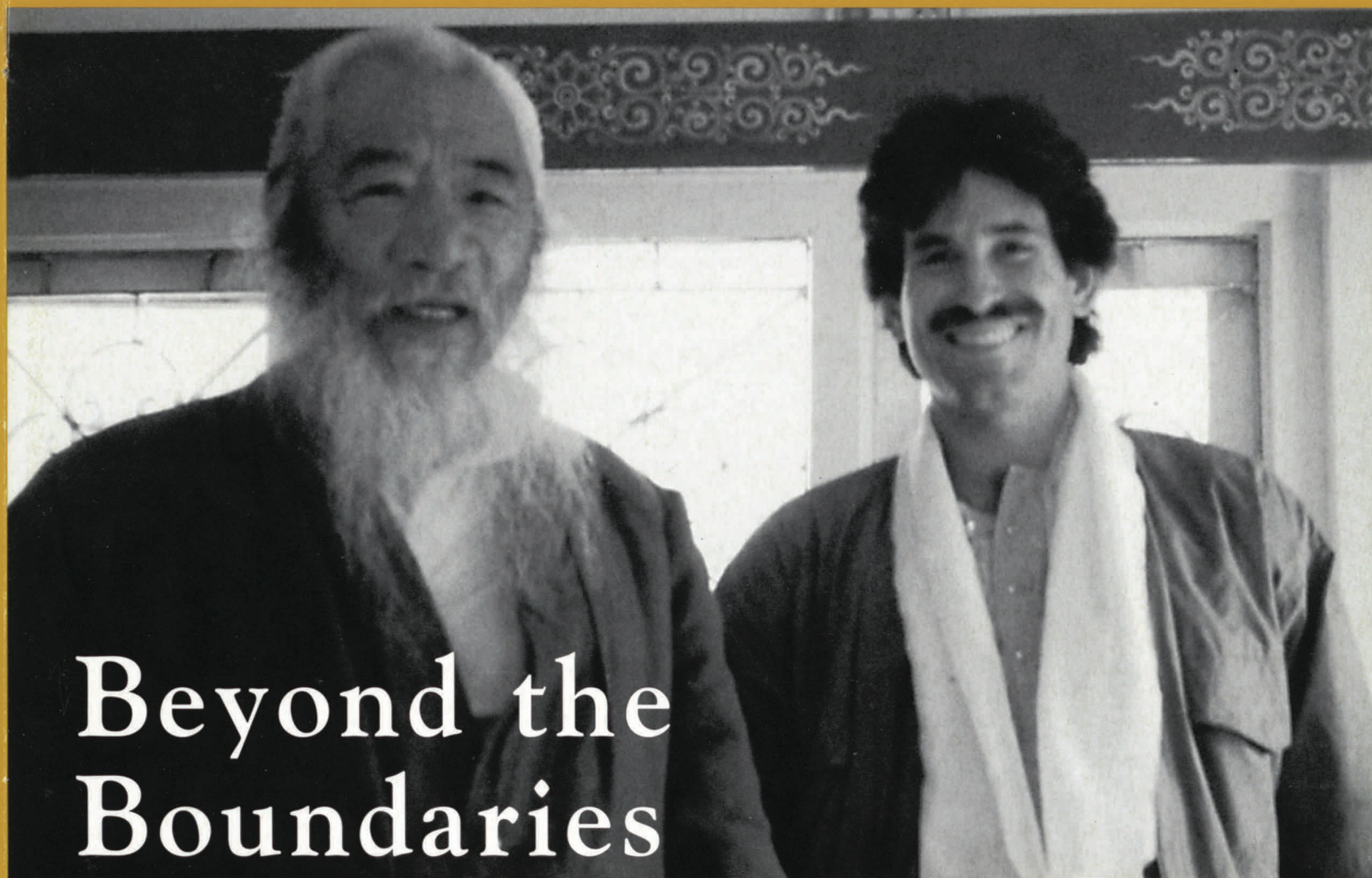


# WHAT IS ENLIGHTENMENT?

Volume 4, Number 1

A Biannual Journal of Moksha Foundation

January 1995



## Beyond the Boundaries of Tradition

Chatrul Rinpoche and Andrew Cohen  
Pharping, Nepal

*Conversations on the Nature of Truth*

\$4.50 U.S./\$6.00 CAN.



Penor  
Rinpoche

Tulku  
Urgyen

Chatrul  
Rinpoche

Rabbi  
Ginsburgh

Lex  
Hixon



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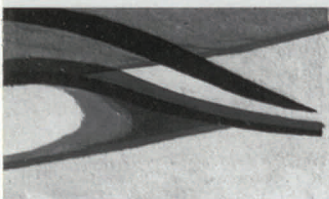
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## THE UNIMAGINABLE INCONCEIVABLE REALITY



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*"I have found and continue to find that there is so much confusion, misunderstanding and misinformation as to what Enlightenment actually is and what it really means. That is why I have encouraged my students to publish this journal as a vehicle to present our ongoing investigation into this question, and to share our discoveries with those who are also interested in this vast and most subtle subject."*

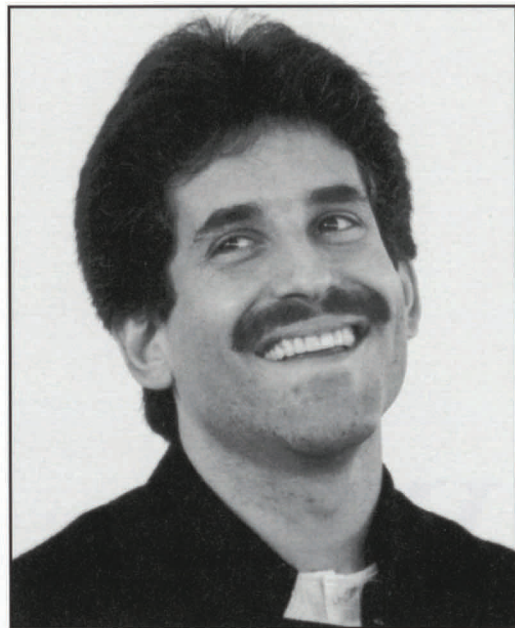
### ANDREW COHEN

is a spiritual teacher and author of *Enlightenment Is a Secret*, *Autobiography of an Awakening* and other books. He was born in New York City in 1955. He spent his teenage years living in Europe, where at the age of sixteen he experienced an explosive and overwhelming revelation of the inherent oneness of life. The

impact of this experience in time propelled him on a passionate and relentless search, which culminated fifteen years later in a deep spiritual realization that transformed his life beyond all recognition.


Since that time, the fire of Andrew's awakening has sparked a revolution in the consciousness of many, many people. Most importantly, it has led to the discovery of a profound and all-encompassing spiritual teaching that clearly reveals the vast and subtle nature of the enlightened condition and the challenge of what it means to live this rare attainment. Andrew now travels around the world extensively every year, giving public talks and intensive retreats. A growing worldwide community of students who have come together to live these teachings in a committed way has led to the establishment of a network of centers throughout North America, Europe and Israel.

Anyone who has seriously considered Andrew Cohen's teaching can attest to the fact that it is extremely difficult to distance oneself from its challenging and revolutionary implications. This is because Andrew dares us to question our own priorities and the extent of our commitment to the rare and extraordinary possibility of liberating ourselves in this birth. For Andrew, to awaken to the truth means to discover that perspective of reality which illuminates the way things actually are beyond personal preferences and preconceptions. Through the realization of this profound perspective, Andrew encourages the serious seeker to pursue an ongoing and independent investigation of what it means to truly live an undivided and fully human life. *"It is only by becoming an expression of this undivided view ourselves that we can find a way to live together that makes perfect sense. Only then can that extraordinary evolutionary potential inherent in the race as a whole become a living reality."*





# Beyond the Boundaries of



**W**HAT DOES IT MEAN TO TRULY meet a spiritual teaching and path that is different from one's own? And why would anyone who is serious about pursuing liberation to the end engage in such an endeavor? In the case of a person who, like Andrew Cohen, is already himself a teacher of liberation, what would motivate him to actively pursue such meetings?

The encounter between representatives of different spiritual paths and beliefs can be both challenging and fascinating. But too often such meetings fail to live up to their promise of revealing something profound about the human condition. Discourse between people on different spiritual paths often seems to stop with something resembling détente: the lessening of tensions between rival ways of thought and belief. There is no doubt that the coming together of differing traditions for the purpose of finding some common ground is beneficial. It is far preferable to the disputes, sometimes even leading to bloodshed, which are commonplace among religions today, and which have been the norm throughout history when differing faiths meet. But meetings pursued for this purpose alone seldom seem to become the vehicles for a deep and passionate investigation into the human condition that they could be. Differences of viewpoint often tend to be glossed over, and the potential for real challenge and discovery is seldom realized.

Yet there have been hints throughout history that something else is possible when followers of different paths meet. The great Buddhist university of Nalanda in medieval northern India was open not only to vying sects of Buddhism, but also to practitioners of other religions. It holds a place in

history as a source of tremendous spiritual inquiry and creativity, at least in part due to its role as a meeting ground for serious discussion among seekers of diverging orientations. Socrates visited the leading thinkers of his place and time to test his understanding against theirs, and both his philosophy and method of inquiry became seminal for the West. In medieval Africa there was a great university at Timbuktu, where Muslim, Jewish and other thinkers met for discourse and debate, contributing to a great flowering of thought important to that continent and the Middle East. Indeed, there is reason to believe that many, if not most of the great spiritual traditions of our day were to a large extent the product of the meeting of people with contrasting viewpoints through ancient history's invasions, migrations and commerce. And it is almost certain that these encounters between varying ways of thought were not tame and entirely harmonious affairs, but were passionate, searching, creative and intense.

If the contact between differing spiritual traditions has had such a profound effect on religious history, then could not contemporary meetings between teachers and seekers of differing paths hold a great potential for furthering the individual's investigation and discovery of the truth? It would seem that such meetings, if pursued with passionate interest, could be a powerful vehicle for testing, refining, and deepening one's understanding of the human condition, and for revealing where that understanding is limited and where it is not. But this kind of powerful result from such a meeting would seem to require a willingness to fearlessly and meaningfully question oneself and all of one's assumptions. Rather than glossing over or avoiding the differences and contradictions revealed in such encounters, one would have to want to come to terms with them, whatever the consequences.



# Tradition

## Editorial by Hal Blacker

Andrew Cohen pursues such meetings with this kind of willingness to be challenged and to take risks. In the following excerpt from his forthcoming book, *An Unconditional Relationship to Life: The Odyssey of a Young American Spiritual Teacher* (to be published in 1995), he explains his reasons for doing so:

*"In my ongoing interest in trying to always deepen my understanding of the awakened condition, I have taken every opportunity to meet spiritual teachers from different traditions. This has been and continues to be a fascinating and educational experience. It is far too easy to assume that we have come farther than we actually have if we are not willing to test the depth and validity of our own conclusions. It is only through making the effort to seek out the company of those who seem to have the same depth of interest in liberation of the human spirit as we do that we will be given the opportunity to test our own knowledge and find out if there are any limitations in our own view. So often, teacher and student alike too easily become self-satisfied and overconfident in the belief that their path and their way is perfect and beyond question. The spiritual path is the search for and discovery of total insecurity. More often than not, it becomes the very opposite of that.*

*The validity of any teacher, path or system can only ultimately be determined by their results. The result rather than the promise is what I have always been interested in. Often what can seem to be a perfect teacher, teaching or tradition can, when scrutinized more closely, be discovered to be far from that. The deeper one peers into the human condition when faced with the highest possibility of perfect liberation, one tends to find more questions than answers."*

What is revealed in this statement is Andrew Cohen's willingness to test himself and his own understanding in the encounter with another, and to penetrate beyond the appear-

ances and assumptions that give the illusion of security, to an investigation that is infinitely challenging and fascinating. Because it is here, where there are "more questions than answers," that what matters, what can bring real change, can be discovered.

In this issue of *What is Enlightenment?* we present five such journeys into the realm of insecurity and discovery. Each one is unique but they are all fueled by the same spirit of fearless investigation. In each encounter a meeting truly does occur, born from a dialectical tension that draws one deeper into further inquiry.

In these meetings between Andrew Cohen and teachers of very different traditions—three Tibetan Buddhist lamas, a Jewish scholar of the Kabbalah, and a Western Sufi sheikh—real common ground is unexpectedly discovered. These discoveries of a profound commonality of experience and understanding are important precisely because they are not the product of the participants' desire to minimize differences in order to get along. Instead, the universality of the human condition is revealed in the course of a searching inquiry conducted without preconceptions of where that inquiry should lead. Because this universality is truly discovered rather than manufactured, these discoveries have the power of surprise, freshness and wonder, a power that they might not otherwise have.

These meetings are a beginning, not an end. They are offered in the hope that they will inspire in the reader the willingness to place his or her own conclusions on the line, to question all of them, to look with fresh eyes at oneself, at others and at the human condition, and to respond fully to what may be found. ■



# FROM LIGHT

## Meetings with Three Tibetan Buddhist Masters

**T**IBETAN BUDDHISM IS ENJOYING unprecedented exposure and popularity. From the universal admiration for the Dalai Lama and the best-selling status of Sogyal Rinpoche's *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, to movies such as Bernardo Bertolucci's *Little Buddha* and even the rap music of Adam Yauch and the Beastie Boys, it seems that the ancient prophesies of the spread of its fame throughout the world are being fulfilled.

But popularity need not indicate superficiality. To truly meet Tibetan Buddhism is to encounter a vast tradition comprised of the experience and scholarship of literally thousands of years, containing teachings from the entirety of Buddhism's 2500-year history. Tibetan Buddhism has preserved the teachings of all three of the major divisions, called vehicles or *yanas*, that emerged consecutively in the historical development of Buddhism: the Hinayana (or Theravada), the Mahayana and the Vajrayana. A serious practitioner of Tibetan Buddhism is gradually taught the philosophy and practice of all of them, the understanding of the earlier teachings being seen as the necessary foundation for the understanding of the later.

In biology it is said that "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny." This esoteric sounding scientific phrase means, simply put, that the development of the individual resembles the evolution of the species. Thus, a human embryo starts out as a single-celled being, and seems to "evolve" in the womb through phases of being fishlike, amphibious, reptilian, birdlike and finally human. In a parallel way, according to Tibetan belief, an individual's spiritual evolution resembles the historical development of the Buddhist teachings. It begins with the desire to transcend personal suffering, as emphasized in the "Lesser Vehicle," the Hinayana. Having gained some perspective on one's own mind and emotions, concern for the welfare of humanity arises, as emphasized in the "Greater Vehicle," the Mahayana. Finally, one gains perspective on external beings and phenomena as well as on oneself, and knows their emptiness. As a result, in the Vajrayana, or "Diamond-like Vehicle," one has the confidence to respond directly, spontaneously and appropriately to whatever arises, either inner or outer, positive or negative.

