels of higher consciousness. The first level is the spiritual sphere. This level of consciousness is still dual, and the praying or meditating person is relating to something numinous and trying to get in touch with it. Perhaps you have an experience of grace streaming from the divine

channel into your heart. Perhaps you have a vision of the divine, or you see Christ as an aura or a visual phenomenon, or perhaps you feel love streaming from an outer source to the yearning heart.

The next level is the sphere of joint consciousness. This level is characterized by the beginnings of a real merging between the person and the divine. Experiences from the spiritual level are also perceived as a union, but they are still discernibly dual, which may be discovered through a clear-headed investigation of them during meditation or prayer. The hallmark of joint consciousness is that there is an actual flow of exchange between the divine object and the subject experiencing the divine, so the divine factor begins to be present inside the subject, in consciousness itself. Bidirectional awareness is the most precise way to reach the level of joint consciousness.

At the deepest level we find the sphere of unity consciousness, the transdual level or naked awareness. This is the enlightened dimension, the sphere of divine love. It is even more dramatic, and at the same time more ordinary and anonymous, than the other states, and it results in compassion. An individual experiencing glimpses of contact with the third level is in a process of enlightenment. The main characteristic of this process is that the individual can maneuver reliably in the higher states, but that the ego is ascendant when these states are not active.

This means that duality holds more than just the ego, ordinary consciousness, and the heart-awareness. Both the spiritual level and the level of joint consciousness still exist within duality, even though both these dimensions are more encompassing than the ego. It is only in the unity of consciousness that duality is not only loosened or expanded, but fully overcome in true transcendence. Consequently, in the realms of spiritual and joint consciousness the function and structure of the ego is still present, although in a slightly more homeopathic version. It is only when one attains glimpses of unity consciousness that the limitations of the ego and the self-identity are fully suspended, only to return as soon as the glimpse, or series of glimpses, are over. Following contact with unity consciousness, the deep and irrational human belief in the supremacy of the ego and the importance of personality is broken. King Ego and Queen Self are finally dethroned in favor of unified consciousness and compassion.

The spiritual journey through the three higher levels is described and

categorized in different ways in different traditions, although the basic substance of this science of the heart is of course the same.

One way to illustrate differences and similarities between these three levels is to describe the position of spirit, or the divine, in the perception of human beings, and how this position changes at each level of higher consciousness.

At the spiritual level the divine is experienced as an object. The person seeks God. The heart longs for the divine. Here, the two poles are clear: the subject is seeking and longing, praying and striving; and the object is the divine, either a more abstract form of the divine, or in the form of the divine thou. When the spiritual level opens, human beings meet God. The Christian sees visions of Christ. The Sufi mystic meets the formless Allah. The Hindu has visions of Brahma, and the Buddhist perceives the Buddha. This same level is active when the spiritual student sees his or her true master in an overwhelming encounter, infused with love. The training consists of praying to God, of visualizing the divine, either in a more abstract form (a yantra or a mandala) or figuratively (in icons or *thangkas*).

The level of joint consciousness allows the divine to open in the subject field. Either there is some form of unification with the divine, or the divine reveals itself at the very core of subjectivity itself. Now, this may easily be misunderstood to mean that the spiritual is about God being outside, and that joint consciousness is about God being inside. This, however, is untrue. God as an object of the hearts' longing, or as a vision of Christ, is definitely an experience of innerness, as compared to some concrete God-individual on top of Mount Olympus or in Asgaard or Heaven.

Nonetheless, this heartfelt numinousness does have form. The divine appears as a person. The perceived grace streams from some inner source, that yet is outside the subject.

At the level of joint consciousness, the subject pole becomes actively engaged. It is one thing to see the beloved, and another to be unified with the beloved in a total merging of love. Figuratively, this is exactly the difference between the spiritual level and the level of joint consciousness. This union with the divine (the theosis of Hesychasm) is consistently described by the great mystics of the world religions. "I and my father are one." Not "I live," but "Christ lives in me." "I am

Brahman" (*Aham Brahmasmi*). "I am Allah" (*Mansoor: al haqq*). "This consciousness is Buddha." At this point, the practice consists of identification, of surrender in love.

The ultimate level—naked enlightened consciousness—lies beyond these final veils and polarities. Unity consciousness is a transcendence of the very dialectic between the human and the divine, a ceasing of the difference between subject and object.

God has many masks to protect our eyes, so that we dare to look. For as long as our consciousness and our eyes are veiled, we will see veils.

The naked awareness is veiled and hidden behind six veils: the level of joint consciousness, the spiritual, the mental, the emotional, basic life energy, and finally physical matter. The unveiled naked awareness is beyond all dualities, including birth and death. It is like the moon: it is born all shiny and new, grows and expands and becomes whole and round and full. Then it grows old, shrinks, and dies. That is how it looks. But the moon is there all the time, full and round and unchanging. Veils and polarities make it appear to go through the phases in its cycle. Human consciousness, too, is always complete in its unveiled essence, unborn, undying.

Together, these six veils and the unveiled unity consciousness form a description of seven levels or dimensions of existence. Everyone can immediately recognize the four outer dimensions: the physical level and the feeling of vitality or life energy, the emotional level and the experience of thinking. On the journey through the inner dimensions, transitions between the levels denote the different events that are designated as initiations. These are beginnings or introductions to a level that until that moment was only dimly perceived, an event where the full form of the new dimension opens to the individual for the first time. In principle these events are quite clear and conclusive; but in actual practice they can occur gradually as well as partially. Consequently these transitions exist in an amazing variety, and there are also many diverse descriptions of them.

In principle, the first initiation is the first conclusive and total opening from the mental fourth level to the spiritual fifth level. This is the archetypal meeting with the teacher. This might be an authentic devotional contact with a true, living teacher. Or it might be some form of vision of a known or unknown master aura. Or it might be a vision of

Christ or the Buddha.

The second initiation is the transition from the spiritual fifth level to the sixth, the first clear and complete opening to the level of joint consciousness. This is the substantial experience of merging or union with the divine, or with the enlightened aspect of the teacher, or a less specific union with cosmic consciousness.

Because the joint consciousness of the sixth and the unity of the seventh level—despite their qualitative differences—are so closely connected, there are two types of second initiation. One is a pure opening only to the sixth level. In the other, the core opens all the way to unity consciousness. This last occurs—when and if it occurs—in an ultra-short glimpse.

The final initiation is the opening to unity consciousness. With this opening, the individual becomes able to control the access to the transdual consciousness, *rigpa* (the technical word for nondual consciousness in the Tibetan Dzogchen tradition).

We can illustrate the dynamic aspects of these events figuratively. Let's imagine that consciousness and the mind is a vast and complex labyrinth. There are thousands of rooms; some are filled with cities, some with rural settings. There are churches and temples and innumerable ways of life. There are endless corridors and endless doors. Every door leads to a new modification of consciousness: astral dimensions, trance states, hypnotic states, experiences of flowing vivacity and radiant energy; every variation of every kind of experience can be found in this vast labyrinth of the mind of life. Let us assume that only one door—and by the way, it is a completely anonymous door—opens entirely out of the labyrinth and into transdual unity consciousness. This ultimate door to freedom is always open just a crack, but it doesn't look like much, next to all the golden and aesthetically harmonious and beautiful doors around it.

That very moment, when an individual is standing right in front of the open door of freedom, that moment is the first initiation. Light is pouring in through the door, numinosity, love. It is this sparkle of luminosity from the opening to freedom's infinity that gives the teacher the pulsating energy aura of organized bands of color and insight. And it is the condition of eternity focused in the door opening that gives consciousness the sense that there is a teacher present. Which at this

level is quite true. After a while, the door again closes almost all the way. And the individual then spends years in further integration and training, wordless prayer and meditation, to assimilate spirituality in his or her existential process of transformation.

And suddenly, one day, for a brief moment the door is open again, and the individual is right in front of it, on that elastic spot where the leap can happen. For a split second consciousness is outside, is free. The next split second, the person is inside again, in the dualistic labyrinth, but then once again the door is just barely open and the moment is gone. In this second initiation, the individual has not yet gained control over the exit. Everything went so fast that consciousness did not have time to orient itself and register what was going on, and how it happened. But the perspective inside the life-labyrinth has changed. The joint-divine perspective is now an existential reality. And once again, the individual spends years in integration and existential transformation.

In the third initiation, our person has once again been transported outside. But this time, metaphorically speaking, it is happening in slow motion. Consciousness is now able to follow the unfolding of events; it discovers exactly how it is positioned and oriented on the elastic spot in front of the humble door. Consciousness observes what it is that makes the door open (wordless prayer and bidirectional consciousness absorbed in the direction of the essence of consciousness). And the movement itself, through the door and out into freedom, happens with so much awareness that this path and this mechanism from now on become conscious and volitional. After a while, consciousness is back again in the duality of the labyrinth of life. But from now on the individual can initiate this movement by himself and on his own. Help from the teacher and—crucially—from the divine allows this whole process to unfold at a pace, and with sufficient grace, that the student's consciousness is able to grasp the process.

The strange door in this metaphor has the special property that inside it, the difference between being inside and outside is unimaginably vast. But outside the humble door there is simply no difference between outside and inside.

This is the point and the event that signify the beginning of the process of enlightenment.

After this event, the individual first practices bringing his or her

consciousness—in glimpses and moments, anywhere and everywhere—to transduality. After a while, consciousness begins to feel familiar with this process. And the individual slowly discovers that the nondual glimpses lengthen and become transdual states. Usually, this process takes years. In time, consciousness becomes able to rest stably in its own essence. This stabilization, too, takes years and years of practice and existential transformation.

The method of training here is quite simple: it consists of being still, of doing nothing and leaving all processes and all things to themselves.

In the enlightenment process itself, there are only two motives. One stems from the spontaneous compassion with those living beings that have not yet discovered their divine essence. This motive results in a spontaneous learning process, with the goal of helping others acquire insight into transdual consciousness. And insight of this nature can only be transmitted in a context of kindness and love.

The second motive in the enlightenment process is the spontaneous urge, again and again, to let consciousness rest in its source.

The most important sign that a person is in touch with unity consciousness is the immediate emergence of compassion. This compassion naturally expresses itself in friendliness, respect, and helpfulness, with the single intention of creating an atmosphere in which other people can come to know their innermost essence. This—spontaneous—compassion is directed equally toward people who suffer and people who are happy, healthy, and doing fine. From the perspective of unity consciousness, both sorts of people are equally far away from ultimate fulfillment.

The more a person is open to unity consciousness, the more compassion will stream through him or her.

From the three inner levels of consciousness, it undeniably looks as if the meaning of human life consists of two things: love and higher consciousness. And those two are essentially one and the same.

And it looks as if all people in their natural heart have love's compassion; and that at the core of our consciousness, we all share in, and are one in, the same higher consciousness.

To the unmasked heart, the present is not a fleeting moment, nor is it an agonizing tension between time and eternity; to the unmasked consciousness the present moment is like the open sky. Actual real life

shows itself as the great perfection.

And it is not possible to see existence in this way from our everyday, dualistic consciousness. It is this state of affairs, which is a sorry one, that evokes the tangible expression of compassion from unity consciousness.

In the preceding pages, the spiritual process was first described in relationship to the three inner levels, and recapitulated with a view to the initiatory breakthroughs. We will end with a brief sketch of how the meditative process itself can be described in accordance with the spiritual journey through the three inner levels. As we will see, this description is not unlike the classical division found in the Tibetan Mahamudra meditation system.

In *Lamp of Mahamudra*,¹ Tsele Natsok Rangdröl gives the following abbreviated characteristics of the four basic steps of consciousness practice up to realization.

“One-pointedness means being able to remain in meditation for as long as you desire. Simplicity means recognizing your natural face as ordinary mind and realizing it to be devoid of ground and root. One taste means that the dualistic fixation of samsara and nirvana is liberated within awareness. Nonmeditation means that all defilements of ‘conviction’ and habitual tendencies are purified.”²

“The nature of thought arising as non-thought is One-pointedness, arising as emptiness is Simplicity, arising as equality is One Taste, and arising as transcendence of conceptual mind is Nonmeditation.”³

“Lastly, at the time of One-pointedness thoughts are subdued, at the time of Simplicity the root of thoughts is cut, at the time of One Taste self-existing wisdom dawns from within, and Nonmeditation is the attainment of stability.”⁴

The first step (One-pointedness) corresponds to concentrative stillness. The difference between focusing and concentration is that in focusing, the focus object of consciousness keeps changing, whereas the object of the concentrative attention remains the same. Concentration excludes thoughts—and is not meditation proper, but a preliminary training.

The second step (Simplicity) corresponds to the bidirectional meditative emptiness or openness. At this point, we must discern between bidirectional consciousness before contact with the source of consciousness, and bidirectional consciousness with contact and

recognition of the source of consciousness.

