Enlightemment?

An inquiry into the most important spiritual questions of our time

ammachi
yogi amrit desai
master sheng-yen
otto kernberg
father dionysios
sheikh ragip frager
jack engler
taylor hackford

friend or foe...

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YOGI AMRIT DESAI

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Andrew Cohen



Andrew Cohen is not just a spiritual teacher—he is an inspiring phenomenon. Since his awakening in 1986 he has only lived, breathed and spoken of one thing: the potential for total liberation from the bondage of ignorance, superstition and selfishness. Powerless to limit his unceasing investigation, he has looked at the "jewel of enlightenment" from every angle and given birth to a teaching that is vast and subtle, yet incomparably direct and revolutionary in its impact.

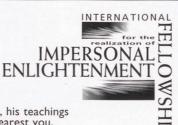
Through his public teachings, his books and his meetings with spiritual leaders of almost every tradition, he has tirelessly sought to convey his discovery that spiritual liberation's

true significance is its potential to completely transform not only the individual, but the entire way that human beings, as a race, live together. In sharp contrast to the cynicism that is so pervasive today, yet with full awareness of the difficult challenges that we face, he has dared to teach and to show that it is indeed possible to bring heaven to earth. This powerful message of unity, openness and love has inspired many who have heard it to join together to prove its reality with their own lives, igniting an ever expanding international revolution of tremendous vitality and significance.

Andrew travels extensively every year giving public talks and intensive retreats. Communities dedicated to living his teachings have formed throughout the world, with a network of centers in the United States, Europe, India and Australia, including an international center in the Berkshire mountains in western Massachusetts, where he now has his home.

As well as being the founder and guiding inspiration behind What Is Enlightenment?, Andrew Cohen is the author of several books, including Freedom Has No History, An Unconditional Relationship to Life, Enlightenment Is a Secret, Autobiography of an Awakening and the forthcoming Embracing Heaven and Earth.

he International Fellowship for the Realization of Impersonal Enlightenment is a nonprofit organization founded to support and facilitate the teaching work of Andrew Cohen. It is dedicated to the enlightenment of the individual and the expression of enlightenment in the world.



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Enlightenment?

"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 we publish this magazine 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, Founder

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The Dialogue Continues . . .



Issue 16, Fall/Winter 1999

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BRINGING IT DOWN

The new issue of WIE is indeed an interesting issue and beautifully done. I only wish that now there could be a conversation among all the people interviewed, to see what we learned from each other.

I do have one serious objection. It appears that one of the standard questions asked in many of the interviews was about traditions that divide clearly between men's and women's roles, the examples being tantra and Orthodox Judaism-where men devote themselves to "study and prayer" while women devote themselves to "home and children." This perpetuates the stereotype that women don't study or pray, which is the opposite of what both Esther Kosofsky and I were saying ["The Back of the Synagogue Is Not the Back of the Bus"]. More correct would be to say that in traditional Judaism men are responsible for the organization of public prayer and for studying and administering the legal aspects of Torah tradition. Women certainly study and women certainly also pray.

The main thing about gender roles in Judaism is not "getting there"—to liberation—but "bringing

it down"-bringing the message to other sentient beings. The liberation ultimately has to be a collective one. There have to be ways of transmitting this to the collective. So the question is: How do you create a structure that does that? If teaching people one-by-one worked, we would have had a world of liberated individuals long ago. It's not enough. So the traditional Jewish gender system is intended, I think, to help support strong family and community structures, in order to preserve and transmit the teachings to the next generation.

Tamar Frankiel Los Angeles, California

LIPSTICK AND ENLIGHTENMENT

Thank you for the wonderful interview with Jetsunma Ahkön Lhamo ["What's the Relationship between Emptiness and Beautiful Nails?"]. I was completely fascinated and inspired by her story and teaching style. I have experienced the same prejudices in regards to my appearance and gender within my own spiritual family. I was openly mocked and laughed at by my fellow students if I ever wore lipstick or

high heels, as if to say that this meant that I couldn't possibly be a serious seeker. In the beginning it hurt and confused me even though I knew that my teacher took me seriously. Eventually, as my spiritual life deepened, I knew that I truly cared about growing spiritually more than about anything else. If enlightenment were as simple as throwing away my lipstick, I would have done it a long time ago.

Thank God that I am not blind enough to think that a male teacher (or student) who wears a shirt and tie and is impeccable in his grooming and appearance could not possibly be the real thing. If that were the case, I never would have allowed the teachings of my own teacher into my life. Don't let good looks and charisma fool you! Any preconceived idea of how a real teacher or a real student should look and dress is only our own limitation staring us in the face and stopping our evolution. Anyone who has found "the jewel" and is willing to share it should be treated as the gift from God that they are even if they don't wear orange robes or shave their head.

> Birgit Chasin New York, New York

LION'S ROAR OF ENLIGHTENMENT

Thank you for your interview of Jetsunma Ahkon Lhamo. Jewish-Italian-American dakini, reincarnation of the founder of the Palyul sect of the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism, incarnation of Lhacham Mandarawa—after reading these outrageous credentials I could hardly wait to hear about her track record in the fifteen or so years she's been teaching and what she would reveal about "the relationship between emptiness and beautiful nails." Andrew Cohen didn't hold back in the interview and Jetsunma didn't flinch. She seems to be a teacher who walks her talk. This was a revelation to me because I'd written her off as a spiritual bimbo when I first heard of her discovery years ago while a member of Trungpa Rinpoche's Vajradhatu community in Boulder, Colorado. By the end of the interview I felt a lot of respect for her dignity.

Her poem "War Cry" was a brilliant addition to the piece. Here Jetsunma unleashes the ferocity of an irate mother protecting her young as well as the nurturing quality of a mother. The language she uses in "War Cry" is that of a woman yet the aspiration to do whatever it takes to achieve victory is beyond gender. The relationship between emptiness and beautiful nails is the lion's roar of enlightenment!

Loring Palmer Somerville, Massachusetts

MIND AND BEYOND MIND

Can we ever know if there actually is *difference* independent of and beyond thought? Perhaps differentiation is purely a function of mind, and difference the mind's creation. Do "men" and "women" exist from a perspective of no difference, beyond mind?

It seems to be a very deeply en-

trenched human condition to equate the representations of mind with what is totally independent of and beyond it. While it is often extremely useful, even necessary, to equate the two to live in the world, the usefulness of the equation in no way makes it true.

It is just as reasonable, possibly more so, to see mind/thought as a tool, which has evolved to be appropriate to, and useful in, the environment in which it finds itself, as to see it as a mirror image of that environment. This is saying nothing about what actually is and leaves what is wholly beyond mind, undescribed, and the mystery it surely is.

To say there actually is difference is saying exactly the opposite. So to ask what it is like to have no notions of self as a man or woman and yet still "be" a man or woman seems a little strange. How the absolute perspective of no difference and the realm of difference coincide can better be seen as the inquiry into what is the right equation of *mind* and *beyond mind*, always recognizing that equating the two is solely the movement of the former.

Andy Cushion Sheffield, United Kingdom

THE BABY WITH THE BATH WATER

Overall I am very favorably impressed with your new issue and its theme of gender and spirituality. I have read the interviews with Andrew Cohen, Sam Keen, and Jetsunma Ahkön Lhamo, whom I had never heard of before but hope to hear from a lot more in the future. I get the impression that Sam Keen is someone who was wounded as a child because he did not measure up to being a "real" man and who has spent much of the remaining decades of his life "proving" that the only difference between men and

women is the hardware. If I am reading his replies correctly, he is absolutely convinced that other than the hardware, 100% of what is male and female is culturally conditioned. To me this represents a classic case of throwing out the baby with the bath water.

Andrew Zahir Ruff Palo Alto, California

IN MY PAGAN OPINION

As aggravating as it was for me to read *WIE* Issue 16 on various gender liberation movements, I have to admit it stirred me up and made me think. As a long-time feminist, I was interested in the interviews with Marion Woodman ["Taming Patriarchy: The Emergence of the Black Goddess"], whose thoughts most mirror my own, and with Mary Daly ["No Man's Land"], whose out-there views are always ahead of the times and therefore stimulating.

But I was bothered by the illustrations in the Woodman article. The Black Goddess is not necessarily a goddess of African descent. It's the earth-related and lusty energy of woman that Woodman talks about, not literally of women of color. I found the photographs sensationalistic and inappropriate for what Woodman was saying. And what was that "Taming Patriarchy" title for the interview? It is time for the destructive beast, patriarchy, not to be tamed but to be euthanized.

I am really suspicious of enlightenment with transcendence as its goal. In my decidedly pagan opinion, this is the height of escapism. It's a great way to avoid taking any responsibility for the desecration of Mother Earth. Also, to ask that we deny the body's pleasures is another way of denigrating woman, who is so often equated with matter and "the flesh." We were born into these wonderful bodies. Let's enjoy them for heaven's sake! To

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me, true enlightenment is wholeness—the joy and delight of spirit, mind and body together, a delicious state in which we, as beingsin-balance, can still participate as spiritual warriors and political activists while living on this beautiful, but endangered, planet.

> Rev. Kay Gardner Temple of the Feminine Divine Bangor, Maine

JUST MORE TRIBAL WARFARE

Underneath the useful points she raises, the essence of Mary Daly's view toward men strikes me as no different from totalitarianism. With Daly, women are, by their nature, the much superior race. Men are not merely inferior; they are the source and the embodiment of all evil in the world. (Whew!) They therefore deserve to be, if not exactly eradicated (her secret preference, one suspects), then certainly rendered powerless and out of the picture.

The logical extension of views like this, if driven by real political power, is policies and social trends that would make your average patriarchy look like a walk in the park. This is not enlightenment, spiritual connectedness, or healthy outrage over real grievances. This is a philosophy of hatred, elitism, racism and totalitarianism. And it's old hat, really. It's just more tribal warfare. Daly's views may seem like a great idea right now to some women. But at their essence they are running counter to the slow trend of history toward respect for all races and both genders. The lasting value of Daly's work, whatever it may be, will not lie in her ultimate vision of life on this planet.

> Lawrence Noves Walnut Creek, California

METAPHYSICS 101

Silly, silly, silly! Mary Daly is one angry womyn

but to me, it's she who just doesn't "get it." With all due respect to the deep wisdom she has accrued from her journey through this life as a female, she is still very obviously identifying with her physical role. In truth, she would have to elevate her viewpoint outside of "time" (a mere construct of the physical world) before she could see her real nature.

The soul's real nature is androgynous, neither male nor female, and in successive lifetimes it clothes itself in gendered physicality in order to grow into love, into compassion, into wisdom. This is "Metaphysics 101." Instead of seeing the world through a lens called female (or male, for that matter), how much better to see it through the lens called tat twam asi ("I am that, too"). There's where compassion lies.

> Judi Thomases Garnerville, New York

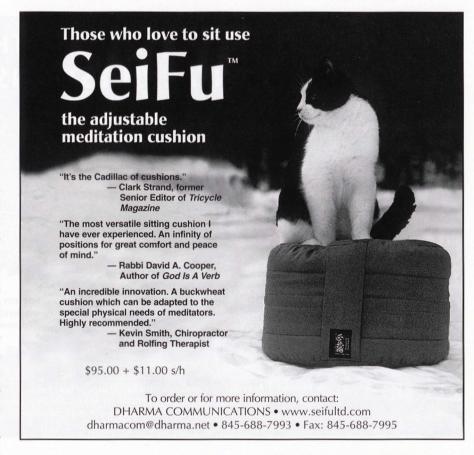
LAUGHING UP HIS SLEEVE

Having read your interview with Swami Bharati Tirtha ["No Difference!"], I consider it bizarre that your magazine would go to any hardcore keeper of a tradition, particularly one as hoary as institutionalized Vedanta, to provoke any response on gender that might be somehow relevant to the name of your magazine.

Perhaps there is a misunderstanding that the Shankaracharya of Sringeri bears no resemblance to the Pope simply because he is a Vedantic scholar. Would you have bothered asking the Pope or the Dalai Lama when a female is likely to be tapped for their jobs? Whatever else titular heads of religions are, they are not freewheelers. Bharati Tirtha is a very sharp and extremely learned individual. He obviously was laughing up his sleeve as to the cluelessness of Westerners regarding what his office, tradition and the Vedantic

texts are about. Throughout the interview Tirtha seemed disinterested in the premise of the guestions asked and was intentionally evasive. He is an "employee" in the service of the Brahmins-selfappointed keepers of the faith who for eons have co-opted and masculinized every variety of institutionalized Hinduism, most certainly including institutionalized Vedanta. It was the response of a corporate spokesperson for him to have said that your question— Could there ever be a female Shankaracharya?—was impossible to answer simply because it was "hypothetical." Better for him to have responded frankly: There will never be a female head of this bastion of Brahmin orthodoxy. It is not open at any level to political correctness or change, regardless of how incomprehensibly rigid that may seem to most Westerners. The female ban follows the letter and spirit of the tradition, as the Shankaracharyas must.

Regarding the texts you featured with demeaning references to women, these were not excerpted from what Christians might call scripture or "revealed Word." Several were characters speaking in stories. So why bother with them? Hindu scripture is ranked. Texts like some of the Samhitas, Devi Bhagavata and Stridharmapaddhati from which you quoted are post-Vedic augmentations, riddled with sociological agendas, many of which were aimed at solidifying control of the "twice-born" priestly caste. Though the Samhitas are part of the "revealed" (shruti) literature, the Manu Samhita that you have quoted is actually a "remembered" (smriti) text, which does not enjoy the same authority as the other Samhitas. Actually, the Manu Samhita deals particularly with the





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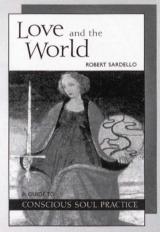
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rules of conduct. This text is regarded by Brahmins as the most important in Hinduism next to the Vedic literature, an evaluation based, no doubt, on the high position assigned to Brahmins in it.

This entire article reflected a tendency in the West to try to understand all things in American terms or, failing that, to Americanize what cannot be understood. The complexity of Hindu traditions resists this cultural bulldozing and political correctness, although attempts have been made and are being made to reinterpret them. A tradition has to be accepted or rejected on the basis of its original contribution and not on the basis of whether it is adaptable to suit the obsessive, indiscriminate preoccupation with universal political correctness prevailing in the U.S. today.

All this begs the question, what has the level of your discussions of gender among traditionalists got to do with a publication with your name? To be provocative and contemporary without becoming frivolous and sensational should be easier by asking yourselves "What is wisdom?" at least as often as "What is enlightenment?"

Mohan Nair Warner Springs, California

INTO THE UNKNOWN

Congratulations on a stunning issue of WIE. I am blown away by the directions in which you have gone in this issue. A few weeks ago the three men who attend a weekly meditation group that I'm a part of read Elizabeth Debold's interview with Andrew Cohen, "Liberation without a Face." Afterwards, we had a beautiful discussion about what it means to be a man, in which we entered into the unknown together, meeting in a place where we had to admit that we don't know what being a man is. It was the deepest we

have ever gone together in a discussion. Beautiful work.

Jeff Feldman Toronto, Canada

FLUIDITY OF GENDER

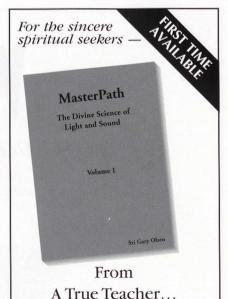
I am responding to the provocative ideas (as usual) set forth in your last issue.

The outing and wider acceptance of gay sexuality is a necessary step in the development of a broader conception of our humanity. The prevalence of androgynous attire and the collapse of sexist barriers in occupations attest to a growing awareness of the restrictions of roleplaying in a cultural script that presumes to define masculinity and femininity. Overidentification with gender is exemplified by the current craze for breast augmentation, though we are not so far away from an era in which women bound their breasts in another image of beauty.

The ancient Greeks seem to have recognized the fluidity of gender and sexual boundaries. It was considered manly for men to lust after boys, then become husbands of women. In Cos husbands dressed as women to bed their brides, while in Sparta brides greeted their husbands with hair trimmed like boys'. It was said that in Sparta the cleverest women loved girls. In Crete, same-sex love was encouraged to avoid overpopulation. Argos celebrated a festival where men donned women's clothes and women dressed like men.

Today, men and women who grew up feeling marginalized by the rigid role ascribed to their gender no longer need to think of themselves as other-sexed. It is ironic for women who love women, for example, to assume the appearance and manner of the male, whom she rejects. The gay male need not take on the mannerisms of a female caricature. What does it mean to feel "like a woman"

continued on page 180



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Original Teachings of the Saints

friend or foe...

from the editors

by andrew cohen

from the editors

"Stay with the fear!" one Orthodox Christian elder told us last autumn in no uncertain terms. "That's what the archangel Michael told the other angels who, in the aftermath of the betrayal and rebellion of God's closest angel Lucifer, were wavering, doubting their commitment to God and feeling the pull of the seductive certainty that Lucifer was offering from his new abode in hell. He was tempting them with the end of all doubt, division and struggle, and offering them the chance to 'reign in hell rather than serve in heaven.' 'Stay with the fear!' Michael told them. 'Because on one side of that fear is the face of ego, but on the other side is the face of God."

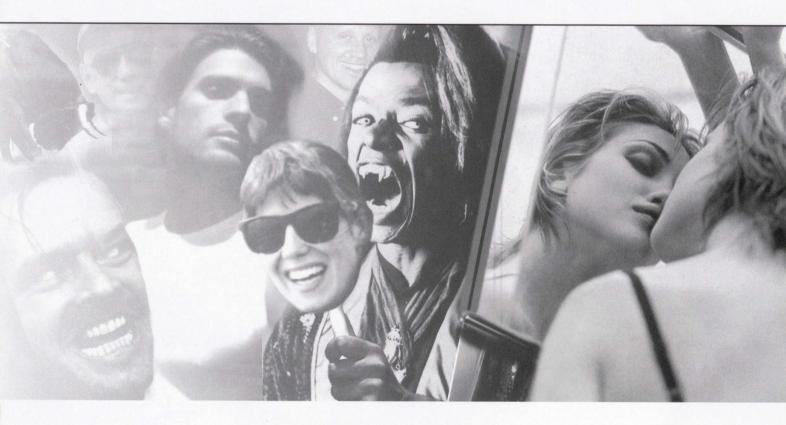
A little over a year ago, long before we had decided on a subject for this issue of WIE, our editorial staff sat with twenty-five members of our spiritual community in front of a big-screen television watching an unusual movie recommended to us by our spiritual teacher. The film, titled Fallen, starred Denzel Washington as a police officer on the trail of a literal demon, a fallen angel who could at will take possession of the human soul merely by touching his victim. In one memorable and eerie scene, the demon, named Azazel, taunts Denzel Washington as his character stands on an urban street corner. A cold ripple moves through the crowd around him as, horrified, he watches this invisible demon move from one person to another . . . and then to another . . . and another. The frightening mark of this demonic possession is written across each successive face as an ordinary human expression gives way to a proud, malicious grin, the chilling smile of one who has laughed in the face of God, no longer respects any authority but their own and cares for no one but themselves. As the credits rolled on this intriguing movie, the room was abuzz with talk, because despite the fantastical plot of this paranormal police story, this villain was not one with whom anyone in that room was unfamiliar. At times, in the midst of the intensity of our collective spiritual life and practice, we had seen that same disturbing smile flash briefly across one another's faces. As a group, we even had a name for it: We called it the smile of the ego.

When we first had the idea to pursue the topic "What is ego?" for this issue of WIE, we immediately had some reservations. "Will it be too heavy?" a few of us wondered about an issue solely dedicated to exploring the nature of spiritual life's perennial enemy. And how, we asked ourselves, could we ever communicate the joy and liberation we had found in facing the elusive demon of ego, in doing battle with that impersonal force within that seeks to thwart our highest spiritual aspirations? But that initial trepidation soon gave way to fascination as we began to explore the multidimensional nature of this all-important subject that has perplexed religious thinkers for millennia and captivated every branch of psychology for the last century.

Indeed, what really is the ego? It is a question that goes right to the very core of who and what we are. The great enlightenment traditions have long spoken about the "enemy within" and about uprooting the need to cling to a false and separate sense of self. Their teachings encourage us to tame, transcend, purify—or in some cases slay—this pernicious foe of the spiritual heart. The Sufis talk about the temptations of Eblis, the great Satan, whose role it is to test us, and insist that we must do battle with the *nafs ammara*, or "tyrannical ego"; the Buddhists talk about narcissism, about the thousand and one forms of self-grasping, and encourage us to subdue the deep-seated vexations of the mind. In Judaism it is *yetzer harah*, our evil inclinations; in Vedanta, the "deadly serpent"; in Christianity, the mortal sin of pride.

But the psychologists define the word "ego" very differently. They identify it as the crucial self-organizing principle of the human personality, the command center of the psyche without which we could not function. According to Freud, the ego is the agile rider of the two horses of instinct and conscience, negotiating the competing demands of both inner and outer forces. Not only is the ego essential to human development, but as the controller of the fierce passions and aggressions of the primordial id or unconscious, it is responsible for creating and sustaining the very civilization on which all of our lives depend.

What is the spiritual seeker to make of these two



seemingly contradictory definitions? Are they even referring to the same thing? With these questions in mind, we set out to discover everything we could about this well-documented yet enigmatic entity that seems to play such a pivotal role in all of our lives. We approached spiritual teachers from almost every major enlightenment tradition, talked to more psychologists than we could shake a Rorschach at (many of whom didn't make it into the final issue), spoke with numerous transpersonal theorists—the grand integrators of psychology and spirituality—and even interviewed a Hollywood director to gain perspective and insight on this powerful player in the human drama.

And as we saw this elusive phantom of the human psyche reflected in the multifaceted prism of modern and ancient thought, we wondered again and again: Is the ego the enemy within? Or is it the command center of the psyche? Or is it some mysterious combination of both? The therapists tell us to develop the self; the Buddhists say there is no self. The psychologists explain how the ego is created; the religions explain how the ego is transcended. And the transpersonal psychologists agree in some way with everyone and include it all in their theories of everything.

As we explored the wildly contrasting terrains marked by these two very different paradigms—from ego development to ego annihilation, from the wounded

egos of modern therapy to the wounded pride of Satan, from the inner children of the New Age to the inner demons of an older age, from self-help therapies to radical exorcisms, from the ego defense mechanisms to the seven deadly sins, from being somebody to being nobody at all, from Freud to the Buddha and back again—one thing became extraordinarily clear: that the way in which we understand and relate to the ego has everything to do with the way in which we understand and relate to all of life—including spiritual enlightenment.

Is it all just a matter of definitions? An issue of semantics? A play of words? At first glance it may seem so, but as we learned in the interviews that make up this issue, the currents of these questions run far deeper than that. When we take up the challenge of enlightenment and dare to aspire to be a liberated human being, nothing could be more important than knowing exactly what we're up against. And yet, never has that question been more complex and confusing, and never has there been more disagreement as to what the most accurate answers actually are. Still, it is how we relate to the ego that colors and informs every choice we make on the spiritual path—what to accept, what to reject, when to move forward and when to step back. And it is those choices, made within every human heart, that will ultimately determine the results of our spiritual efforts.



INTRODUCTION

TO THIS ISSUE BY ANDREW COHEN

WHAT IS EGO ?

A Report from the Trenches . . .

In the end it really is black-and-white. But of course it all depends upon the sincerity of our interest in genuine and truly radical transformation. That's why there is so much confusion about the theme of this issue of *What Is Enlightenment?* Because our ability to recognize the true face of the ego, to see it for what it actually is, depends entirely upon how far we want to go on the spiritual path.

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A simple psychological definition of the ego is something like the "self-organizing principle," that allimportant command center in the psyche that coordinates the different aspects of the self. And that command center must be in good working order for a human being to be able to function in the world with any reasonable degree of competency. The ego as self-organizing principle is neither positive nor negative; its function is mechanistic, and in that, it has no self nature. But there is another definition of ego—the one that inspired the investigation upon which this issue of WIE is based—and the ego in that definition has self nature. The human face of that ego is pride; is arrogant selfimportance; is narcissistic self-infatuation; is the need to see oneself as being separate at all times, in all places, through all circumstances—and that ego is the unrelenting enemy of all that is truly wholesome in the human experience. When this ego is unmasked, seen directly for what it is, finally unobscured by the other expressions of the personality, one finds oneself literally face-to-face with a demon-a demon that thrives on power, domination, control and separation, that cares only about itself and is willing to destroy anything and everything that is good and true in order to survive intact and always in control. This demon lacks any capacity for empathy, compassion, generosity or love; delights in its perfect invulnerability; and, worst of all, will never ever acknowledge that which is sacred.

But I knew none of this when I began teaching the path to liberation fourteen years ago. At that time, I had no idea of the magnitude of the battle I had taken on by daring to lead others to the yonder shore. In those days I thought spiritual experience, tasting the miraculous and unlimited depth of the Self beyond time and mind, would instill enough reverence and awe in the seeker to empower them to face whatever needed to be faced and bear whatever needed to be borne in order to be free. But oh how wrong I was! I didn't realize then that for most seekers, enlightenment experiences were not the end of the path but only the beginning. It's true that without that depth of spiritual experience, it is very difficult for a seeker to take the possibility of their own liberation seriously—but even when one has experienced that depth of Self, when push comes to shove, when our back is against the wall, when like Jesus or the Buddha we must face directly into the darkest regions of the human soul, how many among us

will have such love for the truth alone that we will courageously remain unmoved and immovable?

I can't tell you how many times I have witnessed the shocking and often frightening transformation of a human personality when faced squarely with the truth of its own division, hypocrisy and deceit: in an instant, a warm, intelligent, sensitive, apparently caring personality can change, becoming the face of pure ego, glaring with narcissistic rage because it has been exposed. It is because of many experiences like this that I have spent countless hours thinking about the questions: What is the personality? Who is the individual? It seems that in the end it really is black-and-white, simply because who we are depends upon where our allegiance lies. Is it with the narcissistic ego? Or is it with the spiritual heart? Of course, we can only really find out the answer to that question when we are tested because otherwise it's inevitable that the truth of our own condition will remain obscured, masked by self-concepts that are based on the ego's need to always see itself in a positive light—even if it sees itself as a victim.

Who we are and how we perceive our own experience and the world around us depend upon where our allegiance lies. The perspective of the individual who has surrendered the will of their own ego to their spiritual heart is drastically different from the perspective of one who has not. But it is important to understand that because the ego can usurp any calling of the human soul in order to remain in control—even the longing for liberation—it's usually impossible to tell exactly who it is who is claiming they want to be free until that moment when their faith and love for truth alone are put to the test. It is only then that we can actually find out who we really are and what part of our self is pulling the strings of our own destiny.

To walk the spiritual path in earnest is to find out what we're made of and how much we are truly willing to give up in order to come to the end of division within ourselves. The price for that kind of profound and deeply liberating simplicity is too high for most, because that price is ego death. What does that mean? That means endeavoring with all our being to purify ourselves from any and every attachment, gross and subtle, to the narcissistic ego, that demon of false individuality that masquerades as our own self and whose task it is to keep us, at all costs, separate from our own heart.

a warm, intelligent, sensitive, apparently caring personality can change, becoming the face of pure ego, glaring with narcissistic rage because it has been exposed.

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the spiritual perspective:

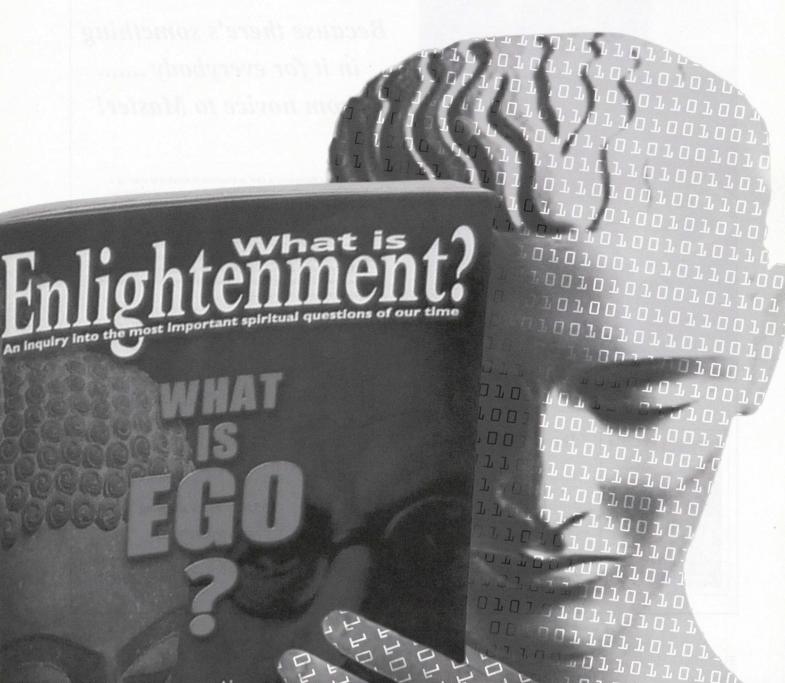
the enemy within



THE EBUR

the psychological perspective:

the self-organizing principle



the spiritual masters

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An interview with

Mata Amritanandamayi
by Amy Edelstein

become
an offering to
the world

A tiny dark-skinned woman draped in a white sari beams as she totters down the aisle of loving devotees. Their outstretched hands are like feather plumes, waving, reaching to brush her as she leaves the crowded hall. Her face is placid, strong and fully alert, as it has been unwaveringly for the last five hours, but her exhausted body can hardly balance; it seems that she may even topple over in a faint before she reaches the waiting car outside. The right shoulder of her sari is stained dark from the sweat and tears of a thousand cheeks that have found succor there. Mata Amritanandamayi has, since early this morning, without pause for food or even a sip of water, literally held one thousand people to her bosom, listened to their troubles and their deepest spiritual longings, showered them with flower petals, pressed sweet prasad [consecrated offerings] into their palms, blessed their photos, malas [prayer beads] and children; and one after the other, each and every supplicant has received the same undivided cosmic love from Ammachi, the Holy Mother.



INTRODUCTION

continued

Young and old, married and single, male and female, wealthy, impoverished, beautiful, crippled, suspicious, crazy and sincere—all are welcomed without exception. And as she embraces each one, chanting softly "Ma, Ma, Ma, Ma" in each person's ear, the transmission of compassion coming from her is one steady stream that never ebbs, never wavers, and her shining face never registers even the slightest trace of preference or fear regardless of who kneels before her.

They say that Ammachi is an avatar, an incarnation of the Divine on earth. They say that her ego has been completely destroyed, that all vestiges of identification with a separate sense of self have been annihilated. They say when she looks out, she sees only one Self in everyone.

So from one who is said to have crossed over, what can we learn about the right relationship to ego? If her eyes see only God, does the ego even exist, in her view? What is this mahatma's [great soul's] message to true seekers of moksha [liberation] when it comes to the most fundamental and ultimately challenging battle of spiritual life? How does her apparently infinite love manifest when it meets the enemy of her disciples, the ego?



when you
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Mata Amritanandamayi's guidance for the seeker of liberation is simple and absolute: Serve God and surrender the ego and all its desires. She says, as many of the most revered saints and sages throughout history have also proclaimed, "Contentment ensues from egolessness. And egolessness comes from devotion, love and utter surrender to the Supreme Lord."

Ammachi's public teachings take place at traditional gatherings that are called "Devi Bhava" [literally "mood of the Goddess'] and "darshan" [audience with a gurul, where she hugs and blesses all who come to see her. Almost a quarter of a million people seek her out every year, and she receives each and every one of them, giving them love and helping them with both spiritual and mundane concerns. She cannot turn anyone away, for to the Divine Mother, all are equal in their need for love. "During the Bhava," she explains, "different kinds of people come to see me, some out of devotion, others for a solution to their worldly problems and others for relief from diseases. I discard none. Can I reject them? Are they different from me? Are we not all beads strung on the one life thread? According to each one's level of

thinking, they see me. Both those who love me and those who hate me are the same to me."

Ammachi is indefatigable, or at least physical fatigue seems to weigh little on her. Her meditation on the divine current appears to drown out all bodily consciousness. Even after traveling all the way from India to Europe, or sleeping for only an hour the night before, Ammachi arrives precisely on time to give darshan. She answers spiritual questions, distributes bhasma [sacred healing ash] to the sick, and not until five or six hours and seven, eight or nine hundred souls later, when the very last person has been received, will she get up for food and a short rest before returning only a few hours later, again precisely on time, to chant, meditate and receive the thousand or so more spiritual pilgrims who have come for her blessing hug.

Often referring to herself in the third person, Ammachi describes the passion that animates her: "Each and every drop of Mother's blood, each and every particle of her energy is for her children [devotees].... The purpose of this body and of Mother's whole life is to serve her children. Mother's only wish is that her hands

should always be on someone's shoulders, consoling and caressing them and wiping their tears, even while breathing her last." Selfless service, Ammachi teaches, is the whole of her life and is the path she prescribes for spiritual seekers who are committed to transcending the ego, to destroying the separate sense of self.

By all accounts the hardest worker at her ashram in Idamannel. in southern India, Ammachi is a living example of her teaching. She can be found carrying bricks to building sites, tending cows or cleaning toilets in addition to meeting with her brahmacharis and brahamacharinis [male and female celibate students] and seeing to all ashram affairs. Her disciples tell stories of how, even after a long day of receiving visitors, Ammachi will cook for them and feed them like little children, with her own hand. She also fulfills a world travel and teaching schedule that keeps all of her closest

INTRODUCTION

continued

devotees on the brink of exhaustion and has inspired numerous charitable works—ambitious projects that have tangibly uplifted thousands of people's lives, including a brand-new, state-of-the-art \$55 million, 800-bed heart transplant hospital, an orphanage for 600 children, 5,000 free houses for the poor and one of the finest computer colleges in her native state of Kerala.

Ammachi's compassion seems virtually limitless. She is so intoxicated with God that she seems to have burned out every trace of personal desire, and many the world over revere her as the very embodiment of unconditional love. And yet, Mata Amritanandamayi, the "Mother of Immortal Bliss," has a wrathful face as well. As unconditionally accepting as she is of those who initially come to see her, for those who have chosen to live their lives under her tutelage as her disciples, she is known to be an equally demanding and exacting spiritual teacher. Her discipline can be fierce; to come close to Ammachi, her students say, is to come close to the fire.

In Ammachi's teachings, the role of the guru is to "break the ego of the disciple" so that "they can know reality." She warns them of the dangers of the ego, saying: "Blindness of the eyes is bearable and can be managed. . . . You can still have a loving and compassionate heart. But when you are blinded by the ego, you are completely blind. . . . The blindness carried by the ego pushes you into complete darkness."

Ammachi believes that the path to liberation is a path of humility and obedience, and that it is only by bowing down to the guru that the disciple can keep his or her ego in check. Long-term students readily tell stories of hardships and tests, of the "ego bashing" and "ego rebellion" that they experience at the feet of their beloved guru. They speak frequently and respectfully of the tough schedules, physical discomfort and strict discipline that have tested them more than a little. "It is not always easy being with Mother," they say, "but she helps to speed up our karma."

One Western student of thirteen years described some of the many ways Ammachi challenges her disciples and explained how in her own case Ammachi has separated her from her husband for long periods of time to help further their sadhana [spiritual practice] and "put pressure on their egos." Ammachi's ordained students observe strict celibacy, and residents of her ashram practice eight hours of meditation a day in addition to their karma yoga [selfless service]. Her disciples sleep little, often only four hours a night, and not infrequently just one or two. "It keeps us on the edge all the time and teaches us surrender," one devotee said. "If you want for yourself, you end up frustrated and angry, so you learn to let go."

When once asked by a visitor whether hard work, like carrying bricks, doesn't unfairly tax the brahmacharis, Ammachi without hesitation explained why she will sometimes call her students to labor even late at night after they have gone to sleep: "Amma wants to see how many of them have the spirit of selflessness, or whether they are just living for bodily comforts. On such occasions we can see if their

meditation is doing them any good. We have to develop the readiness to help when others are struggling. Otherwise, what is the point of doing tapas [austerities]?"

Ammachi knows well the weaknesses of human nature. Often when her disciples are proud or stubborn and do not heed her guidance, she will fast, refusing both food and water. Knowing that their beloved guru is going hungry on their behalf is the worst punishment they could be given, her brahmacharis confess. "The true guru will not allow an iota of ego to grow [in a disciple]," Ammachi says. "To check the growth of pride, the guru may act in a very cruel manner. . . . People who see the blacksmith forging a hot piece of iron with his hammer may think that he is a cruel person. The iron piece may also think that nowhere can there be such a brute. But while dealing each blow, the blacksmith is only thinking of the end product. The real guru is also like this."

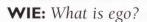
For some observers. Ammachi's standards for her disciples seem harsh and disconcertingly contrary to the unconditional love she expresses in her all-embracing role as the Divine Mother. And in a time when the notion of unconditional love is held so dear in the minds of many Western seekers, Mother's two opposing bhavas [moods] challenge some deeply rooted beliefs. So what is compassion in the face of the ego? What is the right relationship to this perennial enemy of the seeker after enlightenment? In Paris, for two and a half hours in the middle of Ammachi's darshan, I had the rare privilege of interviewing this extraordinary woman for this issue of WIF.

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—from Awaken, Children!



MATA AMRITANANDAMAYI:

You are actually asking, what is unreality? But how can unreality be described? What use is there in talking about something that isn't real, that is nonexistent? And how can you speak about that which is real? Amma can only give you a few hints. The mind is the ego. But the ego is a big lie—it is a liar. It is unreal.

There was a cowherd boy who took his cows to the meadows every morning and brought them back to the cowshed at the end of the day. One evening, as he was tying the cows up for the night, the boy found that one of them was missing her rope. He feared that she might run away, but it was too late to go and buy a new rope. The boy didn't know what to do, so he

went to a wise man who lived nearby and sought his advice. The wise man told the boy to pretend to tie the cow, and make sure that the cow saw him doing it. The boy did as the wise man suggested and pretended to tie the cow. The next morning the boy discovered that the cow had remained still throughout the night. He untied all the cows as usual, and they all went outside. He was about to go to the meadows when he noticed that the cow with the missing rope was still in the cowshed. She was standing on the same spot where she had been all night. He tried to coax her to join the herd, but she wouldn't budge. The boy was perplexed. He went back to the wise man who said, "The cow still thinks she is

tied up. Go back and pretend to untie her." The boy did as he was told, and the cow happily left the cowshed. This is what the guru does with the ego of the disciple. The guru helps untie that which was never there. Like the cow, due to our ignorance, we believe that we are bound by the ego when, in fact, we are completely free. We need to be convinced of this, however.

The ego is an illusion with no existence of its own. It appears to be real because of the power it derives from the *Atman* [Self]. It is animated by the *Atman*. The ego itself can be compared to dead matter; for without the *Atman*, it would have no life. Stop supporting the ego, and it will withdraw and disappear. We ourselves lend the

unreal ego its reality. Expose it for what it is, or rather, for what it isn't, and that will be the end of it.

A dog wags its tail—the tail does not wag the dog. If the tail were to wag the dog, it would be disastrous! The same is true with the mind. The mind, or the ego, should be nothing more than a useful tool; a *sadhaka* [spiritual seeker] shouldn't let him- or herself be ruled by the whims and fancies of the mind.

The ego consists of our thoughts and our mind. Our thoughts are our own creation. We make them real by cooperating with them. If we withdraw our support, they will dissolve. We simply have to observe our thoughts. The clouds in the sky assume different shapes, and they change constantly. You may see clouds drifting by that look like faces of the gods or different animals or sailing ships. A small child may believe that these shapes are real, but, of course, they are only illusions. In the same way, our ever changing thoughts drift through the mind, which is the ego. They assume different forms, but they are no more real than the shape of a cloud in the sky. If we simply witness our thoughts as they drift by, they will no longer have any effect on us or influence us in any way.

A lion made of sandalwood is real to a child, but to a grown-up it's a piece of sandalwood. For the child, the wood is concealed, revealing only the lion. The grown-up may also enjoy the lion, but he knows it is not real. For him, the wood is real, not the lion. In the same way, to a Self-realized soul, the entire universe is nothing but the essence, the "wood" that comprises everything, the Absolute *Brahman* or Consciousness.

WIE: What is ego death for the true seeker of moksha [liberation]?

MA: If the ego is unreal, what death are you talking about? We superimpose the unreal on the real. What really exists is *Brahman*. There is no discovery, only uncovering.

WIE: What are the signs of true ego transcendence?

MA: One who has gone beyond the ego becomes an offering to the world, like an incense stick that burns itself out while bestowing its fragrance to others. For such a person there is no sense of otherness. It is difficult to say what a clear sign would be. People pretend or they imitate this and that quality—but for a real master, one who truly doesn't identify with the ego, his or her entire being, and every action, is a pure expression of divine love and self-sacrifice. Divine love and self-sacrifice cannot be imitated.

WIE: Is it possible for a master to completely annihilate their ego?

MA: A mahatma [great soul] is one who disidentifies with the ego; they see everything as an extension of the Self. Due to our ignorance, we identify with the ego, with that which is not real, but a mahatma is not identified at all with the ego, with that which is unreal.

WIE: How does the guru help to annihilate the ego of the disciple?

MA: A true master creates the situations that will allow the seeker to come out of his or her dream. The disciple wants to continue to sleep and to dream, but the master wants to awaken him or her. The whole

effort of the master is to somehow bring the disciple back to the reality of his or her true existence.

WIE: It is said that the ego will go to any length to maintain its grip on the individual, even masquerading as our own spiritual longing. What are the most important qualities for success in the fight against the endless tricks of the ego?

MA: Performing one's own dharma with utmost *shraddha*. *Shraddha* is very important at the beginning stage on the spiritual path; it is absolutely essential.

WIE: What is shraddha? Is it faith in the possibility of transcending the ego in this life?

MA: Shraddha is more than just faith. It is trust and love. Both trust and love are necessary to transcend the ego—trust in the existence of a higher reality, love for that reality and an intense longing to realize it.

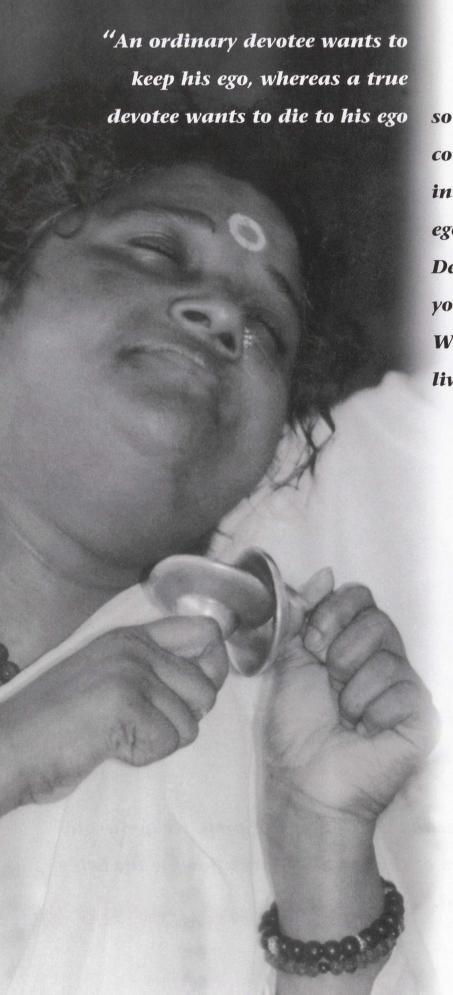
WIE: What is the best way to cultivate discrimination in the face of all the temptations of the ego?

MA: Just as a little boy grows out of his teddy bear and other toys, a true seeker gains the power to discriminate between the eternal and noneternal as his understanding grows and as he advances along the path. The power of discrimination dawns within us as we gain proper understanding and as we mature. As we learn how to evaluate life's experiences in the proper manner, we automatically begin to use our discriminative intelligence. It is an inner blossoming that takes place like a bud opening up. It is part of a slow but steady process.



"If you wish to know
God, you have to
eliminate the ego by
taking refuge in a
guru and by obeying
the guru with
humility and
surrender. When

we lower our heads in front of the guru, we are avoiding the dangers of the ego and thus allowing the Self to be awakened."



so that he can live in consciousness or in pure, innocent love. Dying to the ego makes you immortal. Death of the ego leads you to deathlessness.

When the ego dies, you live eternally in bliss."

—from Awaken, Children!

There is a divine message hidden behind every experience life brings you—both the positive and negative experiences. Just penetrate beneath the surface and you will receive the message. Nothing comes from outside; everything is within you. The whole universe is within you.

There will be many temptations and challenges along the way. Only an experienced person can help you. The way to *moksha* is very subtle, and it is easy for a spiritual aspirant to become deluded.

WIE: What is the role of the spiritual master in guiding the seeker on the path to moksha or liberation?

MA: If you want to learn how to drive, you need to be taught by an experienced driver. A child needs to be taught how to tie his shoelaces. And how can you learn mathematics without a teacher? Even a pickpocket needs a teacher to teach

him the art of stealing. If teachers are indispensable in ordinary life, wouldn't we need a teacher even more on the spiritual path, which is so extremely subtle?

Though that subtle knowledge is our true nature, we have been identified with the world of names and forms for so long, thinking them to be real. We now need to cease that identification. But in reality, there is nothing to teach. A master simply helps you to complete the journey.

If you want to go to a distant place, you may want to buy a map. But no matter how well you study the map, if you are heading toward a totally strange land, an unknown place, you won't know anything about that place until you actually arrive. Nor will the map tell you much about the journey itself, about the ups and downs of the road and the possible dangers on the way. It is therefore better to receive guidance from someone who has completed the journey, someone who knows the way from his or her own experience.

On the spiritual journey, we have to really listen to and then contemplate what the master says. We have to be humble in order to receive. When we really listen and then sincerely contemplate, we will assimilate the teachings properly.

WIE: Why is submission to a guru said to be so important in helping the disciple transcend the ego?

MA: The seat of the ego is the mind. Any other obstacle can be removed by using the mind except the ego, because the ego is subtler than the mind. It is only through obedience to the one who is established in that supreme experience that one can conquer the ego.

WIE: You didn't have an external

guru, yet you completely transcended your ego. It seems you depended on the formless as your guru to take you all the way.

MA: Yes, you could say that. But Amma considered the whole of creation to be her guru.

WIE: Is perfect obedience to the guru ultimately the same as ego death?

MA: Yes. That is why the *satguru* [realized spiritual master] is depicted in the Kathopanishad as Yama, the lord of death. The death of the disciple's ego can take place only with the help of a *satguru*.

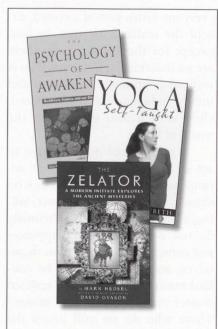
Obedience isn't something that can be forced on the disciple. The disciple is tremendously inspired by the master, who is an embodiment of humility. Obedience and humility simply happen in a true master's presence.

WIE: It takes rare courage to face ego death.

MA: Yes, very few can do it. If you have the courage and determination to knock at the door of death, you will find that there is no death. For even death, or the death of the ego, is an illusion.

WIE: There have been some very powerful spiritual teachers who seem to have been driven by the impure motives of the ego. Do you think that spiritual experiences could at times empower the ego rather than destroy it?

MA: Amma doesn't agree that those teachers to whom you are referring are realized. A Self-realized master is completely independent. Such beings don't have to depend on anything external for their happiness because they are full of bliss, which they derive from within their own *Atman*. Amma would say that



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True spiritual masters have to set an example through their actions and their lives. Those who abuse their position and power, taking advantage of others, obviously do not derive all their happiness and contentment from within themselves, and so they cannot be realized masters. Why would a realized master crave adulation or power? Those who do are still under the grip of the ego. They may claim to be realized, but they are not. A perfect master doesn't claim anything. He simply is—he is *presence*.

Until the moment before realization takes place, a person is not

safe from the temptations of his or her desires.

WIE: So would you say that people like this have become more proud as a result of having had spiritual experiences? Can spiritual experiences at times strengthen the ego in a negative way?

MA: The people to whom this happens are deluded, and they confuse others as well. They will actually push others into delusion. Some people gain a glimpse of something, or have a spiritual experience, and then think they have attained *moksha*. Only someone who is not realized will think, "I am spiritual, I am realized," and this will create a strong, subtle ego. A subtle ego is more dangerous than a gross ego. Even the individuals themselves won't understand that the subtle ego is leading or motivat-

ing them, and this subtle ego will become part of their nature. Such people will do anything for name and fame.

Amma also feels that this kind of pride makes people lose their capacity to listen. And listening is extremely important on the spiritual path. A person who does not listen cannot be humble. And it is only when we are truly humble that the already existing pure Consciousness will be unfolded within us. Only one who is humbler than the humblest can be considered greater than the greatest.

WIE: Since it is possible for spiritual experiences to feed the ego, is it necessary to cultivate purity first?

MA: There is no need to get obsessed with purity. Focus on your dharma, performing it with the right attitude and with love. Then purity will follow.

WIE: What is dharma, in the way you are using it?

MA: Dharma is the right action in the right place at the right time.

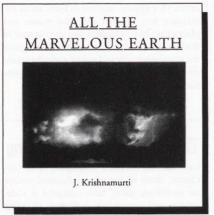
WIE: How can one know what one's dharma is?

MA: By loving life with the right attitude and having the right understanding, we will know what the right thing to do is. And then, if we perform our dharma, purity will come.

WIE: How do you cultivate that kind of love?