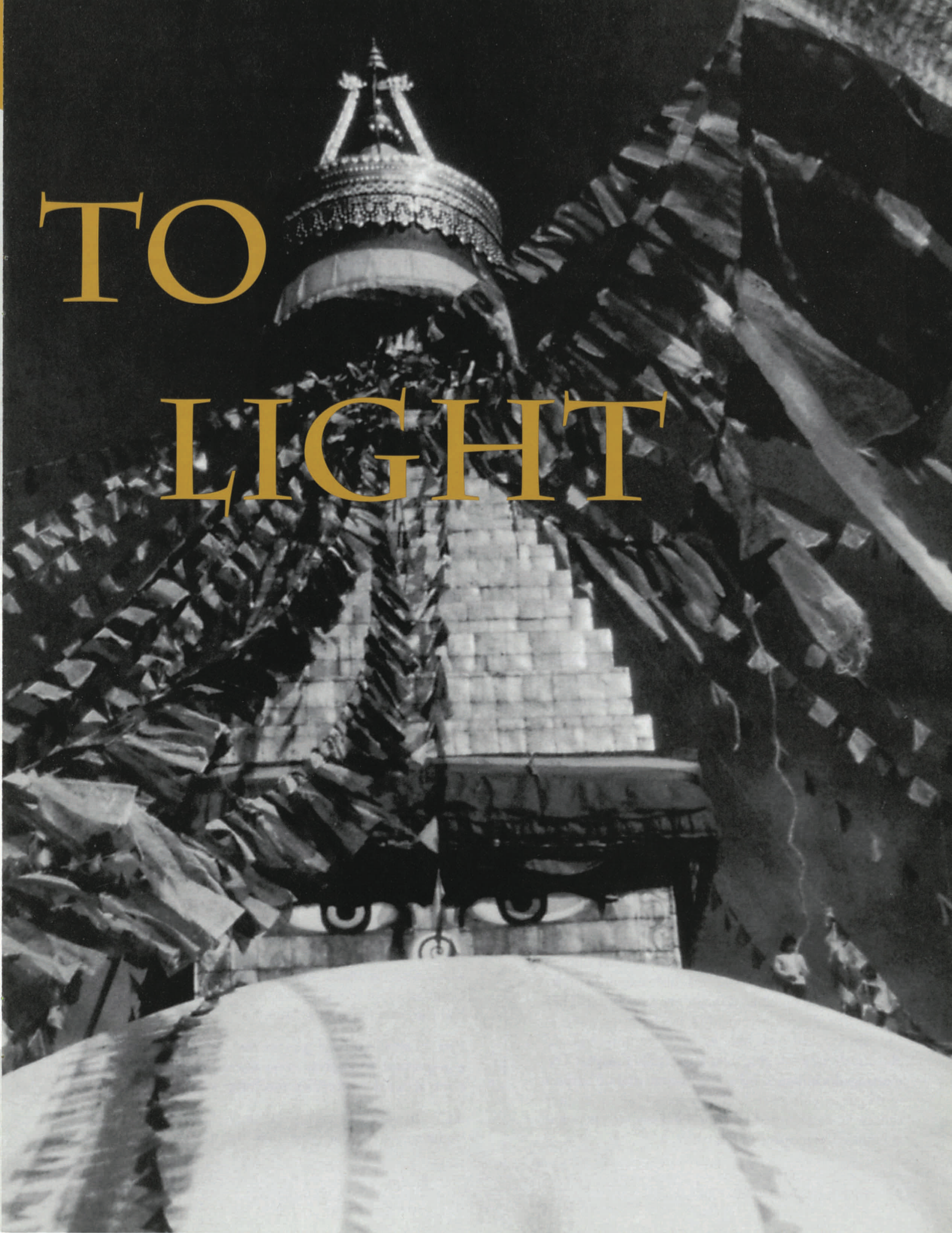
*continued on page 8*

*Introduction by Hal Blacker*



TO

LIGHT





At the pinnacle of the Vajrayana is the teaching of Dzogchen, also known as Ati or Mahasandhi. Dzogchen is said to be the most direct and simple way to liberation, but is not considered suitable for everyone. It begins where other paths leave off, with the experience of liberation and the ultimate nature of reality transmitted by the student's teacher. Its practice consists of stabilizing the realization that has been glimpsed, cutting away all obstacles and deepening one's vision and ability to respond to everything that arises in a spontaneous and natural way that manifests wisdom, power and compassion. Dzogchen is marked by a kind of ordinariness and simplicity, so ordinary that one whose understanding is not subtle enough will miss it or distort it. But for those few who are pure enough to grasp it, it promises freedom beyond the bounds of samsara or nirvana, beyond any limitations of abiding in either the relative or the absolute.

The tremendous weight of the Tibetan tradition is transmitted and ideally made fresh, contemporary and alive by its foremost representatives, the lamas, the teachers who are revered as embodying both the highest potential of human enlightenment and all the power and mystery of the divine. Andrew Cohen first encountered Tibetan Buddhism through one of the foremost representatives of the highest Dzogchen teachings, Chatrul Rinpoche, in 1991 when a student of Chatrul's was struck by the similarities between the clarity and directness of Andrew's teaching and that of Dzogchen, and arranged a meeting between these two teachers. (See "To Keep a Precious Jewel," *What is Enlightenment?* v. 1, no. 1.) As Andrew's teaching developed his emphasis shifted from personal liberation to the importance of putting the context of the spiritual evolution of humanity foremost, and he saw how challenging real transformation is for most individuals. As this occurred many parallels between his teaching and that of Mahayana Buddhism emerged. Interested in these parallels and what they may signify about the nature of spirituality and the human condition, Andrew met in Nepal and India with the three important lamas whose dialogues are reproduced here.

The spontaneously emerging similarities between an ancient and complex Eastern tradition and the discoveries of a contemporary American teacher outside any established tradition and with little exposure to the complexities of Buddhist thought are fascinating. They suggest that the nature of reality, the human condition and the spiritual path may be far more universal and objectively ascertainable than is generally thought. The meetings documented here demonstrate that no barriers of language, culture or tradition are so high that they cannot be surmounted when individuals are open and committed to meeting in the truth. ■

# EVERYTHING IS

**P**ENOR RINPOCHE: It's very rare in the West to give rise to experienced and realized Masters. So there are very few, but really good ones are coming up. It is very encouraging and I hope that it will benefit many people in the future.

There are many views and practices and many writings of Tibetan Buddhism, and I think that you may like to explore Tibetan Buddhism further. It might even add to your realization and experience, and it might be interesting for you.

Dharma or the sublime teaching is nothing but a path or an experience which leads from light to light in this life and the life after it. So whichever teachings there are in the world, if they help to lessen our defilements and to lead us from light to light, then it is the actual dharma.

Actually in the world there are a lot of people who use dharma, who use the teachings to exploit people or as a means to gain political authority or something like that. But this should not be the case, especially according to Buddhism. The teachings have to only alleviate the suffering of people, not bring more suffering to them.

**ANDREW COHEN:** I speak publicly in the West about that a lot. Often people don't like it because they say it is not good to speak this way. But I think it's very important because there is so much of this kind of corruption in the modern spiritual world.

**PR:** You speak a lot about...?

**AC:** Yes, about the impure motives in many teachers.

**PR:** I support your view. Corruption and the dharma never go together. That's the main essence of the teaching.

**AC:** I have been coming here to Bodhgaya and teaching for the last four years. The first time I came a Western woman who heard me teach said my teachings were very similar to Dzogchen. She brought me to meet Chatrul Rinpoche and we had three very good meetings.

**PR:** Dzogchen teachings are very difficult, yet very easy. It is important to impress upon oneself that one can actually bring about the Dzogchen teachings within us.

**AC:** It very much depends upon how far the individual wants to go, the purity of their intention to become free, to



# IMPERSONAL

## Penor Rinpoche

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**H.H. DRUBWANG PENOR RINPOCHE** was born in 1932 in Tibet. After escaping Tibet in 1959, he settled in Mysore, South India, where he built Thekchog Namdrol Shedrub Dargye Ling Monastery and Namdroling Monastery, a scholastic college. Since 1991 he has served as the head of the Nyingma lineage, one of the four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism and the one which specializes in the Dzogchen teachings.

Andrew Cohen met with Penor Rinpoche in January 1994 while in Bodhgaya, India conducting his fourth annual retreat there. Penor Rinpoche was in Bodhgaya for the Monlam, the great Peace Prayer, which has been held there by the chief Nyingma lamas and their monks for the past several years. Although extremely busy (Penor Rinpoche is said to see hundreds of people daily during such occasions), His Holiness took time from his duties to meet with Andrew and discuss the teachings, the dharma. This meeting was notable for its open discussion of the ultimate attainment of Dzogchen and the relationship of the Mahayana to what Andrew calls "impersonal enlightenment."



become enlightened. I teach that it is entirely dependent upon the intention of the individual to give everything to becoming liberated.

**PR:** Actually it is like that. But Dzogchen is beyond avoiding and running after. If we realize the oneness of the subject and object, that ultimately brings the ultimate view of Dzogchen. Otherwise, not.

**AC:** Yes. But many times I see students have the experience of realizing the subject and object are the same, but then complete transformation does not result just from this experience. I emphasize that it takes everything to bridge the gap between that experience, that glimpse, and the ordinary human condition.

**PR:** The ultimate freedom from the mental fabrication of subject and object brings the ultimate realization. For example, if the sun is free of clouds then the light is bound to shine. Just seeing that or just avoiding our defilements and getting realization may be easy. But to actually bring it into our own realization is very difficult.

**AC:** I always tell people that if you want to be free then you have to avoid nothing and face everything. If your motive is to know the truth unconditionally, you have to face everything and avoid nothing.

**PR:** Mere avoiding and accepting is very necessary to those who are at the initial level, but it is not necessary at all times. There is a time which goes beyond avoiding or exposing yourself or facing.

**AC:** I'm not speaking about exposing oneself. I'm saying that if one is no longer afraid then one will be aware of everything, nothing will remain hidden. That's what I mean. You see, if one is not afraid anymore there will be no motivation to avoid, there will be no fear of existence and nonexistence. There's no motivation to avoid anything so then there's no effort involved anymore.

**PR:** It should be like that.

**AC:** It's completely natural.

**PR:** It is natural, but it's not natural to everybody.







I am always repeating to people to realize that there is nothing personal about anything that any human being could ever experience at any moment in time.

**PR:** A very judicious person can always know this.

**AC:** Yes.

**PR:** So if you get that, if you reach that impersonal level, if you can ultimately give away that clinging to the personal, that itself is actually liberation.

**AC:** Yes. This is the essence of my teaching but only rare individuals really get it deeply. People are frightened of such a vast view.

**PR:** [Laughs] Yes, it is like that. Many people dread this really, but there is no way out other than this.

**AC:** Yes, this is my feeling.

**PR:** So keeping that oneness of the compassionate emptiness, see if you can propagate your teachings. You should benefit a lot of people in this.

**AC:** Thank you.

**PR:** So if you have reached that impersonal level, that itself is the realization you have to hold.

**AC:** Yes.

**PR:** So at the moment you realize the impersonal view, there are a lot of people who cling to the personal...

**AC:** Almost everybody.

**PR:** So with those people we feel a lot of compassion. There should be quite an arising of compassion.

**AC:** Yes.

**PR:** Because, as I said, everything is impersonal but we try to cling to it as something personal. And therefore we accumulate a lot of actions and then our own actions bind us.

**AC:** I understand. This is the expression of the world. The human world is this.

**PR:** Thank you very much. It is very good.

**AC:** Thank you. I feel we met.

**PR:** Please try to help sentient beings. ■

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## WITH A CORE OF KNOWING

**A**NDREW COHEN: Rinpoche, the reason that I go to see different teachers in this way is because I feel that the truth is one. And by coming together in this way, it can help to illuminate that. Even though many different traditions and teachers say the truth is one, they don't actually come together very often in agreement.

I feel that what's most important is not experience itself, but it's the depth and subtlety of our ability to interpret it. Many people say that you have to have this experience or that experience. I say this is true, but certain people, for example, can have certain experiences but the conclusions they will draw from them may not be very extraordinary. And I notice ultimately it is the way people interpret their experience that is what determines whether there is going to be wisdom and understanding or not. So coming together in this way is a big learning experience. To find the different ways that people who are mutually interested in the same thing, in the truth, interpret their own experience can help bring it to light.

**TULKU URGYEN:** It is actually true what you are saying. Even though the truth or the real condition of things doesn't differ in any way whatsoever, people differ. And the way they interpret how things are is entirely different based on their individual capacity. That's why there is not just one truth taught. That's why within Buddhism there are nine basic ways of teaching because there are nine basic categories of people. It's not that some ways of teaching are better than others. They are all of equal value in the sense that they are meant for listeners who are different; basically three kinds, higher, medium and lesser, each of which again has three. So that is why in Buddhism there are nine vehicles.

The focus in Buddhism is to benefit sentient beings and bring them to liberation. It is not to teach only one's particular understanding or one's particular favorite teaching. Just like if you give a very profound teaching to somebody who can't comprehend something very profound, they would be very unhappy. If you give something that is too simplistic or superficial to someone who wants the depth, they won't be happy either. That's why there are different levels of



teachings. It is just like a newly born infant who gradually grows up to maturity. My teachings are that way. It is like a staircase where you walk step by step, from the very first step of entering the path until the final completion.

**AC:** I've observed over and over again that it's the purity of the intention of the individual to be free that has an extraordinary impact on their ability to interpret their experience with greater precision and clarity. In my experience of teaching I have observed that two different individuals can have a very similar experience of a glimpse of emptiness, but the two different individuals will respond in completely different ways. One individual will just say, "Oh, that was nice," and will get up and walk away completely unchanged and go back to living a very samsaric and deluded life. And another individual will feel, "After this, nothing can remain the same. I feel compelled to respond fully to this because I have no choice." And so it was from this that I began to understand that the way we interpret our experience is a lot more important than the experience itself, even though I'm not saying that the experience itself isn't absolutely necessary or fundamental.