In both states, extensive training of bidirectional openness (one to three hours daily for five to fifteen years) will result in simplifications in both the restless, perpetually searching and active mind, and in actual daily life. This simplification is generated because the individual increasingly, both during sitting practice and in ordinary daily life, adopts the same spiritual attitude to everything, everywhere. In joy—consciousness immediately opens toward the source; consciousness wordlessly remembers who is joyful in the midst of joy. In grief—consciousness is bidirectional; open to the grief, open to the griever. In thought—the bidirectional openness includes the X that is the thinker. Experiencing stillness and peace—consciousness includes the experiencer. Feels the gratitude of the heart, opens to the source of gratitude in the unfathomable depths of subjectivity. In feelings of love—it defocuses to absolute eternity. To put it simply, everything is equally valid material for bidirectional consciousness. Everything becomes an occasion to remember the ground source of consciousness. This leads to a simplification of the circumstances of one's life. The emphasis shifts from attachment and materiality to a spiritual looseness, a parallel to releasing and renouncing, a willingness to give thanks in all circumstances.

The third step (One Taste) to some extent corresponds to the illuminative identity of the subject and object. Consciousness now has full control over the access to nonduality. An ecstatic uniformity emerges. Just as the ocean everywhere and always tastes the same, all occurrences and impressions taste the same: All is of God. All perceptions and all thoughts are uniformly woven of light. The whole wide many-colored world, and all the endless movements and modifications of the mind, are like waves and patterns on the divine ocean of consciousness. Every human being is a wave on this ocean; is born, lives, and rolls through life, and falls back into the ocean again. But the ocean remains the same. A violet is a wave in the divine ocean. The open blue sky is a stillness in the ocean of consciousness. Joy and suffering are a yellow butterfly fluttering in the summer sunlight. Everything is uniformly a perfect modification of the divinity of consciousness. Existentially, the emphasis has shifted away from identity and its individual modifications, to openness resting in the unfocused

ecstatic limitlessness of eternity. The ocean has let go of the painful identification with the perishable changeability of its waves; the ocean has found its essence, at rest in being ocean. Not that the wave isn't also the ocean. Every drop, this tiny, transparent insect, that deadly virus, all of it is the ocean. But the suffering is this: only to see yourself as an individual. The ecstasy is to realize that you yourself are a perishable individual, and that at the same time you uniformly and identically belong to the divine, all-encompassing ocean of consciousness.

If this kind of attitude is existentially rooted in the heart, then this realization will immediately evoke compassion for all those who suffer because they have not yet found the one simple thing that releases and liberates everything.

The fourth and final step (Nonmeditation) is unity consciousness. The enlightenment process begins with the ability to control access to the source, the essence of consciousness.

At the time of One-pointedness don't fixate.
During simplicity don't fall into extremes.
Don't cling to the taste of One Taste.
Nonmeditation transcends conceptual mind.

—TULKU URGYEN



The Mystery of Consciousness

The transdual, enlightened consciousness that lies behind the ordinary dualistic consciousness function that we all use is called spiritual. Enlightened consciousness as spirituality is not a matter of faith. It is not a theory or a claim. It is a reality. Training methods exist that allow those people who wish to do so, and who have the necessary patience, to unfold these generic potentials. In the preceding pages, such training methods have been thoroughly described.

The spiritual (the three inner levels of consciousness) is more an attitude than it is any particular content. There are no experiences that are inherently spiritual, whether they are transpersonal experiences or visions of different kinds. It is more one's attitude to such experiences, and toward the events of everyday life, that may be understood as spiritual.

But it would probably be even more precise to say that spirit, understood as the higher consciousness that is hidden by ordinary consciousness, is a kind of perspective or a way of looking.

You might say that a person who can see has a different perspective—quite factually a different view—than a blind person. And that would be a fairly good analogy to describe the difference between the orientation of dualistic consciousness and the transdual perspective. Seen from the transdual perspective, the perceptive abilities of ordinary consciousness appear very limited and foggy; compared to the transdual perspective, ordinary consciousness is myopic to the point of blindness.

In the various principal spiritual traditions, the ordinary function of consciousness has been compared to sleep, relative to the wakefulness of unity consciousness. The two intermediate levels (the spiritual fifth level and the sixth level of joint consciousness) might then be compared to dreaming and lucid dreaming.

It is undoubtedly important—if you want to engage in spiritual training—to have a reasonably adequate concept of the intended goal.

There is one more image we might use to illustrate the spiritual as a kind of expanded perspective. When you look at the earth from an airplane at an altitude of ten kilometers, it is impossible to see a human being. You can see cities and roads, countrysides and ocean. But from this perspective, people are so tiny that they are invisible. Movement patterns look very different, too. Cars and trains—if you can make them out at all—barely seem to be moving. The ocean has no wave movements and ships with white wakes are lying still. If you look at the earth from space you can barely see any traces of human activity and history. Even the great metropolises are retouched away. Only the main structures of the continents are visible. Now, if you imagine that a person had two simultaneous perspectives—both the ordinary view and perspective, and also a perspective as seen from space—this would undoubtedly make a major difference in our perceptions, priorities, and actions.

However, a spiritual perspective is not a view of the blue planet devoid of human life. Among the many things that a spiritual perspective discerns, the spirituality, potential, and suffering of human beings are central. Perhaps these analogies, taken together, can offer a more exact image of what the transdual perspective consists of. It is a seeing, when you were blind before. A wakefulness, when you were asleep before. A spiritual perspective, when you only perceived the materialistic before.

It is natural and obvious that when ordinary dualistic consciousness relates to the transdual spiritual consciousness, it can only speculate and believe; it is impossible to argue one way or the other intellectually. This is healthy and natural. But it does not have much to do with reality. It is the old story: Do you, or don't you, want to look through Galilei's telescope? Some believe and others doubt. Some think they know, intellectually, that what the man says you can see in the telescope is a

lie. Only those people who bring themselves to actually look can discover what the reality is.

And it is exactly the same with transdual consciousness. Only those who practice and are patient can resolve the question of what it really is like. Without practice (wordless prayer and meditative deepening)—either there is doubt, rejection due to prejudice; or there is belief and faith. There is no actual knowledge.

How would a good eye surgeon in a world of blind people motivate them to submit to the difficulties of an eye operation? And what if the eye surgeon even had to motivate these people, born blind, to undertake years and years of arduous initial preparations, as well as later, more comprehensive interventions by themselves, and he would step in only at the last moment—what would the chance of success be? And yet everyone was born with the capacity for sight, but the blind could only open their eyes through their own efforts. Could we understand the seeing person's compassion for the blind? Could we understand the seeing person's assertion that all the suffering and problems caused by the blindness were unnecessary, and somewhat self-inflicted: by neglecting to develop the potential for sight? And could we also understand the seeing person's relief—intermingled with her compassion—at knowing that everyone could become able to see if they wanted to; that they were born equal, and that the precious capacity for sight was present as an equal possibility in everyone?

This, or something like this, I imagine, is how the great enlightened masters of our planet must have felt. And even people who perhaps have only just gotten one eyelid slightly open during the first steps of the enlightenment process will definitely feel that way.

The mystery of consciousness is situated at that critical point where the experience of not being able to get any farther on your own shows itself. You can unfold your ego, live the good life, do psychotherapy, work with self-development, do exercises, pray and meditate. By and large, people can work all these things out for themselves. In these steps you can draw on books, and on inspiration from teachers in self-development, as well as from other people.

If you understand the information about wordless prayer and meditation with your very existence, understand it by practicing, understand it with your heart instead of with your intellect alone, you

will be able to grasp the indirect message that the spiritual is acquisition in inwardness. And at some point you will meet the boundary. You believe that if you let go at this point, you will die. Or you will vanish into eternity and no longer be able to find your way back to the ego or to any other stable identity. Or you are afraid of going insane.

At this boundary, at this barrier, the individual needs a certain kind of help. This is the boundary to transdual consciousness. Neutral observation expanding to nondiscriminating awareness. Bidirectional openness toward the source at the innermost core of subjectivity. Wordless prayer, the open empathy of the heart, wordlessness in its broadest sense. Awake. Relaxed. Clear. This is the boundary.

There is nothing here to hold on to. Everything is unknown and new. No focus points. No experiences, with their corresponding experiencer. No visions or images, with their corresponding eye to see. You are at the edge of a bottomless abyss, and you do not dare throw yourself into it.

Either the process stops here, or higher consciousness steps in. This too seems to occur in two ways: either—and this is by far the most common—in the form of a living teacher who is already awake in transdual consciousness, or—and this is rare—in the form of direct divine contact. A consciousness that—as they say—meets the divine at this boundary, has already traversed the path earlier and received help from a living teacher. Here the divine means an enlightened, nonphysical master, an enlightened field of consciousness.

To get through the barrier to unity consciousness, a physical or nonphysical, transdually awake consciousness is needed. A mom or a dad is not needed. There is no need for a therapist or a teacher in self-development. A friend or a partner won't be any use either. Fantasies and wishful thinking won't help. What is needed is someone who is already awake in the transdual consciousness. Someone who has already crossed the boundary. Someone clear-headed. Someone who knows.

From the students' side, the situation is dual. Despite the void-like, floating, and wordless nature of this state, the very boundary that the student is up against shows its limitation, and thus its duality. But at this boundary—if a crossing is to occur—the student meets a teacher whose consciousness is not only dual. At that moment the teacher is transdually awake, and so, to the teacher, there is no difference between the two. To the student there is a difference, but the student also knows that to the

teacher this difference is already dissolved. This knowledge exists in the heart of the student. If this knowledge is intellectual, the situation is different. This knowledge about the relationship with the teacher is a wordless, heartfelt knowing. It is the most highly refined form of loving trust, based on the silent, wordless knowledge of the heart.

This is the situation in which authentic transcendence can occur. In such a situation, the mystery of consciousness unfolds at the very moment that the student lets go completely. The mystery opens in the most refined form of love.

And the essence of the mystery consists of this: that the two half-separate (the separateness of the student) and half-unified (the teacher's transduality) consciousnesses reveal themselves as one and the same consciousness. The last veils fall, and naked awareness realizes itself.

In this unified consciousness the student is introduced to, and recognizes, the transdual aspect of consciousness.

The enlightenment process is not the same for any two people on earth. Every human being is an irreplaceable and original expression of unity consciousness. And at the same time, all the realized, enlightened ones are one and the same consciousness.

The enlightened consciousness as such, the divine, seems to be all-encompassing and all-pervasive. Every human being seems to be permeated and carried by the unity consciousness. From the inner consciousness levels it undeniably looks as if even the tiniest living creature has this seed of consciousness.

This view is mirrored in all the spiritual world traditions. For instance, in Psalm 96:12, "... all the trees of the forest will sing for joy...."

Perhaps the meaning of life is to discover that everything has emerged from unity consciousness? Perhaps the physical universe is a windfall event, a celebration sprung from divine cosmic creativity? Perhaps from a certain perspective in consciousness everything is continuously, in every moment, being created anew? Perhaps every tree and every leaf really is a song of praise?

Perhaps suffering is the price of individualization? Perhaps the function of suffering is that it is the only thing that can awaken us from our sleep of identified fusion with our individualization? Perhaps the compassion in our natural heart reveals the secret that all living beings are one? Perhaps divine unity, for the sake of completion and perfection,

must at every moment freely manifest all kinds of shapes, shades, and modifications at all levels: physical, living, emotional, mental, spiritual, and in joint consciousness?

Perhaps the condition for being fully and wholly an individual is that unity consciousness falls asleep? And perhaps there is nothing wrong with that? Perhaps all of it, piecemeal and as a whole, with all the levels and dreams and sleep and wakefulness, is the great perfection? Perhaps?

By letting the mystery flow into a “perhaps,” one may hope that the horizon of one’s imagination does not become too confined. The primary task here is to describe the path of training that leads to the mystery. Every practitioner must discover for himself or herself what individual meaning the mystery holds.

Wordless prayer and meditation end with an existential barrier. To get through it, an opening is needed, a door. An authentic teacher is such a door.

If a spiritual teacher is a door to pass through, a teacher in self-development is a milestone to walk past. A teacher of self-development with the correct understanding of his or her role is a signpost, showing the way to the ultimate door, the ultimate teacher.

Far too often, people set up camp around one of the great self-development teachers and put down permanent roots. In this way, many of the pivotal religions were formed around the open doorways of the ultimate teachers. Often, the organizations around the teachers become more of a hindrance than a help in moving on and getting through. The organizations petrify and harden in dogmas and rules, and the life vibrating in the teacher vanishes behind walls and locks and the inherent regulation of organizations.

People worship the milestone instead of using its information. We idolize the doorframes and decorate the doors instead of walking through them.

