



Being & Becoming

Exploring the Teachings
of Evolutionary Enlightenment

Andrew Cohen

Revised edition with a new introduction by the author

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Edited by Ellen Daly

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Editor's Note

This collection of teachings by Andrew Cohen has been prepared especially for participants in the EnlightenNext Discovery Cycle—an integrated annual cycle of programs and events dedicated to the evolution of consciousness and culture. Originally published in 2009 as two volumes, this combined 2010 edition opens with a comprehensive new essay, “The Evolution of Enlightenment,” by Andrew Cohen, in which he illuminates the difference between what he describes as “traditional enlightenment,” and what he calls “the new enlightenment” or Evolutionary Enlightenment.

In the excerpts selected for this book, edited from his talks and retreats, Andrew Cohen guides readers in an exploration of the two fundamental dimensions of reality seen through the lens of enlightened awareness: Being and Becoming. As he explains in the opening essay, together they make up an integral and truly holistic view on what enlightenment is and, as he makes clear, should be, for the twenty-first century.

In Book One, *Awakening to Being*, Andrew evokes the timeless dimension that mystics and sages have spoken of for millennia. This “Ground of Being” can be discovered, he explains, through the experience and practice of meditation. Part I, “Meditation Is a Metaphor for Enlightenment,” introduces Andrew’s unique approach to this age-old practice. He makes the important distinction between spontaneous experiences of higher states of consciousness and the deliberate practice of meditation, and explains the value of both as portals to the timeless Ground of Being. In Part II, “The Experience of Being,” Andrew focuses on the spontaneous experience of the Ground of Being. These powerful excerpts capture the timeless depth of emptiness, putting into words the intangible yet compelling qualities of consciousness itself, and transmitting the essence of the enlightenment that is found there.

In Part III, "The Practice of No Relationship," Andrew focuses on the practice of meditation. Responding to questions that will resonate with both new and experienced meditators, he explains and illustrates how the perennial practice of assuming no relationship to our experience can enable the sincere seeker to translate their deepest spiritual insights into a liberating new perspective and a solid foundation for a life of evolutionary Becoming.

Book Two, *Awakening to Becoming*, leaves behind the timeless dimension of Being, and plunges into the "explosion in motion" that is the evolving universe. Cohen takes us inside the evolutionary process, evoking the very impulse that caused something to come from nothing fourteen billion years ago, and showing us how to awaken and cultivate that same creative passion as our own deepest self. The excerpts in Part I, "The Evolutionary Impulse," describe and transmit the ecstatic urgency of that creative principle. Cohen explains how recognizing this impulse as our own Authentic Self is the essence of the new kind of enlightenment he is teaching. He calls on the individual to transcend self-concern and embrace a cosmic sense of care and responsibility for the evolutionary process. The excerpts in Part II, "Transforming the Self," share Cohen's unique perspective on what makes up the human being and what it takes to consciously develop. Included in this are his definition of ego and his empowering teachings on "enlightening the choosing faculty." In Part III, "Five Fundamental Tenets of Evolutionary Enlightenment," Cohen lays out the core principles of his approach to individual development. Part IV, "A Collective Emergence," focuses on the highest purpose of Evolutionary Enlightenment: the creation of a new culture. Cohen illuminates the intersubjective or collective dynamics through which our values are shaped, and shows how we can begin to forge new ones by coming together in enlightened consciousness and an evolutionary worldview.

These excerpts are designed for ongoing contemplation. If you read them with focus, and endeavor to put their insights into practice, you will find that you can return to them again and again as your understanding and experience deepen, revealing with ever-new levels of subtlety and profundity what it means to live a life of Evolutionary Enlightenment.

Ellen Daly, Editor
Lenox, Massachusetts
June 2010

BEING & BECOMING

Introduction

The Evolution of Enlightenment

by Andrew Cohen

The teachings in this book are about spiritual enlightenment—both what we could call traditional enlightenment, and also what I call the new enlightenment, or Evolutionary Enlightenment. Book One is a collection of excerpts, taken from spontaneous talks and dialogues during retreats, that point the reader beyond the mind to the perennial mystical destination of the timeless Ground of all Being. They are powerful, and reading them carefully and with focused awareness can catapult the reader into deep states of meditation and metaphysical insight. Book One lays the all-important spiritual foundation for Book Two, which is all about a very new perspective on the perennial goal of enlightened awareness. It is about what happens when we reinterpret enlightenment in the context of cosmic evolution. Book One is what I learned from my teacher, but Book Two is what I have discovered and created in my own work, over the last almost quarter of a century. During this time, I have discovered a new source of emotional, psychological, and spiritual liberation that easily exists within anyone's reach, anyone who has the eyes to recognize it and the heart to desire it. To put it simply, enlightenment is evolving. It is no longer found only in the bliss of timeless Being; it is found also in the ecstatic urgency of evolutionary Becoming.

It was only after many years of deep introspection, dialogue with masters and thinkers from all traditions, and committed work with thousands of spiritual seekers throughout the world that I began to understand what this new enlightenment is all about, why it is so different from what has come before, and why, as I believe, it holds the key not only to our personal development but

to our cultural evolution. In the pages that follow, I will briefly share with you the journey I took from the old enlightenment to the new enlightenment.

I became a spiritual teacher in 1986 after a powerful awakening irrevocably transformed my life. My own teacher, H.W.L. Poonja came from the Advaita Vedanta tradition, and it was the timeless simplicity of this ancient teaching that catalyzed my awakening. The essence of my realization was simple: everything IS as it is. It was a classic satori, or enlightenment, experience—seeing through the illusion of time directly into timelessness, awakening to the eternal Now, the mystical, absolute, nondual, nonrelative Ground of Being. My teacher taught me—as he'd been taught by his teacher, the great saint Ramana Maharshi—that the freedom I was looking for was already present as the very ground of my own awareness.

That ground, the deepest dimension of who we all are, always already exists prior to time and the creative process. That is why mystics throughout the ages have told us that there is nowhere to go and nothing to do except to realize THAT. After my own awakening to this timeless truth, I initially taught in the same way that I had been taught. My spontaneous response to those who came to me in the first few years of my teaching career was simply this: Realize and surrender. Realize and discover that mystery that cannot be understood by the mind, and surrender to that and that alone. Realize that you were never born. Surrender to the fact that you were never unfree. Realize that there was never a problem and never back down from that realization. Surrender to that and that alone. I was convinced beyond doubt by my own experience that there was nowhere to go, nothing to do, and no one to be or become. In fact, in those days, I was so sure about this view that I questioned the authenticity of any spiritual teaching that implied that there was anything in the future to become other than who we always already are.

This teaching is not new. It has been the precious jewel that has

passed from Master to disciple for thousands of years. The perennial goal it points to is essentially transcendence—a dramatic release or escape from time, mind, and world that is found when one awakens to the timeless, formless domain of Being. In most traditional mystical teachings, this other-worldly emphasis on transcendence as the goal of enlightenment hasn't changed since the Buddha preached the dharma in ancient India twenty-five hundred years ago or since Adi Shankara wrote his Crest-Jewel of Discrimination in the eighth century. And for us postmodernists, it also hasn't changed since the glory days of the 1960s when Harvard psychologist-turned-psychedelic-rebel Richard Alpert, a.k.a. Ram Dass, published his groundbreaking spiritual manifesto and call-to-arms *Be Here Now*. Almost forty years later, spiritual bestsellers are still proclaiming the same message: Transcend the mind and time. Rest in the "now," in the infinity of the present moment. All else is a temporary illusion.

From this perspective, the world and all of manifestation is a mere "play" of consciousness, or *lila* as it's called in Vedanta: What happens here is not ultimately real. Only the Absolute, unchanging, timeless, formless, unmanifest Ground is real. Therefore, nothing needs to change in this manifest world, and true freedom is found in escaping from it altogether. Why entertain an illusion? Why try and improve that which is not real in the first place? But as powerful and as liberating as this perspective was at the time of my own awakening, as a spiritual teaching in our day and age I soon began to find it problematic. I observed that many who came to me in those early years found themselves plunged into the same miraculous state of liberated consciousness that I had discovered, but the effect of this powerful experience was generally not the same. It seemed that, in most individuals, awakening to the bliss of Being did not automatically lead to radical transformation. Many individuals had great difficulty letting go of doubt, even in the face of their own ecstatic flights into enlightened awareness. They were reluctant to accept

and stand for the liberating truth of what they had seen with their own minds and hearts. To me it always appeared obvious that the power and significance of that which is Absolute was given validation only through our willingness to stand for and embody its glory as ourselves—through action, through choice, through the way we lived in the world of time and form.

As I began to engage more deeply with those around me, I discovered that the state of the individual's soul—their capacity for integrity, authenticity, and higher conscience—always played a critical role in determining how ready they were to embody their own deepest realization. So I began to put more and more of my attention on the all-important question: How can we cultivate the ability and readiness to express the beauty, perfection, and wholeness discovered in spiritual revelation? This was the beginning of a radical divergence from the path and perspective I had been taught. Slowly, over a ten-year period, my teaching became more and more about the transformation of the individual and the world; whereas in the traditional teaching the emphasis was really on liberation from self and world.

The differences in the way I was now seeing were based upon an emerging new way of interpreting what enlightenment meant. In the traditional Eastern metaphysical perspective, the world isn't real, it's only an ephemeral appearance, an illusion, a mere insubstantial, transient dream in the mind of God. I felt differently. To me, the world was certainly real and in fact, was an inherent and all-important dimension of what God always is. For millennia, this question has been the spark of an ongoing metaphysical argument among sages, seers, and philosophers. And it is a significant one. If the world isn't real, then nothing needs to be done about the way things are. But if the world is real, then it soon becomes apparent to us that there is real work to be done. This work was what my life was now devoted to. I was wholeheartedly committed to the

transformation of the world—to bringing the power of enlightened awareness into the world through rational action, through moral being, and through engaging with the process of time in the most deliberate and creative way.

From the very beginning, since my early days as a seeker, I had always been convinced that enlightenment had to make sense. It gradually dawned on me that I was going to have to figure out for myself how to translate the profound shift of perspective I was experiencing into a form that would make deep sense to the world I was living and working in. I needed new ways to interpret the meaning and purpose of enlightenment as it traveled from its roots in the traditional East to its new home in the postmodern West. I knew that the questions I needed to answer in order to find my way forward were important beyond just my own experience. But I could never have predicted where they would lead me.

As the years passed, my emphasis that enlightenment is an action and not merely a higher state emerged more and more powerfully in my teaching. I remember one particular morning many years ago during a retreat in India—I was giving a talk, and an unbridled passion poured through me spontaneously. I didn't know where it came from, but it was calling for this miracle, this mystery beyond time, to become manifest in the world of time and form, as ourselves. I found myself imploring those around me not only to awaken to their true Self as timeless Being but to dare to respond to the urgent call to express that liberation in the world of Becoming.

Over time it became clear to me that this awakening passion was really a passion for much more than enlightenment in the traditional sense. The spiritual energy that was running through my veins was calling me to a new, active, and creative expression of enlightenment. It was an enlightenment that by its very nature could never be content with the way things were in the past, no matter how glorious that past may have been. It was an enlightenment

that could also never be content with how things were in the present moment, even at those rare instances when everything seems like it couldn't be more perfect. It was an enlightenment that was defined by a ceaseless and ecstatic reaching forth towards an as yet unborn and unmanifest potential, a constant stretching toward a future perfection that would always lie just beyond one's fingertips. My inner eye and heart were focused on the freedom of that mysterious place between the immediacy of the present moment and the endless thrill of the possible.

Slowly but surely, in my quest to redefine enlightenment, I began to connect it to the most important emergent narrative of recent cultural history: the discovery of evolution. Seeing our presence in this world from the vantage point of a fourteen-billion-year process powerfully recontextualizes the spiritual impulse in a thrilling, rational, and deeply meaningful framework. In this context, we realize that awakening to timeless Being, the perennial goal of Eastern enlightenment, is only half of the picture—half of the totality of reality. The other half of the picture is the world of form, the process of Becoming—the universal creative impulse, that explosion-in-motion that is the entire evolutionary process that we are all part of. If enlightenment is the discovery of what IS, then it must embrace the ultimate nature of all things—seen and unseen, known and unknown, form and formlessness, both Being and Becoming. Being is that timeless void out of which the cosmos was born, the empty ground from which everything arises and to which everything ultimately returns. Becoming is the something that emerged out of nothing and is still emerging in this moment. Becoming is Eros, the evolutionary impulse, the first cause, that original spark of light and energy that created the entire universe. And I realized that it was that very same creative spark that was now awakening in my own heart and mind as a sense of ecstatic urgency to evolve. This is why I began to reenvision the very goal of the spiritual path, seeing the purpose of enlightenment as not merely

to transcend the world, as I had been taught, but to transform the world through becoming an agent of evolution itself. Enlightenment was not the end of the path. It was the beginning.

In the East, they believe that enlightenment is a final endpoint, a monumental attainment that marks the end of becoming for the individual. Someone who is enlightened has liberated him or herself from identification with anything that exists in time. And this conclusion makes sense when you consider the cultural context in which it first emerged. In ancient India, they had not yet discovered evolution. Like most of the world at that point, they had not yet discerned that time had a beginning and moved in a straight line from the past to the present to the future. They believed that time, like life and death, was a repetitive process that was constantly going through the same cycle and would for eternity. As a matter of fact, many Hindus in modern-day India still prefer to see our cosmic origins through the lens of their ancient Vedic science, rather than accepting the findings of Western science and modern cosmology. And if reality is seen through this particular cultural lens, it would make sense that one would soon grow weary of the eternal tedium of cyclical existence and hunger for a final release. That's why the traditions say that the individual who is "fully enlightened," who has gone all the way, is that rare one who has finally achieved emancipation from the endless repetition of birth and death on the wheel of endless becoming.

It's important to remember that up until very recently in human history, we didn't know what we know today: that we are all part of that developmental process that had a beginning in time and that is going somewhere. It's only been in the last couple of hundred years that we discovered evolution, and only in the twentieth century that we came upon what is known as "deep time"—the incomprehensible span of fourteen billion years since the universe burst into being. When we apply the perspective of evolution to the nature of enlightenment, it changes everything.

From the perspective of the eternal timeless ground, the traditional teachers are right. The highest spiritual truth is that nothing ever happened, you and I were never born, and the big bang never occurred. That's enlightenment, that's liberation, that's samadhi, that's satori. But from the perspective of evolution, the entire picture changes. Modern science and cosmology have clearly revealed that time doesn't move in predictable cycles that return again and again to the same point, but is, in fact, a linear process. Fourteen billion years of development have produced all of manifestation—the entire known universe and everything that's contained within it, including its greatest mystery: the capacity for consciousness itself. The arrow of time is a creative process and that capacity for creativity and novelty is the most extraordinary part of the whole dramatic unfolding—from the big bang to the present moment. This is not just another repetition of an endless cycle. This hasn't all happened before. Where we are going is not predestined.

The most exciting part of this realization is that we discover, if we look deeply into our own experience, that our own emerging desire for spiritual freedom is not separate from the impulse that is driving the entire process. I call this the Evolutionary Impulse. When we awaken to this impulse, we discover something miraculous: that that dynamic and ever-evolving creative principle is none other than our own Authentic Self. This is the new source of spiritual liberation in the teaching I have come to call Evolutionary Enlightenment. It's not just about awakening to timeless being—it's about awakening to eternal, ecstatic Becoming. Evolutionary Enlightenment calls on us to awaken to both the timeless peace of Being and the relentless passion of the Evolutionary Impulse.

The reason that the Evolutionary Impulse is the source of the New Enlightenment is because of its future-oriented directionality. And this is the important distinction: the old traditional enlightenment is not future-oriented; it is not time-oriented at all. Traditional

enlightenment points us beyond the world, beyond time and space, towards what has been, at least until now, the perennial source of spiritual freedom and mystical liberation: the Ground of Being. But those of us in the twenty-first century who are looking towards the future, urgently need a mystical spirituality and source of soul liberation that points us not away from the world but to that big next step we need to take in our world. That next step will not emerge by itself—it must be consciously created by human beings who have awakened to the same impulse that is driving the process. As we awaken to this vast perspective, an overwhelming and profound truth becomes clear: At this point in evolution, the process is dependent upon us. The evolutionary process desperately needs our conscious and committed participation. This has become the defining theme and ultimate purpose of Evolutionary Enlightenment over the last ten years. The old enlightenment, with all its power to free the human mind and heart from suffering, can only lift us beyond the world. But when we realize that the world needs our engaged and enlightened action, it becomes urgent that we find a spiritual path, practice, and philosophy that empowers us to courageously and passionately participate in the fast-changing process that we are in the midst of.

This liberating spiritual perspective on the human experience is contemporary and inherently creative. It's a spiritual teaching for our own time because its central tenet is that a more enlightened future for our world depends on one thing and one thing alone—our higher development. The world around us changes for the better as much as we are willing to change ourselves. The world we occupy and cocreate begins to transform as we do. The old model of enlightenment was one in which the individual was liberated but the world remained the same. In the new enlightenment, the point is no longer merely the liberation of the individual; it's the evolution of self, culture, and cosmos through the individual. That's Evolutionary Enlightenment.

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BOOK ONE

Awakening to Being

Part I

Meditation Is a Metaphor
for Enlightenment

Guided Meditation

Be still. Let yourself relax. You don't need to make any effort. Just allow yourself to be deeply at ease. Then take the risk to release your attention to expand and flow free, detaching from any form of conceptual engagement with the mind. Allow your attention to become vast, wide, open, and clear. In that wide-open space, all kinds of things may come and go—thoughts, emotions, physical sensations—but don't focus your attention on any of them. Let it expand in all directions, until it becomes so vast that you're paying attention to everything at the same time while not focusing on anything in particular. Keep letting your attention expand until the awareness itself becomes the object of your attention, until all the structures of the created universe begin to crumble and you start seeing through everything. When everything falls away, you will begin to discover, in your own experience, the unborn, unmanifest Ground of Being, the empty void out of which the whole manifest world sprang into existence. In this place, nothing has ever happened. The universe has not yet emerged; you have not been born; even time itself has not yet begun. When you find this limitless place, then your deepest sense of yourself and of life itself will change from one of imprisonment and limitation to one of unqualified freedom.