What decides how people interpret their experience is their readiness. This is a karmic matter. When someone's ready, they will recognize the significance of spiritual experience, because their consciousness becomes very subtle. For someone else, it will be a momentary thing. It will become very gross, there will be almost no memory of it. It will just be that something nice happened. Whereas the other individual will be so impacted that they will never be able to turn back from it. And that's why I said that the purity of the intention has an extraordinary impact on the way the individual is going to interpret what has occurred.

**TU:** Intention is always a conceptual act. You aim at something.

**AC:** That's completely true. But unless an individual has realized and discovered a very rare and extraordinary longing for liberation in themselves, intention needs to be cultivated. And eventually, of course, when the individual becomes very one-pointed and that longing's been cultivated, there's no need for intention any more. It becomes natural.

**TU:** Everything depends on intention. It's true. All phenomena depend on attitude, frame of mind. As a matter of fact, the whole of samsara relies entirely on one's attitude.

And attitude is always a fixation. It's a way of fixing the mind, focusing the mind, so therefore it's conceptual.

**AC:** I'd say that the foundation of my teaching is the cultivation of the intention for liberation to become unconditional.

**TU:** That is correct. First of all you need to cultivate intention, but ultimately intention needs to...

**AC:** Disappear.

**TU:** Disappear.

**AC:** It must. Because as...

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## TULKU URGYEN:

*"Empty cognizance means that while mind is basically empty, it still cognizes. What people usually do is they understand only one of the two aspects: that it's empty and they hold onto that, or that there is knowing and they hold onto that. This is called lacking the view of unity. And unity means that the mind in essence really is empty and at the same time, naturally, there is knowing."*

---

**TU:** It's a subtle conceptual attitude.

**AC:** Yes. Eventually it has to completely disappear.

**TU:** That's right. That's right.

**AC:** But I've noticed that for most human beings, getting to that point where the relationship with liberation is unconditional, and finally there's no relationship with it at all, is a very rare thing. And this is why most people need an intention in order to generate a great momentum towards one's liberation.

**TU:** Once there is awakening to true and complete enlightenment which is called omniscience of a Buddha, then there is no need for any concept or any aiming in any direction whatsoever because the enlightened qualities are already spontaneously present.

**AC:** Right. Self-existing.

**TU:** In the beginning, intention is necessary. Everything depends on the intention. Usually it's called motivation.



AC: Yes.

TU: It is not just the intention to be free. It's the intention to liberate each and every sentient being as infinite in number as the sky is vast. That is what is called the bodhisattva resolve.

AC: In order to cultivate that view I speak about what I call the impersonal nature of existence, and I ask people to contemplate and meditate on the impersonal nature of every aspect of their own existence. And from this, from seeing beyond the personal, then this willingness to respond to life in a much bigger way begins to reveal itself.

TU: In the beginning steps what is dealt with is the individual self, and later it is the self entities of phenomena. Both of these are fixations. All fixation has to be dissolved. Basically, they are the holding onto subject and object. And while holding subject and object, there is no enlightenment.

AC: I don't believe it is possible to be able to discriminate in a truly profound way unless one has realized and experienced deeply the nondifference between subject and object. Because up until that point there will still be gross and subtle identification with thought as having independent self-existence.

I feel that the experience of nonduality you are speaking about is really the beginning of the path because it is only then that a person can be able to see for themselves what's

AC: The realization of the impersonal view that I was speaking about is the same thing.

TU: What the Buddha taught was to understand natural emptiness. And that state is what he calls the samadhi of suchness. It's already present in everyone. It's not some new event that happens.

AC: No.

TU: It is like the sun in that it naturally shines. If anyone is a sentient being, they have the nature of enlightenment.

AC: But as long as there is any fear or doubt or any trace of effort to attain that state or that realization that you are speaking about, then the naturalness and its inherent quality will not become apparent.

TU: It becomes unapparent. One covers it up by different densities or veils called disturbing emotions, concepts, habitual tendencies, fixation, karmic acts and so forth. All these are like different densities covering it up. It is like when in the sky there can be clouds or mist or haze. It is only when the haze vanishes that the prior existing sunshine is totally uncovered.

AC: That's what the path is. Spiritual practice and the spiritual path is to remove all the obscurations to the natural condition.

TU: Exactly. That's what is meant by the ground, path and the fruition. The ground which is the Sugatagarbha [the Buddha nature as it manifests on the path] is already present in everyone. When you first try to connect it's like cultivating a field. Then the second part is where you plow and plant the seeds and then you apply fertilizer and weed it out and so forth. There are all different segments of the path. A lot of work.

It's very good you understand this. It's necessary to apply these things to the path. Because otherwise, even though we have Buddha nature already, we haven't realized it. It's like being on the path, but not having arrived at the fruition. Like the sun has already risen in the sky, yet there are still clouds. While we already have enlightened essence, it is temporarily covered by obscurations. So even though we have the awakened potential, it is like a sun that shines but is covered by clouds.

AC: So this is why I try to cultivate in people the

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## ANDREW COHEN:

*"That's a very beautiful definition. Your definition does not eliminate the fact of our humanity. In some definitions of enlightenment the fact that it has everything to do with becoming fully human doesn't seem to be readily apparent. The realization of voidness in the way that you are speaking enables us to become Buddhas. It's not simply that we cease to exist."*

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true and what's not true, what's real and what's unreal.

TU: That which abolishes or eliminates the attitude of fixating on subject and objects—subject meaning the individual person and objects meaning the entities that we call phenomena—is what we call transcendent knowledge, the knowledge that sees or realizes true egolessness.



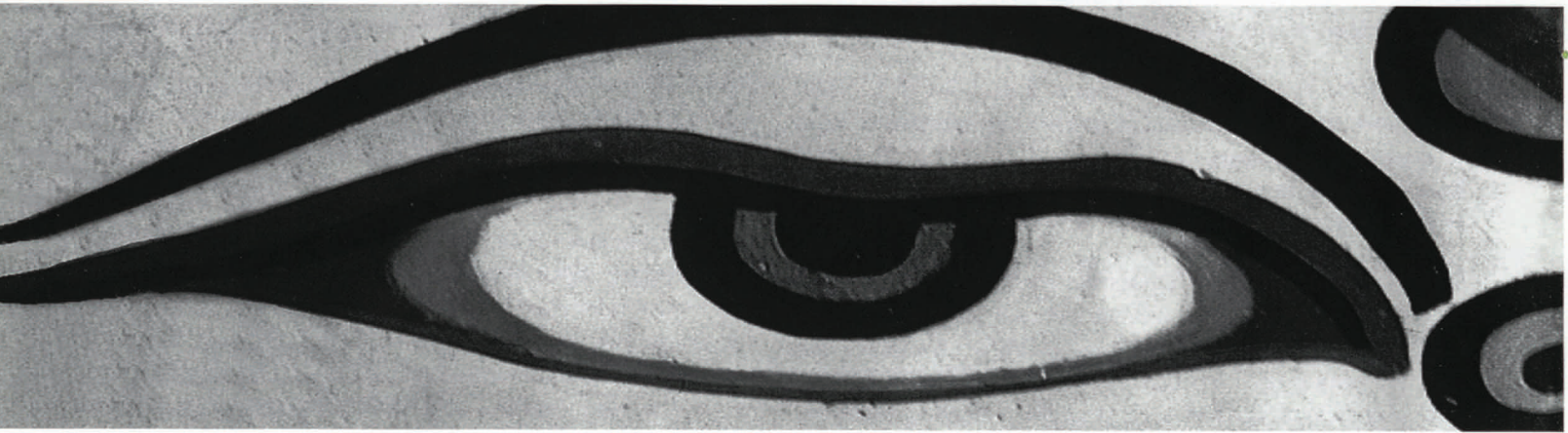
willingness, ultimately, to give up everything for the realization of this precious goal. Because I feel unless that willingness to give everything for that is there, there is a very small chance that one will succeed.

TU: It's true.

AC: And in the West, this concept of renunciation

AC: Yes.

TU: But when we do die, mind is not something that dies. It's not like water drying up or a flame being extinguished. It's not like that. That's why it's so important to first of all take the orientation towards what is true and what is really worthwhile in order to embrace a spiritual path. And at the same time to understand that everything else is pointless.



is not very popular.

TU: On the other hand, if they can think well, don't Westerners understand that nothing really lasts and that ultimately nothing is worthwhile chasing after?

AC: Well, this is a rare Westerner.

TU: Well, it's something very obvious, isn't it, to everyone who faces facts, that whoever takes birth also dies? It's not something impossible to understand. And whoever gets together, they part ways. And whatever you can achieve gets lost. Whatever you build up falls apart again. It's not impossible to understand.

AC: No, no. I think it's very easy to understand, but very few people live their life as though they truly understand it.

TU: It's very true what you say. There are human beings in our world, as many as the stars at night, who don't practice any spiritual path. But those who do, they are as few as the stars you can see in the morning. And why is that? It's because of not really having taken to heart genuinely the fact that nothing lasts and that everything is futile to chase after. On the other hand, everybody does understand that no one lives forever, right?

Nothing lasts, no one lives forever and to chase after what is meaningless leads to pain. And if one can achieve either liberation for oneself or enlightenment to benefit others, that has true worth. To gain understanding of these topics is so important.

AC: I just finished teaching a retreat in Bodhgaya. On the first day I asked everybody to look into what their true and deepest motivations were in their relationship to life for this very reason.

TU: That is good.

AC: Because I find that many spiritual seekers often assume that their motivation is pure, but it is not often so. And I feel for it to become pure, the individual has to be willing to look very deeply and to be willing to question everything.

TU: Intention, motivation, is extremely important when entering the dharma. Anything we get involved in, any act and thought, word or deed which is not aimed at or is not truly spiritual is all utterly wasted. From when you take your first breath until you expire, it all gets totally wasted.

AC: The individual has to be prepared to let go because the truth is a shock. It's a shock. And if one isn't prepared



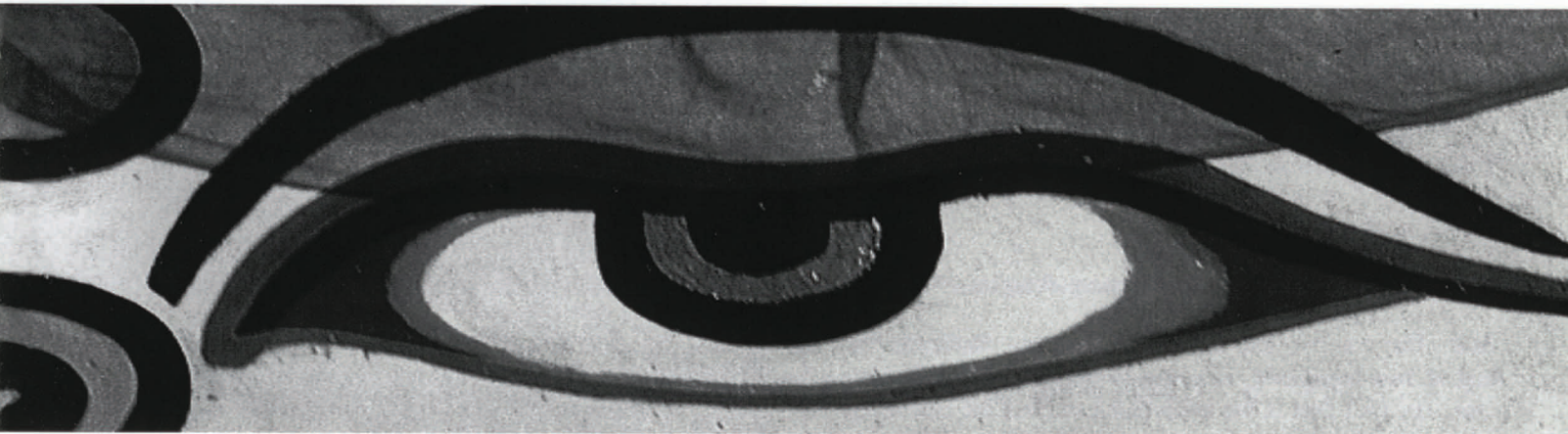
to let go, then even if one has an experience of it, one won't be willing to let go at that moment. So the preparation is very important.

**TU:** This world is made out of the five elements of earth, water, fire, wind and space, but none of these perceive. Our bodies are made out of the same elements in the form of flesh and blood and so on, but none of these experience

**TU:** So after understanding it, just mentally repeating the idea that it's empty in our meditation exercises is not going to help anything.

**AC:** It's nothing, it's useless.

**TU:** But there have been a lot of people in the past who did that.



or perceive anything either. The only thing that can experience or perceive is what we usually call mind; that which knows pleasure and pain. Agree?

**AC:** Yes.

**TU:** So if in the world there is no mind, then there is no knowing of anything.

**AC:** Yes.

**TU:** So, when looking into it, how does the mind look?

**AC:** It doesn't look like anything.

**TU:** The Buddha looks quite closely for the mind, right?

**AC:** Yes.

**TU:** Then he says, "There is no form, no sound, no smell, no taste, no texture."

**AC:** Yes.

**TU:** We hear this. We understand, but that doesn't help us to get that far.

**AC:** Well, no, because we have to experience it.

**AC:** Oh yes. And still today.

**TU:** What they end up with is nothing whatsoever, really. They believe there are no past and future lives, no effects of one's actions, no one doing actions, nothing at all.

**AC:** Yes, but this is a corrupt understanding. It's a corrupt view.

**TU:** It's usually called nihilism.

**AC:** Yes.

**TU:** Another way of belief is that everything is made by Vishnu or Brahma or whatever. This is eternalism.

**AC:** Yes.

**TU:** There are a lot of different flavors of those two basic views that have proliferated in the world.

**AC:** Yes. I feel that one has to finally be able to liberate oneself from all fixed notions of self, relative or absolute, in order to be able to see the way things really are.

**TU:** What is really to blame is the lack of understanding of the view of unity. This comes from not understanding what is meant by emptiness. Because emptiness really means



empty cognizance, not just blankness. Empty cognizance means that while mind is basically empty, it still cognizes. What people usually do is they understand only one of the two aspects: that it's empty and they hold onto that, or that there is knowing and they hold onto that. This is called lacking the view of unity. And unity means that the mind in essence really is empty and at the same time, naturally, there is knowing. The functioning of this is indivisibility, unity. This is how it already is in the nature of all sentient beings.

