



4. RENNA GAGNEJA

NDM: Can you please tell me how this awakening occurred, as well as how you interpreted this experience and what this means to you today?

Reena Gagneja: I had been off work for two years, with much time to myself. Just before awakening began, externally, I experienced a loss in my life, and found myself in a very dark place for several weeks. But the darkness I felt was out of proportion with the external event. It was an onslaught of uncontrollable pain, emotion and intense suffering and I was at a loss to understand and frightened. All the while I maintained outer life (I have two boys) but it was not easy. I became a secret recluse for a few weeks, as much as I could given I had to look after my children, a home etc

At some point during this time a sense of emptiness arrived. My fear grew at this stage, as I thought I was losing it, and couldn't tell anyone, so I just existed in a state of fear, not really knowing what was happening except being convinced that I was having some kind of mental crisis. But as I came out of my cocoon, I went for help to spiritual folk, read and meditated, and started to understand gradually that the emptiness I was experiencing was the place of Truth, of real Self, and it was where we all exist, but mostly unconsciously. There is a however a process of integrating the void, the emptiness, because the void itself is a place where you could just do nothing, and I think we have to partake of life and create something.

I saw that my pain was a result of ego and identity, and this identity was now something I could see as separate and apart from me. I no longer felt

like the 'Reena' I had known, and I began to feel unburdened and free. But there was much from my past to release and I travelled the journey of inner healing, shedding, releasing, cleansing. I had two specific, direct, 'mystical' experiences of Divine Consciousness that healed me instantly and left me in awe. I felt greatly emptied out and welcomed this freedom. It was such a new thing to feel released of the emotional stuff I had been carrying for so many years.

I finally left a career that wasn't for me, and embarked upon work that was more aligned with what I felt was my real path, purpose and passions.

You can read more about 'My Story' here:

www.reenagagneja.com/about/story and here is a video in which I talk about ego death:

How I interpreted this experience: The time had come for attachment to ego to be seen. The damn has to burst at some point. As my banks burst, out gushed all the roles I had played in life and they all had no meaning now, and were too much effort. Instead I found that just being in the moment was the only real place. One can only go on for so long playing the inauthentic 'me' game, seeking happiness outside. I saw the inauthentic life I had been living, all the while believing myself to be so special and great. I was brought to my knees. Eventually, the day comes when life forces your own courage out and you finally admit that the way you have been living and thinking has been pretty much suffering, confusion, anxiety, fear. That's when all these things go.

The emotional intensity I had experienced was directly in contrast with my conditioning which said that emotion is embarrassing. So I understood that it is the VERY things we shun, hide from, and are most fearful of that eventually transform us. There must be a balancing of what we have created, and a return to accountability. It is those very unconscious beliefs about ourselves that we hide from everyone that offer us the hand of freedom. Because we, in essence, are not those beliefs, rather, we are

what is not affected by those beliefs, in fact they have no meaning. But the habit of people to assign great meaning to beliefs and judgments leads to all sorts of problems between and for people, when really they're pointless and painful.

What this means for me today: Life is clearer, simpler and I am more present. Detachment is there. Thought is more functional. Truth and honesty is paramount. Sometimes it is difficult to be with people who have great unconscious beliefs yet do not know this. I was like that too before, that's why I guess I feel I am able to help others on their own awakening path. In the beginning we need a helping hand, but as we become more conscious the understanding just arises.

NDM: When you said that you "understood gradually that the emptiness I was experiencing was the place of Truth, of real Self". How did you gradually come to understand this, was this some kind of process? Did this happen in stages? Did you use a method of some kind to do this?

Reena Gagneja: The emptiness was just there, it was quite sudden, but I understood it in a gradual way as at the start it was very unnerving. I surfed the net for other people's experiences, and that was a great part of understanding with my mind what was occurring at an existential level. I discovered there were others experiencing awakening, each in their own unique way. At the time, I needed to know whether others had also undergone something like this because I felt alone in this, and it was very strange to feel like this.