It is important to learn to use spiritual teachers in a constructive and mature way.

First of all, from the perspective of many of the emerging forms of Western spirituality it is very difficult to understand that something like a teacher might be needed at all. Isn’t the whole point that you should be yourself, be your own master, be responsible for yourself? Of course, it definitely is important to be mature, independent, and responsible for

yourself, particularly in spiritual matters. That is one of the reasons an in-depth psychotherapeutic processing of one's personal history is so crucial in our time and culture. It is essential that the individual not meet the spiritual teacher through the unprocessed material that belongs with Mom and Dad. To the immature or insufficiently processed person, the spiritual teacher all too easily becomes a loving father or a Yahweh-like, divine authority. Or the teacher becomes the good, warm, and embracing mother, or a distant mother who must be courted with constant favors. Our age offers a wide selection of sidetracks in relationship to so-called gurus: naïveté and abuse; seduction and misunderstood spirituality. Mixing the different roles of psychotherapy, self-development, and spirituality in relationship to a single person seems to be a highly explosive concoction. Shock and trauma, neuroses and character issues, Mom and Dad: mixed into self-development and entangled with what should have been a mature, self-responsible, spiritual exchange, it is almost doomed to fail. In some extremely few fortunate cases it might work out, but as a rule it most definitely will not.

It seems more constructive (and for most people, absolutely necessary) to separate these different levels and address each of them with a different teacher: psychotherapy with professional psychotherapists, creative self-development with suitable and clear-headed teachers of self-development. And most important: the actual training in transformation of consciousness—wordless prayer and meditative deepening—with a genuine and clear-headed teacher who can control the function of transdual consciousness.

Our time and culture is very clear about the need for teachers in other contexts. Artists and scientists use teachers, especially at the advanced levels. If you really want to learn to master the violin, you seek out Kremer or Menuhin. But you don't ask Kempf to teach "Für Elise" for two fingers.

And you travel to get to the teachers. You don't sit around in your country of origin, waiting. You seek out the environments and the places where the great teachers are.

Likewise in science. In advanced scientific circles, teaching very often occurs in some form of apprenticeship. Many years of intensive cooperation go into schooling the new researchers.

This is the kind of educational culture among mature individuals that is needed for spiritual practice. And because spirituality is connected to one's personality and psychological structure, some degree of psychotherapeutic resolution is an almost unavoidable precondition for a relationship of spiritual exchange to bear fruit. This is not necessary in the same way in a musical or scientific teaching relationship (although it would often be desirable there as well).

How do you find a spiritual teacher? It's difficult to say. It is possible to say something about what not to do. It is not possible to find an authentic teacher with your head, with the intellect. You cannot think your way to it. Only your heart can find a teacher. This means that you also cannot rely on fashion, rumor, fame, or the number of the teacher's students.

Once again, it turns out to be important that the psychotherapeutic process is reasonably complete. If not, many seekers and students will mix in psychological needs with possible or actual spiritual needs. The lack of a "good-enough" dad or mom, the lack of sensible modeling, will guide the choice of teacher, and this may prove detrimental.

You can and should use your critical sense, your skepticism and analytical sharpness of intellect in the process of sorting and discarding. However, the crucial positive assent can only come from an unconditionally open heart. "Not investigating the teacher is like drinking poison," says Padmasambhava.

Naturally, the best teacher, or the right teacher for the individual at any given level of development, is the teacher who can facilitate the next step. From the student's point of view, the most advanced teacher is not necessarily the most constructive one. If the factual distance between the two perspectives is too great, communication and education will be much impeded, and the occasional fruitful exchange may even become impossible. The three old tried and true tenets are:

An authentic teacher is a door.

A true teacher is found with the heart.

A right teacher is the next step.

Lastly, there is one final and somewhat unwieldy factor in meeting a teacher. This factor can be described in different ways, according to

one's temperament and approach. Some would say that such a meeting—and the fact that it occurs at all—is fated, whatever that means. Other, more ebullient and perhaps more poetical spirits might see it as pure luck; and a more down-to-earth nature might consider it a fortunate accident.

Personally, I have had the great fortune to meet few but foundational teachers; and also—through a fortunate chance occurrence while travelling—to rediscover and recognize my old teacher, so that the mystery of transmission could occur once again.

And the core of the mystery of consciousness is that the enlightened teacher is your own naked awareness.

The paradox is that in one sense, it is all quite simple. It actually looks as if one of the main causes of all the difficulties is precisely that: it is much too simple. It is so simple that you cannot believe it is true. For instance, I think that once in a while everyone asks him-or herself: Who am I really? And you don't just ask, you also stop and listen for a possible answer or a possible reaction from within. In other words, for a moment there is an open, inward listening, when all the usual stuff is on hold and, so to speak, holding its breath. This kind of silent listening, based on the question of "Who am I?," is bidirectional openness. But compelling yourself to do this day in and day out, year after year, without an answer, seems to be quite difficult. However, this is exactly the very path to enlightenment. For instance, remembering the one who feels compassion in the compassion. Not remembering oneself as a body, or a thing, or an ego, or a point in consciousness, or the heart. Not remembering oneself as anything in particular—and actually I am not anything in particular—but just being aware of oneself as an indefinite openness that is present in the feeling. What could be difficult about that? And yet we are usually totally lost in whatever is present, the feeling, the emotion, the thought.

Shouldn't it be simple to wonder about what and where consciousness is? Just to wonder, not to come up with any solutions or answers—who is truly and honestly able to do that? Simply to wonder, into the eternity of consciousness. This is a kind of openness that is difficult to distinguish from wordless prayer. To keep on doing this day after day is exactly the path to eternal bliss.

In its essence, this open wondering is a spiritual attitude toward life.

Bringing this kind of attitude into the ups and downs of daily life will, of course, require daily practice. Allowing this kind of attitude to gain existential weight in your everyday life takes practice. The heart must work to get rid of its self-centeredness. Not once and for all, because that's impossible, but again and again, through wordless prayer in the heart. Consciousness cannot in truth clothe itself in this attitude unless it lets go of its emotional identification with its content. And it so happens that this can only be achieved with a daily effort in neutral observation.

PART III



Chop Wood, Carry Water

Before enlightenment: chop wood, carry water.

After enlightenment: chop wood, carry water.

—ZEN SAYING



To Pray without Ceasing

In all the great traditions on earth, people have acknowledged that it is necessary to support and stabilize the spiritual process with continuous exercises. Being conscious of every breath. Being constantly aware of the beat of the heart. An ongoing remembrance of self or of God. Continuous prayer, or every minute Zen. In the New King James Bible, 1 Thessalonians 5, 16-18, Paul describes this attitude unmistakably: "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks." Clearly, this does not mean once in a while, once a week, or twice a day. Always, without ceasing, in everything, this means: all the time, over and over again, minute by minute, day by day, year after year. For this to become something other than mere words you must prepare yourself carefully over several years, training in a manner that relates to the doings of your everyday life in a sensible, practical, and concrete way. You should begin slowly, realistically, and cautiously, with sporadic, brief exercises spread throughout the day. Only when you have established this routine (perhaps five to twenty times daily in very short sequences, five to ten seconds) does it make sense to begin to expand and lengthen this practice.

The continuous exercise should be woven into everyday life in a natural and unobtrusive manner. And one's motive to begin this kind of practice must be clear.

Why do all the great spiritual training systems insist on the necessity of continuous exercises? There are two main reasons. The first is that

everybody is already engaged in continuous exercises, it is just that they are not spiritual. The other is that there is a lethargy in us that resists the process of spiritual awakening. In part, continuous spiritual exercises serve to replace our habitual, spiritually unconstructive continuous exercises, and in part they serve to process and clear the lethargy.

What are these preexisting nonspiritual continuous exercises? They are the constant mantra-murmur of the ego, and the continuous ego prayer in one's feelings and thoughts. The ego mantra is the unceasing confirmation or denial of the ego: "I'm no good," or "Wonderful me." Both of these, the denial as well as the confirmation of the ego, uphold the ego process, the ego identity, and the egocentricity. The ego prayers are the needs and longings and wants of the ego: I want, I like, I think, I feel, I wish, I hope, I want, I think, I feel, I wish—or in its most generic core form: I, I, I, I, I.

And straight away, to prevent any misunderstanding: The unfolding of the ego with the related constructive, supportive ego prayer and ego mantra is necessary and, to a certain extent, good and beautiful, in all its many-colored ambivalence, during feast and war, in birth and in death.

However, if one single person, after having abundantly allowed the ego to unfold, and after maturing through psychotherapy and self-development, happens to awaken to spiritual practice, then the need for continuous spiritual exercise will slowly dawn on this practitioner. Even if a person sits quietly and meditates or does sensible exercises one hour or two hours every day, that same person will discover that all the other twenty-three or twenty-two hours of the day are still being spent in a dualistic—and usually not only dualistic, but an unequivocally egoistic—lifestyle.

The stream of consciousness itself is a continuous exercise in maintaining the dualistic and fundamentally egocentric lifestyle. The constant traffic of the mind confirms and upholds the dualistic interpretation of reality, and its related experience of the ego as substance and center.

This is exactly why the spiritual training systems (such as Christian Mysticism, Hinduism, Sufism, Buddhism, Yoga, Tantra, the Tao, and the Kabbalah) attempt to control the mind. And as an old Hopi Indian supposedly said: "The white man can rule the whole world, but he is unable to govern his own mind." Who can stop the thoughts and turn off

the inner TV even for just one minute? We can open our eyes, and we can close them. So we have control over our vision. But we cannot control consciousness. Our mind stream controls us. Concentration, meditation, illumination, and unity are steps in the process that teach us to control the mind. Wordless prayer and bidirectional consciousness are phenomena that can only unfold and bloom when the mind has come to know itself so well that the mind, or consciousness, can begin to govern itself.

Continuous exercises are brought in as competition and as an alternative to the traffic of the mind. Trying to fight the mind is hopeless. You have to find some sensible form of coexistence, where little by little you can introduce a spiritual theme into the general bustle and variations of the mind. One single theme of Bach, in the many moods and voices of dualistic music. Delicately, the mind teaches itself to listen more to the mysticism of Bach than to the funk of the ego or the blues of the soul.

A continuous exercise functions as a spiritual alternative to the dualistic movie soundtrack of the ego. Slowly and carefully, spiritually oriented exercises and prayer replace the dualistic exercises and prayer of the ego. Lots of training. Great patience. Many years.

The other main reason that these continuous exercises are necessary is our dim Precambrian lethargy, with regard to achieving greater wakefulness. In the West, this feature has been accurately described as original sin. In the East it is called negative karma. These terms indicate that the sluggishness reaches beyond the personal and deeply into our collective hereditary backgrounds. It is a feature that is embedded in evolution itself, in our genes, in the collective unconscious. From the viewpoint of Western evolutionary theory, life has survived due to a number of efficient strategies. For instance, there is our instinctive assessment of whether someone is friend or foe, whether something is a threat or will serve us. An animal knows whether something in nature is edible or poisonous. A bird can inherit the knowledge that the silhouette of a particular bird of prey signals mortal danger, so that the mere hint of a shadow with this shape triggers flight. And human beings—and lions and mice—have survived by developing and refining the ability to focus.

So when spiritual deepening requires a nonjudging, unfocused, open,

surrendering consciousness, our instinctive survival mechanisms protest. Human beings have survived because of self-interest and a consciousness structure with a psyche and soul underwritten by egoism. The greater the ego, the more Yahweh-like the egoism, the better the chance of survival.

From a spiritual perspective, this instinctive survival strategy (the ego) appears as a resistance, an insurmountable lethargy: original sin, negative karma.

If the individual is to have any real hope of recoding this instinctually anchored (animal) behavior pattern, it will require a fundamental reorganization of the mind. Consciousness must train the use of its higher functions (neutral observation, choiceless awareness, stillness, open bidirectional consciousness, transdual wakefulness) by unlearning those functions (judgment, focusing, action, language) that are necessary to the ego, and ratified by evolution. And practically speaking, this is not doable without a long-term learning strategy that utilizes, among other things, continuous exercises.

Continuous exercises are used to reshape or cleanse the evolutionary lethargy. Therapeutic strategies are of no use in freeing consciousness from being held captive by this lethargy. Only the intervention of an enlightened consciousness can essentially help an individual to transcend negative karma or original sin. But to be able to receive this help from the already enlightened level of consciousness, one must carry out highly accurate and thorough preparations. And continuous exercises serve as one step in this preparing of the soil.