**AC:** Yes. That's a very beautiful definition. Because then it is possible to understand enlightenment...

**TU:** But understanding that this is not anybody's doing.

**AC:** No, it just is.

**TU:** It's naturally and spontaneously like that.

**AC:** But you see, your definition does not eliminate the fact of our humanity. In some definitions of enlightenment the fact that it has everything to do with becoming fully human doesn't seem to be readily apparent. The realization of voidness in the way that you are speaking enables us to become Buddhas. It's not simply that we cease to exist.

**TU:** Basically our mind is an empty cognizance. Not just empty, not only cognizant. But when not knowing, when not recognizing our nature as being such, then that is what is called ignorance.

**AC:** Yes.

**TU:** In Buddhas and bodhisattvas there is no ignorance. There is the actualization of this empty cognizance as a unity.

**AC:** Yes. And the empty cognizance that you refer to is the natural state.

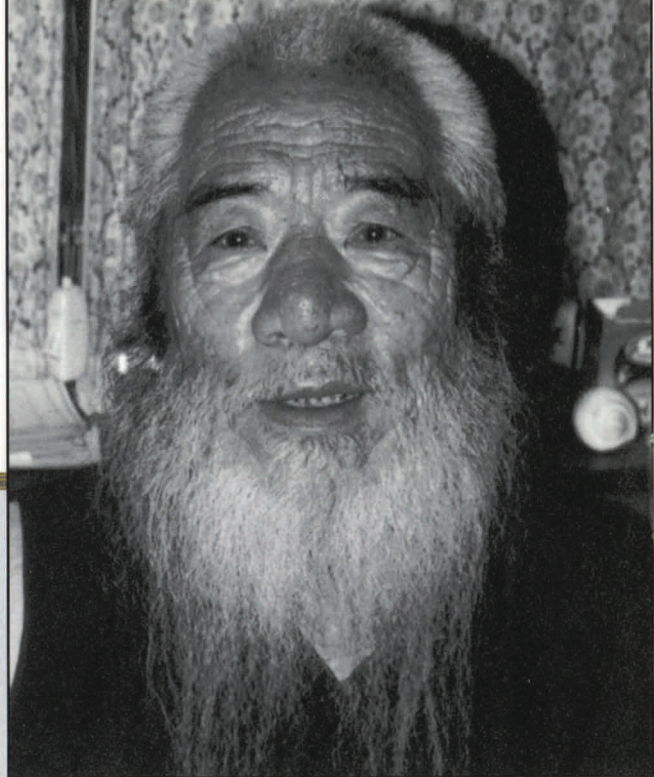
**TU:** Exactly. As a matter of fact, the natural state you should call the unity of empty and cognizant with a core of knowing.

**AC:** Yes.

**TU:** Because anybody else's mind is also the unity of empty and cognizant, but with a core of unknowing. That's the difference.

**AC:** Yes, right. Unconscious.

**TU:** And so everything takes place through the magical display of knowing and not knowing. ■



**CHATRUL RINPOCHE** is considered one of the greatest living Dzogchen masters. Known for his fierce and direct Zen-like style, when he first met Andrew Cohen in 1991, Chatrul subjected him to a kind of examination of his views best described as dharma combat. Apparently satisfied with Andrew's responses, he has met with him four times now and they have become good friends.

**A**NDREW COHEN: Rinpoche, the reason I am interested in pursuing our meetings and my meetings with other lamas is because over the last four years, as my own teaching has evolved very naturally, I have been struck by the many similarities between it and the Mahayana. When I started teaching nothing like that was on my mind. As a natural response to the evolution of my own teaching, these things have come out and that's what has made me very interested in meeting and discussing these matters.

**CHATRUL RINPOCHE:** If we examine all the different teachings and dharmas, they all without exception fall between the distinctions of absolute truth and relative truth, absolute teachings or relative teachings. There is no dharma which is beyond this. So within the Buddhist teachings, in terms of relative truth, there are what we call the basic or Lesser Vehicle and then there is the Great Vehicle and then there



# Chatrul Rinpoche

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**AC:** I've noticed that the purer that a teaching is and the greater the depth of understanding it expresses of the human condition in relationship to the highest possibility of perfect liberation, the more often it poses a threat to the seeker. What I mean to say is that often the purest teachings are simultaneously attractive and also threatening and frightening.

I've noticed that many seekers are actually seeking to escape from what I call the overwhelming complexity of life rather than being interested in facing into it. I feel that unless the individual's intention is very pure, then quite often they will use the dharma as a way to escape from the complexity of life instead of as a vehicle to try and truly understand it.

What I've noticed in many seekers from many different traditions is that there can be a tendency to hide behind conceptual notions about the absolute. Quite often, even if the individual has had experiences or glimpses of the absolute, the individual will still take refuge in inaccurate or false conclusions as to what it really means as a way to avoid coming to terms with the subtlety and the complexity of life. I think a view that is perfect enables the individual to realize on the one hand the sameness of the relative and the absolute and also what I call the natural and inherent order that exists when one is truly abiding between all pairs of opposites.

**CR:** It is essential to examine the world or outer phenomena. Does it have a true existence? Does it have a true reality or not? Or is it devoid of any ultimate reality? Then looking inside at the mind which grasps at this outer world, does it itself have ultimate reality, true existence or not? So the examination of those two things—the reality or unreality of outer phenomena and of the mind—this is really at the root of the Buddhist view.

**AC:** What I am saying is that the true or real fact of emptiness, when it is recognized with rare and unusual depth, requires a very rare degree of intention to be truly free in this life in order to withstand the shock of what is being recognized and being seen.

**CR:** This is actually how the distinction between the Lesser and the Greater Vehicles happens—whether one has fear or not about the truth of emptiness. Those who fear the truth of the ultimate empty nature of everything are of the Lesser Vehicle. And the Great Vehicle is called that precisely because its disciples do not only not fear emptiness, but they have the great aspiration to realize it and the means to actually do so. So that is why there is a difference between the two vehicles. It is in how we approach emptiness.

One finds in the sutras stories of some individuals belonging to the Lesser Vehicle, who when the view of emptiness was expounded by the Buddha Sakyamuni were very frightened by it. They could not fit it in their minds, so

they got so frightened that they vomited blood and passed away on the spot.

**AC:** It's often very hard for the seeker to understand that there's absolutely nothing to get from liberation, that there's absolutely nothing to get from it at all.

**CR:** Regarding the approach to emptiness, there's a very important difference according to the degree of maturity of individuals. Those who through their past lives have purified

## ANDREW COHEN:



*"I feel that if one has attained a certain degree of understanding and liberation, one's view and one's understanding has to constantly be tested so that its validity can be constantly checked."*

their being deeply and have developed a deep connection with and understanding of the Mahayana, the moment they hear about emptiness they will have a strong aspiration to hear more, and then to see how they could practice it with great endeavor and enthusiasm. So they have an inner readiness for that.

If one were to make a distinction among individuals, there are basically three kinds according to their receptivity to the teaching on emptiness. There are some who are completely cut off from any sort of openness to that teaching. Then some have a little more purification or readiness, but they still have a strong interest in the teachings of the Lesser Vehicle and not so much of a deep understanding of emptiness. And then there are those whose minds go entirely to the teachings of the Great Vehicle, and really seek to realize emptiness. So we can roughly distinguish three categories of beings. And that depends very much on the past purification of their being.

**AC:** We're living in a time when more and more people are becoming interested in religion, and many of the most sacred and purest teachings are now very commonly available in the West, for example at almost any bookstore. And therefore quite often many individuals become intellectually familiar with concepts way before they have any experiential understanding of them. And often they feel that they understand far more than they actually do because there's so much exposure to it. In this way people often become somewhat arrogant and also really dull.



**CR:** That is something which in the Buddhist teaching we refer to as becoming stiff to other dharmas, sort of blasé or kind of like being waterproof. The dharma cannot seep within oneself, and then any amount of teachings become just like dry words. They don't help to transform one's being, and the goal of the dharma, which is to blend completely the teaching with the stream of one's being, cannot happen. It is a little bit like if you have very delicious food displayed in front of you and you examine it and think a lot about how good it is, what is its quality and so forth, but you never actually come to taste it. Not only will your stomach not become full, but you might even die of famine in front of the food without actually tasting it.

**AC:** When many of the most sacred, precious teachings are made very public, like they are today, it makes it very difficult for people to recognize them because quite often they are not prepared for them.

**CR:** It is not that those teachings are wrong or incorrect. It's simply that we are completely deluded by lack of awareness, by ignorance and also by a divided mind, by hesitation and doubt. Because of that we are constantly carried away by delusion and are not able to recognize the purity of the view, the purity of the teachings. Now in order to actually recognize the purity of the teachings and the ultimate goal, a lot of commitment and hardship, endeavor and effort will be

was absolutely necessary that individuals be willing to make the kind of sacrifices and face the kind of hardship that you are describing. That's why for the past five years or so I've been putting a great stress on the cultivation of the willingness to give up everything to be free, to be liberated. And in the West, as I told you the first time I met you, this is very unusual because the notion of renunciation in a very serious and single-pointed way, in order to attain liberation in this life, is something that is not easily understood. And in light of the very popularized approach to religion that is becoming very common now, it is even understood less. I've come to believe that unless one is willing to give everything to be free, then the results will not be very significant.

**CR:** You are right. There is a tendency for some persons to take a very easy approach to realization, to Buddhahood, simply thinking that one might achieve Buddhahood just taking it very easy, sort of just eating and sleeping leisurely without any thought of effort or trying to achieve something, thinking that everything will come by itself. In fact we should compare ourselves to a sick person who needs a physician who can prescribe the right medicine, and by taking the medicine gradually one has a chance to be cured. Similarly, we are the sick person caught in ignorance and delusion. And the spiritual friend, or the spiritual master is like the skillful physician, and the teaching is like the medicine, and the practice of the teaching is like taking the medicine which can gradually cure one's illness. So if we attend to a qualified teacher, and if we receive his teaching and put it into practice, then gradually we can cure ourselves from the sickness of delusion and ignorance, and then all the obscuring emotions and ignorance will disappear and the condition of suffering will be gone. But if one hoped to be cured without attending to the clever physician, without taking the medicine, then there is no way we can achieve such a goal. So this is the simile we use in the Buddhist teachings. Do you feel that this fits with your understanding?

**AC:** It does.

**CR:** Please examine and think about all that we have discussed. I hope it will be helpful. I am happy that you could come today since we know each other for so many years now. I am glad you came and when you next come to Nepal, please come to see me again. And I would also suggest that since you are still young and it will be easy for you to assimilate the Tibetan language, if you learn it you could directly communicate with masters without any sort of barriers or intermediaries or translators. And then also you could express your views and teaching to the Tibetan people and they will be able to understand directly in their own language. And this will be very good.

**AC:** Thank you very much. ■

## CHATRUL RINPOCHE:

*"Yes, that is true. It's very important to have this kind of flexibility because sometimes we think that we have unmistaken understanding, and then after some time we find out that actually we still have more to understand or that we didn't understand correctly. And on other occasions we find out that we actually had the right understanding. So we should always be open and ready to do this kind of constant examination."*



needed. So a lot of energy and effort has to be put into it. And if that is done properly, all this effort will have a result.

**AC:** After teaching for a few years, I realized that in order to be able to get significant results, extraordinary results, it



**I** SRAEL IS THE ANCIENT source of three major world religions—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—and is still sacred to all three. It is also one of the most volatile hot spots of modern power politics. Here have been revealed great visions of human destiny and the profound moral codes that could help mankind live peacefully together in fulfillment of those visions, and here man has

The ancient wisdom of Jewish mysticism and the insights of a contemporary American spiritual teacher meet in surprising and remarkable ways.

temple of Herod at the hands of Rome, is the most sacred of places in Israel's holiest city, Jerusalem. Men, women and children pour their hearts and souls out—in grief and in joy—in front of this monument that carries the weight of Jewish history. With faces turned close to its ancient stones, devout Jews passionately pray, their bodies swaying back and forth with religious fervor, and feel the presence of God nearby. Orthodox and Hasidic Jewish children in their yarmulkes and side curls and men with untrimmed beards dressed in long black robes and wide-rimmed hats evoke strong images from the shtetels, the ghettos of pre-war Europe—a world that seems to have survived unchanged.

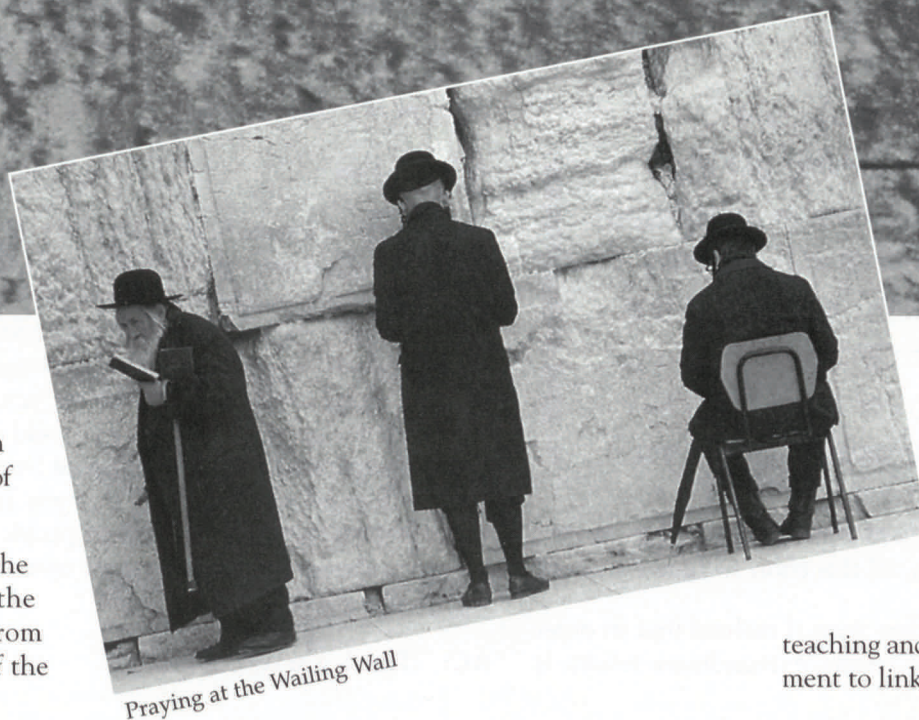
Hasidic Judaism arose in 18th-century Poland as a protest against a rigidity and overemphasis on Talmudic study among the European Jewish status quo. Its founder, a revolutionary called the Baal Shem Tov, yearned to bring the heart back into the religion. He spoke from his own ecstatic mystical experience, reveling in the fact that God is everywhere, in every moment and in every thing; not just in the synagogues. He proclaimed that “every moment is holy; all of life is a prayer,” and that all of one's actions, no matter how mundane, could be raised to the sacred if performed with devotion and joy.