MA: Love isn't something that can be cultivated—it's already within us in all its fullness. Life cannot exist without love; they are inseparable. Life and love are not two; they are one and the same. A little

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Krishnamurti Foundation of America, P.O. Box 1560, Ojai, CA 93024 Tel: 805-646-2726 Fax: 805.646.6674 www.kfa.org "A true guru will not allow an iota of ego to grow in a disciple. To check the growth of pride, the guru may act in a very cruel manner. People who see the blacksmith forging a hot piece of iron with his hammer may think that he is a cruel person.

The iron piece may also think



that nowhere can there be such a brute. But while dealing each blow, the blacksmith is only thinking of the end product. The real guru is also like this."

—from Awaken, Children!

bit of the proper channeling of your energies will awaken the love within you.

You need to have a strong intent to reach the goal of liberation; you need to be focused on that goal. Then such qualities as love, patience, enthusiasm and optimism will spring forth within you. These qualities will work to help you attain your goal.

WIE: You are revered by so many as the embodiment of unconditional love, and you literally hug everyone who comes to see you. But I have heard that you can also be very

fierce with your students. How do these two very different methods of teaching go together?

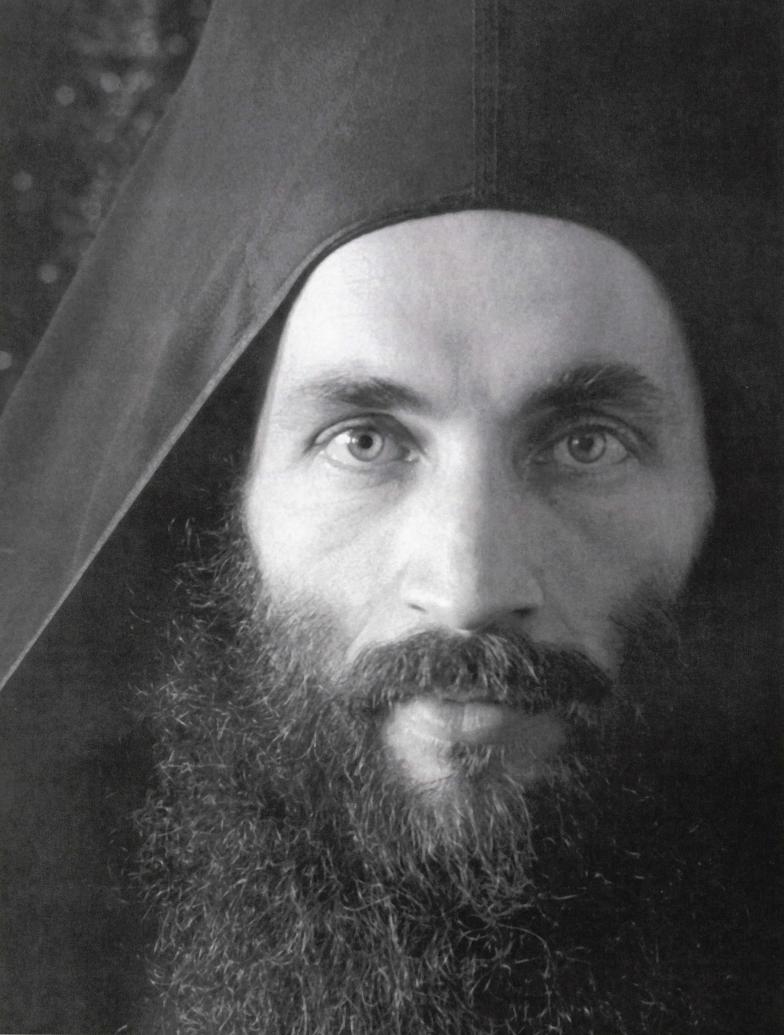
MA: For Amma there are not two different methods; Amma has only one method, and that is love. That love manifests as patience and compassion. However, if a deer comes and eats the tender flower buds in your garden, you cannot be gentle with the deer and say softly, "Please deer, don't eat the flowers." You have to shout at it and even wave a stick. It is sometimes necessary to show this type of mood in order to correct the dis-

ciple. Kali is the compassionate mother in her disciplining mood. But look into her eyes—there is no anger there.

Amma only disciplines those who have chosen to stay close to her, and she only does this when they are ready to be disciplined. A disciple is one who is willing to be disciplined. The guru first binds the disciple with boundless, unconditional love so that when the disciple eventually is disciplined, he or she is aware of the presence of that love in all situations.

Amma helps her children to always be aware and alert. Love has

continued on page 154



the enemy within

an interview with

archimandrite dionysios



y first encounter with Archimandrite Dionysios came, perhaps ironically, via email. Ironic because, despite the decidedly modern means of his communica-

tion, upon receiving it, I felt as though I had been transported back in time a thousand years to an era when the art of writing epistles was a revered and studied form of spiritual discourse. "Mr. Hamilton, dear in the Lord," the letter began, "Rejoice in the Lord. It was a great honor to receive your email of I I September, especially after the recommendation of our respected, common friend, in my case for a long time, the very wise Father Basil Pennington. Please forgive me, since from the day your email came until now I have been away . . .

by craig hamilton

INTRODUCTION

I will be in Greece, at the Sacred Monastery of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross . . . and will await you there to offer you hospitality for as long as you desire, where we can also discuss all the issues you mentioned to me in your letter." Having written the renowned Christian Orthodox elder to request both an interview for our magazine and advice on our upcoming pilgrimage to Mt. Athos, the legendary "Holy Mountain" at the heart of Orthodox monasticism, I was pleased to receive such a warm and generous response. After a long list of suggestions for my trip, the elder added a few more kind words of respect and appreciation, and concluded with the following: "My soul is in trembling for fear that you will not receive my answer in time."

I had read in the Orthodox texts of the profound humility that emanates from many of the holy elders—men whose life of deep, contemplative prayer and asceticism is said to have removed from them even the smallest seeds of self-concern. But somehow, for all my searching in the scriptures, I had never expected to receive an email quite like this. As I began to

type my reply, I had the undeniable sense, even across the fiber-optic pipeline, that the man I had encountered was not an ordinary human being.

From the beginning of our research for this issue, the idea of speaking with an Orthodox elder about the ego had been an intriguing one. For although it is a tradition in which none of us could claim expertise, we were aware that when it comes to defining the enemy of the spiritual path, the Orthodox Christians are perhaps in a class by themselves. To this ancient mystical branch of Christianity, which split from the Catholic Church in 1054, the total purification of the human personality from egotism, selfishness and anything else that obstructs its capacity to reflect the light of God is and always has been the first and final aim of spiritual life. In sacred books with names like The Ladder of Divine Ascent and The Philokalia (literally "love of the beautiful and good"), Orthodox elders from as early as the third century write with passion and precision about the fullblooded "spiritual combat" the sincere aspirant must be willing to engage in if he or she is to have any hope of

defeating the "demons" within that relentlessly attack with ever new and creative tactics. In one of countless such passages in The Philokalia, the fourth-century desert monk St. John Cassian writes, "The ego] is difficult to fight against, because it has many forms and appears in all our activities . . . When it cannot seduce a man with extravagant clothes, it tries to tempt him by means of shabby ones. When it cannot flatter him with honor, it inflates him by causing him to endure what seems to be dishonor. When it cannot persuade him to feel proud of his display of eloquence, it entices him through silence into thinking he has achieved stillness. . . . In short, every task, every activity, gives this malicious demon a chance for battle."

While the word "ego" itself only appears in more contemporary translations and commentaries, throughout even the most ancient Orthodox texts, there are countless references to the hazards of self-love, self-esteem and the "most sinister of demons"—pride. Considered by Christians to be the sin that not only brought Lucifer, God's highest angel, tumbling to a fiery fate but that also led Adam



and Eve to be exiled from paradise on earth, pride is referred to variously as "the mother of all woes" and "the first offspring of the devil." It is also universally regarded as the most destructive and powerful adversary on the spiritual path. As St. John Cassian writes, "Just as a deadly plague destroys not just one member of the body, but the whole of it, so pride corrupts the whole soul, not just part of it. . . . when the vice of pride has become master of our wretched soul, it acts like some harsh tyrant who has gained control of a great city, and destroys it completely, razing it to its foundations.'

To combat the insidious ego so determined to undermine our spiritual progress from within, the monks and nuns of Christian Orthodoxy follow a strict regime of spiritual discipline, including silent contemplative prayer, spiritual study, group worship—and often extreme acts of asceticism. In the belief that a life of ongoing self-deprivation and suffering is ideal, these black-robed celibate renunciates regularly forgo food, drink and sleep for long periods in order to purify themselves of "worldly passions" and come closer to God.

In the Orthodox calendar, we would learn, half the days of the year are days of fasting! And upon reading a description of the rigorous daily monastic schedule still widely followed in orthodox monasteries, I was dumfounded to learn that the monks' routine of solitary prayer, work and worship, which begins at midnight, often doesn't end until ten or eleven the next evening. As I kept searching the schedule trying to figure out when they slept, I was informed by one father that it is, in fact, not uncommon for monks to consistently sleep only one or two hours per night.

And then there are the real ascetics. . . .

In cold, barren caves high on the slopes of Mt. Athos (a vast, rugged peninsula dedicated entirely to monasticism), hermits spend decades in solitary prayer, often subsisting on only "a little dry bread and water." In this ancient eremetic tradition, dating back to the first Desert Fathers who in the third century abandoned the world to live the solitary life, ascetic practices are at times taken to extremes of self-mortification rivaling the most austere yogis of India. In the course of our research, we read tales of

continued

contemporary monks who consider regular self-flagellation with a "passion stick" to be an effective means of subduing temptation, and others who spent years standing or kneeling in prayer on a high rock outcropping until they became crippled. And while reading story upon story of often brutal ascetic labors at times left me wondering whether the line between self-denial and self-torture might have occasionally gotten blurred, I nonetheless couldn't help but be both humbled and inspired by the lengths to which these men were willing to go in their pursuit of life's highest aim.

For as we would be told again and again, the asceticism practiced by Orthodox Christians is not asceticism for its own sake but asceticism in pursuit of a very specific, divine end—the attainment of which has come to be known as "deification." In contrast to Western Christianity, which under the doctrine of original sin tends to emphasize humanity's inherent frailty and imperfection, Orthodox teachings maintain that it is not only possible—but essential—for human beings to become perfectly transformed, radiant expressions of the Divine. Citing the words and example of lesus Christ who said. "Be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect," Orthodox monastics aspire to purify themselves of any trace of ego and in so doing become an immaculate vessel for the glory and workings of God in this world. For proof that this attainment is possible—an attainment considered to be the singular purpose of human life and the

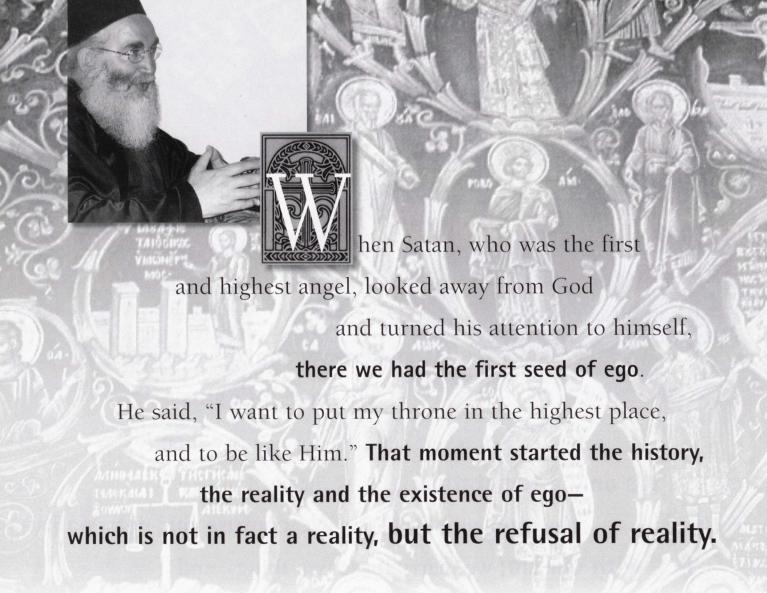
very lifeblood of all Orthodox aspiration—the Orthodox point always to one place: their two-thousand-year legacy of saints, a lineage of holy men and women unbroken since the time of the apostles.

Hearing about the lives of saints from any tradition is always an inspiring experience. And in Orthodoxy, the sheer number of spiritual giants whose lives are celebrated quickly makes one feel the weight history gives to a tradition. But for us, what had captured our collective imagination most powerfully was the conviction among so many of those we spoke with that there are in fact men and women alive today of the same spiritual caliber as the "God-bearing" masters of old whose lives embellish the scriptures. It was our enthusiasm to speak with such an individual that had generated our far-ranging search for illumined Orthodox elders, a search that eventually led us to Archimandrite Dionysios.

Born and raised in a small town in northern Greece, it was clear from early on that Father Dionysios would not find his home in the world. Coming from a religious family with forefathers in the priesthood, at the age of seventeen he left home to pursue his passion for the spirit at the historic cliff-top monastery of Great Meteoron in central Greece. It was here that he met his spiritual father, the widely revered elder, Archimandrite Aemilianos, and became tonsured into the life of renunciation. When several years later the Greek tourist industry had all but taken over the entire ancient Meteora complex. Elder Aemilianos and his band of

young monks relocated to a remote monastery on Mt. Athos and began, along with a handful of other new brotherhoods, to reinvigorate the waning ancient monastic haven with their zeal for the holy life.

Father Dionysios was a bright light from the beginning, known for his unwavering devotion to his elder and for his spirit of selfless giving, shared with all who came to visit their monastery perched high above the Aegean Sea. It was this spirit of generosity and passion for the monastic life that would before long bring invitations from Europe and America and eventually lead him away from the "mountain of silence" he called his home to help guide others along their way. Since leaving Mt. Athos in 1992 to serve as abbot of Holy Cross Monastery in lerusalem, he has also served in an ongoing role as spiritual father and director of convents in Mexico City and northern Greece, and been a frequent visiting elder to many religious communities in Europe, Russia, the Middle East and America. Having recently returned to Greece, where he was given an island on which he will soon build a monastery to house his core group of monks, he is also overseeing a convent he founded outside Athens, where about forty young nuns and novices have gathered from many different parts of the world. It was there that I had the good fortune to spend a weekend with this radiant elder last fall, discussing both the Orthodox teachings on the ego and the glory and freedom that await those who make it their life's endeavor to live beyond its confines.



WIE: What is the ego?

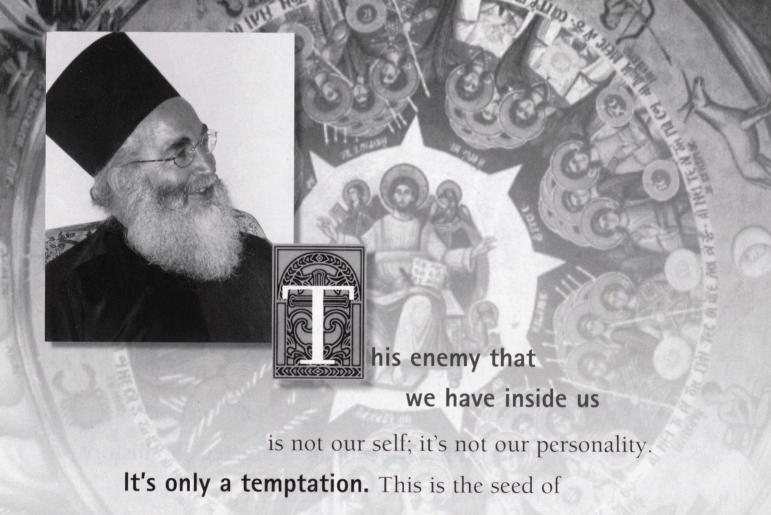
ARCHIMANDRITE DIONYSIOS: When Satan, who was the first and highest angel, looked away from God and turned his attention to himself, there we had the first seed of ego. He took his spiritual eyes from the view of the Holy Trinity, the view of the Lord, and he looked at *himself* and started to think about himself. And he said, "I want to put my throne in the highest place, and to be like Him." That moment started the history, the reality and the existence of ego—which is not in fact a reality, but the refusal of reality. Ego is the flower that comes out from the death of love. When we kill love, the result is the ego.

WIE: What is the character of the ego? How does it manifest within a human being?

AD: When we don't trust. Ego is born when we don't trust others. When we're afraid of others, when we need guns against others, then we need to have an ego because we are in the wrong way of life. We think only of ourselves, and we see only our ego. But when we see each other, when we trust each other, there is no need for ego, no reason for ego, no possibility for ego.

WIE: So in the way you're speaking about it then, ego is the insistence on our separation, our independence?

AD: Yes, on our solitude. Our need to be alone, to have our *own* way of thinking that satisfies us and preserves our personality in the wrong way.



It's only a temptation. This is the seed of
the problem of the ego. We confuse our personality
with our sin; we marry these two things, and
we have a wrong impression of what we are.

WIE: Putting ourselves first and foremost?

AD: Yes. And Christ said, "The last is the first." Because when you want to be the last and you choose the last seat, only then may you call the others friends of yours.

WIE: The ego, this sense of self-importance you've been speaking about, is often described in The Philokalia and other writings of the Christian mystics as the primary enemy with which the spiritual aspirant must wrestle in their quest for union with God. Why is the ego considered to be such a formidable adversary on the path?

AD: It is such a powerful enemy because it is the

enemy within us. We are enemies to ourselves, like Adam and Eve in paradise. Of course, the snake talked to Eve. But she could have avoided him. The snake said to her, "The Lord lied to you," but if she would have trusted the Lord, she would not have started to talk to the snake. And Adam, too, lost his communication with the Lord and stayed with his ego. And the two egos worked together, Adam and Eve.

The real enemy is the ego. It is the enemy because it is against love. When I look at myself, I don't love others. When I want to occupy for myself what is yours, I become the killer of my brother, like Cain killed Abel. When I want to satisfy myself, this satisfaction is gained through sacrificing the freedom of the other. Then my ego becomes my lord, my god,

and there is no stronger temptation than this. Because to us, this ego may seem like a diamond. It has a shine like gold. But whatever is shining is not gold. The ego is just like a fire without light, a fire without warmth, a fire without life. It seems that it has many sides and many possibilities—but what is this possibility? What is ego? Only the means by which I protect myself as if I were in a battle, as if every other person is my enemy, and the only thing I care about is winning the victory.

WIE: It has been said by some of the greatest spiritual luminaries that when one takes up the spiritual path in earnest, one often comes face-to-face with the ego in a way that one never could have imagined previously. In describing their encounters with the ego, many saints have characterized it as an almost diabolical force within that does not want the spiritual life, that does not want God, but that wants to do everything it can to obstruct our illumination, to undermine our firm resolve to stay on the path.

AD: Saint Paul writes beautifully about this event, this struggle inside the human heart. He says, "There is another law inside me telling me to refuse the will of God, to do things against Him, to refuse the grace. It tries to keep me in my past, in my old life, to take me far away from the Lord, to prevent me from following the Lord." This is why I said that the biggest problem in mankind is in each person, not outside of him. For this we need spiritual fathers. For this we need spiritual doctors. We need surgery; we need an operation; we need something to be cut in our heart.

We don't understand that this enemy that we have inside us is not our self; it's not our personality. It's only a temptation. This is the seed of the problem of the ego. We unite our personality, which is a priceless event, with our faults. We confuse our personality with our sin; we marry these two things, and we have a wrong impression of what we are. We don't know what we are, and we need someone to show us who we are; we need someone to open our eyes so that we can at least see our darkness.

There's a mystic, the greatest of the mystics, Saint Gregory Palamas. For thirty years, he was praying only this prayer: "Enlighten my darkness. Enlighten my darkness." He did not name the Lord because he did not feel worthy to name him. He did not address it to anyone, but he said this prayer day and night, more than he was breathing. Because all he knew in himself was his darkness. And he was talking to someone—to whom else?—to Christ, who

said, "I am the Light." But he said only, "Enlighten my darkness."

WIE: Show me my faults?

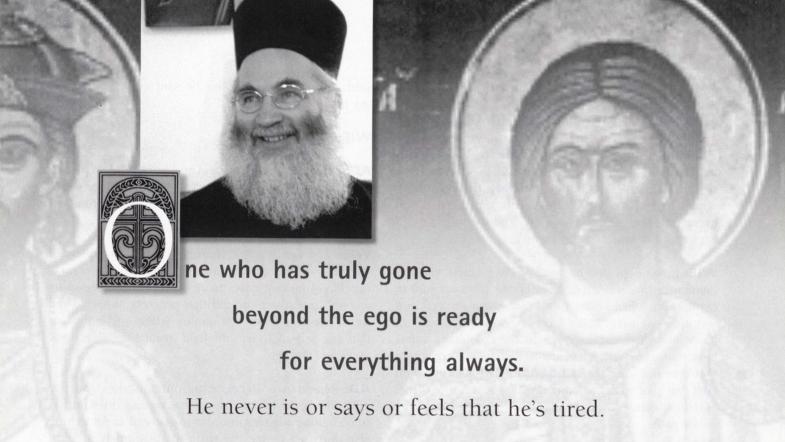
AD: Or come to my darkness and burn it. Make fire in it and make light in it. The greatest thing we can do in our lives is to discover that by ourselves we are nothing. We are darkness. We are dust.

WIE: The ego is often characterized in the spiritual literature as a cunning and opportunistic adversary, capable of turning any situation to its advantage in its attempt to obstruct our spiritual progress. What do you feel is the most important quality within the individual that can help us to win the fight against the clever and ever changing ego?

AD: Repentance. Recognizing our mistakes and our sins, this is the highest thing that we can do. And not to recognize our sins in order to succeed at something else, but just to see the truth about ourselves. Saint Isaac, the great mystic of the Church, says that one who accepts, who understands, who recognizes his sin in front of the Lord, in reality, he is the highest. He is greater than one who has gained all the world, who feeds all the people, who makes miracles, who resurrects the dead. This man, the first one, is bigger because he can never fall down. He has a stability, a level, a place where he can talk to the Lord. He has a place where he can invite the Lord with his tears, with his repentance, with the understanding that he has done wrong. And straightaway he becomes clear. The light comes from him. He becomes a spiritual doctor, a teacher or father, because he's not afraid to recognize sins. It is not a problem for him to say, "Excuse me, it was my fault." This is the key to escape from all the drops of the devil.

WIE: Would it be accurate to characterize this quality you're describing—this willingness to face oneself honestly—as humility?

AD: Not humility. Humility is the result. It would be better to say "wisdom." We press ourselves to be humble. But to recognize my faults—what does that have to do with humility? I have to be *humble* in order to recognize my faults? No. I *have* to see them. It's an emergency. It's my way to exist for the next second. How can I exist with my faults for one second? In front of whom? In front of myself—how can I be with my faults, with my sins? I have to say, "I did it!"



He's always ready to give.

He exists only for others.

And in this, he has joy.

A man without ego is a man with God.

Dostoyevsky expresses this so beautifully in *Crime and Punishment*. The main character, Raskolnikov, kills someone, and almost immediately he understands what he did. He doesn't recognize it by himself, but with the help of the strict hard words of a prostitute, Sonya, who says to him, "Look what you did." She guides him to go into the middle of the plaza, in front of all the people, to say what he did. And he does it. He confesses. He says that otherwise he could not exist, that he would have to commit more and more and more crimes. And he accepts the sentence of the court to go for at least twenty years to the hardest prison. And he goes, and there he feels the medicine of his heart. And he takes this medicine. We have problems

in life because we don't want to accept or recognize our sins. And this is the key. What else do we have to offer to each other? Gold, money, lust, food? Long life? No. Only to recognize our sins and straightaway we have a new world.

WIE: You seem to be speaking about a kind of deep conscience that stirs when we face ourselves.

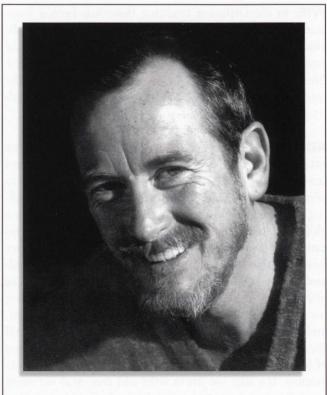
AD: It's love. Love is more than conscience. Conscience is something that says to you, "You do this, you do this, you do this," It's like we're under our own personal court. But love is something much more. Love makes us ready to pay for the sins of others. It's a much

higher step. Not only to recognize our sins but also to be able to pay for sins for which we are not responsible, as Christ did. This is love.

WIE: The writings of the Christian fathers speak of the goal of the spiritual journey as a transfiguration of the human being into an entirely different order of human existence—one in which the ego is killed and we are, in a sense, reborn. What does it mean for the ego to die? And in what sense are we reborn?

AD: The Lord calls us to transform. He wants to give us our reality, our real self, which we have lost. And in spiritual life, especially in the monastic life, this ego really can transform, just as when the disciples, having followed Christ to the top of Mount Tabor, witnessed his body transformed into light. Many fathers used to explain that the transfiguration didn't actually happen to the body of Christ but to the eyes of his students. Because at that moment, their eyes transformed and they could see what Christ had always been—shining, full of light. Through their humility, through following Christ, they were brought to the top of this mountain to enjoy this reality. And every one of us can receive this blessing. Our nature can be transformed.

This transfiguration is our real progress, our real growth. It's not a matter of using our spiritual life in Christ to become better, to become more clever, to know more things, to have more friends, to influence others, to have authority and power, to have money, good health, a good name and a good face. It's only a matter of what's inside our heart. The important thing is that in daily practice there cannot be any seed of ego in the field of our heart. Because when temptation comes, it can destroy the quality of life and of the relationships between people. The Lord taught us to be awake all the time and to pray to him, to say, "Protect us and don't let us enter into temptation." Through this protection from temptation, we can come to see very clearly into our hearts. And by following the simplest, normal life, we can purify ourselves, our spirit and our mind. It's very easy after that for the Holy Spirit to come. It's like in the Eucharist, we are ready all together in the church with the bread and the wine. We pray, and the Holy Spirit comes and makes the bread and the wine into the body and blood of Christ. In the same way, we can purify ourselves, and the Holy Spirit comes and transforms us in all the ways we have read about in books and brings us many more experiences that all the books of the world cannot contain.



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Tel: 0044 (0) 1225 830149, Email: mikaire@btinternet.com **WIE:** In the Orthodox tradition there has been a long-standing lineage of illumined spiritual fathers, great individuals who have demonstrated with their own lives the possibility of destroying the ego and discovering a new life in God. What are the marks of one who has won the spiritual battle? How does the expression of the personality change in one who has truly gone beyond the ego?

AD: He's ready for everything always. He never is or says or feels that he's tired. He has joy. He's always ready to give. He exists only for others. He's ready to serve everybody. He does not judge anybody, including the deepest sinner. He's there as a child, but as a child of a king. Who can touch the son of a king? Who can touch a newborn lion knowing that the mother lion is nearby? Being this way, you're like a small lamb among the wolves, but you're not afraid. You're there offering, receiving everybody, loving, serving, praying for everybody and being ready to die in each moment. and in that, you're totally and completely free. All these are fruits of love because we become the source of love. So is a man without ego. This is the transformation. It's like we are a wild old tree and we need something to come into us and transform this tree into

a good fruitful tree. A man without ego is a man with God, is a man with the Holy Spirit.

When you are ready to die for everybody in each moment, when you love, when you respect, when you prostrate to the other, it's like you prepare him to be ready for an operation; but it's not that you judge the other or feel that he needs something from you. When you are perfect before Him—and we *can* be perfect; in fact, we *have* to be perfect; it's the principal need—then right away people need it, know it, understand it. Very quickly everybody comes to take a seat in front of such a person, in front of a spiritual son or a spiritual father.

WIE: Is it also your experience that a spiritual father who has truly gone beyond the ego not only inspires people to reach for their highest potential but also presents the ultimate challenge to the ego of those who come to see him?

AD: Absolutely. In fact, in the presence of such a person, the devil comes out straightaway. And you can see very clearly how the devil makes people crazy or angry or disrespectful when you haven't even said



You Don't Have to Be Fully Enlightened...

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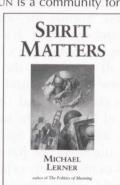
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anything. Just because you are there, they explode. And you can see terrible things in people where otherwise you would see only kind people with ties and gold jewelry. When someone appears who embodies the spirit of God, there you can see what you could see when Jesus was walking in the streets. The devils who were in the people said, "Whoa, who are you? You came here to put us in trouble." Some were scandalized by him, others were thinking about how to kill him, and still others were thinking things against him. He was speaking not to what they said but to what they were thinking. And the same Holy Spirit exists in the spiritual fathers, and it can also create this kind of confrontation. This happens because the other person understands that he cannot play with this man. He cannot hide from this man.

WIE: In Christian writings, the enemy of the spiritual path is often referred to in dramatic terms as Satan, Lucifer, the devil. Is Satan simply a metaphor for the human ego? Or is it something independent of us?

AD: Satan is the teacher. And the ego is the means by which we fulfill his theory. Living from our ego is like burning incense to him. When he smells it, he comes. It is familiar to him; it's his relative, his tongue, his dialect. He likes it. So he comes, and then he starts to open company with our ego. Then he starts to be related to us.

WIE: So would you say that Satan exists in this sense as an impersonal force of evil that operates within each of us as the ego? Or would it be more accurate to say that the ego is already there in us and Satan is the voice of temptation to which the ego listens?

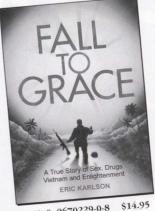
AD: The second. He doesn't have the authority to work through our ego. We're free all the time to decide.

WIE: There are many spiritual authorities in the modern West who are attempting to bring the ideas of Western psychology to bear on the spiritual path. In fact, it is now commonly held that in order to withstand the difficulties of the spiritual path, one has to first develop a strong ego, a strong sense of self. One statement that has become almost a credo in many spiritual circles is: "You have to become somebody before you can be nobody." What do you think of this idea?

AD: That's like saying, "We first have to be the head of the Mafia and then we can become president." Or, "I will first work together with the devil; I shall make

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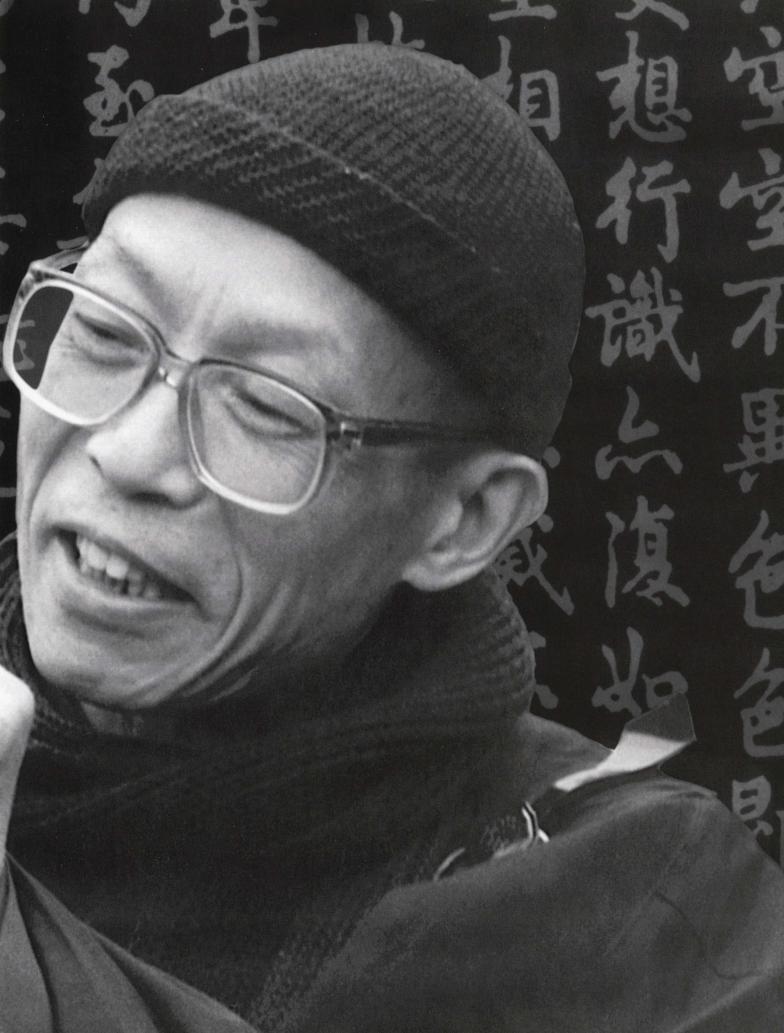
an interview with

an interview with Venerable Master Sheng-yen by Carter Phipps

When it comes to the topic of ego in the spiritual life, few people have staked out the territory like the Zen masters. To read their stories is to enter another world, one where commitment, humility, devotion and insight take on larger-than-life significance and one thing matters above all else: to slay the ego once and for all, and in doing so to achieve enlightenment, to deeply realize one's Buddhanature in this life. Indeed, few people

destroying tactics of the Zen teachers of yore who, in stories that have become legends, resorted to often outrageous acts of enlightened wisdom in order to shock, jolt and awaken their students from the nightmare of

could honestly claim the fortitude of spirit required to withstand the ego-



INTRODUCTION

continued

ego-centered existence. Zen Buddhism, it would seem, has never been a path for the faint of heart, a testament, perhaps, to the First Zen Patriarch, Bodhidharma, who sat facing a wall for nine years to demonstrate his commitment to the path of enlightenment. Even in the modern era, we find echoes of Bodhidharma's resolve in the stories of contemporary practitioners, like the now-classic My Struggle to Become a Zen Monk by Morinaga Soko. In his efforts to gain admittance into the monastic life, Soko spent three days crouched beneath the wooden steps at the entrance to one Japanese Zen monastery enduring what is called "niwazume," a test of character designed to ensure that only the most determined make it through the outer gates. Exposed to the cold wind and snow, he withstood verbal assaults, psychological pressure and even physical beatings before he was finally able, with numb legs and a bloody face as evidence, to convince the monks inside that he had the humility and resolve to take up the austere life of a Zen monk. Those who aren't willing to pay the high price of slaying the ego, in other words, need not even apply.

So from the moment we decided to present an investigation of the nature of ego in this issue, we began a search for a Zen master who could speak from his own experience of the trials of this rigorous path beyond the ego—a search that eventually led us to the venerable master of Ch'an Buddhism Sheng-yen. The word "ch'an" is the

Chinese translation of the Indian term "dhyana," a Sanskrit word meaning meditation, and as Buddhism eventually spread from China to Japan, it was translated there as the term much more familiar to our Western ears: Zen. Sheng-yen, according to his most recent book, Subtle Wisdom, was initiated into Ch'an Buddhism at the age of thirteen when he left behind home and family to take up the robes of a novice in a Shanghai monastery, an austere and traditional temple that would be his home for the next six years. In 1949, however, a wind of revolution and change swept through China, and the Communist takeover of the mainland cut short his career as a young monk. Conscripted into the Nationalist army, Sheng-yen soon headed for Taiwan, and it was there, almost ten years later, that he experienced a powerful spiritual awakening at the age of twenty-eight. It was, he says, "the most important experience in my life up to that point." In a story that could have been taken from the pages of classic Zen literature, the young Sheng-yen was on a brief sabbatical from the military, visiting local Ch'an teachers when, while up late one night meditating, he found himself sitting near an older man, also a guest of the monastery, who impressed Sheng-yen with his steady and peaceful demeanor. Asking the elderly monk if he would answer a question or two, Sheng-yen proceeded to pour out his heart for two hours, giving voice to all of the questions that no one had been able

to help him with during his many years of spiritual practice. And at the end of each question, the monk, whom Sheng-yen would later find out was actually a revered Ch'an master, would simply ask, "Is that all?" Finally, Sheng-yen had exhausted his litany of questions and, in a moment of confusion, hesitated, not knowing what to do. Bang! The monk struck the platform they were sitting on and roared, "Take all of your questions and put them down! Who has all of these questions?" The effect on Sheng-yen was immediate and profound. "In that instant all of my questions were gone," he writes. "The whole world had changed. My body ran with perspiration but felt extraordinarily light. The person I had been was laughable. I felt like I had dropped a thousandpound burden." The words of the Buddhist sutras [scriptures], which once seemed foreign and impenetrable, now came alive as Shengyen's own experience. "I understood them immediately, without explanation," he writes. "I felt as if they were my own words."

As fascinating and inspiring as this story is, what was most intriguing to us, from the perspective of our investigation of ego, was not the experience itself but the way Sheng-yen responded to it. In a time when it seems that so many, after similar experiences of profound awakening, have quickly assumed that the dangers of the ego have been forever left behind, Sheng-yen came to a very different conclusion. While knowing that his perspective on life had radically changed, he also

no escape for the ego

recognized that his "vexations," or the character deficiencies arising from his own ego, had not disappeared and could, under the right circumstances, still cause him trouble. It was not time to rest or to teach, he decided—far from it. It was time to practice—to rededicate himself to spiritual purification with all of the resolve, inspiration and determination that this deep glimpse into his true nature had given him.

So with deepened faith in the reality of a life beyond the attachments of ego, Sheng-yen once again took up the robes of a bhiksu [monk], obtaining early release from his military duties. He began to study with a well-known Ch'an master named Tung-chu, who had earned a reputation as a very demanding teacher, even by the high standards of Ch'an. Tung-chu pushed Sheng-yen hard, one day challenging him to perform prostrations, and then days later reprimanding him for the same; telling him to write, and then tearing up his essays when they were completed; even going so far as instructing him to close up the door to his room just so he could create a new one in the opposite wall.

Grateful to have returned to his interrupted monkhood and discipleship, and for the freedom to devote himself full time to spiritual life, Sheng-yen pursued his spiritual practice with great intensity. On his own initiative, he eventually decided to begin a three-year solitary retreat high in the mountains of Taiwan. Living in a small cliff-top hut with no running water or electricity and

subsisting on wild potato leaves that he grew himself in his backyard, he worked to uproot the deep vexations of his own mind, to bring the full power of the Buddhist dharma to bear upon his attachment to the ego. Beginning with a half-year of prostrations (doing one for each of the almost 80,000 characters in the Lotus Sutra) he then concentrated on sitting meditation and, in his spare time, wrote and completed two books on the Buddhist teachings. Three years later, feeling at home in the quiet calm of solitary practice but convinced that his efforts to cultivate freedom from "greed, anger, arrogance and ignorance" were still incomplete, he decided to double the time of his retreat, extending to a total of six years this period of seclusion, contemplation, practice and study.

It was after he emerged from this second retreat that Sheng-yen began to feel that the time was right for him to take up the mantle of a Ch'an teacher in his own right and spread the Buddhist dharma. But having long been troubled by the extreme lack of education he had often seen among the monks and nuns of Taiwan, he first set out to obtain the formal schooling that he himself had never received during his years of retreat and practice. He headed for Japan and attended a university there, immersing himself in the subtle intricacies of the Buddhist dharma, earning a doctorate in Buddhist philosophy and, in the process, studying with wellknown teachers from almost all the major schools of Japanese Zen.

Later, accepting an invitation from a Buddhist association in the United States, he headed for the unfamiliar territory of America, where he launched a teaching career that would grow rapidly until it eventually encompassed communities of students from both the West and the Far East.

Currently Master Sheng-yen resides primarily in Taiwan but spends several months each year visiting his centers in the United States. As the founder of a liberal arts college near Taipei as well as several monasteries and meditation centers, the author of more than ninety books in ten different languages, a lineage holder in the two major schools of Ch'an Buddhism and personal spiritual guide to thousands of devoted students, Sheng-yen is a master who wears the threads of a great many responsibilities in the fabric of his simple monk's robe. He is credited by some for sparking a revival of Chinese Buddhism, a tradition that is today in exile from its home country—a place where Sheng-yen may visit but cannot teach and where an illicit underground network is the only way to distribute Buddhist literature to the population. In a role that has some similarities to that of H.H. the Dalai Lama, Sheng-yen has spent much of his life working hard to help save and invigorate what was once an extraordinarily rich tradition, despite its continuing oppression in the very homeland where it first blossomed more than a thousand years ago.

INTRODUCTION

continued

Morinaga Soko, in writing about the lessons learned during his ordeal outside the Zen monastery where he became a monk, states, "Until you have subjected yourself to some discipline, you should not put too much faith in your own willpower. When I saw my own will crumbling at the monastery entrance, I suddenly felt I understood the reason for niwazume. As one crouches by the bench on the dirt floor, one's resolve is put to the test time and time again. . . . At the entrance to the monastery, I had learned the meaning of the courage which has its roots in faith and which remains undaunted whenever resistance is encountered." It doesn't take more than a cursory look at the spiritual life to recognize that to truly free oneself from the

fetters of the ego takes courage, determination and resolve in no small measure. Sheng-yen, it seemed, was someone who had spent much of his life attempting to cultivate these very qualities. Indeed, he was a man who had been tested in the fire of the Zen path, who had given his heart and soul to a tradition that demands much of the spiritual aspirant and has a reputation for offering little if any quarter to the needs and concerns of the ego. So what would he, as a person who had truly lived and breathed the experiences most people only read about, have to say about this ancient enemy of the spiritual life? Would he be filled with the fire, intensity and passion for ego death that so many in his lineage have expressed down through the ages?

Or would he, in his current role as a teacher and the public face of Buddhism to thousands of people around the world, be more palliative in his relationship to the ego, more accepting of those for whom the idea of ego death is going just a little too far and more accommodating to a Western spiritual culture in which the ego seems to have fallen from its preeminent position as the one and only obstacle between us and the gates of nirvana?

Sheng-yen talked with me one November afternoon on the second floor of his Queens, New York, meditation center. As the soft chanting of the Buddhist sutras drifted up through the wooden floorboards from the room below us, we sat together and spoke through a translator for an hour.

WIE: What is the ego according to Ch'an Buddhism?

MASTER SHENG-YEN: In Ch'an Buddhism the idea of ego revolves around the idea of attachment or clinging. The ego originally does not exist. It is created as a result of attachment to the body and attachment to one's ideas or one's own viewpoint. But because both the body and the mind are impermanent and constantly changing over time, our attachments to them are always changing as well. And as these attachments change, the ego also changes. So from the perspective of Ch'an, the ego does not exist in the sense of being a permanent, unchanging entity. The ego does not exist independent of one's changing attachments to one's body and one's ideas.

WIE: What does it mean to go beyond the ego?

SY: There are two different ways to accomplish this transcendence of the ego. One is experiential, through experiencing the transcendence of the self. And this can be done through practice, the practice of sitting meditation and the investigation of a *koan* [paradoxical question]. It is possible to attain this experience without a practice, but that's very rare; most people need to do the

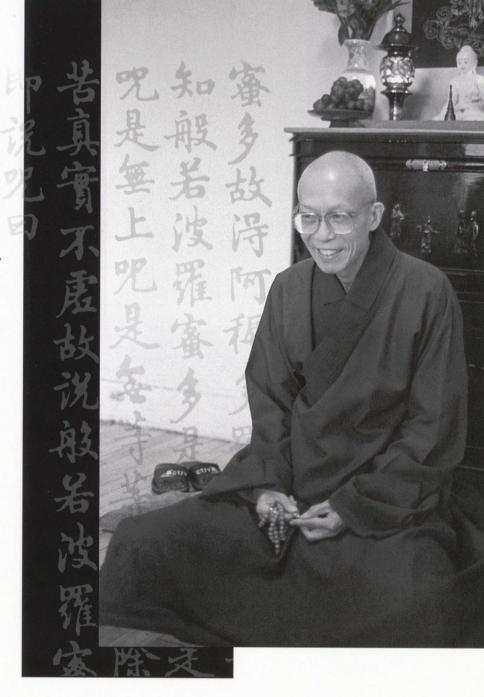
practice. The point of this kind of practice is to essentially push the ego into a corner so that it has nowhere else to go. It cannot escape anywhere.

So the ego and the method that you are using to transcend the ego are in direct opposition to each other. As I said, the ego is based on attachment—our attachment to the body and to ideas. Therefore, the method of transcending the ego is to deal with this attachment, to put down this attachment. When the ego is cornered and has nowhere to go, the only thing one can do is to put it down. And when one puts down the ego, then that is enlightenment.

WIE: Could you explain further how facing into a koan helps to "corner the ego"?

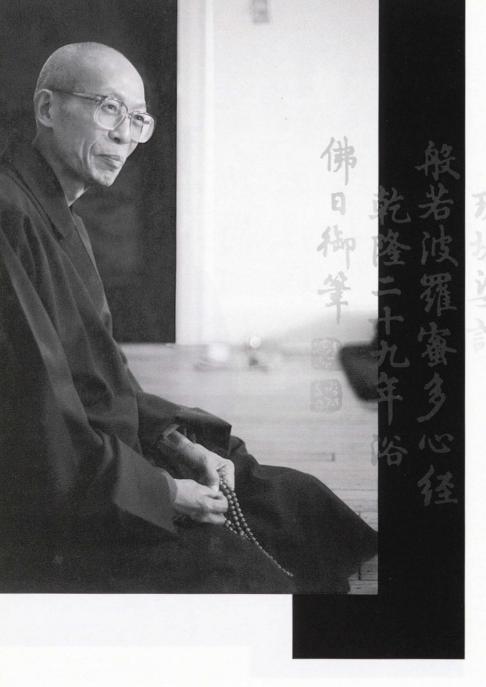
SY: In this method, you're actually not trying to solve the *koan*. Rather, the method involves asking the *koan* to give you the answer. A *koan* may be like, "What is *wu* [nothingness]?" So you keep asking and asking the *koan* to give you the answer to that question. But actually, it's impossible to answer. Of course, in the process of asking,

"The Buddha, after his enlightenment, did not say, 'I'm the center of the universe." Neither did he say that he represented the entire universe. What he said is that the Buddha is here to encourage all sentient beings to see that ego comes from attachment, and if we can all put down this attachment, then we will be liberated."



your mind will give you answers, but whatever answer you get you have to reject. And you just stay with this method—keep asking and keep rejecting whatever answer comes up in your mind. In the end you will develop a sense of doubt. You will not be able to ask the *koan* anymore. In fact, it'll be meaningless to ask anymore. Then there is nothing to do except to finally put down the self and that is when enlightenment appears in front of you. But if you ask the *koan* and you simply get tired, if you can't get an answer and so you just stop, that's not enlightenment. That's just laziness.

The second way to transcend the ego is the conceptual way. It happens when there's a sudden and complete change in one's viewpoint. It can happen, for example, when one's reading a *sutra* [Buddhist scripture] or listening to a dharma talk. In an instant, one can become enlightened. But for this to really work, a person has to already want to know the answer to the question, "What is ego, what is the self?" They have to already be engaged with this question in their own mind. And then, when they come across a particular sentence, they can suddenly recognize the answer and



"A very peaceful, blissful, happy feeling is not the same as enlightenment. Enlightenment is not having an attachment to any viewpoint or any attachment to the body. There's no burden at all, and that's why one would feel happy."

instantaneously realize enlightenment. One very good example is the Sixth Patriarch, Hui Neng. He heard one sentence from the Diamond Sutra and got enlightened. However, for people who never think about these issues and questions in their daily life, who don't care about what the ego is and have no desire to know what the self is, this won't work. Listening to a dharma lecture or reading the *sutras* isn't going to help them.

WIE: What is the role of the teacher in liberating the student from his or her ego?

SY: First of all, the most important thing is that the student has to really *want* to know what the nature of the ego is. They need to have this burning desire to know. Then, what the teacher can do is to give the students a method or a tool to investigate and show them how to go about practicing the method. Many students may have a method and not be able to use it well. So the teacher can show a student how to use their method properly and can also show the right attitude and conceptual understanding they need in going about their practice. And if the student has a strong desire to

understand the nature of their real self, then the method will be helpful. They will be able to see that this self that's based on attachment is illusory. It's not real. And when they realize this, they will also see that there's no such thing as the ego.

WIE: In your recent book Subtle Wisdom, you write, "Sometimes the mind experiences something that it takes to be enlightenment, but it is actually just the ego in a very happy state." Could you explain the difference between these two experiences—between genuine enlightenment and a condition where the ego is simply, as you said, "in a very happy state"?

SY: The experience of happiness can also be a part of enlightenment; a person can feel happy whether they are enlightened or not. But usually when one is in this blissful, happy state, it is because, in that moment, one is no longer feeling burdened by one's body or by one's mind and emotions, and so one feels very at ease. However, this is not the same as liberation. One may feel very light; it doesn't mean anything. A very peaceful, blissful, happy feeling is not the same as enlightenment. Enlightenment is not being attached to any viewpoint or having any attachment to the body. There's no burden at all, and that's why one would feel happy. For example, Shakyamuni Buddha, after his enlightenment, sat under the bodhi tree for seven days to enjoy this happiness, this dharma joy from his liberation. But one can feel happiness whether one is enlightened or is not enlightened. So we need to be able to distinguish.

WIE: In your book you go on to say that this experience of the ego being in a very happy state could occur because "the ego may even be identified with the universe as a whole or with divinity." Could you explain what you mean by that?

SY: That feeling of unification with the universe is actually one kind of *samadhi* [meditative absorption], a result of a deep state of concentration, and when a person is at this stage, they recognize that the entire universe is the same as themselves. What happens is that one expands one's small ego outward, to include all viewpoints, to include all of the universe and everything in it. So at this point, one would no longer have individual selfish ideas or individual selfish thoughts that normally arise from the narrow, selfish ego. In fact, one may experience a tremendous power that would result from this *samadhi*, a power that would come from the idea that "the universe is the same as me." People who have had this kind of realization can often become very great religious leaders.

