



## 2. LINDA CLAIR

***NDM: There seem to be many definitions on terms like enlightenment, self-realization, liberation, awakening and so on depending on various schools of thought and beliefs. Can you please tell me in your view, what is enlightenment? What is an awakening, what is self-realization and what is liberation?***

Linda Clair: Enlightenment is the realisation that 'I' am not the body, i.e. the freedom from fear of death (of the body). I would say that an awakening is the realisation that 'I' am not the mind and it can be quite profound, but it is still an experience and there is still an 'I' or mind in control – you just realise that it is in control. With full realisation, the mind subsides and there is no experience anymore – it's actually the end of seeking experience and the end of the concept of time. It's the end of all concepts.

***NDM: Can you please tell me about your awakening, enlightenment and how this shift occurred, what it felt like in the body, what happened to your mind?***

Linda Clair: I can't remember my awakening very clearly now – many memories have faded. It happened on the fifth day of a 10 day meditation retreat, and I remember a huge letting go of the mind, but at the same time sensing that the mind was still there to some degree. It never regained its former strength, but it was really the beginning of the end. There was deep gratitude and relief, but also a knowledge that a lot more work was required.

I suppose the main thing I remember is a deep enthusiasm and determination to be completely free of the mind and the realisation that it was possible for me. My teacher Peter Jones had prepared me very well for it, and this is extremely important, as the ego can get carried away with something like this happening. There is a great temptation to delude oneself at this point and say there's nothing more to do . . . but there was a lot more. This happened in 1997 and for the next 7 years I practised intensively. My whole life became my practice. I had a partner, two children and a part-time job but everything revolved around becoming more and more conscious.

I suppose I became obsessed with it. I started doing retreats with a Japanese Zen Master who was living in Australia (Hogen Yamahata) and relished the discipline of the Zen practice. When someone told me about a monastery in Japan called Bukkokuji that took Western students, I knew I had to go. Hogen-san had spent 10 years there with his master, Harada Tangen Roshi, who was the abbot. I arrived there in February 2004 and spent 6 weeks there. It was so hard and so intense – all I wanted to do for a while was to go home, but I knew I couldn't leave. It was a

place of extremes – extreme harshness, extreme kindness, extreme practice, extreme compassion. I didn't realise it at the time, but it was the beginning of the final stage of enlightenment. Being there was the final straw. . .

When I returned to Australia, I felt deeply detached and peaceful. I did a few more retreats with Hogen-san and then in January, 2005, during a 10 day retreat, it happened. For the first few days of the retreat, I took it 'easy', not extending myself, just sitting during the allotted times. Then one morning Hogen-san was going around correcting people's postures and when he adjusted me I let out a strange sound that was quite loud. I felt suddenly embarrassed, very self conscious and emotional about the noise that I'd made and there was this deep surge of energy within me. Something in me shouted ( not out loud) 'this is enough- I can't take this anymore!' and I saw that there was still a deep fear of sitting through pain – even after everything I'd gone through. From that moment on, I decided to sit through every break during the retreat, which meant that I'd be sitting for up to about 3 hours at a time. Initially, when the bell would sound, my body would start pulsing violently and it felt like my heart was going to explode. Then the sensations would gradually subside and I would start breathing normally again. This happened every time the bell sounded, but after a few days, it started to become less extreme. Then one day – I can't remember which day of the retreat it was - everything stopped. There was no pain, no bliss, no time – just the body containing this intense energy. It felt like everything that I had thought was real became an illusion, and everything I thought was unreal became real. It felt a bit like a fairy tale coming true . . . a strange feeling. There was deep, deep peace and contentment. I didn't feel like jumping up and down with joy- it was very gentle and ordinary – it felt like something had finally clicked into place.

***NDM: Many people in this neo advaita movement also say that you are what you are seeking. That this is a problem of a false belief that there is a separate seeker that can attain, find, reach enlightenment. That any kind of communication or teaching that encourages one to continue doing this, either through meditation or any other means is only keeping the seeker chasing his her own tail and perpetuating the dualistic illusion, the Lila, more samsara, maya so to speak.***

***So they say there is no method to do this. Everything is just acausal, "It just happens" or it does not so you may as well give it up and just relax. Forget about it and live your life. However many of these communicators say they are not teachers since there is nothing to teach but still give meetings and satsangs on their message of non teaching and to do nothing. What are your thoughts on this?***

Linda Clair: Maybe it's more true to say that you are not what you are seeking, you are not who you think you are. The source of all suffering is the belief that you exist as a separate self and this is not something that you can disprove intellectually. All beliefs stem from this, so all beliefs are false. You can't convince yourself that your body is an illusion; you can't talk your way out of it. You can only realise this through your own body, and this takes a lot of practice, guidance and love from someone who has realised this in their body.