The Baal Shem Tov was called a *tzaddik*, a “righteous man,” who was

# Vessels for A Talk

struggled violently against man throughout most of history.

For the Jew, the Wailing Wall, the last remnant from the destruction of the



Praying at the Wailing Wall

considered a connecting link between God and man, and his followers were called the Hasidim, or the “pious ones.” At the

eternal core of Hasidic teaching and life is the continual movement to link together the transcendent,



the divine, with one's earthly human existence. Because of this it teaches absolutely no removal from the world; rather the world is to be transformed, consecrated and made holy by a life lived daily as an offering to and affirmation of God.

Andrew Cohen first encountered Hasidism through one of its foremost representatives, Rabbi Ya'akov Milkovski, the Admor of Amshinov, whom he met in Israel in 1992. Descended from a long line of Polish rabbis, the Admor (an acronym for "our Master, our Teacher, our Rabbi") lives a life that is simple and unadorned. As the head of a Hasidic lineage, someone in his position would often be lavishly served by his followers

prayer that would take most devout Jews only minutes. According to his followers, when he says, "You are blessed," his whole body is shaken by the knowledge of God. Because of his unusual schedule of prayer, which takes up the whole day, the many visitors who come to him for advice are received from midnight until dawn. No one knows when he sleeps.

In the course of their three meetings over a year and a half, Andrew Cohen, born a Jew but having no Jewish education whatsoever, and Rabbi Ya'akov, whose life is an expression of total immersion in Judaism, unexpectedly found that they had independently come to many of the same discoveries

with another highly respected Rabbi from the Hasidic tradition, Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh, the head of the Yeshiva Od Yosef Chai and a teacher of Hasidic thought throughout Israel. Born in St. Louis, Missouri in 1944, Rabbi Ginsburgh immigrated to Israel

Rabbi Ginsburgh



# the Infinite

between Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh and Andrew Cohen

and given big cars and expensive clothes as gifts. But Rabbi Milkovski does everything himself, from traveling on the bus to walking his children to school, and refuses any gifts. During the day he prays so ardently and with such one-pointed absorption that he often loses himself completely, taking more than two hours to complete a

about the spiritual life. Their agreement was often so profound that the Rabbi repeatedly expressed surprise, almost disbelief, over the fact that Andrew had come to such conclusions on his own, without the aid of scriptural study.

Intrigued by this phenomenon, this past summer Andrew Cohen met

after receiving an M.A. in mathematics in 1965. He is a known authority on the Kabbalah, the esoteric teachings of Jewish mysticism that date back to at least the thirteenth century in Spain, and which are an important source of spiritual understanding in the Hasidic tradition.

For the Kabbalist, God is both





Copying the Torah

hidden and revealed. On the one hand, He is the Infinite, forever unreachable, inaccessible and beyond all comprehension: a mystery. On the other hand, He is forever being revealed through a rich symbolic and mystical understanding of the Torah that unveils not just the word of God, but His very essence and His universal laws.

The Torah, which Rabbi Ginsburgh refers to often in his talk with Andrew, is the source from which the Jewish religion draws its inspiration and its laws, and is its most sacred text. It is mainly comprised of the five books of Moses, considered to be the word of God, but also includes what is called the “oral Torah,” the ongoing rabbinical commentaries on how the sacred laws and commandments are to be carried out. The study of the Torah is at the heart of Jewish religious life. In the words of one religious scholar, this study calls for a “passionate and active grappling with God’s living word” which makes it dynamic, ever-new and challenging. The Holy Torah is forever being re-examined, discussed and interpreted. The mystical traditions of the Kabbalah and Hasidism infused the study of the Torah with renewed life and passion.

The dialogue reproduced here, between Rabbi Ginsburgh and Andrew Cohen, is a fascinating exploration into the essence and the purpose of religious life. As one listens to the two men speak, time and space seem to dissolve—the ancient wisdom born from over 3000 years of intense love and devotion to the Torah intersecting in surprising and remarkable ways with the teaching of a modern spiritual teacher who stresses independent discrimination unbounded by any tradition.

Rabbi Ginsburgh speaks from a deep knowledge and understanding of the Jewish soul. Yet he also reflects the complexity and contradictions of his time and place. While he is learned and wise in spiritual matters, his staunch adherence to a belief in total Jewish sovereignty over Israel, his forceful stance against Arab influence, and his belief in the superiority of Judaism in general (views that are common among Orthodox Jews and Hasidim), are controversial and may be seen as one-sided. Despite this, his ability to articulate with depth and subtlety a tradition notable for its emphasis on mankind’s role, with God, in the creation of a sacred, sane and just world is undeniable and extraordinarily moving.

**RABBI GINSBURGH:** When I was much younger I knew a lot about Eastern thought. So I think I can relate to where your teaching is coming from. And I have read your book, *Enlightenment Is a Secret*. It seems that you don’t want your teaching to become institutionalized, like a practice, but instead teach that liberation should be spontaneous.

**ANDREW COHEN:** Since that book was written my own teachings have evolved quite a bit. There is a lot more form and structure in the way that I teach now than at the time when that book came out. That book’s teachings are just for the individual who wants to be free. Now I’m teaching in a way that’s responding more to the whole of the human predicament in light of the realization of the impersonal nature of life itself.

As my teaching evolved I began to emphasize the need for people to live with great integrity, and that the individual who embarks on the spiritual life has a great responsibility to all of life. I feel that people who live a spiritual life should be trying to



demonstrate what's possible in terms of evolution. They should be trying to prove that real evolution is possible.

Over time I began to make a distinction between what I saw as personal enlightenment and impersonal enlightenment. Personal enlightenment would be where the individual looks for some kind of religious experience, some kind of solace or some sense of well-being, but is fundamentally only concerned with themselves and their happiness. Whereas in impersonal enlightenment, or what I call the impersonal view, individuals endeavor to realize their ultimate nondifference with other human beings and through that to be able to live and to coexist with other people in a way that proves that the highest possibility of human existence and human evolution is a living possibility. So one is no longer just concerned with one's own happiness or liberation, but is concerned with the evolution of the whole race.

**RABBI GINSBURGH:** How can you explain the fact that you yourself are evolving? How does that happen?

**ANDREW COHEN:** Well, I always say that I'm interested in the truth more than anything else. I'm not interested in resting anywhere and because of that I think I'm always questioning a lot of the conclusions that I've come to. And I'm always looking at things anew and afresh. Also, because I'm so involved with other people and with teaching, I'm always learning more and more about the nature and predicament of the human condition in relationship to the highest possibility of perfect liberation. So I'm constantly seeing the struggle between

the human predicament and this higher evolutionary possibility. The closer I look at it, the more people I meet and the more that I teach, the more I become aware of the subtlety and the delicacy of the whole situation. And I begin to appreciate more and more what's involved for most people to really give their life up to something greater.

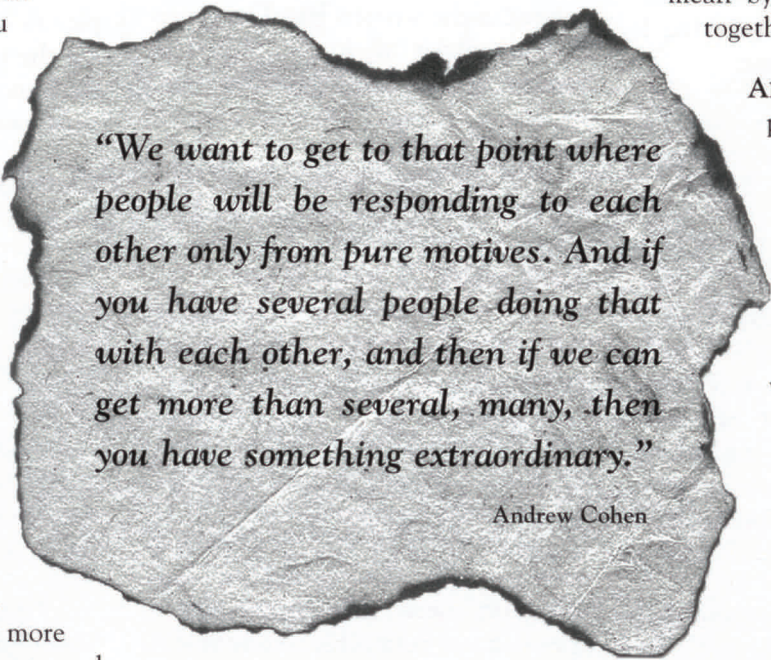
**RABBI GINSBURGH:** What is the ultimate end, or the ultimate good happy ending?

**ANDREW COHEN:** The ultimate happy ending? To prove the law of love in the way we're able to be together. Another way to say it would be to prove the existence of perfect goodness as our own condition, as an expression of the human condition.

**RABBI GINSBURGH:** That is to bring the world to perfection.

**ANDREW COHEN:** Absolutely.

**RABBI GINSBURGH:** That means that



*"We want to get to that point where people will be responding to each other only from pure motives. And if you have several people doing that with each other, and then if we can get more than several, many, then you have something extraordinary."*

Andrew Cohen

people will be good to one another and loving to one another.

**ANDREW COHEN:** Absolutely. They

would be responding to each other out of the purest impulses rather than through what's normal, which is mixed motives: some pure, some not so. Most people are a mixed bag of both. So we want to get to that point where people will be responding to each other only from pure motives. And if you have several people doing that with each other, and then if we can get more than several, many, then you have something extraordinary.

**RABBI GINSBURGH:** So what you're trying to do is create a group of people who live by pure motives?

**ANDREW COHEN:** Yes, absolutely.

**RABBI GINSBURGH:** You have a few of them?

**ANDREW COHEN:** Yes. I have a community in northern California of about 150 people and then about 80 in London, and a community in Amsterdam also.

**RABBI GINSBURGH:** What do you mean by a community? They live together?

**ANDREW COHEN:** Yes, people live together in houses and most of them have given their whole lives to practice these teachings and to prove that this is possible.

**RABBI GINSBURGH:** So what do they do?

**ANDREW COHEN:** You mean in terms of their practices?

**RABBI GINSBURGH:** Yes.

**ANDREW COHEN:** They meditate together, they study the teachings and they discuss them together, and look into their own depth or degree and subtlety of understanding. They are constantly



seeing how well they can express themselves and how much they know. The men and women meet together separately in order to look into the impersonal nature of the human condition and to learn how to speak about the personal and practical side of life from an impersonal perspective—which means with a greater and greater degree of objectivity. This kind of thing. And when people live this life it's a religious or spiritual holy life.

**RABBI GINSBURGH:** You said earlier that you are trying to give more form to the teaching.

**ANDREW COHEN:** I have to because as more and more people come, then the form and the structure become a vehicle for the evolution of the individual and the whole. Whenever a group of people come together, form and structure is essential.

**RABBI GINSBURGH:** At first sight form seems to contradict the way.

**ANDREW COHEN:** That's what I used to think. When I started teaching I had a very strong idea of that.

**RABBI GINSBURGH:** So the question is how to overcome that apparent paradox.

**ANDREW COHEN:** Well, I feel that if one is always more attached to the truth than any particular structure or form, then the structure will be constantly reevaluated in light of the living truth. Assuming that one has evolved to the degree that one would be aware of that kind of depth and subtlety, the structure itself would be constantly informed by that. It wouldn't become fixed or rigid and it would constantly be responding to the evolutionary needs of the individuals. In that sense the structure itself would become a living entity.

**RABBI GINSBURGH:** So the question

of forms is a very important thing. You said the more the community grows, the more there's a necessity for form.

**ANDREW COHEN:** Absolutely, yes.

**RABBI GINSBURGH:** The forms are living in the sense that there is some inner awareness of...

**ANDREW COHEN:** The needs of the individual.

**RABBI GINSBURGH:** And the light that is changing its phases and its spectrum from time to time through the course of history—and therefore things adjust.

**ANDREW COHEN:** Exactly.

**RABBI GINSBURGH:** So that is the bridge or the connecting point to what Judaism is all about. There is a need for such forms. There are certain forms that were given in the written Torah and then there are the forms that are always in a state of progress or evolution which is called the oral Torah, the oral tradition, which is not so fixed as the written law. The general thing about all kinds of Eastern thought is that liberation is a "run" out of our mundane sense of reality or the world.

**ANDREW COHEN:** Right, but I object to that. I go through great pains to say that true liberation should give us the courage or the strength to be able to live this human life in a way that most people don't have the courage to do.

**RABBI GINSBURGH:** The basic principle of the mystical way of Judaism is called *ratzo vashov*. *Ratzo vashov* means a continual living dynamic of what we call "run and return." Run and return means running out of confinement and being able to return into that previous state of confinement in order to rectify it, to transform it. This is called the rectification process. There are all types of religions or ways

which don't have what we call the vessels in which to return and integrate the spiritual lights into this world. So at some point they all become impotent, sterile.

**ANDREW COHEN:** Yes, I agree.

**RABBI GINSBURGH:** You have visions or experience of light, but there's no ability to integrate it into this world.

**ANDREW COHEN:** Right. It just dissipates then.

**RABBI GINSBURGH:** It just dissipates or a person just leaves this world, just escapes. The question is if liberation is an escape from this world.

**ANDREW COHEN:** Not at all, not in the way that I teach it. I go to great pains to tell people that there are two kinds of seekers; one kind wants to escape from having to come to terms with what I call the overwhelming complexity of life. And there are other people who really want to wake up, which means they want to try to come to terms with the overwhelming complexity of life. The majority of seekers are the ones who want to escape and the minority are the ones who want to truly awaken.

**RABBI GINSBURGH:** OK, that's good. Because escape is relatively simple.

But the question is where does the potency come from to return and who really is giving the forms in which the infinite can integrate with the finite? Because the infinite and the finite are contradictory. So there must be some great power, some ultimate power that teaches how to integrate infinity with the finite.

That is the whole concept of the Torah being given to Israel, with its so many commandments, which are forms for taking that experience of true liberation and true unity—of all being one and God being all and all being



God—and integrating it into our daily lives. Obviously with the ultimate purpose of becoming good and loving. That is certainly the universal principle of man and God.