Meditation Is a Metaphor for Enlightenment

Rightly understood, meditation and enlightenment are one and the same. Meditation is the experience of a particular state of consciousness that has certain qualities, which are also the qualities of enlightenment itself. This is why meditation can be understood as a metaphor for enlightenment. When you meditate, you are consciously choosing to assume the enlightened relationship to your own experience, which is a position in relationship to your experience that is free—free from compulsive identification with time, thought, and feeling. In order to do this, you can follow three very simple instructions: Be still. Be at ease. Pay attention.

Being still is a metaphor for wanting to be free more than anything else.

The decision to be still in meditation represents a fundamental posture in relationship to life itself. It means you are making a commitment that no matter what happens, even if the whole world seems to be falling apart, you will not move. In the unenlightened state, driven by the erratic nature of the conditioned mind and the wild and untamed emotions of fear and desire, we are almost always moving. This is what makes us untrustworthy, and it is why we are constantly losing our bearings. Not moving is a metaphor for the goal, because one who is enlightened is one who inwardly never moves from that which is most important.

Ease of being is a metaphor for letting everything be as it is.

Letting everything be means you are no longer grasping at or trying to control your experience in any way. When you experience ease of being, there is a profound release of a fundamental existential

tension, which is the deep and often unconscious conviction that something is terribly wrong. The freedom of enlightenment is based upon this dissolution of existential tension. Letting everything be, you discover an unconditional freedom that has always been at the ground of your own experience—the liberating recognition that nothing is fundamentally wrong.

Paying attention is a metaphor for having no relationship to the arising of thought or the presence of feeling.

When you choose not to identify with the movement of thoughts and emotions, sooner or later you will have the profound experience of your own Self standing free from the mind—free from the compulsive habit of conceptualization and personalization. Your awareness will become so vast that it embraces all things while simultaneously being the experience of freedom from all things. You will discover that you are resting as awareness itself, beyond all thought and emotion. It is the presence of this miraculous depth of attention that makes one who is enlightened appear to be unusually awake.

The Posture of Freedom

My approach to meditation is very simple: Be still, relax, pay attention, and assume no relationship to anything that arises. No relationship to the content of consciousness is the posture of freedom. When you assume no relationship to your experience, you are aligning with the deepest part of yourself, which is the Ground of all Being. That groundless Ground has never had a relationship to anything that ever happened in time, because it always abides prior to the world of time, form, and mind.

Under the right circumstances, it is not difficult to have a powerful experience of the Ground of Being, to taste its indescribable peace, bliss, rapture, and stillness—like a still forest pool, in which you sink ever more deeply and where your mind is not moving at all. It is very important to taste the inherent liberation of your own infinite depth, but that kind of experience, in and of itself, will not necessarily teach you how to have a liberated relationship to the chaos of your own mind and emotions. Sinking to the depths of your own Self is always profoundly inspiring, but it's not enough. It is equally important to know how to stay on the surface when a storm is raging and to have no relationship to the chaos. For most of us, that is ultimately a source of greater confidence and soul-strength than the experience of infinite depth. And in fact, from an absolute or nondual perspective, being at the surface is no different than being at the very bottom of the pool. Even if it doesn't necessarily feel that way, in time you will come to understand that it is the same. That is the secret of freedom.

One of the most difficult things to understand about enlightenment is that freedom is not a feeling. Freedom is not any particular experience, no matter how profound the experience may be. Freedom is not peace; freedom is not joy; freedom is not ecstasy. Peace, joy, and ecstasy feel free, but that is just a feeling

of freedom, not freedom itself. A person who is not free can have an experience of sinking into the peace, joy, and ecstasy of the Ground of Being and feel during that experience as if they are free. But that doesn't mean that they are actually a liberated human being. And on the other hand, a person who is free may experience pain, fear, frustration, confusion, or anxiety, and not lose their freedom. All experience comes and goes. The feeling quality of your own experience will always be changing, and all the more so if you live a deeply engaged and committed life. So if you want to be a liberated human being, that liberation is dependent only upon the position that you are taking in relationship to your experience; it's not dependent upon the quality or the content of the experience itself.

This is a hard lesson to learn, but it's very important. The way to practice it is, in the meditative state, to assume no relationship to the content of consciousness. The purpose of meditation is to maintain a posture of freedom, no matter what your inner experience may be. In that posture, you remove your attention from thoughts, images, and concepts, and allow it to come to rest upon consciousness itself. If you want to be free, it is important to learn how to directly experience the unbroken chaos and impersonal confusion of your own mind without being disturbed by any of it. Only if you can bear it will you be able to take responsibility for it. If you can't bear it, others will inevitably suffer the consequences. If you can't handle the content of your own mind while you are simply being still and paying attention, then how are you going to be able to make the right choices when you are walking, talking, and engaging with others? So meditation is training for life.

When you assume no relationship to the content of consciousness, it doesn't matter what arises. You may have the most sublime, glorious, ecstatic experiences, or you may be overwhelmed by frightening, dark, and malevolent impulses, but you remain disengaged

and unmoved. We all have to be careful with the choices we make in relationship to our own internal experience, moment to moment, because there are always consequences. Whenever you allow yourself to be thrown around unconsciously by the inner storms of thought and emotion, you will pay a price for it. And the worst part of that price will be your own confidence, your own belief in your capacity to be free. But if you remain absolutely motionless, inwardly and outwardly, then when the storm passes, you'll experience a tremendous sense of exhilaration, because you realize that your own intention to be free is stronger than the chaos of your own mind.

Spontaneous Revelation & Noble Effort

There are two ways that you can experience the intoxicating joy, profound peace, and ecstatic wakefulness of the Ground of Being: spontaneously or through effort.

Spontaneously, like an unexpected visit from God, for no particular reason, the doors of perception can open, expanding your awareness to reveal a higher and deeper dimension of consciousness. This kind of event often happens in the company of an enlightened master who has access to this unmanifest ground, or in a group of dedicated individuals who have come together for a higher purpose. But you can also experience the Ground of Being simply through your own disciplined effort, through choosing to step beyond the conditioned mind.

A spontaneous experience is a source of tremendous inspiration because it proves something to you, directly. When you unexpectedly discover the shocking clarity of bliss consciousness without having made any effort to attain it, it compels you to acknowledge the existence of a deeper, higher dimension of your own self. But as extraordinary and miraculous as they are, spontaneous experiences are rarely enough to finally liberate us from an unenlightened relationship to the mind and emotions. More often, they will simply reveal how extraordinary our potential for liberation is, here and now, and simultaneously expose how self-deceived we are most of the time.

A spontaneous experience of higher consciousness is like a free ride to heaven. But to stay there we have to be willing to pay the price. That means that at a moment's notice, we have to be willing to do battle with the demons of fear and doubt. True liberation is something we all have to be willing to fight for. Sometimes it may be easy, but at other times you will find yourself overwhelmed by fear, doubt, confusion, narcissistic concerns, and materialistic

desires. So the willingness to make effort has to be unconditional in relationship to your own mind. That willingness is what creates receptivity to higher consciousness in each and every one of us. When you are willing to make the noble effort to liberate yourself, to consistently struggle to make the right choices for the right reasons, it creates a receptive inner atmosphere. Through the disciplined practice of meditation—the conscious, consistent renunciation of the mind and emotions—you create fertile ground inside you for higher consciousness.

In the end, no matter how profound your experience of revelation, the only question that matters is “Am I going to be ready to change, based on what I have seen, or not?” Only if you are ready to change will the spontaneous experience of liberating insight become the initiation that leads to lasting transformation. If not, it will soon fade into nothing more than an inspiring memory. When you fall back into a state of unenlightenment, in an instant the fears and desires of the ego overwhelm you once again. That is why it is so essential to cultivate the habit of making noble effort. You need to assume an inner posture that’s going to ensure your victory. If you’re not deadly serious about this, you’re not going to make it. That’s guaranteed.

Part II

The Experience of Being

Meditation: A Portal to a New Dimension

One of the many miraculous functions of meditation is that it is a portal to a different dimension. When you go deeply into the meditative state, your awareness detaches itself from the thought-stream. Then your identification with emotion, memory, time, and body begins to fall away. You become aware of something very mysterious. Imagine that you had been fast asleep in a small dark chamber and then you suddenly awakened to find yourself floating in the infinite depth of a vast, peaceful ocean. You literally become aware of a new dimension, when moments before you had experienced yourself as being trapped, a prisoner of your body, mind, and emotions. When you awaken to this new dimension, all sense of confinement disappears. You feel that you have access to the whole universe and also to that which the universe exists within. You're aware of body, mind, time, and space, but there's another dimension that extends in all directions, unlimited by any of it. Meditation is the portal to this dimension, a door to the realization of limitlessness.

Why is this experience significant? Because the infinite context you awaken to is not just a quiet place inside your own head. It's a deeper dimension of reality itself. Life, death, and everything in between, reality as a whole—the seen and the unseen, the known and the unknown, all that ever was and ever could be—is made up of both the manifest and the unmanifest. But most of the time, all we are aware of is the manifest dimension, the domain of time and space and becoming. Meditation will give you the direct, conscious experience of the unmanifest dimension, which is the Ground of Being itself.

The Ground of Being is empty. It is an objectless, timeless, spaceless, thoughtless void. But everything that exists has come from this no-place, including you and me. Paradoxically, while

empty, this no-place is pregnant with infinite, unborn potential. It is the ground we all emerge from, the womb of the entire universe. When something came from nothing, fourteen billion years ago, the nothing didn't disappear. That unmanifest, unborn dimension is the ever-present ground out of which everything is arising in every moment. And meditation allows you to know this ground within your own experience. Even in the awareness of the body and the movement of thought, beneath it all, in the state of meditation, you become conscious of a current of stillness that is the echo and the reflection of the Ground of Being. There is a great mystery there. In the infinite depth of that emptiness, there arises a knowing, a pure knowing itself that seems to answer all our questions and relieve us of all our existential doubts.

Whenever we journey far enough beyond the conditioned mind—beyond thought, beyond form, beyond time—we will always discover this same mystery. That is why we meditate, so we can awaken to the instantaneously liberating nature of the Ground of Being. The more profound is our experience of the Ground of Being, the more we begin to emanate that mysterious knowing which is enlightened consciousness itself.

Who Am I?

Spiritual seekers for millennia have asked the question “Who am I?” In order to discover the answer for yourself, the first step you have to take is a big one: You have to be willing to let absolutely everything go. You have to take a journey to the deepest dimension of your own self, a journey that will lead you all the way back to before the beginning—before anything ever happened, before the universe was born. Before the beginning, there was no time, no form, and no space—only absolute emptiness. Before the beginning, there was nothing . . . but you were there.

In order to go back to before the beginning in your own experience, you have to put your attention on the deepest sense of what it feels like to be yourself right now, and simultaneously let everything else go. Letting go means falling so deeply into yourself that you lose awareness of the physical body, until all that is left is empty space. In that empty space, the mind is completely still; there is no time, no memory, and not even a trace of personal history. And the deeper you fall into that space, the more everything will continue to fall away, until finally all that will be left is you. When you let absolutely everything go—body, mind, memory, and time—you will find, miraculously, that you still exist. In fact, in the end, you discover that all that exists is you!

The deepest part of your own experience of consciousness is the Ground of all Being. Beyond time, it is the formless emptiness out of which everything arises. It is what the Buddha called the deathless, what some call eternity consciousness. However we attempt to describe it, it is the very same timeless no-place out of which this whole evolving universe burst forth. And as I understand it, this is one definition of God. Already full, already complete, with nowhere to go, nothing to do, and no one to be or become.

That primordial ground is who you always are, no matter how things may appear at any moment in time. It is the very essence of your own self at its most fundamental level. When every attribute that you habitually identify as being you falls away, your Self is there. That Self has no name, no history, no gender, no personal identity. That Self is unlocatable, because it exists everywhere and nowhere at the same time. It is you and it is me; it is One without a second, the Self that we all always are. Beyond memory, beyond time, beyond the manifest realm, who you are never changes.

When you awaken in this way, you will find yourself always already resting in the eternal moment before time began. This is the recognition that liberates: Prior to everything, I already am. In the great mystical traditions, it is this profound revelation that catalyzes enlightenment: The SELF is ONE, and before anything ever happened, IT IS. And I AM THAT.

Once you truly know this, it will radically transform your relationship to life. It is indeed a shocking revelation to experience directly that there is a part of your own self, your own consciousness, that was never born and has never entered into the stream of time. And when your locus of identification shifts from the personal sphere to that unborn Self, you stumble upon the unending miracle of freedom and absolute positivity that is inherent in the nature of being itself.

Ecstatic Indifference

In the experience of meditation, if you go deep enough, you discover a peace that is absolute. It is a peace from another dimension. There is a miraculous quality to it, because it is infinitely deeper than any experience of peace, tranquility, or contentment that you could imagine with the mind. Absolute means unqualifiable, beyond measurement, and that quality is the essence of the peace that is found in the unmanifest domain. The reason that this peace is so profound is that you become conscious of a part of yourself that has never been born and will never die—the Self Absolute, the part of you that exists beyond time.

It is only in the absolute peace of the unmanifest ground that you experience freedom from the knot of existential tension that abides at the core of the self-sense. The gnawing sense that something is fundamentally wrong dissolves in the perfection of that no-place. In the Ground of Being there is no birth and no death, no unfulfilled desires and no need to be or become anything other than what already is and always has been. That's why there's such deep contentment. If you pay close attention to your experience, when you are in a deep meditative state, you will discover and rediscover the ever-new and always liberating revelation that your most profound moments of happiness are those rare instances when you are free from desire. When you directly experience the absolute peace of the unmanifest ground, there is no desire for the things of this world. Knowing that ground, there is nothing you want except to be: to have nothing, to know nothing, to be no-one, for eternity. Beyond time, two hours or two hundred thousand years makes no difference. You are awake—awake and at peace, eternally dwelling on the mystery of pure unmanifest potential. In blissful, ecstatic indifference, you wouldn't mind if the whole universe disappeared.

Pure Subjectivity

When you awaken to the Ground of Being, you will be able to contemplate the nature of your own consciousness in its primordial state, free from all content, before it entered the stream of time. Consciousness is not an object. Consciousness is the subject. In order to discover consciousness, you have to locate the deepest part of your self—deeper than the body, deeper than feeling, deeper than thought. Consciousness is that pure subjectivity that is at the core of your own experience of yourself in this very moment. It is impossible to know with thought, because thought can only recognize objects. When you begin to contemplate the nature of consciousness, the subject puts its attention upon itself.

Consciousness is always primary. If consciousness is the subject, the very core of your experience, then everything else that exists is an object—external to consciousness itself. Your thoughts and your emotions are external to that primary experience of pure subjectivity. Even your physical body is only a sheath, an object from the perspective of consciousness.

You cannot go any deeper into your self than the absolute subject. There is nowhere else to go. Everything begins and ends in that primordial ground. When you penetrate through all the layers of identity—your ethnic background, your gender, and the particulars of your personal history and life circumstances—you finally come upon the subject, which is identical for each and every one of us. When everything else falls away, the subject will still be there.

The recognition that consciousness is primary has always been the source of enlightenment. If you want to be a liberated human being, you need to discover this for yourself, because consciousness is the foundation of everything. If you don't know consciousness, you don't know who you are.

When Something Contemplates Nothing

The Ground of Being is not an object, and that is why a metaphor often used for it is zero. You will find that when you focus your attention upon zero, or no-thing whatsoever, you will begin to intuit a dimension of being that is immeasurable, unquantifiable, ever ungraspable by your linear, rational mind. The mind is accustomed to focusing on objects—that's what its function is. So when you try to focus on something that is not an object, the mind doesn't know how to do that. But if you make a decision to contemplate zero, you can begin to penetrate beyond the subject-object dualism that defines most of our experience. When you focus upon zero, when something meditates upon nothing, a flip can occur that throws you beyond the mind and beyond time. What opens up is a nonconceptual dimension of perception that is not ordinarily apparent. Through the contemplation of zero, you drill a hole in the structures of your own ignorance and begin to penetrate the mystery of consciousness.

From the perspective of the rational mind, a human life is a linear, limited event, defined by the movement of time. But when you penetrate beyond the mind, you get glimpses into a mystery that transcends time in an instant. You begin to directly see, know, and feel that instead of merely being an individual body, mind, and personality that was born and is going to die, the deepest part of you is that empty Ground of all Being that has never become anything. The degree to which you have realized that who you are at the deepest level is that timeless, spaceless ground will reveal itself in how much spontaneous freedom you are able to manifest through your human personality, in time and space. If your contemplation of zero is powerful and profound, then the way you relate to life will constantly demonstrate a freedom that extends far beyond the fears and desires of your own ego. Your very being will become a portal for that primordial depth that transcends life and death.

Self-Delight

The empty groundless Ground of all Being needs no external affirmation; it is always already perfectly self-fulfilled and complete. But it wants to know itself. It is perpetually self-seeking and, when it finds itself, is always affirmed in its own self-discovery. All Being wants to do is delight in itself, forever, endlessly absorbed with itself. It seems that the very nature of consciousness at the deepest level is this self-delight.

If you give attention to the empty ground of your own experience of consciousness, you will see for yourself that self-delight is its nature. Consciousness is not an object; consciousness is the subject and the subject is perpetually meditating upon itself. Once you have located that pure subjectivity, and cultivated enough concentration to become aware of its qualities, you will discover that indeed there is something mysterious and infinitely compelling about the deepest level of consciousness itself. And that is its absolute nature. Whenever you rediscover that groundless ground, whether it has been five minutes or five years, miraculously you will find that it is ever new.

Like a Candle in the Dark

When you fall very deeply into the Ground of your own Being, your ego, or what is sometimes called the frontal self, goes to sleep. It hasn't necessarily died or permanently disappeared, but it is temporarily not awake to the world and all of its own wants and desires and connections. And as that egoic experience recedes, you become emotionally and psychologically in touch with the eternal nature of Being.