***NDM: What would you say is the difference between a glimpse at awakening and full blown enlightenment?***

Linda Clair: An awakening is still subject to time – it comes and goes. Enlightenment is permanent - it is the end of time and the realisation of eternity

***NDM: Do you see stages or levels in this enlightenment process?***

Linda Clair: Yes, I feel that there are levels of maturity leading up to 'enlightenment' and also after 'enlightenment'.

***NDM: Do you mean this in the sense of it deepening over time or something else?***

Linda Clair: I have been in this 'state' for over 5 years now, and it has deepened significantly. It's true that once one is 'enlightened' there's no going back or going forward, but once one is established in this state, there is a further maturing or deepening process that naturally occurs. It's an extremely intense state to be in all the time – 'now' is a highly energetic state. The body can feel quite fragile at times as it adjusts to containing even deeper, more intense levels of energy. It feels a bit like the universe is contained in your body.

***NDM: Some people say that if someone "understood" that they are not the body/mind, that they are this ever present awareness, not the ego, that this is self-realization. Do you believe someone can become self-realized, enlightened by realizing this with the mind, logic, some form of philosophical reasoning or the intellect?***

Linda Clair: Enlightenment is completely beyond the intellect, beyond logic, beyond reasoning. It is not something that can be understood by the intellect, but can only be realised in the body. It's nothing like I thought it would be because it is nothing that can be imagined, or thought about. It's the complete unknown. Once I was free of the control of the mind, or intellect, I realised how limited it is, and how it rules by fear. It's a bit like being held captive and being told by your captor that everything outside your prison is dangerous, so there is a great fear of going beyond it. But once you go beyond the mind you realise that it was all a bluff.

***NDM: When this occurred, how did your partner as well as your friends and family react to this?***

Linda Clair: When I returned from Japan, I was in a deeply detached state – there had been a fundamental shift and the person that I had been wasn't fully there anymore. My partner reacted quite strongly for a while – quite a bit of fear came up about what was happening in me. After realisation, the fear dissipated and he was very happy about the whole thing. There didn't seem to be a reaction from my children – they were busy finding their way in the world, as I was finding my way out of it. The rest of my family just think the whole thing is a bit strange and don't really want to talk about it, which is fine with me. Some friends think it's great and feel that if I can do it, then maybe it's possible for them, and others don't want to know about it (or me). I was never a highly social person and during the years of intense practice, I became even less social – I just didn't have the energy or desire to socialize much. I know there are quite a few people who think that I'm arrogant for even saying that I'm enlightened.

***NDM: Many people are under the impression that a person that is enlightened is extra-ordinary and has super-natural abilities and so on. Would you say are the most common misconceptions are about a person being enlightened?***

Linda Clair: Enlightenment is realizing that you are not special - not fundamentally different from anyone or anything. That's the freedom – not wanting to be special anymore. I feel more ordinary and insignificant than I ever have, and it's a beautiful feeling. Most people (and I know I did) have their own idea about how an 'enlightened' being should be and so there are a lot of judgements about their behaviour. People seem to feel that you become this 'perfect' being, but everyone has their own idea of what perfection is – it's a very personal concept. I don't know about the super – natural abilities thing . . . I know I hear and see things that I didn't before , but that's just because I'm not obsessed with myself anymore. You become very open in every way when there is no fear.

***NDM: How would you describe how this has changed you on a practical day to day basis? The way you do your work, how you interact with others?***

Linda Clair: I do things in a much more spontaneous way than before. You can't really be spontaneous if you're always using the past as your security and trying to remember what you're doing as you're doing it. I plan appointments and other things, of course, but I have to make sure I write things down or I often forget about them. If I'm cooking something I have to put the timer on for the stove because as soon as I walk out of the room I forget about it. . . but I find that I always remember what I really need to remember. It probably sounds a bit disconcerting, but it's so good having a clear head – not having a whole lot of thoughts swirling around in my head. My interactions with others are different because I'm not trying to 'get something' out of an interaction, so the whole intention behind socializing has changed.

***NDM: Can you describe what happens to your ego, your sense of self when this occurs?***

Linda Clair: There's virtually no sense of self anymore. I can't 'look' at myself anymore- it's impossible. I can see that there is still a bit of ego there at times, but the natural inclination is to see it and let it go rather than to strengthen it and feed it. Before this happened, I was very self conscious - I actually defined myself by the way other people saw me. Now I feel very grounded in my body, but also very spacious and light. There's no judgement of myself and so no judgements of others.