But the Buddha, after his enlightenment, did not say, "I'm the center of the universe." Neither did he say that he represented the entire universe. What he said is that the Buddha is here to encourage all sentient beings to see that ego comes from attachment, and if we can all put down this attachment, then we will be liberated. And so the Buddha sees himself as a friend, a wise friend to all sentient beings, encouraging them to understand that ego comes from attachment and encouraging everybody to practice, to put down this attachment.

So in the Buddha's nirvana, there's no more arising and no more extinguishing. There's no self—no big Self, no small self—and that is the true enlightenment. That's the enlightenment of the Buddha.

WIE: So if an individual is identified with the universe as a whole, is there still, in that case, an ego attachment that the individual hasn't given up?

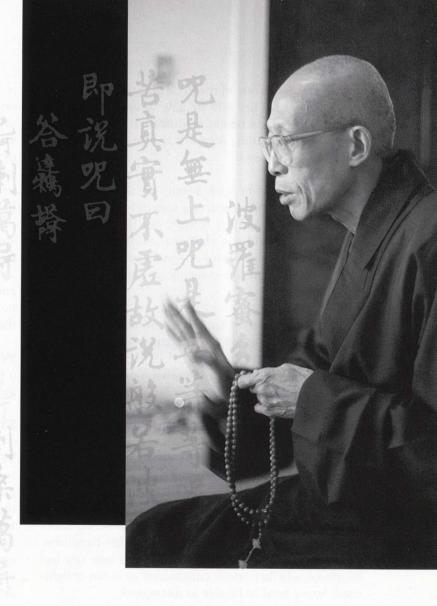
SY: Yes.

WIE: Some of the great Ch'an and Zen patriarchs were reputed to have been very fierce teachers who would go to great lengths and use very extreme measures to liberate their students from their egos. In your books, you have written about how some of your own teachers were very tough with you as well. Is it because our attachment to the ego is so deep and so strong that these revered masters needed to employ such extreme measures to get their students to go beyond the ego?

SY: Actually, not everybody needs these harsh methods. The kind of method that is used has to match the needs of the individual student and the condition of the moment. Timing is very important. For example, when I teach my students, I only use harsh methods when it is necessary. Most of the time I use a lot of encouragement, especially for beginner students. It is for those who have been practicing for a while, who have a lot of confidence in their practice already but who still have this attachment to the ego, that I will use some harsher methods to help them to move forward. But it takes a very experienced, very good master to know when the time is right to use such methods.

WIE: Another passage from your book reads, "If your sense of self is strong, solid, and formidable, then there is no way you can experience enlightenment." What do you mean by this? Why is it difficult for a person with a strong sense of self or what Westerners would call "a strong ego" to experience enlightenment?

"When I teach my students, I only use harsh methods when it is necessary. Most of the time I use a lot of encouragement, especially for beginner students. It is for those who have been practicing for a while, who have a lot of confidence in their practice already but who still have this attachment to the ego, that I will use some harsher methods to help them to move forward."



SY: It's not necessarily true that people who have a very strong ego cannot be enlightened. In fact, those who *know* that they have a strong ego may, in some cases, actually be very good candidates to practice the Buddha-dharma. You see, there is a type of person who is very egocentric yet at the same time has a strong desire for enlightenment. Because of this strong desire, they are naturally going to be very unhappy and dissatisfied with having a big ego, and that attitude will be good for their practice. When you have such a strong ego, you have to be willing to do something about it. So someone like this could be a good candidate for practicing and studying Ch'an.

Then there are also individuals who have what we would call a weaker or softer ego. This can help them, but only if they still have a real desire to deal with their

ego. If they don't, they are not going to be any closer to enlightenment because they won't have any confidence in the practice. They won't have diligence in the practice. But if an individual has a weaker, softer ego and still understands that they need to practice diligently to deal with it, then we could say that these individuals, because they have both a strong desire for liberation and a smaller ego, are closer to enlightenment.

WIE: Today many Western spiritual teachers believe that traditional spiritual paths, including Buddhism, do not properly address all the needs of the modern seeker. In particular, they feel that people may need psychotherapy to supplement their spiritual practice in order to work out many of their emotional attachments and problems with their ego. Do you feel that the Ch'an path is incomplete when

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YOGA, EGO &

a two-part interview with Yogi Amrit Desai by Andrew Cohen

I HAD ALWAYS WONDERED IF THE PRACTICE OF YOGA HAD ANYTHING TO DO WITH EGO DEATH.

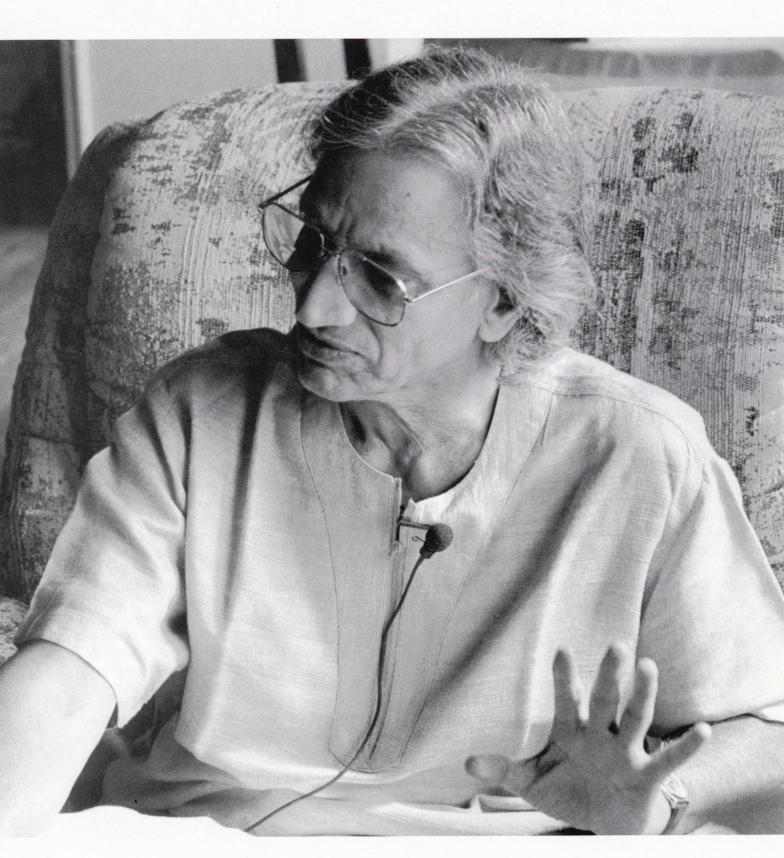
I have been teaching the path to liberation for the last fourteen years and before that I had several teachers, but my first guru was a true master of yoga. His life was a literal embodiment of the Bhagavad Gita, the bible for any aspiring yogi, and he could, simply through taking one breath, dive deep into the mystical ecstatic trance of nirvikalpa samadhi, considered to be the highest attainment on the path of yoga. Indeed, he was a true

does YOGA
PURIFY the EGO?

EGO and the
GURU/DISCIPLE
relationship



PURIFICATION



INTRODUCTION

continued



master who could at will transcend body consciousness—a feat few have equaled in any time. And yet, in this world, the amount of chaos he attracted to himself and all those who gathered near him never ceased to amaze me. And then there was the renowned master Swami Muktananda, who in his time was considered to be the greatest yogi of them all and whose powerful transmission of shaktipat awakened the dormant kundalini energy in hundreds of thousands of Western bodies, but who disillusioned multitudes of seekers worldwide with revelations of his "tantric" escapades with the young daughters of his disciples. In those days (the late seventies/early eighties), I also heard intriguing reports of the incredible experiences that were occurring for many in the presence of Yogi Amrit Desai.

Yogi Desai originally came to America in 1960 to study fine art and design in Philadelphia, after which he worked in various design and textile firms while pursuing a career as a talented artist. A close disciple since his youth of Swami Shri Kripalvanandji, a master of kundalini yoga, Yogi Desai began teaching the then largely unknown art of hatha yoga in his new home of Philadelphia soon after arriving in America. The school of yoga he started became so successful that he eventually abandoned his career as an artist to devote himself wholeheartedly to teaching. It was not until 1969 that Yogi Desai received formal shaktibat initiation from his guru, and it was then, in the early seventies, that he went from being a successful yoga teacher to a true guru in his own right, a master of kundalini yoga who had the ability to awaken

the *kundalini-shakti* in others. Many experienced powerful awakenings through being in his presence.

One man described his experience as follows:

My body filled with a brilliant white light, and I allowed myself to be absorbed in it. I felt that my life, as I previously had known it, literally came to an end. My ego identity became meaningless; there was no time: past and future did not exist. All that existed was pure light and pure bliss. I was content to remain in this state forever. When I opened my eyes again, I noticed that my body had bent forward: my forehead was touching the floor. I do not remember assuming that position. I was actually bowing down to Yogi Desai. I had never bowed down to anyone in my life, but some inner unknown force had prompted me. I knew I wasn't bowing to Amrit Desai, but rather to my own higher self, which he had helped me to see.*

Yogi Desai founded an ashram in Sumneytown, Pennsylvania, and as word of his dramatic effect on people spread far and wide, he soon was invited to teach all over America and Canada. After several years, Yogi Desai began to decrease the focus of his teaching work on shakti experiences and began to once again put more emphasis on hatha yoga and the principles of holistic living. "I eventually stopped the intensive outward flow of the shakti energy because so many were not ready to handle the

*John White, (ed.), Kundalini, Evolution and Enlightenment, Anchor Press, 1979, pp. 184-188

YOGA, EGO & PURIFICATION

intensity of the physical, mental and emotional purification that it brings," he said. "I realized that my disciples needed more grounding, more clarity in their thoughts and emotions, and more purification in their bodies before moving to this deeper level." He now focused his teaching on a new style of yoga that he created, which he called "Kripalu Yoga," the basis of which is a gentle practice of yoga postures supported by the breath in an unbroken flow. In this new style of practice, the cultivation of a detached, conscious awareness of the process itself is the goal rather than the perfection of the postures or breathing techniques. Then, in 1979 he opened the Kripalu Center for Holistic Health in Lenox, Massachusetts. According to his biography, Yogi Desai felt that "holistic health would be the most effective way to introduce yoga to people who needed it but were not yet open to its more traditional forms. The services of the center would incorporate the teachings of hatha yoga and raja yoga, adapted to the modern Western approach to healthy living." The center soon became a phenomenal success, eventually welcoming more than a thousand visitors a month to its facilities. which were staffed by nearly three hundred full-time yogi residents. The rest is history.

Yogi Desai, who himself was married, encouraged strict celibacy in his disciples. In 1994, a scandal erupted that tore his community apart when it was discovered that the master had not been living his own teaching and had in secret

been sleeping with several of his students. Disgraced and literally thrown out of his own ashram, he left behind him a wake of intense anger and profound disillusionment.

As shock waves penetrated throughout the American yoga community, I remember my own disappointment, for I had seen Yogi Desai as the last of the few modern pioneer masters of yoga in the West who, up until that point anyway, had remained free from scandal. What is going on here? I found myself asking over and over again. These great men were true masters after all, men who not only had experienced glorious heights of bliss and ecstasy that most only dream about, but in this case, who also had the power to transmit that experience to others. These men had also, through the cultivation of unusual self-discipline, mastered the art of concentration, the very foundation of true yogic attainment. One would think that that powerful combination—mastery in selfdiscipline, concentration and spiritual ecstasy—should result in a very high degree of self-control, detachment, awareness and profound spiritual conscience. And yet, much of the time, the norm for these masters seemed too often to be one of shockingly less than conventional levels of self-control, detachment, awareness and . . . "So, what gives?" I kept thinking to myself. I also was frustrated because now Yogi Desai had given all the doubters yet another reason to have little faith in our power to transcend our lower instincts and become living embodiments of radiant spiritual purity in this dark and cynical world. For

many years, in my own teaching work, I had received a lot of flack for daring to say that it was possible to become an expression of absolute simplicity in this painfully divided human world, and events like this made me feel more and more alone. After all, I had discovered that the cynics, many of whom wear spiritual clothing, write spiritual books and lead seminars, like it when a master falls on his face. Why? Because it lets them off the hook.

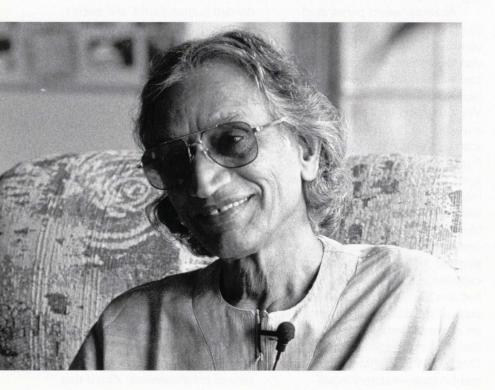
When the opportunity arose to speak with Yogi Desai about the topic, What is ego?, for this issue of WIE, I leapt at the chance. What would the master have to say about this all-important question and its relationship to the ultimate goal of spiritual practice, considering everything that he himself has gone through? Did his experience verify my suspicions that yogic mastery didn't necessarily equate with death of the ego, the perennial enemy of enlightenment? And if that was true, what did it mean about yoga as a path to enlightenment? What did it mean about the ultimate significance of mastery and its relationship to ego death?

Yogi Desai, after a period of retirement, has resumed his teaching career and is now once again growing in popularity and gaining success and recognition as a master of yoga. He travels around the world and teaches as he once did, and was recently invited by Deepak Chopra to give a presentation at his millennium celebration. Yogi Desai was also asked to be the leading spiritual teacher at a new ashram that Chopra plans to found.

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does

ANDREW COHEN: It is said that all spiritual practice in pursuit of liberation is solely for the purpose of slaying the ego. From your perspective as a master of yoga, could you please define what the ego is?

AMRIT DESAI: The ego is really the inborn sense of "I am," and that is something that nobody can avoid. The sense of "I am" is an identification that has different expressions through the evolutionary stages. The first experience of "I am" is when we directly identify with the body and is connected with the survival of the body. That's how it begins. And then I realize that I have a body, but I'm not my body. Then I realize that I have a mind, but I'm not my mind. I have my emotions, but I'm not my emotions. I have my self-concepts, but I'm not the concepts I have about myself. I have opinions, but I'm not my opinions. It's an evolutionary process, an evolutionary journey of ego. Ego is a sense of "I am"

YOGA PURIFY the EGO?

as an individual being, which nobody can deny. Ego is not something that is useless or that should be gotten rid of. It needs to be purified by clearly realizing who I really am.

AC: Can you please describe how that purification takes place on the path of yoga?

AD: In Ashtanga yoga, or eightlimbed yoga, there is the practice of the moral and ethical codes of conduct (yamas and niyamas), yogic postures (asanas), breath control (pranayama) and a proper, balanced, simple, conducive lifestyle. This is what creates the appropriate conditions so that the internal environment can be purified and so that naturally you begin to vibrate at progressively subtler frequencies. And then that makes certain stratas of life that are at a much more subtle level, which cannot be grasped intellectually or biologically, begin to come within your

reach. It is the purification of the body, mind and heart.

AC: Yogi Desai, I want to ask you an intriguing question: What does it mean to have no shadow? I understand that your guru, Bapuji, was supposed to have been a truly remarkable being. What I want to know is this: Do you believe that it's possible for anyone to ultimately destroy the ego, which means to purify the vehicle of ego tendencies and motivations to such a degree that they thereby become truly empty and finally free from narcissistic selfconcern and selfish actions? Do you think it's possible to have no shadow in this way?

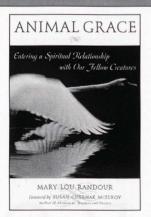
AD: Yes, it is possible. And it has been proven by many great masters who reached that state. It is not the annihilation of "I am," but of the false identification that follows "I am"—the false identification with the self-image, self-concepts, belief systems, personal biases and fears

and attachments. It is a letting go of who I am not. It is a discovery process, a letting go process; it's not an acquiring process.

AC: There are many well-known therapists who would say that it's not possible to not have a shadow. But I've always felt that if it wasn't possible to not have a shadow, then enlightenment really wouldn't mean anything. Whatever it ultimately means to be fully enlightened, I have always assumed that that would imply that the enlightened one was no longer casting a shadow, simply because of their utter purity of motivation.

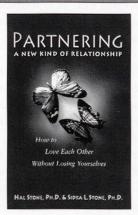
AD: What I consider shadow is self-image and self-concepts, and they are all built into our unconscious, which is why we call it "shadow." It's an emotional reaction, and it's unconscious because our survival reactions are supposed to function in that manner. When an animal is attacked,

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Available at Your Favorite Bookstore or call (800) 972-6657, ext. 52 New World Library www.nwlib.com adrenaline is released and immediately there is a reaction. So why do human beings have that emotional reaction? Because human beings have a survival instinct just like animals. Human beings, however, identify not just with the physical body as "I am"; they also identify with self-image as "I am." So when anybody attacks who I believe I am-my opinions, my way of doing things, my approach—it triggers in me the same survival reaction that ordinarily protects against danger to the body; and with that same intensity, human beings protect their self-image.

AC: So would you say that the goal of spiritual practice would be the eradication of those unconscious tendencies, to no longer cast a shadow?

AD: Exactly. That's the function of yoga.

AC: Could we say that would be, for lack of a better term, a perfected state or perfected condition?

AD: Yes, that would be a perfected condition.

AC: Jungian analyst Marianne Woodman, who regularly teaches at Kripalu, feels that perfection as a concept or as a goal "rapes the soul." She feels, as many others do, that for the human being who is seeking to evolve, the ideal of perfection not only does more damage than good but is, in fact, impossible to achieve.

AD: That is because psychology has been developed in the form of a "healing art." It's a pathological system; Freud's focus was dealing with pathological conditions. Yoga, on the contrary, is about transcending the ego rather than developing the ego. At the same time, psychother-

apy may be necessary for people who are emotionally sick; it is appropriate for them to develop a healthy ego because that's the groundwork for transcendence of ego. That is why I always taught that we go from recovery to self-discovery. "Recover" means I want to come to a normal state. However, most "normal" people are sick; most people are schizophrenic or live with internal conflicts, most people have fears or paranoias.

AC: Right. So-called normalcy, from the point of view of enlightenment, is delusion.

AD: Yes, that is why I say that yoga was not developed for the pathological conditions; it was developed for enlightenment. My guru reached that state, and where I am coming from is having known directly from my guru that that state is possible.

AC: Do you think that it's possible for someone to become powerfully enlightened or awakened and yet still have a big ego? I've seen several of my own students, as a result of experiencing profound insights and intensely blissful feelings, awaken to their own deeper nature to such a degree that they were able to speak in a powerful and effective way to others about it. And yet at the same time, their egos and self-importance definitely seemed to grow large as a direct consequence of their experience. But when they were asked to forgo the ego-driven, narcissistic thrill of charisma and personal power that the experience had bestowed upon them, they found it impossible to face into their pride without sacrificing the newly won enormous self-confidence. It seems that in the last twenty years there have been many powerfully awakened masters, extraordinary people who were in touch with and capable

of transmitting spiritual experiences to others who also, in retrospect, seemed to have had very big egos because of a narcissistic investment in being the best, the greatest, the truest, the most enlightened master alive. Is the temptation of self-importance almost always a by-product of powerful spiritual transformation? Even though ego death traditionally is the goal of spiritual practice and experience, isn't ego growth, except in very rare cases, almost always the inevitable result? Remarkably, in the end, for most, isn't the temptation of narcissism the "Catch-22" of enlightenment?

AD: What I have noticed is, even in the practice of yoga, when you begin to have the higher spiritual experiences, there is a danger because at every step or evolutionary stage for us all, there are temptations. And one of the first temptations, which you described, is a messiah complex that begins to emerge the moment you have some spiritual experiences. You begin to see the reality, and it gives you a grasp of what is going on. And all of a sudden the ego wants to take over and possess that. There is a tendency already there, and if you don't let go of that, then you are caught there, because that's where prosperity and anything you ask for begins to happen for you. That's the power—your abilities, your spiritual power, begin to manifest into worldly prosperity. And if you get caught there, then you stop there. So at every step of the way toward higher spiritual evolution, there is a surrender that is very basic to the spiritual unfoldment. So I would say, yes, that is very normal and most people compromise at a very, very beginning level of spiritual awakening, and they can't go any further.

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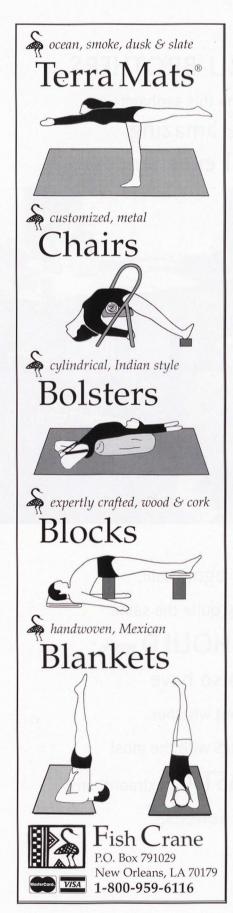


but when I saw their ego, I said,

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AC: So the temptation of personal power is one of the biggest traps of spiritual experience?

AD: The biggest. And it is meant to be that way. What is the last nightmare that happened to Christ or the Buddha? They were given the temptation of having anything they wanted, and they chose wanting nothing. All they wanted was emptiness, wanting nothing for themselves, and therefore, they could transcend that state.

AC: This is something that's not understood, I think, by many people—that inherent in spiritual experience is a temptation of narcissism, a temptation to be the one, the one who knows, the special one.

AD: Right, that is: "I know, and you do not know." If I'm superior to others, if I believe that I know more than you, then I am already setting up a distance and a separation from you. And that separation itself causes competition and jealousy, blame, shame, guilt. These are all the manifestations of that separation. Fear and all those human drives begin to come in. Once I believe that I am better than you, as soon as that takes over, I'm using the Source power to develop resources-more people loving me, more people understanding me, more people respecting me, more prosperity, more power, more knowledge, more skills-better than anybody else. That is a separative force taking over. And that separation is called "ego."

AC: Do you think that many gurus have succumbed to this temptation?

AD: *Many* gurus. There is no guru who survives without having to go through this. Because this is always the case; that's why we are

all born and go through those experiences. Every spiritual seeker goes through this experience.

AC: I'd like to ask you two questions about yoga and ego. Ashtanga yoga, the eight-limbed path, is traditionally taught as a path to liberation or ego transcendence. It seems that it is possible for a gifted spiritual practitioner to be able to attain high levels of practice in yoga, like the last three of the eight limbs concentration (dharana), meditation (dhyana), and absorption into the Self (samadhi)—but still be weak in the lower or more fundamental limbs of Ashtanga yoga, like the yamas and niyamas, the moral and ethical codes of conduct. Yet it seems to me that liberation or ego transcendence is absolutely dependent upon perfect stabilization in the first two limbs of yoga, even though levels of dhyana and even samadhi can be obtained, because without that stabilization in the vamas and nivamas, the power of that extraordinary attainment would not be grounded on a strong moral and ethical foundation. Without that foundation, obviously the ego could be tempted by the power and the glory experienced in the higher stages. So Yogi Desai, do you think it's possible that, in the end, the first two limbs of Ashtanga yoga, the yamas and niyamas, are ultimately more challenging for yogis than the last three? More challenging even than samadhi

AD: Yes, they are.

AC: Because it seems that many of the greatest masters and yogis of the past twenty years have had more trouble with the first two than they did with some of the higher stages.

AD: That is true. You do not practice the *yamas* and *niyamas* one

hundred percent until you go through complete liberation. That is the way it is.

AC: So you're saying that it's only with final liberation that the yamas and niyamas can be perfected?

AD: Exactly, and that I know for sure because my guru, the great yogi Bapuji, himself knew that from his practice. He lived in complete seclusion and observed silence for the first twelve years so that he would not be a victim of the external distractions. If you read Muktananda's biography, or that of any great yogi, you see that when they went through the kundalini awakening, the sexual energy becomes more powerful than for any other person in the world, because that's the force that it begins to create for connecting with and penetrating the chakras

[psychoenergetic centers in the body]. And if you do not protect yourself, you can be distracted.

AC: Protect yourself, how?

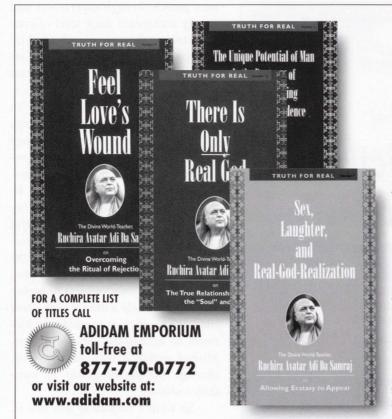
AD: By living in appropriate conditions that will help you to stay centered in your *sadhana* and not get distracted.

AC: You mean away from temptations, for example?

AD: Away from temptations, yes. That's why my guru lived in silence. He observed silence almost the entire time, and he observed celibacy.

AC: So what you're saying is that in the higher stages of practice, it gets even more challenging; the yamas and the niyamas become even more difficult to practice?

AD: Yes. Right. The issue is energy management. When we all were young, we had a tremendous amount of energy, but this energy was managed by ego, by unconscious forces—we were driven by fears, insecurities, demands, competition, jealousy, anger, fear, blame, shame, guilt—all those forces were managing this vitality and health, and look where we end up. In the path of yoga, consciousness becomes the manager of the energy. So management of the sexual energy is about developing consciousness. And money is also an energy, prosperity is an energy, knowledge is an energy. For most people, when they are growing and learning, they become distracted by all those things. That's what you're talking about. So the yamas and niyamas are the foundation and what one must learn to master in order to manage that energy.



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And in order to manage that energy, you have to develop consciousness. It must be consciousness rather than ego.

AC: I have another similar question on yoga. You're a master of kundalini yoga. It is said that the awakening of prana [vital energy] in the spiritual practitioner begins a process of purification that over time will naturally cleanse the entire organism, body, mind and soul of all blocks—physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual. You said in your book Working Miracles of Love, "On his return journey to the highest, man must pass successively through each state of consciousness he once passed on his journey away from God. On the path of kundalini yoga, this journey is made by the divine kundalini energy which is aroused from its slumber in the muladhara, the lowest chakra, and raised to the sahasrara, the highest chakra and the seat of cosmic consciousness. As the energy is raised, man passes through experiences and finally transcends each level of consciousness inherent in each chakra. This process is a slow and evolutionary one. The aspirant must progress on the path with great patience, understanding and self-acceptance in order to transcend the ego trappings of each chakra and gain passage to the next chakra or level of consciousness. Although such evolutionary processes are slow, they can be accelerated by awakening the energy of kundalini-shakti [a powerful spiritual energy] through the practice of kundalini yoga. Once activated, the shakti speeds up this process, helping man raise his consciousness to higher and higher levels within a very short time. What otherwise would take lifetimes to accomplish can be accomplished within a very short period, through the potent power of kundalini-shakti."

So what I wanted to ask you is,

do you think that it's possible to awaken the primordial, evolutionary energy and, as a result, go through many intense spiritual experiences and powerful awakenings, and yet still leave the ego intact? Over the years I've been teaching. I've met many students who've had their shakti awakened, have experienced many kriyas [spontaneous purifying yogic movements], and have had many powerful experiences through being with teachers of kundalini yoga. But it often seemed that the experiences didn't enlighten them at all. I mean, a lot had happened, but they were still struggling with the ego more or less in the same way they were before they had undergone these experiences. In kundalini yoga, it is said that once the shakti is awakened, purification is going to

naturally occur of its own accord. But for most of these people, it didn't seem that the awakening of the prana or the shakti really had had any big purifying effect.

AD: I'm chuckling because I've had the same experience. I have seen my guru-brothers who have also done this sadhana [spiritual practice] and have had the most amazing kundalini experiences but when I saw their ego, I said, "It's not working quite the same as I would think it should work." And that is why I also have the same question about whether the ego disappears with the most fantastic, extraordinary spiritual experiences, with all kinds of visions. These are the visions of shakti. they are the movement toward the highest center of consciousness, they are the blockages being released, but they are not about final union. When final union happens, only then do you really transcend the ego completely.

Anyway, I don't think that the evolutionary journey should always be judged or verified against the complete annihilation of ego. There could be ego and still be a journey and a progress continuing to work. That is my conclusion. If I see somebody who is doing kundalini yoga and he still has ego, I don't think that that means he has done nothing. I don't judge that way. I think a person can truly evolve and have many powers or siddhis [paranormal powers] and realizations, and ego could still be there. That doesn't deny their growth.

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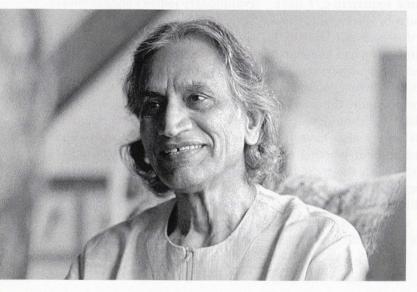
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"The function of the guru is to help the DISCIPLE to encounter all his fears and insecurities,



and without that there is no progress.

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the disciple is bound to have
FEAR and RESISTANCE.

And somewhere along the way,
the disciple is going to have so many
fears that are SURFACED by the
guru that the disciple would then be
tempted to see the weaknesses
in the GURU."

Part 2

EGO and the

ANDREW COHEN: My next question is about the role of the guru or master as a role model and example. Shortly after I began teaching over thirteen years ago, I opened my eyes one evening after meditating with a room packed full of people who had come to hear me teach. I remember vividly becoming aware of the absolute trust in the eyes of the expectant faces staring at me from all directions and being stunned by the recognition of the incredibly delicate position I was in as a spiritual teacher or guru. The absolute faith in me as a role model and example of what's possible forced me to consider once again the enormous burden anyone who dares to show the way for others automatically assumes. Even more significant is the fact that a true guru is declaring to the world that it is possible to be free in this life, to stop creating karma through acting out of ignorance and selfishness, to liberate oneself from the destructive power of the ego to cause pain and suffering, to be a living embodiment of victory in this life. I've always felt

GURU/DISCIPLE relationship

that without living examples, it's very difficult for a seeker to find a willingness in themselves to take that extraordinary leap of trust into the unknown that real transformation is based on. After all, to take the leap that releases us from the clutches of the ego, we have to be convinced that it is possible to succeed. In your case, you had your own guru as a profound example of what was possible. And no doubt his grace and blessings instilled a confidence in you that you also could carry that burden. Yogi Desai, at this time in the modern spiritual world, there's a deep cynicism about what's actually possible to achieve through spiritual practice and experience. One of the big reasons for this occurrence is because of the disillusionment experienced by so many as a result of the well-publicized failings of many of the greatest masters and gurus of our time. And what seems to be happening as a consequence is that, these days, many psychologists have assumed the mantle of spiritual authority that the gurus and spiritual masters held in the

recent past. But those therapists make no bold claims, and they do not challenge the ego in the way that only an enlightened master has the authority to do. So what I wanted to ask you is: Without that authority and without the example of a life lived free from fundamental contradiction, how would it be possible for anyone to believe that one can become free in this life and therefore be willing to take the risk of surrendering their ego?

AMRIT DESAI: The enlightened master still lives as a human being. If it is perceived that the master must be total and complete and have finished all his karma, that he is one hundred percent pure and has everything worked out, that system doesn't work. There is a misconception about enlightened masters and what they are or they are not. As long as they are in the human body, and as long as they haven't completely finished and ultimately reached nirvikalpa samadhi, or the highest stage, they will manifest all of human ego and human manifestations of temptations, likes and dislikes—but on a much more refined or conscious level. It is still going to be there. So the theory that somebody should find such a master is very problematic because they will always find some fault, you know?

AC: But don't you think it should be possible, if someone was truly a master, for them to be able to live a life that's free from fundamental contradiction? Because without that example it's very difficult, if not impossible, for the seeker to have the trust to take that leap beyond the ego. Isn't it essential that there are living examples of masters who are able to live their life free from contradiction? In your case, you had your own guru whom you had absolute faith in. Now I'm sure that if you found that there was a disparity between his words and his deeds, it would have instilled some doubt in your own faith and in your own ability to do the work that you've done over all these years. Isn't that true?

AD: Actually, this is true at a certain stage, but there are other stages of growth where more than the perfection of the master, the faith of the disciple, seems to be most important. And this faith can work at a deeper level than even what the master can provide. Because what the disciple gets from a master is more linked to their own faith and trust than to what the master has even achieved sometimes.

AC: Yes, in some cases it can work that way. In my own case, my guru really helped to liberate me through his grace, and it's impossible to repay that debt of gratitude. But at the same time, there was a disturbing discrepancy between the things that he said and the way that he lived. And ultimately, it led to us having to part ways. But you see, that was after that leap had been taken, and in my case, because my own faith in what I had realized was strong, that experience didn't weaken me. Ultimately, it made me stronger and more independent. But the point is: In order for the seeker to get to that place where they'd be willing to take that incredible leap beyond the ego, beyond the known, they have to believe that this master has done it. Most people need living examples. It's the faith in a living example that enables the seeker to trust—it's like jumping off a cliff or jumping out of a plane without a parachute. Because without that trust, if there's any fundamental doubt about the master, then the heart closes down.

AD: The function of the guru is to help the disciple to encounter all his fears and insecurities, and without that there is no progress. But when a guru initiates that, the disciple is bound to have fear and resistance. So if you just keep trust as the foundation of the

guru-disciple relationship, or hold the idea that the guru must provide an example of perfection, almost, in fundamental areas, then it's not going to work, because somewhere along the way, the disciple is going to have so many fears that are surfaced by the guru that the disciple would then be tempted to see the weaknesses in the guru.

AC: You said that someone can become a master, but they're still human, and unless they reach this supreme perfected state, for example, like Bapuji, which very few people ever do, the fact that they're incarnated in a body means there's going to be inherent imperfection. But all I'm talking about is being able to live a life free from fundamental contradiction.

AD: Maybe it will be clear if you say what the contradictions are that you consider fundamental.

AC: Well, that there's no contradiction between, for example, the teacher's teaching and the way that they live.

AD: That is a matter of interpretation.

AC: Really?

AD: Yes. Because you know it is a very well-known fact that when a therapist takes a patient to a certain level of connecting with their past traumas, there are areas where they don't want to face what they need to face to break through those blockages, and they will begin to doubt the therapist. The same thing happens with the guru for a disciple. That is why some gurus really test the disciples. There was a guru who actually made sure that

the disciples watched him go to a prostitute. He slept there, and the next day he came out and saw who still wanted to be his disciple. They test like that in India. Some of the great gurus have done that. So it is actually the function of a disciple to—you know, in India they say, "To be like a swan that can separate the milk from the water."

AC: Sure, to discriminate. So the disciple doesn't blindly act from gross, conditioned moral judgments that just come from the culture. They must cultivate a deeper understanding. Is that your point?

AD: Right, they have deeper understanding. So in America people may say, "Well if he's like Nityananda, with a big stomach and a big heavy body, how could he be a guru?" And if that is your concept, how can you ever find the right guru? Because there are other concepts that go with this—

AC: No, but I suppose the point is that if Nityananda said, "In order to be serious about spiritual life, you can't eat more than one apple a day," and then he was this big fat guy who was eating enormous amounts of food every day, that would be the problem.

AD: Right, I know it. I know it.

AC: So that would be an example of a fundamental contradiction. That's what I meant.

AD: There always has to be some degree of integrity.

AC: But what I'm saying is, if we're speaking about enlightenment and real spiritual transformation, the seeker, in order to take that leap beyond the mind, has to be able to trust

the fundamental integrity of the guru as a human being.

AD: And what I'm saying is that doubt is not created by the guru; it's created by the disciple.

AC: You once said that two weeks before your fall from grace at Kripalu, you prayed to God to take away your ego. And you implied that everything that happened at Kripalu was God's answer to your prayer. I wanted to ask you, how do you see it all now that several years have passed? Was everything that happened at Kripalu God's way of answering your prayer to help you slay your ego?

AD: I would say it is a result of my karma. If I interpret it in such a way that it helped me to move into the spiritual dimension, then I would say yes, it is God's grace. But not without recognizing that there were lessons in it for me.

AC: And what were they?

AD: I needed to let go of the role my fears played in that experience. The main realization was: I needed to let go of whatever fears were holding me back. And that's the main reason why I was born in this life, to particularly see that and let go of the kind of behaviors that were structured around my fears.

AC: Is there anything that you wanted to add to the topic of ego and the spiritual life?

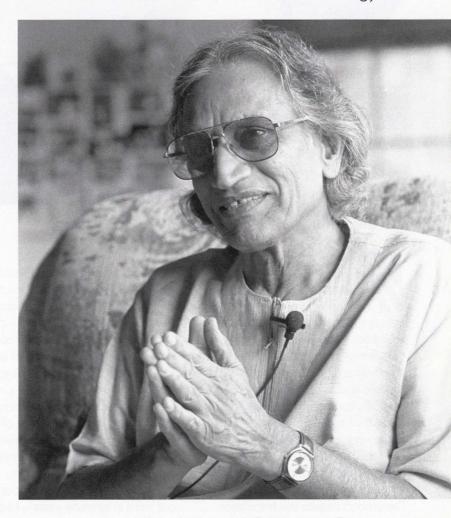
AD: I would like to see the disciple being in a more nonjudgmental space. Because judgments are very likely to come up—

AC: You mean about the teacher?

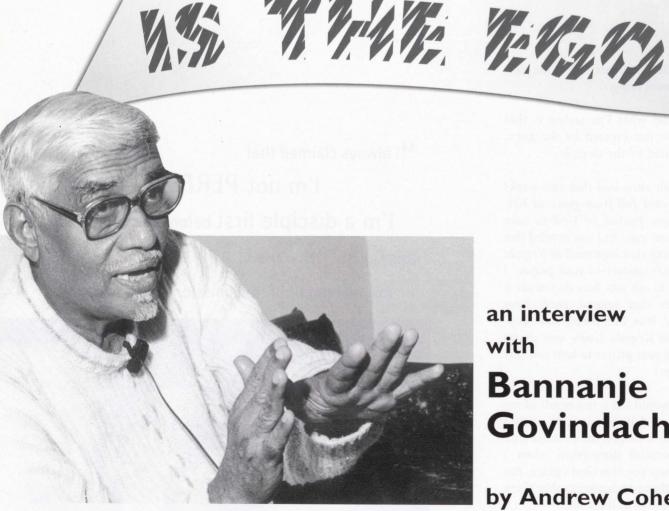
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"I always claimed that
I'm not PERFECT.
I'm a disciple first before I'm a guru.
This is just the role that I play

for the benefit of transmission of the energy.



I CLAIM NOTHING; that's what I always say."



an interview with **B**annanje Govindacharya

by Andrew Cohen

introduction by Craig Hamilton

lying in India is always a frightening proposition. In a land where daily power outages are more predictable than train schedules, and where traffic signals (when they work) hold about as much authority as The Clean Water Act, the thought that aircraft maintenance and air-traffic control could be anything more than sophisticated guesswork is, at the very least, a stretch. But as our chartered eight-seater twin-prop plane began its descent back into the Bangalore Airport that stormy evening last December, despite the trepidation with which we had begun our journey that morning—and the wind and rain buffeting our thin sheet metal hull somehow the only experience any of us could relate to was bliss.

Only a few hours before, we had

been deep in the jungled foothills of southern Karnataka at the beautiful new ashram of the man we know only as Ajja or "grandfather"—the extraordinary sage of Advaita Vedanta whose moving declarations of absolute freedom graced the pages of our Fall/Winter 1998 issue—a man whose rare spontaneity, uncontainable joy and infectious peace of being had left all of us convinced beyond a doubt that we had encountered one whose ego truly was no more.

Our meeting that afternoon our third in as many years—had been a seamless experience. As always, Ajja had been welcoming, generous, delightful, radiant—and absolutely uncompromising in his insistence that for him, there is no personal existence. As a delicious South Indian lunch

soon gave way to dialogue, in a matter of minutes the discussion was hovering on that most important and delicate topic that always seems to come to the fore when we encounter a teacher of the ancient Indian nondual philosophy of Advaita Vedanta: How does Advaita, a teaching that proclaims the absolute unity of all things, deal with the complexity of the human experience?

Like the words of the great twentieth-century sages Ramana Maharshi and Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj—men immortalized in the modern spiritual canon as legends of nondual attainment—Ajja's emphatic declarations that "there is nobody here," "the person who sees has gone" and "there is only bliss, there is no one to experience that bliss" were alive with the

WWW.W.W.W.W.W.W.W.

undeniable presence of that which is forever beyond time and action, name and form. It was clear from his rare purity and simplicity of being that when Ajja said, "There is no ego," he was simply articulating his own ongoing experience.

But coming from contemporary America—where two-day Advaitabased "enlightenment intensives" have become the latest addition to the health spa weekend workshop circuit, and where the unreality of the ego is being boldly declared by a "newly awakened teacher" in nearly every town large enough to have a Wal-Mart—we felt it was worth asking whether Advaita, at least in its contemporary Western form, might be oversimplifying the enormous challenge of genuine spiritual transformation. So when we began our research for this issue and simultaneously began planning our tour of India, we had left open the possibility that perhaps, journey in the land of mystery, we would stumble upon someone who could bring further insight to our ongoing questions.

Enter Bannanje Govindacharya. A pundit and guru of great renown, Govindacharya is known throughout India as a man for whom the scriptures are second nature. With over fifty books and five hundred published articles to his name, the largely self-taught teacher draws enormous audiences nationwide to his public discourses on Vedanta and many other aspects of Indian religion and philosophy. He had first come to our attention two years before as the legendary pundit who had "discovered" the previously unknown Ajja—a fact all the more interesting in light of his own philosophical allegiances. For although Govindacharya is regarded by many to be one of India's foremost experts in Advaita philosophy and had the eyes to recognize Ajja, one of the purest expressions of nondual attainment in

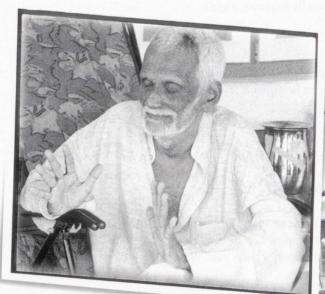
modern times, he himself is not an advaitin, but a

dvaitin or dualist—a proponent of the

devotional Tattwavada school of Vedanta which, in contrast to Advaita, does not deny the reality of the manifest world. Curious to find out what this avowed dualist would have to say about the modern incarnation of Advaita that is capturing the imagination of so many Western seekers, we had been hoping to at some point have the opportunity to speak with him. By luck, our chance to do so all but fell in our laps when a few of Govindacharya's disciples attended a talk by our spiritual teacher, What Is Enlightenment? founder Andrew Cohen. Eager to arrange a dialogue between the two teachers, they invited us to join them at the pundit's home on the evening of our return from Ajja's ashram.

As our plane touched down with a lightness and agility that seemed to paint the morning's fears as merely the play of maya [illusion], our group was abuzz with talk of the coming meeting. What would this classical pundit have to say about Vedanta's views on the ego? Would he only be a man of knowledge or would he also

be a man of experience? Looking forward to what the next leg of our journey would bring, we thanked our pilots for our safe deliverance and climbed aboard a motorrickshaw, hoping we would fare as well in our journey across town as we had in India's friendly skies.



somewhere along our

Indian sage Ajja



Ananda Kutir, Ajja's new ashram

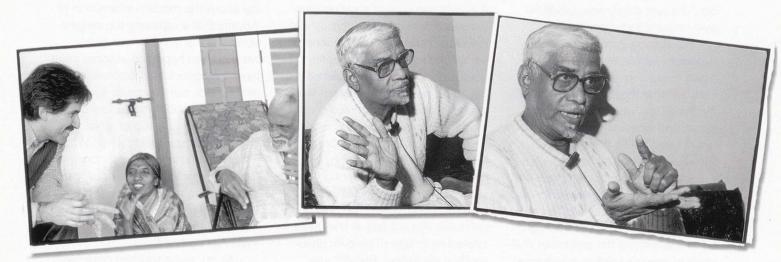
ANDREW COHEN: In spiritual traditions where moksha [liberation] is the goal, it is often said that the ego is the one fundamental obstacle on the path. In my own teaching, for example, I speak about the ego as pride or arrogant self-importance, as this very intense, profound need within the individual to see themselves as being separate from the whole. How would you define "ego" from the point of view of Vedanta?

BANNANJE GOVINDACHARYA: In Indian philosophy, "ego" has different shades of meaning. The ego is not only pride or self-importance or arrogance. In the most basic sense, ego means awareness of the self. This is the subtle ego, what's called *ahamkara* in Sanskrit. And that is wanted; that is not to be denied.

AC: Shankara said that the ego is the only obstacle to moksha and it's what the sadhaka [spiritual practitioner] must make every effort to liberate themselves from. Would you say that he was referring to this sense of self-importance or pride?

BG: Yes. This *tamasic* or gross ego. When you say, "I'm superior to all, I am great, I am learned, I am special." This should not be there. If one wants to reach *moksha*, this is to be avoided in any type of *sadhana* [spiritual practice].

AC: Wouldn't you say, though, that for all except the fully liberated one, there's some gross ego functioning, still active?



not to be rejected. Awareness of self is a very essential part of practice. First I must know: What am I? In order to have the awareness of God, I must first have the awareness of my *own* self. This is the required ego. One must have it. It is not to be denied by practice or by any other spiritual pursuit. It is there even in the deep sleep state. Even in *moksha* you are aware of your own self, with awareness of God simultaneously. So this is one kind of ego.

And then there is the dangerous ego. That ego means self-importance or pride. That is the gross ego. And that is always dangerous in the practice of the spiritual. Krishna says in Bhagavata, "If you've acquired a knowledge, wisdom or philosophy, don't be egotistic." Don't think, "I have learned this, I am a scholar because *I* did this." No, this should not be there. Even after knowledge, surrender should be there, submission should be there. Then you will be knowledgeable. Otherwise that knowledge is dangerous. If you want to realize God, you must erase this ego, this self-importance or pride.

BG: Yes. On a certain level, it is there. Of course, to some degree, these forces can be overcome through learning. But the dangerous thing is that by learning, one may also develop ego.

AC: It usually happens, right?

BG: Yes.

AC: Because there's pride in knowledge, pride in knowing. And this can be difficult to eradicate.

BG: Yes, that is correct.

AC: Also, it's possible that one could have powerful spiritual experiences, a powerful awakening, deep realization, and even be proud of that.

BG: There are so many levels of realization. And sometimes what appears to be realization is actually a totally false realization. There can be realization that exists

entirely in the mental world; it is only a mental experience. In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna says, "You perceive the world through the glass of your belief. You don't see it how it is." So if your belief is wrong in the very beginning, the *foundation* is wrong. You can build a big castle of realization, but the entire castle will collapse.

AC: In the West at this time, there's literally an explosion of interest in Advaita philosophy, mainly due to the influence of Ramana Maharshi, Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj, H.W.L. Poonja and Ramesh Balsekar. And there are also now a number of Western teachers propagating the advaita or nondual teachings. In Advaita, what is emphasized is the unreality of the world—the unreality of manifest existence. And in that, what's being stressed by many teachers is also the unreality of the ego. Therefore, it is said that the sadhaka need not make any effort to struggle against the negative ego in their pursuit of inner freedom because the very object that they're trying to free themselves from—the ego—is merely an illusion. The teaching goes: Simply realize that the ego never existed and then live happily in the knowledge of one's own inherent freedom.

Now my view on this is that it's only the rarest of rare realized persons who could get away with saying such a



thing—that the ego is an illusion—and that therefore one need not make any effort to liberate oneself from its corrupting influence. Indeed, only the rarest of rare individuals, someone like Ramana Maharshi or Ajja, could say something that absolute,

that outrageous, and it actually be true. Why? Because those rarest of rare beings are already finished—their ego has been utterly destroyed, burnt in the fire of spiritual experience until there was nothing left. But to encourage a seeker who is very, very far away from that kind of extraordinary attainment to presume that their ego is an illusion appears to be a dubious form of instruction. In fact, it could be dangerous in some cases because it opens the door for self-deception and/or self-indulgence. The seeker could easily, under the guise of enlightened understanding, abandon all effort to censor or control impure motivations or tendencies that actually do exist within them. In other words, "Well, the ego doesn't exist; everything is unreal, so nothing really matters anyway."

BG: Just to deny ego is of no consequence at all. If somebody merely *says* that they have no ego, *that* is ego—that is the greatest ego. "I don't have ego so I need not reject it" is a foolish statement. Somebody who says, "I don't have ego," is at the same time *expressing* his ego. This is against our experience. It's just escapism through philosophy.

These people say the ego is false and not existent and that therefore they don't have to reject it. But what is existent then? Does that mean everything is nonexistent? Then why practice? Practice is nonexistent! If the whole thing is false, if it doesn't exist, and if only the real essence exists, then why practice? A realized person can say that they don't have ego because it is a self-assessment; it is not self-assertion. They can say it. But not all people can say it. It is not a common, general statement.

You see, the problem is that in Advaita there is no acknowledgment of individuality. Advaita says that all is only one *Atman* [Self]. But Advaita is just a certain sect in India; it's not the whole of Indian philosophy. In fact, Shankara, who lived in the seventh century, was the only major Indian philosopher who preached Advaita. Later philosophers—Ramanuja, Bhaskara, Nimbarka, Madhva—everybody condemns Shankara. Nobody accepts him. But nowadays, Advaita has become a fashion.

AC: In Advaita philosophy, the world of appearances, or the world of manifestation, is rejected.

