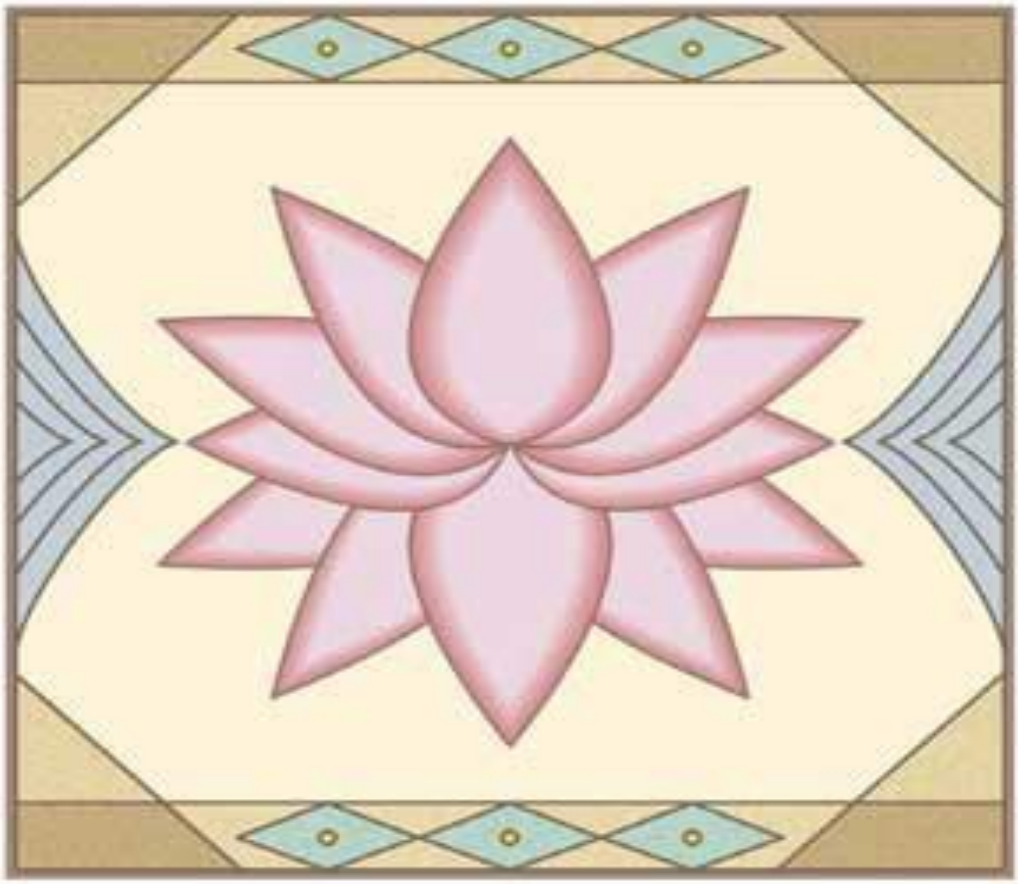

toward a psychology of awakening

Buddhism, Psychotherapy, and the Path of Personal and Spiritual Transformation

john welwood

useful; it can be an aid. But a therapist's knowledge and expertise can easily be experienced by clients as another form of rejection. The only way to promote healing is by reversing the condition of rejection that creates dis-ease in the first place.

Since the condition that has created our dis-ease is a fixed, partial view of our experience, we can't promote healing just by adopting a different view. It might be a better view, it might be a wonderful view, it might be the greatest view of reality in the world, but it will not be healing if it's just another set of beliefs and attitudes. It will be another frame that screens out some aspect of experience, another box we will eventually have to outgrow.

Instead of building bigger or fancier boxes, we need to develop the antidote to all our partial views of reality: *being present with our experience as it is*. This is *unconditional presence.* We could also call it *beginner's mind.* As Suzuki Roshi put it, "In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, in the expert's there are few." We have all become experts at being ourselves, and in so doing we have lost our ability to be present with our experience in a fresh,

open-minded way.

Although therapists often think of themselves as experts at knowing people, the truth is that there are no experts in the realm of human experience. That is because the nature of human experience is unbounded and open-ended—it doesn't come boxed to begin with. If you're an expert, your expertise is based on what you know; and what you know is a set of boxes, a collection of concepts, memories, beliefs, ideas about reality—not reality itself.

Beginner's mind, by contrast, is a willingness to meet whatever arises freshly, without holding to any fixed idea about what it means or how it should unfold. As a powerful state of openness that cuts through old prejudices and beliefs, it lets us see things freshly and find new directions. What could be simpler than this? And yet what could be more difficult?

If I ask you, "How do you feel right now? What's going on for you?" and you look inside yourself, the most honest first answer would probably be, "I don't know." If you know right away what's going on inside you, that's probably just a thought—your mind hopping onto a familiar island in the larger sea of the unknown. Let that go and just stay with the question.

Looking within, you may find no single thing to grasp onto, nothing that easily fits into a conceptual box. Indeed, the totality of our present experiencing is much larger and richer than anything we can know or say about it at any moment. To tap the healing power within us, we first have to let ourselves *not know,* so that we can make contact with the fresh, living texture of our experience, beyond all our familiar thoughts. Then when we express what we are feeling, our words will have real power.

The therapeutic dialogue, like any intimate encounter between two human beings, is full of mystery, surprise, and unpredictable turns. Therefore, great therapists are likely to be more interested in what they don't know about their clients than what they do know. When therapists operate primarily from knowledge, they are more

likely to be manipulative; when they operate from not-knowing, they are more likely to embody authentic presence. Letting themselves not know what to do next invites a deeper quality of stillness and attentiveness into the work.

In supervising therapists, I have found that they often have an inordinate fear of these moments of uncertainty. Therapeutic training rarely teaches people to remain open and alert in the face of the unknown. So when therapists don't know what to do or say next, they usually feel deficient. And they search around in their bag of tricks, or else quickly shift the client's attention to safer

and more familiar ground—thereby leaving the creative edge of the present moment far behind.

How then can we go about being present with our experience? Actually, the deeper, background presence of our being is happening all the time, although we usually don't recognize it. What we notice instead are the islands in the stream of consciousness—the islands in this case being our thoughts, the places where our busy mind lands from moment to moment. We only notice where our mind lands, not the spaces through which the mind moves like a bird in flight. We don't notice the gaps between our thoughts, even though they are happening all the time. If I talk very slowly, you . . . will . . . begin . . . to . . . notice . . . the . . . spaces . . . between . . . the . . . words.

What is happening in these gaps? Usually we don't notice them because we're too busy weaving together the strands of our thought into the familiar fabric of our ego identity. From ego's point of view, these gaps are scary; they represent absence of control. Yet these gaps are entry points into a still, nonconceptual awareness that is always there, self-existing. When we settle into this awareness, it becomes unconditional presence—just being with what is, open and interested, without agenda. So when we relate to our experience in a friendly, nonreactive, and allowing way, we open ourselves to the embrace of our larger, unconditioned nature. And it is here—as the spark of our basic sanity reveals itself, like a lotus rising out of the muck of neurosis and confusion—that the healing of our conditioned self takes place.

So we don't have to manufacture unconditional presence; in fact, we can't, because it is already there, like the sun, behind the clouds of our busy mind. This is the great discovery of the meditative traditions, going back thousands of years. Pure awareness is direct, unfabricated knowing, clear and fluid like water. Although we swim in this sea of pure awareness, our busy mind is constantly hopping from island to island, from thought to thought, jumping over and through this awareness, which is its ground, without ever coming to rest there. Meanwhile, our unconditioned awareness operates silently in the background, no matter what our busy mind is doing. Everyone has access to this. It is our most intimate reality, so close that it is often hard to see.

Of course, whenever we open into a larger presence, our conditioned personality often tries to flee from that experience, or else grasp it and put it in a familiar box. For example, though we may open in a wonderful new way with someone we love, this may also be scary, so we quickly do something to shut the energy down. One moment we may be there freshly with a piece of

music and the next moment we're distracted. Or we try to recapture that moment—which is another way of shutting presence down. Instead of trying not to shut down, all we can do is to see how we do this, again and again, and notice how it affects us. The key to waking up from our distraction is to bring awareness to our lack of awareness, and be present with our lack of presence.

Therapists often inadvertently close down their clients' experience by putting it in familiar interpretive boxes as well. When a client starts to open into the larger space of being, if the therapist cannot allow this opening to take its own course, or interprets it in some conventional way, the client may quickly fall right back into his or her old, familiar identity. At other times a client may open up a feeling that the therapist has some resistance to experiencing. Here is where therapists must also be willing to hang out with their own raw edges, or else when their clients activate these touchy areas, they will pull back, offer a quick fix, or try to steer the client in some other direction.

The most powerful healers or teachers are those who can model authentic presence and bring it into their work. Inviting and allowing another person to have his or her experience just as it is—this is perhaps the greatest gift anyone can offer. Yet though open presence is natural and spontaneous, the capacity to recognize and sustain it in the midst of the mind's distractions requires training and practice. Unfortunately, professional psychology training consists mostly of transmitting knowledge and information. The most important thing—the ability to bring a quality of unbiased presence to experience just as it is—is hardly even mentioned.

That is why meditation is such a useful training for therapists and healers. It teaches us to be there with our experience as it is and become more comfortable with the gaps where our identity doesn't exist. We discover that letting go of our familiar identity will not kill us. We find that pain and fear become solid and overwhelming only when we contract against them. We see that no states of mind have any finality; they become fixed only when we make up stories about what they mean. We learn to trust in the unknown as a guide to what is most fresh and alive in the moment. With this trust, therapists can begin to let go of their knowledge and let what is needed to help others emerge spontaneously from the fresh edge of the moment.

Unconditional presence promotes healing by allowing us to *see* the ways in which we are contracted and *feel* their impact on our body and on our relations with the world. It is not enough just to see, not enough just to feel. We must both see *and* feel. Of course, it may take months or years to clearly see, feel, and penetrate with awareness a pattern in which we are stuck. As the pattern becomes less solid and more transparent, gaps open up in it, and these gaps become doorways that let us tap deeper resources that pattern has been blocking.

For example, when we have shut fear out of awareness, it remains frozen deep within the body, manifesting as background anxiety, tension, worry, insecurity. When we finally bring full attention to the fear, feeling and opening to it, our larger being

makes contact with the fear, perhaps for the first time. As this happens the fear starts to loosen; it cannot remain so tightly contracted in the embrace of our full, caring presence. As the fear loosens, we may also gain access to our compassion, the antidote that could allow our fear to relax even further. Of course, for deeper, older patterns that have been with us since childhood, we may have to meet them like this many times before they fully relax or transform.

When children are in pain, what they most want is this kind of presence, rather than Band-Aids or consolations. They want to know we are really there with them in what they are going through. That's what our wounded places most need from us as well—just to be there with them. They don't need us to say, "Things are getting better every day." The full presence of our being is healing in and of itself.