***NDM: So when this sense of self and frame of reference disappears. Who or what do you become?***

Linda Clair: You become everything and nothing. I used to use the body as a reference point – I believed I was the body and this defined me. When you realise fully that you are not the body, that even the body is not real, you become what you see and hear without being defined by them. It's so difficult to describe . . . There is no separation between you and anything or anyone else. You become what's happening and this is always changing, so it's a bit like you become change. Change becomes your security. When you can't hang onto anything, you have nothing to lose

***NDM: Did you experience any fear or anxiety when this awakening was going on?***

Linda Clair: Yes – the whole process is about seeing that it's only fear that separates us. The fear manifested in different ways during my process, but really it all came down to the fear of death or attachment to the body. I didn't realise until afterwards how deep the fear was and how it dominated everything in my life, down to the smallest body movement. When the fear dissolved, time stopped.

***NDM: How would you know if a person was faking this, putting on a clever act? For example what are the signs that a person is not really enlightened?***

Linda Clair: Even though you become 'change' once you are enlightened, there is also a certain consistency about someone who is in this state of flux. There's a natural spontaneity that arises from the dissolution of the ego, and you can

usually sense this freedom and depth. There is a strong energetic presence around someone in this state. I remember when I first became aware of the energetic presence of my teacher (Peter Jones). I looked at him one night and there was suddenly this sense that I had never really looked at anyone before - I saw my potential in his eyes. I saw the depth that I had been (unconsciously) looking for most of my life.

***NDM: When you say energetic state, do you mean as in Qi or prana. A life force around the person?***

Linda Clair: Yes, as the mind loses its power, the body reverts to its natural state. The pure intelligence of the body, which is really universal intelligence or life force, starts to take over. The body becomes more and more deeply 'energized' as this happens and at the point of enlightenment there is a huge surge of energy that forces the mind into submission.

***NDM: When your ego vanished, disappeared, did it briefly at any time pop up again at any stage of this process, or try to claim this enlightenment in some subtle way?***

Linda Clair: Once you are in the enlightened state the mind never regains its former power – it's just too slow. In the first 18 months or so after enlightenment the mind did give me a bit of a taste of how it used to be a few times, but it didn't last very long at all. When it happened, it was quite a shock to realise that I had lived most of my life in this emotional state.

***NDM: Where there at any times where you thought that you were enlightened to find out a few days later that this was just a glimpse at enlightenment?***

Linda Clair: There were times when I momentarily wondered and hoped 'is this it?' but I knew that it wasn't. Peter used to say "If you think you've got it, you haven't got it", but I didn't really understand what he meant until I actually 'got it'. When it happens, there is no question about it – it is just so obvious and real. In a way, you can't have a glimpse of it, because it's not a relative state. Having a close relationship with my teacher really helped me, because it's very difficult to become deluded when reality is sitting in front of you.

***NDM: The title of your book "What do you want" is such an important question. I can imagine for some people it must be a very difficult question to answer. How do most of people you teach answer a question like that?***

Linda Clair: It is a difficult question to answer because what you want is something that you've never experienced – it's nothing that you can think about. Most people are driven to do this practice by their own suffering. When you first start meditating there can often be some very deep, intense experiences that give you a taste of something that is beyond the mind – beyond thinking. At first you think that this is what you want – more deep, intense experiences that relieve the suffering. After a while you realise that even these experiences, however deep they are, are still temporary and when they end the suffering feels even more acute. You become more and more aware of the intensity and extent of your suffering (and everyone else's) but you see that there is a possibility to be free of it. So it's really what you don't want that ends up pushing you towards what you want - which is freedom from wanting anything.

***NDM: In your book you mention how your teacher Peter would say that it's easier to ask the question "where am I" than asking the classic question as with Atma Vichara self enquiry, "who am I". Do you also use this question as a technique in your teaching method and can you talk about what can happen when it becomes an intellectual exercise and the person can get stuck in the head?***

Linda Clair: I often say to people at the beginning of a sitting to use the sensations in the body to reaffirm that they are here; their body is here, sitting in this room. You are wherever your body is, which is always here now, in this moment. You really need to fully establish this and become deeply grounded in your body before you start asking 'who am I'. This question then naturally arises and is non intellectual. So, I don't advise people to ask this question unless they are very mature and it arises spontaneously, otherwise you can become quite confused and deluded.