It is self-evidently true that the great enlightened ones on this earth eliminate original sin and negative karma. But it is just as self-evident—and we all see this, every day in the media—that this does not help in the least unless each of us as individuals help the process along, with psychotherapy, ethics, prayer, meditation, and continuous exercises. Even though this earth has seen a long line of radiant, enlightened teachers (Rumi, Krishna, Buddha, Christ, Francis, Rabia, Meera, Yeshe Tsogyel, Teresa, etc.), and even though each of them, according to their individual capacity and caliber, takes on original sin and purifies it for all the rest of us, this does not help one bit unless each individual lends a hand, too. Frankly, the world has not become a better place, and people have not improved, since the Buddha and the Christ. Rather the opposite

—when seen from the ordinary levels of consciousness. Even though there are one billion Christians on the planet, and Christ has accepted the total load of original sin for all these one billion Christians, it doesn't work. It is only when the individual does his share of the work (psychotherapy, prayer, ethical behavior, meditation, and continuous exercises) that it turns out, again and again, that at the right moment, when the mystery opens, the enlightened consciousness has already purified the negative karma and has taken and forgiven the original sin. But this divine function can only unfold when the individual human being has prepared himself or herself through existential transformation.

The old teachers bear witness to the divine power of enlightened consciousness to eliminate original sin and negative karma for oneself and others.

Master Eckhart speaks in the West:

Indeed, you might well turn away quickly and in a short time from all sins, so strongly and with such true revulsion, and turn so strongly to God that, though you had committed all the sins that ever were or shall be since Adam's time, they would all be forgiven you, together with the punishment for them....¹

Master Tulku Urgyen speaks in the East:

One moment in the purest rigpa can eliminate the accumulation of negative karma from a whole lifetime, or even from several lifetimes.

Continuous exercises purify and prepare transformation at the collective unconscious-instinctive level. It is probably clear by now that the two main reasons that practitioners for thousands of years have engaged in this kind of practice are connected: partly because the continuous self-affirmation of dualistic consciousness is replaced by spiritual remembrance, and partly because the collective resistance is purified and prepared, so that the ego is made transparent at the same time that original sin and negative karma are transformed and purified through the contact with the enlightened transdual consciousness.

This labor continues for many years before the enlightenment process

may begin—and the work continues unaffected after the enlightenment process has begun. Before and after: chop wood, carry water.

Continuous exercises and mind training are interconnected. The two processes are mutually inspiring. This interaction is described with particular clarity in the Graeco-Russian Christian heart-prayer mysticism. Here, the continuous exercise is the prayer of the heart. But as the exercise deepens, consciousness is transformed, and the different layers and stages of the path to realizing the essence of consciousness are uncovered.

To me, it is a fact that the different spiritual training systems, the esoteric inner aspects of the world's religions, have a universal core. It is this common structure—the methods, the practices, the stages of consciousness, and the goal—that form the experiential foundation of the science of consciousness in spiritual processes. Every era reformulates and translates the universal structures into a terminology and form that will fit its style of culture and science. The current, and probably future, trend of our time seems to be that the universal esoteric core, global mysticism, is increasingly expressed in a scientific, non-dogmatic, and non-sectarian form. This could develop into a science of the heart. A science of consciousness, with a derived teaching structure, variously adapted to suit different cultures and temperaments. A great deal of promising scientific research has already been done on meditation and mystical states. A vast task still lies ahead, however, of uncovering and clarifying basic parameters and definitions. Mystical experiences in the spiritual traditions have never been correlated across cultures, and cannot yet be cross-referenced with precision.

In the following I will try to summarily sketch the crucial stages of awareness as they are described in the Hesychastic tradition of the Eastern Orthodox Church, in which the seeker retires inward to achieve an experiential knowledge of God. My two main sources are the very beautiful and innocent “Story of a Russian Pilgrim,” which is a basic text of the heart prayer tradition, and the *Philokalia*, which is the core text of heart prayer mysticism.²

On the benefit and the necessity for most people of a clear-headed spiritual teacher:

This greatest of all great doings (the heart prayer as a means to

theosis, deification, and enosis, unity consciousness) can be gained by many, or even by all, mostly by being taught. A few men receive this gift from God without being taught, working from inner compulsion and the warmth of their faith. But what is rare is not the law. Therefore it is necessary to seek a teacher who is not himself in error, to follow his instructions.

(In the Hesychastic tradition, the foundation consists of the monastic vows, the clearing of one's conscience, and the letting go of worries. This is a foundation that our own era can presumably better manage by satiating the ego-life, clearing biographical issues in psychotherapy, and a process of self-development.)

On concentration as preparatory training for prayer and meditation:

Attention is serenity of the mind, or rather its standing firmly planted and not wandering, through the gift of God's mercy. Attention means cutting off thoughts, it is the abode of remembrance of God and the treasure-house of the power to endure all that may come.³

On neutral observation as not saying yes to Heaven or no to Hell:

[O]ne who performs saving works simply from the fear of hell follows the way of bondage, and he who does the same just in order to be rewarded with the kingdom of heaven follows the path of a bargainer with God. The one they call a slave, the other a hireling. But God wants us to come to Him as sons to their father; He wants us to behave ourselves honorably from love for Him and zeal for his service; he wants us to find our happiness in uniting ourselves with him in a saving union of mind and heart.⁴

On choiceless compassionate equality—the next step:

He who has attained to true prayer and love has no sense of the differences between things: he does not distinguish the righteous man from the sinner, but loves them all equally and judges no man, as God causes His sun to shine and His rain to fall on the just and the unjust.⁵

On bidirectional openness, where consciousness becomes still and approaches its nakedness:

Keep your mind colourless, formless, and imageless."⁶

Our mind is pure and simple, so when it is stripped of every alien thought, it enters the pure, simple, Divine light and becomes quite encompassed and hidden therein, and can no more need anything but the light in which it is.⁷

On illumination and union, first with the teacher, and through the teacher, with God:

Suddenly I saw something flash quickly before my eyes, in the air as it were, like the figure of my departed *starets* ... Then I felt as though the soul of my *starets* made its way into my own, or gave light to it. I felt a sort of light in my mind....⁸

Through grace, we become Gods and sons of God and are illuminated by the light of his knowledge....⁹

I become aware of God in transformed self-awareness. God acts upon me in order to make me God, in order to assimilate me to his likeness; it is the likeness which is both my true self (the naked essence of consciousness) and my consciousness of God.¹⁰

There are many types of continuous exercises. They could be divided into two large main categories. One type is a kind of preparation for meditation: channeling exercises, circulation exercises, and the use of symbolic images (channeling and circulation exercises such as the pineal-hara or yin-yang-breathing described in *Presence Meditation*,¹¹ symbols such as a flower or a candle or a yantra in a chakra). The second type is the quintessence of prayer, centered in the heart in the form of a mantra (such as *Jesus Christ; Kyrie eleison, Kriste eleison; La illah il allah; Namo amida butsu*).

Most people have experimented with quite a number of simple exercises during processes with self-development. If one of them suits you, if you find it relatively easy to do and you have used it for maybe five to ten minutes a day for at least two years, a simple exercise like

that could be used as a continuous practice.

As mentioned above, you begin this training by first bringing the exercise into your daily activities five to ten times a day for five to ten seconds at a time. Next, you expand the practice, making a game of combining the exercise with all imaginable moods and all possible situations. You connect the exercise—by doing it—with every imaginable modification of your daily life: Practice for a few moments while walking, while sitting or standing, during holidays and hazards. While waking up, while falling asleep, washing dishes, in the shower, on the toilet, while cooking, when you are happy, sick, tired, angry; laughing, crying, making love, having an argument. You weave the continuous exercise into every situation. Slowly the spiritual orientation and memory will permeate your concrete everyday life. Spirituality, exercises, prayer, and meditation stop being something separate, solemn, distant, ceremonious. Spirituality becomes like your breath, always there; like your heartbeat it lies behind everything, is simultaneous with everything; and because the practice is conscious, consciousness of and in everyday life is affected and altered.

Spirituality in the shape of the continuous exercise becomes a habit. It becomes a habit to remember the continuous exercise that points in the direction of more profound forms of prayer and meditative deepening.

Gradually, the spontaneously remembered continuous exercise becomes an opportunity for the individual not only to practice his or her exercise in the middle of everyday life—in the check-out line at the supermarket, for example—but to use the exercise as an opportunity to open the heart and consciousness further: from the continuous exercise to neutral observation; or from the exercise to bidirectional consciousness. And once the enlightenment process begins, also from the continuing exercise to nondual openness.

Many people have asked the question: Doesn't practicing like that give you a kind of parallel life, and make you distracted? Doesn't it actually make you less present? First, please remember that this kind of practice is somewhat advanced; it presupposes maturity, ego life, psychotherapy, and self-development. The next point is that our ordinary consciousness, in the course of our busy everyday life, is not particularly present and certainly isn't unambiguous. While I am eating, I might be listening to music, chatting with a colleague, having private thoughts, and feeling

something else entirely. So in the cafeteria, at least five programs are running simultaneously: eating, background music or noise, conversation, private thoughts, hidden feelings. Now, if the actual person in this actual situation simultaneously prays the heart prayer or does the yin-yang breathing exercise, wouldn't he or she be *more* present? Try it, and see for yourself. But prepare properly for it, practice your continuous exercise for some weeks or months before blending it with high-attention activities like conversations, or you will have a different experience.

Completely ordinary people, and that means most of us, are not collected and are not present. We are diffuse, distracted, and very scattered. A continuous exercise—correctly established and thus tested for many years—produces collection and a direction toward openness and spirituality that most of us do not indulge in in our daily contacts and lifestyle.

Only rarely are we truly present. Usually we are on our way to some achievement; we have a goal in mind. Or we experience our activity as a diversion from boredom. Entertainment as an escape from emptiness. Or some part of us has been parked offstage, or set on an ulterior motive. We are rarely totally in the present. You approach the total present, the experience of the open sky, by letting consciousness rest with a view to itself in an effortless openness to everything.

For instance, by letting consciousness be what it is—a transparency, a crystal used as mirror by the cosmos—and letting all the mirror images happen by themselves and leaving them to themselves, they emerge. They change and transform:

Formation, Transformation; Eternal mind's eternal recreation.¹²

The present always holds the whole: thought, sensation, body feelings, images—self-image and world-image. If all the elements are equally included, the path to the totality, the transdual, is laid out.

Or letting go of everything, letting everything be in its own right. The two are one: letting go of everything, letting everything be, is the same as containing and equally including everything.

Fortunate is he who meets a teacher. More fortunate is he who meets

his old teacher.

Blissful and eternally helped is he who is united with the old teacher in the enlightened present. Every total now is like that.

For instance, feeling the openness of consciousness itself. Remaining awake, ready, in the unmanifest, and letting go of every natural manifestation. Acknowledging distraction as it condenses into solid thought. Back to wakefulness itself. Resting in relaxed, undistracted nonmeditation.

For instance, remaining at the wellspring of consciousness: the not-yet-thought, the not-yet-experienced. All differences vanish in the unity of the open present.

Language is diluted and homeopathically present in the stillness: Remain in open, fresh awareness with this.

The thought point is the point where wakefulness becomes so dim that consciousness is saturated with the thought potential and creativity that it contains. When consciousness loses altitude, thoughts crystallize. If consciousness keeps to the heights, the sky opens.

Thinking in wakeful emptiness is like writing in air. Thoughts leave no trace. They are freed and evaporate the moment they form. Compassion flows freely from the open present. Rarely are we truly present and fully here.



When Practice Permeates Dream and Sleep

We are such stuff as dreams are made on,
and our little life is rounded with a sleep.

—SHAKESPEARE, *THE TEMPEST*

The spiritual process is a slow awakening. Little by little, awareness of the three inner levels begins to permeate everyday life. The practicing individual gathers time around himself in transparent presence. Investment in the past and in the future becomes less dramatic and interesting, as compared to the open intensity of the present. When the apostle Paul in his first letter to the Thessalonians (AD 49) wrote “Pray without ceasing,” the practitioners of the heart prayer subsequently took this statement literally: to pray day and night.

Experience shows that after many years of practice, the continuous exercises spontaneously begin to permeate first the dream life and later the deep, dreamless sleep. Spiritual consciousness is woven into the vegetative and autonomic processes of the night.

In self-development, the meaning and energy level of the dream are of crucial importance.

On the three inner levels of consciousness, however, the primary focus is on the structure of consciousness, on consciousness itself and on its clarity and openness. In wordless prayer and meditative bidirectional

consciousness, the spiritual, and spiritually operative, point is the orientation of consciousness toward its source. The content that fills consciousness and the mind and the senses is less vital. Likewise with dreams. Progress with regard to the three inner levels shows itself in the consciousness level occurring in dreams.

It is helpful to discern between three types of dream consciousness that are related to one's spiritual and continuous practices.

1. You begin to practice your spiritual continuous exercise in the dream, just as in your waking everyday life.

The fact that the continuous exercise and your spiritual practice are reflected in the dream life at all should be considered a positive sign for the overall endeavor.