BG: In Advaita, the world doesn't exist. It did not exist, does not exist and will not exist. It is only illusory—it seems to be real, but it doesn't exist. And in Advaita, because they believe the world is nonexistent, they don't give any importance to it. And then, in fact, they cannot give importance to sadhana either. It is not necessary because essentially you are Atman. But the world is real. We live in this world and we face the problems of this world. Sorrow is there, pain is there, bliss is also there—everything is there. Everything is real. So, there is meaning to life. Otherwise, there is no meaning. And if there is no meaning to life, there is no meaning to liberation—because you are already liberated. This bondage is a false notion, that's all. There is nothing. There is no meaning to liberation. There is no meaning to practice. But if it is real, you have to swim this ocean and reach the other shore.

So, what is *moksha*? According to Shankara there is no individual *moksha*. Everything becomes one, that's all. But Madhva says practice is individual, realization is individual and even *moksha* is also individual. The perfection of yourself is your *moksha*. Perfection of myself is my *moksha*. We are like seeds. If you sow a seed, it becomes a tree and is full. So the fullness of the growth of that tree is the perfection of that seed. So the perfect growth—the perfection of your own personality—is *moksha*. It is not for you to become like someone else, and not for you to become one with all. *You* must become your *own* self.

the integrators

sheikh ragip/robert frager 82

> jack engler 94

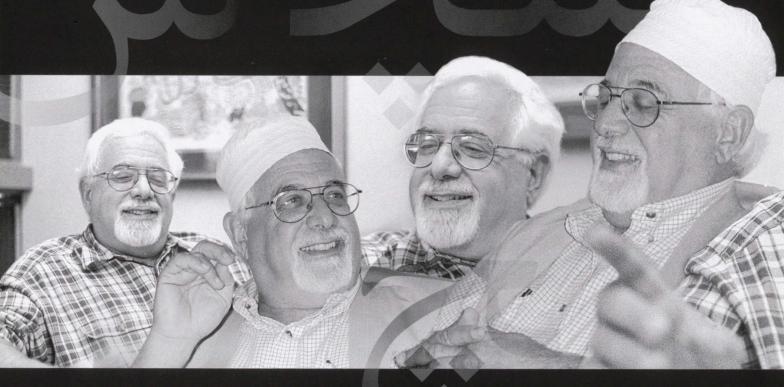
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the man with

a two part interview with

Sheikh Ragip/Robert Frager

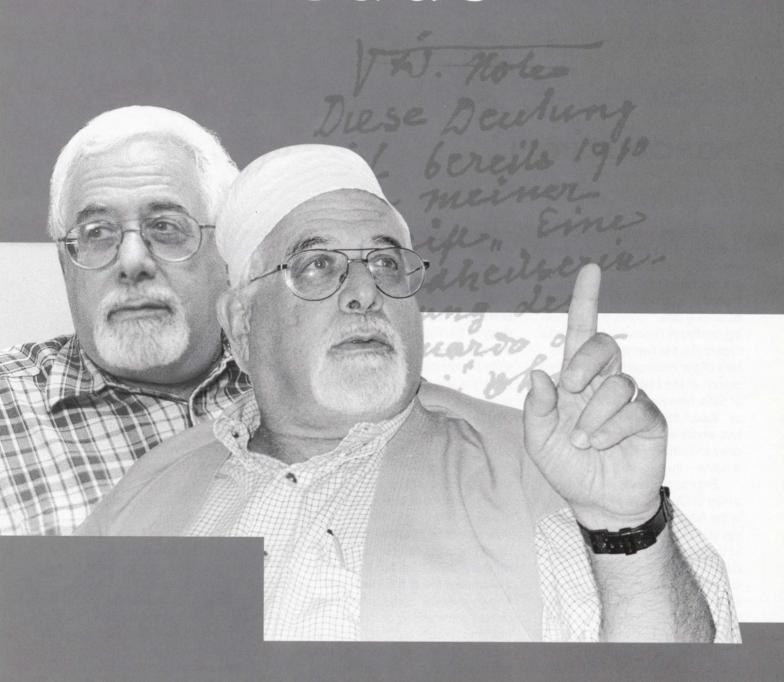
by Craig Hamilton



"Two interviews? Sure. You could call it 'conversations with a schizophrenic,'" the voice on the other end of the line chuckled warmly, "because I'll probably contradict myself. When I'm wearing my Sufi hat, I often say terrible things about psychology."

It was an early fall afternoon—the first day of school at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology—and Dr. Robert Frager, the school's founding president,

two heads



was in good form. Having called the soft-spoken professor with a proposal I was almost sure would be met with at least some hesitation—to interview him twice about the same subject—I was glad to find my unorthodox idea landing on what seemed to be receptive ground. From his comments, it was clear that we weren't the first to have pondered the seemingly unbridgeable gap between the two sides of this human-potential pioneer's life.

INTRODUCTION

continued

To the many students and faculty members of the progressive academic institution he helps guide, Dr. Frager is a dedicated teacher, a Harvardtrained psychologist and the author of, among other works, the psychology textbook *Personality and Personal Growth*. To the twenty or so members of the Redwood City, California, branch of the Halveti-Jerrahi order of Sufis, however, he is Sheikh Ragip, or "Baba," the man whose hand they kiss, whose words they revere and obey and whose life they seek to emulate—their spiritual guide.

Prior to this issue, we had been aware of Dr. Frager's pioneering work in the field of transpersonal psychology and of his role in establishing one of the country's first institutions dedicated to this emerging field of research and practice. Yet it was only when, in the midst of our research into Sufism's teachings on ego, a review copy of his new book, Heart, Self and Soul: The Sufi Psychology of Growth, Balance, and Harmony, arrived in our mailbox, that we began to learn of his role as a spiritual leader in this deeply devotional Turkish branch of Sufism. We were immediately intrigued. How was it, we wondered, that one man could stand so firmly in two worlds that—at least where the ego is concerned—seemed, well, worlds apart?

Having spent at that point several months exploring both spiritual and psychological perspectives on the ego, it had become undeniably clear that while Sufism and psychology have both dedicated themselves to the study of the nature and workings of the ego, they have come to wildly different conclusions about both what it is and the role that it plays on the path to wholeness.

To the God-intoxicated sheikhs and dervishes [practitioners] of Sufism, the ego has always been public enemy number one. Indeed, among all the wisdom traditions of the world. Sufism, the thousand-year-old mystical branch of Islam, may (with the possible exception of Orthodox Christianity) hold the fiercest stance of any regarding the nature and treatment of this timeless foe of the spiritual life. Known in Arabic as the nafs ammara or "self commanding or inciting to evil," this "rebellious," "tyrannical" aspect of the self is considered by many Sufi masters to be "harsher than Satan" in its capacity to drive the spiritual practitioner away from the path. In its endeavor to prove and maintain our separation from and superiority over others, Sufis hold, the cunning, deceitful and ever resourceful ego-"the greatest veil between us and God"—will go to any length necessary

to deter us from progressing spiritually—a fact that many Sufis feel warrants often extreme counterforce.

Upon returning from his historic battle with the Meccans, the prophet Muhammad is said to have turned to his followers and declared: "We now return from the lesser holy war to the greater holy war—the war against the nafs." And throughout Sufi literature, whenever the subject of the ego is raised, the term "mojahada," or "spiritual combat," is likely soon to follow. Using words like "mortification," "destruction" and "annihilation" to describe the ends to which they hope to send the ego, Sufi masters speak with fire and conviction about the struggle required to overthrow the tyrant within. "Resistance to the nafs is the basis of all spiritual practice and the perfection of all spiritual endeavor," the eleventh century Sufi text Kashf almahjub asserts. "Unless this combat is waged from the beginning, nothing will be achieved on the Path," cautions Sheikh lavad Nurbakhsh, current head of the Nimatullahi order. "Unless you condemn your nafs, resisting it at every moment and in every situation, and deny yourself even that which is permissible, you will constantly be deceived by it," warns ninth century Sufi master Abu Hafs

the man with two heads

Haddad. And finally, the renowned fakir Abu Bakr Saidalani states, "There is no attainment of Reality without the death of the *nafs*."

Yet while the great masters of Sufism—like the greatest sages of all religions—are unified in their contempt for the ego, it is nonetheless clear that here in the dawn hours of the twenty-first century, religion no longer holds undisputed authority when it comes to defining the territory of the self. Indeed, under the reign of the scientific worldview, if anyone retains proprietary rights to the mysteries of the psyche, it is the psychologists, hands down. And where the ego is concerned, they are singing a decidedly different tune. Championing the ego's vital role as a "functional center" and organizing principle in the personality, as the indispensable mediator between opposing psychological forces or as the core sense of individuality without which the personality would be unable to develop, the theorists and therapists of Western psychology, while their emphases and theories vary widely, appear unified on one important conclusion—the ego, rather than being an adversary in our quest for freedom, may well be our greatest ally.

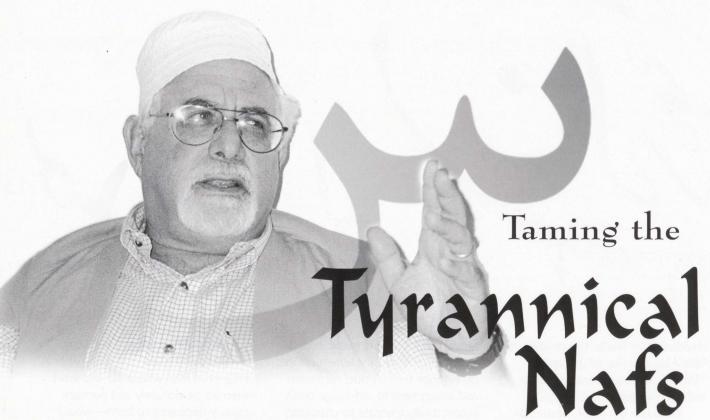
In part, of course, this vast ideo-

logical gulf can be attributed to a difference in the way these two camps define their terms. Pride, narcissism and attachment to self-image don't automatically translate to character, "functional center" and healthy sense of self. Yet, definitions aside, what is undeniably clear is that in the major schools of Western psychology, the notion that there is an "enemy" within us that seeks to actively undermine our spiritual development or that it is our very attachment to an identity that must ultimately be relinquished if we are to reach our full potential does not exactly find a receptive hearing. Indeed, even in the pioneering field of "transpersonal psychology" where mystical wisdom and developmental theory have recently become bedfellows, one is much more likely to find discussion of the ways and means of "healing the wounded ego" and "accepting ourselves as we are" than of the need for absolute renunciation in the face of the ego's insidious and unrelenting barrage of temptations. Indeed, wherever the psychological paradigm is allowed reign, the implicit or explicit goal seems to be one of healing rather than transcending, of repairing the self rather than losing the self altogether.

In light of the apparently irreconcilable aims of these two approaches

to human development, we wondered how Sheikh Ragip/Dr. Robert Frager—a man whose life and work seemed passionately and perhaps equally dedicated to both—would reckon with the always tricky terrain the ego presents? How could these two approaches really come together in one man? Would he indeed be the "schizophrenic" he'd warned us we'd meet? Or would he, like others in his field, have worked out a way to somehow combine the two views into a unifying "theory of everything"? And if he had, would it be a truly happy marriage?

Intrigued at the unusual opportunity that had presented itself, we traveled to California last October and spoke with Sheikh Ragip during the Saturday evening gathering at his Persian-decorated Sufi Center outside Palo Alto. And the following Monday, across a conference table at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, we met with Dr. Robert Frager. The result was a fascinating exploration of the lives and views of one of the human potential movement's leading innovators, illuminating both the depth and wisdom of two powerful traditions and the subtle and often confusing territory that reveals itself when they attempt to find common ground.



An interview with Sheikh Ragip Frager al-Jerrahi

WIE: What is the ego?

SHEIKH RAGIP: It's interesting that when Freud's writing was translated into English, what was translated as "the ego" is in German "das Ich" which means "the I." So our modern theories of personality are built on this notion that ego is the "I"; it's my sense of who I am. And Sufism would very much agree with this definition. Sufism explains that this sense of self, what it calls the "personal soul," is an outgrowth of our capacity to objectify ourselves, to see ourselves as objects. Now, our capacity to do that gives us tremendous power to act, to plan; it gives us tremendous control. But the problem is that when you begin to say, "There is an 'I.' Here I am, an object," then by definition you're also separating yourself from the world. If I say, "I" or "me," that immediately assumes dualism. Because there's "I," therefore there has to be "other." But from the Sufi point of view, we're seeking unity-and that dualism, which is so powerful, is one of the greatest blocks to attaining unity. Who wants to give up "I"? We don't want to give ourselves up; we're terribly attached to this sense of "who am I?"

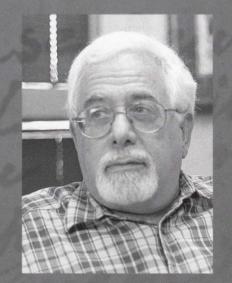
So, fundamentally, the roots of the ego are this sense of separateness or individuality. We identify with

this separateness instead of identifying with the soul, instead of identifying with the divine in us. And to the extent that we are attached to our self-content or self-image or separateness, that is one of the things that keeps us from truly pursuing a spiritual path. It holds us back from our deepest mystical experiences because often in those experiences that sense of a separate self dissolves. One of my old colleagues once said, "Everybody wants God but fights like the devil to avoid union!"

WIE: In your book Heart, Self and Soul, you also define the ego as "the collection of all those forces within us that lead us off the spiritual path." Is the ego, as you're describing it here, what in Sufism is called "the tyrannical nafs?"

SR: Yes. In Sufism, the lowest level of the *nafs* or self is the *nafs ammara*, or tyrannical *nafs*, which refers to all those forces in us that lead us astray. And at that level we are also unconscious of them, in denial that they exist, very much like an addict who says, "I have no problem with alcohol. I just have a little with breakfast, a little with lunch, a little something in between, but I have no problem." It's that denial, that unconsciousness, that makes the tyrannical *nafs* so incredibly powerful. And

The Beast on Which the Buddha Rides



An interview with Dr. Robert Frager

WIE: In addition to your role as a Sufi sheikh, you're also the founding president of a progressive academic institution devoted to transpersonal psychology. You mentioned to me previously that you are in some ways a very different person in your two different roles, and that as a result, you often even contradict yourself. In particular you said that when wearing your Sufi hat you often say terrible things about psychology, your chosen profession. Can you speak a little bit about your experience of the conflict between these two worlds?

ROBERT FRAGER: One way of putting the problem is that in using the term "psychology" in an academic setting, in an institution that offers a Ph.D. degree, we're taking on the whole Western academic tradition with its emphasis on head alone—certainly not heart, much less soul. If you break apart the very term "psychology," "psyche" means spirit or soul in Greek; and therefore, psychology or psychoanalysis is literally the scientific analysis, the logical cutting up, or parsing, of the soul, which in itself is pretty crazy. How in the hell do you parse the soul? How can you be analytic when it comes to the soul?

When you even use the term "psychology," you're buying into something that says logic will do it. But

logic is a very limited tool. Certainly, logic has caused me to make a lot of wrong decisions in my life. And in Sufism, as soon as you get to the higher stages, forget logic. It doesn't figure anymore because you have a paradox; what is that soul in you that's transcendent? What is before the before? And after the after? These are not questions logic is ever going to handle.

So I think psychology can only take one so far. And I think the problem with much of modern science and technology, including psychology, is that it doesn't know its own limits. Huston Smith, who had the fascinating experience of being a professor of philosophy and religion at the "Temple of Science," MIT, wrote beautifully about this. He said there's the huge night sky, which is this vast array of stars and things that you can't see with the naked eye. And science is taking one searchlight and illuminating one piece. The problem with science is that it says, "Everything we didn't illuminate doesn't count." So one of the problems with psychology, like much of modern academic science, is that it doesn't really acknowledge the value of where it doesn't go—which is to issues of the heart, to issues of ultimate meaning and value, to issues of the spirit.

Now, psychology does some things wonderfully. I've often spoken with Muslim psychologists, colleagues

Taming the Tyrannical Nafs

many of us are in that stage more than we'd like to think. I think it's a stage that one drops into, for example, when somebody cuts you off on the freeway, or when someone is rude, or when someone hooks your pride or makes you angry. We descend to that level of unconsciousness. So it's incredibly powerful.

Now Sufism speaks of the *nafs* as moving through stages or levels, and the second level is called the "self-blaming *nafs*" or the "regretful *nafs*." At this stage, you're more aware of it, but you're still caught by it. It's like, "I know I'm going to say the wrong thing, I hope I can stop . . . oh damn, here I go . . . ," and you start the sentence and you *know* you should shut up, but you can't; you just do it. In that particular stage, we at least realize

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that we're off-center—we're in the grip of something that is not our highest level of consciousness—but we still let ourselves do it even knowing that we're driven.

And then, as we continue to work and see it more clearly, as we try to substitute positive action and meditation on the names of God, which are positive qualities, little by little we ideally weaken those forces and move out of their domination. But even then, these forces can get revved up in certain situations. We may be under control of them ninety-nine percent of the time, but they're still there, except maybe in the very highest saints. There's a classic story of the prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him), where he goes out late at night to pray in the desert. And his young wife, Aisha, thinks he's going out to meet another woman. So as he's going out into the silence of the desert, she stomps out, and he looks at her and says, "Oh, Aisha, have you brought your little Satan with you?" And she says, "What little Satan?" He says, "Every human being has an imp, a little devilish part, their nafs." And she asks, "Even you, O Prophet of God?" And he says, "Yes, even me. However, I made mine a Muslim." Now, another translation of that is, "I brought mine into submission," because "muslim" means one who submits. So while the great saints often exhibit the most extraordinary patience and self-control in situations in which the rest of us know we would blow it, I think that in all but the greatest saints, theoretically that potential to be tempted is still there.

WIE: Does that temptation take on different forms as one progresses on the path?

SR: Yes. For instance, if we stay with the stages of the nafs, what happens next, after the regretful nafs, is that we come to what's called the "inspired nafs," the inspired self in which the wisdom of the heart, the wisdom of that inner light, begins to come more and more into the personality, into consciousness, so that we really have an alternative now to the forces of the ego-which is intuition, a sense of guidance, a sense of connection to truth. The problem is that the lower forces are still somewhat in action. The reign of the ego is not by any means over, and the biggest danger, of course, is that the ego can begin to use the wisdom and the light for self-aggrandizement, for inflation, rather than for selfdiminishment. Ideally, one says, "This light isn't mine, this wisdom isn't mine. It's something that comes through me. It's something from another source." But the ego wants to say, "This is my wisdom. I know."

There is an interesting book that's just recently out

The Beast on Which the Buddha Rides

who've said to me, "As a Muslim, should I even be *dealing* with Western psychology? Isn't it a distortion from our point of view as religious men and women?" And generally I've said, "Look, notice that the whole clinical field in psychology is really the psychology of the lower levels of the *nafs* [ego or lower self]." That's all it is. It's very valuable. In fact it teaches us some things about the *nafs* that we wouldn't know otherwise. The Sufi tradition, for example, doesn't talk about some of these fascinating defense mechanisms of the psyche—like repression or projection, the things that Freud and Anna Freud and the neo-Freudians laid out. Understanding this is very valuable. But if you think that's all the psyche is, that's absurd.

WIE: It seems to be a common view among transpersonal psychologists that before we can truly begin the work of abandoning the ego, it is essential that we first develop a strong ego. Indeed, ever since psychiatrist and meditation teacher Jack Engler first put forth the statement "You have to be somebody before you can be nobody," this idea has come to be regarded as almost the first commandment of the transpersonal psychological field. I recently read Engler's statement to the Christian Orthodox elder Archimandrite Dionysios, and he responded, "That's like saying you have to become the head of the Mafia before you can become president!" What is your view on this?

RF: They're both right. I've noticed, and I'm sure this is true in Greece, the spiritual traditions in general don't take children of one year old or even five years old into a monastery. But why don't the ashrams, the monasteries, take kids in at birth if they really believe that the kids should be surrounded by spiritual beings and by spiritual discipline, instead of being surrounded by the worldly life? It seems to me that one reason is to give them a chance to develop their personalities, develop their likes and dislikes, mature enough so that they come to the monastery with a personality—even though, interestingly, that personality is developed in the world. You have to let them be in the world and develop to a certain extent, because only then do they have a real vocation and can they make a reasonable choice. In other words, they have developed their egos, they have developed their personalities to some extent.

My former teacher Kennett Roshi once put it this way; she said, "If you look at the Buddhist iconography, there's a picture of Maitreya, the Buddha to come, sitting on a giant beast. He's larger than the beast—bigger,

"If you break apart the very term 'psychology,' 'psyche' means spirit or soul in Greek; and therefore, psychology or psychoanalysis is literally the scientific analysis, the logical cutting up, or parsing, of the soul, which in itself is pretty crazy. How in the hell do you parse the soul? How can you be analytic when it comes to the soul?"

weightier, stronger. He hasn't killed the beast but he *sat on it*, controlled it." And that beast is the ego. I think that is the goal. The goal is not to kill the ego. It's not to have no personality, but it's to sit on it and to be bigger than it is. Now, sitting on it isn't beating it or starving it. It's sitting on it. I mean the ego might say, "I'm being abused." But then who believes it? The goal is to somehow have developed yourself as a spiritual being so that the ego is a small part of you but a developed part.

Now I think Engler's statement can certainly be misinterpreted to mean: "Well, I have to work *just* on developing my ego now." My guess is the best way to do it is you work on developing your ego in the context of sitting on it. You don't just go, "Let me feed this beast and let it go free and then by the time it's really grown I'm going to have a hell of a time taming it." That's pretty dumb! What you do is feed and love the beast, but you train it as you're nourishing it with love, with understanding.

WIE: So you're saying that whatever aspects of self need to be developed to grow spiritually can all be developed in the context of spiritual pursuit?

When we start on the spiritual path, there is a rebellion and the forces of the tyrannical ego that have been underground suddenly become revealed. You suddenly see the power of the nafs, and you think, 'Oh, my God! I'm in much worse shape than I thought I was.' The problem is, you just didn't know what bad shape you were in before.

by Mariana Caplan called *Halfway Up the Mountain*—which is a bad metaphor because it's probably an endless mountain—but it talks about many of the dangers of having spiritual teachers who are halfway up the mountain, but have somehow stopped at this stage. It's the most dangerous stage of all because if the ego gets inflated with real wisdom, real light, it's very hard to change things. Because the light is real, the wisdom is real. The only problem is that the ego begins to attribute it to itself, not to something greater than itself. And so the self gets firmer, crystallized even; but what we want, of course, is for the self to become more transparent, less of a "thing," lighter.

WIE: Sufism has a thousand-year legacy of saints, living embodiments of the divine who have demonstrated with their own lives the possibility of a life that is free from the ego's tyranny. How does the expression of the personality change in an individual who goes beyond the ego?

SR: They still have their personality, but one way to put it is that the personality doesn't run them. They run their personalities. Another way to put it is that somehow the personality is beautified. It's permeated with light and love. It's still a personality, and it doesn't mean they become generic, like a vanilla shake sheikh. They're all different. But there's a beauty there, because the personality has become like a vessel that holds the Divine. Like a clay pot that soaks up its contents, in holding the Divine, the personality becomes permeated with the divine qualities of love, light, generosity and divine compassion. And also, to push the metaphor, it doesn't leak anymore.

One of my teachers once said, "If you haven't got your basic life in order and have not begun to live a life of calmness, stability, service, honesty, practicing the basic virtues and then you meditate or do other spiritual practices, it's like having a cow that eats organic grass and gives wonderful organic milk, but when you milk that cow, the milk goes into a pail with a couple of small holes in the bottom." Terribly wasteful. You probably never get to use that milk. The personality is very much like that pail. Certain habits like dishonesty or lack of calmness are like holes that make it so we can't hold the state of love of the Divine. We lose it. And the great ones don't.

WIE: Throughout Sufi literature, the ego is often characterized as a kind of willful part of the psyche that actively opposes our spiritual progress. What is the driving force behind the ego's agenda? What is the raison d'être of the ego?

The Beast on Which the Buddha Rides

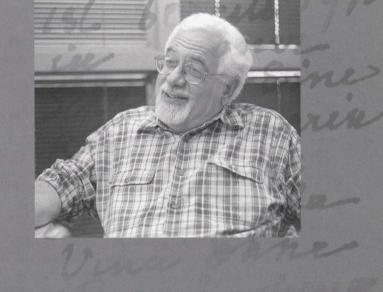
RF: Yes. I think developing ego out of the context of spirituality, where it's just pandering to the ego, is a foolish mistake.

WIE: You've been speaking about ego in a number of difditionally been used differently by psychological theorists itual traditions have tended to use the word "ego" to refer to the enemy of the path, the compulsion to maintain and preserve at all costs our separate sense of self, our identity, Western psychology generally refers to it in positive terms as either our personality or as a set of capacities or functions that we need to live effectively in the world. Yet transpersonal psychology, in its attempt to bring psychology and spirituality together, often seems to blur this distinction by referring to the ego at times as an obstacle that needs to be transcended and at other times as simply the personality. Isn't it essential, however, if we really want to exactly what the obstacle we must face really is, and that we keep a stark vision of the negative ego-the enemy of the path—firmly in our sights?

RF: Well let me seem to not answer this. I think, from a Sufi perspective, one very important component of the struggle to develop oneself spiritually is service—service to humanity but also service to the world, to all of creation. One of the great tools to do that is the personality structure, including the ego, the sense of self. Now even as you're working to divest yourself of that separate sense of self, which is the last stage, in order to get there, paradoxically, you need to use that self well. It is the beast on which the Buddha rides. If you look at the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, when you go through the experience of nirvana, you go through the experience of union and dropping all separateness. But you come back to serve. In the classic ten ox-herding pictures, the last image is returning to the world with "bliss-bestowing hands"—which means with your personality structure. But the difference is that your personality is firmly under your control. It's a tool that you use. It's not the master.

WIE: So in this sense we're speaking about the ego as personality as opposed to identity or attachment to self-image?

RF: Well, ego is an essential part of personality. It's not all of personality, but certainly when you say "I," that's a part of your personality, the core around which the



Here at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, you need a teaching credential that says, 'Now this person has theory, they've had supervised practice, now they can teach.' Well, who taught the great spiritual teachers? Nobody. They taught from that very real, immediate place, which is beyond the personality and beyond the limited life experience that any one person has."

Taming the

Tyrannical Nafs

SR: Well, there are probably two answers. One is self-survival. The ego is scared of change, scared to death of deep mystical experience and transformation, because from its point of view, that kind of change is death. It doesn't think it's going to survive it. And it may not. So it's a survival mechanism. It is the part of all of us that wants to stay the same, a kind of inertial component in all of us that says, "Don't change."

Another aspect is that the ego is often talked about by the Sufis as connected to Satan, to the devil. And it's interesting, Jung says much the same thing about the shadow. On the one hand, it's that which we don't see or accept in ourselves, but he also says that it's connected with larger cosmic forces, what we call "Satanic forces." And no one likes to talk about this. It's not real popular. In fact I'm teaching a course in spiritual psychology to one of the new religious groups that is very focused on positive thinking, and whenever I bring this up, it's like I've poked one of their sacred cows. "How can you say evil exists? The universe is good, God is good!" And part of me tries to say, "Wait a minute. Whenever there's light, there's shadow."

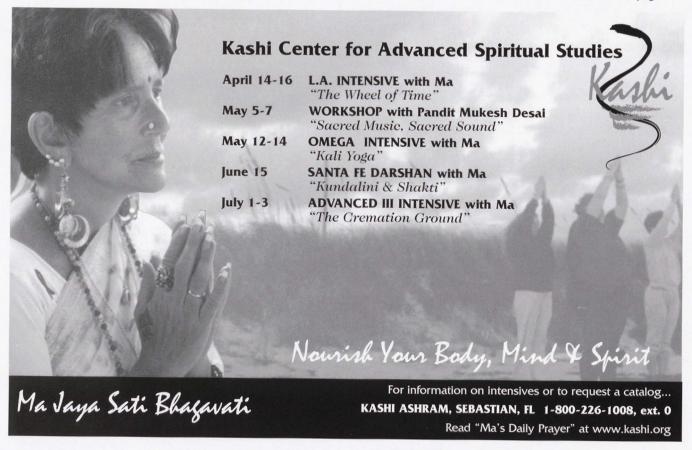
It also seems like it's not inaccurate to occasion-

ally refer to the *nafs* almost as though it is motivated, like a person. On one level it's a metaphor, but on another level, there's also a sense that it seems to act like an entity. Sheikh Tosun Bayrak has often referred to the *nafs* as "the thief," something that wishes to steal away that which is beautiful and valuable in our lives. It's almost as if it's a servant of Satan whose job is to test our faith. In fact, sometimes he has said to us as well, "Be especially careful after you've been on *Hajj* [pilgrimage to Mecca], after you've really done some spiritual work, because thieves usually don't go to empty houses, but if there's something there . . ." When you grow, when you change, in a sense almost a counterforce can be activated.

WIE: How does Sufism recommend that we guard ourselves against this undermining force within our own psyche?

SR: One way that Sheikh Tosun has spoken to this is: "What do you do when a thief comes into the house at night and you're in your bedroom, and you hear this thief creeping around, you hear the candlesticks going into his bag? If you charge downstairs with a knife in your hand, the thief will also have a knife. If you have a

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personality is built. The individual personality is built on this funny delusion that we're separate. It's built around: "Who am I?" and "What have I done?" "What motivations do I have?" "What desires do I have?" "What relationships do I have?" There's a weird presumption in there that there's an "I" having relationships, there's an "I" having desires. It's a linchpin for the whole personality.

WIE: But it seems that the ego that the spiritual traditions are trying to get rid of is very specifically the ego as identity, the insistence that "I have to know who I am all the time, and I'm going to distort reality at any cost in order to see myself the way I want to see myself, in order to preserve this solid tangible notion of me." This seems—at least potentially—to be something very distinct from the personality itself.

RF: But that notion of a separate "I," a separate "me"—if you pull that out, there's not much personality left to hang on. What's there?

WIE: Well, as you mentioned earlier, and this has also been my experience of the greatest masters I've known: as that need to have a separate sense of self, that need to know who we are, drops away, the personality becomes filled with something else. So there's still a personality; there's a structure there. But it's no longer driven by a compulsion of anxiety and fear around preserving an identity. That's gone, and what's left is a fully human expression of something sacred.

RF: There is a personality there, but developmentally that personality initially formed around a sense of separate self. I'm saying that at a certain point, the sense of self is essential in human development. You don't develop without it. I mean without that sense of self we'd probably be feral humans without a lot of intelligence.

In the course of development I think many of the great saints have developed a personality. They have developed a way of understanding and relating to people. And then it gets transformed, but there is still a structure there that allows them to understand the problems of people who come to them. So I agree with you that the personality ultimately becomes a structure that's imbued with the Divine and it doesn't have the capacity to throw one off, to distort in the way it used to. But I think, developmentally, that structure did grow up from a sense of "I," from the ego. In the course of normal development, one develops an ego and develops a personality structure. And ideally in the course of normal spiritual

development, one transcends them

wrong. I think the real answer is to hold that growth in the context of the spiritual. It's tricky because we are talking about two different levels. One is the normal maturation and growth of the ego. But at the same time There's something far greater going on here. All of this is in a larger context. This maturation and growth are happening but there's a larger whole that that's part of. It may have been Jung who said, "The problem with ego is that it wants to be the center of consciousness. It pretends to be the center of the whole psyche, of everything." So if you say, "Grow, but you're only a part of you're not the president of this system. There is this greater Self and we may not see it clearly now, but it's really what we're going to connect with eventually."that, I think, is one way of seeing how these two aspects fit together. It's a matter of context.

WIE: It seems that one of the chief aims of transpersonal psychology is to bring together the insights of Western psychology and the wisdom of the spiritual traditions. But are the traditions really deficient in some way? To be complete, does Sufism need to be augmented by the ego-supporting methodologies of psychology? Do you think, for instance, that your own spiritual teacher, Sheikh Muzaffer, would have been a more enlightened man and a better master if he had undergone Western psychotherapy or been exposed to Western psychological perspectives?

RF: You're asking someone who is quite biased about this. I don't think he would have been a better man or attained a higher level of spirituality had he undergone psychoanalysis, although there is a famous saying in Sufism: "Those who know themselves, know their Lord." And certainly, psychoanalysis is one very powerful way of knowing *some* things about ourselves. My sense is that his full education as a Sufi went so deep that he attained a level of self-understanding and spirituality that was complete in some ways. However, he might have been a better spiritual guide for others had he known more about Western psychology. I'm not sure.

WIE: Why do you say that?

RF: Well, to understand some of the mechanisms of distortion that his students were still stuck in, it may have

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the 1001 forms



of self-grasping

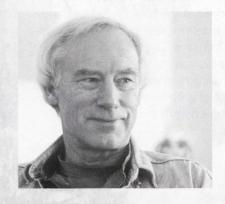
or ...

do you really have to be somebody before you can be nobody?

lack Engler is one of the pioneers of transpersonal theory, a relatively new way of thinking about human development in which Western psychological theory meets Eastern enlightenment philosophy. He is a practicing psychotherapist who also teaches Theravada Buddhist "mindfulness" meditation and Buddhist psychology. He is also the man who made the by-now famous declaration: "You have to be somebody before you can be nobody." His statement has become a catchphrase in much of the Western Buddhist world and almost a commandment among transpersonal psychologists and theorists. Because enlightenment is traditionally understood to be about the death of the ego, I wanted to ask this psychologist who is deeply steeped in Buddhist practice and philosophy what he meant when he originally made that statement back in 1981.

Engler's journey on the contemplative path began at age sixteen, when he read The Seven Storey Mountain, Thomas Merton's autobiography. This initiated a long and winding adventure that took him from the University of Notre Dame to Benedictine and Trappist monasteries in Europe to Thomas Merton's monastery in Kentucky. After Merton's strong discouragement of Engler's inclination toward the monastic life, he pursued novitiate training with the intention of becoming a university chaplain and professor and continued further academic study in England and Germany, where he got a degree in theology. He then went to Oxford

Jack Engler
by Andrew Cohen





to get a doctorate in biblical studies. Reaching an impasse in his personal, intellectual and academic quest, he experienced what he called a "personal crisis—a personal and spiritual dead end." He returned to America in 1969, became a social activist and then began teaching religious studies. He eventually made a decision to "start graduate work all over again" in psychology and religion at the University of Chicago, where he got his M.A. and Ph.D. He came to the end of his search when, one day, he entered the Vivekananda Vedanta Society bookstore in Chicago. Driving by the small bookshop and knowing nothing about Vedanta, he said, "Something prompted me to just jam on my brakes and go inside." In the back of the store he found a copy of The Heart of Buddhist Meditation by Nyanaponika Thera. "I got about thirty pages into it," he said, "and I knew that I had found what I had been looking for all my life. It was instantaneous." For his doctoral dissertation, he devised a research project that would take him to India to study Buddhist psychology and practice meditation. While there he spent time studying at the Nalanda Institute and did extensive research with practitioners from the Calcutta Buddhist community, many of whom he described as having reached "at least the first stage of enlightenment." The data he compiled from this research was

groundbreaking, endeavoring to "establish cross-cultural validation of the psychological changes at each major stage" of Buddhist meditation practice. Upon his return to America, his aspirations changed, and he decided that rather than remain in academia, he would go into clinical practice because, he said, "I had finally seen not only my own suffering but everybody else's. India just profoundly changed me that way."

Is it true, as transpersonal therapists like Jack Engler advocate, that Buddhist meditation and Western psychotherapy work together to liberate the different levels of self that make up a human being? Is it true that "personal issues" need to be addressed in a more personal, therapeutic framework, whereas the deeper and more profound dimensions of letting go occur on the meditation cushion? Is it true that enlightenment experiences usually do not liberate the self from the effects of childhood trauma or attachment to the personal and fundamental narcissistic tendencies? Are the transpersonal therapists correct when they assert that there is no fundamental contradiction between a psychology that endeavors to heal the ego and a spiritual teaching that encourages us to abandon it?

I looked forward to meeting the man who said that "you have to be somebody before you can be nobody" because for a long time I have

wondered if that statement was really true. Was it really true that you have to be somebody before you can be nobody?—that one needs, as the transpersonal therapists say, to have a strong ego, a strong sense of self, before one would have the kind of confidence necessary to take that mysterious leap into the unknown? From my own experience as a spiritual teacher, I have found without exception that if enlightenment is the context and the goal of the spiritual quest, then allowing any room whatsoever for the endless needs, pains, anxieties and frustrations of the narcissistic ego always has only one outcome: giving air, water and food to that which, in the spiritual experience, is recognized to be completely unreal. I was curious to know why the transpersonal therapists never seemed to see things as that black-and-white. Indeed, Engler's declaration has become so widely accepted as a truism in most spiritual circles these days that I wondered whether his words were being used by some teachers, students and therapists alike at times to avoid the potentially overwhelming implications of having to step beyond the ego entirely in order to experience directly what enlightenment is all about. But first, I needed to ask him what his definition of ego is from his perspective as a psychotherapist as well as his perspective as a proponent of Buddhist enlightenment teachings.

ANDREW COHEN: How would you define the word "ego" in your role as a psychologist? And how would you define the word "ego" in your role as a teacher of Buddhist psychology and meditation?

JACK ENGLER: In the psychoanalytic tradition, ego has a very positive connotation. It's a collective designation for a whole set of very important psychological functions. Functions from thinking to feeling to reality testing—a whole set of capacities that are essential to human life. And very often people have deficits in these different areas of functioning. In therapy, one thing you're trying to do is develop what's traditionally called "ego strength." As a psychologist, part of my effort is to help people develop capacities that may be underdeveloped or may have been derailed earlier in development or may have been compromised by subsequent trauma. So ego, in this sense, is a *positive* thing. That's the way I think of it in psychology.

But a lot of people who come to me for therapy don't think of ego that way. They think of ego in a spiritual context, where it's a *bad* thing. But talking about ego in a spiritual context, to me, is even more problematic. It gets talked about almost like it's an alternate personality within me that is bad; it gets reified as some part of me that I have to battle with, that I have to transcend. I think spiritual language reinforces a lot of dualistic thinking when we talk about ego that way—unless we're really careful in how we define it. Now instead of "self versus other" it's "self versus ego." And so the struggle just continues in another guise.

If you ask me what I think ego is in a spiritual sense, I guess I would say it's our attempt to grasp ourselves. It's the myriad forms of self-grasping that are doomed to endless frustration and disappointment. I think that's the root of what ego is, and everything else follows from this, whether it's preoccupation with self-image or whether it's attempts at self-aggrandizement or whether it's experiencing self as separate and over/against others. The core of it seems to be this attempt to grasp the self and fix it. Or fixate it, that's a better word. And where does the self-grasping come from? I think it mostly comes out of fear, out of this core, chronic, anxious sense that we don't exist in the way we think we do.

AC: In our research for this issue, we've basically boiled it down to two very rough definitions of ego. In the first definition, the psychological definition, it's really neutral in nature, not positive or negative: ego as the self-organizing principle.

JE: Well, to me, that's positive. Because we need a certain amount of self-organization.

AC: Okay. So we could say that ego in this sense is positive and would be the self-organizing principle that obviously has to be in fairly good working order if one is going to be able to do any serious spiritual practice. And just to put it in a simple way, the other definition of ego is negative, which we're roughly calling "narcissism."

JE: Mark Epstein used that term, too, in his book *Thoughts without a Thinker*. I hesitate to call it narcissism unless you distinguish between narcissism in a clinical psychological context and narcissism as it's understood at the deeper spiritual level because they're not exactly the same. I don't want to reduce what I think is the very deepest level of spiritual insight to a narcissistic personality disorder.

AC: Yes, it's much bigger than that.

JE: There is a core narcissism that is much more universal and much deeper, which underlies *all* personality structure. So if we're talking about narcissism in *that* sense, then I would agree with your definition.

AC: So from the spiritual perspective, we could say that that would be, in essence, what the ego is. Whether it's termed "ego" or the so-called obstacle to enlightenment.

JE: Well, yes, but as I said, I think of it more as self-grasping. To me, self-grasping is a more dynamic, experiential way to describe it. And you can see that in working with people and asking them to observe the moment-to-moment workings of their mind. You can help them identify all the thousand and one forms of the attempt to grasp the self.

AC: Could you define the different aims and goals of psychotherapy and Buddhist meditation with regard to the ego?

JE: I don't see them as inherently different. I just think they work at different levels of mind, at different levels of experience. But the goal is still freedom from suffering,

freedom from our inner blocks, freedom from those stuck places where we try to grasp at ourselves or where we become so afraid that we turn back in some way and contract around whatever it is we're trying to protect. In that sense the goal is the same. The path is also very similar. It's what we do when we sit down on a cushion or we look into our teacher's eyes: We're trying to see a clearer reflection of ourselves and face whatever it is that's unfaceable. In therapy it's the same thing: It's meeting a person where they are and then helping them go where they don't necessarily want to go-to see particularly the ways in which they may be contributing to their own suffering, and asking them to look at that. So in principle I don't see a difference. It's just a different level of experience that they're working on. The goal and the method in the broader sense are very similar, very complementary. And I think they're not even linear. But I used to think they were linear—that you do one and then you do the other.

AC: You are well-known for your statement, "You have to be somebody before you can be nobody."

JE: Yes, well, I don't see it as quite that linear or exclusive anymore.

AC: Then could you please explain what you originally meant?

JE: In a general way, I would still stand by it—that you have to be somebody before you can be nobody, although it's a provocative way of putting it. What I had in mind when making that statement was that if you are going to go to the depths of Buddhist mindfulness practice, which I was talking about, it requires certain psychological capacities, what in the psychoanalytic tradition would be called certain basic "ego strengths." And those ego strengths form around some stable sense of who you are, some stable sense of identity. And I still believe that's true.

AC: The essence of the statement "You have to be somebody before you can be nobody" seems to be that unless one has developed a healthy sense of self-confidence and unless one has a fairly stable sense of oneself, you're saying that it's going to be difficult for that individual to begin to practice mindfulness meditation in the kind of way that's actually going to be able to liberate them.

JE: No, just about anyone can do basic mindfulness practice and derive *some* benefit from it, unless they're in some kind of acute mental state in which thoughts

and feelings are just too disorganized and too chaotic because then asking a person to look inward and be aware moment to moment of their thoughts and feelings would simply be too overwhelming, it would become a regressive or fragmenting experience. But short of those kinds of states, I believe anyone can benefit from basic mindfulness practice. So I wasn't addressing basic practice then. I was really talking about going to the depths of practice, particularly those experiences of enlightenment that the Vipassana tradition talks about. What those higher stages of practice require is considerable ego strengths. For instance, a basic ego strength is the capacity to tolerate aversive feelings and emotions without becoming undone by them—what in psychology is called "affect tolerance." That's what I had in mind, that kind of thing.

One of the main things I was responding to, though, when I wrote that article was something I had seen in myself and was seeing in a lot of people I was working with, which was an attempt to use meditation practice to do an "end run" around normal tasks of human development.

AC: What do you mean by "end run"?

JE: Thinking that spiritual practice alone can substitute for normal psychological development; that somehow by going deep in practice and getting enlightened, that's going to solve all the nagging neurotic problems that have continued to plague one. So, "You have to be somebody before you can be nobody" was also meant as a cautionary statement to pay attention to *all* basic tasks, not just spiritual ones.

AC: You felt that people were trying to avoid facing certain parts of themselves by focusing their attention exclusively on enlightenment and spiritual practice?

JE: That's right. So the intent of my statement was to address that issue. But then, in that article, I tried to elaborate it further in terms of a linear developmental model. I wouldn't do that in the same way today because now I think our spiritual life and our psychological life are much more interwoven. I think the statement still has value in the way I originally meant it, but I would take it out of this tight psychological model of human development where we *first* have to develop a sense of self and *then* we will be able to see through the illusion of self.

AC: So in other words, development doesn't have an absolute or rigid structure. You're saying now that the

"Therapy doesn't bring you to the point of seeing through the inherent illusion of seeing yourself as a separate entity, and it doesn't bring you to the kind of total freedom that spiritual practice promises.

That's clear. And it doesn't pretend to. But if it's done well and it's successful, I think it really does relativize the way you hold yourself. You don't hold yourself so tightly and you're not so wedded to concepts of who you are."

strengthening of the ego in the positive sense—as this organizing principle—and the questioning of its ultimate validity could occur simultaneously?

JE: People who are doing a lot of spiritual practice and who don't have much experience with therapy think that therapy somehow inevitably strengthens selfgrasping or ego. But my experience with therapy, when it's successful and done well, is that it does just the opposite. It doesn't bring you to the point of seeing through the inherent illusion of seeing yourself as a separate entity, and it doesn't bring you to the kind of total freedom that spiritual practice promises. That's clear. And it doesn't pretend to. But if it's done well and it's successful, I think it really does relativize the way you hold yourself. You don't hold yourself so tightly and you're not so wedded to concepts of who you are. It begins to loosen up all your fixed ideas of self and in that way can contribute to growth in spiritual practice also. So I don't see one as tightening the ego and the other as loosening it. I see them both working in the same direction. And I see it much more as an interweaving of personal work and spiritual work. It's just that therapy doesn't take it to the depth that spiritual practice does.

AC: Could you please explain what you mean when you say that our evolution, for lack of a better word, is a combination of personal and spiritual work? What do you mean by one, and what do you mean by the other?

JE: Well, personal work has to do with our own individual life history, our own individual narrative, and whatever unfinished business we're carrying from that.



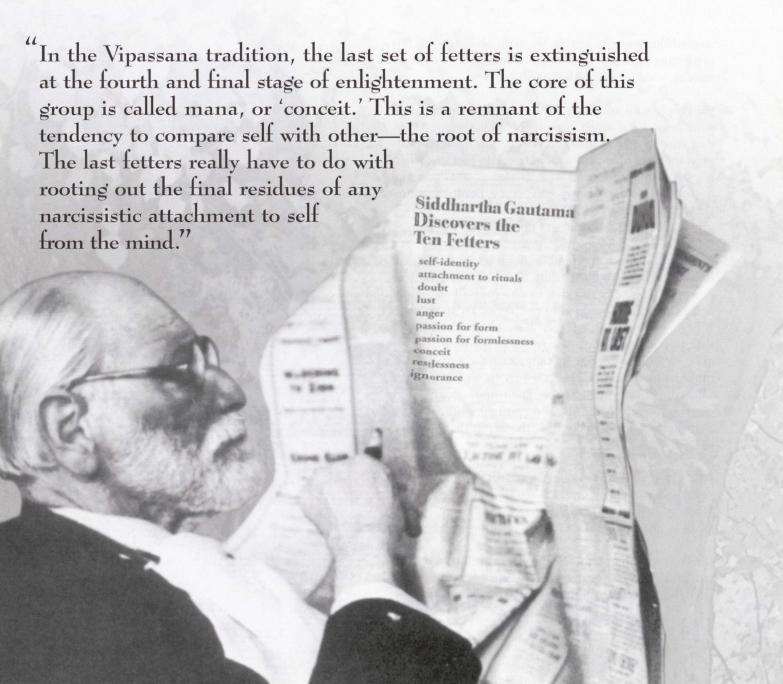
It has to do with personality and social functioning, relationship issues, work issues. These issues come up in Buddhist mindfulness practice—and probably from time to time in all practices. The different traditions work with them in different ways, and some don't work with them at all. Zen doesn't, for instance. And that's fine for the goals that Zen sets itself. The ultimate spiritual goals don't have to do so much with personality and personal functioning. They have to do with liberation from all those deep-rooted causes of suffering in the mind—in all of our minds. These universal causes of self-generated suffering-fear, greed, anger, selfdeception, shame, doubt-get filtered and expressed through personality and personal history, but they exert an influence at a level prior to their elaboration in individual behavior. They are universal; they're not unique

to any one particular individual.

But facing universal issues means facing personal and particular issues. As I've understood it in my own work and as I've seen it in clients who come to me for therapy as well as students in the meditation hall, it basically means, in the simplest possible way, facing whatever we haven't been able to face. Spiritual practice demands that we do that in one way, and personal work and therapy demand we do it in another. To the extent that anything hasn't been faced, it's going to continue to plague us and cause problems for ourselves and others.

AC: Absolutely.

JE: So, in a general way, that's how I understand the interweaving of personal and spiritual work. It's



continuing to uncover the blocks, the resistances, the ways in which we cause suffering to ourselves and others.

AC: In my own teaching work over the years, I've found that when one courageously looks into what enlightenment promises, one discovers an absolute perspective. And after that discovery, one either sees oneself as the one who was wounded and traumatized, or one recognizes oneself to be that which was never wounded or traumatized by anything. I've seen people leap from the perspective of the ego to one beyond the ego. One in which they discover a completely different relationship to their own experience. This new, liberated perspective may indeed include the awareness or memory of trauma, narcissism, fear, doubt, etcetera, but now, because they have discovered a completely different way of relating to their fundamental sense of self, their relationship to the ego and all of its baggage will be transformed.

You say that psychotherapy and Buddhist meditation practice often work hand in hand and that they work with different parts of the self. But I've noticed that when we allow ourselves to identify in any fundamental way with being the one who suffered, who was traumatized and who therefore needs to be healed, it inevitably has a profound effect on the way we relate to the very real and maybe continuing effects of whatever that trauma may have been. If, from the context of enlightenment, we have recognized the ultimate insubstantiality of the ego or personal self—that from an absolute perspective it does not exist—not just intellectually but deeply through our own experience, our relationship to whatever may be the continuing karmic consequences of our personal history is going to be very different than if we are convinced we are exclusively that separate self.

