



4. KAREN RICHARDS

In February 2008 at the age of thirty-three, Karen experienced a sudden and radical awakening. Prior to this realisation, no teachings or practices were followed – in fact at that time the terms non-duality and awakening were completely unfamiliar. This spontaneous realisation presented itself during a period of intense emotional suffering and when demands in life exceeded Karen's physical capability.

Karen attempted to persevere in the face of these challenges, the consequence being a severely debilitating illness that affected physical functioning on every level. Although the illness had a devastating effect on life as it was then known, it seemed to create a space for a deeper reality to be recognised.

As her state of health was so poor, Karen was unable to return to work – meaning that she spent a significant amount of time confined to her home. The effect of this period of solitude was profound surrender, allowing the realisation to become deeply integrated into daily living. Two and a half years after the initial recognition, someone Karen didn't know approached her for guidance, which really was the beginning of sharing in a more active

way. Karen now shares openly with all those who wish to enquire into the true nature of reality.

Karen grew up in a small town in the heart of England and was born into a non-religious family. After a somewhat turbulent childhood and unsettled early adult life, she trained as a nurse in 1993. After qualification in 1996, Karen went onto practice nursing in the NHS full time for twelve years, gaining experience in many specialities including general surgery, urology and medicine before specialising in intensive care. In the years prior to the realisation, Karen has experienced challenges and disappointments that seem common to many. She is also a certified life coach and that, coupled with her nursing career has given her considerable experience of working with people from a variety of backgrounds and circumstances. This has endowed her with the ability to empathise and understand life as it is to commonly experienced, making her easy to communicate with.

Following the realisation, Karen's experience of illness – coupled with her extensive experience of healthcare, enabled dis-ease / illness to be seen from a different perspective. Misperception of what we are and the stress that can ensue in direct relation to that misperception, means that we are often in a state of persistent resistance to life as it is. This negative state of functioning is the foundation for many of our health challenges. The rediscovery of who we are is fundamental for the transformation of the human life experience. It means that the peace that is already here is recognised and experienced directly, having potentially profound healing effect on the mind and body.

Realisation – from a human perspective – means that the unity beyond apparent diversity is remembered. Life can then be embraced fully and authentically – without contamination from the lens of the conditioned mind, bringing relief from all psychological suffering. An inevitable consequence

of this recognition is the arising of compassion, love and respect for life in all of its appearances – having an ever deepening impact on the human experience. This has the direct consequence of transforming the world we see literally before our eyes, having a powerful healing effect on the planet as a whole.

‘May you rediscover who you truly are, for in that knowing lies liberation, peace and wisdom. You are THAT for which you have been seeking’

Much love, Karen Richards

Bio from,

<http://karen-richards.com>

INTERVIEW

Q: I notice that you use the word "coach" on your website instead of teacher, why is this?

Karen Richards: I don't see myself as a coach or a teacher, so maybe I should speak about that. I see myself more like a friend and I think that it's really important to be able to meet people where they are because if there is this kind of labeling set up from the beginning, then it seems to detract away from meeting someone in the experience freshly.

I have nothing to offer anyone. I have nothing to give anyone. It's not a question of me knowing better than them. I don't see it like that so it's really about seeing it as an investigation and exploring and using the benefit of my experience to support that person's own exploration. In so doing it becomes self evident in what is true through using certain pointers, certain questions, inviting certain things to take place in terms of directly looking. And so I think any sort of label that gives the impression that somebody is full of knowledge, that has something to impart and that person does not know themselves, can be quite a limiting set up from the off set.

So I guess my passion is about making it as equal as possible from the outset so there are no limitations before we even start, or to try and minimize those limitations before we start exploring.

Q; Can you please tell me how you began to share this message with other people?