The practice is constructed in such a way that the basic continuous exercise offers an occasion for the heart, in any specific situation, to heighten consciousness. If you spontaneously remember the exercise on the bus—and practice it, too—then this will gradually bring you to allow the next step: neutral observation or wordless prayer or bidirectional consciousness, according to the particular path you are following in your practice.

It is exactly the same with the dream life. If you dream that you are walking down the road, and in the dream spontaneously remember to practice the continuous exercise, it will obviously mean a heightening of consciousness, relative to an ordinary dream. And this can offer the dreamer an occasion to remember, and thus to practice, the next steps in the spiritual process. You would then dream that you are engaged in wordless prayer or that you are bidirecting your consciousness. This is an important step forward, because the bidirectional consciousness of wordless prayer and meditative bidirectional consciousness are not qualitatively different in dreams than the corresponding consciousness during waking practice.

When a person in the enlightenment process gains control over nondual consciousness, then this practice, too, may be reflected in dreams. One would then dream that consciousness first opens to the bidirectional state and then expands to the nondual state. This has the effect that the dream that was the point of departure for the continuous

exercise—in this case, bidirectional consciousness deepening into nondual openness—the dream dissolves and vanishes. That which was projected and externalized in the dream scenario falls back into the naked essence of nondual consciousness.

The range of spirituality extends from ordinary dualistic consciousness through continuous exercises to wordless prayer or bidirectional consciousness, and from this heightened spiritual consciousness on to the nondual practice of the enlightenment process. This is directly mirrored in dream life. And when the consciousness of a dream is permeated by a moment of bidirectional consciousness, the dream stops. Either the person wakes up to ordinary consciousness—while practicing the nondual state—or sleep continues, but now as conscious, dreamless sleep. This is a clarity, a kind of luminous state of consciousness, which is similar to the nondual consciousness of the enlightenment process.

Nondual consciousness dissolves and lifts the dream to a luminous conscious clarity with no object. The training primarily consists of one's usual daily spiritual practice: exercises, prayer, meditation, and especially the sequence of spiritual continuous exercises.

The secondary training specifically targets the sleep cycle and focuses on the process of falling asleep. The point is to maintain consciousness as far as possible into the sleep state and at the highest possible level. At the level of the basic continuous exercises the task is to fall asleep while practicing your exercise and centered in your heart. The classical training consists of holding the image of a radiant point in the heart, a symbol of the level of joint consciousness. This is an attempt to maintain your consciousness at the sixth level, since such an image (in the aura, or as a bindu point in a chakra) is an enfoldment from the sixth, through the fifth, and down to the fourth level. If your practice is stable at the next levels (neutral observation, choiceless awareness, wordless prayer or bidirectional consciousness), consciousness will attempt to maintain itself at the level at which you practiced while falling asleep. You observe the process of falling asleep from the level you have stabilized through the practice. So if an individual is in an enlightenment process, and accordingly is stable in his contact with the seventh, nondual level of consciousness, he will attempt to accompany the falling-asleep process with the nondual consciousness, which—if he is successful—leads to conscious, dreamless sleep; a consciousness that is an objectless

luminous clarity, resting in identity of the essence and source of consciousness.

2. You begin to have lucid dreams, accompanied by the most constructive associated practice.

Lucid dreams are dreams in which you know that you are dreaming. Such dreams occur occasionally in ordinary dream life. There are many different sources of lucidity in dreams. Special stress factors may cause lucidity in a dream. You are being chased by bandits, and you run away and come to an abyss. The bandits are closing in. All of a sudden, you know that you are dreaming, and that you can save yourself in any way you want. When you know you are dreaming, you can change the dream as you please. Or: Lucidity can occur from something unreal or illogical in the dream, like a car driving through the room on the third floor of the building. A car cannot do that, ergo, this must be a dream. Or: Someone calls your name in the dream, and your reflective capacity is activated and produces lucidity. Or: I see myself in a mirror and am thereby transported to the reflective consciousness, which evokes lucidity. One last fairly common factor is that dreams of flying often result in lucidity. "I cannot fly—I am flying—I must be dreaming." Illogical dream events often give rise to the discovery that you are dreaming.

From the point of view of the ultimate goal, the most constructive practice in lucid dreams is to begin the spiritual practice sequence: continuous exercise, visualization, wordless prayer or bidirectional consciousness, and, if possible, nondual consciousness. Second best, but still excellent, is to seek light, which will bring you closer to the source of lucidity and thereby consciousness. Failing that, search for a spiritual teacher, or if there isn't one, a wisdom figure in the archetypal sense. But wordless prayer and meditation, either accessed directly or as a part of a spiritual practice sequence, is best.

Using lucidity for other experiments is understandably tempting, but essentially without spiritual substance. But it can be of great spiritual significance if you make use of the opportunity of lucidity and practice as you would in your everyday waking life.

3. Your dream consciousness turns astral, accompanied by the practice most relevant to that state.

The astral dream state can develop spontaneously or from within a lucid dream. In an astral dream state, I am aware that I am asleep, lying in the bed in this room, and also dreaming. In the lucid state, I know that I am dreaming while I am dreaming. In the astral state, I have the additional awareness that I am lying there, asleep. The sleeping body, the bed, and the room are included in the astral dream state. Consciousness is usually localized outside the body and observes the sleeping body from the outside.

At this point the temptation is great either to get scared or to experiment with different possibilities. This is a very powerful state. The openness of the creativity and reality-shaping capacity is even greater than in the lucid dream state. From an ultimate perspective, the object is always, first and foremost, to realize the naked essence of consciousness. Accordingly, the most constructive thing to do in an astral state is to immediately begin the spiritual climax: exercises—prayer or meditation—unity consciousness. To support this process, it is most comfortable to center consciousness—which experiences itself as being outside the body—above or in one of the four higher chakra points (heart, throat, pineal, crown). In the astral state of consciousness these four locations will correspond to reflection points, focus points for the inner levels. If a sleeper remembers to use this type of opening in a spiritually correct manner, his or her entire process may occasionally receive a considerable boost forward.

These hints are only shorthand sketches, since very few people have a practice that enables them to make optimal use of this kind of situation. The crucial factor is the daily spiritual practice. The effects on dreaming and sleeping states of consciousness manifest largely of their own accord. It is obviously important not to shift the emphasis from waking, everyday life to dreams and sleep. Even for people with a regular and well-organized practice (two to three hours a day), weeks, months, or years may go by between the reflective responses in the dream and sleep processes. However, if your practice is constructive, in time spiritual consciousness will automatically permeate the vegetative consciousness forms of the night.

In the story of the Russian pilgrim quoted earlier, the storyteller gives a brief and clear description of how the continuous exercise may be reflected in dreams. First, very simply: "During sleep I often dreamed that I was saying the prayer."¹ And later: "Sometimes also, though very rarely, I saw my departed *starets* in a dream, and he threw light upon many things, and, most of all, guided my ignorant soul more and more toward humility."²



The Death Process

*Sancta Maria, Mater dei,
Ora pro nobis peccatoribus,
Nunc et in hora mortis nostrae.*

(Holy Mary, Mother of God,
plead for us sinners,
now and in our hour of death.)¹

The following account rests—as is true, incidentally, of everything else in this book—primarily on my own experiences and observations, supported by a rich groundwork that has become apparent through exchanges with numerous other practitioners. I have attempted to systematize this material, and my considerations, so that they, to a reasonable degree, correspond with those texts on the spiritual horizon of the death process that I consider to be the most authoritative. The primary sources are: *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* and *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, by Sogyal Rinpoche; especially, *The Mirror of Mindfulness*, by Tsele Natsok Rangdrol; and last but not least, the final chapter of *Repeating the Words of the Buddha*, by Tulku Urgyen, my own root teacher, an enlightened Dzogchen master of the highest caliber.

The undertaking in these final considerations is solely to relate the spiritual practice to the death process. The focus is not on the psychological processes surrounding death—anger, despair, grief, loneliness, and fear—nor will the various classical death meditations be described here. In this text, the exclusive focus is on how a spirituality

that is deeply anchored in daily life can and will permeate and spiritualize the death process.

The way you live, and the habits you've learned, will be one of the key factors influencing the way that you die. One dies from the perspective on life one has lived with. An agile old housewife who had interwoven her daily tasks with joy died in an extension of the movement she used to smooth the bedspread over the newly made bed. A doctor died while commenting on the dwindling heart-graph on a screen. Molière died on stage. If a person has been doing one to three hours of exercises, prayer, and meditation for ten to twenty years, experience shows that this will have a profound influence on the death process.

In order to describe this with greater precision, it will be helpful to use the image of inner and outer levels of consciousness.

Ordinary consciousness lives and unfolds in the first four levels of consciousness: the physical-corporal, the life energy of the body, the astral-emotional, and the mental levels. These four levels and strategies of perception conceal and veil the three inner levels: the spiritual, joint, and unity consciousness (fifth, sixth, and seventh levels or spheres). Death appears very different, depending on whether it is experienced from the three outer levels or from the three inner levels. The fourth level, the level of the heart and the mental level of ordinary consciousness, seems to follow either the experiential mode of the outer levels or the perspective of the inner levels. Death, understood as an ending, closure, and disappearance, is real at the first four levels. The physical body dies, rots away, and vanishes. Its base matter is absorbed into new cycles. The vital energy, life, also fades away at death—it largely shuts down with the last exhalation. The astral-emotional energy—all my emotions, personal memories, images, dreams—all vanish at death. The archetypal, collective, astral matrix, however, remains, albeit at a collectively unconscious and impersonal level. In the mental field, the content of consciousness vanishes. The swarm of words, images, and personal thoughts that I have spoken, heard, and thought in my life disperse like a cloud and are dissolved in death. The impersonal form of consciousness, consciousness itself—this remains. It is precisely consciousness in and of itself that is the way to the inner levels. The three inner levels are usually fairly dormant in a human life. They are

present as seeds, ready to sprout, but often they do not sprout. The inner levels are present in everybody, but they are hidden; consciousness is usually not awake at its inner levels.

The aim of exercises, prayer, and meditation is to wake up at the inner levels of consciousness. If an individual is awake—that is, has discovered and realized his spirituality—that person will experience what might be called the continuous level of the self. It is definitely impossible to be conscious at the fifth, spiritual level without experiencing the progressive karma; one begins to experience that consciousness again and again incarnates or manifests itself from a more universal and impersonal level through the mental, the astral, the vital, and the body. Through this process the spiritual continuity of consciousness creates its individuality and limitations, and the advantage of this individual demarcation has a price, which is the death of the individual. But at the fifth, spiritual level—once it is awake and realized—death seems much as a dream-filled sleep seems to the ego. I go to bed and I fall asleep. There are dreams, and there is the vegetative continuity of deep sleep. But the next morning I am once again—strangely enough—myself. Remembering continuity. Being continuous. For the ego at the fourth level, sleep is a break in consciousness, but within an overall continuity. The person who is awake at the fifth level “shall not taste death.”

Jesus said: “Blessed is he who came into being before he came into being.” And: “For there are five trees for you in Paradise which remain undisturbed summer and winter and whose leaves do not fall. Whoever becomes acquainted with them will not experience death” (Thomas, 19). And: “But when you see your images which came into being before you, and which neither die nor become manifest, how much you will have to bear!” (Thomas, 84)²

If a person is awake at the level of joint consciousness, the sixth level, the continuity of consciousness will extend through life, the death process, the bardo state, and up to conception and incarnation into life in the womb. Life and death surge within an unbroken continuum of consciousness. At the seventh level there is neither life nor death.

Jesus said, “It is I who am the light which is above them all. It is I who am the all. From me did the all come forth, and unto me did the all extend. Split a piece of wood, and I am there. Lift up the stone, and you will find me there” (Thomas, 77).

From the awakened perspective of the three inner levels there is no death, understood as ending, closure, and disappearance. As the Irish healer Bob Moore³ once said, "There is no such thing as death." Here, death is a transition or a modification in an overarching continuum of consciousness. Or, from the perspective of unity consciousness, there is neither birth nor death; unity consciousness transcends the phenomenon of time itself.

But seen from the perspective of the first four levels of consciousness, death is frightening, absolutely real, and everything related to the ego personality ends and disappears.

Using this background context—which cannot be proved, but which can be experienced—the death process can be described more accurately.

In principle, what happens when you die is somewhat analogous to what happens during the process of falling asleep. In death, consciousness moves inward to its essence. During the actual death process, the physical garment is cast off, the vital veil is released, the astral-emotional is abandoned, and the dualistic mental veil is dropped. To the subjective experience of the dying person, the process typically looks like this: If the consciousness of the dying person is very clear, three experiences will follow one after the other. As consciousness relinquishes its identification with the physical, there is an experience of heaviness. The dying person wants to be lifted up. As consciousness lets go of the identification with the vital-energetic level, the dying person experiences cold and wants to be warmed. The release of consciousness in the solar plexus, at the astral level, generates thirst. When consciousness begins to leave the fourth level, loosening its rootedness in the mental dual-verbal mode of experience, it is experienced as a feeling of dissolving, of floating away in a homeopathic expansion.