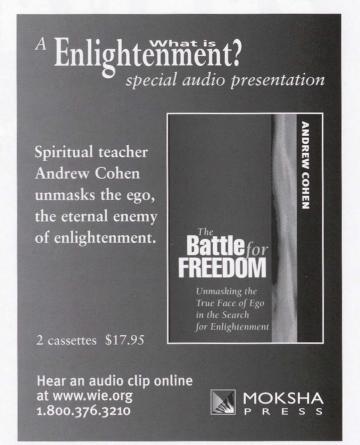
I wonder if psychotherapy and meditation practice really do work hand in hand to heal and liberate our humanity in the way that many transpersonal therapists say they do. I mean, theoretically they do, but because the context of the inquiry in psychotherapy is always relative, by definition—which means giving significance to the woes of the ego or personal self—I often wonder if, without an absolute context as the bottom line, psychotherapy could ever have anything to do with what liberation has always been about.

JE: I'm not talking theory. I'm talking about what I've seen in people. I've seen both kinds of effort work together, both in teaching spiritual practice and in doing therapy. I think what you say is true—a fundamental shift does occur in the way one relates to one's experience through spiritual practice. But it feels a little more complex to me. I would say both the personal identifications and the nonidentification with experience are quite real. I both am and am not that person. It's not that from this perspective I am and from that perspective I am not. Both are true: I both am and am not. I remember a conference in New York with His Holiness the Dalai Lama where someone started to raise a question about these two levels of reality, the relative and the absolute. They prefaced their remark with a comment about the relative level, saying, "Of course, I know that this ultimately isn't real . . . " His Holiness interrupted them right away and said, "Stop. It's very real. And if you deny its reality, you will create much suffering for yourself."

AC: That's definitely true, but I'm not talking about denying anything that's true. I'm talking specifically about our ultimate identity and what the effects are of that discovery on our relationship to our personal history.

JE: Let's take the case of trauma. Some very traumatic events happened—sexual abuse, let's say—and had very real consequences that deserve our compassion and our understanding. All of that was true. Did it happen to me? In some ultimate sense, no, of course not. But then, nothing does insofar as that "me" doesn't exist absolutely

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Is There a

An interview with Kaisa Puhakka nd and include transby Andrew Cohen

In thinking deeply about this ever intriguing subject—What is ego?—for this issue of WIE, a captivating thought entered my curious mind one afternoon: Could it be that in these changing times that we are living in, in the fertile fields of the emerging spiritual paradigm of the new millennium, a new formation has emerged—the transpersonal ego? Could it be that in the wake of the disillusionment caused by so many fallen "enlightened" gurus and masters, the mantle of authority about all things spiritual has slowly but surely been usurped by the Ph.D.s, by psychologists who have a deep love for the spirit, transpersonal psychologists who have become experts not only in psychology but also in theoretical understanding about the highest reaches of spiritual attainment? Wait a minute, I thought, this is interesting—

relate transcend

is there a new formation of the perennial ego being created here? One that knows more about itself, about its birth, evolution, ultimately empty nature and even death than any other formation of ego yet created? And the inevitable question arose: Could that kind of extraordinary knowledge about itself inadvertently be, for the ego, from the point of view of enlightenment, the most sophisticated defense mechanism ever evolved in the history of mankind? I had to find out! So I called Kaisa Puhakka, psychologist,

Zen practitioner, transpersonal theorist, Clinical Faculty Director at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology and all-around intellectual giant who single-handedly transcended and included Ken Wilber's theory of everything at the California Institute of Integral Studies's 1997 conference on "Ken Wilber and the Future of Transpersonal Inquiry."

Puhakka's responses to my questions about the "new formation" are revealing and indicative of the profound predicament of being a seeker of self/mind transcendence who at the same time is an expert on the subject. She wanted it to be clear to the reader, however, that in her view, any attachment or "position" of knowing was an inherent limitation and that maybe I, in my position as a "spiritual teacher," in asking these questions, was falling prey to the very predicament I was pointing to in others. WHO KNOWS?

What follows is a provocative, and hopefully fun, inquiry into the question: IS THERE A NEW FORMATION ON THE SPIRITUAL HORIZON?

ANDREW COHEN: I'd like to begin by asking you: Who is the most enlightened person you know of? Who has touched your heart the most and in whom do you have the greatest faith—alive or dead?

KAISA PUHAKKA: The Buddha would be one. Ramana Maharshi comes to mind. And I would say that I get that feeling from some of the Tibetan masters. And in the contemporary world, H.H. the Dalai Lama and Sasaki Roshi.

AC: Okay. So now what I want you to do is to imagine—even though I know this is impossible—but anyway, just for fun, imagine that you're some conglomeration of the Buddha, H.H. the Dalai Lama, Ramana Maharshi and Sasaki Roshi. Imagine that you have embraced their minds. You have become one with their minds and one with their enlightenment—and one with their profound wisdom that comes from beyond the mind.

KP: Alright. Sounds wonderful.

AC: Kaisa Puhakka has stepped aside and now she's just an empty vehicle for enlightened mind. So now, Enlightened One, I would like to ask you a couple of questions.

The first question is: Transpersonal psychologists seem to be in a double bind. On one hand, they have become experts in using the mind to conceptualize, communicate and facilitate the subtleties of the unfoldment of the evolution of consciousness. On the other hand, in order to truly know the real meaning of the spiritual path, we all

have to be willing to give up not only the need to know but also the need to be the one who knows. Enlightened One, what do you have to say about this intriguing double bind that the transpersonal psychologists are in? What do you have to say about the enormous challenge of renouncing the great temptation of the intellectual and personal empowerment of transpersonal psychology's all-encompassing, profoundly clarifying, intellectually satisfying theories of human development?

KP: The predicament that the transpersonal theorists find themselves in is kind of a heightened human predicament—the human predicament being that we really want to know. It's very hard to legislate against this instinct to want to know, or this desire or longing to want to know, which is very fundamental and has to do with our desire to touch directly what is real. And so this is just one other expression of it.

There is something very funny about this, of course, because, as you said, in order to really touch enlightenment directly or be enlightened, you have to give up the need to know. So how do you get out of that? It's a very profound predicament. Because if somebody tells you, "Just give up the need to know and that's how you'll get there"—it ain't gonna work.

AC: So, what would you say to transpersonal psychologists? What would you tell them from your perspective of enlightened mind?

KP: What I would tell them is that in making maps, as



they do—they characterize their theories as maps—if you do it like a child who is building sand castles, then there's nothing wrong with it. The child in his or her most creative mode is excited when the waves come in and wipe out the castle; the child screams with joy as the whole thing crumbles. Then they get the chance to build another one. If we have the appreciation that these maps are something that we have fun doing and that stimulates our minds, but that there are always an infinite number of other ways of drawing maps, then there's nothing wrong with the map-making activity, just as there's nothing wrong with the child playing in the sand.

Now the trouble with the map making is when one takes one's map very seriously and says, "Well, this is the correct road map, and there's no other map that is as good as this one." That's when you are implicitly making the claim that you actually know the territory, that you have walked it, and that there's some kind of correspondence between the territory and the map. As soon as the map making ceases to be fun and play, as soon as we take the maps too seriously, I think it actually becomes a hindrance to walking the terrain. If you are reading a map when you're walking, you're missing everything along the way. As Sasaki Roshi says, "You're running around thinking that there's some kind of a spiritual path or great way laid out in front of you like a road. You are fools. There is no road in front of you. The great way comes into being as you walk." There is no road that is ready-made, let alone a map that will describe the road. The road itself comes into being in the walking.

AC: And besides your advice on making the maps, what would you tell them?

KP: Besides being map makers, as human beings who are concerned with becoming enlightened, they also need to sometimes just do the walking.

AC: Without the maps?

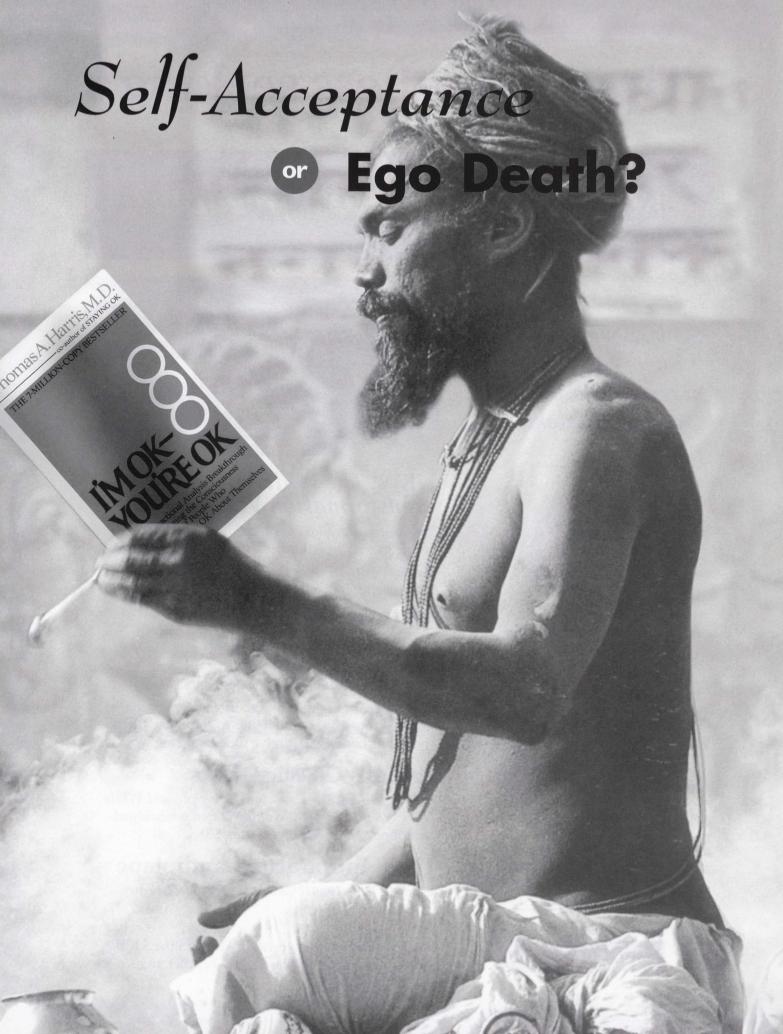
KP: Yes, everybody needs to do the walking without the maps.

AC: Enlightened One, do you think that because of their professional role, there is a strong potential in the ego of the transpersonal psychologist to take refuge in knowing in a way that protects them from the raw, undefended vulnerability of not knowing or having no idea? What I mean to say is: Do you think that it's possible that the subtle, comprehensive and all-inclusive developmental theories of transpersonal psychology could be, from a certain point of view, the most sophisticated ego defense mechanism ever evolved?

KP: Well, certainly it has the potential to be a very powerful way of making you feel comfortable that you really know the lay of the land and also that you have all but arrived.

AC: Do you think that the challenge of letting go, for the transpersonal psychologist, could potentially be that much more difficult because, in their case, there is that much more to let go of? Indeed, the direct experience of profound letting go, of having to radically abandon identification with knowing or being the one who knows, could be that much more terrifying?

KP: Yes, that is true. Though I find that basically to be true of *all* intellectual-type people. With them it's the philosophies or intellectual constructions that get in the way, and with other people it's something else. But certainly, here the irony of it is heightened because here we have people who essentially are seeking to free themselves from all these trappings—whereas other people may not have that as a goal. In wanting to pursue freedom and enlightenment, the theories become the trappings, and they become very, very powerful trappings.



Paul Lowe Saniel Bonder

nlightenment equals ego death. For millennia this equation has held true. While the term "ego," meaning "I" in Latin, is obviously a relatively recent addition to the English lexicon, just about every major enlightenment teaching in the world has long held that the highest goal of spiritual and indeed human life lies in the renunciation, rejection and, ultimately, the death of the need to hold on to a separate, self-centered existence. From Shankara's rantings against the ego as a "strong and deadly serpent" to Muhammad's declaration of a "holy war against the nafs [ego]" to the Zen masters' fierce determination to use any means necessary to break the ego's grip on their students, this "ego-negative" interpretation of the spiritual path has remained enshrined in enlightenment teachings for ages, for the most part unquestioned and unchallenged.

Yet in the course of our research for this issue, it became increasingly apparent that the meaning and significance of ego death are undergoing radical revision in our Western spiritual culture, a culture steeped in the values of autonomy and self-reliance and informed by a psychological understanding of human nature. In some contemporary spiritual teachings, this revision is a shift in emphasis, some might even say a translation of older values into a modern context. But in others the rejection is more total, a radical reformulation of both the path and the goal of the spiritual life. In fact, the ideal of ego death is more and more often viewed with suspicion rather than respect, skepticism rather than reverence—as a chimera, an illusion,

a pot of fool's gold at the end of a mythical spiritual rainbow.

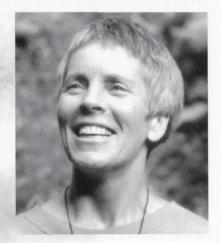
It was perhaps never more obvious to us that the tectonics of the spiritual world had profoundly shifted than when, last September, a series of books crossed our desks that seemed to capture this changed landscape in stark relief. Titles like Relax, You're Already Perfect and There Is Nothing Wrong With You: Going Beyond Self-Hate, A Compassionate Guide for Learning to Accept Yourself Exactly As You Are made crystal clear a conclusion that had been dawning for some time: that the teachings of self-acceptance have earned wide recognition as an alternative approach to the path of liberation. "Much of spiritual life is self-acceptance," popular Buddhist meditation teacher Jack Kornfield writes in his best-selling book A Path with Heart, "maybe all of it." To Kornfield and many other harbingers of this kinder, gentler spirituality, it is a crippling selfjudgment or self-hate (rather than a narcissistic ego) that is at the root of our spiritual dilemma—a core psychological wound that true spiritual work enables us to acknowledge, uncover and ultimately heal. "We must accept ourselves as we are" is a common refrain of these teachings—in order that all the parts of ourselves that have been hidden away in the dark corners of the psyche, including the ego, can be reconciled and integrated within a whole and unified vision of self. To the advocates of this approach, the traditional ideal of ego death is simply an anachronism in today's eclectic and democratic spiritual culture, a relic from another era that invokes a patriarchal, hierarchical and dualistic view of the spiritual life in which man is separate from God, and the spiritual seeker is called to engage in a self-defeating effort to kill the "bad" part of their personality.

What most intrigued us about this new paradigm was not that the message of self-acceptance plays an important role in the burgeoning Human Potential movement—after all, the groundbreaking book I'm OK-You're OK has been popular since the seventies—but rather the fact that the philosophy of self-acceptance has now found its way into teachings that have enlightenment as their goal. But is that where it belongs? What role should self-acceptance play in the lives of those who aspire to profound spiritual liberation?

In a break from our usual interview format, we approached four spiritual teachers who emphasize selfacceptance in their own work and asked for a written reply to a single question addressing this important issue. We contacted the omnipresent pioneer of new age spirituality Deepak Chopra; one-time heir apparent of Osho Rajneesh and maverick therapist, now independent spiritual teacher, Paul Lowe; Zen meditation teacher and author of a popular series of books on Zen and psychology, Cheri Huber, and former long-term disciple and spokesperson for Da Free John, now independent teacher of the way of "white-hot mutuality," Saniel Bonder—and they each graciously agreed to participate. And while these four diverse teachers did not always confirm our suspicions about this new face of East-meets-West spirituality, their articulate and illuminating answers force one to question many traditional beliefs about what's truly important on the path to liberation.

QUESTION: The goal of traditional spiritual teachings has generally been understood to be ego death—the final destruction of our attachment to a separate sense of self. But in today's rapidly evolving spiritual culture, what is often taught as the means to liberation is not ego death, but self-acceptance—acceptance of every aspect of ourselves, including our egos. The message of self-acceptance has become increasingly popular and is now commonly seen by spiritual teachers from almost every tradition to be the most effective and holistic way to address the suffering of contemporary Western spiritual seekers. As someone who works closely with many seekers, guiding them on the delicate and subtle path to liberation, why do you emphasize the importance of self-acceptance in the pursuit of spiritual freedom?





DEEPAK CHOPRA: When people get in touch with themselves, they become aware that the inner core of their being contains opposing energies. The human soul, because of its karmic baggage, is a place of ambiguity. It is a place where sinner and saint, the sacred and the profane, the divine and the diabolical coexist in seed form. When we get in touch with this part of ourselves and accept it for what it is, we simultaneously lose the need to judge others. Christ said, "He who is without sin shall cast the first stone." I believe what he was saying was that self-acceptance makes us compassionate, forgiving and nonjudgmental of others. This is the first stage of liberation.

CHERI HUBER: "Kill the ego" is a phrase that is easily misinterpreted. Who is identifying "ego"? Who is killing whom? Who is seeing whom as the problem? Who is right and who is wrong? Who is making these decisions? There are two things we can count on where egocentricity is concerned—One: It is very clever; Two: Its only job is survival. Ego will take anything—ANYTHING—and use it for its purposes, even the notion of killing/dissolving/transcending/accepting itself. You can see the danger, spiritually speaking, of misinterpreting "kill the ego."

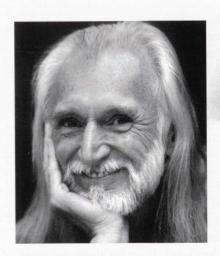
These words are interchangeable: I, ego, egocentricity, conditioning, karma, suffering. The definition they share is that they are the illusion of a self that is separate.

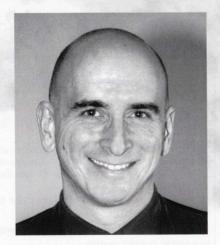
I offer this as a working definition of self-acceptance: The realization that there is nothing separate—from All That Is, from "God," from Essence. It is the momentby-moment living awareness that the self who struggles is not who we are but is, instead, karmic conditioning, a learned response to life, a survival system that served us as children but has lost its efficacy for us as adults and now needs to be appreciated, embraced and relieved of its job.

The desire to get rid of ego is very different from ceasing to identify with a karmically driven, egocentric, socially conditioned illusion of a separate self. The first implies a contest: Ego is charged with killing ego;

"The desire to get rid of ego implies a contest: Ego is charged with killing ego; ego battles with ego; ego wins!"

Cheri Huber





PAUL LOWE: If I emphasize self-acceptance it is because it is the deepest level of the spiritual path I have found that people will allow me to share with them. I have not found people who are ready to share at the level of, let's say, radiating nothing. When I share more deeply, it is not about self-acceptance, it is just being, including everything, with awareness.

This is not new. Jesus said, "Take no thought of the morrow, let the morrow take care of itself." It is an inclusive, positive approach, and to me, it is living what IS real. Is it good or bad? Does it benefit or harm? It just is!

On one level we have the illusion that there is an ego; on another level there is no ego. It is the same with self-acceptance. Self-acceptance is still a movement away from what is. At a certain level of realization, there is no self; therefore, self-acceptance does not exist.

We think we can accept or not accept, but the fact is: Existence is existence and we can either say yes or no to it. With "no" we go into the mind and conditioning, whether it is Christian conditioning or the new waves of Eastern influence. But when we live a total, unconditional "yes" to what is happening, we evolve.

Science says we use five percent of our brain and experience one-billionth of reality. People who have entered the depths of Eastern wisdom tell us there is much more. And there is. We get there by being

SANIEL BONDER: You're asking for what amounts to (a) a rationale for profoundly tantric, nonexclusive, genuinely liberating dharma and practice, or (b) a rationalization for why contemporary Western seekers need to be let off the hook that many of our Eastern forebears have swung from for lifetimes. I'll shoot for (a).

The phrase "self-acceptance" seems to imply resigning yourself to karmic limits. I prefer the term "greenlighting," which, as in Hollywood, gets real changes going. I welcome people to greenlight their limited egos and even the sense of separateness instead of chronically wasting energy fighting all that. For every Olympic spiritual gymnast who proclaims that he's blown the moon of ego out of his sky and now there's only sunshine, there are thousands of people (excuse the pun) mooning around!—wishing they could have really done it; practically, or actually, giving up hope of ever transcending the vise of separateness, which still grips them day and night.

What needs to die is separateness. Not "I-ness" itself. "I" is just the natural, organizing function of individual personhood. We need it to navigate space-time—even in dreams and visions. "I" can't blow "your" nose. Limited, egoic "I-ness" is OK. It's also not identical to chronically suffered separateness. And I suggest that it's possible, and much more natural and feasible, to transcend the separateness—and thus to enter fundamentally liberated existence—without assuming it's necessary

ego battles with ego; ego wins! The second implies letting go of the illusion of control; it is the end of struggle, and the means to that end is awareness.

The processes that I teach for ceasing to identify with conditioning are threefold: pay attention, believe nothing, take nothing personally. I don't actually teach self-acceptance. I encourage people to see that the things they believe about themselves are not true. When you see through all that you have been taught to believe, when you realize who you are, self-acceptance becomes irrelevant.

CONTINUUM

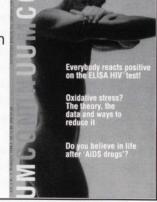
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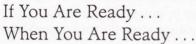
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All suffering is held in place by false beliefs. All beliefs are false. What is, is. Believing it is not helpful. Believing is what the illusory separate self does to maintain an existence outside the present moment. The process of not taking any of this personally allows us to see that we are all in the same boat. We can take responsibility for ending suffering, but we don't have to blame ourselves for being born into it.

Paul Lowe continued

ourselves, unconditionally, in each moment. And the method I have found most supportive is absolute ruthless honesty with yourself, and when you are ready. sharing the truth with others. Be in the truth of each moment—all that you are sensing in the body, thinking in the mind, feeling with the emotions. Don't suppress it and don't support it. Be with what is.

I have come to see that this focus on enlightenment is outdated. It was a goal for a while; it gave us something to head for. But enlightenment is another myth, another idea of God, something outside of ourselves to look toward to comfort ourselves.

In my search I have often felt, "This is it!"—and then discovered another level. It seems there are endless levels of awakening, of consciousness expanding: and yet, there's only One—there is the unformed. From the unformed we create what we call reality through saying yes or no.

Saniel Bonder continued

in advance, or ever, to flatline the thinking mind, banish reactive emotions, exterminate "I-ness," and always be gloriously blissful no matter what!

Transmission of the fundamentally nonseparate, nonexclusive state is crucial. You can then template on an awakened helper's radiant nature and, with good counsel and wise friends, greenlight your heroic, tantric identification with your previously cut off, detested, shadow parts. But you don't get reduced to just being all that. You get to recognize it. Your own infinite conscious nature is cooking alive and awake, so you're suddenly noticing what has made you tick in separateness all along, in ways you never could have before. And you get more and more confident that your "I" and all its stuff cannot sabotage your awakening into integral, nonseparate freedom of Being.

That awakening, when it occurs, is not perfection. Paradoxically, it's not without limited "I-ness." It also detonates a massive, endless, spontaneous transformation of that local self and all its parts. But nobody I know who's gone through it would trade it in!

the psychologists

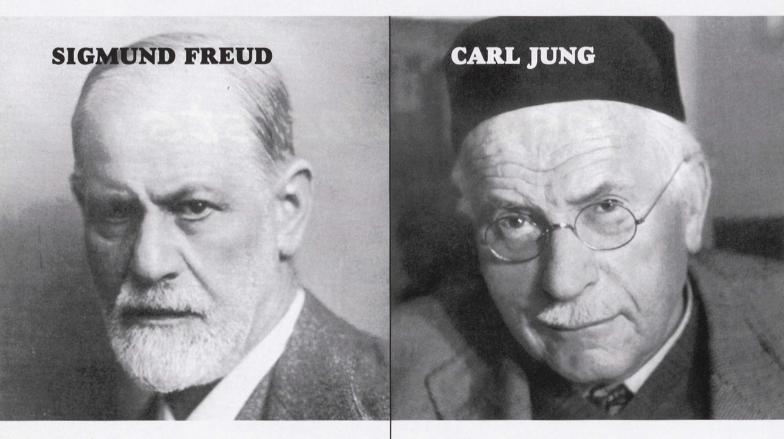
leon hoffman

james hollis 123

henry stein 127

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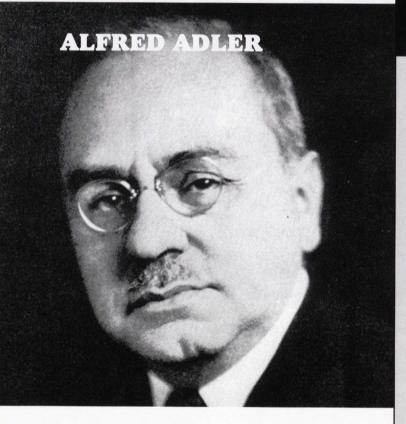
The ego [is] a poor creature owing service to three masters and consequently menaced by dangers: from the external world, from the libido of the id, and from the severity of the superego. . . . As a frontier-creature, the ego tries to mediate between the world and the id, to make the id pliable to the world and, by means of its muscular activity, to make the world fall in with the wishes of the id.

-from The Ego and the Id

The ego is the complex factor to which all conscious contents are related. It forms, as it were, the centre of the field of consciousness; and, insofar as this comprises the empirical personality, the ego is the subject of all personal acts of consciousness. . . . On the one hand, the ego rests on the total field of consciousness, and on the other, on the sum total of unconscious contents. "?

> —from Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self

Ich"?



Very early in my work, I found man to be a self-consistent unity. The foremost task of Individual Psychology is to prove this unity in each individual—in his thinking, feeling, acting; in his so-called conscious and unconscious—in every expression of his personality. This self-consistent unity we call the 'Life-Style' of the individual. What is frequently labeled 'the ego' is nothing more than the style of the individual.

—from The Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler

igmund Freud, Carl Jung and

Alfred Adler. These three figures loom large in the history of modern psychology, casting long shadows that have, in the course of one century, forever changed the way we use the first-person pronoun, "I." Among these giants, Freud is indisputably the most towering monolith. It was Freud's pioneering use of the term "the I" ("das Ich" in his native German, which was then translated into the Latin "ego") that brought "ego" into common parlance and popular interest to the process of self-consciousness.

What is the ego? What is the "I" or subjective sense of self? How does this unequivocal yet enigmatic fact of our experience as human beings come into being? What is the nature of the "ghost in the machine"? While religion and philosophy have asked these questions for millennia, modern Western psychology has sought to bring a scientific, albeit mechanistic, understanding to the nature of the mind and its workings. Psychology is recognized in the secular world today to be the definitive source for knowledge about the ego. So for this edition of What Is Enlightenment?, we wanted to tap into the original wellsprings of modern psychology—or at least come as close to them as we could.

Introduction by Susan Bridle



INTRODUCTION

continued

Sigmund Freud, with extraordinary passion, ingenuity and insight, was intent on acquiring scientific certainty about the essence and activity of the ego, which he believed could be attained only by isolating the various phenomena of the mind and consciousness as mechanisms. The repercussions were revolutionary. In his more than fifty years of groundbreaking research into the human psyche, Freud elaborated a network of theories about the many currents and crosscurrents below the surface of the human personalitythe conscious and unconscious; the ego, id and superego; the libidinal and aggressive drives; the Oedipus and Electra complexes; the defense mechanisms—that have become inextricably interwoven in the fabric of modern thought. We now know that there is far more to the "I" than meets the eye.

How we view the "I" seems to color how we view everything. Our understanding of the "I," the ego, is perhaps the first and closest lens, the first film against the cornea, through which we look at

Was ist "das Ich"?



our experience and at what it means to be a human being. For Freud—immersed in the dynamic tensions and countertensions within the psyche that he believed made man unique among the animals and enabled the selfinterested compromise that we call human civilization—the ego is constantly buffeted by opposing forces and does its best to negotiate them all. "The poor ego . . . serves three severe masters and does what it can to bring their claims and demands into harmony with one another. No wonder that the ego so often fails in its task," he writes. Freud's therapeutic aim was the courageous and fully conscious acknowledgment of this harsh reality of the state of man, and it was this that he felt would facilitate his highest vision of psychological health: the "transformation of neurotic misery into common unhappiness."

Psychoanalysis—Freud's innovative treatment method in which the patient is encouraged to speak freely about memories, associations, fantasies and dreams and which relies on Freud's theories of interpretation—was Freud's noble cause and, for a time, it was Alfred Adler's and Carl Jung's as well. Alfred Adler, a medical doctor with a deep interest in psychology and human nature, met Freud in their native Vienna in 1900 at a medical conference where Freud presented his new theories about dreams and the unconscious. Freud's radical ideas were met with scorn and open hostility—as they often were

during these early years of the psychoanalytic movement. Adler, one of the few who had recognized the brilliance of Freud's first major work, The Interpretation of Dreams, was dismayed by the proceedings and came to Freud's defense in an article he wrote for a medical journal in which he demanded that Freud's views be given the respect and attention they deserved. Adler soon joined the circle of psychologists who gathered at Freud's home on Wednesday evenings for animated discussion, debate and collaboration about emerging psychoanalytic theory. Buttressed by his loyal supporters, many of them insightful psychologists and original thinkers in their own right, Freud's movement grew as his seminal ideas gradually captured the imagination of intellectuals throughout Europe, England and America. Adler was for a time the president of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Association and the editor of its journal. Yet there had always been differences between his own views and Freud's, and over the years, these differences became increasingly apparent—and increasingly problematic. For one, Adler never accepted Freud's views about the overarching significance of infantile sexual trauma. Freud was launching a revolution, however, and there was no room for dissent among the officers. In a dramatic and politically charged break, Adler resigned his posts in 1911, leaving Freud's circle along with a group of eight colleagues to found his own school of psychology. He

and Freud never met again.

Adler's school of psychology, which he called "Individual Psychology," was based on the idea of the indivisibility of the personality. His most significant divergence from Freud's premises was his belief that it was crucial to view the human being as a whole—not as a conglomeration of mechanisms, drives or dynamic parts. And in contrast to most psychological thinking of the time, Adler believed that, fundamentally, human beings are self-determined. Central to his therapeutic approach was his belief that people always have control over their lives and make choices that shape them. "Individual Psychology breaks through the theory of determinism," he writes. "No experience is a cause of success or failure. We do not suffer from the shock of our experiences—the so-called trauma—but we make out of them just what suits our purposes. We are self-determined by the meaning we give to our experiences." Adler's emphasis on the wholeness of the person and the fact that our values inevitably shape our experience led to his conviction that, in the end, there is only one true meaning to human life: care and love for our fellowmen. "There have always been men who understood this fact; who knew that the meaning of life is to be interested in the whole of mankind and who tried to develop social interest and love. In all religions we find this concern for the salvation of man." For Adler, it is only this meaning, this

interpretation of our experience—and our conscious increasing of fellow-feeling and care for the whole of humankind—that leads to the genuine mental health and happiness of the individual.

Carl Jung met Freud in 1907, after he sent Freud a report on some of his early research in the psychotherapeutic technique of word association, to which Freud responded with an invitation to meet him in Vienna. Jung lived in Zurich, where he was practicing psychiatry and teaching at Zurich University. At that first meeting in Freud's home, the two men talked "virtually without a pause for thirteen hours." Each was captivated by the other's genius and passionate interest in psychology, and they began a close correspondence in which they exchanged letters as often as three times a week. lung quickly stepped into a leading role in the psychoanalytic movement, becoming a staunch defender and chief disseminator of Freud's ideas. Freud confided to lung that he saw him as his "successor and crown prince," and lung became, for all concerned, Freud's heir apparent. From the beginning, Jung found Freud's theories about "repression" and "the unconscious" to be ingenious explanations of much of what he was finding in his work with his own patients. But, as Adler did, he struggled with Freud's insistence on the primacy of the sexual drive.

Yet there was another significant tension between Freud and Jung: Jung's burgeoning interest in world religions, mythology and alchemy, with which Freud had

little patience. Religious imagery and occultism had in fact been a recurring fascination for lung, and he had had several "paranormal" experiences and encounters with psychic mediums during his youth. A major turning point in Jung's intellectual career was his book Symbols of Transformation, researched and written between 1909 and 1912, while he was still Freud's champion spokesman and organizer. Jung immersed himself in world mythology, plunging deep into the subterranean caverns of dream, fantasy and preverbal imagery where all manner of gods and demons dwell. "The whole thing came upon me like a landslide that cannot be stopped," he wrote of his work during this period. "It was the explosion of all those psychic contents which could find no room, no breathing space, in the constricting atmosphere of Freudian psychology and its narrow outlook." In 1914 Jung broke with Freud to develop his own school of psychology, which emphasized the interpretation of the psyche's symbols from a universal mythological perspective rather than a personal biographical one. "The psyche is not of today," he asserts. "Its ancestry goes back many millions of years. Individual consciousness is only the flower and the fruit of a season." For Jung, the aim of life is to know oneself, and to know oneself is to plumb the depths of the inchoate seas of not only the personal unconscious but the collective unconscious as well.

What is the ego? Is it the battered servant of three harsh masters

with competing demands, as Freud asserts? Or is it, as Jung suggests, the central complex in the field of consciousness subject to the powerful whims and furies of the vaster unconscious? Or does it make no sense to speak about the ego as separate from the human character as a whole, as Adler insists? Many more names have been added to the pantheon of modern psychology since Freud, Jung and Adler carved out their respective places. Psychologists as diverse in approach and predilection as B. F. Skinner and Abraham Maslow have made ingenious attempts to solve the mystery of the "I" and discover the nature—or debunk the very existence—of the ghost in the machine. More than two thousand years ago, etched into the stone walls of Apollo's temple at Delphi were the words: "Know Thyself." Does Western psychological inquiry take us to the heart of this matter? Or is it, as worldrenowned theorist of ego development lane Loevinger suggested to us, "just an attempt to see the shadows on the wall of Plato's cave"? How close psychology can come to knowing the mysteries of the human heart and soul is perhaps an open question. Yet for this issue of What Is Enlightenment?, we were eager to know what light the leading torchbearers for Freud, Jung and Adler and their schools of thought could shed on our questions about the ego. What follows are three intriguing interviews with passionate exponents of the schools of psychology that forever shaped our understanding of das Ich.

Was ist "das Ich"?

LEON HOFFMAN, M.D., is Chair of the American Psychoanalytic Association's Committee on Public Information, Director of The Parent Child Center of the New York Psychoanalytic Society, a contributing editor for the Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association and a training and supervising psychoanalyst in adult, child and adolescent psychoanalysis at The New York Psychoanalytic Institute. He has written extensively on Sigmund Freud, women's psychology and children's issues. As spokesperson for the APA, he regularly speaks in public forums about the role of psychoanalysis in addressing both personal and societal concerns in contemporary American culture.

Interview by Susan Bridle

WIE: Can you please define the word "ego"?

LEON HOFFMAN: From a technical psychoanalytical perspective and the way it's used in psychoanalytic therapy, "ego" has a very specific meaning. Freud initially divided the mind into three theoretical constructs: the id, the ego and the superego. The id has to do with the person's passions, the

person's wishes: sexual wishes or aggressive wishes. The goal in life is to gain control of these passions and utilize them in the most effective way. We've got all these impulses, and basically the goal is to get a balance between using these impulses and at the same time curbing them in some way. That's how the concept of superego first came into psychoanalytic thinking. Superego forms in

the development and socialization of the child, through the interaction with the parents. Take a very simple example: A child wants to eat all of the time, wants to grab everything, and the parentparticularly the mother in early life-will start imposing restrictions. And eventually when a toddler starts to crawl and wants to put his or her hands into an electric socket, the parent is going

to say, "No, you can't do that." So "no" is a very important part of child development. There's this constant balance between forces of wanting to do everything right now and other forces saying no, you cannot do this right now, you have to control it. You have to delay gratification. This is where the concept of the ego comes in, because the ego involves your capacities for memory, your capaci-

environment. The ego could not exist by itself; the ego can only exist within the context of relationships with other people.

So, the ego is the part of the person's mind that achieves compromises between a variety of opposing forces to develop one's self in the most adaptive way in one's social environment. The ego has to do with adapting to your social situation while at the same time LH: Yes, "negotiate" is the perfect word.

WIE: How would you define "conscience," and how does conscience fit into psychoanalytic theory?

LH: Well, that's what the concept of superego is. Superego is really one's sense of morality. In psychoanalytic theory, the development of morality is a crucial concept. It starts from day one, from the fact that in rearing children, you have to begin to say "no" very early. At some point the child is put to bed when he or she doesn't want to go to bed. The development of conscience is very much connected with the child learning that his or her passions can't be gratified all the time. And you want to develop a "healthy" sense of conscience—not too strong and not too weak. Oftentimes, if parents are too permissive, the child develops a very strong self-punitive streak because they are frightened that nobody is controlling their impulses. So a simple definition of conscience would be our internalized controls, the way we have learned to regulate our wishes.

WIE: Some developmental theorists speak about there being a qualitative difference between conscience that is based on internalized societal "shoulds" and "shouldn'ts" and fear of retribution—the more traditional Freudian definition of superegoand conscience that is based more on an independent reckoning with our interconnectedness with others and genuine concern for the effects of our actions on others. It could be seen as more of a spiritual conscience than a conformist conscience. Does psychoanalytic theory recognize this kind of distinction?



reud said that the goal of analysis was, "Where id was,

there ego shall be." And what that means is: You make everything conscious. If you make the unconscious conscious, that will lead to mental health.

ties for perception and your capacities for controlling your impulses. Freud in fact once said that the first person who spoke a curse, who spoke words instead of hurling a stone, was the creator of civilization. So, I'm angry at you, I'm not going to punch you, but I may tell you that I'm angry with you. That's a very important concept for our understanding of the way the individual develops the ability to live within a social

resolving the conflict between your inner desires and wishes and your inner sense of morality. It's like in a marriage when one person says black and the other person says white. You have to resolve that in some way.

WIE: So the main function of the ego is to negotiate between the various instinctual drives and social forces in order to adapt appropriately to the environment?

LH: Well, I would say that, psychoanalytically, these are two extremes of one continuum. Everybody to some extent has an inner sense of control and an outer sense of control. So, for example, there are these catch phrases: "When you're drunk, alcohol dissolves the superego." In other words, you do things when you are intoxicated that you wouldn't do otherwise. Or, "If you're far away from home, your superego stays at home." There's a gradation between controlling our impulses to a greater extent or a lesser extent. Some people need the policeman right there all the time; otherwise they will steal. That's one extreme. And other people are so conscienceridden that if they pick up a paper clip, they'll feel so guilty they'll have to confess. So I think you have these various gradations. One of the central concepts in psychoanalysis is that the difference between health and pathology is much more quantitative. So I would not say there's such a qualitative distinction between these two kinds of conscience. I would say there's a continuum between those two extremes.

WIE: Over the past several decades, many spiritual teachers have criticized traditional religious teachings that emphasize renunciation and self-denial, feeling that they are repressive and life-denying, an archaic throwback to an oppressive patriarchal era that we should strive to move beyond, and that they only promote greater conflict and fragmentation within the self. The late maverick spiritual teacher Bhagwan Rajneesh has gone so far as to say, "Let it all be expressed. Let your biology be satisfied to its fullest. . . . If your biology is completely satisfied, there is no fight between the conscious and the unconscious. You become one whole." My question is: What effect do you think letting the id run wild has on ego development?

LH: That's a huge problem! If the instincts run wild, not only can you not live in society—you can't really live with yourself. It really would lead to enormous problems. It would lead to a total disorganization of the personality. It would be completely inconsistent with the ability to live. I guess the most dramatic example of instincts or id running wild would be somebody in a flagrant manic psychosis, where everything goes. In the sixties and seventies, when people started doing things like primal scream therapy and "letting it all hang out," a lot of people got very, very disorganized. I think this is an example of where the idea of "letting it all hang out" is a distortion of Freudian theory.

WIE: Many contemporary psychotherapists and self-help authors have put a great deal of emphasis on the idea that we all have "wounded egos." They encourage us to get in touch with the wounds and traumas of childhood, to unconditionally love and accept ourselves just as we are, and to stop judging ourselves in order to heal our fragile and damaged egos. At the same time, however, the movement from seeing oneself as a victim to seeing oneself as fundamentally not a victim—as having free will and responsibility for one's own life and choices—is essential for psychological health and maturity. Do you think that contemporary therapeutic approaches that emphasize our woundedness and victimhood are helpful in furthering self-development? Or do you think they run the risk of promoting a kind of developmental arrest?

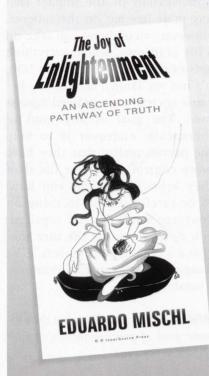
LH: You see, nobody is whole. But to go to this extreme and say "You're very wounded" could reinforce a kind of masochism—the idea that "I'm a real sufferer," that kind of thing. It's a little bit like the idea of victimhood. Now it is very important to understand the impact that racism in our society has on African American people. And you have to be aware of the impact that homophobia has on homosexuals or the impact that any prejudice has on the sufferer. However, victimhood can take on a life of its own, where everything gets explained by projection: "Oh, it's not my fault. I'm this way because society is prejudiced against me." The goal of any kind of therapeutic endeavor is to help the person realize that they have more control over their life than they acknowledge. So you have to be careful that in focusing on your ego's need to be repaired, you don't reinforce the idea that "I'm a weak, helpless person." The danger is that you can reinforce a passivity.

WIE: Can you describe what the ultimate goal of psychoanalysis is with regard to the ego?

LH: The ultimate goal of psychoanalysis is to help the person to understand, as much as possible, factors from the past that are persistent in the present unconsciously and to gain better control over some of these factors in order to make the best adaptive decisions in the present. Adaptation is a very important issue here, a very important concept.

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LH: Optimal psychological functioning is where you don't experience too much anxiety, too much pain, you don't get into too much trouble in your social environment, and where you are using your resources as adaptively as possible. It's adaptation to the environment and the balance between the environment and your own inner forces.

WIE: What makes the difference between two people who, despite being in the same environment—let's say a hostile environment—respond very differently? What enables one person to rise above their circumstances and become an inspiration to others, while another person in that same situation is defeated? It seems that there is more involved than just adaptation.

LH: Yes. I was just thinking, "What do you say about someone who was in Nazi Germany?" It probably takes a very unique person to be able to do some of the things that need to be done in that environment. How somebody like that survives, God knows. There's no psychoanalytic answer for that.

WIE: Can you please explain the traditional psychoanalytic understanding of what are called "ego defenses" and how they work?

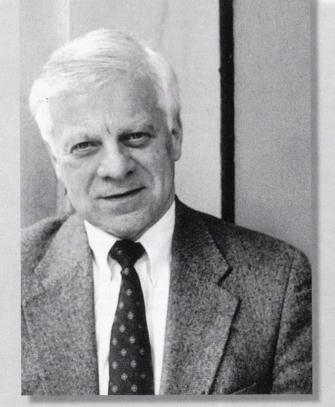
LH: Well, from the very beginning of life, you learn particular devices and defenses, or ways of coping with unpleasant situations. People sometimes think about the defenses as something abnormal, but it is a normal part of life and a normal part of the way the mind works. Some defenses are considered to be more mature than others. Denial is an example of an immature defense. Denial is when something happens and you deny it. Let's say a parent dies, and the child doesn't talk at all about it; the child goes on in his merry way and he acts as if everything is normal. That would be an example of denial. Now, there's always a border between pathological and normal, because in everyday life we use denial all the time. I mean, the fact that we're not immortal—we just don't think about that. It's been reported that people with cancer who have denial often have a much better prognosis than people who are just focused in on the cancer—"I'm gonna die, I'm gonna die." So some forms of denial are extremely adaptive and useful.

An example of a defense that is quite useful, and would be considered more mature, is what's called "sublimation." Say a child had a family member who had some kind of sickness, and the child later became a doctor. This is when you change emotional conflicts into something that's socially useful. Intellectualization is another common defense, where you cope with your feelings by learning all about them and you change your feelings into ideas.

WIE: What was Freud's view on the ego defense mechanisms? Did he believe that successful psychoanalysis should lead to the giving up of the defenses?

LH: Well, Freud started out with one theory and then later came to a second theory. In this first theory, the idea was that the cause of pathology was repression and the goal of psychoanalytic treatment was to undo repression. So, for example, if you had some early

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Was ist "das Ich"?

JAMES HOLLIS, PH.D. is Executive Director of The Jung Educational Center of Houston, Texas. Hollis trained as a Jungian analyst in Zurich, Switzerland, and is the author of eight books and over forty articles on Jung's work. He has his own active therapy practice and travels around the country lecturing to audiences of students and peers on Jungian theories of human development and what he calls "the meeting point of psyche and soul."

Interview by Amy Edelstein

WIE: What, according to Jung, is the ego?

JAMES HOLLIS: The ego as defined by Jung is the central complex of consciousness. When we hear the word "complex" we tend to think of something that's pathological, whereas all a complex really is, is an affectively charged cluster of energy. The complex of the ego begins to form when we first split off from the primal other, which is typically our mother; that is when we separate from the breast. And while that separation is necessary for the formation of the individual, it's also very painful because it's the loss of that early experience of unity and sense of primal belonging.

Jung saw the formation of the ego as essential for consciousness. Consciousness is predicated on the split between subject and object to become conscious I have to know that of which I am not. I have to have a sense of "that over there" versus "this over here." He also saw the ego as a necessary agency of intentionality, focus and purpose. How is it that you and I arranged to meet at the same time to address the same subject? It was a function of "ego focus" that was critical for this conversation to occur.

The ego, as a complex, is extremely malleable and "invadable." When the ego gets invaded by contents from the unconscious, when it's in the grip of other complexes, it becomes insecure or powerdriven, or whatever the case may be. You see, what we often call "ego" is really the ego under a state of possession by one or more of the complexes, such as a money complex, a power complex, a sexual complex or an aggression complex. These complexes are not an individual's core nature, but they do have the power to usurp or possess the ego.

with the other parts of the outer and inner world, where we could absorb messages from the culture, but not necessarily be subsumed by them, and we could also dialogue with the unconscious.

WIE: Do these complexes have a will of their own or do we, in the end, choose which complex predominates?

JH: Let's take an example: A person could say, "When I look at my history I see that there are certain patterns there. The only person who has been in every scene in the history of my life has been me, so I am state of ego, I think, is when we're responding strictly reflexively to the moment. In an activity of sports, one is normally not in a complex. One could be at the batter's plate so filled with anxiety that one couldn't swing the bat, but usually in the moment of the ball's flight, one is wholly absorbed and present to the moment. That's a pure ego state.

WIE: Would Jung's pure ego state be equivalent to a condition where we were in touch with reality directly as it is?

JH: Yes, that's right. In that sense it would be not unlike the Zen concept of "no mindedness"—it's just pure being. And yet to function in culture, we need an ego that allows us to structure time and organize our energies in service to certain abstractions like economics or service or whatever.

Jung's concept of the ego evolved over time. Early on he wanted, I think, to privilege the messages of the unconscious and to say that the job of the ego was to serve what the unconscious wanted. Later in his life he modified that and emphasized the need for ethical responsibility. For example, if I dream I'm murdering someone, I don't wake up and murder the person. I say, "What's that about?" That's a proper use of the ego—to serve as a conscious processing of life's experience, neither giving too much authority to the outer world, nor too much to the inner world.

WIE: What was Jung's view on the relationship between conscience and ego?

JH: Well, let me step back and I'll come around to that in a moment. You see, for Jung, the superordinate reality is what he called the "Self"—which is not to be confused



or Jung, the central metaphor was "individuation."

Individuation means becoming that which the gods intended, not what the ego intended.

WIE: In Jung's view, is the ego a positive, negative or neutral force in the personality?

JH: As I described earlier, the ego is a necessary formation for the creation of identity, consciousness, intentionality and purposeall of which are pluses. The ego itself is not a problem. However, when it's in a state of possession by our insecurities, when it's in the grip of our history, it becomes neurotic, so to speak-it gets in the way. So the problem is not the ego; the problem is what happens to the ego. The perfect balance—if we could ever achieve it-would be an open ego state in dialogue

somehow the manufacturer of those patterns. I can blame Western civilization or my parents, if I want to, but I have to recognize that somehow I am doing this." We'd say that that's good work by the ego because it's opening up dialogue with other parts of the psyche.

WIE: Is the ego, according to Jung, equivalent to who or what we refer to when we say "I"?

JH: Generally speaking, "who I think I am" is the ego state. But the problem is "who I think I am" can also be a complex. I could be born a slave and have the identity of a slave. The only time we're in a pure

with the ego. In the first half of life, our task is to develop an ego, a conscious sense of who we are that's strong enough to leave our parents and go out into the world and say, "Hire me, I can do that job"; "Have a relationship with me, you can trust me"; etcetera. If we fail to develop our ego awareness sufficiently, we remain children. The dialogue in the first half of life is the dialogue with the world: What does the world ask of me? But the second half of life, Jung said, was for the ego to develop a dialogue with the Self. The question then is: What does the Self ask of me?—which is much more of an interior dialogue, and one could say, a religious dialogue. Because the Self may very well wish one to go in a direction that the ego would prefer not to go in—a direction that might lead not to a path of self-aggrandizement but to a path of sacrifice. For example, if the summons of the Self is to be an artist, then chances are you're going to starve in our culture. And yet if that's what the Self is asking and the ego continues to fly off in the other direction, immense internal suffering is going to be the by-product. So ultimately, the ego would have to come to respect what the Self was asking. There would be an ethical and religious responsibility to dialogue with that and still live in the real world. And part of the task of the ego is to cope with the conflict that that could produce.

WIE: What is the Self according to Jung? Is it that which represents or calls us to realize our highest potential as human beings?