NDM: What would you say is this "strange sensation of emptiness, nothingness" . Can you please elaborate on that and describe this emptiness, nothingness some more?

Reena Gagneja: This nothingness is a place where there is no meaning and no need for meaning. It is a place where even thought is effort, and action is effort too. Alert awareness is ever there. There is a timeless sense. It's a beingness. It feels heavy in the body, or rather the body feels particularly heavy. It's just a void sensation.

There is one aspect which I feel is the most challenging in this void, and which I know to be a common experience for some people. And that is that there is also an acute sense of aloneness, and some anguish. This is what I think is happening here: I believe that the void has thrown you into a place where you experience Truth yet it is mixed up with your own pain but now, you are faced with the pain, not denying it. So the process of going into blissful Truth rather than 'void Truth' is to pin point the cause of your pain. This is how it has been for me, and this is how I have been able to wipe my own slate clean, so that in awareness of truth on an ongoing basis, I can also participate in life, but this time freely and spontaneously. I see this as the process of dying in life and the discovering there is no death, that Eckhart Tolle speaks about.

If you do not travel that inner journey of your own pain, it would probably be very easy to stay in the void, as, when you are there, you want to simply be, not do, not talk to people, not make any effort. It is not laziness however, it is simply the way it is. I have had several people contact me who have found themselves in the void and who are worried about how they no longer feel emotion. It is not a comfortable place. I think it is just a question of time and honest enquiry, one has no choice but to let it happen.

NDM: Is this "place of Truth", of "real Self", a kind of feeling, or some kind of state that you experienced?

Reena Gagneja: It's not easy to find the 'right' definition, because we are trying to define in words something that is beyond words, but if we are to

try...feeling, state, experience, knowing...it's all those and none of those. A beingness perhaps – let's stick with that one for now. This space is not the void alone, it is the integrated void, where feeling has returned, a more whole sense of Truth, rather than just an absence. The void is like an absence, whereas real Self / Truth – the experience after void-integration - is a presence. I mean, in terms of how it feels.

NDM: When you said that "it was where we all exist, but mostly unconsciously' . How do we exist there? Is this a place we have to go to in meditation or some kind or mindfulness practice?

Reena Gagneja: How do we exist there? – I don't know, we just do, it's the Mystery. It is our God spark. It is our essence. This is the Oneness within the Cosmos and we are part of That. We are not this lonely, separate, ego-racked individual, we are all joined in Oneness. Yes, spiritual practice can be useful but it is a means to an end. The end is to see you don't need the very means.

NDM: If I wanted to access this place of self or emptiness you speak of. What would I have to do to get there? Would you be able to show me how do this?

Reena Gagneja: What you have to do - As long as you think there is something to do to get somewhere, this very notion itself will mean you never 'get there', because you are leaving the domain of being in the now, and moving into a headspace of sometime in the future. Only when we can let go of the searching for something in a future time, can we find what we were looking for in the first place.

As to whether I can show how to get there – sadly, no. Awakening happens spontaneously. But I can certainly help you to release the desire or need to

access any such place, and see what is really behind such a need. It is always insecurity and self-worth issues. This in itself, if you will work with me honestly, will free you up immensely, and then maybe it won't matter so much to you as to whether you feel you have 'got there' or not.

NDM: How would you describe the activity in your mind. Is it active, slow, clear? Is it like it usually is or different somehow?

Reena Gagneja: It's much slower. Thoughts that arise are non-invasive. There is empty space. Thoughts are functional. But when the void is more prominent, there is much emptiness, when it is less so, the mind is more active. Even with stressful or negative thoughts, there is detachment, an awareness of this as it is happening which takes the sting out of its tail.

Also does your mind have a certain evenness to it or does it ever fluctuate back and forth?

Both, but much evenness on the whole. When the void is more 'alive' there is little fluctuation.

