



## 8. CHRIS HEBARD

Chris Hebard is the founder and creator of StillnessSpeaks.com, a premiere resource on the internet aggregating the text, audio and film of authentic contemporary and traditional teachers of Non Duality and Self Inquiry from within all spiritual disciplines. The website reflects his enthusiasm and love of its material

The approach of StillnessSpeaks is integral; it does not promote any particular path or methodology. Chris attempts to honor the many paths available to all Truth Lovers; in doing so, he hopes to demonstrate that there is only one destination.

Chris writes, speaks and films on Self Inquiry, advaita, and non-duality extensively throughout the United States and Europe.

### INTERVIEW

***Q: Shunryu Suzuki said "there is no such thing as an enlightened person, only enlightened activity". If that is the case, then what are your thoughts on some of these contemporary advaita teachers that charge exorbitant fees for the teachings?***

Chris Hebard: Be forewarned: I can only answer from direct experience, which may, or may not, match with conventional wisdom. All that can be shared here is what has been seen here.

Before we start, understand that whatever is said here is absolutely valueless unless it is congruent with your own discovery.

Let no counsel replace the journey of direct experience thru self inquiry.

Here, then, is this view:

Truth cannot be copyrighted, nor is it a commodity.

How could one charge for it?

At best, the attempt at communicating the ineffable is an act born of love, to love and by love itself.

It points at what is: how do you charge for what you already are?

The charging of fees normally implies consideration for the transfer of something of value.

In this unique case of Self Inquiry, nothing is ever transferred.

Belief is simply dismissed in favor of reality.

Clinging and Grasping happen.

When they happen, fear happens.

Then, identity happens.

When identity happens, there is multiplicity.

When multiplicity happens, there is suffering.

When suffering is entertained, grasping for approval, authority, exclusivity, prestige, money, possessions happens.

This is the "false and villainous vast world that cheats and ravages the minds of all people (except the wise)"...that Ramana Maharshi refers to.

How, pray tell, does one charge exorbitant fees for Self Inquiry, when wise?

There seems to be a subtle odor lurking in the subterranean reaches of many sanghas today, in the form of fees parading as donations, and in the form of criticism of competitive teachings and teachers and, in private conversations, quietly seeking approval or control.

Some might say that how one behaves has nothing to do with the truth. I find it otherwise. What is seen acting out is either congruent with what is known as true or it is not.

Then if someone were to charge unreasonable or exorbitant fees for this truth and were obviously amassing or hoarding wealth, not being charitable or practicing dana (giving) with it in any way; what would this indicate to you about this person?

***Q: Would it mean that they lost their enlightenment? Or that they were never enlightened in the first place, or some other factor?***

Chris Hebard: Let me start with a working definition of the term, "enlightenment" for the purposes of this discussion. Enlightenment is the clear and deep seeing that what I am is not an object at all, I am no-thing. I do not exist--at all.

To a person, "enlightenment" might seem like an event, set in time and space, but, it is not. Such a view would be a hypothetical construction based upon a deeply held assumption of the independent nature of the mind, body and world. It would be a misconception to be expected. How could a person see it otherwise? The very basis of the analysis would be flawed.

For this reason, there is no such thing as an enlightened person; thus, there can never be a loss of enlightenment.

If "enlightenment" could be described as an "event", it would be an event which occurs outside of time, space, and, normally, outside of memory. It could be called the absolute confirmation of our eternity, beyond doubt itself. What is, is, without limitation, shining in its own totality. It is, its own reality, independent of objects altogether.

Some of the confusion regarding "enlightenment" has to do with memory.

When something occurs outside of memory, it does not mean it did not happen; it simply means that the mind has no recollection of it.

And, this is exactly the point: ultimately, the mind is not invited to this party. That is not the same as saying that nothing was experienced--only that nothing occurred to the mind.

When we drive down a familiar road, we pass many landmarks, which we see every day. Yet, should we think back to the drive earlier that day, we do not recollect everything that we saw. Does this mean they were not experienced?

Turyia, consciousness without an object, is the natural "state" and is actually experienced all of the "time". It is the space between two thoughts, when revealed in its glory.

What is "mind"? For this dialogue, I would suggest that mind is mentation and that mentation is the aggregate of sensing, feeling, thinking and perceiving. None of these exist independently of awareness; thus, the body, mind and world can never be seen as apart from consciousness.

We do not experience objects; we only experience our perceptions of objects. The experience of objects is an inference, an unverifiable leap.

Now, as to your question: if a teacher acts selfishly or incongruently in any way, with this understanding, what does it tell us?

This question speaks to an apparent process, in time and space which follows initial "enlightenment", a process which I refer to as "self realization".

It seems like a sticky subject, because we are forced to acknowledge the relative as well as the absolute view simultaneously. But, how could we entertain any sort of conversation at all without such an acknowledgement?