JH: The Self would be the wisdom of the organism. The totality of the purposefulness of that which we are. which transcends consciousness.

WIE: You mentioned that in "dialoguing with the Self," one might discover that one's destiny was to become an artist. When Jung refers to this "summons of the Self," it seems that he is referring to that undertaking or role in life for which we are best suited, which utilizes our talents most fully, regardless of what it may be—and that it is not necessarily a summons to the spiritual path.

JH: Well, it would be our true vocation in the sense of the Latin vocatus-to be called. What is it that one is called to be, as a being, as a person?—which has very little to do with ego. History is full of people whose egos could have been well-served by the position they were in, but who felt some other kind of summons and had to leave that secure world in service to meaning or enlargement or depth.

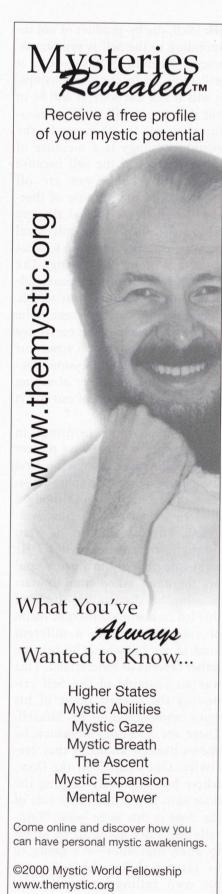
WIE: What would you say would be the goal of Jungian psychology? Would it be to help us realize our highest potential?

JH: Yes. You see, for Jung the central metaphor was "individuation," which is so often confused with ego development. It isn't ego development-it's positioning the ego in relationship to that superordinate reality that we all are. Individuation means becoming that which the gods intended, not what the ego intended. And there can be quite a difference. When one says, "Not my will, but thine," that's the ego dialoguing with the Self. Now, the "Self" is a word like "God"—it is meant to be ambiguous; it's not referring to an entity, it's essentially referring to a mystery.

WIE: How does Jungian therapy help us cultivate the willingness and ability to respond to the call of the Self?

JH: Well, the by-product of not responding to the Self is symptomatology. When the Self is violated, it will show up in our relationships, it will attack the body, it will be in our dreams, it will produce emotional states. In other words, the symptomatology is a measure of the autonomy of the Self because it's saying, "Look, you are off course." And the purpose of therapy, whether it's formal therapy with a therapist or an individual process, is to pay attention to what those symptoms are saying. The Jungian approach to symptomatology is not to suppress but to ask, "What do they mean? Where is the wound and what is the corrective asked?" For example, it's not our goal to remove depression. Depression is really a way of saying some vital dimension of our life is not being lived.

We have some paintings in our institute by the Swiss painter Peter Birkhauser. When he first started out he was a graphic artist. He was very rational and thought modern art was anarchic and valueless. Then, at midlife, he went through a real depression. He went into therapy in Zurich, and his therapist asked him to start painting his dreams. He did, and this led to a whole different realm of creativity and to a different kind of art for which he became rather famous in Switzerland. This was an example of the Self critiquing the narrow range of his ego's understanding of himself. There are paintings in which he shows himself afraid of that creativity. One's called At the Door, where he's anxiously holding the door shut and at the other side of the door is this huge beast. Naturally the ego's going to be afraid to open that door-it's going to be eaten up! But the beast was his own calling, and when he



opened the door, he was flooded with energy. So you can see why it's necessary for dialogue with the unconscious as well as with the outer world. And there's a need for the strengthening of the ego, so it can take on this dialogue, but not strengthening it in the fantasy that it will be in control. The proper attitude for the ego is really humility.

WIE: In spiritual traditions the ego is seen as a negative force in the individual; for example, as the force of pride or selfishness. From that perspective, it is entirely paradoxical to imagine the ego cultivating an attitude of humility. Yet it seems that Jung was elucidating two different aspects or stages of ego development one where the ego, as a self-regulating function, needs to be strengthened in order to help us navigate the challenges of life, and the other, where the ego needs to be humbled in order to allow the individual to discover the deeper and more subtle wisdom inherent in life.

JH: That's correct. Generally speaking, there are two tasks in our development. One is the formation of ego to be strong enough to take life on, to meet it on its own terms. The other is to have the strength to humble the ego and say, "Now what do the gods want of me?" That's a whole different thing.

WIE: Jung spoke in depth about the shadow. What is the shadow in his view, and how is it related to the ego?

JH: Well, the most functional definition of a shadow is: that within myself which makes me uncomfortable about myself. So we would quickly think of typical issues like anger. I would not want to acknowledge my anger because it's

unsettling to my self-image. But many times, as in the case of the Swiss painter, our most powerful qualities are also a part of our shadow. So the shadow is anything that would challenge the ego's fantasy of control.

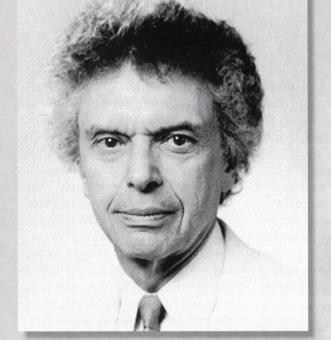
WIE: So the shadow can also include our positive traits or those impulses within us that could lead us into something unknown and potentially even further our growth?

JH: Yes, absolutely. And that's why the shadow is not synonymous with evil. The shadow is omnipresent in our culture—in our indifference to suffering around us, in our own pettiness, and in our own sins of omission as much as commission. But on the other hand, the shadow is often the place where the real creative energies are to be found.

WIE: Would Jung see evil as a complex or force within us? Or would evil be our own egotistic or narcissistic urges taken to an extreme?

JH: Well, those are all possibilities. In Jung's book Answer to Job. he talks about the shadow side of God and says that our entire Western theology has been one-sided. The shadow got split off and sent underground or projected onto the enemy over there. The dark side of divinity is our own opacity toward the dark side within ourselves. Underneath those dualities is a unity of life's energies; it's just that ego-and this is a good example of what ego can do—in feeling uncomfortable with the ambiguity of all of that, tries to split things off: "I'm good. You're bad. Our people are good. Those people across the Hudson are bad." It even tries to create a split in theology. What do you do with evil in

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Was ist "das Ich"?

HENRY STEIN, Ph.D., is a classical Adlerian psychotherapist, training analyst, Director of the Alfred Adler Institute of San Francisco and the author of numerous articles on Adler's philosophy and approach to clinical practice. For the past seven years, he has been the primary editor for the soonto-be-completed twelve-volume series The Collected Works of Alfred Adler. Integrating Alfred Adler's and Abraham Maslow's visions of human health and potential, Stein has developed several innovative treatment methods for cognitive, affective and behavioral change.

Interview by Susan Bridle

WIE: Could you please explain Alfred Adler's understanding of what the ego is?

HENRY STEIN: Adler was very influenced by a German philosopher named Hans Vaihinger, who wrote about how every discipline psychology, sociology, law, you name it-establishes fictions to try to describe things. And after a while, we tend to think of these

fictions as having reality to them. And when we talk about the ego or self, we're basically trying to hone in on a region of functioning that in fact doesn't exist. When we talk about the ego or self, what we're trying to do is get to a mysterious core of something in a way that I don't think a neurobiologist could, you know, if they would try to cut a person open to find the self. Where is it located? Is it in the head, is it

in the stomach, in the heart? But if you respectfully accept the idea of a fiction, you could say that the ego is the entire person—as they function. Adler equated the ego with the entire self or personality.

Adler disagreed with Freud on a number of issues, particularly regarding the division of the personality into ego, id and superego. Freud hypothesized a division of the personality into these so-called segments or dynamic parts, but Adler said that there is no division. that the personality is a complete unity. Adler: believed that you could not accurately look at the personality as subdivided, that you had to look at it only as a whole, as an organized whole without contradictions. Freud made a distinction between conscious and unconscious. But Adler didn't feel that there was such a distinction. He felt that there was a kind of fluidity

been developed largely to simply prevent action. But the main thing was that Adler believed that the personality was organized around a single "fictional final goal." This fictional final goal is unique to each person and pretty much guides and dictates most of the individual's actions. So you might say it defines the ego and sense of self. Adler said that everything within the personality, whether it's thinking, feeling, memory, fantasy, dreams, posture,

here are some therapies that are largely technologies, where it's not so important

what kind of character you have but only how skillful you are in the technique you are using. And I

find that remarkably absurd. Adler said that you really cannot convince or persuade anybody until you are able to show them as well what you mean: You have to do and be what you talk about.

there, because what seems to be unconscious can be raised to consciousness very rapidly under certain circumstances. Freud indicated that there was a conflict or war between the parts of the personality, between the id and the ego and the superego. But Adler said that that is an erroneous assumption. He felt that there is no internal war or conflict, and that the individual moves only in one direction, even if it appears contradictory. In other words, you can have a person who seems to be in deep internal conflict, but that internal conflict is an illusion because the conflict has

gestures, handwriting-every expression of the personality—is essentially subordinate to this goal. This is pretty much Adler's way of getting a sense of the person.

WIE: Can you explain what this fictional final goal is?

HS: It's like an imagined final position or result. It's sort of like if you were a playwright, it would be your curtain line. It's where everything is leading toward as an imagined fulfillment. Now, this goal gets formulated even without words in early childhood and becomes what Adler

called the "childhood prototype." The child imagines some time in the future when they will grow up, when they will be strong, when they will overcome insecurity or anything else that bothers them. So if they feel that they are ugly, they will be beautiful. If they feel that they're stupid, they will be brilliant. If they feel that they're weak, they'll be strong. If they're at the bottom, they'll be at the top. All of this is conceived without words as a way of living in the insecurity of the present that may be uncomfortable or unbearable. It would be unbearable to say that these feelings of insecurity or inferiority are a permanent condition for you. So what the child does, and eventually what the adult does, is they imagine that the future will bring a redemption, will bring relief from the inferiority feeling. The future will bring success, significance, a correction—a reversal of everything that's wrong. It's very purposeful. This fictional final goal is an embodiment of their vision of the future. It's similar to a hologram insofar as each little piece of it carries the whole story in miniature. Each part is a reflection of that whole.

WIE: Why did Adler feel it was important to see the human being as an undivided whole?

HS: Responsibility. Otherwise, you could say, "One part of me wanted to do this, another part did not," or "The devil made me do it," or "This little voice in me said . . . "-basically, "I'm not in control; I'm not responsible." This is all grounds for mischief. Adler was saying, "It's you!"

WIE: There's fundamentally one person in there calling the shots.

HS: Yes, calling the shots and having

an intention. It's not instinct, and it's not something like the universal unconscious that is affecting you. You have *chosen* to do this, at some point. Now when you chose it, it may have been a guess as to the best way to go, but then what happened is that it became automatic and like a habit, and then you just kept doing it. And it may not function very well anymore, but you keep doing it anyway.

This idea of singularity is very important when it comes to treatment. In treatment, how in the world do we deal with the person who has fifteen different symptoms and all these little bad habits and problems? My God, we're going to be busy for years. They've got emotional issues and they've got cognitive issues and behavioral issues and you could say, "Hey, this is not going to be done in six weeks, this is going to take six years." It's sort of like trying to put a whole bunch of puppies in a basket—one jumps out as you put the next one in-you get the emotions under control and then the physical symptoms act up.

WIE: If you approach it in this way, it can be a lifelong project to straighten all this out.

HS: Yes. Adler says, "Wait a minute. If in fact there is a single goal and this single goal is causing the symptoms and problems and is, in a sense, orchestrating everything, you don't work on the fifty-two different subcategories of symptoms, you work on the goal." When you change the goal, everything else begins to shift, the symptoms begin to vanish. People get goose bumps when they come to the realization that they can change their life so dramatically and that it isn't an overwhelming, laborious, lifelong task. That's the good news. There's bad news: The bad news is that you now have responsibility. And that's a trade-off. When people are willing to accept this responsibility, they almost have a sense of being reborn, and the sense of freedom and empowerment is wonderful. And then they accept the responsibility very willingly; it's not a burden. But other people—who don't want the responsibility—will back off, and what they'll do is they will either forget the insight or they will argue with it or sabotage it.

WIE: What is Adler's definition of conscience, and how is it different from Freud's concept of superego?

HS: Freud's superego is an external pressure: the parental voice, the culture's expectations about what you should do or should not do. It's based on the assumption that there is a very unruly, selfish, aggressive, sexual little child in us who will do a lot of damage if not controlled. Adler's concept of conscience is very different, much more optimistic and positive. Adler said that the core issue is social feeling or the feeling of community. This starts out in a child as a sense of contact with a person, usually the mother, who is absolutely reliable, who is safe, who is encouraging and nurturing. It starts out as a feeling, but eventually it can become cognitive. If the child, and eventually the adult, develops this sense of connection and contact—this sense that there are other worthwhile, reliable human beings with whom they have a feeling of trust and safety, who they want to be near-and if they are also given enough encouragement and training, they learn to reciprocate, and this leads to a very good result. Now, this starts out as a feeling or as an action; it starts out in a noncognitive way. Eventually, when the child begins to think about bigger issues, when

they begin to think about conscience and morality, there is a sense in which this gives cognitive support to what they already feel. From the Adlerian standpoint, you don't help a person develop a conscience by moralizing, by threats, by "shoulds" and control. What you do is you build that sense of contact, connection, trust and empathy, and out of that you build a logic of conscience and morality. You see, the cognitive side cannot contradict the emotional side. What I'm saying is that no matter how you indoctrinate somebody intellectually, no matter how much you preach to them, no matter how much they read, if there is not at the core a feeling of caring and connection, you will never get genuine conscience.

You see, Adler said that when you feel connected to people, you then begin thinking in a commonsense way, and in a moral way because it makes a lot of sense-you care about them. And you feel in that direction. He doesn't make a sharp distinction between what you feel and what you think because once a person develops the sense of connectedness, the thinking and feeling sort of work together like music and lyrics. So, for Adler, this would be a prerequisite for genuine spirituality and religious practice because without it what you get are contradictions. I have a number of clients who are very devoted to their religion, but their life is a contradiction of the religion's teachings. They're caught up in a compelling inner image that is stronger than their religious influence. And this causes them a certain amount of aggravation; but until they develop that sense of real connectedness, not just to a spiritual practice but with other people, they really can't go very far, in spite of their efforts.

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The SEEDS of the SELF

an interview with

Otto Kernberg

When we began doing research for this issue of What Is Enlightenment? eight months ago, exploring as many different spiritual and psychological approaches to understanding the ego as we could get our hands on, a contemporary psychoanalytic philosophy of ego development known as "object relations theory" captured our attention. We were fascinated to discover that many leading thinkers at the interface of psychology and spirituality, including A. H. Almaas, Ken Wilber, Jack Engler and Claudio Naranjo, rely on object relations theory in their own models of psychological and spiritual development. In particular, a number of transpersonal psychologists have found remarkable parallels between the ancient Buddhist doctrine of the illusory nature of the self and this modern Western

analysis of the constructed nature of the self. In his anthology Transformations of Consciousness, coedited with Ken Wilber and Daniel Brown, lack Engler writes, "It may come as a surprise that . . . both Buddhist psychology and psychoanalytic object relations theory define the essence of the ego in the same way." Needless to say, since exploring the essence of the ego is exactly what we were seeking to do, we wanted to speak with someone well-versed in object relations theory—a subtle and complex interpretation of the architecture of the ego that is now one of the most influential schools of contemporary psychological thought.

We were delighted when Otto Kernberg—one of the primary engineers of the theory—squeezed an hour into his busy schedule to speak with us.



INTRODUCTION

continued

Kernberg, who at age seventy-two still works a seventy-plus-hour workweek, is a renowned psychoanalyst, clinical researcher, developmental theorist, psychiatric treatment innovator—and a legend in the annals of psychology. A native of Vienna, he immigrated to Chile with his parents during the Second World War. He earned his undergraduate, medical and psychoanalytic degrees in Santiago, where he began his professional and academic career in the 1950s. Dr. Kernberg is not only a principal architect of object relations theory but is also widely regarded as the world's leading expert on borderline personality disorders and pathological narcissism. Current President of the International Psychoanalytic Association, founded by Sigmund Freud in 1908, he is also Director of the Personality Disorders Institute and the Cornell Psychotherapy Program at The New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center and Professor of Psychiatry at the Cornell University Medical College. He is the author or coauthor of thirteen books as well as dozens of research papers.

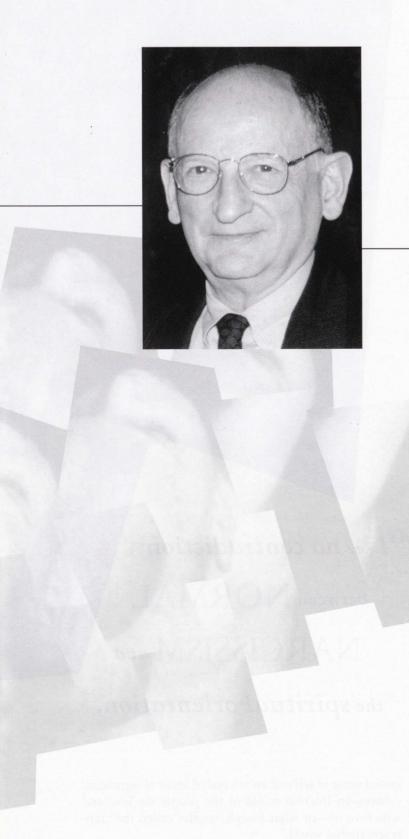
In his more than forty years of research, including clinical work with severely disturbed patients, Dr. Kernberg has inquired with laser-like

precision into the subatomic components of the psyche and identified what he believes are the most fundamental building blocks in the construction of self-identity. In our conversation, as he walked me through the basics of object relations theory, I was drawn with him into looking at human experience through the piercing clarity of the object relations microscope. I began to grasp intellectually, intuitively and even experientially his intricate vision of how the separate sense of self gradually takes shape from the moment of birth—how undifferentiated fragments of raw experience eventually cohere into emotionally charged images of self and others, and progressively coalesce into an integrated, internalized sense of self and an integrated inner "representational world" of others. Indeed, after a course in object relations from Kernberg himself, or after reading the books in which he outlines his theory, it's hard not to be convinced that selfhood is not inherent in human experience from birth, but is in fact entirely a mechanically constructed phenomena.

I found contemplating the nature of the self as described by object relations theory to be a mesmerizing

experience. Yet at the same time, I had the uneasy feeling that as the separate sense of self was being deconstructed, so also was the mysterious source of our humanity—like a woven sweater from which one pulls a thread, unraveling it inch by inch, reducing it to a pile of cotton fibers. A materialist scientist, Kernberg believes that the discovery of an integrated theory of consciousness modern psychology's Holy Grail—is the task of neurobiology working in conjunction with modern research in psychoanalysis.

Speaking with Dr. Kernberg about the nature of the ego was meeting a visionary, encountering a mind with rare quality of attention, expanse of perspective and subtlety of discrimination. He possesses an unusual flexibility and originality of thought that easily embraces subjects normally beyond the scope of traditional psychoanalytic thinking, making him not only a defender of Freud's genius but a Freudian revisionist with a mission for psychoanalysis in twenty-first-century society and culture. I was honored to have the chance to explore the mystery of the seeds of the self with one of modern psychology's foremost pioneers.



WIE: Could you please define the word "ego" as you have come to understand it?

OTTO KERNBERG: The ego is an invention of the English translation of Freud's "Ich." "Ich" in German means "I," and it refers to the categorical "I," or to what also is called the "self," insofar as it has a subjective quality to it. Freud never clearly differentiated the impersonal, structural quality of what "ego" means in English from the subjective quality that the word "ich" signals in German. James Strachey, in his translation of Freud, tried to make him sound more scientific by bringing in Latin terms and making everything more precise. In the process he decreased somewhat the fluidity, humanity, warmth and flexibility of Freud's terminology and the poetic aspect of Freud's writings.

It is true that Freud in 1923 started to describe his "Ich," his "I," his "self," as a structure of the psychic apparatus in contrast to the id and the superego. And this was then picked up by the ego psychologists, particularly in this country. Many characteristics of the ego have been defined. The ego is the seat of consciousness; it's the seat of perception. The ego controls motility; the ego controls unconscious defense mechanisms; the ego is the integrating agency that brings together the demands of external reality and the superego. While all of this sounds a little mechanical, they are impersonal functions, and classical, pure ego psychology went in that direction, losing touch with the subjective quality of the self-concept. So this is why nowadays there has been a reaction against this.

Object relations is a contemporary psychoanalytic

theory that puts the emphasis on the importance of earliest relations with significant others as the building blocks of the construction of the tripartite structure of ego, superego and id. More specifically, from birth on, our relations with significant others, under the impact of strong affects [emotions], are internalized as affective memory. These basic affective memories contain the representation of the self, the representation of other—called "object" in object relations theory—and the dominant affect linking them. There are many of these dyadic structures of self- and objectrepresentations that eventually consolidate. All the self-representations are eventually integrated as an integrated self. And that integrated self practically corresponds to the "I," to the categorical "I" or categorical self of the philosophers.

In simple terms, one might say that from birth on we have an inborn capacity for perception, for memory, for establishing representations of what is perceived, and gradually we develop symbolic thinking and the capacity for abstract thinking and intelligence. We absorb what's going on around us, our relationships with things and with people. The ego is like a computer, absorbing information, integrating it and learning how to sort out what is important from what is not; what is good, what is bad; what is helpful, what is damaging. We learn the control of our own body, and we gradually learn to differentiate what's inside from what's outside. And eventually, an internal world is built up. Part of this remains in conscious memory, in consciousness—a small part. And a large part goes into unconscious memory, into what is called the "preconscious." The preconscious is like a reservoir of information that we don't think about all of the time, but that we have access to. And part goes into a still deeper level, the dynamic unconscious or the id.

Now, what's in that dynamic unconscious or the id? All of that which the ego or self cannot tolerate in consciousness. It's just too intense; it's too dangerous, and it tends to get forbidden. Freud said that what are particularly intense and tend to get forbidden are early sexual impulses and desires and early aggressive impulses and desires.

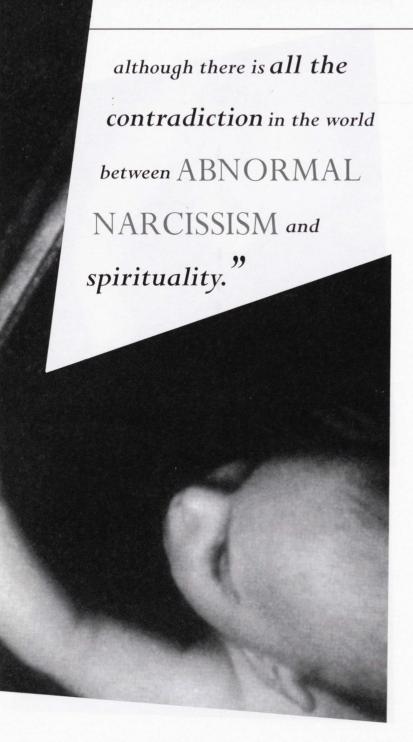
So the ego has the double task of general learning as well as setting up an internal world of representations of self and others. And these representations are gradually integrated, so then the ego develops an inte-

"I see no contradiction between NORMAL NARCISSISM and

the spiritual orientation,

grated sense of self and an integrated sense of significant others—an internal world of the people we love and who love us-or what Joseph Sandler called the "representational world.'

The ego, in short, is the seat of consciousness, of perception, of motor control, of conscious memory, of access to the preconscious. But also-and very fundamentally-it's the seat of the world of internalized object relations and an integrated sense of self.



WIE: Many spiritual traditions define the ego very differently from the way that the psychoanalytic tradition usually speaks about it. In fact, the ego is seen not as something that we would want to cultivate or develop, but as the very force within us that we must do battle with and ultimately extinguish if we want to evolve spiritually. In these traditions, the ego is understood to be the force of narcissism and self-centrism and as the insatiable and fundamentally aggressive need to always see ourselves as separate from others. These traditions see the ego, in this sense, as the enemy on the spiritual path—as that which thwarts our higher spiritual aspirations. In your work, have you encountered anything like this within the human personality?

OK: I'm familiar with this approach to spirituality; one finds this particularly in Eastern religious movements. However, it seems to me that there are semantic problems here. There is a psychoanalytic concept of narcissism. At the clinical level, "narcissism" refers simply to self-love, self-esteem and, at a more theoretical level, to the investment in the ego with libidinal energy. When Freud coined the concept of narcissism, he assumed that libido was first invested in the self and then later displaced onto others. And eventually, a certain equilibrium is established by which one invests both self and others with libido or love. One implication of this early formulation is that if there is too much self-love, there is not a lot left for loving others. And if there is too much altruism, there is not much love left for self. This early formulation, however, has been questioned in the light of later findings. Now, the dominant psychoanalytic thinking is that the loving investment in self and in others occurs simultaneously and that under normal conditions, self-love and love of others go together. Those happy natures who have been treated well are at peace with self, can be very secure, love themselves-and at the same time be very committed to others.

This is very different from abnormal conditions in which there is abnormal self-love. Pathological narcissism is what is usually called an "ego trip." This is an individual with an exaggerated love of self and in whom there is a devaluation of others. There is an impoverishment of that internal world of significant others, the representational world that I described to you. So these individuals who are very full of themselves at the same time don't have an internal world of representations of significant others nor the richness of an internal moral world, and they are excessively dependent on being admired and accepted by others. On the one hand, these people are very grandiose, yet on the other, they are easily hurt, feel easily rejected and easily can get very envious and resentful of other people who don't suffer from the same hypersensitivity that they do. When you have somebody with what's perceived as a very great ego, that usually indicates the existence of

abnormal narcissistic structures, where the love is invested in self with a kind of grandiosity, entitlement and ruthlessness. There is also a sense of emptiness that goes with this because the richness of life comes from our gratifying intimate relations with significant others as well as from our appreciation of ideals that are outside of us, for example, in the area of truth or science, or the area of aesthetics or art, or in the area of religion and moral values. People with an abnormal grandiose self-sense cannot invest normally in these values, and their life is impoverished.

So from the psychoanalytic viewpoint, the idea that spirituality implies an effort to reduce the importance of the ego, of narcissism, in order to open oneself up to religion, to art, to truth, holds true for narcissistic pathology, but not necessarily for normal self-esteem or self-regard. That should be harmonious with spiritual development. And there is a natural religiosity that is part of normal development, reflected by all of the trends toward developing an integrated internal moral system.

Psychoanalysis has nothing to say about the existence of God-that's a philosophical problem, not a psychological one. But certainly there's something to say in the sense that religiosity is a profound human need and that the religions—or universally organized moral systems directed to protect what is good against evil-make eminent sense from a psychological viewpoint because evil exists. It exists in the sense that primitive aggression is always there as a potential in the human mind. It shows up not only under abnormal conditions of the individual but it also shows up when there are what we call "regressive group situations," regressive mass psychology situations in which aggression can rapidly take hold and, therefore, represents concretely what we call "evil."

WIE: *Traditional religious or spiritual perspectives tend to* see these matters as more absolute; there is not a distinction between "normal" and "healthy" narcissism—and, in fact, "healthy narcissism" would be seen as an oxymoron because, from this point of view, any form of narcissism would be seen as a negative expression of self-centrism and failure to show awareness of and concern for others. From this perspective, the seeds of narcissism are the seeds of corruption and evil. Based on your experience as a psychoanalyst, do you think that it is possible to uproot all vestiges of negative narcissism within the self? Is this an ideal that you would even encourage people to strive for?



OK: Well, again, the idea that spirituality and narcissism cannot go together I think is a mistake, because it does not properly differentiate between normal and abnormal narcissism, as I have explained. Secondly, by the same token, one cannot say that the evil in the world is constituted by narcissism. But it is significantly constituted by pathological narcissism. And I would add even further, it is constituted not just by any pathological narcissism but by the most severe forms of it—in which there is a particular malignant development that consists of a return to primitive aggression and an idealization of the self as an aggressive self with

SELF-REFLECTION and an HONEST SEARCH

for one's unconscious motivations increases knowledge and meaning in life. It has been said that 'only an EXAMINED LIFE is worth living." And psychoanalysis has helped with that. "99



power over others. This pathological idealization of the self as an aggressive self clinically is called "malignant narcissism." And this is very much connected with evil and with a number of clinical forms that evil takes, such as the pleasure and enjoyment in controlling others, in making them suffer, in destroying them, or the casual pleasure in using others' trust and confidence and love to exploit them and to destroy them. That's the real evil—that synthesis between pathological narcissism and primitive aggression. And we find that at the level of individuals and in groups as well. Sometimes we find it in organizations. We find it in

certain fundamentalist ideologies; we find it in certain aspects of mass psychology. That's the real evil.

But to answer your question: No, it is not ideal to divest everybody of narcissism because normal narcissism is a source of pleasure in living, of enjoyment of self, enjoyment of healthy self-affirmation, healthy aggression, enjoyment of sexuality, eroticism, love, intimacy. This is all part of normal narcissism. And what I am trying to say, in essence, is that I see no contradiction between normal narcissism and the spiritual orientation, although there is all the contradiction in the world between abnormal narcissism and spirituality.

WIE: Within many religious teachings, a central aspect of spiritual practice is rigorous self-inquiry, in which one looks deeply into the nature of one's motivations. In this self-inquiry, one confronts and comes to terms with some of the narcissistic tendencies you were just describing albeit in a much subtler form than these extreme cases. In the religious traditions, one is looking at this negative narcissism—it's still negative or malignant narcissism rather than positive narcissism—but it's at a subtler level, and it's this that the spiritual practitioner is trying to root out from within their motivations and from within their psyche.

OK: Yes, I understand that. In fact, the goal of psychoanalysis is to increase our self-knowledge of the unconscious motivations of behavior. Freud at one point said that there will always be objection to psychoanalysis, that he has brought a plague to humanity. What he meant was that we all have primitive, antisocial impulses, sexual desires, aggressive desires, that run counter to the needs of culture. Under the best of circumstances, these are transformed into culturally useful and positive elements. Under the worst of circumstances, they become evil. What I'm trying to say is that the deepest, unconscious motivations have in them the seeds of both good and evil. I agree that selfreflection and an honest search for one's unconscious motivations increases knowledge and meaning in life. It has been said that "only an examined life is worth living." And psychoanalysis has helped with that. This searching self-reflection for unconscious motivations may provide not only greater knowledge of the self but also may help to free oneself-at least in part-of the destructive aspects of repressed conflicts. In this regard, self-reflection and an honest search for one's motivations helps spirituality, but it does not necessarily bring happiness; it also brings the pain and sorrow of discovering that we are less ideal than we wanted to think ourselves.

WIE: In many Eastern religious traditions, the highest goal of human evolution is called enlightenment. One way of defining enlightenment is that it is a condition in which one is utterly awake and in touch with reality exactly as it is. It is a condition in which one is no longer motivated in any way to distort reality, to preserve one's self-image, or to support any personal bias or agenda. In this view, the ego is seen as a distorting mechanism, as the colored glasses that must be removed if we are to be able to see things as they are and to respond to life with true integrity. Now, one of the central activities of the ego is the screening or distorting mechanisms by which impressions or information that contradict or challenge one's selfimage or worldview are selectively ignored or distorted. Do you think it is possible to reach a state where one is no longer compelled to screen anything out to protect one's self-image or worldview? Do you think it is possible to attain a condition where one has no need or motivation whatsoever to distort reality in any way and, therefore, is able to be completely in touch with reality exactly as it is?

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OK: I think that there are certainly degrees of freedom from distortion, and I would say that a function of the normal ego is to try to achieve enlightenment in the sense of decreased distortions and being able to see reality—both external and internal—as it is. But it seems to me that this is an ideal state that is reached only partially by most people and most likely not as a permanent condition, but oscillating. In other words, there are always unconscious needs that influence us; the shadow of our dynamic unconscious colors all of our perceptions, and it is almost inhuman to be able to free oneself completely from that. So I would say that enlightenment as you describe it seems to be a road, an aspiration. But I would seriously question that possibility in an absolute sense-except perhaps for extremely gifted, unique individuals whom we would consider saints. And even those probably have achieved such a condition only in a transitory way.

WIE: Harvard psychiatry professor George Vaillant, in his book The Wisdom of the Ego, asserts that ego defenses are not pathological or symptoms of mental illness, but are in fact ingenious resources of the psyche for adaptation and even creativity. He says, "At times we cannot bear reality. At such times our minds play tricks on us. Our minds distort inner and outer reality so that an observer might accuse us of denial, self-deception, even dishonesty. . . . But often such emotional and intellectual dishonesty is not only healthy but also mature and creative." Do you agree that emotional and intellectual dishonesty is often not only healthy but mature and creative? Or do you believe that a truly healthy human being is one who is undefended?

OK: I think that everything he's saying is correct. I would just change some of the emphasis, in the sense that while it is true that self-deception may occasionally be life-saving, in general, the more severe forms of primitive defensive operations tend to weaken the ego. Denial, for example, is a defense that may be helpful sometimes. There are certain conditions, such as when an individual hears terrible news—about a mortal illness, or about the death of a close relative or some other major tragedy—and they react with a kind of a defensive numbness. This is a form of denial, but it may be a denial that helps survival. Defense operations may help survival and protect functioning under certain conditions. But, in general, it is of course true that the more we tolerate reality, the better off we are.

WIE: What is the ultimate goal of psychoanalysis? What

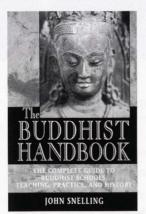
do you think is the highest human potential with regard to ego health and development?

OK: In very simple terms, Freud said that the goal of psychoanalysis was to help individuals to be able to work and to love. And to expand a little on it, I would say the goal of psychoanalysis is to free individuals from the restrictions of unconscious conflicts and the defenses related to them, as well as to resolve a lack of integration of the internal realm of object relations—in order to permit people to commit themselves to work, to creativity and to mutuality of love relations. Also, to open themselves up to the scientific, moral and aesthetic perspectives. And of course, more specifically, to resolve the symptoms for which the patient comes to treatment. But these would be the most general goals.

WIE: Object relations theory has been adopted by many contemporary transpersonal psychologists, particularly those with training in Buddhist psychology and philosophy, because it seems to support the Buddhist teaching that there is no self—that we are not born into this world as an independent entity in the way we think we are, but rather that our independent sense of self is actually a delusion, an

illusory manifestation of mutually dependent coorigination. Transpersonal therapist and teacher of Buddhist philosophy Jack Engler writes, "Both Buddhist psychology and psychoanalytic object relations theory define the essence of the ego in a similar way: as a process of synthesis and adaptation between the inner life and outer reality which produces a sense of personal continuity and sameness in the felt experience of being a 'self,' a feeling of being and ongoingness in existence. . . . In both psychologies, the sense of 'I,' of personal unity and continuity, of being the same 'self' in time, in place and across stages of consciousness, is conceived as something which is not innate in personality, but is evolving developmentally out of our experience of objects and the kinds of interactions we have with them. In other words, the 'self' is literally constructed out of our experience with the object world. This 'self' which we take to be 'me' and which feels so present and real to us is actually an internalized image, a composite representation." So, my question is: Are we now, the two of us having this conversation, two composite representations of the many internalized images that have arisen out of our encounters with the object world? Or, is there a self that exists prior to or beneath this process? Is there a self independent of the whole process of object relations development?

continued on page 179



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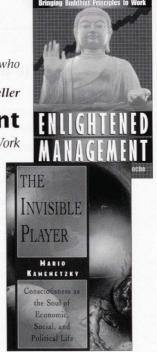
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WHO IS SATAN?

AN INTERVIEW WITH

Taylor Hackford

THE DIRECTOR OF *THE DEVIL'S ADVOCATE*BY CARTER PHIPPS

As a young boy growing up in a small town on the edge of the Bible Belt, it sometimes seemed as if there were essentially two kinds of people in the world: those who believed and those who didn't. Not in God—everyone believed in God. I'm talking about the devil. For some, it seemed, the concepts of Satan, hell and eternal damnation were as real and tangible as the ground beneath their feet. But for others, myself included, the arcane concept of some supernatural figure dealing out temptation and punishment from beyond the grave just seemed profoundly out of step with modern life, an obvious anachronism



INTRODUCTION

in an age of semiconductors and space travel. The notion of Satan and even the idea of sin not only failed to inspire in me fear or trepidation, they hardly even registered on my moral radar screen. Hell, in my liberal Christian upbringing, was a state of mind rather than a physical place and I was raised to show little concern for ideas that seemed. for the most part, to be mere superstition. Except perhaps for a brief encounter with the exquisite beauty of the poetry in John Milton's Paradise Lost and Christopher Marlowe's Doctor Faustus in my college years, I had almost no experience with this classic embodiment of evil that has so enthralled the pious and the faithful for centuries. So when I went to see the movie The Devil's Advocate two years ago, I hardly expected that it might begin to change my opinions about the power and resilience of this timehonored symbol.

The movie tells the story of a young defense lawyer, played by Keanu Reeves, with a perfect string of courtroom victories in a small

Florida district who accepts an offer to go to work for a very large, very wealthy international law firm in New York City. The law firm is run by a man suspiciously named John Milton, played by Al Pacino, a charismatic, charming and confident international power broker with an unusual interest in the fate of this young hotshot attorney. As the story unfolds, the devil is truly in the details, and Keanu Reeves ends up the unsuspecting protégé of this man of influence and prestige who. as we soon learn, is none other than Satan himself, a modern embodiment of God's most famous fallen angel. It is in many ways a classic story of temptation and seduction, an updated version of Faust told with all the energy, flair, cleverness and special effects that mark the best of Hollywood's talents.

Having been a spiritual practitioner for many years at that point, I was struck by the power of the film's portrayal of Satan, whose name is derived from an ancient Hebrew word meaning "adversary." Indeed, here suddenly was a devil I could

relate to as a real spiritual adversary, one whose diabolical yet disquietingly human escapades breathed new life into the timeworn ideas of sin, transgression, pride, temptation and evil. As Faust, Paradise Lost, The Devil and Daniel Webster and no doubt countless other artistic works on this theme had done for generations past, this modern-day supernatural parable began to open my eyes to what, in fact, the concept of the devil could signify for the spiritual seeker. While still just as skeptical of the fire and brimstone, hell and redemption spirituality of my childhood hometown, I nevertheless felt a new appreciation for the idea of the devil and its vivid representation of the challenges we all face on the spiritual path.

This appreciation was helped along by the fact that, in the story, the main character falls prey to the classic temptations of vanity, lust, ambition and greed in ways that are disturbingly easy to relate to from one's own experience. And the movie pulls no punches as to the consequences of its characters'

WHO IS SATAN?



actions. To sell your soul to the deadly sins of vanity, greed and ambition is to sell your soul to Satan himself—an idea that, presented in this modern form, caused, I confess, a few moments of self-reflection. Not because I was worried about spending my postmortem days in a fiery hell, but simply because the movie makes a powerful link between small transgressions of conscience and the painful consequences that unfold when we place the appeasement and gratification of our own ego above all else.

So as we began our research for this issue—exploring the question: What is ego?, What exactly is our adversary on the spiritual path?—we quickly put The Devil's Advocate on our list to review along with numerous other books and videos, both classic and modern, addressing the subject of the devil in the spiritual life. Although he has lost some of his luster in our modern information age, the figure of Satan still is a topic of tremendous fascination, as attested to by the volume of material currently devoted to his

study. Indeed, as the personified force of evil intentions in the human soul, his specter has dominated the Western moral imagination since the advent of Christianity two thousand years ago, and today there almost seems to be a resurgence of interest in the ideas that have created and sustained his myth. While the religious fervor that has often accompanied the idea of Satan has gratefully receded from our culture, could it be, we wondered, that he still articulates aspects of our spiritual and moral lives that cannot be easily translated into a modern context? The devil may, for good reason, no longer have a place in our psychologically informed society, but as Andrew Delbanco, author, social critic and Professor of Humanities at Columbia University, points out in his book The Death of Satan, "Despite the loss of old words and moral concepts—Satan, sin, evil we cannot do without some conceptual means for thinking about the universal human experience of cruelty and pain. If evil with all of its insidious complexity escapes the

reach of our imagination, it will have established dominion over us all."

With all of this in mind, we set off to find someone who could shed some light on the devil, this proud and ageless spirit whom Al Pacino had brought so vividly to life on the big screen. And what better place to start, we thought, than with the film's award-winning director himself. So I called Taylor Hackford, who upon hearing the topic of this issue, What is ego?, immediately responded, "Yes, that's exactly what The Devil's Advocate is all about," and generously agreed to talk with me. Apparently Hackford, in tandem with his screenwriter and collaborative partner Tony Gilroy, was the primary creative force responsible for the provocative ideas that animate The Devil's Advocate, Indeed, from the moment we started talking, he spoke with great passion about the message behind this captivating modern morality tale, and explained why, at the close of the second millennium, the ancient myth of the tireless master tempter known as Satan, is still relevant for us all.

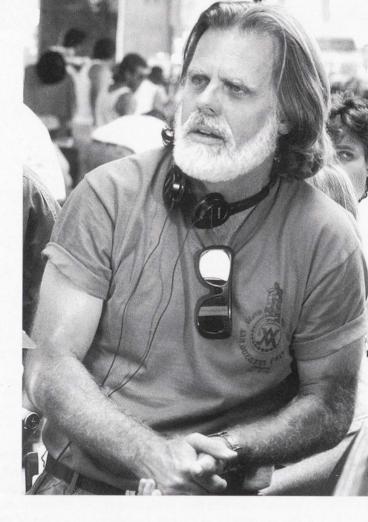
WIE: In your film The Devil's Advocate, Al Pacino plays the role of the devil. What is his character meant to represent? Is Satan a metaphor, or is he real? Who or what is the devil that you were trying to depict?

TAYLOR HACKFORD: The whole concept of the devil is a metaphor on one level. And I think what was of particular interest to me in making this film is that whether we call it "God" and the "devil" or we call it "good" and "evil," I believe that they're both inside mankind, and that you make your own choices. It's very clearly stated in the film: You make your own choices, and what you're always fighting is ego. What you're always fighting is narcissism. What's different now from when Walter Huston did The Devil and Daniel Webster? Well, there are some things that are different. You're now, as we say in the film, "fiberoptically connected to your every eager impulse." In other words, the whole culture is based on ego gratification. We're constantly inundated not just with products that you can groom yourself with, but with infinite ways in which you can satisfy your urges and reflect your own image.

The Devil's Advocate portrays a very powerful world where you have these large economic entities that are constantly looking for the best and newest gunslinger—and in this instance it was Keanu Reeves, as a lawyer. It's a world in which, when a bright young facilitator can come in and save the day, there is the promise of untold riches and ego gratification—not just in terms of a better car, a nicer apartment, a better suit, but also in the sense of the media, where everything starts to shine on you and build you into something larger than the next man, the next woman. That was what we were reflecting in the film.

WIE: So we're dealing with the same timeless issues that people have always struggled with, but they're just heightened in every way in the modern age?

TH: Yes. And it's a question of how far we're willing to go in order to let the ego shine, in order to let that



beacon penetrate not only the local scene but the world. Feeding that ego is what *The Devil's Advocate* was all about.

So, getting back to your question-Who is John Milton, the Al Pacino character?—what was important and interesting to me was where it becomes clear in the movie that, in a certain sense, the devil didn't do anything. For example, in the last scene, Keanu Reeves says, "You made me do this! You destroyed my wife. You did it." And Pacino replies, "Give me a break; I didn't do a thing. Every single step of the way, you could have made another choice, and you didn't. You double-dealt your wife the moment you got to New York. You were already looking at other women. You wanted this. You decided in the court case to get a man off, even though you knew he was guilty. Every step of the way, you made choices, and you made them because you wanted the reward." That is what we were really looking at—how far people can be willing to go for the stroking of ego, for the aggrandizement of their own narcissism.

WIE: How did you direct Pacino? As the devil, what kind of personality did you want him to express?



Over and over again the protagonist falls into the trap of his own PRIDE and VANITY.

'Lose?' he says at one point, trying to defend his actions, 'I don't lose, I WIN. I WIN! I'm a lawyer. That's my JOB. That's what I DO.'

At which point the DEVIL looks at him calmly with a knowing smile and responds,

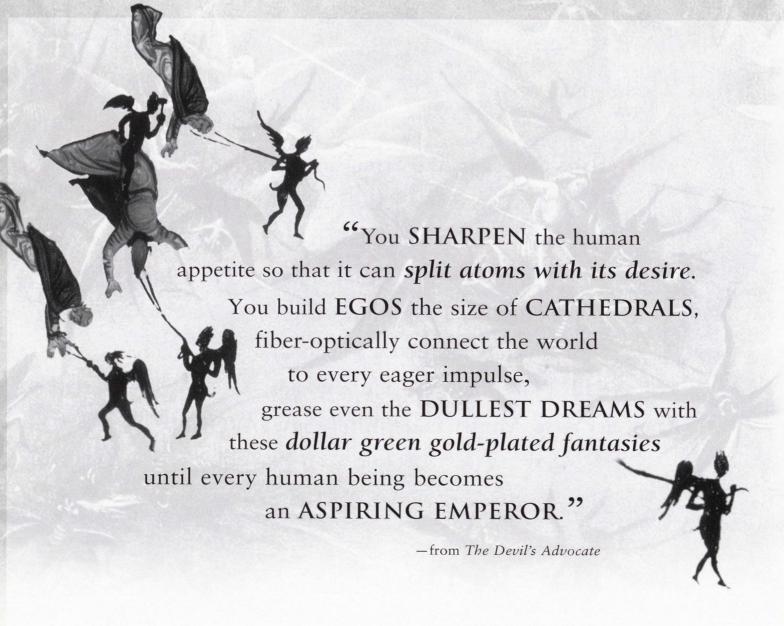
'I rest my case. Vanity is definitely my FAVORITE SIN."



TH: Well, it took a lot of time to convince Al to do the role. He looked at the screenplay and said, "It's another devil movie." And I said, "Al, listen, you've played Richard the Third, you'd like to play Macbeth, I'm sure you'd love to do King Lear. All of these are classic roles. The devil is also a classic role." Look at Walter Huston in The Devil and Daniel Webster: It's an incredible performance. The thing that's great about it is that this amoral character, who is an angel who has fallen from grace, resents his "father"-but at the same time, loves mankind. I wasn't interested in having this omnipresent figure pointing his fingers and having lightning come out of them. I was interested in someone who truly loves and understands mankind. You see, mankind has its own weaknesses: mankind's

ego creates folly. This devil loves mankind because men are going to always make the choice that will send him into ascendancy. He's been winning the game for a long time.

When I sold it that way, Pacino started to get it. And I said, "You know, this character, John Milton, the man who runs the law firm, is incredibly smooth and smart. But he doesn't have to be all buttoneddown." I wanted somebody who you believe could walk into international corporate boardrooms and carry on a very intense and articulate conversation. But at the same time, he's got a little looseness to him, he's not surprised by anything, he's not uptight. He's seen it all. And Pacino looks ageless, which he is. You just feel an ease and at the same time a wit, and a



devilishness perhaps, that come off of him. So what I asked Al to do was to play it very cool, very easy. When he's in his office and he's the chairman of the board of this huge international law firm, he doesn't have to evidence his power with a loud voice. Everything is easy; he's in complete control.

On the other hand, when he's out in the street, when you see him walking with Keanu Reeves in Chinatown, I wanted him to reflect a whole different persona. He comes alive. These are his people, the people in the New York street. I wanted you to get a sense that John Milton was not born with a silver spoon in his mouth, that he was a self-made man, that he's got his feet on the ground.

Then at the very end of the film, he's defrocked defrocked of his corporate suit—and now you see him in his apartment, and you see, in fact, that he is the devil. There's a chance then for him to kind of let it all hang out. He has a lot to say in the last scene. His monologue is very important because it's the crux of our argument. It's what we were trying to reveal about human beings at this point in the millennium—that whole sense of the narcissism of capitalism. So at that point he takes on this larger-than-life persona, and he can raise his voice, he can shout to heaven, because, having been cast out, he's an angry entity. It's the first time in the movie you see him reveal that he has resentments. Of course he doesn't have resentments against mankind—he has resentments against heaven and God, and rails against them. It's a full-out battle. So what I talked to Pacino about was modulating a performance over the entire film, where, as you would expect with the devil, he's not going to really reveal himself until finally he takes off his corporate garb and says, "This is who I really am." And actually at the end of the film he can be seen as a bit of a tragic figure, because he's always doomed to fail if, in fact, you have a moral tale where God wins.

WIE: The dangers of feeding and empowering the ego are clearly depicted in the film. How far do you take this critique?

TH: Well, if you're ultimately asking: Do I think we can live in an egoless society?-no, I don't, and I'm not trying to say that. Without ego, you don't have individualism. And I would certainly say that ego is responsible for many works of artistic genius because you have to have people who say, "I can do it differently; I can do it better." You may say, "People can be individuals without having to feed their egos." But in reality, in order to step out and really make a stand, in order to walk out on the precipice and say, "I can do this better," you have to believe it, and that means your ego is being developed. However, once you do step out, there is a support system in our culture that comes into play that starts to say, "You're a genius." But you're not a genius. You may be right on certain things, and you may be very talented in certain areas, but that doesn't mean that you're God. Our society gives power to people who are successful. All of a sudden, if you've created something unique and interesting, you're set apart. That's okay—you should get some recognition. But, unfortunately, sometimes that affirmation creates a sense that you deserve special treatment and recognition in areas where you're not so talented. And then self-importance starts to take over, and you find that you're making decisions that are destructive, making decisions that have nothing to do with your talent but have everything to do with your narcissistic desires. I mean, these are the things that we are faced with every day. The problem is that we have a society and a worldwide capitalistic system that are there to satisfy your narcissism on every level and give you a sense of yourself as larger than what you really are.