When you awaken to the eternal nature of Being, you find that there is something miraculously and mysteriously compelling about it. It's like staring at a candle in a dark night—you find yourself mesmerized by something that is unchanging yet infinitely compelling. You feel that you are being drawn into something that you can't rationally understand but that your heart or your soul understands completely. You're being drawn into it, and as you are drawn into it, the only thing you experience as being real is the eternal or timeless nature of Being itself. You find yourself in a state of rapture. Why? Simply because a deeper part of yourself has been released from your ego's endless fears and concerns, and drawn out of the time process altogether.

No Relationship Is Freedom

When any one of us takes the meditative journey from the ego's relationship to life to no relationship whatsoever, which is zero, sooner or later we make the same thrilling discovery: No relationship is an experience of freedom.

The ego is constantly locating and relocating itself in time and space, in relationship to others and its environment. But when you meditate upon zero, you override that self-locating mechanism. The sense of yourself as being an individual, a separate entity located at a fixed point in space and time, in relationship to other objects, falls away. That's what radically changes your perspective. You no longer experience yourself as existing at a particular point in space, because you become one with the space itself, which is the Ground of your own Being.

The freedom you experience in the Ground of Being is the nature of consciousness before the beginning, before there was the awareness of an other, before there was any notion of relatedness. Before the beginning there was only One. Before otherness, before there were two, there was only freedom—the inherent liberation of consciousness before it located itself in time and in space, as you or me. The instant consciousness locates itself in a particular place, as a particular object, it loses awareness of the inherent freedom that is its natural state and self-sense. When the self is not enlightened, it is fundamentally identified only with the notion of difference, unaware of its primordial unity. So the liberating experience of self-discovery that everybody has when they return to zero is consciousness reawakening to the perennial truth that it is only One.

From that One came the Many. The moment the threshold is crossed into manifestation, we enter into the context of infinite relatedness that is the manifest universe. As long as we are

human beings, we cannot escape relationship. And indeed, the whole purpose of conscious evolution is to infinitely expand our capacity to embrace the fact of relatedness, ever more deeply informed by the enlightening revelation that there is only One. So in order to radically reorient the self in this way, we have to take that step back to before the beginning, and discover for ourselves that no relationship is freedom.

Everything and Nothing in One Breath

Consciousness is not an object, so you cannot say it is something. And yet it is not nothing. Nothing is void; it has no attributes, no qualities. Consciousness is empty of any thing, and yet there is something endlessly compelling in that emptiness. When you contemplate consciousness, you discover a mysterious sense of knowing that is both knowing nothing and knowing everything at once. Whatever one is becoming cognizant of, its nature seems to be everything. Fullness. Completeness. The emptiness is full. That's why the emptiness is compelling, because it is full of the knowing of some mysterious everything that is not a thing. It's everything; it's nothing—you can go on forever: everything, nothing, nothing, everything, always meaning the same thing. If you could say everything and nothing in one breath, perhaps you could capture the paradoxical nature of consciousness.

A Questionless State

When you locate the nonrelative, or absolute, nature of consciousness in the deepest depths of your own self, you will discover and directly experience the source of enlightenment, or spiritual freedom. As you awaken to the Ground of your own Being, you will find that consciousness is experienced as knowing. It is not a cognitive understanding—not knowing anything particular, but knowing itself. It is a clarity that is empty of content; a weightiness that is full of nothing in particular; a profound knowing that, because of its absolute nature, is experienced as being of ultimate value and meaning. This kind of knowing dissolves all questions, because the experience of that empty ground is the answer—the one answer that always liberates each and every one of us. That answer renders the mind utterly impotent. In that questionless state, you are profoundly rooted and radically free, supported by an absolute confidence in the knowing of no-thing that changes everything.

Alone with God

One of the attributes of consciousness is the sense that “I could stay here forever.” There is no impetus, no desire to do anything. And yet there is more to it than that. If there is simply no desire, that would be the absence of a certain quality. But the desirelessness of consciousness is connected to its fullness, to the overwhelming presence of a knowing that is everything and nothing at once. This pure knowing is so profound that we could use the word God as a metaphor for its absolute nature. When we begin to meditate upon consciousness, and become compelled by this mysterious sense of absolute fullness that is empty, we can have the experience of being aware of or in touch with God. When you are giving your attention to this experience, and you feel the sense that “I could stay here forever,” you will begin to understand why men and women throughout history have spent years, even lifetimes, meditating in caves. When you directly experience the nature of consciousness, it is so compelling that you will understand that mysterious longing to be alone with God, forever.

In the World but Not of It

One distinctive quality that emerges when you awaken to the formless, empty Ground of your own Being is the experience of detachment. And that is because that ground exists prior to everything. Emptiness is primary. Before anything ever happened, that ground was—and through everything that is unfolding, it always is. So when you awaken to that empty ground, you instantaneously experience a profound freedom from everything that has ever happened. The Ground of Being transcends, or exists prior to, the whole world, the movement of time, and the entire life process. That is why its discovery is so powerfully liberating.

In that experience, detachment or freedom from everything will spontaneously and naturally emerge—not because you are making the effort to let go or be detached, but simply because you have discovered the part of yourself that is always free from the process of time and becoming. Your body, your mind, and your emotions cannot transcend time. But the Ground of your own Being, which exists prior to and beyond time and the entire world process, is always already perfectly free from it. When you give all of your attention to that deepest part of yourself, you will experience yourself falling out of time. You awaken to the paradox of being in the world but not of it, because the place from which you are seeing it exists prior to everything that ever happened.

No Reference Points

Consciousness has no boundaries, no beginning and no end. The cognitive faculties of the human mind cannot grasp its infinite nature, because we habitually relate to the self that is observing only as a fixed, finite entity, and to every object that we give our attention to as being fixed and finite also. But when we discover consciousness, suddenly the observer who appeared to be finite stumbles upon that which is infinite. It's like stepping off a cliff into empty space. You lose all reference points, because your attention is on something that is not an object and that ultimately, in the shocking clarity of enlightenment, is revealed to be not separate from the one who is observing. The observer and the observed are one and the same. This is why consciousness is so endlessly compelling and ever new, even though it never changes. Usually something is compelling because there is some variety in it. No matter how beautiful an object is, over time it will become familiar and lose its captivating quality. But consciousness is not an object. It is always the same, and yet it is infinitely compelling. Why? Because it IS.

Part III

The Practice of No Relationship:
Questions and Answers on Meditation

Being Still: A Posture of Independence

Q: Why is it important to be still?

A: Being still is a metaphor for wanting to be free more than anything else. It's a symbolic or metaphorical statement of your intention to become liberated. If you are serious, when you decide to meditate, you will sit like a rock. Why? Simply because your stated intention is to be still and be awake.

Human beings have a very low tolerance for emotional instability. In the face of fear, desire, insecurity, frustration, or anxiety, most of us tend to be weak and self-indulgent. We feel victimized by our own condition and give ourselves license to continually betray our own higher intentions and cause suffering to others. So if we want to be free, if we want to become truly trustworthy human beings, we have to take the situation into our own hands. In the way that I teach it, the physical posture of being still is a demonstration of self-control. So the practice of meditation is like a training ground, where we can learn to remain still in the face of a turbulent mind, which is a metaphor for being true to our intention to be free in the face of the vicissitudes of life.

The posture of stillness is a posture of independence—a stance of aloneness and self-reliance in relationship to the movement of your own chaotic mind and irrational emotions. It represents the fact that if you truly want to be free, you are no longer dependent upon others to save you from yourself. If you are deadly serious, you take responsibility for your own liberation. That doesn't mean that you won't receive all the help that the universe has to give, but a big part of authentically receiving that help is accepting your independence, making the commitment that no matter what, I am going to do this. Too often, we are given all the help we could ever need, but because we are not serious, we squander it. Unless we

embrace an authentic posture of independence, we're never going to be able to accept help or be of real help to anyone else. Our ability to liberate ourselves, support each other, and ultimately transform this world is completely dependent upon our unwavering, independent commitment to freedom and our willingness to follow through on that stated commitment at all times, in all places, under all circumstances.

A Friend You Can Never See

Q: In meditation, what should I be paying attention to?

A: Nothing in particular. In meditation, you want to discover what awareness is, free from attachment to any object. In the enlightened mind, awareness itself becomes the object of awareness. To discover what this means, you need to let your attention expand beyond all objects in consciousness—beyond the body, beyond the mind, beyond the world, beyond this infinite universe. Even the universe can become an object in consciousness. The hardest thing to understand about enlightenment is that the object of our seeking is not an object. Most of us are locked into a dualistic experience of subject and object, self and other, self and world, even self and enlightenment. And too often, spiritual techniques for practicing awareness end up inadvertently reinforcing this fundamental duality.

My teacher once said to me, “I’m glad you’ve found a friend you’ll never see.” That’s what the enlightened mind is: a friend you’ll never be able to see. That friend emerges when you discover that the most authentic part of your own self is already completely free. It is not possible to be mindful or aware of this already free part of yourself in any ordinary way, but when you have the courage to let go, you will find that, miraculously, it can and will respond with great passion and incredible precision, seemingly with no premeditation whatsoever. Out of the blue, the right response will appear. And only after such a faster-than-thought response do you become aware of the fact that a part of yourself that you’re not normally conscious of is paying attention all the time. That part of yourself is always awake—even when you don’t seem to be. The expression of that wakefulness is the shocking spontaneity of enlightened awareness.

Many of us say we want to be enlightened, but how many of us are ready to let our whole lives be guided by a friend that we will never be able to see? For most of us, it's unbearable even to conceive of, because it points to a kind of surrender that is unimaginable, a surrender in which the ego no longer gets to run the show. Finally, all the weighing and measuring is given up, because you have no doubt that what you are seeking for is something you will never be able to grasp with the mind. This is the dawning of humility: when you begin to discover a nonmaterialistic, not-knowing relationship to the immeasurable, ungraspable, inconceivable, all-consuming mystery that is your own deepest self. It is this that opens the door for that friend you will never see to begin to speak through you and, ultimately, to become who you are.

Beyond Measurement

Q: My experience of meditation has been powerful and profound, and yet when I reach a certain depth I always seem to stop. Is there a way to push deeper?

A: With meditation you can't push. Meditation is one of those things that cannot be forced. You just have to make yourself available and then see what happens. All any of us can do is make ourselves available, and we do that by being still, being at ease, and paying attention. The depth you are looking for comes from letting go, not from "pushing deeper." But in any case, you shouldn't be so concerned with how deep your experience is. Consciousness is infinite. You could have a more powerful, more profound experience of it, but it is still the same infinite ground that you are speaking about. That is why, when we try to describe the experience of consciousness, words always fall short. We might use words like "powerful," "profound," or "deep," but the words are only a metaphor, a quantification of infinity, for that which cannot be measured. A little bit of infinity or a lot of infinity—it's the same thing.

So you shouldn't worry about how meditation is supposed to feel, or spend too much time comparing your experience to what you may have heard from others or even to what you may have experienced yourself in the past. You are entering into a realm where measurement doesn't mean anything. Dwelling upon too many ideas about what meditation is supposed to be like is just a distraction from your own direct experience. Just make yourself completely available and then see what happens. The state of meditation is an immediate one. It doesn't require time. But if you're holding on to an idea of a particular kind of experience that you are convinced you need to have, you are not going to be able to see deeply into the experience that you are having right

now. Meditation—and indeed, the recognition of enlightenment itself—doesn't have anything to do with any kind of experience that you can imagine with the mind. The state of meditation, which is synonymous with enlightenment, is the freedom from experience, and that freedom is always immanent. But it does require a ceaseless willingness to relinquish any ideas you have about how it is supposed to feel. Then you will discover the enlightened mind. It's right here. It is always already the ground of your own experience in each and every moment.

You Have to Be Interested in Nothing

Q: I have been practicing leaving the mind and emotions alone, but I often find meditation boring.

A: In order for the experience of meditation to be endlessly fascinating and infinitely compelling, you have to be interested in nothing. Day in and day out, we are constantly preoccupied with one thing or another, always busy with something. But if you want to experience profound meditation, and a depth that liberates, the object of your attention must be nothing—absolutely nothing whatsoever. If you are attempting to meditate, but are not actually interested in nothingness, then of course you will be bored. That's just like sitting in a darkened movie theater waiting for a film to start—eventually you will experience frustration and boredom.

But imagine that you are sitting in that movie theater and instead of waiting for the film to begin, you become interested, passionately interested, in the darkness, in the nothingness. There is something in the nothingness that once discovered is infinitely compelling and absolutely absorbing. There is an ungraspable mystery there and there's nothing boring about that mystery. Nothingness is what existed before the universe was born. How could something come from nothing? That is the greatest mystery. That's what you would be interested in as you contemplate the darkness. The more deeply you are able to penetrate the nature of nothingness, the more the mystery of being and nonbeing, of life and death and that which transcends both, begins to reveal itself. There is more to nothing than meets the eye.

Once you truly become interested in the darkness, you wouldn't want the movie to start. You might actually be disappointed when it started, because it would take you away from your meditation.

The Purpose of Meditation

Q: Why is it important to practice meditation consistently?

A: You meditate to remind yourself that you're not a prisoner. If there is power in your meditation, if your experience of the Ground of Being is deep and profound, you will discover and rediscover, over and over and over again, that you are not a prisoner. You are not held captive by your own mind, and nor are you imprisoned by your emotions. It sounds simple, but it's so easy to forget. If all you are aware of is the endless rollercoaster ride of thoughts and feelings, of course you will believe you are trapped.

The Ground of Being is a deeper, infinitely more subtle dimension of your own consciousness that simply cannot be perceived by the gross faculties of the conditioned mind and ego. You can't see it; you can't taste it; you can't touch it. So even if you have directly experienced the unconditioned freedom of that empty ground, when you return to the world of conditioned mind and ego, you're likely to doubt it. The mind simply cannot cognize this ground, and the ego cannot know it. That's why it's very important to meditate as much as you can. If you meditate regularly with a strong intention, you will keep rediscovering that you're not a prisoner. You cannot recognize that enough. Until your conviction in your own freedom is unwavering, and you're able to prove it through unbroken consistency in the way that you live, you should meditate every day as if your life depended on it. You need to keep having that experience. Each and every time you realize that you're not a prisoner, you gain a deeper confidence in the limitless, inherent freedom of that empty ground that is your own deepest Self. It builds a conscious conviction in no-limitation, and, as I teach it, this is the most significant purpose of meditation.

Unbearable Simplicity

Q: I'm having trouble with meditation.

A: If you're having trouble with meditation, that means you're not really doing it. The powerful thing about meditation is its radical simplicity: Be still, be at ease, pay attention. That's the beauty of it—meditation means doing absolutely nothing. And there are only two positions in relationship to that: You either do it or you don't. But often we find this simplicity unbearable. It confronts us with ourselves at the deepest level, and most of us just can't bear that degree of transparency. But that's why it's important to learn how to meditate. It's only in the exquisite simplicity of doing absolutely nothing that you begin to be able to see yourself in ways you ordinarily would never be able to do. If you really engage with this unbearable simplicity, it's impossible to hide from yourself.

Meditation Means Letting Go of Everything

Q: In meditation, what is it I need to let go of?

A: If you want to be free, everything. In the meditative posture, you should be holding on to nothing. The idea is to have no attachment whatsoever—no attachment to life, no attachment to death, no attachment to anything in this world. So it is not a matter of letting go of any thing in particular. If there is something specific that's troubling you psychologically and emotionally, you can try to let go of it and you may feel more peaceful, but that's not meditation—and it's not freedom. Many people think that if they could just let go of this or that, they would be free. But if you are going to be free in a context of enlightenment, you have to be willing to let go of everything. The freedom of enlightenment itself is only won through letting go absolutely. So in the posture of meditation, which is a metaphor for enlightenment itself, unless in every moment you are letting go of everything, you are wasting your time.

Meditation only becomes real, powerful, authentic, and liberating when it means letting go of everything. Otherwise it is just some kind of psychospiritual relaxation technique. It may make you feel much better, but it won't set you free. Feeling better and being free don't necessarily mean the same thing. Feeling better is relative; being free is not relative. Ultimately, spiritual freedom depends only on how profound is your ability to let go of everything—and not just once, but over and over again. So if you understand what it means to let go of everything, you know all you need to know about meditation. Then your meditation is real. It's the posture of freedom—a profound existential stand you are taking in relationship to life and death; a philosophical and spiritual position you are assuming in relationship to eternity.

Progress in Meditation

Q: Is it possible to objectively measure one's progress in the practice of meditation and, if so, how would one do that?

A: Yes, it is certainly possible, and there are many ways to do so. But the way I determine progress in meditation is not necessarily in relationship to the profundity of the deeper state experiences an individual claims to be having when he or she is sitting quietly in a meditative posture. I've noticed that people can have quite powerful meditative experiences, but in the long term they don't necessarily seem to have much significant effect in diminishing the ego or evolving the soul. So I say that if one's experience of the unmanifest Ground of Being is deep and profound, if one is truly awake to that dimension of the self that has never been born and never entered into the stream of time—the knowledge of which is ever full, ever complete, and always One—that should be reflected, over time, as very tangible qualities in the expression of the personality.

If you are truly awake to the Ground of all Being, that means that at the deepest level of your own self, before thought, you have realized that nothing is wrong. So in order to measure an individual's progress in the practice of meditation, I would be asking: Does his or her relationship to life really reflect an unshakable conviction that nothing is fundamentally wrong? Or is the personality still contracted around a deep and abiding sense of existential insecurity and desperation? The degree to which an individual begins to evidence over time, through their conduct and spontaneous responses, that they are in fact existentially at ease will reflect the degree of progress in their meditation practice. One of the signs I would look for is a very rare and remarkable kind of stability. If real progress were being made, then at those times when the individual was under stress or pressure, it would

be apparent, even if on the surface they seemed agitated or afraid, that deeply they were still unmoved.