**ANDREW COHEN:** In the way that I approach it I put great emphasis on the individual becoming committed to their own purification. Purification means becoming aware of and being willing to come to terms with their compulsive and almost hypnotic obsession and distraction with ignorance and fear, which prevents this higher knowledge from being available to them. We can, through this purification, through a very dedicated and intense investigation into the nature of the real, end distraction or preoccupation with ignorance, with what I call wrong and false views about the nature of our own identity and the nature of the absolute. Then we will become more aware of and in touch with that power that you were speaking about and the way to respond in the world of time and space in the most appropriate way will reveal itself to us. And that's what I feel so much of spiritual work and spiritual practice is all about. It has to do with this purification, it has to do with making ourselves a pure vessel, an empty vessel so that we will be available for that.

**RABBI GINSBURGH:** It's important that everybody strives to become that empty, pure vessel. Very fortunately for us, for mankind, much of the revelation has already been spoken. The question is how to not voluntarily disassociate oneself from it. If God has already spoken with man, and he is continuing to speak, the question is how to get in tune with that. But the various religions even disagree about who God spoke to, and what he said.

**ANDREW COHEN:** Yes, I know.

**RABBI GINSBURGH:** But I think you

just have to look into all of this objectively.

As soon as you say that there has to be this bridging of the paradox between the absolute and the relative, that is the true absolute. And the true absolute has the power to bridge that.

**ANDREW COHEN:** I completely agree—and the ability to interpret our experience in such a way that that paradox is always kept in balance. For example, certain ways of approaching the truth overemphasize the absolute and others overemphasize the relative and then one is always getting an imbalanced or distorted perspective one way or the other. And the ideal or complete view would be one that kept both in a perfect state of equilibrium constantly and through the attainment of that kind of equilibrium would know how to respond in the most appropriate way in the world of time and space, in the realm of cause and effect. That perfect way or that correct response would become apparent.

**RABBI GINSBURGH:** It's a question of taking the time and the devotion to find out more really what it's about. A lot of people have had experiences, in all generations...

**ANDREW COHEN:** But it doesn't necessarily lead to anything.

**RABBI GINSBURGH:** I can say, thank God, that I believe I also had such experiences, many such experiences, when I was about the same age as when you had your experiences. Spontaneously. One of the chapters in your book is about thought. That is a big topic. We can deny thought, have experiences of no thought, and then of great light revealing itself. That type of experience is called *tohu* in the Kabbalah, or the "chaotic light" experience. The ability to bring that into vessels, that is one's lifetime work.

**ANDREW COHEN:** Yes, that's the whole point.

**RABBI GINSBURGH:** That's the whole point. Our own faith is that fortunately, thank God, we have a system that is God-given.

In the East the ultimate absolute unity is based on having no volition because volition, will, is man's, it is karma. We don't believe in that. We don't think that absolute unity denies volition.

**ANDREW COHEN:** It's interesting because in my own teaching I'm always emphasizing that we're always the one who is choosing. People very used to the Eastern approach say to me, "What do you mean? Who's choosing? There's no one to choose." I say, "No, you, whoever you are, you are always making choices between lightness or darkness, heaven or hell, good or evil, whatever it is." They say, "No, there's no one there." I say, "Yes there is." So I actually have taken that into consideration. I emphasize the overwhelming significance of the fact that we're all always making choices and the choices we make can either be an expression of perfect goodness or of the worst form of evil, or something in-between.

**RABBI GINSBURGH:** It's not only that we're making choices, but God also chooses. In Eastern thought there is usually no purpose. Everything just is. But in Jewish thought there is purpose. The purpose is: God created the world in order for us to bring his infinite light into this finite existence. That's the purpose, that's utopia.

**ANDREW COHEN:** I have no argument with that.

**RABBI GINSBURGH:** That is goodness. When that light enters into the vessel of this world, that becomes infinitely good and loving. Good for all mankind.



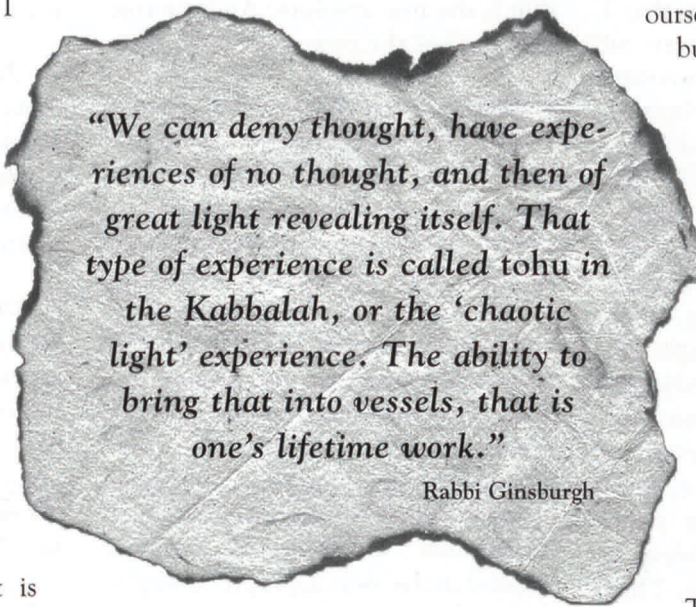
Basically the Jewish people believe we're in a certain way the messengers to bring this light to mankind.

**ANDREW COHEN:** Right. So what would you say to this? I go to India every year and visit Tibetans. I have a gathering there every winter. So whenever I'm there I visit lamas, and I've met some of the highest and most respected ones. Though they don't admit it at first, I've discovered after spending more time around them that they believe, in a way that is similar to the Jewish people, that they're the chosen people. Even in Buddhism they feel that their form of Buddhism is the highest and the purest. Even though they don't at first admit it, when you speak to them candidly it is often revealed that they feel that their view is superior, not only to the other forms of Buddhism but of course to Christianity and to Judaism—because they're theistic, and all the rest of it. They also have a sense of being the highest vehicle and being the true messengers of the highest teaching. I've often felt that Tibetans and Jews have a lot in common in that sense.

**RABBI GINSBURGH:** But at some point we have to make the choice. And the choice should be made after a lot of reflective study of what's going on.

Another way of saying it in the most general terms is that most Eastern thought, and all thought of liberation, in the sense of escape especially, is called in the Kabbalah a female syndrome rather than a male syndrome. Male is always considered to be drawing down light, an influx into reality. The person is enwedged above, but his whole passion, the male passion is to bring things down. Whereas the female passion, the posi-

tive female passion, is to elevate, to lose ego. But each one is in a state of what we would call existential frustration without the other, just like a male and a female.



*"We can deny thought, have experiences of no thought, and then of great light revealing itself. That type of experience is called tohu in the Kabbalah, or the 'chaotic light' experience. The ability to bring that into vessels, that is one's lifetime work."*

Rabbi Ginsburgh

**ANDREW COHEN:** Because they have to merge, to become balanced.

**RABBI GINSBURGH:** To balance and to merge. The Jewish way, and especially the way of the Kabbalah, says that the Torah was given for the possibility that, with all of our female desires, some potent male seed will impregnate us—which is the Torah. The male aspect would be the Torah and the female aspect would be that part of the Kabbalah which is this passion for liberation and ascension and purity. Western culture is generally like a frustrated male syndrome, whereas Eastern religion is a female syndrome. The meeting point is the Torah, the Jewish teaching. But it's something which we can't explain, it's something that is God-given, so we can't rationalize it. We just say that if you, especially as a Jew, but maybe any human being at a certain point, will just objectively take the time to study and to learn and to be able to overcome his ego, he'll be able to acknowl-

edge this for himself. The Jewish people, on the one hand, are the eternal people. On the other hand, the fact that we haven't yet brought the world to utopia, for many Jews means it's not working; for which we can only blame ourselves. We have the vehicle but our own balance is the problem. It is very likely that the part of the balance which is not there is just the Kabbalah aspect. But if that would be more emphasized...

**ANDREW COHEN:** The desire for ascension, not just the law.

**RABBI GINSBURGH:** Not just the law. You have to be able to understand the law as being the return. There has to be run and return. That's the expression: run and return.

**ANDREW COHEN:** So you're saying if the study of the law was balanced more by the personal, by the...

**RABBI GINSBURGH:** Ratzo—which is the run to ascend. Then that is the balance. There's a true balance of run and return. It's called a pulse. Every second of one's life is a pulse and the pulse is running to the infinite and bringing the infinite down into finite vessels. Now the question is how to rectify that. Rectification means creating vessels.

**ANDREW COHEN:** There is the Jewish belief that if that would happen, the Jewish people would bring peace to the whole planet.

**RABBI GINSBURGH:** That is the intention. That is the messianic era we believe in. It is very, very immediate, especially now. It takes just a few people to make it happen. How that will appear, it is perhaps impossible to say.



**ANDREW COHEN:** What would be the catalyst for such an extraordinary and inconceivable massive revelation and transformation of human consciousness?

**RABBI GINSBURGH:** The catalyst would be the recognition of truth. For a non-Jew, that the teachings are perfect. For a Jew, there is more to the picture. There is an entire body of form which is given to us. We are intended to reach higher, so the higher you go up, the more form you have to have, to bring it down.

According to Judaism, a good non-Jew also has a portion in the world to come, like a Jew. A good non-Jew is seeking for liberation, not only to individually overcome pain and suffering, but to help mankind overcome pain and suffering. That is good. That is certainly the best motivation that any human being could have. Just that by itself—that desire for good—makes one a complete vessel.

On the cover of your book you say that the secret will always remain a secret and the timeless will always be above time. For us, the secret and the timeless have to become...

**ANDREW COHEN:** In time. I agree. That is when it begins to mean something, it has to become manifest in time.

**RABBI GINSBURGH:** OK, so we see it the same.

**ANDREW COHEN:** We agree on fundamental principles, yes.

**RABBI GINSBURGH:** Let's take another example from *Enlightenment Is a Secret*. You wrote of enlightenment as being like getting into the flow of a river.

**ANDREW COHEN:** Yes.

**RABBI GINSBURGH:** So in Judaism there is upstream swimming against

the current and there is swimming downstream with the current but faster than the current. You're leading the current.

**ANDREW COHEN:** I've never considered that possibility.

**RABBI GINSBURGH:** Actually in one of the parables it says that the true secret is that the Jew is the one that's swimming faster than the current, that he's leading the current. So again this is a classical Eastern idea: that being in the current is just being part of the unity of everything. In Judaism that would be called the ultimate nature, the true nature.

But that's not what it's all about. That power is not going to bring peace to earth.

**ANDREW COHEN:** No, no, no. Because you have to take responsibility for it.

**RABBI GINSBURGH:** Exactly, exactly.

**ANDREW COHEN:** But that's the essence of what I teach.

**RABBI GINSBURGH:** OK, so sometimes you have to swim upstream. Sometimes fish swim upstream, to give birth and to die also.

**ANDREW COHEN:** Yes, like salmon.

**RABBI GINSBURGH:** So that's a very very important thing in the world.

**ANDREW COHEN:** So that would be a metaphor for what?

**RABBI GINSBURGH:** Sometimes the ultimate act is not to give in to nature; in order to give birth you have to swim upstream. Because what is that swimming upstream? It's returning to your own source where you were born. You have to be ready to die for it.

**ANDREW COHEN:** Yes, that's what I say all the time when I teach. ■

*"Every second of one's life is a pulse and the pulse is running to the infinite and bringing the infinite down into finite vessels."*

Rabbi Ginsburgh



# Allahu The Unimaginable

"ALLAHU AKBAR  
MEANS THAT REALITY  
IS INCONCEIVABLE,  
UNIMAGINABLE AND  
BEYOND ALL OF OUR  
CONCEPTIONS, BEYOND  
EVEN ALL OF  
OUR RELIGIOUS  
UNDERSTANDING."

LEX HIXON

A burst of shouts rang out, piercing through the chorus of voices that had by now reached a fever pitch: "Allah! Allah! Allahu Akbar! Allahu Akbar!" It seemed like we had been singing and dancing for hours. The men, arm-in-arm, were the outer circle, the women holding hands formed the inner circle, and the musicians and Sufi singers were in the center.

We were carried around and around, again and again and again, caught up in the relentless dance of ecstasy that is the Sufi *dhikr*, or "Circle of Divine Remembrance." If the *dhikr* actually fulfills its highest purpose, one is lifted out of the illusion of separation and individuality to be consumed in divine intoxication itself. According to Sufi tradition, in the *dhikr* true mystical ascension into God-consciousness becomes living reality.

After their meeting together in New York this fall, Andrew and some of his students were invited by Lex Hixon to attend this evening of Sufi celebration and worship. A well-known figure in the spiritual world, Lex is a scholar of world religions, the author of several books (including *Heart of the Koran* and *Atom from the Sun of Knowledge*) and for many years hosted a popular New York City radio show called *In the Spirit*. A spiritual practitioner himself, he holds positions of accomplishment in five spiritual traditions: Advaita Vedanta, Islamic Sufism, Vajrayana Buddhism, Eastern Orthodox Christianity and Soto Zen.

Lex and Andrew first met a year ago when Lex heard Andrew speak at a philosophy class at Sarah Lawrence College. After the class, they had the opportunity to talk in depth about their philosophies and experiences of spiritual life. Lex has been profoundly influenced and inspired by the renowned Indian sage Ramakrishna. His own philosophy, like Ramakrishna's, is founded in a vision of the universality of religions. He expressed a deep respect and appreciation for Andrew's teachings, comparing them to the teachings of Ramana Maharshi

Introduction by Kathy Bayer



# Akbar!

## Inconceivable Reality

### A Sufi Dhikr with Lex Hixon

and Ramakrishna. But he went on to caution Andrew about the fact that enlightenment teachings are not for everybody and that few are prepared to take up such a call. He felt that a teaching that from the beginning stresses direct understanding and experience of the Absolute could potentially be limited and difficult for many to grasp. In both meetings, Lex emphasized the importance of religious traditions in that they offer spiritual guidance for people at all levels of interest and involvement.

That evening in New York, dressed in a long white robe, a brightly colored shawl thrown over his shoulder, Lex had become Sheikh Nur al-Jerrahi who, after meeting with Andrew, conducted the weekly dhikr at a Sufi mosque. Since he received transmission to become a formal successor of the Sufi teacher Muzaffer Effendi, he has been a spiritual guide for several Islamic Sufi Dervish communities in America. The evening was a fascinating one and gave us a taste of Sufi life.