Trying to fix a problem without being fully present with it would be like trying to use drugs to create a state of health. Although drugs may relieve symptoms, relieving symptoms does not produce health. What keeps the organism healthy are the immune system and the vital resources of the body. If these are not activated, no amount of symptom relief will ever keep us healthy. Thus, certain therapeutic technologies may relieve symptoms without ever promoting real healing.

Seeking a "fix" cannot lead to genuine healing because it keeps us in the same mind-set—wanting our experience to be other than it is—that created our dis-ease in the first place. Our natural healing resources become mobilized only when we see and feel the truth—the untold suffering we cause ourselves and others by rejecting our experience, thus shutting down our capacity to be fully present. When we recognize this, our dis-ease starts to become conscious suffering. As our suffering becomes more conscious, it starts to awaken our desire and will to live in a new way.

Genuine Compassion

In opening to our experience of life as it is, we often find that it does not meet our expectations of what it should be. Perhaps we don't fit the picture in our mind of who we should be. Perhaps those we love don't measure up to our ideals. Or we find the state of the world disheartening, even shocking. Reality is continually breaking open our heart by not living up to how we would like it to be.

If we can also open to our "broken-open heart," it has a bittersweet quality. Reality never quite fits our fond hopes—that is the bitter taste. The sweetness is that when reality breaks our heart open, we discover a sweet, raw tenderness toward ourselves and the fragile beauty of life as a whole.

This is the beginning of feeling real compassion toward ourselves and others—for the difficulties we are facing in our lives. A friend who was dying of cancer tried every possible treatment she could find. Nothing worked. At first she blamed herself, but she finally realized that the greatest healing was not in curing the cancer but in coming to terms with it. We all need to heal our separation from reality and our struggle with it. The whole world is in need of that.

So the greatest difficulties we face also offer the greatest opportunities to practice unconditional presence. What is especially helpful in this practice is recognizing again and again that our experience is not as solid as we think. Indeed, nothing is what we think it to be. Meditation helps us recognize this by letting us notice and relate to the gaps or open spaces in our experience, from which genuine clarity and wisdom arise.

If we take this approach, our old wounds from the past can reveal hidden treasure. In the places where we have contracted and turned away from our experience we can begin to uncover genuine qualities of our being that have long been veiled. In the most painful corners of our experience something alive is always waiting to emerge. So whatever pain or problem we have, if it helps us find a quality of presence—where we can open to it, see it, feel it, include it, and find the truth concealed in it—*that* is our healing.

10

Vulnerability, Power, and the Healing Relationship

THERE IS A CENTRAL HUMAN EXPERIENCE that will shake us to the roots and that each of us must eventually face. Nobody likes to acknowledge or talk much about it. So we usually try to ignore it, wrapping ourselves in habitual routines to avoid having to face it. Since there is no ready-made term for this experience, I will call it *the moment of world collapse*. This experience of the ground falling out from under us is at the core of both the existential and the Buddhist traditions. For existentialism, it is a source of existential anxiety, while for Buddhism, it is the beginning of a path that leads toward enlightenment, awakening, or liberation.

World collapse occurs when the props that have supported our life give way unexpectedly. Suddenly the meaning our life previously had seems to lack weight and substance and no longer nourishes us as it once did. Before, we may have been motivated by dreams of success, achievement, wealth, or simply by a desire to be loved or to provide for our family. Now, suddenly, we wonder why we're doing all of this and what it's all about. We may cast about in vain for some absolute, unwavering reason for it all, some unshakable ground, yet all we are left with is the arbitrariness of it all and our hopeless attempts to grasp onto something solid and secure.

At the same time we feel raw and shaky when our old structures fall away and we don't have anything to replace them with. Yet the tenderness and nakedness we discover here are essential qualities of being human—which we usually try to cover up and hide. When the props of our identity start to crumble, what we encounter is our *basic vulnerability*. The kind of vulnerability that accompanies moments of world collapse is one I have also come to know quite intimately through extended meditation practice. It is clear to me, as an existentially trained psychotherapist who has also practiced meditation for many years, that we cannot fully appreciate either therapy or meditation, or how they help us access deeper qualities of our nature, without taking account of the central importance of world collapse and basic

vulnerability.

Existential Heroism

In the existential tradition, the feeling that accompanies moments of world collapse is called *existential anxiety* or, in Kierkegaard's words, *dread* (*angst*). Existentialists regard this kind of anxiety as ontological, that is, as a response to potential *loss of being.* When we perceive the basic groundlessness of all our finite projects, our whole sense of who we are is put in question. This kind of anxiety emerges from, and is intimately connected with, the very nature of human existence. Meaning, purpose, support, direction, stability, coherence—none of these are givens on which we can securely rely. Since our mind creates them, we can just as easily see through them, or suddenly find ourselves unable to depend on them. The dread of facing death is perhaps the most dramatic instance of this loss of familiar supports and reference points.

Existential psychology makes a distinction between this kind of ontological anxiety and ordinary neurotic anxiety—about threats to our self-esteem, pleasure, or security. Ordinary anxiety is often a smoke screen that allows us to distract ourselves from the scary groundlessness that underlies our life. Worrying about what people think of us or about whether we are getting ahead, for instance, keeps us from having to face the deeper existential dread of our whole ground falling out from under us. We often seem to be in love with our neurosis because at least it occupies us and gives us something to hold on to. It gives us a sense of self—unlike those moments of world collapse, when there seems to be nothing there at all.

In the existential tradition, Sartre's notion of nausea, Camus's investigation of suicide, Kierkegaard's alienation from conventional rational, philosophical, and religious structures, and Nietzsche's attempt to create new values based on life rather than fear all grew out of a keen perception that the old structures of meaning that formerly guided and supported people's lives no longer held up. There was no longer a clear, absolute ground for human life; in Nietzsche's words, "God is dead." Existentialism developed out of this loss of an absolute, unshakable ground that justified people's lives. It sought a way to *create* meaning out of a person's own individual existence. The only authentic source of meaning was your own individual conviction, action, and choice.

Human life thus took on a heroic dimension for the existentialists, who tried

to find and create their own meaning in a meaningless world. One archetype of this heroic effort was the myth of Sisyphus, as Camus wrote about it. Although the rock keeps rolling back down the hill, Sisyphus keeps rolling it up again, finding heroic meaning in his own will and determination.

From this perspective, existential anxiety is a given; there is no way to finally overcome the sense of groundlessness and dread. For there can never be a guarantee that the personal meanings you create for yourself are going to hold up for very long, especially in the everimpending face of death. What's meaningful today is not necessarily meaningful tomorrow, and what has been meaningful throughout your whole life may not do much for you at the moment when you're dying. You may cast a look backward at the moment of death and wonder, "What have I done with my life that really matters?" Since self- created meaning cannot provide any absolute ground, *angst* is inescapable.

Before exploring the role that world collapse and basic vulnerability play in psychological healing, I would like to describe the transition I went through in shifting from the existential perspective—the heroic attempt to create my own meaning—to a more Buddhist-inspired contemplative outlook. During the early 1960s I went to live and study in Paris—when I was in my early twenties, at a time when I was extremely influenced by the existentialists. That was the place to soak up the existential flavor of the time. The existentialists were my personal heroes because the world I had grown up in didn't make much sense to me, and these were people who were at least trying to establish a new sense of meaning for themselves and the world. So I'd sit in the cafés that Sartre frequented, and I'd walk along the streets that Rilke wrote about. Even the stones, the streets, and the walls in Paris exuded a certain existential aura. I would walk along the bridges over the Seine that I imagined Camus had thought about throwing himself off. It was wonderfully romantic and painful at the same time. Yet I was in despair because I didn't find it really satisfying just to acknowledge the absurdity of the world and heroically struggle on from there.

Fortunately, just when I was starting to feel that I had rolled the rock up the hill a few too many times, I came across the teachings of Zen, which showed me a way out of the existential impasse. The real problem wasn't that human existence was absurd or that there wasn't any absolute basis for a meaningful life. The basic problem lay instead in the nature of the self we create, who we think we are. I realized, in other words, that life was not the problem, but rather that "I" was the problem. This realization made sense of things in a

whole new way for me. Anxiety, meaninglessness, and despair did not have to be denied but could become stepping-stones to something deeper.

Emptiness and the Fabricated Self

Existentialism tries to fill the void that opens up in moments of world collapse through the heroic attempt to forge one's own authentic response to reality. By contrast, Buddhism does not try to fill this emptiness at all, but rather provides a way to enter into it more deeply. When I read the playful stories about the Zen masters, it seemed that they had found a way to actually enjoy and even celebrate this emptiness. This led to a radical shift in my perspective. I could see the despair of world collapse, in the Buddhist context, as one moment in a larger journey of transformation, rather than as a final or ultimate condition.

Like existentialism, Buddhism developed as a response to the experience of world collapse. The Buddha himself, as an Indian prince, was born into a world of coherent social traditions and meanings. His life had been preprogrammed for him by his father and his social caste. Although he was supposed to inherit his father's kingdom, he found his life permanently altered by four moments of world collapse—when he saw an old person, a sick person, a dying person, and a wandering holy man. The shock of these encounters, which undermined the meaning that had supported his life until then, started him on his own personal quest to find out what really mattered. After trying the various ascetic practices of his day, he finally decided to sit still in meditation until he got to the bottom of things. One of his major discoveries was the central fact I'd like to emphasize here: the illusory nature of the conventional self. He saw that all his ideas about himself had no ground, no substance, no solidity, no continuity. In fact, they only prevented him from having a direct, immediate experience of himself and life.

As Western psychology also shows, the conventional self is not something given in the nature of things, but is, rather, a construct. We fabricate our notion of who we are out of "self-representations"—images of ourselves internalized from our early interactions with our parents and social environment. Our consciousness comes to identify itself with various objects of consciousness— ideas about ourselves and the world, the work we do, the things we own, our personal history, dramas, and achievements, the intimate relationships we hold most dear. We hold on to all these things because they are supports for our identity, because they make us feel that we exist, that we are real.

The word *identity* comes from a Latin word that means "the same." Maintaining an identity literally means that we are trying to establish some kind of sameness from day to day. Our identity is what holds us together, and we use it to avoid the frightening experience of our world collapsing. Yet identification is a form of false consciousness. Our fabricated identity can never be real, because it is based on identifying with things that are extrinsic to us. Therefore, it can never provide true satisfaction or security.

Why do we need to identify so tightly with things that are not who we are— beliefs, images, possessions, behaviors, social status? Here is where the Buddha inquired more deeply than the existentialists. Through his meditation experience, he discovered the nature of consciousness to be a radical openness, wide open to the whole of reality.

Of course, Sartre also described consciousness as a no-thingness. Yet in his view the human being is destined to feel this as a lack, in comparison with the apparently solid rockness of a rock or treeness of a tree (what he called the *en- soi,* the in-itselfness of things). The tree is clearly just what it is. But what is a human being? My father is who he is, a tree is what it is, yet who am I by comparison? We would like to possess the same kind of solidity that we tend to perceive in the Other. "They seem to have no trouble being what they are, so why is it so hard for me to be what I am?"