One way to understand enlightenment is that the self, at the deepest level, is already grounded in the knowledge of being inherently full and complete as it is, wanting nothing. But that groundless ground is also the source of the evolutionary impulse, or Authentic Self, which entered into the stream of time out of that void. So the expression of enlightenment in an evolutionary context is always paradoxical, perfectly poised between the Authentic Self's ecstatic compulsion to create the future and the Ground of Being's state of inherent fullness and perfect contentment with things as they already are. So what I would look for in an individual would be both of these qualities: Is he or she passionately committed to the evolution of consciousness, ecstatically compelled to develop, and yet fundamentally free from the whole process at the very same time? That's how we would measure the results of meditation in an evolutionary context.

BOOK TWO

Awakening to Becoming

Part I

The Evolutionary Impulse

When Nothing Became Something

The teaching of Evolutionary Enlightenment is all about the manifestation, or expression, of the experience of enlightened consciousness. Enlightened consciousness, in one way of defining it, is the experience of consciousness beyond the narcissistic separate self-sense or ego. Traditionally, spiritual aspirants have discovered this dimension of consciousness through the practice or spontaneous experience of meditation. Let go of your compulsive attachment to thought and emotion, and allow yourself to sink deeply into absolute non-activity. Quiet down. Slow down. Stop moving. Stop thinking so much. Concentrate. Be still and stay awake. When your attention begins to release from the conditioned mind-process and you fall into a deep meditative state, you'll notice that the interior dimension of Being, or consciousness itself, begins to open up to literally an infinite or immeasurable degree. You discover the infinite Ground of your own Being, the unmanifest dimension of reality. In that no-place, there is no time, no space, no world, and no mind. Nothing has happened yet. This absolute nothingness or voidness or emptiness is traditionally called the unmanifest dimension. And when you discover this in the depth of your own self, you realize, "This is what it was like before the universe was created." The manifest dimension is everything that has been created—everything that has come from that emptiness or that nothingness.

It's very important to understand that everything that exists—the whole universe, including each and every one of us, is a manifest or material expression of that which does not exist. From nothing came something. The unmanifest became the manifest. From emptiness, from the void, this whole material universe, which eventually gave rise to life, emerged. Everything that exists came from nothing. That means nothing is the source of everything that is. That which became everything is that nonmaterial spiritual essence. The fundamental

mystical insight throughout the ages is basically this: that the ultimate essence of everything that exists is this no-thing-ness. That is traditionally the revelation that enlightens—that frees the self from this world of creation and everything in it. In a traditional context, enlightenment was transcendence, freedom from the world.

Evolutionary Enlightenment, however, is about the manifest, or active, or creative expression of enlightenment. It points to a new orientation to spiritual development and a completely new context for the human experience. It is a radical embrace of manifestation in which you begin to see your own incarnation—whoever you think you are, including your human personality with your body, your mind, your soul, from the gross to the subtle, from your deepest spiritual revelations to your most mundane experiences and everything in between—within a truly cosmic, evolutionary context. You realize that who and what you are is a product of fourteen billion years of cosmic evolutionary development. Every dimension of who and what you are is intimately related to, connected with, a part of, and an expression of the creative process itself that began when something came from nothing fourteen billion years ago. And therefore, every part of you is also connected to that groundless ground out of which everything emerged. That unmanifest dimension is at the very core of your own experience in every single moment including this one, whether you are aware of it or not. The ground of your own experience of being yourself is that mystery of consciousness.

But when seen from this evolutionary perspective, the nothingness is not nothing. There is nothing happening there, and yet it is deeply compelling. If you get into a deep state of meditation, it's absolutely entralling. Why? Because even in the absolute nothingness prior to the big bang there was still the infinite potential for everything that came out of that void. The unmanifest domain is the realm of infinite potential before anything happens. It's a place

where everything is possible but nothing has happened yet. So even in absolute emptiness there is some kind of positive creative tension that is experienced as a suspended state of absolute awareness. This quiet tension exists in consciousness because everything is possible but nothing has yet occurred. So there is a vibration of empty fullness that is enthralling.

When I speak about the manifest expression of enlightenment, I'm pointing very specifically to what happened at that precise moment when nothing became something. What happens when the nothingness which is the essence of everything that exists becomes manifest? It's very important to actually recognize that moment in your very own experience. So what we're very interested in, in this particular teaching, is locating that same vibration—the same energy, the same intelligence—that initiated the entire creative process at the very beginning.

That energy and intelligence is the creative impulse, the urge to become. It can be called Eros. And the highest and most profound expression of the evolutionary impulse at the level of consciousness is when a human being experiences a mysterious urge or compulsion to become more conscious. It's the spiritual impulse. And that impulse, which is the same evolutionary impulse that initiated the creative process and is driving it right now, doesn't have a personal ego attached to it. Most people have no idea about this particular part of themselves. In this teaching, I call it the Authentic Self.

The Authentic Self is that same vibration that exists in the nothingness. And just as the empty Ground of Being is vibrating with the infinite potential for everything, the Authentic Self within you is fueled by a sense of infinite potential to effect change in the next moment, in relationship to what has not yet occurred. This evolutionary drive has been active since the beginning of time, but now it is actually beginning to become conscious of itself in individuals who reached the higher levels of development. From nothing to

energy to light to matter to life to consciousness to self-reflective awareness, this drive to become has been surging forward for fourteen billion years, and it is just now beginning to awaken to itself in the light of human awareness.

In the highly developed human capacity for self-reflective awareness, the process that originated with the big bang not only awakens to itself but begins to take responsibility for itself. The entire evolutionary process begins to take responsibility for itself through the consciousness and cognition of the awakened human being at the leading edge. And that's why this is of ultimate importance for all of us. When you really understand Evolutionary Enlightenment, you realize that this is not really about you as an individual; it's not about your development. It's about the evolution of the process itself. The significance of your human life is that the universe is evolving through you. That's the manifest expression of consciousness beyond ego. That's when you become an evolutionarily enlightened human being.

How Does God Feel?

I've always wanted to know, how does God feel? It's not difficult to experience what God feels like in his or her formless state. If you meditate deeply, if you sit still for long enough and let your mind become very quiet until you are resting in and as the Ground of all Being, you will start to feel as good as God must feel—full, empty, and free; absolutely content; desireless. All the formless God ever wants to do is be—meditating eternally on the Self. That's why, when we discover that deepest dimension of our own consciousness, we feel, "I could rest here forever." When you experience that state of purest Being, you are experiencing how God must have felt before the universe was born, and you are also experiencing your very own deepest self, which is not separate from that empty groundless ground.

However, that Ground of Being is only one part of the nature of God. God is also everything that emerged out of that nothingness—the explosive fourteen-billion-year process of Becoming. And when God takes that momentous leap from formlessness to form, the feeling experience changes dramatically. The Ground of Being is God in his or her unmanifest form, but the minute the threshold is crossed from nothing to something, God manifests as the evolutionary impulse. The one Self decides to create itself in form, and out of nothing surges an unthinkably vast desire to become. The entire universe, including your own self in this very moment, is the expression and manifestation of that one desire.

The closest we can come to understanding how this creative dimension of God feels is by looking at the biological manifestation of the evolutionary impulse. The desire to create form is experienced in the human body as the procreative impulse or sexual desire. If you observe the arising of sexual desire in your own experience, you will see that it is felt as a sense of ecstatic

urgency—both a feeling of ecstasy and the simultaneous sense that “I must . . .”

That same creative impulse is experienced at higher levels of the self as the drive to innovate, the passion to create that which is new. When any one of us is overcome by that creative drive, what we experience, once again, is a sense of ecstasy and simultaneous urgency. This is a higher, much more evolved expression of the creative impulse that only human beings experience. No other life form seems compelled to create that which is new. And the highest expression of that uniquely human experience is the spiritual impulse, which is the mysterious compulsion to evolve at the level of consciousness. The ecstatic urge to become more conscious is the most profound expression of the First Cause that there is. That impulse, when it awakens in the human heart and mind, is what I call the Authentic Self.

Human beings experience the creative dimension of God at every level of our being, but it is easiest to first locate it at the gross physical level, where it can, at times, seem overwhelming. Think about that ecstatic compulsion when you experience it in its greatest physical intensity, and then try to imagine that same intensity at the level of consciousness. That is how God feels all the time about creating the universe. And God never experiences relief. So when God leaps from formlessness to form, he, she, or it enters an almost agonizing state, where the desire to create or to become is overwhelming and ever unfulfilled.

How God feels, then, is always a paradox: On one hand, from the perspective of the unmanifest, unborn, empty Ground of all Being that has never entered into the stream of time, everything is always already perfect. Nothing has ever happened, and so God rests eternally, peacefully, and blissfully. But for the part of God that has become manifest, that decided to create the universe, the experience is one of unbroken, ecstatic urgency. The intensity

behind this compulsion is emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, philosophically, and physically overwhelming. And what begins to emerge in the human heart and soul, as we awaken to the Authentic Self, or spiritual impulse, is the dawning recognition of the fact that each one of us, at the highest level of our being, is that manifest dimension of God, the very same energy and intelligence that initiated the entire creative process.

As you awaken to the Authentic Self, you begin to intuit and feel directly connected to that evolutionary impulse, to that surging energy and intelligence. You actually start to feel it working in you, moving in and through your own body and mind as the mysterious compulsion to evolve at the highest level. When you feel that surge, what you are experiencing is the most subtle and profound expression of the initial cosmic explosion—the outer reaches of the big bang. That’s the furthest it has gone, as far as we know right now: when you, a human being at the leading edge, awaken to this mysterious compulsion to evolve at the level of your very own consciousness. So when you experience the spiritual impulse, you are experiencing the big bang as a surging compulsion for interior development and growth. The innermost regions of the Kosmos are aspiring to actually evolve and be developed in and through you. The Authentic Self is the felt sense of that initial burst from nothing to everything that you participated in fourteen billion years ago. At the level of consciousness, it is experienced as a sense that there is something unthinkable important that must occur NOW.

Why Am I Here?

The experiential discovery of the empty Ground of all Being is the discovery of the Source—the no-place that we all came from. It is the womb out of which the entire evolving universe was born. Everything that exists emerged from nothing at all.

The experiential discovery of the empty Ground of all Being is only half of the picture. The Ground of Being is the unmanifest dimension of reality—the static and unchanging, beginningless and endless, timeless and formless foundation of all that is. But out of that unmanifest Ground of Being, the entire manifest universe of becoming was born—a dynamic, ever-unfolding cosmic process. For any human being who aspires to know not only who we are but why we are here, understanding what actually happened at the very beginning, at that instant when something suddenly burst out of nothing, is crucial.

Before the beginning there was a void. It couldn't have been more still or peaceful, simply because absolutely nothing had yet occurred. Then suddenly an impulse emerged and exploded—an impulse to become—that gave birth to a powerful creative process. But who or what initiated that process? What energy or intelligence made the choice to take that miraculous leap from formlessness to form? Somewhere, somehow, a choice must have been made. Such an audacious move, that instantaneous leap from nothing to everything, could only have been made by a force that was nothing less than God-like. So I interpret the word God as meaning not only the empty Ground of all Being but also that creative principle—the evolutionary impulse, the urge to become, the First Cause, the elemental driving force behind the evolving universe. And that creative principle does not exist “out there” or somewhere up in the sky but emerges from the deepest dimension of Being itself, which is not separate from your very own consciousness.

That is why we could say, if you dare to let yourself think in such audacious terms, that at the very beginning, at the moment when the initial leap from formlessness to form took place, you and I were there. All matter, time, and space were a great singularity—compressed into one fine point. Think about it for a moment: Is there anywhere else that you could have been at the moment when the universe was born? That one point was the only place to be, and in fact, we were all there. We were there, but we were there as I. Before the universe was born, the One had not yet become the many. So there was only you, and you were alone. And since you were the only one, the only reasonable conclusion is that you made that choice to do this. To do what? To create the universe. As God, or the creative principle, you/we/I chose to take form.

This may be an outrageous thought, a theological fantasy, but if you make the effort to dive deeply enough into your own experience, what you will discover is that who you are is not separate from that creative principle or evolutionary impulse. Just imagine, for a moment, what it would be like to be God, resting in a perfectly blissful, overwhelmingly peaceful state of being for infinite eons of no-time. In that profound stillness there is nothing missing, no desire whatsoever. Absolutely nothing has occurred. That's where we all were before the beginning, before the big bang. Perfect peace and beatitude. Quietude without end. Unburdened by the weight of existence, we could not have been more content. And yet, for some reason, out of that perfect contentment, we made a decision to create the Kosmos. We chose to manifest a material universe from our own unmanifest body. We could have continued to rest happily in Being, meditating on nothingness for more countless eons of infinite no-time. But we chose to take the unthinkable step and endeavor to manifest our own Self in and through form.

When you abide in the Ground of your own Being, you can begin to intuit for yourself what that moment right before the beginning must have been like. In that emptiness, you experience two things. First, there is unconditional freedom, which is the inherent quality of consciousness when it is unencumbered by attraction to anything other than itself. But also, in that empty no-place, there is a sense of infinite potential. So you can imagine, if you multiply that experience a billionfold, how God might have felt when he or she was meditating in perfect equanimity before the universe was created: Absolute freedom . . . and anything is possible. You might even be crazy enough to think you could create a universe. A more bold or audacious thought I don't think has ever arisen and probably never will.

What could be a greater challenge than to create something out of nothing, to manifest a material universe before we even existed in form? But we decided to take that unimaginable step. How do we know? Because it's happening. Because we are here, now, fourteen billion years later, reflecting on this very question. And considering the fact that at the deepest level of consciousness itself, there is only One and that One is who you always are, you would have to conclude that from before the beginning in infinite no-time, through the choice to take the plunge from formlessness into form, and up until the present moment, it could only be you and you alone who is responsible for all of this. Who else could it possibly be?

When God's Purpose Becomes Your Purpose

The evolutionary impulse is inherently free from fear and self-concern, because it is not an individual. It's a force of nature, a function in consciousness that is wild and fearless and utterly one-pointed. So when you, the evolving human being, awaken to that powerful impulse, God's mission becomes your mission. When a human being is flooded with the passion of that evolutionary energy and intelligence, he or she is spontaneously liberated from fear and self-concern, because now his or her attention is focused primarily on the power and the purpose of that creative principle.

When you experience the urge to evolve at the level of consciousness, the nature of the impulse itself is ecstatic. It is the movement of a profound positivity that is difficult to put into words, a deeply wholesome, absolute YES. You find yourself overwhelmed by the inherent goodness of life, of consciousness, of knowing who you are and the miraculous nature of the process you are part of. When you've awakened to this evolutionary impulse, you have no doubt that it is good, that life is good, that God is good, that the whole process is good. It is inherently good, and you know what? It wants to be better.

Of course it wants to be better—that's why you experience the creative impulse! That's what the urge to evolve is all about, especially when that impulse becomes aware of itself through the awakening human being. Then you directly experience how much the process itself wants to evolve, wants to develop. The energy and intelligence that initiated the big bang is compelling you, as its own creation, to evolve. Why? Because to whatever degree you evolve, that very energy and intelligence evolves also. God evolves through you—through each and every one of us, as we evolve. When you really get this, there's only one thing left to do: You have to get on with it. You have to evolve, you have to develop,

you have to become. That's when God's purpose becomes your purpose.

What is God's purpose? To create the universe, in his or her own image. And what is that image? Consciousness. To create a material universe in the image of God, as outrageous as it sounds, would have to mean nothing less than the awakening or enlightenment of all matter. That seemingly impossible task is what I call the Universe Project. From this perspective, we've obviously barely begun. It's been fourteen billion long years, which to the human mind seems like an inconceivably vast expanse of time but in the mind of God is probably just a few moments, considering what an infinite project this process appears to be. So the creative principle, the God-impulse, has an overwhelming amount of work to do. Throughout history, when we were in need, we would pray to God for help. But now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, God needs our help. The fact that now there are highly evolved human beings who can awaken directly to the evolutionary impulse means that God, as the creative principle itself, like never before is able to see, hear, taste, touch, and feel his or her own creation through us. And even more importantly, that Kosmic intelligence and creative energy can begin to consciously act through the awakened human being. If that principle is who and what we really are, if we have recognized that I Am That—the acting representative of the creative principle in the world—then what we are doing, and why we are doing it, becomes all-important. God is completely dependent upon us. Indeed, the evolution of consciousness, which is the evolution of the interior of the Kosmos, is entirely dependent upon the conscious evolution of human beings at the leading edge. There is no other way for God to evolve in and through matter.

God is only as powerful in this world as those of us who have the courage and audacity to become one with our own impulse to evolve. That's the awesome significance of being a human being

who is awake. When you realize this for yourself, you discover what an extraordinary blessing it is to be who you are, in this world, right now. In fact, the whole point of the creative process is to be here—to participate fully, radically, consciously in the Universe Project. So in this evolutionary context, the whole point of enlightenment is not merely to transcend the world so that you can be free of it but to embrace the world completely, to embrace the entire process as your own Self, knowing that you are the creative principle incarnate, and you have a lot of work to do. As an individual, you are instantaneously liberated, simply through taking that step, but your personal liberation is merely a byproduct of finally embracing the awe-inspiring burden of the Universe Project, which in truth has been yours all along.

The greatest challenge for a mortal human being is to realize and take responsibility for the fact that who you are right now, in all your imperfection, is that One without a second, and that One is endeavoring to develop and become more conscious as you. God has fallen out of the sky, but now he, she, or it is beginning to emerge as the creative impulse, which is your own Authentic Self, and is longing to consciously evolve, in and through and as you. So you have to ask yourself: Do I have that much guts, that audacity of intention, that boldness of spirit. Is there enough love in my heart to be willing to be the One? The answer to that question is really the answer to every important question. Who am I? Why am I here? What is the meaning of life? All of these questions are answered in the deepest possible way when you point the finger at yourself and say “Yes.”

A Function of Consciousness

The Authentic Self is the evolutionary impulse, the creative spark behind the cosmos, becoming conscious of itself in the awakening human. The Authentic Self is a function of consciousness that acts in the world but exists in another dimension beyond the world simultaneously. Awakening to the Authentic Self feels like being on a highway that is vibrating, constantly moving forward, that keeps calling us to itself: "You have to get on this, get with this, get into this, this is it . . ."