At the energetic level, the life energy gathers around the heart during this process. Feet and legs, arms and hands become cool or cold. Warmth and life are centered in the heart. This is the last thing that happens before the final exhalation.

Consciousness changes throughout this process, in parallel with the abovementioned basic psychosomatic experiences and the process of energetic heart-centering. Consciousness moves through its natural modes of function, inward toward the naked essence of consciousness:

first passing through ordinary dualistic consciousness, then, more or less clearly—depending on the person's practice—through neutral observation (the dying person loses interest in his or her surroundings), on to nondiscriminating awareness, to end in an unfocused state of consciousness. For a person unaccustomed to prayer and meditation this is generally a confused state of mind. But an individual with a considerable practice background may experience this state as unfocused bidirectional consciousness, and accordingly as a natural state of wordless prayer and openness toward the source.

This occurs immediately before the last exhalation. The ensuing process may proceed in a tremendous variety of ways, depending on how much practice the individual has, and on the inner level consciousness at which he or she is awake and stable. Without spiritual training and without practice, consciousness will move from the fifth to the seventh level in a flash, immediately after the last exhalation. But since the ordinary, untrained consciousness is unfamiliar with this state, and consequently is unable to orient itself or to recognize it, the overwhelming power of this illuminative glimpse of the naked enlightened consciousness of the seventh level will cause the untrained consciousness to fall into a kind of faint, or sleeping state.

The amazing thing about death is that the dying person, through a natural process of uncovering, is brought inward to the naked, unhidden consciousness. But it is only through practice that it becomes possible to maintain wakefulness and navigate in the three inner levels, whose reciprocal movements form the intermediate state between death and the next life.

The archetypal structures of near-death experiences (such as tunnels, wisdom figures, light, and bliss) correspond to the waking passage from the level of ordinary, mental consciousness to the spiritual level. The main characteristic of a near-death process is that the person in fact does not die, which means that the process of disrobing consciousness stops before the seventh, nondual level, and usually at the fifth, spiritual level. And the experiences of the fifth level are usually ecstatically positive. However, when a person really dies, all anchoring in the body, in the breath, in the astral and the mental, is lost. As the delay caused by the normal identification and anchoring of the lower levels comes to an end, the subsequent dismantling of the fifth and sixth levels, the spiritual and

joint, pass in a flash.

A person without a predominant spiritual practice cannot recognize the meeting with, or the enfoldment into, unity consciousness. Accordingly, the rest of the process, from the moment of death to the next birth, happens partly in a kind of faint, partly in a dream state alternating between blissful and nightmarish dreams, with no option of affecting this process or navigating in it to any significant degree.

However, if a person has a ballast of practice (one to three hours daily for ten to twenty years), this training will automatically permeate the bardo state. And, depending on how far the practice has developed through the spiritual practice sequence (continuous exercises—visualization—wordless prayer or bidirectional consciousness—nondual consciousness), this practice will automatically permeate the last moments of the death process and, more important, the after-death state. It is well worth remembering that true spiritual practice is impersonal, which means it is not about the ego. At the fifth level, the core of the practice is the longing for, and later the meeting with, the divine Thou. On the sixth level it is the union with the divine, or joint consciousness. And on the seventh level, it is the transcendence of all opposing forces, including the opposition and the interaction between the human and the divine.

The more practice, the greater the navigational capacity in the intermediate stage.

Since the after-death states primarily unfold at the three inner levels of consciousness, the connection with, and the rootedness in, the lower levels (the astral-emotional, vital or life energy, and physical) is missing, which is what causes the loss of centering and orientation. The contraction that generates individuality, which is maintained during life by the physical-vital-emotional foundation, is absent. In the after-death state, consciousness is infinitely expanded and without substance. Still, the more a person has practiced during his or her lifetime, and learned to navigate attentively on the inner levels, the greater the possibility of navigating in the after-death states. Since a thoroughly embedded practice will manifest spontaneously in the after-death states, it can form a foundation for the otherwise foundationless consciousness, and begin a process of crystallization, or orienting and navigating. This is an exact analogy to the appearance of the continuous exercise in dreams: The

continuous exercise causes the dreaming (or here, the after-death) consciousness to begin to ascend the sequence of spiritual practice.

Up to this point in the book, the description of the spiritual developmental process all the way to the process of enlightenment has been kept within the context of one lifetime, namely the present one. And—as it is emphasized for instance in both Christian and Tibetan mysticism—experience does show that it is possible for a person to realize the enlightenment process in one lifetime. However, Indian spiritual traditions (such as Vedanta, Jainism, Mahayana), among others, maintain that the process of spiritual enlightenment usually extends over several lifetimes, and that it is embedded in a more impersonal overarching developmental continuum. This development includes the process of the self through the progressive karma, as well as the collective karmic process at the level of joint consciousness.

The inner levels may be compared to holographic images. An ordinary flat, two-dimensional photograph is made with unorganized white light, but to make a hologram it is necessary to use the organized light of a laser. Another difference between ordinary photos and holograms is that while the image can still be recognized in the negative of the two-dimensional photo, the frame of a hologram is either dark, or a complex, rhythmic pattern with no visible image. You can only reveal the holographic image from the frame with coherent light, light that has only one single wavelength. The key lies in shining the right kind of light on the frame. Suddenly an enchantingly and surprisingly three-dimensional image emerges, seemingly out of nowhere.

Meditation and prayer organize the light our consciousness uses, both to create and to view images, and the inner planes are a kind of five-dimensional hologram that becomes visible only when a more organized consciousness-light shines through the everyday elements of our three-dimensional and highly time-bound perceptions and philosophy. While the light of the ego and the ordinary consciousness cannot see and cannot make out or even imagine a pattern extending over multiple successive lives, or over several simultaneous lives, the more coherent consciousness of the inner levels cannot help but reveal the patterns and connections that link successive lifetimes in karmic continuity. The ego is present in the pattern, but only as a constituent part. It is not the ego that lives again and again.

The different successive (or at the seventh level, simultaneous) lives are part of a progressive history of spiritual development and enlightenment. This perspective is visible only from the inner levels. For example, if ten-thousand people were creatively arranged to spell the word "COMPASSION" when seen from a height of one kilometer, this would be impossible to see from the perspective of the ten-thousand individuals. But it would be visible from above. It would also be clear that no single person was displaying the word compassion; only the context could reveal it.

When a person has absorbed a spiritual practice so profoundly that the practice of continuous exercises, continuous prayer, and continuous meditative openness begins to permeate the dream life as well as everyday life, the practice will also permeate the death process. This will heighten and sharpen the progressive karma, the process of the self from this lifetime and on through the next one. If in this lifetime a person has learned to orient him-or herself at the inner levels, the moment of death may become an opportunity to recognize the naked awareness that is naturally revealed in a climactic flash in every death process. If this moment is recognized, the individual will actually be able to begin the enlightenment process itself at that same moment, which would be invaluable both during the death process and in the course of the life that follows.

However, the most important thing is that when the spiritual practice permeates the death process, experience clearly shows that the dying person dies a less painful death; his or her consciousness and presence are clearer, consciousness maintains awareness closer to the actual moment of death, and death becomes more spiritual, self-reliant, and, most important, peaceful. The opportunity to die in a spiritual atmosphere, surrounded by people with spiritual experience, and supported by people who pray and meditate in a natural and straightforward manner—this is far too rare in our time. Experience clearly shows that such a death process will be beautiful as well as meaningful.

Enlightened consciousness, the naked essence of consciousness, is hidden in the ordinary consciousness—in and by the self-image, in and by the worldview—in the same way that a hologram is hidden in a random-looking two-dimensional negative. Meditation and prayer are

essentially about a different way of seeing. Ordinary consciousness cannot see its own higher or inner levels of function. It is ordinary consciousness itself, through its basic operations (instinctive judgment, focusing, activity, and language), that conceals the functions of inner consciousness (spiritual, joint, and unity consciousness). The aim of wordless prayer and meditative deepening is to unlearn the ordinary ego-use of consciousness, and in this process of unlearning, to discover the higher levels of consciousness, from which fulfillment, spiritual interconnectedness, and compassion spontaneously flow.

With these hints about the relationship between spiritual practice and the death process we come to the end of this outline of prayer and meditation as a path to the process of enlightenment. It is my hope that this description will be a source of inspiration and perhaps of clarification and benefit to the many spiritually open people who, in so many different ways, nevertheless are all still striving to achieve the same thing.

Appendix



Dzogchen in the West An Introduction to Jes Bertelsen and Vækstcenter

BY KARL ANTZ¹

[T]o present this in a major language ... might be important, as it might inspire others working with other teachers but with fundamentally the same project: How might one, in an authentic way, transfer and reformulate Dzogchen for the West, and how might one develop a preliminary training, a *ngöndro*, maintaining some of the [original] elements and at the same time tentatively making use of some Western techniques—e.g. depth psychology, philosophy, and such. That is our cultural background, and for a Westerner Dzogchen must be placed within that context ...

In his books and in his teachings, Jes Bertelsen seeks to integrate the Dzogchen view and practice, as he learned it from Tulku Urgyen, into a Western cultural context. While holding traditional approaches to Dzogchen in great respect, he insists on the need to acknowledge and incorporate fundamental achievements of Western societies and culture, including democracy, gender equality, and science, as well as the insights of Western philosophy and depth psychology.

Jes Bertelsen emphasizes that his aim is not to establish a new school of Dzogchen. In recent years, Dzogchen is being introduced in many contexts in the West, and he feels that perhaps his books may offer inspiration to other groups and individuals, by showing how one community went about this, acknowledging and partly growing from its

Western roots and with a mandate from an authentic Tibetan lineage holder.

Childhood and Education

Jes Bertelsen's work and teachings can tentatively be described as moving between, and to some extent seeking to integrate, two seemingly polar opposites: on the one hand, an investigative, analytical approach, seeking to discover constituent elements, connections, and systems; and on the other hand, an intuitive, contemplative approach to life—remaining aware without evaluation, seeing observer and observed simultaneously. Keeping in mind the ultimate inadequacy of such labels, one could say that these two approaches to some extent correspond to a “Western,” scientific, disaggregating, systematic investigation of the objective, phenomenal world, and an “Eastern,” more holistic, intuitive, meditative approach to all impressions—a contemplative perspective that stems from knowledge of an ultimate reality beyond the seemingly objective.

These contrasting perspectives suggested themselves already in his childhood:

When I was two and a half years old, I lay in a coma for three days, and the physicians were of the opinion that it was too late ... And this situation initiated a specific type of activity: I simply began to meditate, using self-invented mantras that, as it turned out, sounded somewhat Tibetan. And then there was a kind of deepening contemplation, a looking inward; I sat quietly in the *vajra* posture and hummed those syllables. This began shortly after my recovery and I continued to do that. I had a feeling of having connected with something in the course of this near-death process; there were feelings of separation and fear, but there was also something constructive. And this was so valuable that I wanted to maintain a connection with it in some way. This led me to begin this meditative activity. And I continued and practiced it daily for about an hour, refining it, until I was about fourteen years old.

When I gradually became more aware, at the age of about five to six years, I began to investigate what this might be. And I began to take note of certain things. When, for example, I had

been given something that I had wished for—for instance, a toy car—I would first put it on the ground instead of playing with it; and I would investigate: Where does this expectant joy about a gift actually come from? I contemplated in this way: to begin with, inwardly with the aid of my self-invented mantras, the stillness, and then noticing a vague feeling of anticipation about the present. And then I would investigate from where this anticipation came ... And this process was probably the trigger for all of this.

When I got older there was a feeling that ordinary reality somehow was not what was essential. There was a very distinct feeling—already at the age of five or six years—that what one got to know, immediately observable reality and the relations between people, was not everything; that there were deeper layers. And real meaning had its source in these deeper layers. It felt important to get at those. And [these meditative exercises] were a tool for entering them. That was the next step in this process. So there was a feeling that reality as it was presented and as it appeared in the mind and in the intersubjective field wasn't the real thing; that something more essential could be accessed. And this was integrated into the rather spontaneous process of self-healing that began after my illness and on which my first notion of practice perhaps was founded.

Some years later the question arose: What basically happens when I fall asleep? And now I suddenly discovered that this was one of the paths on which one could travel inward. It seemed as if the process of contemplation that began when I practiced in the way described earlier in some respects resembled the process of falling asleep—the difference being that in this process I never fell asleep. And so I thought that it ought to be possible to move in the opposite direction. But this already involved a rather more discursive or analytical consciousness, so this must have been at the age of about fourteen years.