Yet in envying the apparently solid realness of Other, we fail to appreciate how our awareness is a kind of illuminating presence that allows things to stand out and be revealed as what they are—in their suchness. We regard our spaciousness and nonsolidity as a deficiency, something that should be filled up or nailed down. Yet the very fact that we can take things into us and let them affect us, or see Other as solid at all, means that we ourselves are not solid, but rather empty like a mirror, open like space.

Here is where meditation practice can be extremely helpful—in helping us appreciate our nonsolidity as a powerful clarity and presence, rather than a terrifying deficiency. Meditation allows you to observe the mind in its attempts to grasp onto the stream of passing thoughts, feelings, and perceptions, or identify with them, yet never getting anywhere with this. You keep trying to come to some conclusion about things, but every position the mind takes is succeeded by a different one a few moments later. You find that you can't hold on to anything. This provides a direct experience of the lack of solidity of the self.

Yet this need not lead to existential dread. When you first learn to meditate,

you find yourself constantly trying to do something with your thoughts— identify with them or disidentify with them, fight them or make love to them, own them or disown them. But as you continue to meditate, you find it's impossible to maintain this grasping and rejecting one hundred percent of the time. You discover moments of space between each mental fixation, where something different, something unknown is happening, which is not grasping. Gradually you find you can relax a little into these gaps. As you keep sitting, relaxing into these open spaces, you discover the larger ground of awareness and peace in which grasping takes place—what we could call the *open ground* of our being. This discovery points toward a liberation that lies far beyond the existential freedom to make meaningful choices. It is the beginning of a path beyond existential despair.

Many of us recognize that life is a continual process of moving forward, and that it's impossible to move gracefully through life unless we can let go of where we have already been. Though we may know this rationally, it is still hard it to let go, and still painful when old structures collapse on their own, without consulting us first. The crumbling of our own identity right before our eyes is especially painful. Yet since life is continual flux, this means that we must be prepared to go through a series of identity crises. Especially in this era of advanced future shock, when the meanings holding people's lives together erode ever more rapidly, identity crises inevitably escalate at an ever- increasing rate.

Meditation is a way of learning to accept and welcome this, by letting go and falling apart gracefully. As we sit, we can see that most of our thoughts are about ourselves; in fact, they are our way of trying to keep ourselves together from moment to moment. When we no longer reinforce these thoughts, the self we've been trying to hold together in a nice, neat package begins unraveling right before our eyes. As soon as we stop trying to glue it together, it quickly comes unglued. This allows us to see how we are constructing and maintaining it, and how that causes endless tension and stress.

The nonexistence of a solid, continuous self-identity is not an idea unique to Buddhism. We find it in the Western tradition as well, though it develops out of philosophical analysis rather than meditative practice. David Hume, for instance, observed that we can only observe various objects of consciousness, never a separate subject: "For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other. I never catch *myself*."[a] William James found that the continuous self was a belief

constructed out of the endless sequence of thoughts overlapping each other and, in the process, passing along an illusion of ownership (see the James quotation in chapter 3). This trick that each thought plays—immediately taking up the baton passed on by the preceding expiring thought and handing it on to the subsequent arising thought—creates the illusion of a central thinker lying above or behind the mindstream. Sartre also wrote about the illusoriness of the managerial ego: "Everything happens as if consciousness were hypnotized by this ego which it has established, which it has constructed, becoming absorbed in it as if to make the ego its guardian and law."[b]

Meditation and the Path beyond Dread

Yet we might well wonder, "So what if our identity is an arbitrary construction—how does that help relieve anxiety and suffering?" Having discovered the insubstantiality of the ego identity, we still need a path that can help us discover what is on the other side of our conventional, limited notions of self. Otherwise, we could easily fall into nihilistic despair.

Similarly, in psychotherapy it is not enough just to help people deconstruct their old false self. It is also crucial to help them see what lies beyond it. As a meditator, I'm keenly aware of the beauty of the first moment when a client comes to realize, "I don't know who I am." I consider these moments sacred, because they potentially mark the birth of a whole new way of being. The realization "I don't know who I am" emerges at a point in therapy when the old structures have started to collapse and fall away under the weight of greater consciousness, yet before some new direction has emerged. This leaves the client in an in-between zone, which is the threshold of new birth.

If we can stay present and not recoil from the emptiness we encounter when our familiar sense of self breaks down, we eventually discover not just a meaningless void but a fresher quality of presence that feels awake, alive, and liberating. But because conventional therapists are often unfamiliar with the path that leads through emptiness, they often try to steer their clients away from such moments, or else smooth them over. There is little in Western culture or Western psychology to prepare people for dealing with moments of identity loss. Because most Western therapies are based on theories of *personality*, they are geared toward knowing, rather than not-knowing. An unspoken assumption in the therapeutic world is that we should always know who we are, and if we don't, that's a real problem.

So when an old maladaptive identity starts to break down and the client finds nothing to hold on to, this may be frightening for client and therapist alike. What do I as a therapist do at that point? Should I try to shore up the old structure or patch together a new one? Or is it all right to let the client dangle in space on the edge of the abyss? At times like this I rely on my own realization that none of us really knows who we are, that this is the nature of our being, that if we have a true self at all, it somehow lies in the heart of the unknowingness that opens up when we inquire deeply into our experience, and that if we can hang out on the edge of this unknown, we may discover how to let ourselves be, without having to be some*thing*.

In providing me with that realization, meditation has also furnished a context for working with these moments in therapy. I once had a powerful experience of world collapse during a three-month meditation retreat with my teacher. About six weeks into it, I found the patterns and meanings holding me together radically falling away, at a level of intensity that reminded me of my old existential days, magnified a few extra degrees. I realized that I didn't really believe in the self I was holding on to for dear life, even though it was a better self than I'd ever had before. And yet, if I let go of myself, what then? I knew I would fall, and I didn't know where I would land.

It was extremely helpful to work with that fear in an environment of meditation. I found that I *could* let my self fall apart. The atmosphere of the practice environment encouraged that in a friendly sort of way—other people were also practicing, and the whole purpose of being there was to let your world collapse, to keep going, and to let something new and unexpected happen. I don't want to say it was "meaningful" because I didn't necessarily find some new meaning there, something that I could hold on to and use as the basis for constructing a new and improved self-structure. And yet neither did I fall back into a sense of utter meaninglessness or existential despair.

Letting go of the need to be some*thing*, giving up the struggle to hold on to the old meanings that support our identity, if only briefly, allows a clearing to open in the mind. And this in turn reveals a basic intelligence and well-being, known as *buddha-nature* in the Buddhist tradition—an essential clarity, transparency, and warmth intrinsic to human consciousness. This is not the neutral or scary emptiness that existentialism addresses, but a fullness of presence whose brightness and sharpness cuts through confusion, rationalization, projection, self-deception, and all the other tricks we play on ourselves.

Therapists often try to help their clients move away from the utter vulnerability of not having anything to identify with and not knowing who they are. But this vulnerability is an important stepping-stone that can lead to a deeper recognition of what it means to be human.

As humans, we are the animals that stand erect with a soft front, fully exposing our heart and belly to the world. We take the world into us through this soft front. To have sensitive skin means that it can be easily pierced. This literal vulnerability is reflected in our psychological makeup as a basic tenderness and receptivity that often feels raw and shaky when we first encounter it. In touching this vulnerability, clients start to connect with their own living heart, which can shift the whole way they relate to their problems. In my work, I usually don't have to try to make someone feel their vulnerability; it usually comes up on its own.

It's interesting that the word *vulnerability* usually has a pejorative meaning in our culture. That's because we associate it with loss of power and strength. If we say that someone is vulnerable, this usually means he is weak, overly sensitive, and easily hurt. But it's important to distinguish our basic human vulnerability from the fragility of the ego identity, that brittle shell we construct around our soft receptive core where the world flows into us. Feeling essentially tender at heart, we usually hide our vulnerability behind a facade or mask that puts distance between us and the world. But the shell we construct is fragile and always susceptible to being punctured, if not demolished (in moments of world collapse). Other people can usually see through our facades, and death or some other vicissitude will eventually break through this shell. Continually having to maintain and patch up our shell leaves us fragile and defensive—and *this* is the vulnerability that we usually associate in our culture with weakness. In fact, that kind of brittleness *is* weak; continually having to be on guard is a position of weakness.

Power and Vulnerability

Learning to accept and relate to our vulnerability, by contrast, is a source of real inner power and strength. Fake power of the macho kind—which is really a form of control, tightness, and tension—has no real strength in it. As an attempt to have power *over*, it is topheavy and thus forever in danger of being toppled. Trying to maintain control in this way keeps us highly vulnerable in the fragile ego sense. Since life constantly challenges our attempts to control it,

the amount of energy we put into guarding and defending only drains our strength away.

The power that comes from relaxing into the open ground of being and making friends with the rawness and vulnerability we find there is more grounded and real. This kind of strength is powerful in the way that water is. Water is the softest element, in that anything can penetrate it; it shapes itself to any mold and follows any contour. And yet, as the *Tao Teh Ching* points out, nothing surpasses it for wearing down what is hard and tough. The way that leads from basic vulnerability to genuine power lies through gentleness and loving-kindness, which help soothe the panic that surrounds our vulnerability. Indeed, kindness and gentleness are our most natural response to vulnerability

—as when we see a young child, an animal, or a close friend in pain. Not so, usually, with ourselves, strangely enough. Somehow we have to *learn* to be kind to ourselves.

I would like to illustrate this through a case example. A client in his mid- thirties, call him Ray, came to see me with the presenting problems of exhibitionism and alcoholism, as well as a fear that he was homosexual because of problems relating to women. His mother had abandoned him at age six, and he'd been adopted by an uncle. The uncle was a macho type who was not able to be kind or tender with him. Nonetheless, he came to identify strongly with the uncle.

I've chosen this client to discuss because all his symptoms kept pointing back to the issue of vulnerability in one way or another. His exhibitionism was one of those strangely appropriate symptoms that are perfectly symbolic. It was his way of exposing his vulnerability while not having to give up control. His fear of being homosexual was connected with fear of his tenderness. His alcoholism—getting drunk and busting loose—was a way in which his aliveness was trying to break free from his overcontrolling ego. And his coldness toward women grew out of a fear of being at their mercy, being in a vulnerable position again.

Ray's way of feeling strong and manly was to be on edge all the time. Those were his words—"I'm always on edge." One way he conveyed this was through an image of driving a car on the freeway stuck behind people who were driving too slowly. This portrayed his frustration with how he was driving himself. Yet keeping himself on edge was also a way of trying to keep himself together, stay in control, and feel like a man.

What I did with Ray was to hang out with him in the raw places that came up

for him as we worked together. I never introduced the word *vulnerability*— that came from him. But this side of him clearly wanted to be recognized and included in his life. It was important for him to discover that vulnerable didn't have to mean victimized. One day he said, "It's okay to be hurt. That doesn't mean that I'm bad or unlovable." And he began to see how he created anger and struggle with women in order to feel strong rather than tender.