What's so extraordinary about the Authentic Self in relationship to evolution and enlightenment is that it is egoless, and its relationship to life is always an unconditional, absolute, passionate positivity. The creative impulse, no matter how it expresses itself, is the Authentic Self. But the highest level of its expression is the evolutionary impulse at the level of consciousness, the spiritual impulse, the urge that comes from consciousness itself to evolve or transcend itself.

Authentic Care

The Authentic Self cares passionately, cares desperately about evolution. And when people start to directly experience for themselves what the Authentic Self is, they literally begin to light up with awakened understanding—suddenly life, being alive, being a human being begins to make perfect sense. They exclaim, “Oh, this is the part of me that cares about the life process, about the world system, about infinite Becoming itself!” And that’s so important, because if we can awaken to this Self and recognize what it is, it can help us to make this extraordinary transformation. If we can identify with the Authentic Self—and through doing so, release our attachment to the ego and its fears and desires—that can be the catalyst for Evolutionary Enlightenment.

Unselfconscious Creativity

What I call the Authentic Self or evolutionary impulse does not reveal itself in the stillness and silence of meditation. The Authentic Self only reveals itself through activity. When it emerges, it is unmistakable: It is unselfconscious creativity. One way to easily describe what it looks like is to take the example of a great musician, someone who is truly gifted, a master not only of their instrument but of their art. Such individuals become so fused with what they are playing, and have so fully mastered their instrument and the art form, that consciousness itself seems to be using the vehicle of music to express the transcendent dimension. Any creative individual, from a genius trial lawyer to a passionate, egoless public servant to a great poet or writer, expresses this same mysterious quality. Anybody who is completely committed to the creative endeavor at any level and who has reached the level of mastery where there is an unselfconscious intelligence that is surging through them, expressing that which transcends but includes this world, is an example of the Authentic Self in action. But in a spiritual context, we're not just talking about making music or making art; we're talking about freeing the self so the self becomes the instrument that's playing that music, so that our very own capacity for consciousness and cognition experiences the same release the gifted or talented musician experiences with an instrument in his or her best moments.

Ecstatic Intimacy

For the Authentic Self, there is no sense of otherness in relationship to other people. That is one of its most miraculous qualities—the experience of there being literally no separation or ego defenses between self and other. Even though you can be aware of the objective fact that there is one person here and another person there, emotionally that distinction is not experienced. There is no felt sense of separation, gross or subtle. So when two individuals come together in the Authentic Self and have a conversation, the experience is almost of thinking aloud with yourself, because there is only one Authentic Self. There are not two. The ego can only have a relationship with other separate individuals, and by nature those relationships are always personal. But the Authentic Self can only have a relationship with itself, and there is never anything personal about it.

The Authentic Self is impersonal by nature. It has only one face. If you awaken to the Authentic Self and another person awakens to that same Self, you will find that you experience a strong pull to come together, but what you are drawn to is not the other individual's personal qualities. The Authentic Self isn't interested in other individuals. It is interested in itself in others. Many different people can come together in the consciousness of the Authentic Self—men and women, old and young, from different cultural backgrounds—but what they are attracted to in each other is one and the same. In that state there is a lack of self-consciousness, a sweetness that cannot be surpassed. It is an ecstatic intimacy that is non-sexual and not based on shared personal history. The qualities of this intimacy are impersonal innocence, sincerity, interest, and egoless passion, free from conflict and competition. The Authentic Self longs to be together with itself in this ecstatic intimacy, and when it finds itself, the potential for a radically new order of human relationship emerges in this world.

God's Desperation

The awakened passion for evolutionary transformation is not reasonable. It demands change, right now, and it will not wait. Why? Because God is always desperate to grow. God is infinite in the unmanifest realm. But in the manifest realm God is not infinite—God can only know him- or herself to the extent to which conscious beings are actually able to awaken to their own absolute nature. So the creative principle's desire to grow won't be satisfied until the whole universe has awakened to itself completely. When a human being awakens to the Authentic Self and experiences the urgency of the impulse to evolve, that's what he or she is feeling—God's desperation. And that's why it is not reasonable, and it never will be.

The Promise of the Future

In evolutionary spirituality, we are more interested in the future than we are in the present moment. Why? Because the present moment has already happened, so there is not much that we can do about it. We've already arrived there. But the future, which always exists in the next moment, is something we can actually impact.

Much of postmodern East-meets-West spirituality is focused on the present: "Be here now." "Be in the moment," we are told. And while that may bring some release and relief in the short term, in an evolutionary context, we discover that the present isn't really where the action is. The action is in the future, because the future is something that we can actually get involved in creating. The future is something that we can take responsibility for in the most exciting way possible. When we begin to care about evolution, we feel a passion for the future that is all-consuming.

When you experience this evolutionary impulse moving within you, you will feel an unbelievable excitement and thrill about life. Why? Because of what it is possible to create. So what we begin to thrive on, what excites us, what turns us on constantly, what lights up our hearts and our minds is the evolutionary or creative potential inherent in the present moment to build the future. And that thrill that we feel is not separate from the very impulse that initiated this entire creative process out of nothing fourteen billion years ago. In Evolutionary Enlightenment, that is how we define God: as the energy and intelligence that initiated the creative process. God is Eros; God is the urge to become, the engine behind the evolving universe. And that creative impulse is, by its very nature, a utopian impulse—an urge toward perfection.

If you look at the creative impulse as it expresses itself at different levels, you can see that this is its nature. Often, if you meet an

inspired artist, engineer, scientist, or musician, you will find that he or she is driven toward an ideal of perfection and trying to express that perfection through his or her particular talents. Even at the biological level, when the creative force expresses itself as the sexual drive, it is still a utopian yearning: "I want to meet the perfect partner, make perfect love, produce perfect children, have a perfect family, live a perfect life . . ." Even though it doesn't usually work out that way, the creative impulse, by its very nature, is a reaching toward perfection. And since that impulse, which we experience at all levels of our being, is the same energy and intelligence that initiated the entire process, that means that God's intention in creating the universe was and is a utopian impulse.

So in the teaching of Evolutionary Enlightenment, the most important step for the individual is simply awakening to and then aligning his or her own intention with the creative impulse, which is already a utopian impulse. It is not something that any one of us has to manufacture through philosophical or intellectual inquiry. It is the nature of the creative force itself.

Paradoxically, as you recognize the creative impulse as a drive toward perfection, it is important to understand that perfection can never be realized in the manifest world. You are never going to reach perfection; I'm never going to reach perfection. It's not possible. Before anything happened, before something burst out of nothing, we could say there was perfection. So perfection exists in the unborn, unmanifest, unbecome state or place, which is the Ground of all Being in every moment. But the minute God decided to create the universe and took that leap from formlessness to form, perfection was left behind. And the whole creative process can be understood as the eternal striving for perfection that can never be reached. The entire Kosmos is endlessly reaching toward perfection but destined never to get there. And as I teach it, this is the perfect posture to be assumed by the individual who wants

to develop: We would strive to manifest that relationship to life in which we are always reaching for perfection while knowing that we are never going to reach it. What a paradox! Why would you strive to reach something that you could never possibly reach? Because that puts you in the best possible position to evolve.

When you are constantly striving toward perfection, you have to stretch, you have to reach, you have to always keep moving. Too many of us tend to be lazy, self-indulgent, full of inertia—and because of this we waste so much of the precious time we have. We just want to rest, to take a break. But when we awaken to the evolutionary impulse and assume this posture of reaching toward perfection, we have no time to waste, because there is always further to stretch. The promise of the future is endlessly compelling. When we die, when our time comes, I believe we will have to answer for what we did with our time on earth. Did you waste the precious opportunity you had to consciously participate in the evolutionary process? Did you live a foolish and selfish life? Or did you really live passionately, with great intensity, as if the life of your soul depended on it? If you knew you had been living in that perfect posture, always reaching for unreachable perfection, you would be able to look God right in the eye and say, "I'm ready for the next round."

Part II

Transforming the Self

The Science of the Self

Anyone who enters the arena of conscious evolution must make the effort to acquaint themselves with the territory. What is the territory? The territory is consciousness. The territory is your own self. There are different levels or dimensions to who you are, and you need to understand and be able to distinguish between them very clearly if you are serious in your aspiration to evolve.

It's hard to overemphasize how challenging this is. In all but the rarest among us, the experience of consciousness or subjectivity is so close to the self-sense that it is almost impossible to objectify it enough to make these important distinctions. In the unenlightened state, we are so identified with the quality and content of whatever our subjective experience happens to be from moment to moment that it is difficult for us to know which dimension of our own self we are abiding in. So if we are interested in Evolutionary Enlightenment, we need to cultivate a profoundly objective interest in the science of the self rather than remaining lost in the subjective drama of our ever-changing inner experience.

The teaching of Evolutionary Enlightenment emphasizes three fundamental distinctions in the nature and expression of the self. First, there is the deepest part of your own self, the Ground of all Being. That Ground is the unmanifest foundation of your own experience of consciousness, beyond this world of time and becoming. But if you are interested in the development and evolution of your own consciousness, the most important thing to understand is that development only occurs in the manifest dimension. And in manifestation, there is a part of you that wants to evolve, and there is another part of you that definitely does not. The only reason that most people who insist they are interested in evolving don't actually change that much in the long run is simply that, usually

unknowingly, they identify more with the part of themselves that doesn't want to evolve, which of course is the ego, than with the part that does, which is the Authentic Self. This simple distinction is everything: The Authentic Self and the ego are two different worlds. They are two different perspectives. They are two completely different dimensions of who you are, and like parallel lines, they never meet. This is why most of us live in such a deeply divided state. And if we have not yet begun to awaken, we won't even know it. In moments of deep meditation, we may taste the timeless Ground of our own Being; in moments of spiritual inspiration, we may become so overwhelmed by the evolutionary impulse that we unselfconsciously become one with the Authentic Self. But sooner or later we inevitably fall back into the personal world that the ego creates. And throughout all this, we do not even understand what is really occurring—we are just aware of the rise and fall of different emotional states. So simply beginning to make these all-important distinctions, making the effort to locate and identify these different dimensions of your own self from one moment to another, is a big part of what it means to awaken.

If you want to consciously evolve, you need to become a master of your own self. So when you feel the grip of fear and self-concern, when at a visceral level you experience an irrational resistance to change, you need to understand that this is the inertia of your own ego. When you sink into a meditative state and find yourself mesmerized by absolutely Nothing, captivated by the fragrance of eternity, you need to recognize that this is the quality of the unmanifest Ground of your own Being. And when you experience the ecstatic thrill of creativity, a fearless passion for evolution that is infused with urgency and purposefulness, you need to be aware that that is the movement of the Authentic Self. If you want to know who you are, you need to learn to be awake to each dimension of your own self as it is arising. That's objectivity. If you no

longer want to be lost in the subjective fluctuation of your own experience, you need to cultivate radical objectivity. And the hardest thing to be objective about is oneself.

What Is Ego?

Ego has become a confusing word these days, because when used in different contexts it has completely different meanings. There is an enormous difference between the way ego is defined in a psychological context and the way it is defined in an enlightenment context. A general psychological definition of ego usually refers to what we could call the self-organizing, integrating, or unifying function in the psyche. Understood in this way, the ego is an essential structure in the self that needs to always be in good working order. But when the word ego is used in an enlightenment context, it refers to something else altogether. Ego is the perennial foe on the path to enlightenment, the deeply ingrained, unconscious, compulsive, and mechanical need to remain separate and superior at all times, in all places, under all circumstances. In the way I define it, ego is an irrational refusal to say yes to life, to love, and to evolution at the deepest level of our being.

The true nature of ego, in the spiritual sense of the word, can only really be understood once you have directly experienced something inconceivably positive. Ego seldom reveals its true face, except in those rare moments when, having stumbled upon that which is unthinkable positive, absolutely wholesome, and immeasurably good, you feel compelled to respond, to declare a whole-hearted YES to that which you have recognized. It is only then that you come face to face with the force of a powerful inertia within you that blindly resists, defies, and denies that radical positivity. This is what ego is: that immovable stance, deep in the human psyche, that irrationally refuses the call from the heart to embrace the highest goodness.

Most of us go through our entire lives and never see the ego for what it is. And that is because we almost never find ourselves in the position of being challenged to unconditionally embrace

that which is inconceivably positive. But when we begin to aspire to evolve at the level of consciousness, to live a spiritual life, to become an enlightened person, we dare to open our hearts to the thrilling possibility of something so unthinkable glorious that it's just too positive for most of us to bear. This is simply terrifying to the ego or separate self-sense, because it feels the overwhelming pressure to relinquish control. This is when it emerges out of the shadows and its true face can be seen. Only when we dare to even consider saying yes to our highest aspiration will we become aware of the profound division that exists deep within the structure of our own self. The ego, unmasked, is a raw, irrational, defiant refusal to say yes unconditionally to life itself. This anti-evolutionary force, this powerful inertia, exists in all of us.

The Challenge of Radical Authenticity

Authenticity means freedom from pretense. The ego is terrified of authenticity, whereas the Authentic Self is that and recognizes only that. So the ego is terrified of the Authentic Self. The ego is not interested in substance; it's only interested in image. The only thing ego cares about is how it is perceived. It doesn't care if the image it projects is authentic or not. It is a shapeshifter, an operator, always the opposite of the Authentic Self's straightness, simplicity, transparency, and consistency.

Most of us are still fundamentally identified with the ego. And at a deep level, we know that we're living in a way that lacks a fundamental integrity and authenticity. We're not really as unconscious as the ego would like to claim. Usually, the ego takes the position of being a victim, but under scrutiny, that position is exposed as a sham. The ego's real position is a refusal to play the game of life for real. It's a refusal to be radically authentic, a refusal to be absolutely committed to life. And the ego gets angry when it is exposed, because without victimhood to hide behind, there is a demand to play the game of life for real, now. And this is what the ego wants to avoid at all costs.

When you understand the nature of these forces, you can appreciate the enormous challenge of radical authenticity on a soul level, the enormous challenge of being a fit vehicle for the Authentic Self, as yourself, in this life. It means the game is up forever. To become this authentic, you have to break through the entire false world that most of us are living in. So there is a battle to be fought between the ego's investment in image and falsehood and the Authentic Self's passion for truth and transparency.

Few of us want to aspire for true integrity of self. Even those who have deep and powerful experiences of higher states can still be terrified of radical authenticity. But if evolution is to occur in

a way that is stable and meaningful, radical authenticity is the most important part of the path. The power of your own potential transformation ultimately rests on how deeply authentic you are capable of being, at a soul level, as a human being. Radical authenticity is the ultimate threat to falsehood. It's the ultimate threat to everything that's wrong in this world.

The High Road

People often ask me if it's possible to attain a state where the ego actually dies. And I say, well, I've met one or two people in my life in whom it appeared that this had occurred—the ego had literally dissolved. But in those rare cases, I don't think it was a result of the individuals' own choices or efforts—it was more like a spontaneous combustion, an act of grace. So I do believe that the death of the ego is possible, but I don't think it is an attainable goal. If something like that is going to occur, it's beyond our control, and it's extremely unlikely for most of us. I don't personally think it's possible for anybody, through the power of their will alone, to eradicate the ego completely. But the point is, it doesn't really matter. If you are willing to face and take responsibility for your ego's self-centered motives, conditioned responses, and often irrational impulses to such a degree that you are able to choose not to act on them, they might as well not exist. If you don't act on them, the world is never going to know about them. There won't be any karmic consequences. And that is a reasonable, realizable, attainable goal. So I am convinced that, in this way, it is possible to transcend ego to a profound degree, simply through the power of one's own awakened intention to do so.

In the way that I teach, I try to get people, first and foremost, to recognize that they actually have an ego and begin to understand how it functions, and second, to become deadly serious about transcending it in a way that is significant. However, getting a highly developed, postmodern, narcissistic individual to take seriously for more than a brief moment the possibility of actually transcending their own ego is a difficult task. That notion is just not part of our culture. But if it's not going to happen as an act of grace, the individual has to want to achieve that more than anything else.

Indeed, to take that kind of responsibility for oneself and one's own enlightenment is the ultimate challenge for any human being, and for most of us it's just too demanding. Because we have been immersed in conditioned reactions and responses and ways of thinking for a lifetime, there is a very powerful momentum within all of us that doesn't stop or die simply because we decide one day that that would be a good idea. But if we want to evolve beyond ego, if we care deeply enough about the impact of our actions on others and the world around us, we can always choose, right now, not to act on any of it. At times it will be extremely difficult, emotionally and psychologically, but it is possible. And as far as I understand it, that's the high road. That's the real spiritual practice: the inspired choice to cease to act out of ego, over and over again, at all times, in all places, under all circumstances. In my understanding, that would be as significant as the death of the ego, if not more so. That would give birth to a noble human being, who has inherent self-respect, dignity, and self-confidence, simply because he or she is being true to a higher intention in the face of the temptation to do otherwise.

The Dark Night of the Soul

The teaching of Evolutionary Enlightenment compels us to begin to make black and white or absolute distinctions—not just theoretically but directly in relationship to our own self. And that is because this is a teaching of enlightenment. Enlightenment, by definition, refers to that which is non-relative or absolute. Most of us are not in the habit of thinking in such terms, but if you are seriously interested in evolution beyond ego, it's essential to learn how to do this. When you begin to see for yourself the dramatically opposing nature of two of the most powerful forces at work within your own psyche—the Authentic Self and the ego—it literally shocks you awake.

The transformation from ego to Authentic Self is a deadly serious business, and it's important to understand how these forces work. You can have a deeply inspiring experience of inherent freedom, ecstatic positivity, and overwhelming creative passion. And then twenty-four hours later, you can suddenly find yourself in the midst of a profound attack of existential doubt. Often we are puzzled by this. We ask, "How could I experience such unshakable confidence in my own potential for transformation and then so quickly fall into a state of doubt and despair?" But that's human nature. The ego doesn't want you to become a liberated human being, and this kind of experience is living proof of that fact. The attack of doubt is the ego's response to your experience of your own Authentic Self. And the greater your experience of your own potential to actually become that Authentic Self, the stronger is going to be the violent response from the ego. Unless you can endure the intensity of this kind of experience and stand firm in the face of the overwhelming temptation to doubt, you are never going to authentically evolve, and the experiences you have, no matter how profound, will not amount to much in the long run.