Have you noticed if your energy in the body has changed in any way?

I am not sure what you mean exactly, but I would say that there is a sensitivity to people and myself, ie emotions present, their feelings, the inner cause. This is useful with counselling clients. I can also get my kundalini energy to rise from the base of my spine at will. I also feel a sense of universal guidance present and communicating which is felt through the body at times. There is also a sense of the collective,

NDM: When you say "We are not used to being in awareness without analysis and judgment. It's a stepping back from all of our image and definitions. It feels like a void because it is the very absence of the mental activity."

Is there a dullness to this "void", this absence of mental activity? Is it or was it frightening in any way?

Reena Gagneja: The void isn't dull, it's just empty, but alert. It is the mental activity that makes one dull. The void gives rise to a beingness in the moment, it is quiet. Speaking is effort, doing also.

Frightening yes, for sure, but more initially, when it was a new sensation.

NDM: So when you are in this emptiness that "feels" like a void, you no longer make analysis and judgment?

Reena Gagneja: When the void is more prominent, no, not so much, and if judgment arises it is fleeting and there is nothing to it. When the void is less strong, it takes a bit longer to step back into a non-personal space. But in a general sense, judgment and analysis has lost its attraction.

NDM; How would you describe this void if you could see it, touch it, taste it, hear it? If you close your eyes and look within. What do you see exactly? What is there?

Reena Gagneja: Just a nothingness, an empty space. Non-judgment, No meaning to things. Just a beingness. Emptiness is a better word.

NDM; How does this feel in the body? Does it feel light or heavy? Do you feel grounded or more ethereal?

Reena Gagneja: The body feels slower, heavier, like it can't keep up, and the effort to do things is greater than usual.

NDM: Have you spoken to a spiritual teacher about this. Someone who has also been through this and can assess what this emptiness/void is exactly?

Reena Gagneja: I have spoken to and interviewed several spiritual teachers (see www.soulalert.com) but I did not ask them this question.

I don't feel I need such validation. I don't think there is any benchmark. From emails I get from others going through something similar each person's experience seems to be similar but unique.

We are each our own pupil, our own teacher and our own church. We only need to visit our own Self. Ultimately, it is the very spiritual and religious seeking that hinders spiritual evolution, because ultimately, there is no other possibility to truly awaken to Truth, other than alone. That's where God is – in your aloneness. It is difficult for people to 'own' their own aloneness (experienced usually as loneliness) but if we can do this, we can go beyond it into acceptance of it. So, often, people want external validation, but there is little point in this, except to satisfy the ego and intellect. It makes no difference what someone else says, for they are just words.

Before I had the awakening experiences, I had spent over 20 years following teachers, gurus, belief systems and 3 religions. I had even travelled to Japan on a pilgrimage to a Temple to find Buddhahood. It was only when I awoke spiritually that I knew I would no longer need a teacher or a religion again.

I believe we are entering a time where people need genuine friendship more than spiritual teachers as such. Their own inner teacher is stirring.

Not only that there are people with big followings – there is one in the media right now – who are shown in the end to be not ego-less, but narcissistic, despite their teachings about going beyond ego. So you have to be careful who you learn from, and revere. For a true teacher it's about you, for an inauthentic one it's about them. People have to go past the concept of attaching to 'my teacher.' And the teacher has to go past the concept of 'my students.' This 'my' is the issue.

NDM: How would you remove my roadblocks that stand in the way of this truth surfacing in me? Is there a method of some kind that you would use to do this?

Reena Gagneja: I cannot remove them for you. You have to do the work yourself. But I can help you to see them, or some of them, depending on your heart intention, then you can choose to keep them, or be done with them once and for all.