Another image that Ray had of being on edge was hanging on to the side of a cliff. We often came back to that sense of holding on to a cliff's edge, and what that was like for him. A third image was of being out on a limb—how he felt when he was in love. If his love wasn't fully reciprocated, or if his lover left him, he was afraid he would fall into an abyss and be swallowed up by dreaded feelings of terror and emptiness. Once when he felt out on a limb, I asked him to shift his attention to the feeling of "nothing there if she leaves me." Staying present with the emptiness, without judging it, reacting against it, or drawing conclusions about himself from it, he experienced an inner warmth, which was all red and yellow, arising in that void. This experience helped undermine the equation in his mind between vulnerability and being a victim.

Ray was in a classic macho bind—he could feel strong only by maintaining tight control, which kept him forever on edge. Yet an occasional helpless look in his eyes, his longing to be spontaneous (which he acted out through getting drunk and busting loose), as well as his willingness to keep coming and working on his problems, revealed a deep tenderness that was trying to find expression. What he needed, without realizing it, was to have his vulnerability held—something that had never happened before in his life. I don't mean that he needed to be literally held, but rather that he needed to have his vulnerability seen, recognized, and accepted, that is, *held in awareness.* After all, our larger awareness is the ultimate holding environment that can allow us to embrace all our different feelings and experiences, so that they no longer have to terrorize or overwhelm us.

What I most remember from the time Ray and I spent together is that sense of being there together, hanging out on the edge of that cliff—exploring what it was like to hold on for dear life, what it was like to let go and fall into the void, and what it was like to have his feelings held in a friendly, open space of awareness and compassion. Through this work, Ray came to realize that vulnerability did not have to mean annihilation, disgrace, humiliation, dishonor, or abandonment. He discovered to his great surprise that it was possible to be gentle and strong at the same time. Eventually he was able to

overcome his alcoholic binges and enter a marriage partnership, although his marriage also opened up further levels of vulnerability for him to face.

Of course someone could object: "Maybe it's all right for people with intact egos to open up their vulnerability, but what about people who can't hold themselves together in the first place because their world is always collapsing?" I would work with clients with a weak ego structure differently from those who have an intact set of defenses. If they are continually falling apart, then my first concern is to help them develop firmer inner support, self- confidence, and self-respect. If the conventional ego is ultimately a fiction in *absolute* terms, it still has *relative* usefulness, especially for those whose sense of self is weak or damaged. Once there is some sense of support and confidence, then it becomes more possible to open to the feelings of vulnerability that go along with being open. Establishing this kind of inner trust and friendliness is especially important with highly disturbed clients, so that their vulnerability is not a constant source of panic.

The more therapists distrust their own vulnerability, the more likely they are to worry, "What will happen if I let clients face their existential void? They might go over the edge!" In fact, Ray had "gone over the edge" earlier in his life. Once when he had been high on drugs, he felt his whole world fall apart and checked into a mental hospital for several weeks. That reinforced his feeling of "I can't go near that scary place again. It's off limits." But directly experiencing our fear or vulnerability is not what causes this kind of "freak- out." The real problem is how we react to those feelings and freeze into panic about them. This is like hitting an icy patch on the road and then slamming on the brakes, causing the car to go out of control. What is important is how people relate to their vulnerability and fear. And this is where meditation can be of particular value, especially for therapists. If therapists can learn to work directly with their own vulnerability and loss of identity, they are less likely to steer their clients away from their raw edges, out of their own anxiety.

Meditation teaches us to be spacious, kind, and gentle through letting our world collapse and discovering that this does not kill us but makes us stronger. Through facing our raw edges, we can become more compassionate with others and can better help them to accept their vulnerability as well. In the Buddhist perspective, our basic vulnerability is the seed of enlightenment already present within us. It is said that when we let this tender heart fully ripen and develop, it becomes a powerful force that can cut through all the inner barriers we have constructed. In its fully developed form tender heart

becomes transformed into awakened heart, *bodhichitta.*

The mutual vulnerability between two people who meet each other transparently—client and therapist, lover and beloved, guru and disciple—is that allows them to affect each other deeply. If we look at the god and goddess of love in Greek mythology, we see Aphrodite associated with instruments of war and Eros armed with arrows. This suggests that we can only truly love if we are willing to let ourselves be

wounded. In this sense, vulnerability means “able to connect.” As we will explore further in part 3, this capacity to be vulnerable—to the raw edges in our own experience—is what allows us to truly connect with ourselves, with others, and with life itself.

11

Psychotherapy as a Practice of Love

Genuine psychotherapeutic eros must be a selflessness and reverence before the patient's existence and uniqueness.

—MEDARD BOSS

FREUD ONCE ADMITTED in a letter to Jung that "psychoanalysis is essentially a cure through love." Yet while many psychotherapists might privately agree that love has some kind of role in the healing process, the word *love* is curiously absent from most of the therapeutic literature. The same is true for the word *heart.* Not only is this term missing from the psychological literature, but the tone of the literature itself also lacks heart.

My interest in the place of heart in psychotherapy developed out of my experience with meditation. Although Western thought often defines mind in terms of reason and heart in terms of feeling, in Buddhism *heart* and *mind* can both be referred to by the same term (*chitta* in Sanskrit). Indeed, when Tibetan Buddhists refer to mind, they often point to their chest. Mind in this sense is not thinking mind but rather big mind—a direct knowing of reality that is basically open and friendly toward what is. Centuries of meditators have found this openness to be the central feature of human consciousness.

Heart and Basic Goodness

Heart, then, is a direct presence that allows a complete attunement with reality. In this sense, it has nothing to do with sentimentality. Heart is the capacity to touch and be touched, to reach out and let in. Our language expresses this twofold activity of the heart, which is like a swinging door that opens in both directions. We say, "My heart went out to him," or "I took her into my heart." Like the physical organ with its systole and diastole, the heart-mind involves both receptive letting in, or letting be, and active going out to meet, or beingwith. In their different ways, both psychological and spiritual work

remove the barriers to these two movements of the heart, like oiling the door so that it can open freely in both directions.

What shuts down the heart more than anything is not letting ourselves have our own experience, but instead judging it, criticizing it, or trying to make it different from what it is. We often imagine there is something wrong with us if we feel angry, needy, dependent, lonely, confused, sad, or scared. We place conditions on ourselves and our experience: "If I feel like this, there must be something wrong with me. . . . I can only accept myself if my experience conforms to my standard of how I should be."

Psychological work, when practiced in a larger spiritual context, can help people discover that it is possible to be unconditional with themselves—to welcome their experience and hold it with understanding and compassion, whether or not they like it at any given moment. What initially makes this possible is the therapist's capacity to show unconditional warmth, concern, and friendliness toward the client's experience, no matter what the client is going through. Most people in our culture did not receive this kind of unconditional acceptance in their childhood. So they internalized the conditions their parents or society placed on them: "You are an acceptable human being only if you measure up to our standards." And because they continue to place these same conditions on themselves, they remain alienated from themselves.

The Dalai Lama and many other Tibetan teachers have spoken of their great surprise and shock at discovering just how much self-hatred Westerners carry around inside them. Such an intense degree of self-blame is not found in traditional Buddhist cultures, where there is an understanding that the heart- mind, also known as buddha-nature, is unconditionally open, compassionate, and wholesome. Since we are all embryonic buddhas, why would anyone want to hate themselves?

Chögyam Trungpa described the essence of our nature in terms of *basic goodness.* In using this term, he did not mean that people are only morally good —which would be naive, considering all the evil that humans perpetrate in this world. Rather, basic goodness refers to our primordial nature, which is unconditionally wholesome because it is intrinsically attuned to reality. This primordial kind of goodness goes beyond conventional notions of good and bad. It lies much deeper than conditioned personality and behavior, which are always a mix of positive and negative tendencies. From this perspective, all the evil and destructive behavior that goes on in our world is the result of

people failing to recognize the fundamental wholesomeness of their essential nature.

Meditation, Psychotherapy, and Unconditional Friendliness

While studying Rogerian therapy in graduate school, I used to be intrigued, intimidated, and puzzled by Carl Rogers's term "unconditional positive regard." Although it sounded appealing as an ideal therapeutic stance, I found it hard to put into practice. First of all, there was no specific training for it. And since Western psychology had not provided me any understanding of heart, or the intrinsic goodness underlying psychopathology, I was unclear just where unconditional positive regard should be directed. It was only in turning to the meditative traditions that I came to appreciate the unconditional goodness at the core of being human, and this in turn helped me understand the possibility of unconditional love and its role in the healing process.

The Buddhist counterpart of unconditional positive regard is loving- kindness (*maitri* in Sanskrit, *metta* in Pali). Loving-kindness is unconditional friendliness—a quality of allowing and welcoming human beings and their experience. Yet before I could genuinely express this kind of acceptance toward others, I first had to discover what it meant for myself. Meditation is what allowed me to do this.

Meditation cultivates unconditional friendliness through teaching you how to *just be*, without doing anything, without holding on to anything, without trying to think good thoughts, get rid of bad thoughts, or achieve a pure state of mind. This is a radical practice. There is nothing else like it. Normally we do everything we can to avoid just being. When left alone with ourselves, without a project to occupy us, we become nervous. We start judging ourselves or thinking about what we *should* be doing or feeling. We start putting conditions on ourselves, trying to arrange our experience so that it measures up to our inner standards. Since this inner struggle is so painful, we are always looking for something to distract us from being with ourselves.

In meditation practice, you work directly with your confused mind-states, without waging crusades against any aspect of your experience. You let all your tendencies arise, without trying to screen anything out, manipulate experience in any way, or measure up to any ideal standard. Allowing yourself the space to be as you are—letting whatever arises arise, without fixation on it, and coming back to simple presence—this is perhaps the most loving and

compassionate way you can treat yourself. It helps you make friends with the whole range of your experience.[a]

As you simplify in this way, you start to feel your very presence as wholesome in and of itself. You don't have to prove that you are good. You discover a self-existing sanity that lies deeper than all thought or feeling. You appreciate the beauty of just being awake, responsive, and open to life. Appreciating this basic, underlying sense of goodness is the birth of *maitri*—unconditional friendliness toward yourself.

The discovery of basic goodness can be likened to clarifying muddy water—an ancient metaphor from the Taoist and Buddhist traditions. Water is naturally pure and clear, though its turbulence may stir up mud from below. Our awareness is like that, essentially clear and open, but muddied with the turbulence of conflicting thoughts and emotions. If we want to clarify the water, what else is there to do but let the water sit? Usually we want to put our hands in the water and do something with the dirt—struggle with it, try to change it, fix it, sanitize it—but this only stirs up more mud. "Maybe I can get rid of my sadness by thinking positive thoughts." But then the sadness sinks deeper and hardens into depression. "Maybe I'll get my anger out, show people how I feel." But this only spreads the dirt around. The water of awareness regains its clarity through seeing the muddiness for what it is—recognizing the turbulence of thought and feeling as noise or static, rather than as who we really are. When we stop reacting to it, which only stirs it up all the more, the mud can settle.