WIE: And this invariably leads to problems.

TH: Right. Because when you have millions of people with this kind of need for gratification, and the culture is saying that it's possible for everyone to satisfy all of their needs and desires all of the time, there are obviously going to be clashes—clashes of ego. The contradictions will multiply until things explode. But I can't say that ego is not a valuable thing—it is. It's just a question of how to control it, how to modulate it, how to keep it from growing to the point where it becomes a sort of large, fatty tumor.

WIE: *In Christian theology, the most fundamental sin on* the spiritual path is pride. And pride, of course, is Lucifer's mortal sin. Over and over again in the movie, the protagonist falls into the trap of his own pride, egoism and vanity. Unable to accept any kind of defeat in the courtroom, he practically throws his life away to protect his perfect string of victories. "Lose?" Keanu Reeves says at one point, trying to defend his actions, "I don't lose, I win. I win! I'm a lawyer. That's my job. That's what I do." At which point the devil looks at him calmly with a knowing smile and responds, "I rest my case. Vanity is definitely my favorite sin." Could you say more about the relationship between pride and evil, and how that informed the creation of the movie?

TH: I think, at a certain point, no one is infallible. And if you think you are, if your pride gets to the point where you say, "I'm the best," there's still always going to be somebody who's better. And if it comes down to having to confront failure, that's when you want to change the playing field. In other words, then you resort to devices and techniques that are not necessarily ethical. Because you've got to preserve your ego and your pride. But you don't want to feed the ego to the point that you end up with a big cirrhosis of the liver-where you open it up and see this huge fatty mass in there that you've created—created by drinking into it. Now the fact is that most of the time all of that stuff is hidden, and what you are basking in is this glow of notoriety, this glow of success that is worshiped and celebrated in our society. And that is a very heady brew to ever resist. That's what happens in this film. Of course, that's what the devil is celebrating. "Go for it! Win! Don't pay any attention to what God is saying. Don't pay any attention to this other stuff. You can feed your ego. You can have all the sex you want. Why feel any guilt about anything anyway? There is no guilt; just go for it!" That's what he's saying. And too often in our society, that is a goal in and of itself. I think the last confrontation is being faced with your own hypocrisy. That's the hardest thing in the world. The hardest thing is to look and say, "I did



it all myself." That's what Keanu finally has to say, "I did it. I destroyed my wife. I did it all." And the wonderful thing in the movie is that he goes all the way through this whole process, and then he realizes that he can still control the situation.

He can make the right choice. The devil, as all-powerful as he is, still needs the individual to make their own choices.

So the devil is pushing Keanu to give in at the end, and when it doesn't happen and everything falls apart, and the devil is defeated yet again, you think. "Oh, wow, it's a happy ending." But I couldn't leave the film that way. So then it's a flashback to the very beginning. Everybody goes, "Oh, it didn't really happen. His wife is still there. All that horrible stuff didn't really happen. Isn't life great; it's a movie." And then at the very end, what I wanted was to have him do something in court that totally violates the ethics of his profession. He doesn't represent his client because he knows he's guilty. He violates that contract, and so therefore the judge is going to disbar him because you can't do that within the legal profession. He does something that is morally right, but professionally wrong.

Then he walks out thinking, "I stood up. I did the right thing for the first time in my life. That's an amazing thing!" And as he goes out, he realizes, "My God, the press is going to make a hero out of me! I can be incredibly famous. I'll be on the cover of Time magazine—for doing the right thing! That's going to be great." And immediately you see him make that decision, and he tells the local reporter, "Call me tomorrow." And when he does, you realize he's feeding the ego again. And then all of a sudden the reporter turns into Al Pacino, the devil. And the devil says, "Yes, I lost before, but I'm back." So in other words, if you win a moral victory, it's not over. You confront those choices every single day. And the temptation is never going to stop.

WIE: At the climax of the movie, when the devil tempts the protagonist, he does so by offering to take away his "bag of bricks," his guilt and worry over the consequences of his actions—in effect, severing him from his own conscience. And this seemed to be the characteristic of all the devil's henchmen in the movie—a kind of eerie confidence, born presumably from a lack of conscience. In looking into the subject of evil for this issue, we came

across several passages asserting that the definition of true evil is the conscious denial of one's conscience. Bestselling author and psychologist M. Scott Peck, in his book on human evil People of the Lie, writes, "What distinguishes the evil is the specific type of pain they are running away from . . . the pain of their own conscience." Could you explain how you sought to portray the human conscience in relation to the force of ego and evil?

TH: Well, first, I agree with Peck's statement. Second, in this particular story it was important to base Keanu's character in a background that was quite religious. His mother, played by Judith Ivey, is obviously a religious person who is close to the church and very orthodox in her beliefs, so you know that there have been a lot of moral teachings in this young man's life. He has a certain code of ethics that he has at least attempted to follow, and tried to stay fairly close to the line. In other words, if he's trod across the line, it's been briefly, and he's come back.

But then the stakes are raised, and he goes into a new world, which in this instance we call Babylon, but it's New York City. Babylon traditionally is the place of corruption, the place of sophistication, the place of great wealth, the place of all the temptations. And you start to see that line blur, and you also see that within the context of a seemingly legitimate professional life, everyone is doing it. Everyone is doing it, so it's okay. You see the subjugation of the conscience. And the conscience is replaced by the building and the swelling of ego. And only at a certain point when everything around Keanu starts to change does he start to come to the realization, "Oh my God, I created all this." Before that, he is completely oblivious to it. This is what we were trying to say. The conscience gets buried, especially when those around you and the society celebrate the subjugation of the conscience.

WIE: But Reeves's character makes several decisions during that time when he knows what's right, but he clearly chooses to do the wrong thing. So in a way, he subjugates his conscience himself-consciously. He knows what's right, but he makes a different choice.

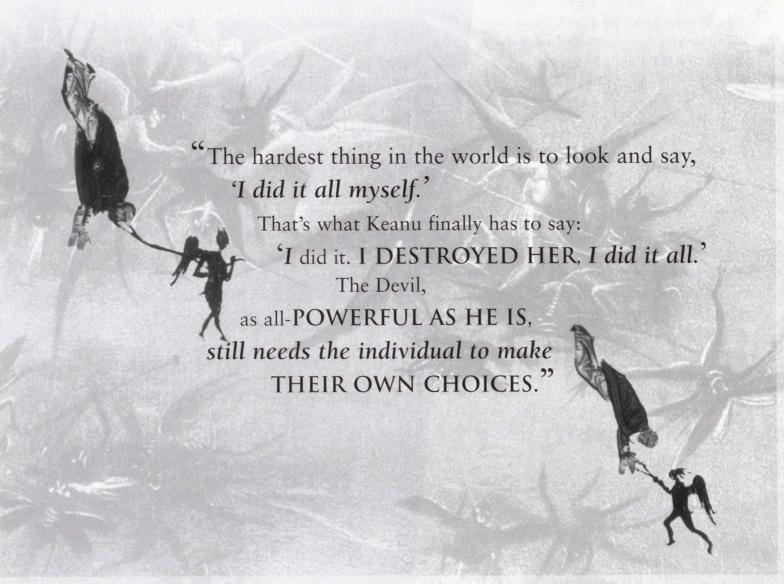
TH: Absolutely, because the other side of it feels so good. What he's getting in exchange is so good. It's a process of intoxication of the ego, to the point where you're totally intoxicated. You've buried conscience.

Now when you have a moral tale like this, you want to take your protagonist up to the precipice. And by the time he's at the precipice, there's a lot of bodies lying along the line. In this instance, the sacrifice is his wife. The sacrifice is this person who is closest to him, the person who has supported him. The person who really loved him—he has destroyed. He has destroyed. However long the intoxication of the ego lasts, finally the perfume drifts away and you have to confront reality. So at the end of the movie, Keanu has to confront the horrible truth of what he has done. He has completely subjugated his conscience.

WIE: In an interview you were quoted as saying of the character of the devil in the movie, "His greatest lure is what we have in common with him, our greed, ego,

jealousy, competitiveness, lust, dishonesty." Could you say a bit more about that?

TH: I think that there is good and evil in each of us, that we possess all of those things. You know, the piety of man would say, "I don't lust. I don't feel those things." But that's bullshit of course; human beings do. But to say, "I have no conscience; I have no sense of good," is also bullshit. You may subjugate those things, you may deny them, but they're there. And that's my point. I didn't ever want an audience to abdicate responsibility by saying, "The devil's out *there*. And he made me do it." The devil doesn't *make* you do anything. You do it yourself. ■



"The moment you say no' to any

"Don't try to get rid of the ego-sensation.

Take it, so long as it lasts, as a feature or play of the total process—like a cloud or a wave, or like feeling warm or cold, or anything else that happens of itself. Getting rid of one's ego is the last resort of invincible egoism."

Alan Watts

"We do not want our sages to have big egos; we do not even want them to display a manifest dimension at all. Any time a sage displays humanness—in regard to money, food, sex, relationships—we are shocked, shocked because we are planning to escape life altogether, not live it, and the sage who lives offends us. We want out, we want to ascend, we want to escape, and the sage who engages life with gusto, lives it to the hilt, grabs each wave of life and surfs it to the end—this deeply. profoundly disturbs us, frightens us, because it means that we, too, might have to engage life, with gusto, on all levels, and not merely escape it in a cloud of luminous ether. . . . We do not want to surf the waves of life, we want the waves to go away. We want vaporware spirituality."

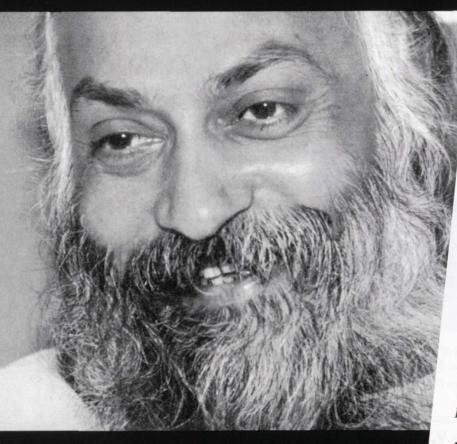
"Tantra avoids mind and encounters life face-to-face, neither thinking, 'This is good,' nor thinking, 'This is bad.' . . . It says yes to everything. It has nothing like 'no' in its vocabulary, there is no negation. It never says no to anything, because with no the fight starts, with no you become the ego. The moment you say no to anything, you have become the ego already; a conflict has come in; now you are at war. . . . Only a total yes reveals the real God."

Osho Rajneesh

NO INVESTIGATION OF THE NATURE OF EGO could be complete without giving some attention to the bold, outrageous and enormously influential life and teaching of Osho Rajneesh. During his years as the most popular, most unpredictable, most prolific and some would argue most driven guru in the modern spiritual world, he created two of the biggest spiritual communes in modern history, released hundreds of books in dozens of languages and helped catalyze the movement to integrate Eastern spirituality and Western psychotherapy. Osho was the provocateur of the spiritual world, and his "sannyasins" were its merry pranksters, determined to find love and laughter in all aspects of life, to celebrate their way to enlightenment, to transcend their egos without leaving anything behind in the process and to love the senses with the same fervor as they loved the soul. Today, almost a decade after Osho's death, the pervasive influence of his teachings can be felt in all corners of the spiritual world. Literally thousands of spiritual teachers, therapists, authors, healers, body workers and counselors are incorporating his ideas, using his techniques and, in many cases, were trained in his communes. His passionate embrace of the teachings of tantra, in particular, has had a significant impact on popular spiritual culture, with a great many now wholeheartedly endorsing the tantric philosophy of life. So what exactly did this spiritual rebel have to say about the ego? Like Osho himself, it was radical, controversial, and, love it or loathe it, it raises quite a few questions about the true nature of the path to enlightenment.

thing, you have become the ego."

is osho right?



what do think?

"To the extent that you leave behind all things, to that extent—and no more—does God enter you with all that is his, inasmuch as you completely renounce all that is yours in regard to all things."

Meister Eckhart

"The ego is your enemy. It is like a thorn stuck in the throat of an eater. Destroy this enemy with the mighty sword of knowledge and be free to enjoy the sovereignty of your own empire, the bliss of the Atman. Check all the activities of the ego and the selfishness they involve. Attain the supreme reality and be free from lust. Dwell in silence and enjoy the bliss of the Atman [Self]. Lose all sense of separateness, and realize in Brahman your infinite nature."

Shankara

continued from page 37

many aspects. When Amma disciplines her children, she does this with the sole purpose of guiding them along the path to help them to fully blossom. This blossoming will happen only if a conducive atmosphere is created. It can never be forced. A true master does not force his or her disciples because pure consciousness cannot force anything. The master is like space, like the boundless sky, and space cannot hurt you. Only the ego can force and hurt. Amma will patiently continue to create opportunities for that inner opening, that blossoming, to take place within her children.

The guru-disciple relationship is the highest. The bond of love between the guru and *shishya* [disciple] is so powerful that one may sometimes feel there is no guru and no *shishya*—all sense of separation disappears.

WIE: What do you do when the ego takes hold of one of your disciples?

MA: Amma lovingly helps her children to realize the danger of being under the grip of the ego, and she shows them how to get out of it.

WIE: Some Western psychotherapists and spiritual teachers believe that we must develop strong egos before we seek ego transcendence. They say that most of us have weak or wounded egos as a result of the emotional and psychological traumas that we have suffered over the course of our lives, and they advocate various forms of therapy to help us build up our character, ego and sense of individuality. You had quite a difficult childhood; you had to bear harsh treatment and even physical abuse, and yet you transcended your ego completely. Would you agree with these teachers that in

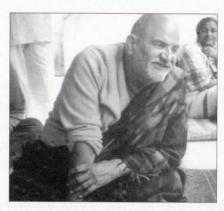
the pursuit of enlightenment, we first need to build up the ego before we endeavor to transcend it?

MA: Most people are deeply wounded within in some way, and those wounds have been caused by the past. Those wounds usually remain unhealed. They are wounds not only from this life but from previous lives as well, and no doctor or psychologist can heal them. A doctor or psychologist can help people to cope with life to a certain extent, in spite of those wounds, but they cannot actually heal them. They cannot penetrate deeply enough into their own minds to remove their own wounds, let alone penetrate deeply enough into the patient's mind. Only a true master, who is completely free from any limitations and who is beyond the mind, can penetrate into a person's mind and treat all those unhealed wounds with his or her infinite energy. Spiritual life, especially under the guidance of a satguru, does not weaken the psyche; it strengthens it.

The ultimate cause of all emotional wounds is our separation from the Atman, from our true nature. It may be necessary for a person to go to a psychologist, and that is fine—but to put spirituality aside in order to first strengthen the ego is to perpetuate that sense of separation, and it will only lead to further suffering. What is the use in thinking, "I will go to the doctor as soon as I feel better"? To wait for either the inner or outer circumstances to be "just right" before we embark on the spiritual journey is like standing on the seashore waiting for the waves to completely subside before we jump into the ocean. This will never happen. Every moment of life is so utterly precious, such a rare opportunity. We should not waste it.

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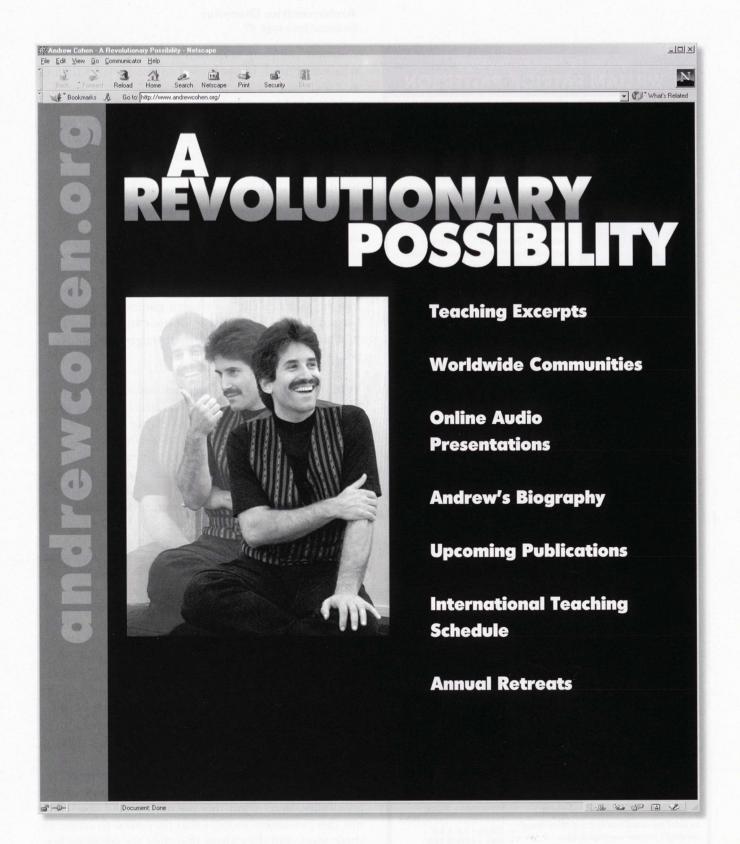


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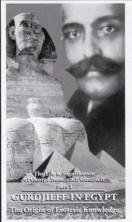
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Archimandrite Dionysios continued from page 49

common company with him so that he will give me whatever I need, but because I am more clever than he is, I will then use my power for good."

It's good to send children out to study, to learn to sing, to learn athletics, to be well educated, to have an economic basis from which to start their life. But how often do we see that the dreams of all the rich men and their children are broken? The Bible says that "if the builders are working very hard to build a tower that the Lord does not bless, they have worked for nothing."

This ego is the modern god of the twentieth century and the twenty-first century. And the idea you referred to in your question is the modern religion. But we know this temptation. Ego means, "I don't believe in the existence of the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit does not exist." But this is a lie. The Holy Spirit guides the world and blessed are they who want it, who see it, who breathe in it, who move in it, who inspire through it, who love it, who are uniting with it.

WIE: There are also many spiritual authorities today who insist that the ego is an inherent and irreversible fact of our humanity and that any attempt to give up the ego, to transcend our lower nature in pursuit of perfection, is itself an expression of the greatest hubris. Jungian psychologist Marion Woodman goes so far as to say that the very notion of perfection "rapes the soul." How would you respond to those who assert that we are, by nature, flawed and incapable of reaching perfection?

AD: Christ said, "Be perfect. Become perfect. And when you will be and you will do everything perfectly, saying within yourself and believing that you are miserable, terrible lost sinners, servants, there you will find humility and glory." It's possible to be perfect because He is perfect, because He received our nature. So if He did this, we can do it; we can be with Him. It's possible to be perfect because of this gift. And it's possible to not be perfect because we have the authority to refuse the gift, to refuse the love. And when we refuse it, then we need theology, then we need philosophy, then we need to create new books and new theories that say that the ego cannot be transcended.

It is possible to be free of the ego. It has to be. It's necessary. It's only because people don't know of this possibility, don't want this possibility, and don't permit this possibility to exist that they need to create all these ideas. But they know that they are speaking lies. This is the craziest thing we can hear. What doctor says to a sick man, "Look, sickness is a part of our nature. We have to be with it. So we don't have to cut our nails. We don't need to wash our face, because we shall be dead tomorrow anyway"? What kind of teaching is this? Yes, it is possible to be free of the ego, but it's a mystery.

WIE: The ascetic practices of Orthodoxy place a strong emphasis on the need to suppress our instinctual drives. Impulses like lust, hunger, thirst and even the desire for sleep are often held at bay for long periods in extreme acts of renunciation. What is the role of ascetic practice in attaining freedom from the ego?

AD: Asceticism is a means to get where we want to go. It is a railway on which the train can run. Many people feel that asceticism means following a set of rules, but it's not a law that is imposed on us. In football, for example, it's not that the rules of the game are hard, but that they help the game to come out perfectly. And so it is with ascetic life. The special periods and rules of fasting, vigil and prayer serve as mystical ways or means. We follow these mystery ways, these divine commitments, these divine orders. And outside of the general rules, there are also personal rules that are given in the communication between spiritual father and son, special vocations for each individual. We see saints who spend much time in the caves or in the forest or in the desert. And they don't go there with plans to come back; when they go there, they go forever. And the Lord guides them then.

When Christ went to the desert after his baptism, he went to face the devil. He didn't think in his mind, "After forty days I will return." He just went there. He came out of the Jordan River, baptized by Saint John the Baptist, and he went to the desert. From one point of view, he lost time being alone there. He didn't go to his people to give them food, to bless them, to guide them, to give the Holy Spirit to them. No. He went to the desert. And he said to the devil, "My friend, look, until now you were playing with the people. You started with Eve in paradise, and now you are finishing with me. I am here alone. I'm not eating. I'm not drinking. And the cold in my bones in the night in the desert is terrible. I suffer. But I don't play games. I'm here. Alone. And you come to me and you tell me to turn stones into bread. You tell me to prostrate to you. You? To give you the authority of my people? Go now. We have seen each other. I know who you are and you know who I am." And in that moment the devil gave up everything.

So the ascetic life is necessary. To be ready in each moment to die, in front of everybody for everything this is the desert, this is the ascetic life. And it brings the Holy Spirit. And if we go, the Lord will guide us. ■

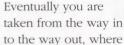


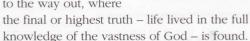
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Master Sheng-yen continued from page 58



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it comes to addressing the suffering of the modern seeker and that a person would be well advised to consider this dual approach—psychotherapy and spiritual practice—in their pursuit of enlightenment? Or is spiritual practice alone, if it's sincere and diligent, sufficient to free us from the ego?

SY: There are two different issues here. First, individuals who have very severe psychological problems should not use the Ch'an method. It's not good for them. If they just want to learn the beginner's sitting meditation, we will teach them and they will reap benefits from that, such as improved health. However, a person with severe problems should get a doctor to help them recover before they begin the practice of Ch'an.

But generally, for individuals who do not have severe psychiatric problems, Ch'an practice is sufficient. There's no need to get help from a psychiatrist or a therapist. In fact, sometimes psychiatrists or therapists come and seek help from me.

WIE: In the last thirty years, there have been many powerful teachers who have had profound spiritual understanding and experience and have attracted large numbers of students, but who eventually fell from grace due to corruption and scandal, sometimes in very shocking ways. Is it possible that spiritual experience and understanding could, in some cases, actually empower the ego?

SY: It's hard to say. I don't really want to comment on this. It is a problem. There are some individuals who think that they are enlightened, that they are liberated, and they also have the idea that after they're liberated, they do not need any morality; they do not need to uphold the precepts [basic obligations undertaken by

Buddhists] anymore. And according to my own understanding of Buddhism—I can only speak for myself here—we follow Shakyamuni Buddha and if we look at the Buddha after he was enlightened, he didn't go and drink. He didn't go and hang out with women, sleep around and cheat people out of their money. And so that is what we follow. The Chinese Ch'an masters emphasize the importance of upholding the precepts.

WIE: For everyone, teachers and students?

SY: In the *sutras*, the Buddhist scriptures, they say that if you are really genuinely enlightened, you will *naturally* uphold the precepts.

WIE: You are a revered teacher with students in Taiwan and also Western students here in America. Some of the Western spiritual teachers and psychologists we have spoken to for this issue have said that the ego of Westerners is different from the ego of Easterners—that Westerners are more attached to an individual self and personal identity. If that's true, then theoretically, it should generally be easier for Easterners to get enlightened than it is for Westerners. Do you agree with that? Is that your experience?

SY: This is not necessarily the case. It all depends on whether you have the desire for enlightenment—whether, as I was saying, you really want to understand the nature of the ego.

WIE: You're saying that's the key to success?

SY: Yes, that's the key. You may have a weak or small ego, but if you don't care about these things and you don't have a strong desire, then you're not closer to enlightenment.

AD: About the teacher, because the teacher is going to be a button-pusher.

AC: That's their job.

AD: That is his job. So when he pushes the buttons, he becomes the object of attack and denial or gets pushed away.

AC: Yes. It happens to me all the time.

AD: When this happened, it wasn't a surprise to me. If you hear some of my lectures just before that, I was even saying that now you're putting a garland in this guru's hands, but someday you might throw shoes at him.

AC: It's the absolute nature of the relationship. The commitment is so intense that the feelings tend to be extreme, especially if one is really involved.

AD: Then it's even worse. At Kripalu, we had 350 full-time residents for more than fifteen years, living under the one roof, sharing common resources, living simply with the restrictions of a balanced, simple life.

AC: When people come together in this way, everything gets a lot more charged.

AD: And people create their image of the guru and they project it onto him, even if the guru does not claim it.

AC: Project what?

AD: The idea that the guru is very evolved, that he is very highly developed, he is self-realized. They project those images on him because they want perfection in the guru, so they can depend on him.

So in order to create dependence, they instill something that is not there. You see, I always claimed that I'm not perfect. I'm a disciple first before I'm a guru. This is just the role that I play for the benefit of transmission of the energy. But I claim nothing; that's what I always say.

AC: Well, you have to claim something; otherwise you wouldn't be able to be a guru. Isn't it true?

AD: I did not claim enlightenment.

AC: I'm not saying you did. But you just said, "I claimed nothing." That couldn't be true because to be a master of yoga and to do the work that you're doing, you obviously have to claim something.

AD: Sometimes gurus delude peo-

ple by saying, "That's where I am and I'll take you there." That I did not do.

AC: But in the whole path of kundalini yoga, after shaktipat transmission, then one meditates on the form of the guru. You said, "Meditate on me, take refuge in me"—which is, you know, definitely not claiming nothing. That's claiming quite a lot, that's saying, "I'm a vehicle you can use."

AD: Right, that I said. But not as a *perfected* vehicle. All I claimed is that you can use my role, but not as a perfected being. They put that kind of perfection into it. The guru role has inherent possibilities of creating dependency on it.

AC: But ultimately in the relationship between the guru and the

continued on page 162

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disciple, isn't the goal that there should be nothing between them, no fear and no doubt, so that they could completely merge and become one?

AD: No fear and no doubt is an ultimate condition. That means they have reached the final stage. It is not something that you can expect in an evolving soul relationship, which is the guru/disciple relationship.

AC: But it is the goal.

AD: It is the goal, yes. It is the intention that you move toward that.

AC: And wouldn't the guru want to be able to offer that potential to the aspiring soul? In the role of being the guru, isn't that really what they're offering?

AD: Yes, they're offering that as a potential and giving them the directions and every possible support and method by which they can go, and in that they may have to trust the guru. It's a critical path—to trust the guru. But then what I always said is, "Trust the guru within you first before you can trust the outer guru."

AC: In the guru-disciple relationship, though, doesn't it work the other way around? Isn't it through beginning to trust the outer guru that the disciple begins to experience a liberating fullness within themselves? And doesn't the experience of that fullness within themselves instill in them a sense of confidence and independence that few people ever realize?

AD: It can be either way. It depends on who would want to begin where, which will work for that particular individual. But it is complementary in both. Like if my inner guru is not awakened, I'm not even attracted to an external guru.

AC: That's true.

AD: So that's how it begins. Then, through the practice of spiritual teachings, we awaken more of the inner guru, and we become more deeply connected.

AC: And simultaneously more independent, because the more the inner guru is awakened, there's more trust in oneself, and less dependence.

AD: That is supposed to happen, but that's not what necessarily happens in most cases.

AC: Yes, indeed in my community, I would say that about half the people are interested in a real relationship with me that has the power to cultivate real independence, a relationship beyond fear and doubt, where there's liberating intimacy and extraordinary trust. The other half are interested in depending on me merely as an object that supports their ego. They have no interest, really, in what I'm teaching.

AD: I understand that. That happens at all times. You discover gradually that even in spite of deep dedication, ego or human nature is always acting. But if your intention is correct, everything works. Good things that happen, that works. And wrong that happens, that works too. Because you are learning, using bad experiences for learning. Then bad is not bad; it's a good experience in that sense. That's how I use it. Now all the time, you know, I don't consider anything wrong or bad. It's just an experience.



helped for him to understand projection, rationalization, and the process of repression. However, my experience of him was that he understood the depths of the psyche intuitively in a way that was extraordinarily powerful and direct, and in a way that theoretical constructs might very well have distorted or inhibited. I felt so deeply seen by him and known by him, and I would guess that chances are that might have been somewhat distorted by personality theory. It was a kind of direct knowing, and I think when you put theory between the fact of knowing and the object that you're knowing, it tends to distort it.

I had a wonderful teacher, Moshe Feldenkrais, who is an incredible teacher of movement and bodily functioning. He could work directly with anyone from those with the most severe physical handicap limitations from accidents and birth defects, all the way up to great athletes and musicians—to improve their functioning. And he said, "When I'm working with someone, I don't even think in sentences. Because the structure of grammar would get between my nervous system experiencing the nervous system of the person I'm touching."

So, from that place, I would suggest that perhaps much of psychology, because so much of it is theory, is not necessarily useful if one has the ability to have one's nervous system touch another nervous system, to have one's soul touch another soul. When one gets to that place—and one doesn't get to it by studying theory either—the theory only gets in the way.

WIE: So as to whether Sheikh Muzaffer would have been a better spiritual teacher had he been trained in psychology, it seems that where his capacity to guide really came from wasn't somewhere that would have been in any way helped by more theoretical training.

RF: Yes, yes. And I think that is true of the great spiritual teachers. Nobody taught them how to teach. Here you need a teaching credential that says, "Okay, now this person has theory, they've had supervised practice, now they can teach." Well, who taught the great spiritual teachers? Nobody. They were able to receive guidance from that spiritual core, from that source of wisdom. They taught from that very real, immediate place, which is beyond the personality and beyond the limited life experience that any one person has. If one is in touch with that which is greater than the personal self, then one is in touch with that wisdom that's greater than our personal history. So, the more I think about it—no, he wouldn't have been helped by psychology.

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Sheikh Ragip continued from page 92

gun in your hand, the thief will have a gun. No matter what you've got in the house, the thief is going to have the same. It's going to mirror that power that you use against it, and it's going to be terribly destructive." So what do you do? The answer that he gave is, "You turn the light on!" Because the thief is a coward, and if you turn the light of awareness on the process, the thief will flee. You don't fight. You see, the stupidest thing in the world is to fight with Satan. There are lots of great stories in Sufism and elsewhere that show that when you try to fight with Satan, guess who wins? It's a very bad idea.

WIE: There is a famous passage in the Koran where, upon returning from battle, Muhammad says to his followers, "Now we leave the lesser holy war for the greater holy war—the war against the nafs." In light of what you've been saying about not struggling against the ego, what do you think about the Prophet's widely quoted metaphor of spiritual combat?

SR: I think it was a perfect teaching for the time. But you have to understand the context. The Muslims had just come back from fighting the Meccans who had more money, more cavalry, better equipment, better armor and better weapons. But by means of faith, effort and God's grace, they won. So they're coming back exhausted but feeling, "Wow, we did it! We're great warriors, look at what we did! We beat the crap out of them! All those Meccan nonbelievers, we kicked their butts!" And it was at that point that Muhammad said, "Now we're going to the greater war!" He was addressing that little piece of pride.

I think the problem is what we tend to do when we hear "holy war"—it's too easy for it to become black and white. In a war, you know who your allies are and you know who your enemies are. But the spiritual path is much more subtle. The nafs never says to you, "I am your enemy. I'm going to mislead you from your spiritual path. I want you to meditate a little less. I want you to do your work a little less. I want to nail you!" It doesn't do that. It says something like, "You've been traveling, so why don't you take it easy. Don't exhaust yourself; get a little more sleep. It's good for your health. I'm your friend. I have your best interests at heart." So this business is complicated.

I also think it's unfortunate that often we call it the "inner holy war" because war sounds very violent. I think it's far more sophisticated to say it's really an inner training—the way you train a beautiful, intelligent dog or horse or, in a way, a child. I think transformation through love is far more sane and sensible.

WIE: In Sufism, the relationship with the sheikh, or teacher, has always been considered to be essential in helping the dervish to go beyond the ego. There's a quote from Rumi that states, "Whoever travels without a guide needs two hundred years for a two-day journey." How does the relationship with the sheikh help the dervish in leaving the ego behind?

SR: One metaphor I've found very useful comes from a German psychologist who's also a Sufi. She said, "You can see yourself clearly enough to make trivial changes in yourself, just like if you have a cut, you can bandage yourself. But fundamental change you can't do for yourself because you're too close to it. You can't see the structure. You can't see the forest for the trees." She said, "While you can put a Band-Aid on your own cut, you can't take out your own appendix." And that kind of operation is equivalent to what the sheikh can help you with, which is fundamental change. Many things you can do for yourself, but there are certain levels of depth you just can't reach by yourself. You can't do it.

WIE: A growing number of spiritual practitioners in the West today are of the opinion that it's not necessary to have a spiritual teacher or guide. Fueled by the antiauthority teachings of Andrew Harvey and a number of others, more and more people are now attempting to guide themselves beyond ego, often selecting from various traditions the practices and ideas they feel will most benefit them in their quest. In Essential Sufism you write, "The ego is afraid of losing control, and even more afraid of dissolving, and comes up with reason after reason for refusing to let go. . . . " Do you think that, in general, this impulse to walk the spiritual path solo, without a teacher, is possibly just another manifestation of the ego's unrelenting agenda to stay in control of our life?

SR: Yes. I think that's one way of putting it. But there's a paradox. My teachers rarely told me what to do. At one level, I had to do the work myself. I had to do my own prayers. My beloved friend Haridas Baba many years ago said, "I can cook for you, but I can't eat for you." So the teacher can put a banquet out that you will then do the work with. Can you do that with the banquet that's available in all the wonderful paperbacks at \$9.95 and \$15.95? Well, some people would say yes. My own experience is that I have been so inspired by my teachers. I don't think I would have had the patience to stay with this path if it wasn't for

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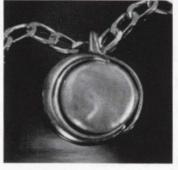
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the love, the acceptance and the example of my teachers. I'm not sure I would have had the courage to see myself honestly and clearly if it wasn't for the sense that they saw me clearly and still loved me and accepted me.

But I think, even more fundamentally, I see the teacher as a powerful role model, an example to show that transformation is possible. How do you know it's possible? There's somebody there whose personality has been transformed, whose vessel has been permeated by light and love. And I also think there are more esoteric aspects. I think certain practices frankly don't have any power unless you've been given them by a teacher. They won't work. So I think this business about being your own teacher ignores the importance of transmission, of lineage, of initiation. The spiritual path is not merely logical or mechanical. It's not psychological or spiritual bodybuilding. It's something much more subtle. I think there's an energetic connection with the teacher. We talk in Sufism about the rabita al kalb, the connection of the heart.

Now I think there have been cases where that connection was established without a living teacher. I think St. Francis did that through Jesus. But that's rare. How many of us are St. Francis? Very few of us. And also, my teachers have said, semihumorously, that it's much better to have a dead teacher than a live teacher because they don't give you much trouble. They don't speak up. They don't get critical. All they do is say, "Love, be happy, don't worry," because what else are they going to tell you in their writing? They can't say, "Now, you know what you're doing when you're doing your practice. Why don't you try not to do that anymore?" in a gentle or not-so-gentle way. When it comes to dealing with the subtle tricks of the nafs, it's very useful to have a teacher because some people start to go into the woods and don't know it. You really need someone to say, "Wake up, boy! You just took a ninety-degree turn and you don't know it."

WIE: Earlier you mentioned that the ego can appear to get stronger in response to our spiritual efforts. In Heart, Self and Soul, you also describe how your first conscious experience of the tyrannical nafs, or negative ego, in yourself came immediately upon your decision to formally ask to become a dervish [Sufi initiate]. Why is it that when one deepens one's commitment to the spiritual quest, the ego seems to become more visible?

SR: Well, I think most people, especially before they take up the spiritual quest, are absolutely under the domination of the tyrannical nafs. But if we use the metaphor of the pharaoh, the inner tyrant, who's the best ruler? It's not the ruler who has to call the troops out to keep order. It's the ruler who gives commands and everybody says, "We must obey." It's the ruler whose authority isn't questioned. And so it seems to me that until one gets onto the spiritual path, the ruler has it easy, because there's no opposition. There's no rebellion. But when we start on the spiritual path, there is a rebellion and then what happens is that, in a way, the forces of the tyrannical nafs that have been underground, that have been hiding, suddenly become revealed. That revealing is actually a weakening of their power because they're no longer unconscious. But what happens is that, paradoxically, very often when you start on the spiritual path, you suddenly see the power of the nafs, and you think, "Oh, my God! I'm in much worse shape than I thought I was." The problem is, you just didn't know what bad shape you were in before. You were run by this thing. You weren't fighting it. So when you first see it, there's a shock.

For us, one of the greatest blessings is to fast during the month of Ramadan from dawn to dusk. One reason is that it's an incredible mirror for the nafs. We get short-tempered. We say, "I don't want to fast. I want to sleep." Or, "I have to drive today. Maybe I shouldn't fast." We begin to hear the voice of the nafs. And one of the great blessings of fasting or doing any ascetic practice is to begin to hear the voice that's opposing, that's saying, "Don't do this. I don't like this." It's a bit like The Wizard of Oz. There's this big powerful voice and you think, "Well, obviously we have to follow that." But meanwhile there's somebody saying, "It's really just the little man behind the curtain." Because the more clearly you see it, the more you really see it is like a trickster, and the less power it has. But you have to see it.

You see, the danger is that ascetic practices don't



always do that. Purohit Swami, who is one of the great Indian teachers of this century, has a brilliant translation of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, in which he says, "I have met many practitioners of hatha yoga, all of whom had strong wills and had developed great capacities and great power—and very powerful egos in the process." So if you just do ascetic practices without the context that this is a practice of looking at yourself, the danger is, of course, you're going to feed the ego—"I fasted for a month!" It's interesting that in Islam you can't fast for more than a month, and this came about partly to address this problem of self-inflation: "Well, you only fasted for twenty-nine days, I fasted for thirty-five!" So asceticism gives an incredible potential for ego inflation; but on the other hand, if we use it with this context of, "Watch what's going on, watch the process," then it really can reduce the ego tremendously.

WIE: In researching this issue, we learned that Orthodox Christian ascetics are often encouraged to soften their discipline when they have guests, so that they can't show off their feats of austerity to others.

SR: There is a tradition in Sufism that has a very powerful focus on reducing the ego in this way. It's called

the Malami tradition or "the path of blame." What the Malamis will do, knowing that the ego wants to be known and thought well of, is they will either be invisible or deliberately soften their practice in front of other people, so that other people think they don't have much of a practice. The Malamis, for example, almost never wear special clothing. They don't even have a special meeting place. They avoid all the trappings, because they know that the ego loves trappings. I have one very dear friend who is a highly respected teacher in this tradition. And I have seen him walk into our mosque in Istanbul and look like somebody who just walked in from the street, not like a visiting teacher. And he's a wonderful, brilliant teacher. Many of the Sufis have this quality—as opposed to showing your practice to other people, almost deliberately showing that you don't have one and then running to do your prayers where they can't see you. So in that sense it is like war. It's almost like a war against the ego. It's very sophisticated. It's like, "Whatever you want, I'm going to go do the opposite. You want to look good? We're going to look bad. You want to be seen? We're going to be invisible. And any time we're gonna be visible, I'm going to make sure we don't look the way you want us to." It's an incredible discipline.



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sanandasiva@earthlimk.net www.elk-mountain.com/lotus PO Box 47, La Joya, New Mexico 87028 and independently. If what you're asking is: Does that shift in perspective substitute for therapy or does it shift the relationship to experience enough so that other kinds of therapeutic work become unnecessary? Well, I've never seen that.

AC: Okay. But my whole point is that the absolute or liberated perspective provides a completely different context in which to view and have a relationship with every aspect of our humanity.

JE: You see, a lot of the Indian practitioners I met when I was doing research in Calcutta had suffered extreme trauma in their lives, just like many Western students. Really bad stuff. And some of them had reached pretty deep levels of enlightenment. No one claimed or presented themselves as having completed the path, but they had attained fairly deep levels. But it was clear that even with the shift occurring that you described, there was still a lot of personal suffering in their lives that they were going through and that had not been addressed—and was not getting addressed. And we see that in a lot of Western students and Western teachers. They've had their kensho experiences, their enlightenment experiences, and they're going down like flies. They're still misbehaving, sometimes outrageously so. They're still engaging in a lot of misconduct around what else?—money, sex and power. So there's still a lot of personal work to be done. The only alternative position I think you can take is: Do more practice! Get more deeply enlightened. Go to the end of the path, and then none of this will ultimately be a problem for you. Well, I suppose that's a defensible position. In principle that's what should happen. I've just never seen it. Maybe I just don't know people who've gone to the end of the path. There ain't too many of them around.

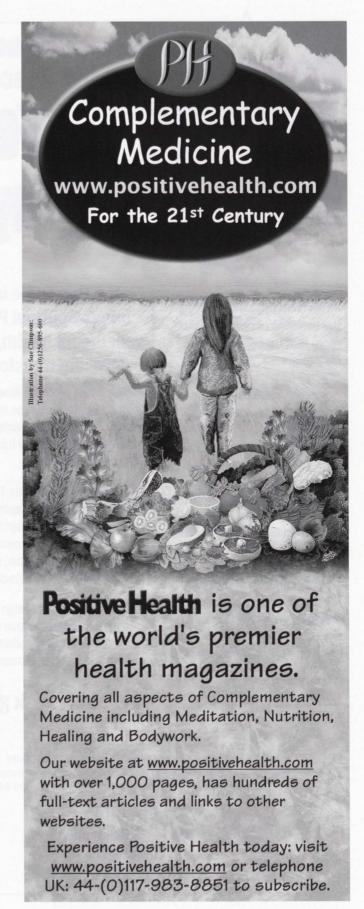
AC: That's true.

JE: Even in the case of very deeply enlightened teachers, there is a lot of meshuganah [crazy] stuff that they can be involved in.

AC: I know. And that creates a lot of doubt about the possibility of any kind of transformation that can express an attainment or stabilization in a perspective that is absolute.

JE: I guess the only thing you can say is that, short of full and complete freedom, there's personal work to do. And you either do it or you don't.

AC: You said earlier that in the deeper levels of spiritual





As my third eye opened, I felt the energies of people in the room that I'd been tuning out of my awareness. When I put it over my heart, I experienced a wonderful heart opening, that continued to move into the upper heart or soul seat area after I had moved the instrument to another place. Held on the sole of the foot, I felt energy coursing up through my legs and spine. I entered a quiet, blissful state. Later the presenter held it over my solar plexus and I witnessed a powerful release of feelings, feeling my breath deepen and quicken, without experiencing any particular emotional state. - Janis Bell, Ph.D, Columbus, OH

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practice and experience, there is a transcendence or a letting go that occurs on a deeper level than that of the personality. It's a level that you said was universal.

IE: Right.

AC: So don't you think we could say that ideally, from a certain point of view, if that letting go was occurring on the deeper or more universal layers of being, automatically there would be a liberation from the compulsive fixation on the personal because in that experience of deeper letting go, there would be a simultaneous recognition of the ultimate unreality and emptiness of the personal fixation and all the suffering that it creates?

JE: Again, it just doesn't seem to work that way. If you look at what the Theravada Buddhist tradition, for instance, claims happens when one has gone to the end, then yes, what it describes as the final outcome of spiritual practice is that all forms of self-generated suffering end, including personal suffering. But one of the things I've always found very credible in the Theravada tradition is that you don't get full freedom all at once. It comes by stages or increments. There are four different experiences of enlightenment. And the earliest stages are still compatible with a lot of personal meshugas [craziness] and ways in which we can still create problems for ourselves and others. So the ground shifts, and the relationship to self and to experience shifts. But it doesn't shift completely and all at once.

In these four experiences of enlightenment, the path to each is basically the same, but what's different are the "fetters" or the samyojanas that are extinguished in each enlightenment experience. These

fetters are the root sources of inner suffering, and a different set of fetters is extinguished in each one of the four enlightenment experiencesextinguished irreversibly, permanently, according to the testimony of practitioners. No therapist, incidentally, would ever claim changes in therapy are irreversible! The progression in extinguishing these fetters fascinates me as a psychologist. The first set of fetters that are extinguished are basically cognitive in nature—what a cognitive psychologist would call "maladaptive cognitions" or "core beliefs." In extinguishing these misguided beliefs about who we are, our basic understanding and perspective changes. But simply extinguishing basic beliefs and assumptions doesn't automatically shift the underlying motivations, impulses and emotions that can still drive us to act in ways that create suffering. Cognitively, we may relate to our experience differently, yet we can continue to act in the same neurotic ways. Not to the same extent, perhaps, but basically we can still find ourselves acting in unskillful ways that create a lot of problems. The second set of fetters reaches deeper into the psyche, into the affective or motivational bases of behavior. Motivations, impulses and affects are much more difficult to shift than cognitions and beliefs. The last set of fetters is extinguished at the fourth and final stage of enlightenment. The core of this group is called mana or "conceit." This is a remnant of the tendency to compare self with others—the root of narcissism. The last fetters really have to do with rooting out the final residues of narcissistic attachment to self from the mind. And that's more difficult to shift than the affective or motivational bases of behavior.

The same progression happens in therapy. Cognitions, beliefs, perspectives change first. Core drives, motivations and impulses are much harder to change. Hardest of all to change is narcissistic investment in the self. So when you say that ideally the realization of emptiness should free one from personal neurotic problems, I don't think it's that simple. I think the shifts take place in stages. What the tradition describes and what we've learned in therapy are exactly the same progression. That shift doesn't take place all at once.

I was reading something the other day in Philip Kapleau Roshi's book Zen Dawn in the West. A student asks him a similar question about kensho, and Kapleau replies, "Kensho doesn't eliminate character. If anything, kensho makes character failings more obvious." He's talking about his own experience and his experience with his students. But he's also talking about the first experience of kensho. The Zen tradition has always said there can be little kensho and great kensho. The opening can be small or it can be large, but it's still just a first glimpse of enlightenment. My teacher, Anagarika Munindra, used to call it "a little bit of enlightenment." That first glimpse doesn't shift everything.

AC: My last question is: Do you think that the Buddha would have been a better teacher if he had undergone psychotherapy and had Western psychotherapeutic training?

JE: Oh, how to answer that? The answer is no. The Buddha did both spiritual and personal work for eons, if you believe the stories. So what we see in this one lifetime is just a teeny tip of the iceberg of what went into his realization. And how much you want to conclude from that is risky. But he wasn't addressing directly the kind of problems that people bring into therapy. People would bring those kinds of problems to him occasionally, their different kinds of unhappiness. But the level on which he addressed them was very different than the level on which a therapist would address them.

AC: But my question is, do you think the Buddha would have been a better teacher if he'd undergone psychotherapy and had Western therapeutic training? Transpersonal theory suggests that the Eastern enlightenment teachings presume a certain level of psychological health and development or ego strength as a prerequisite for spiritual practice, and that the Eastern teachings don't really have any knowledge or understanding about the earlier stages of childhood and ego development. The criticism is that the Eastern teachings alone are insufficient to address many of the emotional and psychological needs that a lot of people have because they are simply not taken into account. So if this is true, we could say that obviously in the Buddhist teaching, this dimension of ego or selfdevelopment isn't really addressed. Are you saying that in spite of that, you feel that the Buddha wouldn't have been a better teacher, that there was nothing missing from his teaching?

JE: If the Buddha had been born in Brooklyn, like all enlightened teachers these days, it would seem to be a prerequisite. If he had been born in Brooklyn, then I would say that if he had some experience of psychotherapy, it would probably help him to teach Western students! But he was a man of his time and his culture. and that wasn't necessary. Those personal issues were handled by other roles in the society—whether it was shamans or rainmakers or midwives or whoever. It wasn't that there was no one around to address them.

But the Buddha himself had no need for psychotherapy. Not everybody needs psychotherapy. God help us! ■

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traumas or sexual fantasies and you repressed them or forgot about them, this was the cause of a neurotic symptom. So the idea was to undo the repression, to undo the defenses. The analyst was like a bulldozer, and come hell or high water the idea was to find out what these old memories were, what these old fantasies were, and make them conscious, and that would cure your neurosis. It then became clear that a lot of the time this was not therapeutic, so by 1926 he developed what was called the "second anxiety theory." What he had come to understand was that it's not just old fantasies or wishes that are unconscious but also these mechanisms of defense that are unconscious. So the goal of analysis became trying to understand the unconscious defense mechanisms that the person is employing. The person may not be aware, for example, that he's using denial to deal with something that's disturbing. So the first goal would be to try to understand the ways in which the person is dealing with stress unconsciously. Freud wrote about the idea that "mental health" involves illuminating a lot of these defenses. He said that the goal of analysis is: "Where id was, there ego shall be." And what that means is: You make everything conscious. If you make the unconscious conscious, that will lead to mental health.

But what I was saying earlier is different from at least the original version of Freud. To some extent, you need defenses. You know people sometimes say, "Oh, he's being so defensive," as if the person is doing something bad. But you need to have that. You can't go to work and start screaming at your boss even though you're furious. That would be an example of appropriate repression. You have to act in a certain way; otherwise you're going to lose your job.