***NDM: Do you think there is an evolution of consciousness occurring?***

Linda Clair: I feel that there is always an evolution in consciousness occurring, but I don't know if there are any more people seriously interested in reality than there ever were. Maybe more people are interested in reading about it and it's great that people like Eckhart Tolle have made the whole thing more acceptable in the west, but it's hard to say how many people are seriously interested in going the whole way

***NDM: Why is it important to have a living teacher?***

Linda Clair: Nothing compares to coming face to face with reality in the flesh. There is no escape, no excuses. It is a very powerful reminder that it is possible to be free while still in the body. The mind will still resist, but when faced with reality, it knows it is danger. The closer you become to your teacher, the closer you come to reality. When someone is dead, you can feel the energetic presence of their words or photograph, but there is often more of a separation.

***NDM: There is an interesting dilemma when seeking enlightenment because the desire for it can become the obstacle. How did you navigate around this desire for enlightenment?***

Linda Clair: It wasn't a dilemma for me – there was no choice, nothing I could do about it. I didn't navigate around it – the longing became stronger and stronger until it totally consumed me. I didn't start off consciously seeking enlightenment – it was almost like it sought me out. Eventually, you need to want it more than anything else - otherwise you're not prepared to go through what you need to go through. By the time you realise what you've got yourself into, it's too late to pull out - you're just too deeply into it.

***NDM: Can you tell me what happens with excitement?***

Linda Clair: I feel that excitement is the body's inability to contain joy. It's often an expectation of something about to happen, or a reaction to something that has

just happened. When you realise that there is no time, there is no excitement – just a deep joy that is contained in the body.

***NDM: Did you at any time experience any unusual physical sensations in the body, or in your head?***

Linda Clair: It was not long after I first met my teacher that I started to feel strange sensations. I remember as I was driving away after visiting him once with my partner, I felt quite a strong tightness and tension in my shoulders for no apparent reason. I mentioned it to my partner, and he said he was feeling similar sensations. I didn't really think much more about it but then not long after starting formal practice with him I started to feel unusual sensations in my head. They began as mild sensations in the centre of my head and then progressively became stronger. I wondered whether there was something physically wrong with me - maybe a brain tumour, but they would -usually start during a meditation and then disappear when I opened my eyes. There were lots of other sensations in different parts of my body that would come and go – pain in the back, up the spine, in the knees, shoulders. . . I found out later that this is what kundalini energy really is – the past in the body clearing out and purifying. It's facing the pain that we spend much of our lives avoiding. There's not a lot said in detail about the pain that is involved in the process of enlightenment – but it's a very important part of it that everyone needs to go through. The pain actually keeps you very present and although it can be incredibly difficult to bear at times there's a certain exhilaration involved in it as well. After a while I started to understand the reason for the pain and became much more open to it and sometimes even craved it. I preferred being very present and aware, even if it meant being in pain, to feeling a bit dull and half asleep. Eventually, when the body is free of the past, the pain disappears – there is no need for it anymore.

***NDM: Do you feel any emotions at all?***

Linda Clair: Occasionally, I can feel slightly emotional, but it doesn't last long- it just can't. One of the reasons I was so attracted to becoming free was because I was so sick of being a slave to my emotions. I was probably just averagely emotional, but I found that they became more and more intolerable as I got

older. The emotional state is so helpless and selfish. There is a belief that without your emotions you become a robot – you become cold–hearted, but this is not the truth. You can only be truly loving and compassionate when you’re not obsessed with yourself – not emotional. I would not define love as an emotion, but a state that is free of the emotional self. You then feel it more as a sensation in the body.

***NDM: When you were going through the process of removing your ego defences, did you experience any anxiety or fear?***

Linda Clair: Removing the ego defenses is letting go of fear, so there has to be a certain amount of fear involved. I felt fear at many times during my practice, but one of my main fears was that I would not be able to see my teacher – that he would die or move away. So, I had more of a fear of not being able to continue my practice with him. It doesn’t really matter too much what the fear appears to be on the surface because it all comes down to the fear of death of the body.

***NDM: You mention in your book about some teachers being partly enlightened. Do you believe that a teacher should teach if they are not fully enlightened?***

Linda Clair: I feel that it would be fine to teach basic meditation if someone is not enlightened, but you can’t guide people fully through this practice if you don’t know what it ultimately leads to. There are some, maybe many, people teaching the ‘truth’, who haven’t realised it fully themselves. I feel that the intention to teach doesn’t become completely pure until after realisation.

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