The mosque was housed in an unassuming building on a dark and somewhat run-down looking block in lower Manhattan. We entered a long, dimly-lit room, where all we could see were the backs of what seemed like close to a hundred people kneeling on the floor, heads bowed. The room was empty except for several Oriental carpets and a shrine in the far corner highlighted by a colored spotlight. Everyone faced the shrine—the men in front, the women in back. (Later, one of the women explained that we shouldn't take offense at the fact that the women worshiped behind the men, as it in no way signified anything about their status. It was simply less distracting to be segregated in this way, and because women wear dresses in the midst of so much movement, it was more appropriate for them to be in the back.) We were immediately swept up into a continuous wave of kneeling, then bowing and standing again, hands always brought back and clasped together over the heart. The ebb and flow of

an unbroken cycle of prayers, offerings to Allah, moved from passionate exaltations to quiet murmurings then to ecstatic praises once again.

After a short period of silent prayer, Lex took Andrew by the hand and they walked together out of the room and up the stairs to the hall where dinner was about to be served. As we began to sit at the low tables lining the wall, the room quickly filled with a cadence of buzzing chatter, warm embraces and friendly greetings. The people were a mixture of many ages, races and cultural backgrounds.

Lex sat at the head table along with Andrew and his wife and a few Sufi friends dressed in traditional garb. As heaping plates of rice, vegetables, bread and lamb were brought out from the kitchen, we spoke with many of the Sufis about their philosophy and practice, and were in turn asked questions about Andrew and his teachings. By this time in the evening, two aspects of the Sufi life had become very apparent to us: the emphasis on a devotional relationship to God and the importance of community. Lex has said of the Sufi way that "The maturing process in a Dervish Order is communal. The mystical ascension into Paradise consciousness, and beyond into the Garden of Essence, occurs hand in hand, hearts intertwined eternally."

After the feast, Lex again took Andrew's hand, leading the procession up the next flight of stairs to a smaller more intimate room where our eyes were immediately drawn to an unusual domed ceiling. Buttressed with wooden beams, the ceiling displayed a beautiful stained glass window that filtered the moonlight from above. Lex seated himself on a low couch, motioning to Andrew to sit next to him while another sheikh sat at his other side. As everyone gathered around, two musicians began to play and we joined in singing Sufi songs. It was not long before Lex introduced Andrew and asked him to speak, encouraging people to ask questions.



Amidst the commotion of tea and cookies being passed, people coming and going, and the background hum of hushed conversations, the questions began. Curious faces were drawn to the discussion as the room grew quiet. Andrew addressed one question after another, Lex following with answers from the Sufi perspective. The dialogue that unfolded was illuminating and revealed many points where the two teachings met and where they diverged. Even in their approach to the discussion itself, Andrew's emphasis on inquiry seemed to contrast with the primarily devotional orientation expressed by many of the Sufis.

The evening ended with the dhikr in the hall where it began. After the celebration, the room was lulled in silence for quite a while before Lex asked for a Sufi mala (beads) and hat to be brought to him. Saying that Andrew had, on his own, arrived at the same understanding as that expressed in the essential tenets of Islam, he placed the mala around Andrew's neck, the hat on his head and gave Andrew an honorary Sufi name, Ali.

The following dialogue is an excerpt from the discussion that evening.

**L**EX HIXON: I would like to ask the brother I call Ali, Andrew Cohen, to say a few words.

**ANDREW COHEN:** Well, I actually have no idea what to say after everything we just sang together. I feel that everything's already been said in what we've been singing. But if any of you have any questions about the spiritual life, I would be very happy to do my best to try and respond to them.

**LEX:** Maybe I'll begin by asking to open the floodgates. Everyone should really ask because the real joy of Sufism lies in conversation and sometimes we have little of it. You can't have enough of it. So I'll ask. If God is the only reality, if Allah alone exists, then what is the value of friendship on the spiritual path? Why do we seek out friendship?

**ANDREW:** Well, I think part of the value of coming together in friendship, especially if you have awakened spiritually, is to bring into being, bring into manifestation the truth of nonduality, the truth of oneness, the truth of absolute and perfect love. And I think that most of us are aware that in the kind of world that we're living in, very few people seem actually interested in doing that.

**STUDENT:** They are longing for it.

**ANDREW:** Secretly longing, but if we all secretly long without being willing to respond to that longing, nothing much will happen. I think it's the degree of willingness that any of us have to respond to that longing that is going to be the degree to which this absolute principle is going to be manifest here on earth. That's when heaven becomes earth. Otherwise the absolute principle is just an idea in someone's mind. Unless the individual is willing to wholeheartedly respond to that longing, it is very hard to know whether this absolute principle really exists or not.

**STUDENT:** What is true humanity? How do we know what true humanity is?

**ANDREW:** That's a very good question. How do we know what true humanity is? It's something I've been thinking quite a lot

about. I think that when a human being gets to that point in their own evolution when they become a very clear and unambiguous expression of perfect love, that's when we can say that they are an expression or manifestation of true humanity. The great realizers throughout history have made an impression on all of us who care, and I think that the impression they've made is that it's possible to become whole, it's possible to become an expression of what I call perfect goodness. Perfect goodness without any shadows, without any traces, without anything other than that. In light of the reflection of a human being like that, many of us begin to see what's possible. We see how far there is to go and we also begin to get a sense that we need to do that ourselves. Those individuals who don't cast any shadow, who are no longer expressing anything that's fundamentally divided, whose actions only express that one undivided principle—we could say they have realized that condition. But as long as an individual is still expressing fundamental contradiction we can say that they have not reached that point yet.

**STUDENT:** Well, there is no life without shadow. There has to be shadow and that's why we are human.

**ANDREW:** Well if I were to say, "Yes, you're right," then that might make many people here far too comfortable with the shadow that they may see themselves casting.

In my experience of trying to help people, I found out that if you give a human being the option to compromise or not, most people will always choose the option to compromise. Why is that?

**STUDENT:** But I don't think it's compromising. It's embracing the wholeness and embracing your life and your shadow. If you think you have to be what you call perfect love and you can't achieve it, then it's like the mountain is too high to try the journey. My sense of trying to be good is to accept my weakness.

**ANDREW:** But there's a supposition in what you're saying. You're saying that a natural and inherent part of human nature is this fundamental division, and I'm saying it's not necessarily so. That's the whole point of what we were even reading here.





**“The human being is the crown of creation and has innate perfection. It’s not even just a perfectibility. According to the Koran, all of the souls, everyone in this room, said yes to Allah before there was even a universe manifested.”**

**Lex Hixon**

**STUDENT:** I feel the bridge between both of you is forgiveness. One of the names of the divine being is the forgiver. It is even said that Allah has created us imperfect, and if we were not, he would create others who were imperfect. Forgiveness and repentance, or asking for forgiveness, is part of our total humanity.

**STUDENT:** I would also like to say that when we make errors, it’s possible to repent and then feel compassion. Allah allows us to make mistakes so that we can feel his compassion.

**LEX:** There is a bridge between the two positions. The human being is the crown of creation and has innate perfection. It’s not even just a perfectibility. According to the Koran, all of the souls, everyone in this room, said yes to Allah before there was even a universe manifested, before there was even a divine throne, before there were angels and even archangels. The human souls, which are the most ancient of realities, existed in mystic communion and even union with the Lord. At that point the Lord asked the souls, “Will you return to me consciously? If I open up the mystery of the pilgrimage of space and time to you in order for me to return to myself consciously in a mysterious manner, if you agree to become my instruments of divine self-knowledge, will you return to me consciously and voluntarily—or should I just draw you back automatically?” And all the souls said, “Yes, you are our Lord, we want to return to you consciously.” So that is our perfection. All souls, everyone you see walking down the street is already an accomplished mystic from pre-eternity. So that’s the perfect side.

But the other side is this beautiful teaching that came from our two sisters. They basically said the same thing from different directions. If Allah does not give us the opportunity to experience his compassion how are we going to ever experience compassion for others, which is actually Allah’s compassion? Feeling compassion for others is not some sort of

superior attitude like, “I’m sorry for that person.” It’s a way of mystic union. So it is not just in knowledge that we achieve mystic union. We achieve mystic union in compassion as well. So this is the whole picture. It’s very rich and it’s very subtle. It doesn’t amount to an answer, it doesn’t amount to a doctrine that one can lay out in so many sentences. It’s a feeling.

The beautiful thing about our community here is because of these wonderful questions, we as a community rediscovered the teaching of Islam directly in our own minds and hearts—and it’s alive and living. It’s not something that we read out of a book or even something that a sheikh told us. It’s something that we’re coming to in community. Islam is a communal mysticism. So we pray in community, and it is said that communal prayers are twenty-seven times more powerful than prayer that is said alone. The same is also true for our investigation of truth, which in Islam is called the tracing of the creation to its source in the beloved creator. That process, if it’s done in community, is twenty-seven times more powerful, let’s say, than when that very same thing is done alone in our meditation chamber.

So we’re very, very communal people. But isn’t this planet a communal planet? We have five billion precious human souls on this planet, and it’s one big community. And that’s the meaning of Islam. Islam is not a new religion. Islam is community. It is the peaceful and harmonious communion of all beings on the planet all bowing to the source of being. This source is formless and cannot even be represented by concepts, let alone by any kind of icon or representation. Icons exist in different traditions but they’re fingers pointing in a certain direction. We have calligraphy as our signs but none of us start worshiping the calligraphy. Similarly, the icons in the various traditions are signs and in the deepest sense of those traditions were never meant to be worshiped. It’s the



immature among those traditions who actually worship the signs. The mature ones see the signs and go right beyond into the formless reality.

**STUDENT:** What is the purpose of us experiencing humanity? What is the purpose of the human experience?

**ANDREW:** Personally, I never answer questions like that. I know that all the great religions of the world have come up with some very satisfying answers, but I don't think anybody can really answer that question. And I think that anybody who says that they know the answer doesn't really know what they're talking about. But the fact is we do know that we do seem to be here. So I think we should start really with that, with what we can be pretty sure we know. So then based on that we have to ask ourselves, "Well, what is actually going on here?"

I think the danger is that most people go through life without ever really asking themselves that question because they become so distracted by the mundane nature of life. Very few people really look very deeply into this question and of the people who do, far too many are too easily willing to accept superficial and simplistic answers that really take away from the great mystery. Some of these questions are very difficult and ultimately impossible to understand with our mind. Can we finally get to that point where we can bear not knowing, but at the same time have that not knowing not in any way lessen our faith or our conviction? We want to know answers like that because we want to have it all figured out so we can feel very safe. And I think one who truly wants to know the truth has to be willing to feel unsafe, has to have that kind of courage and integrity of interest. If we can have that kind of spirit then answers do come to us, but the shape and the form they take quite often are not what we expected.

**LEX:** *Allahu akbar* means that reality is inconceivable, unimaginable and beyond all of our conceptions, beyond even all of our religious understanding in that sense. This is the greatness of reality, the greatness of Allah. Not as someone might think, "Well, *Allahu akbar* means Allah's great because he's very huge in size," or "he's great because he is so powerful that he can create the entire universe." The real greatness is the inconceivability. And I'm so happy the way Andrew responded here. That's why I say we don't give answers here, we don't give doctrine. We're inquiring and we're coming face to face with that beloved inconceivability, and it's communicating with us and communing with us in ways that we can't understand, in ways we don't expect.

**ANDREW:** I just want to make one comment to what is being said. I know that in Islam and Sufism, and also in Judaism, the inconceivability of the absolute principle is something that is spoken about very much, and many people will agree that the absolute principle is inconceivable. It's the absolute conception. But many individuals allow themselves to rest in a sense,

because they say it is inconceivable. In spite of the fact that they say it's inconceivable, secretly of course, they do have concepts about it. One of the fundamental themes is something that is very conceivable, which is love.

But I think the door really begins to open and the truth really begins to become available to us if we're willing to stand in a midpoint where we want to know more than anything else what the absolute truth is, and at the same time we're unwilling to succumb to the revelation or experience of anything that actually can be conceivable. Right at that point there's room for this mystery that's truly beyond conception. The danger and the mistake that so many people make is, even if they would agree, "Yes I know this is inconceivable," they, in a sense, allow themselves to rest because they say, "Yes, I already know this." Then a certain kind of tension that really brings this mystery very near to us is lost.

**LEX:** It is a beautiful definition of Islam that Andrew's giving. Allah warns us in his Holy Koran that if people don't pray with awe, which really means the direct appreciation of divine inconceivability; and with gratitude, which is another form of awe; and with love, which is another form of appreciating inconceivability—then our prayers are merely conventional. In other words they're only cultural expressions. So Islam calls us into inconceivability. In a call to prayer that sense of the inconceivability, and that inconceivability itself, is calling us into itself. So it's very hard for any sensitive heart to become complacent and sit there and say, "Well I know it's inconceivable."

Cultural conditioning can do wonders to veil the human being, but I don't know any sincere Muslim who can hear the





call to prayer without a tremendous sense of being pulled into the divine mystery. I think this is Islam's commitment to calling every single human being on the planet into the picture. Now I'm not saying there are only a few people who are capable or qualified to really be revolutionary, to really raise the deep questions. That's not the Islamic point of view. It's also not Andrew's point of view. Every human being is capable of being called into truth because we already are the truth, we already are that.

ANDREW: Just one other small thing that came to me as you were speaking is that I think one way to look at what the goal is is to find a way to be completely committed to that which is literally inconceivable. And to literally do that. Practically speaking it's very challenging for a human being to be completely committed to something that they can't conceive of. It's possible for people to be 100% committed to something that can be conceived. But is it possible to go that extra millimeter, which ultimately makes all the difference? Because if we can truly enter into that complete com-

**A Sufi calligraphy of seven names of God, symbolizing stages of the spiritual journey. In the seventh and final stage the perfected soul journeys from unity back to the world of multiplicity.**

mitment to that which we can't conceive, then true innocence or what I call true purity, begins to manifest and express itself and all kinds of things begin to happen that are beyond the mind's ability to really comprehend.

LEX: There is one footnote that I can't resist sharing. The divine inconceivability is mysterious in itself. Let's not begin to conceive it. That inconceivability reveals itself in the

Koran. So although it remains inconceivable we have very, very clear messages from the source of being about ways to cultivate the highest realization. A Muslim does not walk around just saying, "Allah's inconceivable, Allah's inconceivable." We don't try to conceive Allah, but Allah reveals himself through his holy book and through his holy friends. So we actually have an abundance of revelation, a superabundance of revelation. If we look at Islamic history it's like an ocean and we have a little cup. That's all we can take from it. There's so much, that we could say the inconceivability itself is infinite generosity. So don't feel that by inconceivability here we mean just some sort of blank wall.

ANDREW: But that's the challenge.

LEX: Tell us.