Karen Richards: What appeared to happen here is that life was so busy. It was such an immersion in me being a separate person. Trying to find happiness and it was all unconscious and I didn't know that's what I was trying to do. And it was that excessive striving that seemed to create ill health. And as a result of the ill health, that created an abrupt stopping. That stopping seemed to create an opportunity through a friend giving me a tape of John Wheeler to listen to actually. That created the opportunity that is always the case to be recognized experientially. And as a result of that experiential recognition there wasn't really a desire to go out sharing this with everyone. That was simply a sitting with that understanding and then starting to share on facebook with my friends and family what I had come to understand. Most of them thought I had gone completely crazy. (Laughter) So it was very interesting to see people's reactions to that and as a result

of that form, other people started to resonate with what I was saying and more and more people started to find me. I'm not even sure how that started to happen. Really I'm not very clear about that but there were suddenly a community of like-minded people or people that were either sharing or enquiring that started to come in touch with me.

And as a result of that platform of sharing to a wider audience, opportunities and invitations started to come in for me to be able to share my experience. It all happened very organically and naturally, everything I do is by invitation. And there's no sense of agenda to get a message out there. Everybody that comes has found me through one way or another. And so this is what I am committed to. Allowing life to direct what happens because I am that life. And getting out of the way completely with how this is supposed to look. Where this is going, I've no idea. I simply respond to what comes up in the experience. And there's a yes or a no to what comes up in the experience based on what I intuit to be the best course of action to take, but there really isn't an analysis going on. It's simply a heartfelt intuitive response to what's unfolding very naturally and organically by itself.

Q: On your website you say that "I don't advertise as such – everything that is done in relation to sharing this message of freedom is solely upon invitation. However, the volume of emails and requests for calls have been continually increasing - creating the need for me to review what I currently offer."

What are your thoughts on how satsang is given traditionally in India as opposed to how it is given in the West?

Karen Richards: I haven't really got a great deal of experience about this but my understanding of the eastern way of doing things is that there is a teacher and people go to this teacher to impart this wisdom and really the way I see things is that life is eternal satsang. So at every moment, every instance, every circumstance there is an opportunity to meet life as it is without a personal agenda.

So when we come into this recognition experientially, there's a deeper opportunity to allow that to unfold naturally by itself without having any ideas that there is anyone that needs to know anything. So there isn't a teacher and a student, there is simply life expressing itself, wherever it's expressing itself. I think it's all about the transformation of conditioned dysfunction into unconditioned loving action and that happens naturally through abiding experientially in this recognition and allowing life to move through the form. So when satsang appears to happen or when a meeting appears to happen, that's simply responding to the invitation to that. But I don't really see it as any different from going down to the supermarket and getting my groceries and enjoying my exchange with the woman on the check out. Meeting life appropriately in that circumstance or speaking with a friend on the phone who needs support about something. So in every circumstance there is the opportunity to respond appropriately to what is arising and formal satsang meetings is just another expression of that. Really, I don't see there is life inside or outside of satsang meetings. There is simply life in all of its appearances, expressing itself spontaneously. So we could look at the tradition and how it's done in the West and I do see there seems to be a, how to put it, artificial meetings set up for this purpose and it can even be advertising for this purpose, but really that isn't what seems to happen here. There is simply a commitment to moment by moment which allows the effects of conditioning to be seen and to fall away naturally and to meet life in a place more and more from the unconditioned, undivided consciousness.

Q: On your trip to India last year, weren't you at the Ramana Marashi ashram?

Karen Richards: I was yes.

Q: Did you attend any of the satsangs there or did they even have satsang or anything like that?

Karen Richards: I simply go to the ashram. I don't spend any time there or go to the teachings or meetings. I spend time on the mountain. There isn't a purpose to it, there isn't a going there to get anything. There is simply an enjoyment, a natural enjoyment of being at that place. I can't really explain it. Although it's a funny thing to try and describe how his physical image represents everything I know to be true without believing. Should I say that it's outside of my self.