If you are serious about becoming a living expression of the Authentic Self, you have to be absolutely prepared for an assault from the ego. This ultimate challenge is what some of the greatest realizers have called the dark night of the soul. And it will happen—not once but many times. At any moment, the ego may strike. Too many of us are unprepared, and we fall into the ego's trap. That's when the light goes out of our eyes—the same eyes that only twenty-four hours earlier had been shining with the radiance of insight and revelation.

What does it mean to be prepared? It means you are ready to say: "I know what this experience is. I know it is only the ego. I know it's not real." When you go through this kind of confrontation with your own self and come out the other side, you realize that the Authentic Self and the ego are two completely different worlds. You see for yourself that the perspective the ego creates is not real in comparison with the perspective of the Authentic Self. But this is a very hard lesson to learn. When you find yourself under attack, it won't seem like an illusion. It will probably seem very real indeed. So only through the profound spiritual practice of contemplating the dramatic difference between the ego and the Authentic Self will you be able to prepare yourself, at a soul level, so that when the attack happens, you will know what is real and what is not, and you will stand like a rock.

Always Now

The ego will always insist that it needs more time. But if your intention to evolve, to become enlightened, is more important to you than anything else, you won't need time. If there is integrity in your spiritual aspirations, you will be ready now. Good intentions for the future only flatter the ego. When you're serious, the time is always now. Unless you intend to do it now, you won't do it. Evolutionary Enlightenment—which is the experience of consciousness beyond ego in a developmental context—only emerges when now is the only time that means anything to you.

Shining Light on Your Unconscious Values

The ego, which is the perennial spiritual enemy, is not just an individual entity. Generally, we tend to think of the ego as a personal psychological problem, either our narcissistic self-concern or our painful, neurotic separate self-sense. But ego is also a collective structure, and it has its own value sphere. Ego, in this sense, is a conglomeration of conscious and unconscious values that represent the way we assume life is supposed to be. It is a set of subtle and not-so-subtle beliefs, ideas, and ways of seeing the world that we deeply subscribe to but may not be aware of. If we aspire to evolve spiritually, these unconscious values may ultimately be a much greater obstacle to our higher development than even our personal narcissism or neurosis.

Our values are what define the choices we make, the actions we take, and the life we create. If you want to know what your values are, just look at your own life. Your life looks like your values. A lot of us think we have higher or spiritual values, but those values are not necessarily reflected in our so-called personal lives.

If you want to evolve—morally, ethically, spiritually—you need to get clear about what these value structures actually are. Unless you can begin to recognize them and articulate them and objectify them in your own experience, you're going to be tripping over them constantly, and you won't even know why you're tripping. Many of us experience a kind of emotional turmoil because we often feel victimized, not free to choose, not in control of our own destiny. We feel trapped by our personal circumstances and intimidated by our own inner conflict and division. The reason we experience this lack of freedom is that the function of choice or free agency is all bound up in our unexamined values. Part of us may aspire to evolve spiritually, but emotionally we are invested in all kinds of unconscious values, beliefs, and convictions that may

stand in conflict with that higher aspiration. This is why we often find ourselves experiencing irrational fear, confusion, and ambivalence in relationship to higher potentials that we ourselves have claimed to find very attractive.

If we're not conscious of the values of our conditioned self-structure, they are going to inhibit our capacity to be a truly awake individual. So it's imperative, if you want to be an agent of conscious evolution, to bring the light of awareness to the collective ego within yourself. And this is not a psychological perspective but an evolutionary and cultural one. For example, you can find out a lot about your values by thinking about your family—not your personal relationships with your parents or siblings, but the cultural beliefs and convictions that you were sharing. Of course, each of us has a particular personal history, shaped by specific circumstances and experiences. But all of this didn't take place outside of a cultural context. Consciousness does not evolve in a vacuum. It evolves through structures, through self structures that are part and parcel of intersubjective cultural structures. So that's why it's important to look at the ego not just as an individual identity but also as a set of values.

Think about your own childhood: Your parents had certain values, they spent time with friends who shared those values, you were sent to certain schools that expressed their values, and all of this influenced the way your evolving self learned to relate to the world. Were they your values? Did you freely choose them? Probably not. Very few people freely choose their own values. Many of us who have grown up in a postmodern world, where the freedom of the individual is valued above all else, assume that we have freely chosen our values, but it's very rarely true.

The culturally conditioned self, the culturally created ego, is a subject in all of us that needs to be made an object in the light of our own awareness, so that we will be in a position to begin to

freely choose who we are and who we will be. And it is not an easy task. It takes an inspired degree of mental focus and a willingness to be rigorous with one's own thought process.

It's much, much easier to engage in this kind of focused contemplation together with others, because then you can see how much the same we all are. The things we each struggle with as individuals are variations on the same theme. Of course, we are not perfectly identical, but if you are willing to be transparent about your own value structures together with others, you will find that there will be enough similarity that you can begin to see the impersonal and deeply conditioned nature of so much of who you are. And this is very liberating because you see that the ego is an impersonal phenomenon rather than a personal problem. It is a cultural predicament, an evolutionary challenge, more than it is a personal obstacle. This kind of perspective on the conditioned self can give you a lot more courage and inspiration to want to liberate yourself and consciously evolve.

It's important to understand that conditioning is not, by definition, a bad thing. To be conditioned simply means to have been programmed by nature and culture, which is how we all evolve and develop and grow. Conditioning only becomes problematic when you don't know that you're conditioned. So if you aspire to become more conscious, you have to begin to shed light on how deeply programmed you have been by biology, culture, history, place, and circumstance and then initiate the process of freely choosing to be who you want to be. Of course, we could never become completely unconditioned, and we wouldn't even want to be. But to become what I would consider a truly autonomous individual, we have to be willing to go through a metamorphosis, which can be an excruciating process. We have to, in a sense, die and be reborn again. This is what really rigorous and serious spiritual practice is all about: learning how to freely choose to be

yourself. And it's a much bigger ordeal than most of us are prepared for.

Once your ego's values have become objectified in your awareness, then you are in a position to begin to freely choose: Is that who I want to be or not? Some of those values may be positive, and you may not want to change them, but what makes the difference now is that they become freely chosen and conscious. Others may be unwholesome, outdated, or simply irrelevant, and these you may intentionally choose to leave behind. This kind of engaged spiritual contemplation is not something you do once and then finish with. It's a process that needs to be engaged with all the time. The evolution of consciousness is a constant endeavor, a demanding endeavor, and an ultimately thrilling endeavor, because the rewards are ever new.

At this particular time in history, it's essential that those of us at the leading edge are willing to put everything on the table and dare to reevaluate who we are—not just for our own sake but for the sake of the new culture we need to create. The evolution of culture means the evolution of these internal value structures. We need to understand that the new structures of the future are yet to be formed. They have not yet been created. So deconstructing the collective ego in the way I've been describing is the first step toward consciously creating the future, by reorienting the way you think about life. That is what can lead to actual transformation and to a dynamic and meaningful engagement with life that begins to express deeper and higher values. That's when you become a conscious creator who is actually forging new structures, not just for yourself but for everyone else. That's when you become a freely chosen self who has found a place and a profound sense of purpose in an evolving universe.

Enlightening the Choosing Faculty

We human beings are complex creatures, driven by many different impulses and influences—conscious and unconscious, individual and collective. At the deepest level, who we are is the formless unmanifest Ground of all Being. And yet, in the manifest domain, we are also one with the evolutionary passion of the Authentic Self that springs out of that Ground. We are simultaneously pulled by the instinctual drives of our biology, distracted by the fears and desires of the ego, compelled by our individual and collective karma, and conditioned by our personal life experience and culture.

You—whoever you are—are all of these things. And yet you are also the one who is able to be aware of them all and, most importantly, to choose what you act upon. If you want to consciously evolve, it is essential that you accept the simple but ultimately challenging fact that in the end, you are always choosing to be the person that you are. For example, if you choose to give your attention to the Authentic Self, your self-sense will experience and express that pure positivity and passion to create the future. If you choose to give your attention to the fears and desires of the ego, the self that you are instantly becomes the expression of those fears and desires. What you choose to give attention to is always who and what you become. The very same individual—with the same body, the same mind, and the same memory—can become a completely different person in an instant, simply because of a shift in his or her chosen locus of identification.

This choosing faculty is central to who and what each one of us is as a human being in every moment. But most of the time we are shockingly unconscious of this fact. Because we are so compulsively identified with the ego, so emotionally invested in its subtle and not-so-subtle belief in being a victim of circumstance, we will

usually tenaciously resist the simple truth that we are always choosing. But when we awaken to the evolutionary impulse, we will begin to recognize that the power of choice is the key to our transformation. It is just not possible to participate consciously, deeply, and creatively in the life process if we are unwilling to endeavor to take personal responsibility for the entirety of who we are. And it is only the revelation and acceptance of the fact that we always have a choice that makes it possible to take responsibility not only for our higher as-yet-unmanifest potentials but also for all of our lower and not-so-conscious impulses and habits.

If you want to evolve, if you want to become a vehicle for the Authentic Self, you need to be able to consistently make rational choices in the face of the ego's often irrational and deeply conditioned tendencies. And the way that you do that is through enlightening the choosing faculty—bringing the light of consciousness, conscience, and purpose to bear on the part of you that is forever defining your destiny. The ego is what veils the choosing faculty and denies it in order to protect the ego's freedom to do whatever it wants and never be held accountable. But when the Authentic Self, the impulse to evolve, connects with the choosing faculty, all things become possible.

Remember, the choosing faculty is neither the ego nor the Authentic Self—it's you. And whatever you choose to identify with is who you become. When you let in that simple truth very deeply, you will discover that most of the time, your own predicament and potential to evolve are completely in your own hands. It's almost always an overwhelming revelation, but if you truly want to evolve, nothing could be more thrilling. If you—which means whatever part of your self has the capacity to be aware of all the conflicting forces within you—are willing to see it in this simple yet absolute way, then you will become a conscious, enlightened locus of choice, a singular force of focused intention who is able to take

responsibility not only for your own self but for the evolution of consciousness itself.

The Liberation of Choice

When any one of us is deeply identified with the limited and separate self-sense that is ego, our experience of the power of choice does not feel free. One feels very much like a victim, a prisoner of one's own emotional, psychological, and conceptual world. In the ego, there is a very fixed, unconscious, and habit-driven relationship to experience, which makes it appear as if there is no freedom of choice. But when we discover the evolutionary impulse, which is our own Authentic Self, something very important occurs. When our miraculous capacity to choose becomes liberated to a significant degree from the ego's narrow world, we become capable of expressing enlightenment through action. Eventually, if we go far enough in our own higher development, in our spiritual evolution, our capacity to choose will become profoundly aligned with the first cause, the God principle, the energy and intelligence behind the initial choice to become. And when your power of choice begins to align itself with the creative impulse in this way, then your own deepest heart-felt spiritual aspiration and desire to evolve becomes one with the original intention to create the universe. And you begin to see that the next step in evolution has everything to do with conscious choice.

Fifty-One Percent

The Authentic Self or evolutionary impulse is the part of me and the part of you that has absolutely no doubt it wants to be free or enlightened. It's the impulse toward consciousness, the unselfconscious, passionate compulsion to evolve, and it is completely free from the fears and desires of the ego. When you are spiritually inspired, that's the part of you that wakes up and knows something miraculous is possible—the passionate idealism that you feel surging through your system.

For most of us who are interested in spiritual evolution, the Authentic Self is awakened to some degree, but what matters is, how much? If you take the totality of a human being to be a hundred percent, the Authentic Self may be only five percent, and the other ninety-five percent is still the fears and desires of the individual and collective ego. With an individual like that, you could have very passionate, inspired conversations about the most important philosophical and spiritual questions, but you would observe that, over time, he or she would not really change. And the reason for that, very simply, would be that the majority of the self was still identified with the fears and desires of the ego. The greater the degree to which the individual is identified with the Authentic Self—ten, twenty, thirty percent—the more impassioned and inspiring the individual will be, but as long as the ego has the greater percentage of influence over the self, no real change will occur.

In the teaching of Evolutionary Enlightenment, meaningful, demonstrable, and consistent transformation only occurs when the individual crosses the threshold from fifty percent to fifty-one percent Authentic Self. When that line is crossed, the ego becomes the weaker part of the self, and that is what changes everything. So the goal in my teaching is for you to do whatever on God's earth you need to do in order to cross that threshold. Once you do,

something miraculous will begin to occur. You will start to feel a growing momentum, a tremendous thrust or backdraft behind you, because when the Authentic Self becomes the dominant presence in your being, you will feel directly connected to the very source of the creative impulse itself. You are no longer running merely on your own will and intention; there is a deeper and higher energy and intelligence that is catapulting you forward.

A Moral Predicament

Many of us have had spiritual experiences in which we momentarily glimpse an indescribable glory—a greater purpose and a higher potential for human life. But because those of us at the leading edge live in a culture of such extreme narcissism and secular materialism, we have no context for knowing how to honor and respect a dimension of life that is infinitely greater than the personal sphere. We are culturally unprepared to respond to our own deepest spiritual experiences, and therefore, even after glimpsing the glory of our own potential, we rarely make the noble effort to actually transform ourselves for the highest reasons.

The problem is that most of us are not spiritually mature enough to have reached the point where we want to pay the price to genuinely evolve, here and now. And because we don't want to, we have consciously and unconsciously convinced ourselves that for various reasons we can't. This, in a nutshell, is the evolutionary predicament of the postmodern narcissist: We don't want to make the effort to change. And from a cultural perspective, it is a moral issue, not just a personal psychological problem. The ego is very invested in conveniently having a problem, like a wounded soldier who is not quite ready to go out onto the battlefield of life. Most of us are playing the same game, and of course, there are many professionals—therapists and spiritual teachers and so on—who will conspire with us to perpetuate that view. But it's not actually true. Unless we are severely mentally damaged, the problem is not that we are incapable of exercising the power of free agency in order to transform ourselves. The problem is that, more often than not, we just don't want to. And as long as we allow ourselves to remain on the sidelines, we are not going to be able to serve the evolution of our species in any deep and profound way. We will always be mesmerized by a self-created personal drama, full of excuses, ever

remaining consumers of natural resources and personal experiences who have nothing significant to contribute.

I'm not in any way denying the reality of the emotional, psychological, and physical wounds, traumas, and shadows that we all carry to differing degrees. But I am saying that there is a much bigger context in which to look at them. Maybe the fact that we have neuroses, that we've been emotionally, psychologically, or even physically hurt, is just part and parcel of the developmental process. Of course nobody likes to suffer, but unfortunately some degree of suffering seems to be an inherent part of the incarnational experience. Think about the evolution of the cosmos: Planets violently collided to form new elements; and for all its beauty, nature is often brutal in its struggle to survive. For many of us highly developed human beings, life is comparatively easy, but even then, there are always traumatic events that make powerful negative imprints on the psyche. That's just part of the process. The problem is that as obvious as this may seem, most of us in the postmodern world don't believe it. We have somehow gotten the strange idea in our heads that we live in a universe where we—the most privileged, wealthy, highly educated sentient beings this side of the Milky Way—are not supposed to suffer. And in an authentically developmental context, that simply couldn't be the case.

When we awaken to this truth, our heart deepens and widens in a way that is profound, and our perspective begins to expand. We make less of a big deal out of our own emotional and psychological discomfort, because our goal in life is no longer just to avoid suffering. That is an enormous shift, because it makes it possible for us to embrace so much more of the human experience and begin to participate in the life process in a truly dignified way. This is not a perspective that lacks compassion. Indeed, it is really about becoming a big-hearted human being, one who doesn't even think about

the possibility of not having difficulties, challenges, and problems. There are many reasons that we suffer: some are utterly petty and some are noble. But if we care deeply about a higher purpose, what matters is that we are always willing to make the effort to not use our own suffering as an excuse to be unavailable to life.

This perspective on transformation won't help to rid you of your neurosis, but it will make it possible for you to take responsibility for it and enable you to embrace life in a much bigger way, in all your imperfection, right now. And that makes all the difference in the world. There is only so much time we have, and we can spend that precious time trying to get rid of our neurotic pain, or we can become concerned with things that are infinitely more important than the fact that we happen to suffer emotionally from time to time. Considering that now we are needed more than ever to consciously participate in the evolutionary process, the strange notion that we're never supposed to suffer could be seen as not just misguided but even diabolical. If God is the energy and intelligence that created the universe, then it must have been the devil who whispered in our ears that we're not supposed to suffer, rendering us unavailable to God because we are too busy licking our wounds. Only when we get to that point where we realize we no longer have a right to wait on the sidelines while others are fighting on the battlefield of life will we find the resources within ourselves to make whatever effort is necessary to participate wholeheartedly. When we reach that point of maturity where our own pathological self-concern is seen as a moral failing in relationship to the evolution of the Kosmos rather than as a personal psychological problem, we will find the soul strength to take responsibility for all of it, right now. Nothing truly significant is ever going to happen in our struggling world until you and I, in all our imperfection, are unconditionally ready to be responsible for ourselves so that we can participate in

the evolutionary process, without hesitation. That is a dignified approach to higher development, a mature relationship to the precious gift of being alive.

Integrity, Authenticity & Transparency

As we begin to awaken to and engage in the path and practice of conscious evolution, the most challenging realization of all is that it is our responsibility, as individuals, to become fit vehicles for the wild impersonal passion of the evolutionary impulse. In this light, the state of our soul, which means our capacity for integrity, authenticity, and transparency, becomes the biggest deal in the universe. If we are morally underdeveloped and lacking in these soul qualities, we will never be able to carry that evolutionary impulse without corrupting its expression.