Methods: Spiritual Counselling – I am a qualified counsellor, and have helped people to move beyond limitations and into greater freedom and detachment. People sometimes say ‘I don’t need counselling’ and some people do have a level of awareness to self-enquire and self-heal. But those that say this are often the ones who are in denial, and prefer to keep experiencing anger or guilt or depression, and keep their dramas, rather than facing themselves. You see, spiritual counselling is just a statement to the universe to say ‘Ok, I’m ready for a new way, help me.’ But people in denial will go on living unconscious lives till they realize that what they were calling happiness is actually suffering, then they will want to change. Those that are ready to change, are those that have been brought to their knees in some way or other and have the courage to say ‘I need help.’ This is what I had to do, and because I was one of the former type for many years, it was only through the dark night of the soul that I was able to learn some humility and to quieten the ‘Yes, but...’ In the end, there is hidden pain, and this has to be released. The good news is that there is a whole new world beyond our idea of pain – this is our authentic Self that is able to experience joy and create.

Soul Plan Readings (SPR) - Here’s a Blog Post I wrote about them: www.reenagagneja.com/soul-plan-readings. I usually recommend this as a starting point. It is quite amazing but your name (through sound vibration) reveals your karmic challenges, talents, goals and soul destiny for this lifetime. You see, there is a danger with the void that you lose the will, that you see no point in daily life. But becoming an enlightened robot is not to be recommended! I believe with awakening comes accountability to help others and make this world a better place. An SPR clarifies much, and uncannily accurately (clients almost always relate to the information about them) highlights the type of game (gifts and goals) that you would be wise playing in this life. Yes, we are the actor, not the character, but this

realization presents us with a responsibility to choose which role(s) we wish to play.

More about SPRs:

www.reenagagneja.com/work-with-reena/soul-contract-readings

Hypnotherapy – this quietens the ‘monkey mind’, and I have had good results with clients, especially where the mental analysis is strong habit. This is usually used during counselling. Often the beliefs we hold and the constant analysis is very strong, so hypnotherapy bypasses this analysis and reaches deeper parts of us, where negative beliefs can be released more easily.

NDM: So in essence what you are saying is, is that there is no method to find this place or get to this place of emptiness you speak of? That if you let go of the searching, the need, or effort to do so, that it will just happen somehow by itself. Is this correct?

Reena Gagneja: It will happen by itself and in its own time, yes, but it cannot be forced. It may happen today, it may not happen in this lifetime, who knows. But this is not important. Your own part is to see why you want it so much, or what the searching is really about, on an emotional level first of all. Sincerity is the key. Being honest about what is really going on in those secret corners of yourself is the starting point. We’re all human, and we’ve all got insecurity, emotional pain and ingrained beliefs. So if you want one word for a method I would say: Authenticity. Had I not been willing to do uncomfortable work for many years, I do not think the awakening would have happened.

NDM: When you say "Only when we can let go of the motive, the searching, the need to be somewhere or something other than where and what we are, can we find what we were looking for in the first place."

What are we exactly?

Reena Gagneja: We are Beingness. We are Mystery. We are non-personal. We are the I Am. We are Source.

NDM: How different is someone like you from me for example?

Reena Gagneja: No different at all - only superficially so (physical appearance etc). Essentially we're all One and the same, absolutely.

NDM: In an interview with conscious TV. I heard you mention enlightenment. What is enlightenment exactly?

Reena Gagneja: This word is a loaded word, like God. I would say: a beingness in the Now, detachment.

NDM: Are you enlightened?

Reena Gagneja: I don't know. I do not like to use labels, whatever they are, whether spiritual or other. This was the whole thing that happened during awakening – I lost interest in labels and definitions, incl. spiritual labels. Labels define you, and that is the antithesis of enlightenment. Thus to say 'I am enlightened' is the same as any 'I am...' label. What difference does it make? And why spend the energy trying to answer such a question which is impossible anyway?

NDM: Is there a difference between awakening and enlightenment?

Reena Gagneja: Please see the above Q. How can this be truthfully answered? As for subjectively, again, it's not worth spending the time and effort. It's an intellectual discussion, that's all. In fact, I received this very topic in an article in my inbox the other day (entitled, "Is awakening the same as enlightenment?") and I thought initially it was interesting, began to read, but after just a few lines, it seemed like too much mind effort.