On a personal level I assume it was these three things that triggered the process: first, the attempt to recover something that had been present in this death (or near-death) experience; next, that which had to do with the perception of reality, that is to say

the feeling that this here could not be the real thing. I had a clear feeling that something remained unsaid in the way that reality was described, that there must be something essential, a different perception that, when I asked them about it, my parents and friends were unable to describe—they could not relate to this; and finally, my investigation into what happens when one falls asleep. There were these three elements.

Over the following years, Jes Bertelsen pursued this analytic-scientific track further. After finishing high school he studied at the Institute for the History of Ideas at Aarhus University. This institute was founded and headed by the Danish theologian and philosopher Johannes Sløk (1916–2001).

[The History of Ideas] is interdisciplinary in that it is based on the fundamental ideas behind different disciplines, giving one the opportunity to specialize in many different areas—fundamental psychological, philosophical, artistic, religious ideas, and so forth. The main motive is the interdisciplinary investigation of the context and structure behind these ideas, and to see all this in relation to the fundamental developments of an epoch.

How you structured your studies was very much up to yourself. I told Sløk what my fields of interest were and he left it to me to study them. Sløk had some clear demands: you had to master Latin and Greek, and you had to read certain philosophers and authors. Apart from that it was up to oneself. So I could plan without interference what I wanted to study in whatever way I wanted, which subject I wished to choose for my thesis and so forth. And this is where Jung, Freud, and Reich, and later Kierkegaard and Existentialist philosophy came in.

In 1970 Jes Bertelsen received Aarhus University's Gold Medal for his Master's thesis, *Kategori og afgørelse* (*Category and Decision*).

Based on Kierkegaard's *Papirer* [*Papers*] and other works, it is a presentation of what he had found in Aristotle and Trendelenburg [the author of *Elementa Logices Aristotelicae*, a collection of

passages from Aristotle's *Organon*], how he had reformulated this, and how he differed from the theory of fundamental categories found in Hegel, Fichte, and possibly also in Kant. This was my basic thesis. I sought to demonstrate this historically and to uncover Kierkegaard's theory of categories—something that he himself never does—but it is self-evident that there is in fact a thoroughly thought-through theory of categories behind Kierkegaard's works.

Since high school I had occupied myself with Kierkegaard and Jung, and I now wanted to try to demonstrate the connection between Kierkegaard's existential analysis and Jung's depth psychology. So I spent several years familiarizing myself with Kierkegaard's philosophy; my doctoral thesis² examines the connection between Kierkegaard and Jung. This study, like the Master's thesis, traces the classical theory of categories and opens toward, and later includes, mysticism.

After he successfully defended his doctoral thesis, Jes Bertelsen spent a period studying at the Jung Institute in Zürich.

It seemed to me that Jung's depth psychology was among the most useful, open, and interesting developments in the Western tradition. After I had written my thesis, several foundations for scientific research offered to finance a period of study abroad, and I spent a year and a half at the Jung Institute. I went through a qualifying analysis but did not complete it as the whole procedure seemed very dogmatic to me.

I wanted to find out what really happened if one actually practiced Jung's writings instead of just reading them—and if one compared that with Kierkegaard and Kant, what might happen if one entered into this directly?

At the same time I wanted to revive my investigations of the form of meditation that I had practiced between the ages of two and a half and fourteen years. I began to experiment; I tried to discover what I later came to call the concept of bidirectional consciousness: from where do thoughts arise? How might one begin to directly establish what is apperception and when

thoughts arise?

Two questions became the koan, so to speak, that I used in my amateur fashion. One was, to move every time a thought arose from this thought to the question: "From where does this thought come?" in order to reach the point where it developed its form as thought. Such a thought seed in consciousness exists without form; it comes into existence as something, and its formation so to speak appears as a feeling or a thought.

The other question was the investigation of what apperception is. We know what it is technically, and we have many definitions of this concept—Kant's or Kierkegaard's or those of others—but what is apperception in practice? How can one develop a consciousness of apperception or fix one's attention on it? And what does that mean? And very soon one discovers that this is not possible as long as one holds on to language; as soon as language is present, apperception vanishes. And this means that apperception is a phenomenon that transcends language; apperception exists in a different dimension.

So there were these two endeavors: the search for the origin of impulses and pre-forms of thoughts, feelings, and ideas, and the question of what pure apperception is as a phenomenon "experienced" in consciousness. "Experienced" in quotation marks, because very soon one discovers that apperception exists as a precondition for experience, so to speak. One cannot even formulate "This is a kind of experience." As soon as you do that you have proposed a dualism—which means that one has taken it [apperception] for granted. And from this entire problem area—that is, from Kant and Kierkegaard, not as a theoretical thought procedure but as koan-like investigation in practice—originated all of this. After this several years followed where I practiced this form of meditation. Every day I sat for several hours, worked with my practice, and tried to write everything down. That was the next step.

Bob Moore, Vækstcenter, and *Higher Consciousness*

From 1970 to 1982, Jes Bertelsen taught at the Institute for the History of Ideas at Aarhus University. This period ended with a series of lectures on depth psychology that drew large audiences, including from outside the university.³

In 1978 Bertelsen had encountered the Irish healer Bob Moore, who was living in Denmark; their relationship lasted until Moore's death in 2008.

I had experienced certain perceptions that I could not really connect with anything. I did not understand them. In the language of Jung, these experiences resembled archetypal images and symbols.

For a long time people had been contacting me, and I tried to the best of my ability to give them feedback in some form—about their dreams as well as about their self-development. When I returned to Denmark [from the stay at the Jung Institute in Zurich] I had established a foundation in order to be able to work more systematically with people on the basis of my knowledge, amateurish as it might have been, about how meditation practice works. And at about this time these perceptions began to arise.

When I met Bob I had a clear intuition that he knew what this was all about. And he could make adjustments to it—he knew exercises and had explanatory models with which I could make progress in this area; he offered a structure to all this—a structure that I could use as a point of departure. And this basically gave greater precision in the development of my own meditative process. Because now I could clear out some of these perceptual phenomena, with the result that I could concentrate more clearly on what was important: from where stem the impulses in the mind, in consciousness—thoughts, feelings, and ideas—and I could penetrate deeper into this without being distracted by the perceptions that would arise. I made progress with the aspect of apperception as well, as the domain of clairvoyance, so to speak, was separated from that. And this led to greater precision.

I think, with regard to all of this—the encounter with Bob, the fact that I put his exercises into practice and received his explanations, which led to a clearer distinction of these two domains—that all this led to a certain kind of opening in 1981.

This opening was the strongest spiritual opening I had yet experienced. And it demanded a kind of synthesis or description of my own actual point of view regarding this whole question of meditation. After *Drømme, chakrasymboler og meditation* [*Dreams, Chakra Symbols, and Meditation*, 1982]—which is a distillate of the period with Bob—this experience occurred, this breakthrough, or, if you want to put it that way, this flash of illumination.

In order to classify this experience I tried to gather everything: What kinds of experiences had I had with meditation myself and what kind of experiences together with people that I had been teaching up to that time? I gradually began teaching a little more experimentally, and we would exchange experiences and ideas: “You might try to do it this way or that; what do you experience when you do it this way?” In this manner I had gathered a lot of different experiences; and that was the source material for *Højere Bevidsthed* [*Higher Consciousness*, 1983].

By that time I had read Longchenpa’s *Kindly Bent to Ease Us*—in Guenther’s translation. I had read all three volumes, but especially the second volume on meditation left a deep impression on me. I felt that here was somebody who knows. But Longchenpa [1308–1364] had been gone a long time, and I thought: “Well, I can’t travel somewhere to get information,” so ...

I have always been of the opinion that there are two sides to religion: something you might call ecclesiastical religiosity, where one relates to rituals, texts, dogmas, and belief systems. And on the other hand a monastic spirituality. And here, in mysticism or monastic spirituality, I saw again two aspects: one that is culturally defined—for example, relating to God and the Devil, or having to be of male gender in order to experience a process of enlightenment; and another aspect that was universal. And from the very beginning I was interested in the universal aspect.

Personally, I had next to no interest in the ecclesiastical religious matters of belief systems. And neither did the culturally defined aspects of mysticism—which obviously is always formulated in relation to the respective culture—interest me very much.

But as far as I can see, there is something like a universal core in mysticism. And it was this core that I was interested in from the very beginning. In my view, this core is practically always based on experience. It is always grounded in a way distinct from historical and cultural conditions—and completely different from ecclesiastical spirituality. The frame of reference behind *Højere Bevidsthed*, unitary consciousness, is, therefore, a combination of what I had read of Eastern mysticism—e.g. Longchenpa—and Western mysticism, as well as what I had cursorily read of Rumi and Hindu-mysticism. Here, it seemed to me purely intellectually that the frame of reference was the highest, that is to say, a nondual unitary consciousness.

Meanwhile, Jes Bertelsen had left his position at Aarhus University and, together with Hanne Kizach, had founded Vækstcenter (the Center for Growth) in Nørre Snede. This is a place for the teaching, study, and practice of self-development and meditation. It is also a kind of lay convent whose core is the spiritual dimension of life, embedded in a framework that is in accordance with our time. This means that members of the community interact with society much like the majority of people in Denmark—and strive to maintain personal balance in terms of their economy and finances, professional activities, love and sexuality, interpersonal relationships, and interaction with the social and natural environment.

[We founded Vækstcenter] in part to enable us to intensify a way of teaching in these areas that could be formulated totally freely; to establish a place for instruction and for people that was based entirely on the ideas and visions that I had experienced up to that point. All this built precisely on these visions and structures; and we tried in this way on the one hand to gradually establish a progression of courses, and on the other hand to gather a community of people to make it possible to begin experimenting

with other states, other kinds of consciousness; to develop the entire dimension of meditation, of dream work, and the domain of [mental and spiritual] energy to a point where it might crystallize into an alternative way of living—a way of living that could be integrated into everyday life.

Jes Bertelsen expresses his approach to teaching as well as his work in connection with Vækstcenter thus:

It was not particularly interesting to try to convince people. It was far more interesting to try all of this out collectively; and my own concern was to try and keep it free from all dogmatism. From the very beginning this was my main interest. I believed that it should be possible—and that in any case we in the Western world find ourselves in a situation where there is a readiness to tentatively work with some of these tools, to develop them and to compare them with other pedagogical tools—and to set them free. I regarded that as a challenge. That is what I was interested in.

Tulku Urgyen and Dzogchen

In 1989, Jes Bertelsen was on vacation in Nepal, where he visited a friend and student of his who was working there. This friend introduced him to Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche, one of the greatest Dzogchen masters of our time. And this encounter proved to be of crucial significance for Bertelsen's life and work. Tulku Urgyen introduced Bertelsen to the nature of mind.

[This encounter] is described in *Bevidsthedens flydende lys* [*The Flowing Light of Consciousness*, 2008]. It was interesting that Tulku first described the matter with words, and Andreas Kretschmar translated that into English. It was very clear and vivid. He used the image of the sun, its rays, and space or expanse. The point is that the rays of the sun—that is, the part of consciousness that moves outward from the source—is continually in an expressive modality, in expressions, as thoughts, feelings, images, concepts, experiences. And the task at hand is to move backward along the rays and to attain fusion with the sun.

And this image was very close to my own way of working. I quickly realized this on the basis of his way of putting it—already here he used the expression “self-cognizant awareness,” *rangrig*, as one way to designate *rigpa*. And the other was to designate it as the ultimate source of all content of consciousness.

These were the very two concepts along whose lines I had moved backward before I wrote *Højere Bevidsthed*, concepts that I had somehow and amateurishly invented myself—these very two concepts he used. And after having described the theoretical aspect and giving this verbal pointing-out instruction, he stopped talking; from then on he used his hands. And that was extremely powerful. Suddenly there was no longer any mediation via the translator; he communicated with gestures, maintaining contact with me, and then he very simply showed it to me in its totality. The essential introduction happened purely in gestures. So there were no words when he “said” it. Because during the build-up he was aware that now—now!—I was there as fully as I could be;

and now he continued wordlessly in direct contact. At that moment even the translator vanished.

At the time I did not understand any Tibetan, so I was there with him, as it were, completely beyond language. And I was certain—that is how I experienced it inwardly—that I was at the place he was pointing at. And then he wordlessly drew away the final veil. And then it came; it broke through.

This lasted about half an hour. Later he offered suggestions as to how, in his opinion, I should work from now on. And he gave me exactly the form of practice that I actually had been working with—exactly the same practice, down to the details. That made a big impression on me ... Tulku Urgyen's own assessment was: "This is recognition of the nature of consciousness, it is being in the nondual state, in *rigpa*, and it is to stay in it for a certain duration."