It's like a symbol, like the mountain is the symbol of the highest truth and it acts as a reminder, like a Zen koan would act as a reminder I guess, or some people use spiritual names as a reminder of the truth of what they are. So it's similar really. There is no agenda. Fortunately for me last year a friend paid for my ticket. They sponsored me to go and that was just part of the natural arising as well. It's just what seemed to unfold. There was no 'I have got to go to India'. There was a sense of someone has offered a ticket and that's what seems to happen. So there was just a responding to that. And so yes it isn't about trying to get anything, it's just life unraveling very naturally, very spontaneously and responding to that consciously.

Q: The next question is about another comment that you made on your website. You said, "Being paid for this type of work can

sometimes be seen as highly controversial – as fundamentally there is nothing to be done and no-one to do it. However, from another more experiential perspective it can be seen as essential work – contributing to the experience of peace in our world.”

Is there anything else besides that which would make this controversial?

Karen Richards: I think there is a misconception that individuals sharing in this way should not be paid. There seems to be this idea or this sticking point around money. And in the East, this is my limited understanding of it, it's seen more as a way of life. And so it's accepted that people are supported if they are undertaking that role, fulfilling that need. And this way of teaching seems to have been transferred to the West with the same kind of ideas surrounding it and of course the West is living in a completely different way to the East. So there are so many variables that don't directly translate to that. And there has to be some way of meeting basic needs. So if someone is coming to me and they want to directly inquire into the nature of reality, that is absolutely what I will respond to, but at the same time in order to be able to respond, I need a place in order to respond from. I need internet access; I need to be able to eat, in order to be able to provide what is being asked of me naturally by life itself. There needs to be some basic essentials that are covered and at the moment it appears to require an exchange of money to facilitate that process. I don't think it's about making millions and exploiting people but rather simply getting those basic costs covered in order for myself to be able to do that. Otherwise, I will have to, and my health isn't brilliant at the moment, I will have to find some other way of supporting myself and I would not be able to be available. So what's the trade off? It does seem to be a level of balance in respect of this; some common sense to meet what is being asked and that if people are looking to explore the costs and time needed to be covered in a reasonable manner and in a reasonable way.

Q: The next question is about what is traditionally known as dana. Do you feel that this traditional model can't work in today's world?

Karen Richards: I don't necessarily feel that I know enough about it to be able to comment, so by dana you mean the act of just giving of yourself unconditionally.

Yes correct, it basically means giving; you would share the teachings from a place of generosity with no expectations of any kind or compensation, or for anything in return.

Karen Richards: Well I think that comes down to the previous question and the things we have already touched upon, and from a personal perspective here. Prior to the recognition, there was dysfunctional giving going on. I was a nurse, I put everybody else's needs before my own. That was what actually wore me out and brought me to the point of not being able to sustain that level of giving. So giving isn't always healthy giving. So it's how we define that giving. It isn't always appropriate to just simply give and give to the point of exhaustion. And it can be a sign of unmet emotional needs and overcompensation for that. So it's about having a balanced perspective and seeing all these things in context and not having too rigid a view as I see it. Being open to the possibility that what may be seen as right action in the eyes of the world is coming from a conditioned place. So this recognition is about seeing through all the conditions of every kind and allowing life to express itself more and more freely. So we can't, as I see it, place rules upon this. This is about letting all the rules dissolve.

Q: Where do you see this heading; more towards a westernized business sort of model or back to the traditional model of dana?

Karen Richards: I really don't know the answer to that. I have no way of knowing how this is evolving. What I see in the world, what is going on out there is two opposing polarities. There's a lot of unrest and a lot of dysfunction, but there also appears to be more and more people that are really committed to living from a truthful place. This may just reflect my own understanding so we've got no real way of actually being able to measure this or understand this in any way at all. All we can do is be committed to being true in each and every moment and to be open to seeing through any distortion, any attempt to manipulate experience in any way regards to a personal will, a personal agenda. And relax into what is always available and everything takes care of itself from that place. Everything is resolved there. So I think it's the absence, or the breaking down or the dissolution of models of any kind to allow pure undivided consciousness to emerge into the world.

END OF INTERVIEW