ANDREW: The challenge is that even if we speak of compassion, love, tenderness, sweetness, beauty and joy, can we leave that out of the realm of our own possession? Do we even need to put that necessarily on the face of God? Because if we don't need to then suddenly infinite space for us to find out what is really so is revealed. The reason I keep repeating this is because so many of us, so many human beings, always put a face on God in order to make ourselves feel better. And this mystery and this beauty and this love, if it is to be truly untainted by the personal, needs to remain untouched by us.

LEX: Islam itself is precisely the refusal to put a face on God, if you want to put it that way. That is Islam. So congratulations, you have discovered Islam. But if the divine itself reveals its mystical countenance—which consists of ninety-nine divine principles, divine names, divine energies, not just sweetness and beauty but also awesomeness and majesty and all the powerful qualities—if Allah manifests his mystic countenance, that's not like us putting a face on that. That's a completely different thing. That's the divine itself coming forward in its own mysterious nature. But what our brother was saying is that our tendency is to put a face on it, in other words to project something on there.

ANDREW: The danger then is that the innocence is lost, that's all I'm saying.

LEX: And by innocence I think that you also mean the purity.

ANDREW: Yes. Absolutely.

LEX: So remember that we sing that Allah is a fountain of purity. I didn't know why we sing that—but now I *do* know why we sing that. Because purity really is this state in which we're not putting a face on divinity, we're not manipulating divinity, we're not doing all that. We're in purity. As the brother said, we're innocent. ■



# INTERNATIONAL T

## FOR ANDRE

Los Angeles, CA .....	April 5
Portland, OR .....	April 8 - 10
Toronto, Canada .....	April 20, 21
Woodstock, NY .....	April 23
New York, NY .....	April 27 - 30
Harvard University .....	May 3
US EAST COAST RETREAT .....	May 5 - 7
Corte Madera, CA .....	May 13, 14
Vienna, Austria .....	May 27, 28
Hamburg, Germany .....	May 31
Cologne, Germany .....	June 2
COLOGNE RETREAT .....	June 3, 4
<i>a two-day retreat</i>	

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ROME RETREAT .....	June 10
<i>a one-day retreat</i>	
Paris, France .....	June 14
Gordes, France .....	June 17, 18
London, England.....	June 24 - July 2
Amsterdam, Holland .....	July 8 - 14
AMSTERDAM RETREAT .....	July 15
<i>a one-day retreat</i>	
Tel Aviv, Israel .....	July 20 - 25
Zurich, Switzerland .....	July 29
SWITZERLAND RETREAT .....	July 31 - August 8
<i>a seven-day retreat in Schweibenalp</i>	

*Dates are subject to  
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## MEDITATION IS A METAPHOR FOR LIBERATION

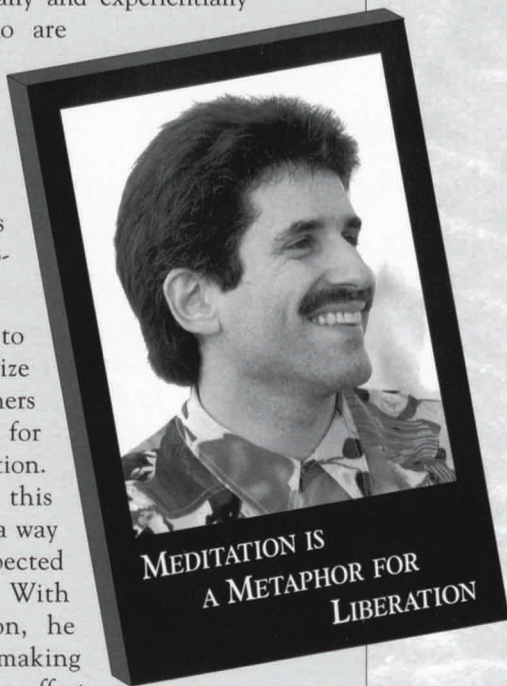
In this powerful and thought-provoking tape, spiritual teacher Andrew Cohen reaches beyond traditional and popular views of meditation to uncover a radical perspective on the purpose and significance of meditation in spiritual life. He demonstrates practically and experientially how, for those who are serious about awakening, meditation can and must be approached as a metaphor that can reveal what it means to live a life of profound freedom.

Some approaches to meditation emphasize letting go, while others stress the need for effort and concentration. Andrew addresses this seeming paradox in a way that is both unexpected and illuminating. With depth and precision, he illustrates how making effort and making no effort are both necessary aspects of meditation and of an enlightened life. Through inspired talks and guided meditations, the listener is taken beyond struggle to experience a deeper possibility—living life with perfect spontaneity and an unwavering commitment to their own absolute freedom.

July 10, 1994 Amsterdam, Holland

If you would like more information about other audio and video titles by Andrew Cohen or about our audio tape subscription series, please contact Moksha Foundation or FACE England to receive our most recent Audio/Video Catalog.

See page 38 for Audio & Video ordering information.



# NEW R

### **The Pursuit of Spiritual Freedom** (audio only) September 3, 1994 Corte Madera, CA

In this compelling talk, Andrew Cohen speaks about how liberating our attention from compulsive fascination with ourselves allows us to look deeply into the impersonal nature of life. He explains how such an investigation demands tremendous courage, innocence and humility, and a willingness to embrace the mysterious event that is life itself.

### **What Is Consciousness?** (audio only) August 3, 1994 Schweibenalp, Switzerland

Andrew Cohen begins this teaching with a fascinating discussion on consciousness in which he addresses many commonly held assumptions about the nature of awareness and mindfulness. He goes on to reveal a radically new perspective on the whole realm of personal experience that contains tremendous implications for the evolution of the entire human race.

### **True Vulnerability Is the Ultimate Risk** (audio only) June 24, 1994 London, England

In this inspiring tape, Andrew Cohen teaches that if we want to be free we must take full responsibility for our entire existence. This, he states, is only possible if we are willing to give ourselves completely to the ultimate risk of being truly vulnerable, of living without any fixed position in relation to the whole experience of being alive.

## ALSO A

The following is a selection

### **The Fire of Creation** Portland, OR April 13, 1994 (audio only)

### **True Spiritual Community** A compilation of talks on what it means to live the holy life. (audio only)

### **A Life Without Pretense** Bali, Indonesia February 14, 1994 (audio only)

### **Spiritual Quest: Becoming Fully Human** (audio only)

Side One: JFK University  
Orinda, CA October 26, 1993  
Side Two: Interview with Hans Burgschmidt  
Toronto, Canada November 20, 1993

### **Independence, Trust and Intimacy** Corte Madera, CA October 22, 1993 (audio only)



# RELEASES

## ***Piercing the Illusion of Security***

**July 9, 1994 Amsterdam, Holland (audio only)**

In these penetrating dialogues, Andrew Cohen challenges us to question all false ideas we may have about the nature of reality, which allow us to create an illusion of security amidst the chaos of life. He explains how only a tremendous willingness to find out what is true will enable us to pierce this illusion and discover final liberation in this birth.

## ***The Questionless State***

**July 20, 24, 25 & 26, 1994 Tel Aviv, Israel (video only)**

Taken from Andrew Cohen's recent visit to Israel, this compilation of spirited dialogues gives a real sense of the vast scope of Andrew's teaching and the extraordinary depth of investigation that has engendered it. Andrew explains how any true investigation into the nature of life must start with a "questionless state," which he describes as a "deep letting go into life."

## ***What We Do Is Who We Are***

**November 12, 1994 Corte Madera, CA (video only)**

In this far-reaching talk Andrew Cohen brings clarity and a fresh perspective to the traditionally acknowledged understanding that who we are is not limited to our mind or emotions. He goes on to examine the nature of absolute freedom, describing it as an experientially convincing realization that does not need any fixed ideas to support it.

## AVAILABLE

Some of our best selling titles:

### ***Do You Believe You Can Be Free?***

Cologne, Germany May 30, 1993 (audio only)

### ***A Perfect Relationship to Thought, Part I***

### ***A Perfect Relationship to Thought, Part II***

Kathmandu, Nepal February 10 & 11, 1993 (audio and video)

### ***The Law of Love***

Theosophical Society, NYC April 24, 1994 (video only)

### ***The Courage to Be Victorious***

New York City, NY April 26, 1994 (video only)

### ***The Truth Demands Everything***

Bali, Indonesia February 20, 1994 (video only)

### ***The Path of Simplicity***

Mill Valley, CA September 25, 1993 (video only)

## AUDIO TAPE SUBSCRIPTION

We have received many requests for audio recordings of Andrew Cohen's most current teachings, many of which are not available in the audio/video catalog. In response to this interest, these tapes are now being made available through a new subscription series that offers a special selection of Andrew's latest teachings from around the world.

The audio subscription is offered for a 6-month period, priced at \$7 per cassette which includes shipping worldwide and has the following two options:

- a) One tape every four weeks  
(7 tapes) \$49.00
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(13 tapes) \$91.00

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## THE THRILL OF THE UNKNOWN

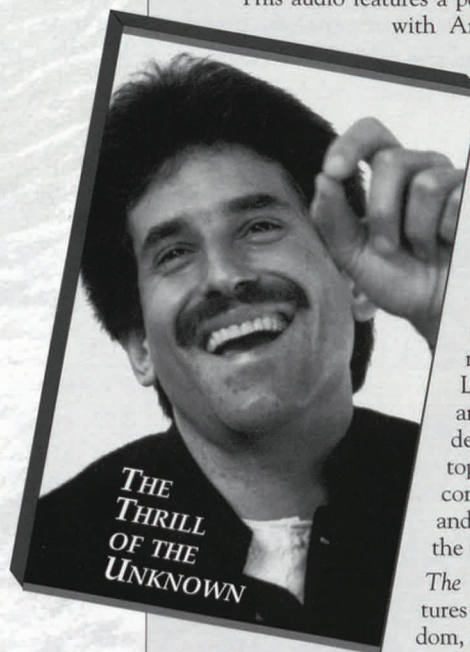
This audio features a powerfully engaging interview with Andrew Cohen in which he

explodes many of the reigning myths about enlightenment and challenges us to consider the thrilling possibility of actually becoming an expression of this profoundly awakened condition ourselves.

Recorded in New York City in April 1994 with noted radio host and interviewer Len Belzer, this lively and provocative conversation delves into many important topics including: the mystery of consciousness, meditation, love, and what it means to dive into the unknown.

*The Thrill of the Unknown* captures Andrew Cohen's rare wisdom, passion and spontaneity, and gives the listener an insightful

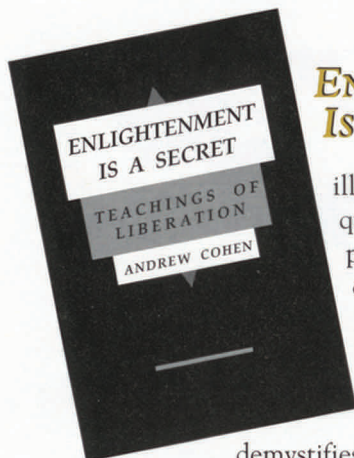
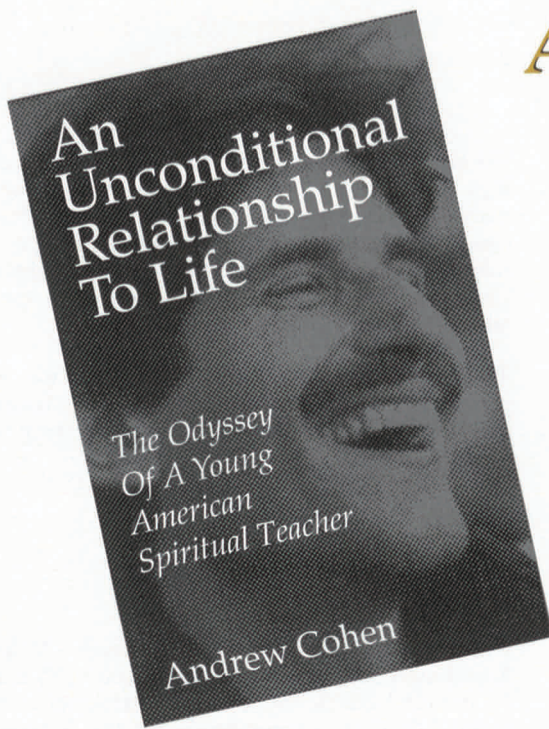
glimpse into a truly original expression of a timeless spiritual teaching.





# AN UNCONDITIONAL RELATIONSHIP TO LIFE

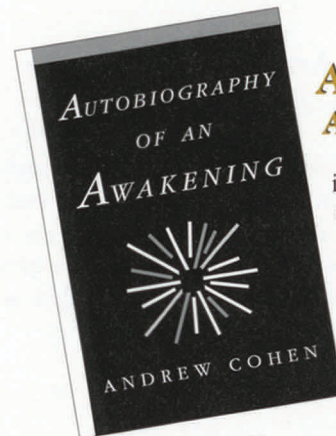
An Unconditional Relationship to Life, Andrew Cohen's fourth book, to be published in the spring of 1995, is a strikingly original and powerfully experiential journey through the modern spiritual world both East and West. Describing the evolution of his own understanding through his meetings with teachers from various traditions and through questioning many of the current spiritual paradigms, Andrew Cohen opens a door to a deeper understanding revealing what the goal of liberation actually is, unencumbered by the usual myths and superstitions which are so rampant in the spiritual world today. The author's bold call to think independently challenges the reader to look beyond that which may have become all too familiar, in a way that both inspires and liberates.



## ENLIGHTENMENT IS A SECRET

illuminates the deepest spiritual questions with the authority, power and poetry of a timeless classic. This extraordinary book is an indispensable source of inspiration and insight for the serious seeker of liberation because it both

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## AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF AN AWAKENING

is a portrayal of Andrew Cohen's uncompromising search for liberation, his profound awakening, and finally his painful struggle to come to terms with the discrepancy between his teacher's realization and his own. The

essence of his story is a captivating and provocative inquiry into the nature of enlightenment.

Booklets of Andrew Cohen's teachings are also available in French, German, Dutch, Italian, Hebrew, Spanish and Tibetan. (Please call for details.)

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Unconditional Relationship (will be shipped when available)	\$ 10.95	3.00ea	£ 7.95	1.00ea	<b>FOR FOREIGN PAYMENTS</b> please send an international money order in:  <b>USA</b> US Dollars (Videos in PAL* format cost \$33 including shipping.)  <b>UK</b> Pound Sterling (Eurocheques are also accepted)		
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