This core discovery enabled me to extend this same kind of unconditional friendliness toward my clients. When I first started practicing therapy and found myself disliking certain clients or certain things about them, I felt guilty or hypocritical. But eventually I came to understand this differently. Unconditional love or loving-kindness did not mean that I always had to like my clients, any more than I liked all the twists and turns of my own scheming mind. Rather, it meant providing an accommodating space in which their knots could begin to unwind.

Part of what had been confusing for me was that I identified unconditional positive regard with Carl Rogers's personality and nondirective way of responding to people. I finally realized that unconditional friendliness did not mean always having to be nurturing, nondirective, or nice. In truth, I often don't like to be nice. Sometimes I want to confront clients in a more challenging way. When I got out from under my client-centered superego, which whispered

in my ear that I should be like Carl Rogers and always have positive feelings toward my clients, I was actually able to be more fully present with them. The more I could let myself *be,* the more I could be with others and let *them* be *themselves*.

It was a great relief to realize that I did not have to love or accept unconditionally that which is conditioned—another's personality. Rather, unconditional friendliness is a natural response to that which is itself unconditional—the basic goodness and open heart in others, beneath all their defenses, rationalizations, and pretenses. Unconditional love is not a sentiment but a willingness to be open. It is not a love of personality but the love of being, grounded in the recognition of the unconditional goodness of the human heart.

Fortunately, unconditional friendliness does not mean having to like what is going on. Instead, it means allowing whatever is there to be there, and inviting it to reveal itself more fully. In trying to help clients develop unconditional friendliness toward a difficult feeling, I often say, "You don't have to like it. You can just let it be there, and make a place for your dislike of it as well."

The metaphor of letting the dirt settle out of the water also applies to therapeutic work. At its best, therapy does not involve analyzing problems or coming up with solutions. When a therapist can extend unconditional friendliness toward whatever is arising in his or her clients—letting it be and being with it—this helps them settle down with themselves and their experience. Then they can take the next step—meeting their experience fully, which invites what is going on under the surface to be revealed and met.

The health of living organisms is maintained through the freeflowing circulation of energy. We see this in the endless cycles and flow of water, the cradle of life, which purifies itself through circulating, rising from the oceans, falling on the mountains, and rushing in clear streams back to the sea. Similarly, the circulation of blood in the body brings new life in the form of oxygen to the cells, while allowing the removal of toxins from the body. Any interference with circulation is the beginning of disease.

Similarly, when we do not recognize our basic goodness, self-doubt blooms like algae in water, clogging up the natural flow of self-love that keeps us healthy. When loving-kindness does not circulate throughout our system, blockages and armoring build up and we get sick, psychologically or physically. When a therapist extends *maitri,* unconditional friendliness, toward a client's whole range of experience and very being, this begins to penetrate

the clouds of self-judgment, so that person's life energy can circulate freely again.

This understanding allowed me to approach psychotherapy in a new way. I found that if I could connect with the basic goodness in those I worked with— the underlying, often hidden longing and will to be who they are and meet life fully—not just as an ideal or as positive thinking but as a living reality, then I could start to forge an alliance with the essential core of health within them. I could help them meet and go through whatever they were experiencing, as frightening or horrifying as it might seem, just as I myself had done on the meditative cushion. Orienting myself toward the basic goodness hidden beneath their conflicts and struggles, I could contact the deeper aliveness circulating within them and between the two of us in the present moment. This made possible a heart connection that promoted real change.

I was inspired in this approach by the example of the bodhisattvas in Buddhism, who, in their commitment to help all sentient beings, join compassion with the discriminating wisdom that sees through people's suffering to the embryonic buddha within. For me, seeing the buddha in others is not a way of denying or minimizing their suffering or conflicts. Rather, in the words of Robert Thurman, "A bodhisattva sees simultaneously how a being is free from suffering as well as seeing it with its suffering, and that gives the bodhisattva great compassion that is truly effective."[b] When bodhisattvas engender this kind of allseeing compassion, according to the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, they "generate the love that is truly a refuge for all living beings; the love that is peaceful because free of grasping; the love that is not feverish, because free of passions; the love that accords with reality because it contains equanimity; the love that has no presumption because it has eliminated attachment and aversion; the love that is nondual because it is involved neither with the external nor the internal; the love that is imperturbable because totally ultimate."[c]

The Aikido of Therapy

The poignant truth about human suffering is that all our neurotic, self- destructive patterns are twisted forms of basic goodness, which lies hidden within them. For example, a little girl with an alcoholic father sees his unhappiness and wants to make him happy so that she can experience unconditional love—the love of being—flowing between them. Unfortunately,

out of her desire to please him, she also winds up bending herself out of shape, disregarding her own needs and blaming herself for failing to make him happy. As a result, she ends up with a harsh inner critic and repeatedly reenacts a neurotic victim role with the men in her life. Although her fixation on trying to please is misguided, it originally arose out of a spark of generosity and caring for her father.

Just as muddy water contains clear water within it when the dirt settles out, all our negative tendencies reveal a spark of basic goodness and intelligence at their core, which is usually obscured by our habitual tendencies. Within our anger, for instance, there may be an arrowlike straightforwardness that can be a real gift when communicated without attack or blame. Our passivity may contain a capacity for acceptance and letting things be. And our self-hatred often contains a desire to destroy those elements of our personality that oppress us and prevent us from being fully ourselves. Since every negative or self-defeating behavior is but a distorted form of our larger intelligence, we don't have to struggle against this dirt that muddies the water of our being.

With this understanding, psychological work becomes like aikido, the martial art that involves flowing with the attack, rather than against it. By recognizing the deeper, positive urge hidden within our ego strategies, we no longer have to treat them as an enemy. After all, the strategies of the ego are all ways of *trying to be*. They were the best we could do as a child. And they're not all that bad, considering that they were dreamed up by the mind of a child. Realizing that we did the best we could under the circumstances, and seeing ego as an imitation of the real thing—an attempt to be ourselves in a world that did not recognize, welcome, or support our being—helps us have more understanding and compassion for ourselves.

Our ego itself is testimony to the force of love. It developed as a way to keep going in the face of perceived threats to our existence, primarily lack of love. In the places where love was missing, we built ego defenses. So every time we enact one of our defensive behaviors, we are also implicitly paying homage to love as the most important thing.

As a therapist, meditation was my aikido teacher. As I sat on the meditation cushion with a whole range of "pathological" mind-states passing through my awareness, I began to see depression, paranoia, obsession, and addiction as nothing more than the changing weather of the mind. These mind-states did not belong to me in particular or mean anything about who I was. Recognizing this helped me relax with the whole spectrum of my experience and meet it more

inquisitively.

This helped me relax with my clients' mind-states as well. In working with someone's terror, I could honor it as the intense experience it was, without letting it unsettle me. I also took it as an opportunity to meet and work with my own fear once again. Or if I was helping someone explore an empty, lonely place inside, this gave me a chance to check in with that part of myself as well. It became clear that there was only one mind, though it may appear in many guises. While this might sound strange and mystical, I mean it in a very practical sense: the client's awareness and mine are two ends of one continuum when we are working together. Fear is essentially fear, self-doubt is self- doubt, blocked desire is blocked desire—though these may take on a variety of forms and meanings for different individuals. Realizing that I shared one awareness with the people I worked with allowed me to keep my heart open instead of retreating into a position of clinical distance.

When two people meet and connect, they share the same presence of awareness, and there is no way to divide it neatly into "your awareness" and "my awareness." I am not speaking here about losing my conventional boundaries or identifying with clients' problems, but rather about letting the other person's experience resonate in and through me. I find that I most enjoy my work and am most helpful when I can respond to the other person's work as part of our journey in common—toward discovering an authentic ground of human presence amidst the turbulent crosscurrents of the mind.

12

Depression as a Loss of Heart

DEPRESSION IS PERHAPS the most widespread psychological problem of modern times, afflicting people in both chronic low-grade forms and more acute attacks that are completely debilitating. By framing depression as a "mental illness" to dispose of as quickly as possible, the psychiatric profession and the culture at large make it difficult to approach this experience with curiosity and interest, or to find any meaning in it. While there is certainly a somatic component of depression that can be usefully addressed through drugs, exercise, lifestyle changes, diet, herbs, or biofeedback, the focus on simply getting rid of depression prevents us from recognizing it as a potential teacher that can convey an important message about our relationship with ourselves, the world, or life as a whole. If we want to *heal* depression, instead of just suppressing it, we need to approach it not just as an affliction but as an opportunity to free ourselves from certain obstacles that prevent us from living more fully.

In the simplest human terms, depression can be understood as a loss of heart —our basic openness and responsiveness to reality. Since this openness to reality, which, in Buddhist terms, is "unborn and unceasing," allows us to be intelligently attuned to life and grateful for the wonder of existence, it is the basis of sanity and well-being. If we construct elaborate systems of defenses to buffer us from reality, this is but further testimony to the raw, responsive quality of the open mind and heart that lies behind these defenses. The basic goodness of the human heart—in its intrinsic responsiveness to life—is unconditional. It is not something we have to achieve or prove.

The Genesis of Depressions: Bitterness toward What Is

Depression is a symptom that arises when we cannot feel the goodness and aliveness of our heart. It is a feeling of weight and oppression that often contains suppressed anger and resentment. Instead of taking a defiant or fluid

expression, this anger is muted and frozen into bitterness. Reality takes on a bitter taste. Depressed people hold this bitterness inside, chew it over, and make themselves sick with it. Having lost touch with their own basic goodness, they become convinced that they or the world are basically bad.

This loss of heart usually follows from a deep sense of sorrow or defeat, which may stem from specific losses: loss of a loved one, a career, cherished illusions, material possessions, or self-esteem. Or there may be a more global sense of defeat that has persisted since childhood. These losses tend to undermine the stable reference points that people count on to provide security, meaning, or support for their lives. Depressed people take this loss personally. They blame themselves for the lack of love in their family of origin, for failing to save their mother or please their father, for their difficulty finding satisfaction in work or intimate relationships, for the way their life has not turned out as planned. They feel a sense of powerlessness, loss of control, and pervasive distrust.

Two elements are at work here: a sorrow that stems from something missing in their lives, and a belief that this is their fault, that there is something basically wrong with them, and that there is nothing they can do about it. When people imagine that their sorrow and helplessness are signs of something wrong with them, it becomes too painful to open and relate to these feelings. So they turn away from their pain. The pain begins to congeal, and this is when depression starts to set in.

The Flight from Emptiness

While depression is an extreme reaction to loss, meditation practice reveals that the stable reference points we rely on for security are actually slipping away all the time. Buddhist psychology describes this situation in terms of the "three marks of existence"—three unavoidable facts of life that shape the basic context in which human existence unfolds.

The first mark of existence is *impermanence*—the fact that nothing ever stays the same. On the outer plane, our bodies and the physical world are continually changing, while on the inner plane our mental and emotional states are ceaselessly shifting and passing away. Every mind-state brings with it a new take on reality, only to be replaced minutes later by a somewhat different take. No state of mind is ever complete or final.