Tradition and Renewal

Dzogchen is the culmination of a Tibetan tradition whose roots are deeply entwined with the concept of lineage. These roots can never be severed, even as throughout history Dzogchen as a philosophical and contemplative tradition has continued to evolve in ongoing engagement with the surrounding society and culture.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said that it is the continuity, for instance in Dzogchen, in the lineage, that is the stream of gold. Every teacher and each period produces tangible forms that are shaped by the particular time and its forms of expression; but all of these derive from the gold that flows through them. That is a very beautiful image. Its meaning is easily understood when we look at how Longchenpa had to shape it, or Jigme Lingpa; those are the great masters—but equally all the minor ones, among whom I count myself, had to do this in their own less elegant and less profound ways. Still, the same general law applies to the great ones, in whose works this can be seen clearly, as well as to the minor ones.

While Jes Bertelsen defined his pedagogical approach early on, the relationship of his approach to more traditional forms has become clearer in recent years:

In my view, Longchenpa's presentation in the texts by him that I studied⁴ are exceptionally free of cultural and historical fixations, while at the same time they are in many ways clearly anchored in the Dzogchen tradition. This tension—being as open and free as can be imagined and, at the same time, remaining faithful to traditional Dzogchen—made it possible, even on the beginners' level that I myself work on, to discern what the flowing gold is that comes through ... Tulku Urgyen's image was: it is the same water pipe, even though one tap may be big and the other small—the same water runs through both.

The tension between tradition and renewal leads to understandable and indeed necessary critical questioning of projects such as this. Often, they are dismissed as “New Age.” What is Bertelsen’s view on such charges?

Tulku Urgyen once said something that impressed me greatly: Whatever we had done at this dharma center [Vækstcenter], we had succeeded in developing a genuine *ngöndro*—preliminary exercises for Dzogchen, based on Western foundations.

Leaving aside what he knew through the openness of his consciousness, he did not know the details of what we had done—all of our experiments, mistakes, and deficiencies; but this statement expressed what he concluded. And that is interesting. It is important to have a statement like that. He must have seen it in this way.

There are several reasons for not considering this place [Vækstcenter] as being New Age.

In my view New Age is to a great extent a system of belief. Much in New Age is based on belief—just as in ecclesiastical religiosity. You take elements of mysticism, create some concepts of your own, and believe all this. And only very few people have [authentic] experiences of their own. New Age does not build primarily on experience, so that one does not use anything not experienced by oneself. On the contrary, it builds on holistic, nuanced models of consciousness and cosmic models—models of which the individuals themselves lack experience.

Furthermore, almost all pedagogical structures in New Age are self-designated, whereas in authentic traditional schools, for example at Mount Athos or in the Himalayas, there is an attempt at a kind of quality control regarding individual instruction and practice, by ensuring continuity through transmission from teacher to student; transmissions during which the particular student is examined very carefully as to at which level of ethics, practice, and realization he or she finds herself. There is a very clearly defined level the student must have reached before being authorized to teach. That is not the case in New Age.

I would not have dared to establish Vækstcenter without authorization from Bob Moore. After my big opening in 1981 he

told me that a teacher-student relation was no longer possible, as he felt that I had reached a level where he could no longer teach me. But he did give me authorization to establish the Vækstcenter.

After the encounter with Tulku Urgyen, new structures were developed that are exclusively based on his authorization. After that encounter I felt that what distinguishes Vækstcenter and the forms of practice there is that they are based on experience; that it is not based on some belief system; and that there is no self-designation with regard to teaching. Our practice builds on a tradition, and I have received the necessary authorizations and examinations. And I regard this as essential.

There is a further factor why this does not resemble New Age. Ken Wilber⁵ has made a distinction which I regard as very important; a distinction between what he calls the charismatic element of transmission—what happens when two people, a teacher and a student, meet and this meeting extends into *rigpa*—and what he calls the technical element of transmission: a subsequent period, lasting many years, of adjustment and supervision by the teacher in relation to the student in question. And much of what in my view has a rather New Age character is based on the fact that there may have been a charismatic encounter but no subsequent period of technical transmission by a genuine teacher.

I had the good fortune to experience the, in these terms, charismatic transmission intensively with Tulku Urgyen; and afterward I had the fortune to experience the entire period up to his death, during which I received critical—indeed, very exacting—feedback on states of mind and ego and on where I did or did not stand and so on. And this is essential in understanding the fact of the matter: that the teacher must not be self-ordained but authentic. And that is, in my view, a sound way of working in this domain.

A Multipronged Approach to Spiritual Training

Although much emphasis is placed on working directly with consciousness through meditation training, in fact Bertelsen's pedagogy insists on a broader, balanced approach to spiritual training, using tools that work on several different levels and engage different aspects of personal development:⁶

If you examine the common core of the various spiritual traditions you will, in my view, encounter a rather complex collection of tools—tools that are effective primarily through their interaction.

You have to work with the body and with breathing. You must work with the heart, that is, with the aspect of empathy. You have to work with consciousness. You have to work with the creative element. And if you isolate only one element, you can certainly do that—nobody can stop you from doing that, and it will doubtlessly have some effect. If you work with the insights from creativity or breathing, this can be used as well as misused in many situations. But if you draw on the full appreciation, that is to say on the fact that these tools together open the way to a deeper contact with the heart and consciousness, that they open up to experiences—in that case misuse will probably not take place.

In my view, the core or essence of spirituality or mysticism is a form of contact with some more collective sides of one's personality. That does not mean lower collective un- [or sub-] conscious aspects but rather collectively conscious and collectively emotional potentials. And this dimension is not one-dimensional. So if you approach this matter from only one side—e.g. through the body or the heart or consciousness—you will not be able to get to the heart of the matter. For the point is to discover its multidimensionality. You cannot reach it using only one dimension. This is in a way a system of coordinates: If you want to define a point on a plane you need two coordinates. If you want to identify a point in space you need three coordinates.

Now if we hypothetically state that the core content of mysticism or of spirituality is multidimensional, we need to approach it in many different ways. You cannot reach this core content by using only the heart or consciousness or the body or breathing or creativity.

With regard to compassion, isn't it remarkable when reading Longchenpa, and especially his Dzogchen poetry, that he doesn't say anything about it? When I think back to everything that Tulku told me—at least what he said directly when I was present—there was never any emphasis on compassion. Because emphasizing it is not necessary. Because Dzogchen is compassion and consciousness as one. You cannot reach this level without a connection from the heart to other beings. This is the practical side of the realization that you are not isolated; that you are connected with all other beings; and from there care and compassion manifest. But this is not mentioned separately, because it is treated extensively in the *ngöndro*, the preliminary exercises. There it is continually pointed at because presumably at that stage you do not yet have contact with natural empathy; so that is why it is trained. But as soon as one has reached the breakthrough, compassion manifests spontaneously.

In many places in the West there are attempts to reformulate or reactivate Dzogchen in ways that are better suited to a Western cultural context. Because if you transfer many of the *ngöndro* forms, the preliminary exercises, they will clash with many notions in the West; where this is contrary to reality in the West; where people might think: "Why should I do that and what does it mean?"

To present this in a major language ... might be important, as it could inspire others working with other teachers but with fundamentally the same project: How might one, in an authentic way, transfer and reformulate Dzogchen for the West, and how might one develop a preliminary training, a *ngöndro*, maintaining some of the [original] elements and at the same time tentatively making use of some Western techniques—e.g. depth psychology, philosophy, and such. That is our cultural background; and for a Westerner Dzogchen must be placed within that context ...

It seems odd that one would have to pretend that all this doesn't exist, that one should relate solely to *yidam* visualizations. This is a question that has to be asked of classical Buddhism. Today there exists a very detailed understanding of the Western, typically insecure, psyche, which is very different from a Tibetan psyche. The latter is embedded in a clan society, which fosters a different sense of self. His Holiness the Dalai Lama did not understand why Westerners who functioned splendidly in their environment—Westerners placed at the top in hierarchies, such as professors, practitioners, and so forth—how these could be so fundamentally insecure about themselves. And a *ngöndro* that was developed for a clan person in the middle ages, a person having a security and identity that builds on a hierarchical clan context—how can a *ngöndro* like this be transferred to very insecure, materialistic super-egos such as we are? You cannot just uncritically adopt such things.

And this is why I believe that some of our experiences may be helpful for people in a similar context—perhaps they might adapt some of our ideas: “Those people have done it this way, and this authentic Lama [Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche] has confirmed that this can be used; so maybe we can try and see if it works.” It might serve as an example of how to do it. It might help others with inspiration and give them ideas of how to develop their own approach.

We have tried all this out—*ngöndro*, preliminary exercises, and whatnot—on the basis of fundamental contemporary Western notions: a commitment to democracy, to gender equality, to scientific rigor—you have to relate to the scientific dimension of this matter.

And being a Westerner, you must relate to our Christian cultural background—and this is said frequently by His Holiness the Dalai Lama as well as by many others. We cannot act as if we had grown up in a Buddhist society. If we do that we cut off our Christian roots—the entire archetypal level. Jung put it this way, *anima naturaliter christiana*, which means: the Western atheistic soul is at the deeper, archetypal level Christian. This also is an insight that we cannot just throw overboard. We must relate to it.

And this project is a way of showing how we got it to work in a certain way. Use it and do it your own way, and see if you can use some of these elements.

Notes



Chapter 7

1. Tsele Natsok Rangdröl, *Lamp of Mahamudra* (Kathmandu: Rangjung Yeshe Publications, 1988).
2. Ibid., 45.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., 46.

Chapter 9

1. M. O'C. Walshe, trans., *Meister Eckhart: Sermons and Treatises*, Vol. 3 (Shaftesbury, Dorset: Element Books, 1987), p. 33.
2. These Russian texts exist in English translations; the Russian version of *Philokalia* is a selection of the great classical five-volume Greek *Philokalia*. The following *Philokalia* texts are taken from Thomas Matus, *Yoga and the Jesus Prayer: An Experiment in Faith* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984).
3. Matus, 32.
4. Ibid., 34.
5. Ibid., 85.
6. Ibid., 81.
7. Ibid., 132.
8. Ibid., 74.
9. Ibid., 107.
10. Ibid., 98.
11. Jens-Erik Risom, *Presence Meditation* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2010).
12. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust, Part II*, trans. Phillip Wayne (New York: Penguin Classics).

Chapter 10

1. Helen Bacovcin, trans. R. M. French, *The Way of a Pilgrim and the Pilgrim Continues His Way* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1991), 16.
2. Bacovcin, 20.

Chapter 11

1. The Ave Maria, or Hail Mary, is perhaps the most popular of all the Maria prayers. This version of the Ave Maria is found in the writings of St. Bernardine of Siena (1380–1444 AD).
2. *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (revised ed.), Robinson, James MacConkey, eds. (Leiden, New York, Cologne: E. J. Brill, 1996).
3. Bob Moore, 1928–2008, was an Irish healer and spiritual teacher resident in Denmark from 1974. Bob Moore was the author's first teacher in the energy systems of the body, chakra systems, and dream symbols.

Appendix

1. This text is based on three unpublished interviews with Jes Bertelsen: in 1987 by Karl Antz on Bertelsen's background and education, in 2008 by Martijn van Beek on Bertelsen and mysticism, and in 2009 by Karl Antz and Martijn van Beek on Bertelsen's books about consciousness. Great thanks to Martijn van Beek for his help.
2. Jes Bertelsen, "*Ouroboros—en undersøgelse af selvets strukturer*" [*Ouroboros—An Investigation of the Structures of the Self*] (doctoral thesis, 1974).
3. The lectures were subsequently published as *Dybdepsykologi* [*Depth Psychology*], vols. 1–4 (1978–83).
4. The most important among these are the *Chöying Dzö*, *Nelug Dzö*, *Rangdrol Korsum*, and *Ngalso Korsum*, as well as a number of key texts from the *Lama Yangtig* and *Zabmo Yangtig*.
5. Ken Wilber made this distinction in a conversation with Jens-Erik Risom. Cited in Jens-Erik Risom, *På sporet af elefanten* [*Tracking the Elephant*] (Copenhagen: Borgen, 2007), 144.
6. For more information on the style of meditation and the broader pedagogical approach developed at Vækstcenter, see Jens-Erik Risom, *Presence Meditation* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2010).

About the Author



Jes Bertelsen (born 1946), holds a doctorate in the History of Ideas from Aarhus University in Denmark. Since 1976 he has practiced, taught, and written books about different forms of mind training, ranging from depth psychology through self-development to meditation. While on vacation in Nepal in 1989, he met the Tibetan Dzogchen master Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche, who became his main teacher. Until Tulku Urgyen's passing in 1996, Jes Bertelsen received ongoing instruction from him, as well as empowerments and the authorization to teach all aspects of Dzogchen, and to develop teaching methods suitable for his Western students. His authorship has increasingly focused on Dzogchen and the essential nature of mind.