However, as you have asked, my brief stab at a response would be: perhaps enlightenment is a perpetual awakened state. But I don't think there is a right or wrong answer.

NDM: Do you have any special abilities of any kind?

Reena Gagneja: No nothing special. I used to think I was special, that was my identity and ego. Then I saw this need to be special, and it changed. So now, I don't consider I am special, nor anyone else. But we are all unique, and have unique gifts.

NDM: Do your friends see you as being extraordinary or special, now this has happened?

Reena Gagneja: I do not know how others see me, you would have to ask them. Probably they think I'm a bit of the wall, in fact.

People see people from the benchmark of their own beliefs, pain and self-image so it is not possible to get what awakening is till you can see your own ego. Moreover, people are generally self-involved and may not even have any interest in spiritual truth. It is not always easy with people, because after seeing ego and releasing attachment to this, you can then also see it in others, and see the prison it creates for them, but you cannot change it for them. Only they can do that, but if their walls of resistance and

attachment to their self-definitions is strong, then spending time with such vicious-circle energies is not easy, and I think some people may feel you're a bit strange because you don't offer the same pandering and pats on the backs as others do, so it is not always easy for them either. Of course, I can chill and have a good laugh (in fact it's essential) but my general need for friends and relationships has also changed. So I don't talk about what happened, so much as let people know about my website where I talk about it more.

It takes courage to wake up and smell the odour of your own stale coffee. Those that do this, don't become extraordinary, they actually reveal their own humanity, their ordinariness, their love of truth, they don't want to be special, because they know special is not possible, for how can one drop in the ocean be more special than the next? They have released attachment to their specialness. They are no longer scared of themselves or of their dark corners, and can speak their truth and fear is not dominating.

NDM: Is being in the now like Eckhart Tolle says mean that you are enlightened?

Reena Gagneja: I think perhaps yes if the being in the Now is sustained continuously. Such sustained awakening happens if it happens, but cannot just happen through will or spiritual seeking, not directly through that anyway.

NDM: Do you still get annoyed, experience anger, aversions, aspirations, ambitions, cravings and so on?

Reena Gagneja: Yes, less so, and if the void is prominent, then rarely.

The difference between getting annoyed today and getting annoyed before my awakening is that I don't have a problem with painful emotion anymore. I have some goals, ambitions, because we have to do something in life – in fact, I see it as responsibility - plus we have to eat, pay bills etc. And sometimes I can get attached to them, then at other times they seem so insignificant. Detachment is always there to some extent or other, depending on the void.

The point that is worth making here is that people think of emotion as a dirty word. But it is simply a part of our humanity. It should not be denied, but most people deny emotions and think they are wrong to feel strong feelings. This is the starting problem.

NDM: If you do, what are your ambitions, aspirations, dreams for the future?

Reena Gagneja: Internet businesses, counselling, soul plan readings, perhaps finish my part-written book and see it published, and possibly open some kind of either spiritual centre or an education place for orphaned or suffering kids in India. I see things getting worse in the world before they get better so one needs to take care of family etc and help each other.

NDM: How are you going to use this enlightenment. Do you have plans of becoming a sat-sang teacher at some point?

Reena Gagneja: No I do not see myself as that. Perhaps more active workshops and sessions, through deep enquiry and dialogue, to help people on their awakening journey. But for now, I am doing one-to-one sessions.

NDM; What are your thoughts on neo-advaita as opposed to traditional Vedanta?

Reena Gagneja: I do not know what the difference is – I don't think. I am not sure if I am qualified to make a judgment here.

NDM: Who are some of the non duality teachers that have inspired you?

Reena Gagneja: Jiddu Krishnamurti, Ramana Maharshi, Osho.

For more info visit

www.reenagagneja.com

www.soulalert.com