The second mark of existence, often termed *egolessness,* follows from this

all-pervasive impermanence. Like everything else, the self we consider ourselves to be is in constant flux. While it may be useful to speak of a functional ego structure as an explanatory concept, it is impossible to pin down, locate, or establish a substantial, continuous self-entity in any concrete, definitive way. If we see this as a threat, we may panic, but if we can understand it as a gateway into a larger truth, it can give rise to profound relief. The third mark of existence is that human life always entails some kind of unsatisfactoriness or *pain*—the pain of birth, old age, sickness, and death; the pain of trying to hold on to things that change; the pain of not getting what you want; the pain of getting what you don't want; and the pain of being conditioned by circumstances beyond your control. Because nothing in life is ever final or complete, everything is in flux, and we cannot even control what happens to us, dependable satisfaction remains as elusive as a rainbow in the sky.

These three marks all point to a more fundamental condition of existence, known as *emptiness* in the Buddhist tradition. *Emptiness* is a term that points to the ungraspable, unfathomable nature of everything. Nothing can be grasped as a solid object that will provide enduring, unshakable meaning, satisfaction, or security. Nothing is ever what we expect, hope, or believe it to be. We marry the person of our dreams and find out that marriage does not yield the predictable happiness we had imagined. We spend a fortune on a new car, and three weeks later no longer find it all that exciting. We achieve a major career success and discover that it does not deliver the fulfillment we had hoped for. Moreover, we can never get a firm grip on what we are doing here, what we ultimately want, what life is all about, or where it is going. All of these experiences point to the truth of emptiness—the fact that there is no way to carve anything solid out of the flow of reality or pin down any part of it as "just *this*, only *this*, forever *this*."

From the perspective of trying to get somewhere or establish security, emptiness seems frightening and disheartening. So we can understand various forms of psychopathology as reactions against emptiness and the three marks of existence. The paranoid resents his vulnerability and tries to blame others for it: "Who's doing this to me? Is everyone out to get me?" The sociopath tries to gain the upper hand over the slipperiness of existence. The schizoid and catatonic simply shut down, as an outright refusal to be susceptible to life's vicissitudes. Narcissism is a dogged attempt to solidify a self at any cost. And depression results from blaming ourselves for the way things are, for the

sorrow we feel when we discover life slipping through our fingers.

Depression starts creeping up on us the moment we imagine there is something wrong with us because we cannot keep pain at bay, because we feel vulnerable or sad, because we cannot rest on our laurels, because we do not achieve total fulfillment through work, relationships, or any other finite worldly arrangement, or because we sense the hollowness of our self-created identity. If we were to look more deeply into any of these experiences, it could help us awaken to the essential openness of our nature, which is the only real source of happiness and joy. But depression takes a different route—blaming and recriminating when we cannot control reality. And this inevitably shuts down our capacity to respond and feel grateful for the beauty of life just as it is.

Emptiness—the ungraspable, open-ended nature of reality—need not be depressing. For it is what allows life to keep creating and recreating itself anew in each moment. And this makes creativity, expansiveness, growth, and real wisdom possible. If we regard our intrinsic lack of solidity as a problem or deficiency to overcome, this only turns against ourselves. We fall prey to our "inner critic"—that voice that continually reminds us we are not good enough. We come to regard the three marks of existence as evidence for the prosecution in an ongoing inner trial, where our inner critic presides as prosecutor and judge. And, imagining that the critic's punitive views are equivalent to reality, we come to believe that our self and world are basically bad.

Modern consumer culture fosters depression. All our materialistic addictions are desperate attempts to run away from the truth of emptiness by desperately trying to hold on to form for dear life. Then when marriage, wealth, or success fail to bring true satisfaction, depression is inevitable.

One young man who came to me for treatment of a clinical depression had suddenly found that he no longer enjoyed the things he used to: surfing, going out with the guys, chasing women. He was undergoing a major identity crisis, but because he believed in the ideology of materialism so thoroughly, he was ill-prepared for the life passage facing him. Rather than considering that his depression might hold an important message for him—that it was time to move beyond the carefree life of a perpetual adolescent—he only wanted to get rid of the depression so he could go back to his old lifestyle. He regarded his depression as an arbitrary quirk of fate that had singled him out for mysterious reasons. Although he was getting his first real glimpse of the three marks of existence, the only framework he had for interpreting them made them seem like signs of ultimate failure. No wonder he felt so depressed.

Stories and Feelings

Since depression is maintained through stories we tell ourselves about how we or the world are fundamentally flawed, it is essential in working with depression to

distinguish between our actual feelings and the stories we tell ourselves about these feelings. By *story* I mean a mental fabrication, judgment, or interpretation of an experience. We usually do not recognize our stories as inventions; we think that they portray reality.

Meditation is a highly effective method for seeing through our stories. Through sharpening our mindfulness, we start to catch ourselves in the act of constructing stories and can see them as the fabrications they are. We start to see how we are continually trying to draw conclusions about who we are, what we are doing, and what will happen next. With continued practice, meditators can learn to develop a healthy skepticism toward this storytelling aspect of mind. In Buddhist terms, they are cultivating *prajna*—the discriminating intelligence that lets them distinguish between what is real and what is a fabricated belief about reality, between immediate experience and mental interpretations of that experience.

Underneath the stories that keep depression frozen lie more vulnerable feelings such as uncertainty, sorrow, anger, helplessness, or fear. The stories the inner critic fabricates about these feelings—"I'm no good," "I'll never get it together," "The world is a cold, hard place"—are negative, rejecting judgments that freeze our feelings into a hardened state. And this frozenness is what makes depression a problem, not the vulnerable feelings underlying it.

Any feeling in its fluid state is workable, but when we interpret it with negative stories, it freezes and becomes a roadblock. Frozen fear contributes to the constriction, dullness, and lethargy commonly associated with depression. Yet where there is fluid fear, there is also openness and responsiveness to life. Frozen anger turns in on itself and becomes a weapon of self-punishment wielded by the critic. Yet fluid anger can unlock passion and power we can draw on to effect change. Frozen uncertainty results in confusion and apathy; fluid uncertainty allows for alertness to new possibilities.

In addition to fear and anger, the main feeling underlying depression is sorrow or sadness. What is sadness? The word *sad* is related etymologically

to *satisfied* or *sated*, meaning *full*. So in sadness there is a fullness of heart, a fullness of feeling in response to being touched by the sweet, transitory, ungraspable quality of human existence. This empty fullness is one of the most significant of human experiences. The poignancy of not knowing who we are and not being able to hold on to or control our quickly passing life connects us with the vastness and depth of the living heart. It invites us to let go of the fixed reference points we use to prop ourselves up. If we judge or reject this sadness, then its vital intelligence congeals into the heaviness of depression. In overlooking the opportunity that sadness provides for touching and awakening the heart, we quite literally lose heart.

Thus it is important to help people suffering from depression to relate more directly to their actual moment-to-moment experience, so that they can see through the negative stories told by their critic and contact their genuine heart. When they directly experience what they are going through, it is rarely as bad as they imagined it to be. In fact, it is actually impossible to *experience* their nature as basically bad. The idea of basic badness turns out to be nothing more then a story told by the inner critic; it is a figment of our imagination, never an immediate felt experience. People can discover basic goodness only through opening to their experience. Unlike their fictional basic badness, basic goodness *can* be concretely felt—in their unconditional openness and attunement to life.

A Case Example

One of the clients who most challenged my own faith in basic goodness was a successful lawyer in his mid-fifties whom I saw for more than two years. When he first came to see me, Ted had hardened into one of the most unyielding states of depression I had encountered. Growing up during the Great Depression as the son of immigrant parents who taught him to hate and fear the white Anglo-Saxon world, he had fought to get ahead at any cost and had driven himself hard to achieve material and professional success. He had reached the top of his profession yet was completely miserable and desperate. His body gave the impression of an armored tank, and his health was suffering from the amount of tension he carried around. He spoke at a raised pitch, as though he were delivering proclamations.

Ted had a sharp lawyer's mind that literally attacked whatever he turned his attention to. His mind continually constructed arguments to buttress his dark

views of reality. His themes were always the same: his weariness with life, his fear of death and letting go, the meaninglessness of everything, the demands people were always making on him, his enslavement to *should*s and *ought*s, and the distrust he felt toward everything. His rule of life was "attack or be attacked."

His life had been a series of unsuccessful attempts to overcome the three marks of existence. The more he struggled to gain the upper hand over them, the more he fell victim to the very circumstances he was trying to avoid. He had tried to escape his fear of his own insubstantiality by climbing the professional ladder, but in the stress of doing so, he was literally killing himself. He desperately wanted to be *somebody*. Yet in continually trying to win recognition from others, he had become so overbearing that people rejected him—which left him feeling even more like a nobody. In trying to escape the pain of his life, Ted had numbed himself into an profound state of depression. The three marks of existence persistently haunted him in the form of a continual sense of despair, loneliness, and death-in-life.

Initially I felt assaulted by Ted's manner and presence. To be able to stay present in the room with him, I found that I had to engage in swordplay with his sharp mind during our first few months together. Through these encounters, which involved some intense confrontations, I was eventually able to penetrate his stories and contact him in a more human way. As Ted began recognizing the difference between his real feelings and the rejecting attitude he held toward them, he could see how his negative stories only dug him deeper into his rut. Through developing some skepticism toward these stories, he no longer felt the need to broadcast them so loudly. This helped him slow down, so that he could start to pay attention to what he was feeling in the moment.

The next step in my work with Ted involved helping him recognize and step back from the inner voice that kept telling him what he "should, must, ought" to do. We came to call this voice by various names: "the critic," "the driver," "the tyrant," "the judge." As we proceeded, Ted discovered that his main aim in life had been to win approval and recognition from others, as well as from his own inner critic. He had pursued the more tangible comforts of recognition and approval as a way of not feeling the vulnerability of his own need for love. Feeling that need terrified him because it put him back in touch with the helplessness and despair he had known as a child. Ted had come to hate his vulnerability so much that he had abandoned his own heart. As he realized this, he began to feel his anger, sadness, and fear more directly, instead of just

blaming the world for his condition.

Eventually Ted reached an important turning point that enabled him to start choosing life over death-in-life: Underneath all his compulsive striving and attempts to win recognition, he felt the tremendous sorrow of having lost touch with his heart. It took a long time for him to let this pain really touch him. Yet as he did so, Ted began to acknowledge his desire *just to be,* without having to be an important *somebody.* He started to feel his humanness.

Invitation to the Dance

All our reference points are continually slipping away. We can never create an unassailable position or identity that will guarantee happiness or security. Shall we let this depress us, or can we dance with it? The grand cosmic dance of Shiva in the Hindu tradition or Vajrayogini in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition takes place on the groundless ground where everything is continually giving birth and dying, slipping away. These ancient images of the cosmic dance portray egolessness and impermanence as a source of exhilaration, rather than depression.

Depression is the loss of heart that results from turning against the unfathomable flux of life. Yet at the root of this condition—in the rawness, vulnerability, and poignancy underlying it—our basic sanity is still operating. That is why depression, like all psychopathology, is not merely a disease to be simply eradicated. Instead, it is an opportunity to awaken our heart and deepen our connection to life.