Integrity means that there is a foundation of moral virtue in the structure of the self. In the teaching of Evolutionary Enlightenment, morality is not based on externally dictated traditional values and ethical codes but rather is a naturally emerging result of the revelation that the creation of our future depends on what we do, right now and in every moment. That profound awakening to our inherent responsibility as evolving human beings at the leading edge becomes the basis for a new moral context for human life. So the expression of integrity or moral virtue would be that the choices we make and the actions we take would consistently express our recognition of this responsibility and our genuine care about creating our future. In such an individual, there would be a significant correlation between word and deed, a consistent demonstration of moral courage and soul strength. The fact that we are deadly serious about what it means to be alive would be demonstrated with unusual consistency. There would be a discernible hierarchy of values in our relationship to life, and that which we had recognized to be of the highest importance would be something that we would honor and respect in all the important choices that we make. So integrity of self would mean there is a significant correlation between our deepest ideals and convictions and how we actually live our lives.

Authenticity means freedom from pretense. The ego is a veil of pretense, a mask over the self. It's an appearance, an image that is false and inauthentic. But as we begin to identify with the Authentic Self's passion for freedom more than we identify with the ego's need to protect its self-image, we find that we begin to be disturbed by our own pretense, by the ego's inherent lack of integrity. Authenticity is the expression of an integrated self—in whom the appearance and the reality, the motive and the action, have become one seamless movement. The degree to which we are identified with ego and narcissism is the degree to which we find authenticity emotionally unbearable. The capacity for authenticity is something we have to cultivate and something we have to fight for. It takes guts and courage to surrender to the Authentic Self to that degree—to become emotionally committed to authenticity to such an extent that if we found ourselves swerving into pretense, we would experience extreme discomfort. Many of us are so used to being inauthentic that it doesn't trouble us at all. We have become numb, out of touch with our own souls. It is only possible to become authentic when we begin to care deeply about our impact on others and the world. As the Authentic Self becomes the stronger part of our own self, the unselfconscious expression of who we are will be free from pretense, free from the need to protect a false image.

Transparency simply means that we know who we are. Transparency means that we are not afraid to stand free—before God, before others, before our own conscience—with nothing to hide. It means we are no longer hiding anything from ourselves. Most of us are so invested in our compulsive identification with a false self-image that even the idea of real transparency is a threat. But as we begin to cultivate integrity and evolve beyond the ego's relentless need to protect its self-image, we will eventually reach a point where we want transparency in our own self. If the pure motive of

the Authentic Self has become what is driving us, we are no longer afraid of being seen. If there is real integrity in the self, there will be little fear, because deep within us there are no longer any lies. We are truly an open book to our self, and we know ourselves better than anyone else ever could. Only when we develop a deeply felt preference for this degree of transparency will the influence of the ego's irrational resistance decrease. The instinctive defense mechanisms that the ego hides behind will start to crumble, and the self will begin to spontaneously manifest humility, fearlessness, and soul strength.

Integrity, authenticity, and transparency are different facets of the same diamond. In the rare individual who has worked hard to develop these virtues, there is a distinctive quality of moral evolution. He or she will be a whole person, whose fundamental motives in relationship to life have been purified and who is no longer hesitating to act on his or her awakened recognition of what matters most. When one has truly cultivated integrity, authenticity, and transparency, one knows that if one were to die right now, there would be nothing important that was left unresolved, and one would leave in one's wake a powerful example of what was possible.

Part III

Five Fundamental Tenets of Evolutionary Enlightenment

The Path & the Goal Are One

The Five Fundamental Tenets of Evolutionary Enlightenment define what a liberated or enlightened relationship to the human experience is and what it looks like in an evolutionary context. They describe simply and clearly how any of us, once we have directly seen what is possible, can bridge the gap between that moment of insight or revelation and the actuality of the life we are living here and now.

These five tenets represent the path of Evolutionary Enlightenment, but they also simultaneously represent the goal itself because, as traditional teachings have always told us, the path and the goal are one.

In Evolutionary Enlightenment, the goal for the individual is to reach that point in his or her own development where the Authentic Self has become the primary locus of identification, displacing the fears and desires of the ego, or personal self-sense, at least fifty-one percent. When this dramatic shift of identification has occurred, the individual begins to express that evolutionary impulse as the animating force behind his or her own humanity. And these five tenets describe the specific qualities of that transformation—an inner posture in relationship to the human experience that reflects the egoless passion of the Authentic Self.

So these tenets are the goal in the sense that once you actually begin to transcend ego to a significant degree, you will spontaneously begin to assume the posture of these tenets in relationship to your own experience and to life itself. As you begin to identify more with the passion and inspiration of the Authentic Self than with the fears and desires and attachments of the individual and collective ego, these five tenets will become a natural inclination.

The five tenets are also the path, because if through the cultivation of intention, inspiration, willpower, and choice, you make the effort to assume this posture in relationship to life itself, your

experience will become very similar to that of the individual for whom these tenets have become a natural and more or less effortless orientation. If you earnestly and sincerely, with great dedication and commitment, make the effort to practice these tenets in relationship to life and to your own experience, you will begin to see things in a very different way and to feel things in a very different way. You'll begin to see and feel what the individual sees and feels who has crossed the fifty-one percent threshold.

So this is why the five tenets are both the path and the goal. If you cross that threshold and become aligned with the egoless passion of the Authentic Self, these tenets describe what your actions are going to look like—naturally, spontaneously, and effortlessly. And if you want to become aligned with the egoless passion of the Authentic Self, these tenets describe what you have to do—through intention, will, and effort. The path means you have to strive and you have to make effort to get to some place that you are not already. And the goal means that a profound level of transformation has actually occurred, that to a significant degree you have already arrived. But it doesn't mean that you've completely arrived, because in an evolutionary context there will always be further to go. So if you are sincere in your desire to become a vehicle for the evolutionary impulse, these five tenets must be lived without conditions, at all times, in all places, under all circumstances. In this way, whether inspired by the spontaneous ecstasy of direct revelation or driven by the power of your own intention, your actions will consistently be an expression of the integrity, authenticity, and transparency of the enlightened heart and mind.

The First Tenet: Clarity of Intention

The first tenet is called Clarity of Intention, and it places the outcome of the spiritual quest directly in your own hands.

In the teaching of Evolutionary Enlightenment, each individual is ultimately responsible for his or her own higher development. You may say that you want to evolve, that you want to become spiritually liberated or enlightened, but whether or not that aspiration bears the fruit of transformation is entirely dependent upon how much it really matters to you. Clarity of intention is the foundation of the spiritual life because it compels the individual to come to terms with the question: What is most important? Until any one of us has come to a final reckoning with this question, it will be difficult for any real or consistent development to occur. If you are serious in your desire to evolve, that intention has to become more important to you than anything else in this world.

Clarity of intention, in the context of Evolutionary Enlightenment, means two things simultaneously. First, it means you intend to evolve as a human being—emotionally, psychologically, morally, ethically, and philosophically. Second, it means you intend to become spiritually liberated or enlightened—to transcend, to a significant degree, the ego, or narcissistic separate self-sense.

Clarity of intention is not a feeling; it's an action. It is a conscious position you take in relationship to life at the deepest level. Without a clear intention, no amount of spiritual practice will change you in the long run. Your ultimate success depends entirely upon the kinds of choices you make in every moment. Eventually, you will reach a point where you no longer have a choice, where your own spiritual development is recognized to be a choiceless obligation. Then the Authentic Self, which is the evolutionary impulse itself, will have become the dominant force in your being, and therefore the first tenet will no longer be something you are

struggling with. But until you reach that point, clarity of intention needs to be consciously cultivated.

When you begin to contemplate clarity of intention, you are likely to discover, as most people do, that you don't really want to evolve more than anything else. You may long to taste the spiritual bliss of higher states of consciousness. You may even have glimpsed a vision so profound that it momentarily inspired you to make your life a reflection of the beauty that you have seen. But when you attempt to bridge the gap between those deepest insights and the reality of the way you live your life, the true challenge of Evolutionary Enlightenment reveals itself. You recognize that to become a consistent expression of evolution beyond ego requires nothing less than everything.

The serious contemplation of the question *What is most important to me?* will inevitably catalyze a profound confrontation with the actuality of your relationship to life. It will bring to the surface deep and powerful forces in your own psyche that usually remain hidden. Focusing your attention on your own bottom line in this way enables you to see, maybe for the very first time, the dramatic difference between your Authentic Self's unbridled passion for evolution and your ego's irrational refusal to change. The first tenet makes it possible for you to begin to consciously take responsibility for the forces within you that have the power to determine your destiny.

Clarity of intention is simple, but its implications are radical and profound beyond measure. If you want to evolve more than anything else, you don't have to depend upon higher states, you don't have to wait for God to save you, you don't have to hope for grace to descend. If you are clear about what matters most, nothing will be able to stop you. In a truly courageous soul, grappling with this tenet will forge a strength and an independence of spirit, that in and of itself is liberation. Clarity of intention is the

foundation of the enlightened life and the key to the evolution of consciousness itself, because it places your transformation entirely in your own hands.

The Second Tenet: The Law of Volitionality

The second tenet, the Law of Volitionality, states that if you seriously intend to evolve, and you aspire to become spiritually enlightened, you must be willing to take absolute responsibility for your own self.

Once you have asked yourself What is more important than anything else? and your intention has become clear, the question arises: How do I align myself with that intention? If you have decided that you want to evolve—emotionally, psychologically, morally, and spiritually—then in order to make that possible, you have to find a way to align the choices you are making and the actions you are taking with that stated intention. In this teaching, the way that alignment occurs, the way you translate intention into action, is through embracing the law of volitionality. And that simply means that you take full responsibility for all the choices you are making, consciously and unconsciously.

We all have the power of free agency. We all have the freedom to choose. There may often be all kinds of conflicting emotions, desires, and motives arising in our subjective experience. But if there is something important that you have decided you want to do, you have the power to override those conflicting forces within yourself in order to follow through on your intention. Even if you are not always aware of it, you are the chooser, and if you want to evolve spiritually, you as the chooser have to take responsibility for the choices that you make and the actions that you take.

The way the second tenet works is simply through your choosing to take responsibility for the divided condition of your own self—to take responsibility for every part of yourself that doesn't want to evolve. For most of us, anti-evolutionary impulses will always be present to some degree. The self-system is by its nature a messy, chaotic, complex structure. There are many streams that

come together to make up our subjective self-sense: biological instincts, cultural conditioning, personal history, and perhaps even the karmic imprints of previous lifetimes. There are the countless fears and desires of the individual and collective ego, and there is the fearless creative passion of the Authentic Self. But what makes it possible for you to take responsibility for all of these dimensions of yourself is the transformative recognition that you are always choosing. No matter what has happened to you in the past, you are making conscious and unconscious choices in every moment that determine what kind of person you are, what actions you will take, and what impact you will have on the world around you.

Through the practice of the second tenet, when it is clearly aligned with the first tenet, your life can become an expression of wholeness, an actual manifestation of an integrated self. Through the power of intention and choice, you can get a messy, complex, divided self-system to demonstrate a higher integration. No matter how chaotic and conflicted your inner experience may be, you will be able to achieve this—if it is important enough to you. But in order to manifest that rare degree of liberated wholeness, you must actively take responsibility, right now, for everything you are doing in the present moment and for everything you have done in the past.

The fact is that there are few human beings who truly aspire to be that responsible for themselves. Most of us prefer to see ourselves as victims of the forces within and without. Of course, we have all, in one way or another, been victims of events or circumstances that were beyond our control, and we all inevitably bear the emotional and psychological scars. It's not possible for us to take responsibility for what has already happened to us, but we do have the wherewithal to take responsibility for the consequences of those events.

There are all kinds of conditioned responses that arise as a result of past wounds and traumas—often these manifest as irrational fears, unfounded aggression, or misplaced resentment. As

long as you allow yourself to feel victimized by these conditioned responses, it is inevitable that sooner or later you are going to wound and traumatize others. That is how what is traditionally called karma is created. Karma is created every time you act out of unconsciousness, ignorance, and selfishness in ways that cause suffering to others. And for most of us, karma is a powerful force—the accumulated momentum of literally countless such actions. But when you embrace the law of volitionality, and take unconditional responsibility for all of your own choices, you finally begin to take your karma upon your own shoulders. You bear it so that no one else has to suffer its consequences. Heroically, you choose to liberate the world from your own fear, aggression, and resentment—and most importantly, you empower the best part of yourself. If you care about the evolution of consciousness, embracing this tenet wholeheartedly frees you from the past, enabling you to begin to consciously participate in creating the future.

Like the first tenet, the second tenet is very simple, but it is ultimately challenging for the self. In Evolutionary Enlightenment, we are not asking God to save us; we are stepping forward and saying, “I, as the Authentic Self, the Creative Principle, the God impulse, am going to be the one who will take responsibility for creating the future.” That’s a very bold step to take. The Authentic Self has no past, it has no karma, it has never been wounded or traumatized by anything that has happened to the historical personality in time. But in order to be a vessel for that liberated creative passion, you must be practicing the second tenet to such a degree that the conditioned and irrational responses of your own ego are always contained. Then the multidimensional, chaotic, complex structure of energy, consciousness, and contradictory impulses that you are will become the expression of an integrated self—a self that not only ceases to create karma but begins to generate an entirely new, spiritually empowered momentum.

The Third Tenet: Face Everything & Avoid Nothing

The third tenet, Face Everything and Avoid Nothing, is the ultimate form of spiritual practice. It tells us that if we want to be free and if we want to evolve at the deepest level of our being, we must be willing to face everything and avoid nothing at all times, in all places, under all circumstances.

Most forms of spiritual practice are fundamentally about the cultivation of awareness, and facing everything and avoiding nothing means cultivating a capacity for awareness that is profound. The ego, or separate self-sense, is deeply attached to self-image and is always manipulating its environment in such a way that it will only see the reflection of itself that it is seeking. The ego's tendency is to avoid, deny, and reject any information that it receives—from the outside world or from our own internal experience—that would in any way conflict with that self-image. So as long as we are primarily identified with ego, we will always choose to be blind to certain aspects of our self.

A liberated relationship to life is one that is no longer dominated by ego but has become an expression of the unselfconscious confidence and transparency of the Authentic Self. It is only the ego that has a self-image to protect, and that image creates a barrier, a wall that shields the self from too much reality. So the reason to practice the third tenet is to pierce that barrier, to shatter the ego's defenses in every moment. The Authentic Self is always already free and is only interested in what is real and true. It has no self-image to protect and no motive to avoid anything. Facing everything and avoiding nothing is the practice that removes all barriers to the spontaneous, uninhibited emergence of the Authentic Self.

Only an individual who truly wants to evolve will be prepared to abandon the pretense of the ego and to see things as they are. Only one who strives for transparency, authenticity, and integrity

of self and who is deeply motivated by the evolutionary impulse is going to have the courage to face reality in this way. Anyone else, in the end, will find that they are too invested in maintaining the pretense of a separate self to even begin to practice the third tenet in earnest. But as we begin to identify less and less with the fears and desires of the ego and more and more with the evolutionary passion of the Authentic Self, we will experience less fear, hesitation, and resistance to seeing what is true. We will find the strength and humility to be able to bear whatever we need to bear in order to face everything and avoid nothing at all times, in all places, under all circumstances. Why? Because we want to be free. We want to liberate the self from the grip of ego so that consciousness itself will be free to evolve through us. Our capacity for this rare degree of awareness and self-knowledge is completely dependent upon our intention to develop, because in that we align with the pure passion of the Authentic Self and the very motive to avoid is transcended.

The Fourth Tenet: The Truth of Impersonality

The fourth tenet is called the Truth of Impersonality. This tenet points us to a perspective on the human experience that radically transcends the personal sphere of the separate ego. The truth of impersonality compels us to begin to make the effort to see every aspect of our own human life not merely as a personal experience but as an expression of a vast, impersonal, evolving universal process.

Evolutionary philosophy and evolutionary spirituality are based upon the recognition that this miraculous process has existed and has been developing for billions and billions of years. It reveals to us that our own personal experience of that process in all its many dimensions—inner and outer, gross and subtle—is only a very small part of an infinite unfolding. Thoughts and feelings that arise in individual consciousness reflect emotional and psychological structures or habits that have slowly developed over tens of thousands of years.

In order to practice the fourth tenet, you simply have to begin to pay close attention to the nature of your own experience and ask yourself: Is this really just a personal experience, or is this the expression of an impersonal process? You may feel that whatever you are thinking or feeling is very unique and special, and I may feel the same, but your feeling that it's personal to you and my feeling that it's personal to me are exactly the same sentiment. Isn't even the fact that experience appears to be personal a universal and impersonal human phenomenon? When you contemplate the nature of your experience from this perspective, you begin to have intimations and breakthrough insights in which, over and over again, you see through the illusion of the personal sphere and recognize in many different ways that it is not real.

When I say that it is not real, that doesn't mean that your experience doesn't feel personal. What I'm saying is that even

the experience of it feeling personal is completely impersonal. It sounds simple, but this is something that most of us have to see repeatedly, not once or twice but thousands of times. When your own perspective becomes reoriented in this way, you will begin to see your emotional and psychological impulses and reactions and the emotional and psychological responses of others in the same way that you would see the eruptions of a volcano in Hawaii or a shooting star at night—it's all part and parcel and an expression of the life process. If you want to evolve, if you want to become an enlightened person, this is a perspective that needs to be cultivated until it becomes habitual.

There is nothing more powerful than this impersonal perspective to help us see through the veil of narcissism, the attachment to egoic self-importance. The impersonal view reveals to us that the separate self-sense, or ego, is ultimately nothing more than an illusion of uniqueness, created moment by moment through our compulsive habit of personalizing almost every thought, feeling, and sensation we have. This insight, even if only temporary, can profoundly undercut the conviction that we are each a unique individuated entity living in a separate bubble, isolated from everything else that exists. You are a process. And your process is a very small part of a larger process. Dare to face this and you will become transparent to yourself.

The personal is simply the veil that creates the illusion of separation that is ego. And it's a mighty illusion. It's powerful and profound. Most of us live our entire lives behind that veil, never stepping through it except perhaps in brief experiences of higher states of consciousness. But if you are willing to face the truth of impersonality and have the courage to see beyond your own personal self-sense, your identification and allegiance will begin to shift from the personal concerns of the ego to the impersonal passion of the Authentic Self, which is the energy and intelligence

driving the entire process. When you pierce the veil of the personal, you discover a radical objectivity that liberates you from the endless self-preoccupation of the ego and makes you available, right now, to consciously participate in the highest level of that process, which is the evolution of consciousness itself.