And, for better or worse, such is the truth of my experience: there is, in fact, a "post" awakening process.

I would call it a "cooperation" with what is. And this process is where the deepest and most productive unfolding occurs. It is continual: it follows us thru waking, dream and deep sleep states. It reveals the hidden substance of causal ignorance of both the body and mind. It disrobes and uproots beliefs held so closely as facts that they have, heretofore, been unseeable.

Like a performance race car, bustling at high speed, "awakening" could be seen as the disengagement of the clutch. This extracts the clutch from its gears, but it does not stop its spinning, which only slows over time.

There is no effort in this process of "self realization". As I said, it is more like a cooperation born of the burning desire to know the whole truth.

Even if our initial interest in truth was motivated by the desire for happiness; this stage is something altogether different: this cooperation is driven by the deepest desire to know the complete truth, to see the hidden mechanisms that allow diversity to appear.

I am going to give our unidentified "spiritual teacher" the benefit of the doubt; let's assume that their intent is benevolent.

So, what does the "spinning of this clutch" look like? In Vedantic literature, these behaviors might be referred to as vasanas, or even more subconsciously, as samskaras--deep impressions. For the purposes of our discussion, we'll simply use the term conditioning.

This conditioning might appear as a "burst"-- what we might call "negative emotions": the feelings of anger, sadness, fear, jealousy, rage, depression, vanity, greediness or loneliness that spontaneously erupt.

Or it may display itself in a far more subtle way: the desire for recognition, approval or control in business or at play.

Or the belief that an object of any sort might actually have the power to make us happy--to make us whole and complete.

They are born of one common element; they are selfish. They are born of the belief, on some level, that we are separate and there is a preferred way the world should arrange itself.

Obviously, these subconscious thoughts are completely incongruent with the reality of our direct experience; yet, however subtle, there they are.

This is the evidence of a deeper confusion that remains after awakening; it demands our attention. "Life" asks us, over and over again, "What is it you want most?"

For sure, anything we want more than "enlightenment", we will get!

And, of course!

We underestimate the power of perception. The extroversion of the senses, and our endless fascination with identifying with its perceptions, are a pattern as deep as the belief in the body and world itself.

Like an iceberg, floating within this sea of "spaceless space", deep conditioning is discovered, beneath the surface, out of conscious view.

Simply put, in spite of awakening, there is still some confusion at play.

The key is that, by definition, even a whisp of these behaviors is incongruent with the reality of oneness: the end to seer, seen and seeing as separate events. This can only happen as the result of the true death of the closely held belief in the imaginary inner self- the separate "me".

There is only One or there is not. If there is only One , there is nothing to fear. Moreover, there is nothing to want.

What is this rush for inquiry to be "complete": to be able to smugly plant a flag and to announce the summit with some false sense of finality?

I see no such summit. I see no such point of view. I see only "endless enlightening". How could God's infinite potentiality be anything other?

Each event is our true sat guru, pointing to deeper and deeper beliefs that support that illusion of diversity---until they don't point to anything at all.

They reveal residual attachments and aversions: beliefs in separation still operating "out of sight" reflected as fear and behaviors motivated from the desire for approval and the need for control. They all reek of the rotting smell of belief in separation.

Is the end of our "imaginary separate self" just another belief--or is it something fundamentally more?

If it is true, how could our behavior reflect anything other than this ultimate truth?

Perhaps, the greatest benefit of being in the company of a true teacher for extended periods of time would be the student's ability to see intimately how he lives his day to day life. By some act of Grace, I was given this

precious opportunity-- in spades. I will never tire of expressing my gratitude for it.

Its power permeated my view at every level--birthing in me a keen sense of self honesty regarding my behavior at any given moment.

Spending large, uninterrupted periods of informal time, outside of satsang, in the kitchen, "cutting vegetables", playing sports, going to movies and concerts, traveling long distances, living in close quarters--both enjoying life but also learning from its trials, I was shown how this teaching unfolds in everyday life for a prodigy.

Life without self --selfless living-- has a very distinct perfume to it. Its behavior celebrates both as dispassion and compassion.... truth, love, humor, generosity, beauty, charity and, most assuredly, selfless service.

It is said that the best way to find oneself is to lose yourself in the service of others. This is dana.

Why is this?

The answer is discovered in the exercise of selfless service itself: in those moments of true aid and compassion for "others", the desperate self defined illusion called "me" disappears. What emanates in its place is the delicious, expansive odor of happiness and freedom--it is unlike anything else.

At first, these phenomena might be blamed on the activity itself; later, it is realized that this happiness is actually "seeping" out as the un-identified "you".

Now, we have not discussed the other possibility for our benevolent teacher- that his accumulation of wealth is not motivated by self at all; it is only a temporary reflection of the celebration of the moment. If you dig beneath the surface, I am certain you will discover some who fall into this category.....

END OF INTERVIEW