13

Making Friends with Emotion

EMOTIONS ARE OFTEN PROBLEMATIC because they are our most common experience of being taken over by forces seemingly beyond our control. Usually we regard them as a threat, imagining that if we really let ourselves feel our anger or depression, they would totally overwhelm us. Maybe we would be unable to function or go berserk! So we engage in a struggle with our emotions—which is like trying to stand up against a powerful wave that is heading into shore. If we resist the wave, it is indeed overwhelming. And our resistance prevents us from learning to work with emotions more skillfully— perhaps by learning to ride the waves—and thereby discovering the spiritual challenge and opportunity they represent.

Is it possible then to make friends with our emotions? How could we learn to accept them fully, go *toward* them willingly, and face them directly and fearlessly, so that their energy could become a force of awakening in our lives? If we could learn to enter more deeply into emotion and let ourselves feel what we feel instead of reacting against it, condemning it, or trying to suppress it, we would be able to face more confidently whatever life hands us. After all, life's challenges are painful and difficult only to the degree that we are uncomfortable with the feelings they stir up within us.

Emotion in Western Psychology

The subject of emotion is one of the most confusing chapters of modern psychology. Anyone wishing to learn about emotion from the literature of Western psychology finds a bewildering array of conflicting theories about what it is, how it arises, and what it signifies. James Hillman, at the end of an exhaustive study of these theories, could only conclude that "the problem of emotion remains perennial and its solution ineffable."[a]

In Western culture we have a history of treating emotions with suspicion and contempt, as something alien, *other*, separate from us. From Plato on, the

"passions" have been viewed as our "lower nature." Regarding the source of the passions, as Freud did, as an *it* ("id"), "a primitive chaos, a cauldron of seething excitement," makes it hard to develop a friendly relationship with emotions or accept them as part of ourselves. This view of emotion as primitive and alien is a classic form of dualistic Western thinking.

As a result of regarding emotions as *other,* we feel the need to rid ourselves of these alien forces invading our system, either by acting them out or suppressing them. Yet this fear of our emotions indicates how alienated we are from ourselves. First we are alienated from our own energy, making it *other* and judging it negatively. Then we start to imagine that emotions are demonic, that we have monsters inside us. The irony is that in judging and controlling our emotions, we become further overwhelmed by them, which leads to explosive eruptions that leave us all the more alienated from ourselves. In treating emotions as other, we grant them dominion over us. Suppressing emotions and acting them out are both alienated, afflicted strategies that prevent us from experiencing emotions as they are, face to face.

The Spectrum of Felt Experience

Before we can see how to work with emotion in a more wholesome way, we must understand how emotion arises and gathers force. Our feeling life takes a whole range of forms, from global and diffuse to sharp and intense. This spectrum of felt experience can be pictured, as in figure 3, in a cone shape, with a wide base that becomes more narrow and intense at its peak:

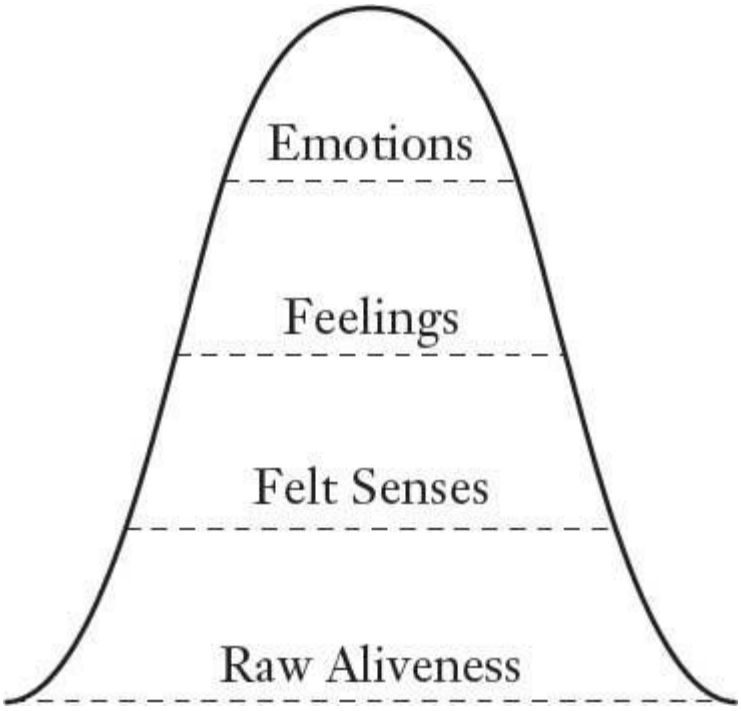

FIGURE 3. *The Spectrum of Felt Experience*

The Ground of Feeling: Raw Aliveness

All feelings and emotions arise as expressions of a more basic life energy coursing through us. The biologist René Dubos describes this basic aliveness as an unconditional sense of wholesome vitality underlying all the ups and downs of circumstance:

> About the experience of life, most people are under the illusion that they can be happy only if something especially good happens. Oddly enough, there is only one phrase I know to express that life is good *per se*, that just being alive is good . . . the French expression, *joie de vivre*. *Joie de vivre* simply means that just being alive is an extraordinary experience. The quality of that experience anyone can see by watching a young child or a young animal playing in the spring. It is totally immaterial what goes on, except for the fact that you are alive. It does not mean that you are very happy with the way you live. You can even be suffering; but just being alive is a quality *per se*.[b]

What Dubos is describing here is the simple joy of just being—*basic goodness*, in fact, that primordial responsiveness to reality that lies at our core, and that is not dependent on whether current circumstances are good or bad.

Our raw aliveness is both the source of particular feelings and the energy

circulating fluidly within them, just as water is the cradle of life as well as a universal element in all living tissues. Like earth, our aliveness is the ground that encompasses and nurtures us, with specific feelings arising from this ground. Like air, which quickens the whole body with vital energy, our aliveness is a mutable openness at the core of all feelings, which keeps them from ever becoming something totally solid or fixed. And like fire, our raw aliveness is a warmth that radiates freely in all directions.

This primordial vitality is the source of our sensitivity as well as our sanity. Our soft skin, the intricate workings of our senses, brain, and nervous system are all geared toward *letting the world in* and responding in appropriate ways. Feelings and emotions are our responses to the world as we let it touch us.

Felt Sense

Between this wide-open aliveness and our more familiar feelings and emotions, lies a subtle zone of sensibility, which Gendlin calls the *felt sense*. Your anger with a friend, for instance, is but the tip of an iceberg—which is a more global sense of frustration in your relationship with him. This larger "iceberg" is wider and deeper than your anger and can be experienced as a felt sense in the body, perhaps as burning heat or prickly tension. In this prickly felt sense there is a lot more going on than just anger. There may also be disappointment, hopelessness, sorrow, or pressure.

We can often tap into the larger felt sense underlying an emotion by asking ourselves, "What kind of an impact is this whole situation having on me?" Although a felt sense is often unclear at first, because it contains many facets of our response to a situation, once we tap into it and start to articulate what is there, we discover much more new information and possibilities than our more familiar emotional reactions allowed for.

Feeling and Emotion

Feelings, such as sadness, gladness, or anger, are more clearly recognizable than a felt sense, which is often unclear at first. And emotions are a more intense form of feeling. The feeling of sadness may build into grief, a feeling of irritation may erupt into rage, a feeling of fear may turn into panic. The distinguishing characteristic of emotion is that it totally dominates our attention and cannot be ignored, and it usually takes a repetitive, predictable form.

Feelings are more subtle and fluid than emotions.

The Birth of Emotional Entanglement

How do emotions start to build steam and take over, becoming claustrophobic or explosive? And what is the difference between wallowing in emotions and working with them more constructively? Suppose you wake up feeling sad. Instead of letting the sadness touch you and alert you to something that may need attention in your life, you focus instead on how it threatens your ego identity: "If I wake up feeling sad, there must be something wrong with me. Only losers wake up feeling sad." When a feeling threatens your self-image, you will want to push it away. So as you judge your sadness negatively and reject it, it freezes up, losing its connection with your raw aliveness. You become caught up in dark, depressive story lines—melancholy thoughts and imaginings you project into the past and the future ("What is the matter with me? Why do I always feel this way? I'll never get it together.").

The more you mull over these stories, the sadder you become, and the sadder you feel, the darker your stories become—a vicious circle that starts generating more intense emotion, such as depression and despair, which in turn lead to more depressing thoughts. As depression starts to congeal out of the simple sadness you turned away from, you may start to see the entire world, your whole life history and future prospects in this dreary light. Your depressed thoughts extend in all directions and keep you stuck in the mire. In this way, what started out as a fluid feeling becomes thick, solid, heavy, and entrapping.

Thus reacting against feelings—fearing fear, being outraged about anger, becoming depressed about sadness—is much worse than the primary feelings themselves, for it turns us against ourselves and causes us to go around in emotional circles. As we spin around in the cycle of feelings-giving-rise-to- highly-charged-thoughts, our perception becomes cloudy, and we often say or do things we later regret.

Cutting through this tendency to get lost in emotionally driven thoughts and stories requires a certain discipline, which psychotherapy and meditation each provide in their different ways.

The Therapeutic Approach to Emotion

Through unpacking the wider felt sense underlying an emotion, psychotherapeutic inquiry can help us free ourselves from the spin of this kind of emotional vortex. In a felt sense we discover a much wider range of meanings and responses than in the emotion itself. For example, underneath the heavy depression you have worked up, you may find that you are sad about not knowing what to do with your life. Discovering this helps you look more deeply into the issue of life direction, instead of remaining stuck in depression. Or underneath your anger with your friend you may discover a need to communicate something essential that you only just now recognize, which releases you from being stuck in the anger.

Although emotional release may be important and helpful in this process, what finally dissolves emotional entanglement is not catharsis per se, but the unpacking of a wider felt sense, which illuminates our larger relationship to the situation in question. And this can lead to a bodily felt shift that breaks through the logic of our story lines and reveals a new way of relating to the problematic situation. Felt shifts break up logjams in the mindstream, allowing our raw aliveness to flow freely once more.

Therapeutic work also brings to light conditioned identity structures that contribute to our emotional entanglement. For instance, working with your sadness and depression may reveal psychological fixations that usually remain hidden—your view of yourself as inadequate to meet life's challenges or your view of the world as overwhelming—so that these can be addressed more directly. In this way, working psychologically with emotional reactions provides an important stepping-stone toward freeing up deep-set conditioned patterns.

One limitation of a purely psychological approach to emotion is the tendency to make the exploration of feelings an endless project, or an end in itself. A psychotherapy that focuses solely on emotional and psychological patterns often fails to help a person recognize and access the larger ground of primordial aliveness that reveals itself in moments of felt shift and release.