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WIE: In many Eastern religious traditions, the highest goal of human evolution is called "enlightenment." One way of defining enlightenment is that it is a condition in which one is utterly awake and in touch with reality exactly as it is. It is a condition in which one is no longer in any way motivated to distort reality to preserve one's self-image or to support any personal bias or agenda. In this view, the ego is seen as a distorting mechanism, as the colored glasses that must be removed if we are to be able to see things as they are and to respond to life with true integrity. Now, one of the central activities of the ego is the "screening" or distorting mechanism that we've been speaking about, by which impressions or information that contradict or challenge one's self-image or worldview are selectively ignored or distorted. My question is: Did Freud think it was possible to reach a state where one is no longer in any way compelled to "screen" anything out in order to protect one's self-image or worldview? Did he think it was possible to attain a condition where one has no need or motive whatsoever to distort reality in any way and, therefore, is able to be completely in touch with reality exactly as it is?

LH: What comes to mind is what Freud said about the goal of analysis being to help the person deal with neurotic misery in order to be able to confront the misery of daily life. The goal of any kind of psychological treatment is to deal with reality as best you can. What you're talking about in enlightenment would be a different view of reality, I assume, from the view of reality from a psychoanalytic perspective—like the idea that there's a higher, metaphysical reality that we try to aspire to. But when I think about reality, I think about it in a very simplistic way, in terms of your real interactions with people, your real interactions with yourself, understanding your body, understanding your relationships with your family and with your friends.

WIE: Enlightenment, in the way I'm describing it, would in no way exclude the tangible realities of our daily experience. What I'm wondering is whether Freud believed it was possible to see everything clearly, to be completely free from distorting defense mechanisms, and completely free from the motive to distort or be deluded. Would Freud have viewed this as an attainable ideal?

LH: Well, he might have called that "ideal health"—even though he believed that was a fiction.

monotheism? Well, it gets split off into Satan—the "adversary"—or the devil, which means "the opposite principle." And that split is the ego at work seeking to privilege its own insecurity. I would say that the sign of a healthy ego is its capacity to live with anxiety, ambiguity and ambivalence—triple A's without trying to always solve them. Because life is anxious, life is ambivalent, life is ambiguous, and that's the reality. And the more we try to solve that or resolve that or split it off, the more we're going to fall into a fundamentalism of some kind—military, political, theological, economic, psychological—and that has the seeds of totalitarianism in it. Much of what I would call fundamentalism is really an anxiety disorder—which they try to solve by black-and-white thinking and projecting onto others. It's very unconscious, and it's very

poor ego development. You can see how important it is for the ego to be strong enough to tolerate those tensions. When I can't tolerate them, I'll dump them on you. That's all projection. And projection is that which the ego is just not dealing with.

You can see how we use the term "ego" in so many different ways. And there's a place for the positive ego; it's not always an obstacle in enlightenment. It's responsible for consciousness and for ethical behavior and for dealing with the conflict of opposites.

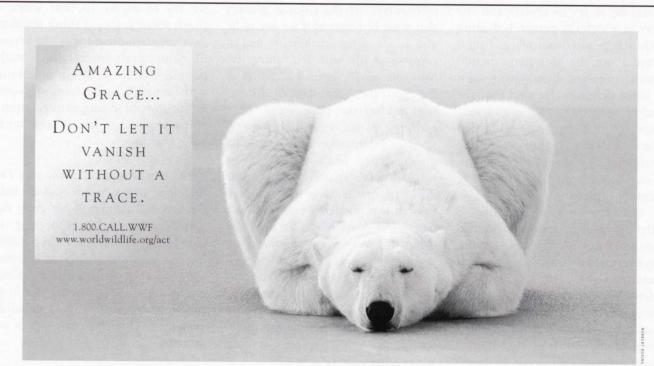
WIE: Many Western psychologists have criticized Eastern spiritual traditions for their "ego negative" views. They fear that the Eastern emphasis on taming, subduing or destroying the ego could hinder healthy ego development in ourselves and jeopardize our normal maturation as

individuals. What do you think about this discrepancy of views?

JH: Frankly I think a lot of it is just terminological confusion of ego with egotism. Even Jung's concept of individuation has been misunderstood as a form of egotism, when in fact it's about humility and submission to one's calling as a person. And that's far from egotism.

WIE: Jung's view of our highest potential as human beings seems to include more of a spiritual dimension than Freud's view did.

JH: Absolutely. The Self is really, in the generic sense of the term, a religious encounter. In fact Jung says, "Every genuine encounter with the Self is experienced as a defeat for the ego"—because the ego's fantasy of control or comfort is overthrown by what the Self wants.



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WIE: Many religious traditions view the spiritual quest as a war between different parts of the self, between the opposing inclinations toward good and evil within the individual. In the Koran, Muhammad, upon returning with his warriors from battle said, "Now we return from the lesser holy war to the greater holy war—the war against the ego." In many religious teachings, the word "ego" is used to describe the baser instincts that we confront in this war, particularly selfishness, narcissism and the fundamentally aggressive need to always see ourselves as separate from others. These traditions see the ego as the enemy on the spiritual path, as that which thwarts our higher aspirations. It is the source of the seven deadly sins in Christianity and the five poisons in Buddhism. In Adlerian psychology, is there an understanding of a noble battle against the ego in this sense?

HS: No, there's not a battle against the ego. Adler said you don't have to fight against aggressive impulses and selfishness. That would imply a war with, essentially, a negative self, and that's not the case. What you do is, you bring out a person's feeling of connectedness. If you bring out the sense or feeling of community, if you bring out the courage of an individual, without even addressing issues of egocentricity and aggression, these things vanish. You don't have to fight them, you don't have to root them out. I look at them as crutches; you know, when your leg heals, you drop the crutches. No one has to tell you, "You better throw those away." There is an assumption there about the core nature of the human being, that the human being is essentially bad and has to be broken of bad habits and has to learn to be good. Adler said, "No, the individual is potentially very good but needs to be trained." At the same time, one can certainly

look at the early tendency for a child to be egocentric. This is a natural thing, but we could say that as you grow up, what you must learn to do is to conquer your egocentricity. This is not saying, though, that you're conquering your ego. This is an aspect of your behavior, of your attitude. And you must conquer your egocentricity and learn to develop consideration for other people. Now if you do this, you can hold on to your ego-and by this I mean the sense of the direction of the person in terms of how they envision their development in life—and you'll be fine.

WIE: Many contemporary therapists and popular self-help teachers and authors have put a great deal of emphasis on the idea that we all have "wounded egos." They encourage us to get in touch with the wounds and traumas of childhood, to unconditionally love and accept ourselves just as we are, and to stop judging ourselves in order to heal our fragile and damaged egos. In Adler's view, however, it seems that the movement from seeing oneself as a victim to seeing oneself as fundamentally free and responsible for one's own life and choices is essential for psychological health and maturity. Do you think that contemporary therapeutic approaches that emphasize our woundedness and victimhood are helpful in furthering self-development? Or do you think they have the potential of promoting a kind of developmental arrest?

HS: It depends on whether, in fact, there was abuse. If there was such an experience, then it has to be dealt with. And I've worked with people like this. They have been terribly abused, and what they need is a corrective experience. If in fact there was this wounding, there has to be a healing. But I don't assume

that that's always the case. There are many people who have not been wounded as children; they have simply been spoiled rotten. Sometimes very spoiled people imagine that they've been wounded. And do you know what the wounding consists of? It consists simply of the termination of pampering. So you've got to be pretty clear. As you look at a person's past, you have to realize that there's frequently a high degree of distortion.

WIE: In light of this, it sounds like you would not support the blanket approach of unconditional selfacceptance that is becoming very popular.

HS: I think the idea of unconditional self-acceptance is very seductive, especially to people who have a great wish to be pampered. If you wake up and look at the world, you see that there is a lot of stuff that people do that is really not very good—and they should stop doing it. This brings up Adler's idea of guilt: There's good guilt and bad guilt. Good guilt is when you feel really crappy and you stop doing it. Bad guilt is when you feel guilty but you keep doing it. So, unconditional self-acceptance? No. I think sometimes it's good that a person feels crappy about what they've done. Maybe it's time to change that. Now it may be that they are debilitating themselves by the degree of self-hatred or self-rejection, and that I would try to pull back on. But there may need to be retained a certain amount of, you might say, dissatisfaction. There's nothing wrong with that. We don't try to simply get rid of it; we try to use it to push you into doing something about it.

WIE: What is Adler's highest vision of self-development or human potential?

HS: Adler really believed that we need ideals. Adler's work is very appealing philosophically, I must say, because it's one of the few really value-oriented psychologies. It puts its values up front as a philosophy. We're not saying that all truths are equal, that everything is fine. No, we're saying that there are certain values that are important and that are healthy, and Adler even said that these are the ones that are most important. Adler's ideal was for the individual to fully develop as much as possible the feeling of community within them, as I've been speaking about, with a high enough degree of activity and courage to carry it out. Someone who has developed this sense of connection does things for mutual benefit. And their sense of responsibility, their sense of connectedness with people, grows into a larger and larger circle. They have a very deep-seated, very positive, very natural concern about the welfare of others that becomes almost as natural as breathing. Adler said that this feeling of community starts out simply as cooperation or consideration and eventually can become a feeling of being connected with the whole, with humanity, and a cognitive perspective on the welfare of mankind. Not everybody develops this, but it's entirely possible. And it goes even farther than that, oddly enough, in terms of what's possible. This feeling of connectedness can extend as far as the cosmos. And as if that wasn't enough, he said that this feeling should also extend to the past-through looking back in time and seeing a vision of what all of these people did who brought the world to where it is now, in the positive sense, and appreciating that. Adler sometimes used the image of being in the stream of evolution. And he said, "Here you are in the stream, and it's brought your

life to where it is now. What will you add to this?" He said that it's not enough just to adapt. In fact, he said that mere adaptation is a form of exploitation. Adler asks: "What are you going to add for the future? What would you improve upon?" And it doesn't have to be something spectacular because we don't need spectacular things all the time; we need lots of little improvements. So, in this respect, there is a sense of: Where do I belong on this earth? What's my role? Where do I fit? What do I do? And Adler's answer is, "You contribute, you invent." This is also why he emphasized our creative power. For our time, for our place, for our circumstances and for who we are, even with our disabilities—we have creative power. Invent a solution to the problems.

WIE: What did Adler feel was the best way to encourage or promote this in people?

HS: Probably the best thing that pulls us toward this is a good example. This is one of the things that we stress again and again in Adlerian training: You have got to live what you're talking about. There are some therapies that are largely technologies, where it's not so important what kind of character you have but only how skillful you are in the technique you are using. And I find that remarkably absurd. Adler would say that you really cannot convince or persuade anybody until you are able to show them as well what you mean: You have to do and be what you talk about. And it's the same thing with parents. Be a good example, number one. But that's not enough, though certainly that is helpful. The other thing is encouragement. People need an incredible amount of encouragement. To be there to encourage the person to go

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beyond what they believe is their limit at the moment—that is important. Everybody needs encouragement, and encouragement is not a very widespread skill—real encouragement, which is patient and not generalized and not just trivialized with buzzwords. And eventually what a person needs, beyond the good example and the encouragement, is some information or stimulation of an ideal of what is possible.

WIE: What did Adler feel was the role of religion or spirituality in representing this ideal?

HS: Adler felt that religion can represent a concrete image or embodiment of human perfection, not to be taken literally but as a stimulation and as a kind of a prodding tool to improve ourselves. It's probably the most beautiful and crystallized form of that perfection that we have.

OK: I don't think that the self is an illusion. I believe that's wrong. But it is true that the self is an entity of subjective experience, sameness, continuity and differentiation from others that is constructed out of our experiences with significant others from the beginning of life. That is true. From the beginning of life there's a sense of subjectivity that develops in the context of relations with others whose representations or images we take in and that shapes our representations of ourselves. And those multiple representations of ourselves eventually coalesce to form an integrated self, which is a reflection of the integration of our subjective experiences in our interactions with others from the beginning of life. And it becomes a very important central agency in organizing one's subjective life, one's relations with others and one's character—that is to say, the dynamic organization of habitual behavior patterns.

WIE: You said that prior to the whole process of integrating self- and object-representations, there's a subjectivity that is present?

OK: There is a capacity for subjective experience of pleasure and pain, for registering representations and establishing memories-from birth on. That imagery gradually consolidates as multiple dyadic representations of self and object.

WIE: Could we in some sense say that this subjectivity, this experiencer, is the self? A self, in some sense, that exists independent of selfand object-representations?

OK: No. I wouldn't say that. I would say that there are fragmented self-experiences from birth on that gradually coalesce and are integrated. And, eventually, there is an integrated self that relates to integrated representations of significant others. The self is always in relation to significant others. Again, the experiencer, the person who experiences, has early self-experiences, and these are the self-representations that finally coalesce into an integrated, cohesive, subjective sense of self.

WIE: The subjective experiencer itself, prior to the content of experience—what would you call that?

OK: Simply the capacity of the central nervous system to acquire a sense of subjectivity—subjectivity that has elements of pleasure and pain and that registers the perceptions of the external world in the form of memories.

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or "like a man"? One can feel only like one's idea of a woman or a man, which is certain to be a stereotype.

Neither sexual preference nor gender has anything to do with the individual's spiritual nature, which transcends both and is the true giver and receiver of love.

> Barbara Klowden Los Angeles, California

AS CLOSE AS MY SKIN

My immediate experience when first picking up the new issue of What Is Enlightenment?: "How Free Do We Really Want To Be?" was mostly one of revulsion. What is this visual attack on my senses? I asked myself, flinching from the air-blown beauties adorning the cover. What's spiritual about this?

Until reading this issue of WIE on the relationship between liberation and gender identity, the whole topic of gender identity was a total mystery to me. How can I even begin to understand what it means to be free of my identification with being a male when that is simply what I have always known myself to be? What has come clear after reading this issue is that my first response to the magazine was not a matter of aesthetics. The very question jumping off the cover was challenge enough to marshal my defenses around a dimension of my being that is as close as my skin and yet as seemingly far away and unknown as the Milky Way.

In his interview with Elizabeth Debold, Andrew Cohen remarks, "the goal of liberation without a face is a natural state or a natural condition . . . [where] we were willing to step beyond any and all notions of gender and of self altogether first, and be willing, once we did that, to actually stay there." This statement served as a compass to guide me through the unpredictable, implicating and disorienting

turns that the issue took.

Mary Daly is a warrior, and something of her absolute resolution did resonate with my own yearning for an absolute reference point in life—there was even something tender and full of depth in her expression. However, since her stand excluded about 49% of humanity, it occurred to me that something must be missing in this view. I found the same unfinished picture emerging from the conversation with Sam Keen. Although he did, indeed, exhibit clarity, eloquence, and passion in relationship to the question of gender and spirituality, I was not moved by his articulation in a transformative way. It seemed to me that the very liberating potential of some of the questions being posed were lost in the force of his own conviction.

The order of the articles must have been deliberate, because I was thirsty for some dharma by the time Jetsunma Ahkön Lhamo and Daniel Piatek graced the pages. Their heartfelt and simple articulation of the truth—that the human relationship to the absolute nature of who we are exists beyond relative distinctions of gender—was an oasis of relief.

The interviews with exponents of spiritual traditions that have deeply fixed roles for men and women challenged my ideas about how an absolute relationship to gender might be expressed. Surely, with such fixed roles, this could not be it! But then, undeniably, something opened up, and there was depth in the expression of these people, reflecting the possibility of realizing our absolute nature, for that place seemed to be their reference point, despite their gendered roles within their respective traditions.

Reading this issue, it occurs to me that I just can't know what it will look like to go beyond fixed ideas of gender. And that circumstances are always only relative,

whereas the truth of who we are is the immediate, absolute, positive expression of a life imbued by that which is beyond time, circumstance, or gender. This is my experience of this issue of WIE-a challenge to take a headlong, abandoned plunge into the groundless free-fall of Self-discovery.

> Morgan Dix Great Barrington, Massachusetts

OPEN SKY OF FREEDOM

You guys have been having a good time these past few years exploring sex, women and enlightenment and now gender. I'm sure this sells a lot of copies, but maybe a better question would be: What do people expect enlightenment to look like, and how does that expectation prevent them from finding the obvious? To get to the deep and radical change required for selfrealization we must go beyond all these personal expectations. Sex has everything to do with personality. Personality has nothing to do with enlightenment. To open up from the ego we must stop taking everything so personally; stop taking our thoughts, emotions, sickness, health and even our gender so personally. We are full of ideas about gender, but ideas are not enlightenment—liberation from ideas is enlightenment. This is where the open sky of freedom is found.

Gender has nothing to do with self-realization, for it or against it. It goes the other way around; selfrealization is the foundation from which we can then begin to explore all the dimensions of being human, including sex. I find that people's concepts of sex create no more or less of a barrier to their selfrealization than do their concepts of anger, truth and even clothes! In the end a concept is only empty air.

Enlightenment is an easy state. It is the natural birthright of all human beings and contains within it every aspect of our experience: sex, self-esteem, pain, laughter and even confusion!

> Connie Zareen Delaney Salmon, Idaho

A FORCE THAT ROCKS THE UNIVERSE

Thank you for this fantastic issue of What Is Enlightenment? I've barely had a chance to dive in and already it's becoming clear that this journal is a revolutionary investigation into gender and sexual preference. I'm thrilled to have such an outrageous canvas of radically divergent views to explore and open up to. The knowledge that it is possible and very necessary to have a clean, clear and free relationship to a force that rocks the universe is a gift beyond price.

> Lisa Haskins Cambridge, Massachusetts

TABLOID JOURNALISM

The two little blurbs on the top of Issue 16, "Could Christ Have Been a Woman?" and "What's the Relationship between Emptiness and Beautiful Nails?" are eyecatching and appeal to the popular culture, but to me are inappropriate for your magazine. They sensationalize it and detract from its high quality. Please don't cheapen WIE by adopting tabloid journalism in order to sell more copies. You have the most candid, serious, well-written magazine in the spiritual periodical business. Please maintain your professional, scholarly style!

> Colette Penn Richmond, Virginia

MORE RELATED THAN WE THINK

Your gender issue, as timely, provocative, and informing as I have come to expect all your issues to be, was foreshadowed by Rainer Maria Rilke decades ago:

"Perhaps the sexes are more related than we think, and the great renewal of the world will perhaps consist in this, that man and maid, freed of all false feelings and reluctances, will seek each other not as opposites but as brother and sister, as neighbors, and will come together as human beings, in order simply, seriously and patiently to bear in common the difficult sex that has been laid upon them."

> Kerry Winter Vancouver, Canada

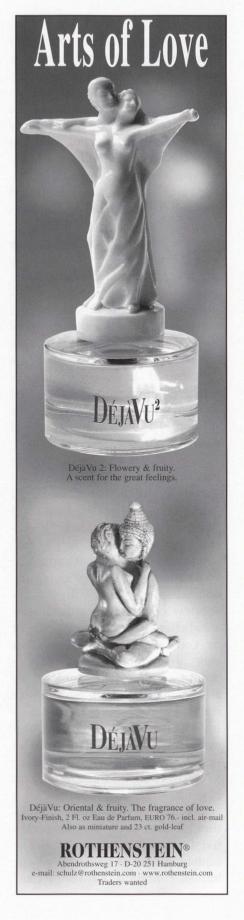


Issue 15, Spring/Summer 1999

CATCH THE RAIN OF GRACE

"I Can," or self-mastery, is a term for Becoming; "I Am," or enlightenment, is a term for Being. The spiritual seeker is looking for what, paradoxically, s/he already is in essence: Being, the ultimate wholeness that is the source and ground of all Becoming. Our native condition, our true self is being, traditionally called God, the Cosmic Person, the Supreme Identity, the One-in-All. Self-mastery is the realization of the truth of becoming, but enlightenment is realization of the truth of being.

Although we are manifestations of being, we are also, like the cosmos itself, in the process of becoming-



always changing, developing, growing, evolving to higher and higher states which ever more beautifully express the perfection of the source of existence. We are essentially being, but we are not static; we are also active. Thus, we are not only human beings; we are also human becomings. Enlightenment is understanding the perfect poise of being-amid-becoming. The spiritual journey is the process of discovering and living that truth.

"I Can" and "I Am" are roughly equivalent to the terms coined by Abraham Maslow: "self-actualization" and "self-transcendence." Selfactualization is the process (recognized by humanistic psychology) of developing a fully functional ego; self-transcendence is the process (recognized by sacred/enlightenment traditions and transpersonal psychology) of seeing through the illusion of ego. "I Am" includes "I Can" but not vice versa.

Personal effort is necessary but not sufficient for enlightenment. Attaining enlightenment or the "I Am" state is always a matter of grace or, more accurately, graceplus. The "plus" refers to "I Can." Although enlightenment cannot be commanded and heaven cannot be entered solely by self-will, it is absolutely certain that without personal effort, enlightenment will not be conferred. To put it another way, grace abounds, constantly raining on everyone; however, we are rough stones from which grace runs off like rainwater. Personal effort and spiritual discipline are necessary to shape ourselves from an unhewn stone into a cup or chalice to catch, retain and utilize the rain of grace.

"I Can" is the human condition; "I Am" is the human potential for growth to godhood. The human potential can change the human condition. But for "I Can"

to actualize that potential, there must be a sense of God as the goal of growth, and a zeal for attaining that goal, a hunger in the heart for more. Otherwise "I Can" is simply self-advancement in directions that may be useful but may also be useless, foolish or evil, and certainly not ultimate. The difference between "I Can" as an aid to selftranscendence and "I Can" as egotistic self-advancement is the moral dimension. It is no accident that all sacred traditions and true religions emphasize morality and virtue as the foundation for higher human development. Morality and virtue are reflections of the nature of God and the ultimate structure of the cosmos.

> John White Cheshire, Connecticut

SPIRIT AND STRUCTURE

Thank you for your amazing magazine! I am so impressed by the quality and depth of your articles, and very grateful for what you contribute to today's spiritual conversation.

I would like to offer a few thoughts on your "The Self Masters" issue. To start with, I happen to be a woman who does use the term "mastery," more specifically "Personal Mastery" (I have authored a monthly column by that name since 1993). And although I concur that this term has been misused, "mastery" does not need to imply controlling anyone, including oneself. Mastery can be seen as a process of continually improving in all areas of life, by honoring the totality of who we are-body, mind and spirit. Moreover, mastery implies that because you value your innate gifts, you set up structures and support in your life in order to fully and reliably express them. Mastery, then, is not an act of controlling and punishing yourself, but is motivated by a positive self-love.

The goal of mastery, as I define it, is to get all parts of yourself on the same team, working together, instead of being in an internal struggle. All parts need to be honored and understood, not squelched and conquered. Mastery doesn't block unfolding from within, but can catalyze and sustain it.

For some exceptional folks it may be fine to just flow with the spontaneous expression of the self, yet for the rest of us, both inspiration and structure are necessary. Inspiration alone risks losing momentum, and structure without spirit crumbles in the dust. While enlightenment cannot be made to happen from the level of ego, the process can be supported by creating the right conditions. Self-mastery, then, can serve as the container for spiritual essence when it works together with the greater self. In so doing, mastery becomes the journey of tapping your full potential as a human being.

> Karin Leonard Santa Cruz, California

SAFARI OF THE PSYCHE

I've thoroughly enjoyed the letters in the recent "self-mastery" issue.

Whenever I pick up WIE, the provocative style and honest inquiry reminds me of a "jungle safari of the psyche" stalking the dangerous wild game of Pandora's box. Taming the preferences of ethical behavior vs. absolute nondoership, impersonal vs. personal enlightenment, celibate vs. tantric, empty vs. full and even the one vs. zero makes it hard to keep score of which team is ahead!

What possible explanation could there be for such variety, controversy and confusion as to the nature of enlightenment (the one) and how it is expressed (as the many)? Well, allow me to add one more ingredient to the proverbial soup through this short story.

One horribly hot afternoon in a small, dimly lit room in Pondicherry, India, Mr. M. P. Pandit shared an uncommon insight with us, which I'd like to pass on to WIE readers. In response to the query that seems to occupy so much of WIE reportage, he responded, "some people are drawn to Becoming, others to Being and still others to Being and Becoming." "But, how will one know?" we muttered back in that steamy atmosphere to a man who had the great fortune to have lived with both Ramana Maharshi and Sri Aurobindo. "You will know by your own swabhava, or nature."

Now this nature is also examined through the heart of a twelfthcentury Muslim mystic scholar from Moorish Spain, Ibn al Arabi. Arabi affirms that the Divine's only option of expression, whether enlightened or not, is always through a unique Self-disclosure of the Divine to Itself in ways and manners that are as distinctly divine and beautiful as snowflakes are. Indeed, he goes so far as to affirm that this so-called transitory world is simply the outward view of God. In other words, our unique nature attracts the one-of-a-kind Selfdisclosure. In actuality, what people believe in (as a result of their enlightenment) is really God's selfdisclosure to their unique nature or swabhava.

> Martin Wolf Sedona, Arizona

DESERT SOLILOQUY

Excerpted from a thirty-eight page letter in response to WIE Issue 16.

I have been living in the desert for the past four months, trying to figure out the purpose and character and particulars of my life. I turned thirty about six months ago, and decided it was time to take some radical action, so here I am, with my palmtop computer, my solar panel, and a couple of hundred books. And your magazine.

A few weeks before I departed upon my current venture, I saw your magazine at a bookstore, and was drawn to it by Anthony Robbins's smiling face on the cover. I had completed Mr. Robbins's Personal Power audio program a couple of years ago and was highly impressed with his sincerity, his communications skills and the content of his system. So, I purchased the magazine and read it cover to cover. The content and focus of your work really moved me and I wanted to respond immediately after I read it, but my preparations required all of my attention, and I let the matter of WIE slip from my mind. Fast forward to October. I discovered your magazine in one of my many bundles of supplies and books and curiously read through it again, wondering if the fire it had initially sparked would again flare up inside of me. Sure enough, as I read through it I found myself burning to write to you.

What is the difference between "I can" and "I am," or "doing" and "being," as I like to say?

I would say they are not different, not opposed; they are different manifestations of the same thing. "Doing" is really "being-in-theworld," while being can be both "being-in-stillness" (or nonaction) and "being-in-the-world." So perhaps "I am" has the potential to be in some ways more encompassing.

However, the presupposition of your magazine seems to be that those who exemplify "I am" tend to eschew "I can" to a large degree. But if awakening makes one less able to effect positive change than a "mere" self-master, then whom does the experience of enlightenment serve?

I have read a great deal of Ken Wilber. I believe he presents the clearest vision of anyone regarding "enlightenment," spirituality in general, psychology, globalization and a whole slew of other topics. But for all of that, I would have to say that I was changed more—more fundamentally, more profoundly, and more "manifestedly"-by listening to Tony Robbins's Personal Power tape program.

Looking to

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Why? How could one tape set about "taking charge of my life" change me more than what is arguably the grandest and broadest vision of life, the universe, and everything that has yet been created by a human being?

I've considered that question a great deal myself, and have some thoughts on it. I have read quite a lot throughout my life and, particularly during recent years, have absorbed much in the areas of spirituality, psychology and "self-help." During the past several months of my solitary existence, I have begun to notice a huge dichotomy between my intellectual understanding of things and my actual manifestations and actions in-the-world. That is, I can read Sex, Ecology, Spirituality, and while I'm reading it I'll develop this vast cognitive model of reality, and feel transported by the clarity of Wilber's concept of "vision-logic," and be very excited about the prospects of my future evolution and development. But, inevitably, I get to the end of the book and all I'm left with are thoughts, ideas, intellectual concepts. How do I apply them, how do I manifest "centauric awareness" in myself, how do I expand my awareness? For all its grandeur, SES can't tell me.

But Anthony Robbins can, and does. There is a vast gulf between idea and application. This is not to say that one is more important or "better" than the other; both are necessary. And, contrary to common perception, Robbins provides vehicles and methodologies for creating whatever changes you want, in any areas of your life: spiritual, social, financial, relational or otherwise.

The fact that Ken Wilber and Anthony Robbins address different aspects of existence doesn't seem to me to lessen the "value" of one: they are apples and oranges to one another.

I think the trouble arises when we start comparing different aspects of existence without accounting for the differences in personality, essence, culture and all the other contexts we unavoidably exist within as human beings; when we start separating "I can" and "I am" and implying that one is somehow "better" than the other.

Overall, I must say that you folks at WIE did a stunning job with this issue; I certainly look forward to reading others whenever I happen to return to the world. Thanks for all the controversy and consideration you stirred up in me personally, and also no doubt amongst your regular readers.

> Iason Preiser By email

BETWEEN ONENESS AND INDIVIDUALITY

Thank you for your thoughtful interviews on the relationship between self-mastery and enlightenment. What a dilemma—to obliterate the ego into no-self, or refine the ego into a fulfilling self. The discussions not only succinctly defined the question, but also gave me a wonderful look at some incredible individuals who have pushed outwards the frontier of human potential. The fact that each of these unique viewpoints never seemed to agree with one another only added to the rich diversity of life-experiences they have uncovered and shared.

It seems clear that to become more than human through obliterating the ego or less than divine through self-fulfillment is the question and opportunity we all face. I suggest that each of us has the potential each moment to move naturally into a state of total union, then back just as naturally into a

more self-generated state of being as life presents us with challenges requiring our limited but perfectly natural conditioned thought process. Just as we breathe both in and out. To live life without deeply transformational spiritual experiences would be as limiting as living life without self-fulfillment. And as we draw to ourselves often terrifying challenges that seem to perfectly match our need and ability for growth, life also offers us astonishing beauty and unlimited potential. Sometimes we need to understand our fears before we can just "do it." But there comes a time when doing it is the path to freedom. Each must choose for themselves when that time arrives

To walk between oneness and individuality is the opportunity we share, and the challenges that arise each moment continue to broaden our perspectives and give us glimpses of realms of being so astonishingly beautiful, so thought-shattering, that it creates the space for joy and fulfillment beyond anything we've previously imagined.

> Dave Greenwood Sedona, Arizona

I AM AND I CAN

I must tell you that I thoroughly enjoyed your Spring/Summer '99 issue featuring interviews with the "Self Masters." As a disciple of Paramahansa Yogananda, I also found some of the questions somewhat perplexing. Your questions posed the theory that the teachings involving self-mastery, or "I Can," are centered in the self, or ego, and that teachings that lead to experience of God, or "I Am," are "traditional teachings of enlightenment." Also implied is that self-mastery practices can lead us to extraordinary revelation only to return, once again, to an ordinary state.

Yogananda, in his teachings, taught that surrender to the knowledge of "I Am" is vital on the spiritual path, but he also saw selfmastery as leading to no less a realization. He taught that meditation, sadhana [spiritual practice], and self-analysis are necessary for one to be able to attain the knowledge of "I Am." Without these essential preparatory stages, he said, most minds would not be able to withstand surrender to the enormity of the realization of "I too, Am That."

Unlike the statement presented by your staff on page 76, which equates self-mastery with the ego and enlightenment with "I Am," Yogananda told his disciples to look upon God, or Self, as the doer in all things, so to him it is not the ego further building up its sense of self, but the Self, or God within, using affirmation, mastery and meditation as a means of further destroying what remains of the ego so deeper levels of realization could be attained.

In Yogananda's own words, the struggle for God took great personal effort, mastery of one's feelings and thoughts, and a great degree of empowerment. His consciousness was such that he never considered this power as anything coming from any limited sense of ego, but that which comes from direct perception and knowledge of God. He said that without continued mastery of the remaining aspects of the ego, the soul loses its degree of realization, much as an athlete loses his/her skill without continued practice. For the soul that has had glimpses of its oneness with God, he prescribed deeper meditation, unflinching self-discipline and mastery of one's thoughts and feelings. Through repeated contact of the soul with God through spiritual practice, he said, the soul could stay anchored in what he termed "Final Realization," whether in meditation or in activity.

> Jim Windus New York, New York

ROOT COMMITMENT

Thanks for the article on Vernon Turner ["A Mind Like Water"]. I cried a lot while reading it. Thank God for it all! A martial artist able to manifest that which everyone exploring the meditation/martial arts connection knows but few can do. I don't think most American male youths can be reached without a martial side to the dharma. I've been in the budo [the way of martial arts] for fourteen years and have found that it's true what Turner says: They don't want the real goods unless you show them, act out, what the inner knowing can express in the physical plane.

I have one friend who's gone

really deep with one of the best tai chi sifus [masters] in the country, but I feel him just going further and further away from the simple joy of spiritual self-knowing. The power he's cultivating daily seems to entice and dazzle him, blinding him to this fact. Turner's tone resonates with the surrender and root commitment that I trust but have rarely found. Almost everyone else seems only concerned with winning.

Jeff Gettman *In transit to Abhayagin Buddhist Monastery* Redwood Valley, California

DUBIOUS CLAIMS

I was miffed by the tone and content of the Vernon Kitabu Turner interview and dismayed by the lack of investigation into the field of Japanese martial arts. One might think Simeon Alev knew nothing of such people as the late Onuma Hideharu in traditional archery and his American students Dan and Jackie Deprospero, or Saotomi Mitzugi, Koichi Fohei, Shioda Gozo, Sugawara Tetsutaka in aikido, among many others. The fact is that traditional Japanese martial arts, or budo, nurtures many who embody true mastery and an absence of pretense or reference to cheap metaphysics or magical powers. If WIE really wishes to examine Japanese martial culture and its relationship to

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concepts of mastery and enlightenment, you need merely begin with these people.

Alev seemed, to me at least, illprepared and overcredulous. He does not seem to have checked the credibility of Mr. Turner himself or the tales of his accomplishments. Both, given their extraordinary nature, demand extraordinary proof or at least a much deeper examination before I, at least, am going to buy into Turner as master of anything, including enlightenment. So many dubious claims couched in such dubious ideas, terms and concepts. People may, in fact, defeat whole armies of bad guys with one finger. but I would like to see some evidence beyond Willie Mills's endorsement of what he called the "unusual skill" of "a mind like water." That WIE should thus support the notion that the metaphor "mind like water" is a "skill" baffled and disturbed me.

The Japanese are very conservative about such things as lineage. Who is "renowned jujitsu master C. O. Neal" and what is his rank and stylistic affiliation? What styles and instructors trace what lineages down to Turner? The information that "so-and-so" is a "master" or holds "so-and-so belts" is meaningless without some reference to styles and organizations and teachers and affiliations. I am forced, for lack of evidence, affiliations, or historical lineages, to question Mr. Turner's fourth-degree black belt in wa-jitsu Who made that one up? There is no wa-jitsu that I can find anything about outside of Portsmouth, Virginia. The closest I can come to such a construct is Wado-ryu karatedo. This is a form of karatedo, founded in 1939 by Otsuka Hidenori, that combines traditional Shindo Yoshinryu jujutsu with Funakoshi Gichin's earliest karatedo teachings. I am forced toward even more profound

doubts about the flat assertion that Turner got rank in wa-jitsu and aikijitsu. How can BUDO grant ranks in arts they don't teach? And the "Ronin Award"?!?!?! The word means "wave person" and was a pejorative term suggesting a rogue bushi, a ne'er-do-well, without visible means of support. The term has come to be romanticized and associated with lone wolf swashbucklers who have more reality on the Japanese big screen than in history.

If WIE wishes to come into contact with warriorship of the best sort why not interview some of the hardworking aikido or tai chi instructors found all across the country and the world. There are many simple, real, hard-working, inspired, powerful, humble, authentic, peaceful, fulfilled, genuine, bona fide, credentialed martial artists who exemplify those ideas and skills Turner would denigrate into matters of mere magic.

Robert Dillon Jr., Ph.D. Dept. of Speech Communication and Theatre Southeast Missouri State University Cape Girardeau, Missouri

BEYOND LETTERS, BEYOND LOGIC

A response from Vernon Kitabu Turner

Dr. Dillon is brilliant in his grasp of martial scholarship, but he has no understanding whatsoever of the essential matter, which is dharma, Tao, The Way, Do-the path to tathagatha-garba, or enlightenment. To seekers I remind-not often enough: "Beyond letters, beyond logic." To Dillon I say, "Your very existence is magic. Where were you before your parents were born?"

At the time of the honor bestowed upon me, Soke Shiyogo Kuniba, the family head of shito-ryu karate and Director of Seishin Kai, Ninth Dan, was Technical Director of B.U.D.O. [Board of United Dojo Organizations]. Master C.O. Neal was director of the jujitsu branch of

the organization. The proper name of his style is kindai-ryu, though he held ranking in several arts as most practitioners do. He had a direct lineage to Japan, for what that is worth. But if my critic is genuinely interested in the true nature of the art beyond history, he might want to read my book, Soul Sword: The Way and Mind of a Warrior. It was what prompted the magazine to contact me.

What people call or label me is their choice, not mine. The abilities I utilize are neither increased nor enhanced by the addition of belts and titles; these are merely the concern of others. In this country especially, there is an attachment to credentials and lineage, suggesting that all who fall outside of a calculated line of "transmission" are not legitimate in their practice. If this is true, then the founding head of every art would be a charlatan. Aikido grew out of a spiritual transformation, the satori [enlightenment experience] of O Sensei Morihei Uyeshiba. Shaolin kung fu emerged from the spiritual vision of Bodhidharma, who introduced the Eighteen Movements of Lo Han to the Shaolin Monks. What was the martial lineage of Bodhidharma or Uyeshiba Sensei when they came to grasp the principle of their arts? Though it is clear that O Sensei had a martial background and Bodhidharma had the need of warrior skills when he meditated, their evolution came from a new and indiscernible place. O Sensei experienced what the Chinese call "wu-wei," the ability to act without consciously "trying to," and doing so appropriately.

I stress munnen, muso, mushin, or no thought, no reflection, no mind. Dillon is able to write impressive strings of notes about other people. Sadly, it shows he knows nothing about what truly matters, and illustrates the inadequacy of the intellectual mind. To

comprehend me you must skip those who learned by rote and start with those who had their own satori or kensho [enlightenment experience]. Begin there or you miss the point. These experiences have been well documented in Asia, especially in Japan, but to think they are the exclusive experience of the Japanese is only the product of egoism. I am not Japanese or Chinese. My own ancestors cried out for a spiritual link to the present moment. This is my first duty. My spiritual tradition is rooted in Christianity and meditation, augmented by Zen instruction under the guidance of Zen Master Nomura Roshi and refined for twenty-two years by Master Shiromani Keshavadas of the Himalayan dhyana (Zen) line. I am now his dharma successor and an ambassador of the Vishwa Dharma Mission to America. This is my main concern. The Warrior Way is fascinating, but it is not my chief occupation; I simply use it as a bridge to teaching Zen dharma.

I suggest that Dr. Dillon spend more time seeking the essence of his own soul and less time documenting the work of others. In attempting to discredit me he proves the endless madness of the intellect as it tries to grasp or reject the ungraspable. In the end, that which exists only as thought will go "poof!"

Vernon Kitabu Turner Norfolk, Virginia

THE GREAT CIRCLE **OF DIVERSITY**

I find your magazine to be a source of informative thought, but one thing that troubles me about the new age is that the industry is a mirror of our culture and that mirror is clouded by institutionalized racism.

I am first a human being born in the divine likeness of God, but my culture and physical appearance is that of a man of African descent. Often the information I encounter in new age or spiritual magazines is gathered from white people, with some of the more exotic races, such as East Indian, Asian or Native American, comprising a small share of the overall authors. People of African descent or native Africans are severely excluded, in particular African American men, from being sources of spiritual wisdom. This exclusion is another form of racism, and when the media excludes us from its presentation of important voices and authorities on the leading edge of spiritual thought, it bolsters the foundation of institutionalized racism.

This is why your recent issue which included the thoughts of not just one but two men of African-American heritage (an occurrence that breaks the "one token" informal rule) took me completely by surprise. I have in fact suggested that my fellow brothers and sisters read this issue. I hope that this issue wasn't just a fluke. I hope to see a greater inclusion of not only blacks but of Asian, Latin and Native Americans in your magazine, for in my as well as others' opinion, white Americans have a very difficult time being members of the great circle of diversity.

If within your heart you have not seen and then taken action to end your part in institutionalized racism, an institution from which you historically have drawn your identity and privilege, then any enlightenment you find will be one born of the great mother of all human misery, ignorance.

> Baraka By email

SLANTED APPROACH

It is always interesting and pleasurable to explore the unfolding mystery of enlightenment through the articles and interviews in WIE. It is so evident just how very important it is to keep the fresh investigation and dialogue going. There are so many facets to the experience of enlightened discovery, and so many ways people describe it. Thank you for your ongoing efforts to present a radical inquiry that illumines this subtle and delicate mystery.

The last issue comparing selfmastery and enlightenment was an important investigation of some crucial differences in perspective. And the interview with Susan Powter ["I'm Not Here to Audition!"] was

An inquiry into the most important spiritual questions of our time...on line!

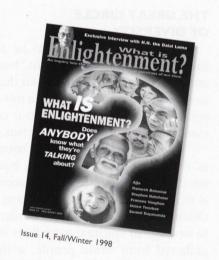
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revealing in many conflicting ways. One cannot help but respect the discipline, determination, success and efforts to help others that Powter embodies through her own model of life mastery (no, strike that word) or "life aspiration," as she might prefer it said. I certainly respect her in these regards. However, I found much of her viewpoint on gender quite disappointing. She states emphatically that God does not have a penis. Or in other words, the Absolute is without gender. I agree. Which would also mean that God does not have a vagina either. Yet. after stating how a gender-specific preference for the male principle excludes all women and is ultimately destructive, she contradicts her argument with her own slanted approach. She states that the earth and nature are exclusively feminine, and that that is what worship should be about. Is this not the very same arrogance and gender preferential exclusivity that she claims to despise in reverse?

Powter's statements that all religions are patriarchal and oppressors of women are simply not true. Yes, there has been extensive history of all kinds of injustices of humanity including the oppression of women. However, let us not undervalue and trash all religious and spiritual structure out of naive anger. Even more, let us not be so blind as to scapegoat all men (or any group for that matter) for the ills of the planet.

I admire Susan Powter's strength and courage to speak the truth as she experiences it. Perhaps if she would honestly acknowledge her role as leader and all the responsibility that entails, and not participate in a gender war that no one can or will ever win, she would reach more people in an even more positive way.

Richard Wilson Newfields, New Hampshire



THE LAST FACE OF ENLIGHTENMENT

Having read your Fall/Winter 1998 issue about enlightenment: "Does Anybody Know What They're Talking About?" there was an urge to write.

At first, enlightenment was a big word. It was far away, attainable only with great effort and only for a few. Then, enlightenment became a dirty word. After many years of practice there were no fruits for many people. Finally, enlightenment became a cheap word. It's right here, all effort is a hindrance, just let it be, enlightenment for everybody.

The four Vedantins in your magazine (representing this last face of enlightenment) may have the insight that form is emptiness (Reality is not-two, is absolute) but they do not have the insight that emptiness is form (Reality is dual, is relative), or that the ordinary, worldly reality is always right in front of us all the time and has to be dealt with properly.

The Buddha's insight (form is emptiness and emptiness is form) seems to be quite reasonable if one considers that staying in either of the two extremes (only seeing Reality as form or only as emptiness) can be rightly regarded as insanity or at

least as delusionary.

Full realization of the true nature of Reality implies that one perceives Reality as both dual *and* nondual. When one sees it clearly, one is not affected by its relative or absolute character; one is unattached and thus free. "Complete" realization implies that there is such a thing as an "incomplete" realization; therefore, enlightenment does have different levels, there are different degrees of freedom.

Denish Dutrieux Amsterdam, Holland

STAY AT HOME

Your interviewer could have stayed home and interviewed himself for all he got out of India and Ramesh Balsekar ["Close Encounters of the Advaita Kind"].

In fact, it seems as if he *did* interview himself, insisting that his version of the fantasy is better than Balsekar's despite Balsekar's gentle attempts to remind him of what should have been the purpose of the interview.

Witness this exchange from your article:

WIE: . . . I'm trying to get to what's true.

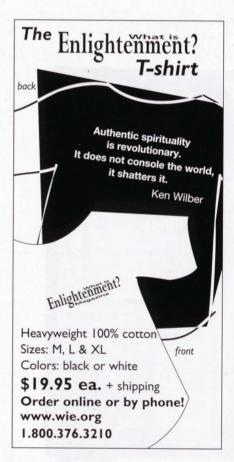
RB: But what is truth? I have already said that whatever I say is a concept.

WIE: Yes, I understand, but not all concepts are the same. Some point to something that is true and others may not be true at all.

RB: All concepts are trying to point to something, but they're all still concepts. The real question would be, "What is the truth that is not a concept?"

WIE: My point is that saying that everything is preprogrammed, that it's all destiny and that there's no choice, seems like a very extreme form of reductionism. According to this view, human beings are like computers; everything about us is completely set.

Do we really subscribe to WIE



to find out the point of the interviewer? "My point is . . . "? This may work in Time or the daily newspaper, but in your magazine such a response is an unforgivable squandering of a wonderful opportunity to hear what a spiritual teacher has to say about what he feels is important.

> Paul Kapiloff Berkeley, California

GOOD WORDS

I wish to thank you for creating WIE, one of the most provocative journals I have ever read. The articles are terrific but the letters to the editor also probe deeply into issues that are important to me. It is liberating to realize that others out there have similar issues and questions concerning spirituality and enlightenment. It's as if an unseen family of fellow pilgrims has emerged in my

life and that I am no longer alone in my quest.

> Clyde Shreve, M.D. Ogden, Utah

As a person committed to the pursuit of traditional Vedantic study and analysis, I was pleased to find What Is Enlightenment? I appreciate to my heart's content that Andrew Cohen approaches the great contemporaries, both secular and spiritual, with the childlike simplicity and matured objectivity that is the very quintessence of our spiritual tradition.

> Swami Ganeshwar Dayananda Ashram Rishikesh, India

Since discovering your publication, I have found it to be something I look forward to seeing each halfyear. Your writers approach many of the most public figures in various traditions to explore and explain to us their views and practices.

One of the things that I appreciate is a tone of humility that is found in most of the articles. Each writer brings their own position to their writing, but also seems to work very hard to be both honest to themselves and to their subjects. This is the attitude that is called for in exploring spiritual questions, both from an individual and collective viewpoint. It is in humility that truth becomes known. Truth cannot be fully explained, but in openness we can see and know truth, though words may not exist to express what we experience.

> Nick Fulford By email

I am very impressed by your publication. What a relief to find something hard-hitting, intelligent and relevant. The sentimentality (though it does have a purpose) of the new age scene can be greatly off-putting, so it is very refreshing

to read something that gets straight to the point and reflects the world as we see it today whilst embracing a spiritual perspective.

> Paula By email

I recently discovered your WIE website and am just blown away by it. Needless to say, I've subscribed to the magazine. What I like is the objective inquiry into basic issues. Most everyone else seems to have an agenda they're pushing but WIE appears to be an open, honest, objective inquiry. Thanks. I'm still exploring back issues in the web site.

> Iack McDowell By email

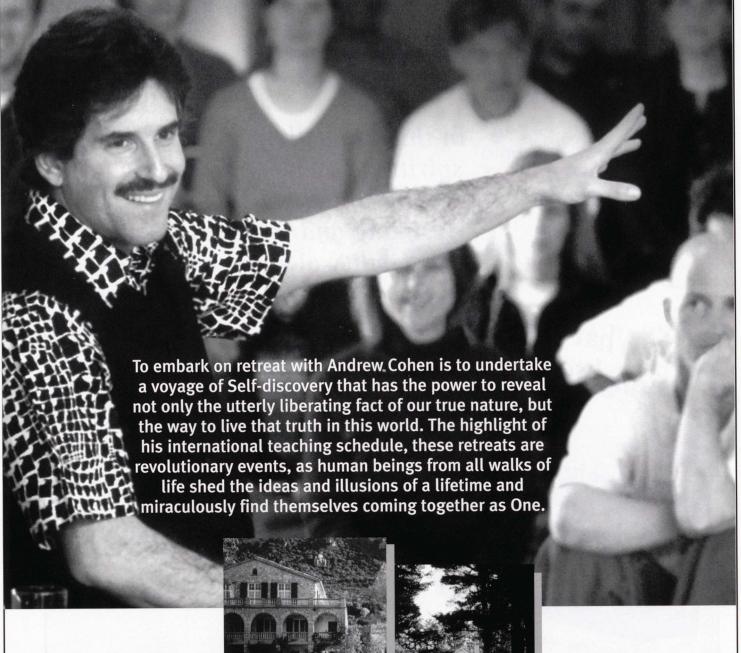
I was really pleased to find What Is Enlightenment? Your perceptive, articulate staff produces some very evocative colloquies. I especially enjoyed Andrew Cohen's interview with Michael Murphy and the interview with Vernon Turner. One quickly perceives from the letters you receive that the readers love Andrew Cohen, who he is and what he does, and that certainly includes me. The readers who write you are also very interesting. It would be nice to meet and talk with them.*

If your readership is very large I take great comfort. If one is likely to get sequestered at the Nut Farm from such compelling pursuit, and I also am caught and confined, I'll at least be in very good company!

> George Freeman Snellville, Georgia

*Editors' Note: So many of our readers have asked how they can continue to explore the questions raised in WIE with others who have similar interests, that, over this past year, we have initiated three new forums: WIE Online Discussion Forum, local WIE Discussion Groups and WIE Subscribers' Events. Visit www.wie.org for more details or call: 1-413-637-6000.

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For more information contact **Impersonal Enlightenment Fellowship** at 800-376-3210 or 413-637-6000 email: ief@andrewcohen.org www.andrewcohen.org

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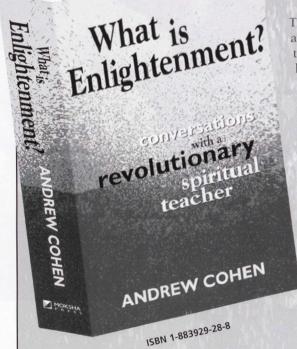


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