Some people, when they hear the word “impersonality,” interpret it as meaning inhuman. But it’s actually quite the opposite. I’m not referring to a process in a flat, mechanical, materialistic sense. This process is alive. And it’s you. The process is you. What is so important about this shift of perspective is that you begin to see your own sense of self as part of this vast unfolding stream of development. Your understanding of what it means to be human expands almost infinitely because you start to see your own humanity and your own potential for greater humanity as a result of this process, an inherent part of this process, and (as far as we know) the highest expression of this process. In this way, the truth of impersonality enhances and enlarges to almost infinite proportions your sense of the significance of what it means to be human.

The Fifth Tenet: For the Sake of the Whole

The fifth tenet, For the Sake of the Whole, is the essence of what Evolutionary Enlightenment is all about. It recontextualizes the seeker's relationship to the spiritual path in such a way that the very motive for pursuing enlightenment evolves from one that is fundamentally self-centered to one that is focused upon the evolution of consciousness itself.

When we embark on the spiritual quest, most of us, understandably, are pursuing freedom or enlightenment for our own sake. This is why we begin with the first tenet, which says, I want to be free more than anything else. But if we sincerely pursue that one-pointed aspiration and begin to develop and mature, we will find that over time our motivation starts to shift. As our understanding and experience grow, we discover that the spiritual impulse is not a personal matter. Indeed, to the seeker who is becoming a finder, it becomes more and more apparent that we are all part of a vast impersonal evolutionary process and that the aspiration for spiritual freedom is nothing less than the expression of the evolutionary impulse itself within the human heart and mind. In this, we recognize that the pursuit of enlightenment could never be merely for the individual alone. The movement toward spiritual awakening is the leading edge of the Kosmic developmental process, and the purpose of enlightenment is ultimately to bring the light of awakened consciousness to that process itself.

Fourteen billion years ago something burst out of nothing, and the most profound expression of that miraculous surge of becoming is found in the human being's emerging capacity for higher consciousness. Consciousness is not the possession of any individual, but it is only through individuals that consciousness can evolve. So the goal of Evolutionary Enlightenment is for the individual to awaken to the evolutionary impulse or Authentic Self,

beyond ego, so that he or she becomes a vehicle through which enlightened consciousness is free to develop and express itself in this world.

The fifth tenet says, I want to be free not for my own sake but for the sake of the whole. When this becomes our natural motivation for seeking liberation, something very significant has occurred. What began as a freely made choice has become a choiceless obligation. Our fundamental motive has evolved from one that is self-serving to one that is not separate from the very motive behind the expanding universe—the pure passion of the big bang, the God impulse, which is our own Authentic Self.

When that pure passion becomes our own passion, human life becomes ennobled—it becomes the holy life, the spiritual life, a life of meaning and value. We discover that we have come home and have found our place in the whole matrix of the Kosmos. We know who we are and why we are here. As long as our fundamental motive is personal and self-centered, life will never deeply make sense. But when we embrace a motive that absolutely transcends the personal, every moment becomes infused with a powerful sense of purpose. That's the death of the ego. All our petty self-concern is radically displaced because we are no longer living for our own sake but are now living for the sake of the whole, consumed by a passion to be utterly free so that nothing will inhibit our ability to participate wholeheartedly in the evolutionary process.

Part IV

A Collective Emergence

A Higher We

Evolutionary Enlightenment is not an individual attainment; it is a collective emergence. And it occurs when all individuals involved awaken simultaneously to the Authentic Self, which is the evolutionary impulse itself, the energy and intelligence that created the universe, experienced directly in the human heart and mind. In that awakening, there is no difference between the deepest spiritual revelation of oneness and a fully embodied, conscious engagement with others and with the life process itself. The timeless paradox of enlightenment enters the stream of time in a collective or intersubjective context and becomes the ground for a higher evolutionary or developmental process. The Authentic Self or evolutionary impulse is the urge toward ever-greater complexity and higher integration. So in this intersubjective nondual or enlightened state, there is the living revelation of the fact that there is only One while simultaneously there is the appearance of the many; and the many, in the knowledge of being One, are ceaselessly striving to realize greater complexity and higher integration.

I'm convinced that this new enlightenment has more potential than traditional enlightenment to effect cultural transformation at the leading edge. But it's more challenging, because people have to cooperate with each other. And that seems to be the real human predicament. How do you get people to cooperate with each other? A bold or even heroic man or woman, a rare individual, will find a way to evolve, but as long as the individual does this on his or her own terms, by him- or herself, WE aren't going to get anywhere. So the challenge is: How do we do this together? It's when we can move forward together that something big starts happening, and the implications for the leading edge of cultural development are very profound.

This is the age of the individual. And we're not doing too well as a result of the fact that we have all grown up in a cultural climate

of narcissism and materialism that has taught us to think far too much about number one. So this teaching is very much about the leap from the I to the We. But it's not a We in which the autonomy of the individual is sacrificed in any way. Usually an autonomous and creative individual has to remove him- or herself from the experience of communion with others in order to be able to freely express his or her creative potential. But in this higher We that I am speaking about, two seemingly contradictory things happen simultaneously. The creative autonomy of the individual is released and empowered like never before, and at the very same time, because the ego boundaries have fallen away between people, there is suddenly no sense of the usual gap that separates one from the other. The one and the many seamlessly merge, and yet paradoxically they don't become indistinct. I am convinced that this is what our next step is. When any one of us looks at our personal predicament in a larger cultural context, we begin to recognize the need for more and more of us to go beyond our pathological individualism in such a way that we are actually going to be able to merge in a higher We, a nondual creative unity—not just as a spiritual state but as a normal way of being—so that new, truly autonomous men and women and as-yet-unrealized cultural potentials can emerge at the leading edge.

A Collective Emergence

The purpose of collective practice and inquiry in the context of Evolutionary Enlightenment is to engage directly with the development of consciousness. Consciousness is not an individual; it is the intersubjective field that we all share, so when a group of individuals come together in this context, that collective represents consciousness itself.

When you come together with others to inquire into the most fundamental spiritual and philosophical principles, you should begin to ask yourself, what is it that captivates your attention? Is it any of the other individuals, or is it what emerges between the individuals? What you will discover, if you are authentically engaging with the process, is that it is not any individual or even the collective that is so thrilling. It is the quality of consciousness that each and every individual is manifesting—a deeper part of the self that expresses itself through the individual but is fundamentally not limited to the individual. This is a radically different orientation to the way we are accustomed to relating to each other, because now we are relating primarily to the intersubjective field of consciousness itself. At a certain point, even the concepts you may be exploring and understanding become secondary, however profound they may be. The concepts are just what you use to manipulate the field. You find that you are one step ahead of even what you understand, and you discover that you are spontaneously acting and responding from a much more intuitive dimension of yourself.

Evolution beyond ego occurs when those who have come together in this way begin to become conscious of and concerned with the emerging intersubjective field rather than any individual. As we progress in our engagement with spiritual evolution, we will notice that our attention gradually moves from being focused

only on the individual to becoming attuned to the collective, until finally it is drawn directly to the field of consciousness itself.

While this process infinitely transcends the individual, paradoxically it is completely dependent upon the individual. Personal enlightenment is an individual attainment; radical impersonal Evolutionary Enlightenment is a collective emergence. But if it is to be more than a short-lived foray into the glory of our higher potentials, the stability of that collective emergence is entirely dependent upon the individuals upholding a very high standard. If a group of people have met in this extraordinary shared revelation, what happens when they leave that intersubjective context and go their separate ways? Will they each honor and uphold the higher level that they reached together? This is the moral imperative inherent in the evolutionary process at the leading edge. If the individual feels obligated to sustain his or her own highest attainment, which has occurred in an intersubjective context, then individual transformation becomes the only moral response to the collective emergence. In an ideal world, each individual would spontaneously feel that because of what had occurred collectively, he or she was obligated to uphold a higher standard individually.

Coming together in this way is much more than a mere exercise or an ecstatic experience—it is a creative act of the highest significance. What is actually coming into being, at the level of consciousness, is that which compels each individual to rise up and meet the very potential that he or she is participating in creating. That's emergence; that's conscious evolution. The individual, in relationship with others, is literally creating that which will demand his or her transformation. That's nondual Evolutionary Enlightenment at the most subtle and profound level. The moral obligation is not imposed from without; it is spontaneously generated within each individual by the intersubjectively revealed higher potential itself.

That is the beauty in the process of conscious evolution: Together we generate this miraculous higher potential and then we find ourselves obligated by our own development. Could there be a greater challenge for the ego? And yet it's not coming from an external authority. In Evolutionary Enlightenment, the true teacher is the Authentic Self. When the Authentic Self begins to awaken in and through the individual and the collective, the guru principle starts operating directly through the field of consciousness itself, fueling and guiding the dynamic surge of intersubjectively self-generating evolution beyond ego.

Autonomy & Communion

In Evolutionary Enlightenment, the promise and purpose of this teaching is a state of being in which powerful autonomy and profound communion exist simultaneously.

Autonomy is radical independence and authenticity. It emerges when the individual is standing completely alone, in a perfect state of self-reliant and independent passionate interest in the evolutionary process. Autonomy is the expression of pure creative freedom—the powerful, unrestricted freedom of the individual to flower in his or her own potential without limit. When you experience true autonomy, you discover an unparalleled fullness of self that is miraculously free from self-consciousness. You simply are who you are, ecstatically experiencing your own authenticity spontaneously manifesting itself.

Communion is the profound revelation of nonduality when it dynamically emerges in a collective context. It is the intoxicating experience of the Authentic Self recognizing itself in others—the many coming together as One in egoless freedom and infinite potential, uninhibited by any sense of separation. In this inclusive, intersubjective nondual state, the ultimate revelation of Oneness becomes manifest in this world as the ecstatic intimacy of human relationship beyond individuality.

For both autonomy and communion to exist simultaneously is a newly emerging potential in consciousness. Usually, when an individual experiences powerful autonomy, it is almost always at the expense of communion with others. And in order to experience profound communion, usually the individuals involved have to sacrifice their autonomy. But in Evolutionary Enlightenment, a dynamic field is created where the one and the many are literally the same and yet simultaneously remain distinct and different.

It is a new and evolving expression of nonduality in which the thrill of autonomy and the bliss of communion merge into one singular, unified state of consciousness.

Evolutionary Tension

Evolutionary tension is the experiential quality of the new consciousness that is liberated between individuals who come together in the Authentic Self. The Authentic Self cares only about the future, and that care is felt in the human heart and mind as a powerful wakefulness, a thoroughly positive and wholesome tension that endlessly compels the individual to rise to his or her highest potential in order to create that future. It is the very opposite of inertia, which is the quality of the individual and collective ego, the downward drag of its endless fears and concerns. Evolutionary tension is an upward pull, a profound sense of urgency to bring into manifestation that which has not yet occurred. It is the dynamic awareness of and surrender to the creative impulse, the demand from the Authentic Self to become more, to reach for higher and more complex forms of harmony and integration. This positive tension creates a context for human relationship that is always evolutionary because it is infused with the living presence of unmanifest, immanent potential.

Natural Hierarchy

Natural hierarchy is the structure of human relationship that spontaneously emerges in a living context of intersubjective enlightenment. Enlightenment means beyond ego, and intersubjective means between subjects. So natural hierarchy emerges when two or more individuals meet in a higher consciousness beyond ego. It is an egoless structure defined only by actual differences between individuals' relative levels of development and experience. In Evolutionary Enlightenment, while the ground of relationship is always nonduality or oneness, the reality of difference, which is the very fabric of any developmental perspective, must be honored. And therefore the relationships between evolving, enlightened human beings would clearly reflect the ultimate truth of non-difference while simultaneously respecting differing levels of experience, knowledge, and authority. If each individual was embracing the demand of evolutionary tension, which compels us to live up to our highest level of experience and understanding while respecting differences, a genuine natural hierarchy would become manifest—a hierarchy defined not by the ego's motives of power and control but by the Authentic Self's desire to develop. Natural hierarchy is a delicate and ultimately challenging principle for most human beings to grasp, because it inherently demands that the ego must be transcended, individually and collectively. Only then will the matrix of human relationships become a living expression of evolution and enlightenment: a dynamic and ever-changing reflection of oneness or nonduality.

How a New World Is Born

The ultimate spiritual revelation is that there is no other. There is only One. When any individual goes very deep into a meditative state, momentarily transcending the separate self-sense or narcissistic ego, this profound singularity at the level of consciousness itself is what he or she will find. There is an uncontainable thrill in those moments when the nonrelative nature of consciousness actually becomes apparent. It's as if the water boils over the edge, and the individual suddenly finds himself or herself overwhelmed by the absolute dimension of Being. That is the revelation that enlightens: Consciousness is One without a second, and I Am That.

The ground, or the foundation, of an enlightened perspective is the direct experience of the nonrelative or absolute nature of consciousness itself. Matter, mind, and time are all relative. Consciousness is not. And it is that interplay between the absolute and the relative, between the revelation of One and the appearance of many, that generates the awakened intensity that is the quality of enlightened awareness. An enlightened human life would be one in which the individual is living right on that edge, in the very heart of that paradox.

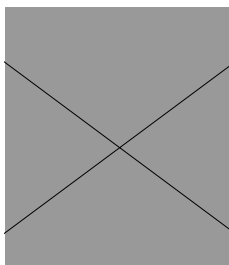
The most thrilling discovery I have made in my two decades as a teacher of enlightenment is that if a group of individuals choose to go beyond ego together, it is possible to experience exactly the same overwhelming revelation of the absolute dimension with our eyes open, in a context that is not one of withdrawal and stillness but one of creativity and engagement. We discover a state of consciousness in which we are each aware that there is only One and yet, simultaneously, we are engaging as many—a state in which we are able to experience unqualified communion and powerful autonomy at the very same time. That's nonduality—incarnational nonduality. It is experienced in the body, in relationship, not only

in the stillness of inner revelation.

In the traditional notion of enlightenment, the egoless state is just consciousness or Being. There is no activity involved, no relationship. It is easy to be egoless when there's no relationship. Any one can experience egoless consciousness in the stillness of his or her own meditation. But the real challenge of enlightenment is egoless engagement in an intersubjective, creative context. That, to me, is the call of the future. That's the new enlightenment that I am endeavoring to bring into being. If a group of individuals come together, and each one is deeply committed to the Authentic Self to such a profound degree that it has displaced the separate ego to become the primary locus of identity, something quite miraculous and dramatic starts to occur. The nature of the Authentic Self is ecstatic urgency and unconditional commitment to creating the future. So when two or more individuals come together and awaken to the Authentic Self, a glorious future is created, at the level of consciousness, right now. Heaven comes to earth now. Heaven is a state of being in which the ego is not necessarily transcended altogether but is defeated. Ego is defeated when an individual's primary locus of identification shifts to the Authentic Self. Then the future at the level of consciousness does emerge in the present moment, and that's what a truly new world is. It's not some vague utopian vision a thousand years from now; it's a new structure in consciousness that emerges at the deepest level, in the most interior dimension of the Kosmos, in real time, right now. At first it is glimpsed as a new potential, and eventually it becomes an actual structure in consciousness that emerges through the many simultaneously. In this intersubjective egoless field, everyone is relating to each other in a completely different way, from a radically different perspective, for very different reasons. And that is how a new world is born.

A new world means a new level or stage of development, and that's something we have to build together. Throughout history,

there have always been rare and extraordinary individuals who were trailblazers, out ahead of everyone else, but new stages of cultural development are not individuals. They are intersubjective structures that are created in consciousness as human beings come together, having transcended old value systems and worldviews and created new ones. So if the shared foundation upon which we build new structures is the transcendence of individual and collective ego, we are going to be consciously creating nothing less than an enlightened culture.



ANDREW COHEN is a spiritual teacher and founder of EnlightenNext magazine (formerly What Is Enlightenment?). Since a powerful awakening transformed his life in 1986, Cohen has been dedicated to helping others in their quest for spiritual transformation. His independent spirit and unusual willingness to question cultural assumptions have led him, over the past two decades, to forge an entirely new spiritual path. A radical departure from the Eastern tradition of his own teacher, Cohen's Evolutionary Enlightenment redefines ancient mystical wisdom in the context of an evolving cosmos and a fast-changing world. His message is characterized by its unique combination of evolutionary urgency and uplifting passion for human potential. Through his work with his students worldwide, he is striving to put the principles of this twenty-first-century philosophy into practice and, in doing so, to demonstrate the possibility of creating a new culture.

A visionary thinker, Cohen is widely recognized for his original contribution to the emerging field of evolutionary spirituality. Through his talks, intensive retreats, publications, and ongoing dialogues with leading philosophers, mystics, and activists, he is becoming a defining voice in an international alliance of individuals and organizations that are committed to the transformation of human consciousness and culture.

Andrew Cohen is the author of *Living Enlightenment, Embracing Heaven & Earth*, and *Enlightenment Is a Secret*.

For further information about Andrew Cohen and Evolutionary Enlightenment, including free audio and video content and Cohen's popular blog, visit: andrewcohen.org

EnlightenNext: A Revolution in Consciousness and Culture

Founded by Andrew Cohen in 1988, EnlightenNext is a non-profit 501(c)(3) global organization inspired and guided by the principles of Evolutionary Enlightenment. Based in Lenox, Massachusetts, EnlightenNext has a network of members spanning twenty countries, with centers in New York, Boston, London, Paris, Amsterdam, Frankfurt, and Copenhagen.

In 2009, the EnlightenNext Discovery Cycle was launched, creating an ongoing program of events that enables individuals to directly participate in both personal and cultural evolution.

Visit www.EnlightenNext.org to find out more about

- Courses and publications on Evolutionary Enlightenment
- Retreats, talks, and seminars with Andrew Cohen
- Connecting with a global network of Evolutionaries, individuals dedicated to evolving consciousness and culture
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