The Meditative Approach to Emotion

By teaching us to relate to emotions in a more nonconceptual, naked way, the practice of meditation provides direct access to our raw aliveness. The meditative approach to emotion, unlike the psychological approach, is not oriented toward the content of feelings, their meaning, or the psychological

structures underlying them. Instead, meditation involves opening to feelings directly, without trying to discover their meaning. When surges of emotional turbulence arise, we practice keeping our seat and opening to their energy.

While psychotherapy unpacks the meanings in our feelings, meditation relates to feelings purely as energetic phenomena, as expressions of our basic aliveness. Uncovering the raw energy of emotions is like moving into the depths of the ocean, underneath the whitecaps of emotional frenzy and the broader swells of feeling, where all remains calm, where our personal struggles empty into the larger currents of life.

Thus meditation allows us to discover a freer, more open awareness that is always available, even when we are caught up in emotional reactions. By helping us recognize the gaps and discontinuities that spontaneously appear in the thick logic of our story lines, meditation can also help us wake up in the midst of intense emotional states when they arise. A meditator might be able to wonder, in the midst of an eruption of anger, "Am I really this angry? Do I really need to make such a big deal out of this? Is this really as important as I am making it? Are these people as wrong as I am making them?"

Transmutation

Drawing on emotion as a vehicle for self-illumination is known as *transmutation* in Tantric Buddhism. As an alchemical term, *transmutation* implies converting something apparently worthless into something extremely valuable, like lead into gold.

The first step in taming the lion of emotion, in transmuting its fierce energy into illumination, is to feel it and let it be, without judging it as good or bad. Running away from a fierce animal or trying to thwart its energy only provokes further attack. We must learn to open directly to the energy of emotions and become one with it, as Chögyam Trungpa points out, "When we are able to become completely one with irritations or feel the abstract quality of the irritation as it is, then irritation has no one to irritate. It becomes a sort of judo practice."[c] Although emotions seem to have us in their grip, as soon as we turn to face them directly, we find nothing as solid or fixed as our judgments or stories about them. In their raw state, emotions are simply expressions of our own energy. It is only our reactions against them and the story lines we weave out of them ("My anger is right because . . . ," "My sadness is bad because . .
.") that make their energetic presence thick and heavy.

Instead of trying to control emotions, judge ourselves for them, or react against them, we can learn to experience them in their immediacy, as a living presence. Trungpa describes several aspects of this process:

> There are several stages in relating with the emotions: seeing, hearing, smelling, touching, and transmuting. In the case of seeing the emotions, we have a general awareness that the emotions have their own space, their own development. We accept them as part of the pattern of mind, without question. And then hearing involves experiencing the pulsation of such energy, the energy upsurge as it comes toward you. Smelling is appreciating that the energy is somewhat workable. Touching is feeling the nitty-gritty of the whole thing, that you can touch and relate with it, that your emotions are not particularly destructive or crazy, but just an upsurge of energy, whatever form they take.[d]

If ego is the tendency to hold on to ourselves and control our experience, then feeling our emotions directly and letting their energy flow freely threatens ego's whole control structure. When we open to the actual texture and quality of a feeling, instead of trying to control or judge it, "I"—the activity of trying to hold ourselves together—starts to dissolve into "it"—the larger aliveness present in the feeling. If I fully open to my sorrow, it may intensify for a while, and I may feel all the grief of it. Yet opening to this pain, without stories, also makes me feel more alive. As I turn to face my demons, they reveal themselves as my very own life energy.

Emotions, we could say, are the blood shed by ego—they start to flow whenever we are touched, whenever the defensive shell around the heart is pierced. Trying to control them is an attempt to keep this shell from cracking. Letting ego bleed, on the other hand, opens the heart. Then we rediscover ourselves as living beings who are exposed to the world, interconnected with all other beings. Letting go of judgments and story lines and feeling this naked quality of being alive wakes us up and nurtures compassion for ourselves and others.

Facing into the turbulence of emotions is like entering the eye of a hurricane. The surrounding winds may be turbulent, but eventually we arrive at a clear opening in the midst of the storm, as Tarthang Tulku suggests:

> When you are emotionally upset, stay within the emotion . . . without grasping or holding on to it.
> . . . Likewise, when anxiety or any other disturbing feeling arises, concentrate on the feeling, not on thoughts about it. Concentrate on the center of the feeling: penetrate into that space If we go directly into the center of the emotion, there's nothing there! . . . There is a density of energy in that center that is clear and distinct. This energy has great power, and can transmit great clarity. . . . We can transmute this samsaric mind because the mind itself is emptiness— total openness, total honesty with each situation . . . direct seeing, total freedom from

obscurations, complete receptivity.[e]

Entering emotions in this way may be a delicate maneuver at first. We may have a brief glimpse of the space within them, but then quickly fall back into fearful stories. Meditation practice helps develop the sustained attention necessary here, through which we learn to stop being "hijacked" by our thoughts. When we enter an emotion in this naked way, it cannot persist for long because it does not actually have any independent, solid existence of its own, apart from our concepts or reactions.

This kind of understanding can also help clients in psychotherapy face their emotions more directly. For example, one man I worked with felt terribly burdened by his hunger for love. The first task was to cut through his critical stories about his need. ("I shouldn't need . . . It's not manly . . . I should be self-reliant.") When he could let himself feel the need fully and directly, he discovered his aliveness in it, as the following condensed transcript illustrates:

THERAPIST: What happens when you let that need be there?
CLIENT: It says: "I'm unhappy. I'm all alone. I'm scared. It's hard to make it on my own. I need someone to love and care for me."
THERAPIST: Can you let yourself just have that need for love right now? What would it be like to let yourself have your need one hundred percent?
CLIENT: (*long pause*) It really shifts things around inside me to do that. . . . When I really go into it, it gives me a feeling of power. . . . It really feels different. . . . I feel more balanced . . . grounded.....There's much more space. . . . There's no desperation or fear. . . . Letting myself have this need is very nurturing, even though no one else is there. . . . I feel full.

Various metaphors have been used to describe the transmutation of emotional energy. The French psychoanalyst Hubert Benoit compares it to the metamorphosis of coal into diamonds, where "the aim is not the destruction of the ego, but its transformation. The conscious acceptance results in the coal which has become denser, and so blacker and more opaque, being instantaneously transformed into a diamond that is perfectly transparent."[f]

This image of transparency and lucency, where emotion becomes a clear window opening onto a deeper aliveness, is particularly prominent in Vajrayana or Tantric Buddhism. *Vajra* is the diamondlike, indestructible clarity of the awake state of mind, which manifests as mirrorlike wisdom. Because it

signifies absolute clarity, the Vajrayana (the "diamond path") sees the world in terms of luminosity, lit up with brilliance. The struggle to shore up a self-image only generates a film of confusion that dulls the natural brilliance of our diamondlike awareness. Transmuting emotion turns the dark, murky world of the confused mind into the radiance of clear seeing.

Transmutation can be a sudden change or happen more gradually, through increasing friendliness with our experience. Other metaphors emphasize the gradual, organic nature of this process. In Trungpa's words: "Unskilled farmers throw away their rubbish and buy manure from other farmers, but those who are skilled go on collecting their own rubbish, in spite of the bad smell and the unclean work, and when it is ready to be used they spread it on their land, and out of this they grow their crops. . . . So out of these unclean things comes the birth of the seed which is Realization."[g] Suzuki Roshi speaks in a similar vein of how the weeds of the mind can be used to feed the awakening of awareness: "We pull the weeds and bury them near the plant to give it nourishment. . . . You should be grateful for the weeds, because eventually they will enrich your practice. If you have some experience of how the weeds in your mind change into mental nourishment, your practice will make remarkable progress."[h]

Transmutation comes about through discovering the open space of being at the core of all experience. This spaciousness cuts our emotional turmoil down to size, so that it appears as a small drama in the middle of a vast expanse of awareness. When we no longer fear our emotions, this promotes greater fearlessness toward life as a whole, known in Buddhism as the "lion's roar":

> The lion's roar is the fearless proclamation that any state of mind, including the emotions, is a workable situation. Then the most powerful energies become absolutely workable rather than taking you over, because there is nothing to take over if you are not putting up any resistance. Indian Ashokan art depicts the lion's roar with four lions looking in four directions, which symbolizes the idea of having no back. Every direction is a front, symbolizing all-pervading awareness. The fearlessness covers all directions.[i]

In sum, the meditative approach to emotion, as cultivated particularly in Tantric Buddhism, involves keeping our seat and staying present in the middle of emotional turbulence, cutting through judgments and story lines in order to enter the emotions more directly, and opening to their energy in all its rawness and power. In so doing, we discover the intense tenderness of our aliveness.

Befriending emotions in this way also allows us to discover the larger

intelligence contained within them. Liberated from reactivity, anger can become a means of direct communication, rather than a weapon. Fear can be an alert that perks up our attention, rather than a trigger to run and hide. And when we appreciate loneliness as a longing to connect and sadness as a fullness of heart, these feelings regain their essential dignity, instead of being a burden.

In the Vajrayana tradition, the complete path of transmutation depends on careful understanding and qualified guidance. It is considered essential to have a firm foundation in meditation practice, which helps free one from the grip of thought and fantasy. It is also important to work with a living, realized teacher who is deeply grounded in the energies of life, and who can guide the student through the many twists and turns along the way. Then, through discipline and practice, the confusion of the emotions may become transformed into the wisdom of seeing things as they are.

14

Embodying Your Realization

Psychological Work in the Service of Spiritual Development

> *The technique of a world-changing yoga has to be as multiform, sinuous, patient, all- including as the world itself. If it does not deal with all the difficulties or possibilities and carefully deal with each necessary element, does it have any chance of success?*
>
> —SRI AUROBINDO

> *The impersonal is a truth, the personal too is a truth; they are the same truth seen from two sides of our psychological activity; neither by itself gives the total account of Reality, and yet by either we can approach it.*
>
> —SRI AUROBINDO

WHEN I FIRST ENCOUNTERED ZEN in the 1960s, I found myself especially drawn to the mysterious *satori*—that moment of seeing into one's own nature, when all the old blinders were said to fall away, so that one became an entirely new person, never to be the same again. In D. T. Suzuki's words, "The opening of satori is the remaking of life itself . . . a complete revolution . . . cataclysmic" in its consequences. A revelation that led to a whole new way of being—I found this prospect compelling enough to make it a central focus of my life.

Many of us who have been involved in meditative practices during the past few decades have had a direct taste of this realization, which inspires great joy and gratitude while bringing fresh insight and clarity. Yet at the same time I have also developed a profound respect for how difficult it is to embody such realizations in everyday life—especially for modern Westerners who live in the world, rather than in monastic settings. Monastic or retreat situations are designed to help people devote themselves one-pointedly to seeing through the veils of the conditioned mind and realizing Being, spirit, or naked awareness

as their own true nature. Yet the full embodiment of such realizations— manifesting as a wise and balanced way of engaging in livelihood, intimate relationships, and the complex challenges of modern society—presents another type of hurdle altogether. We who live as householders, husbands, wives, parents, or working people may also need other methods to help us integrate spiritual realization into our busy, complex lives.

Realization and Transformation

The hard truth is that spiritual realization is relatively easy compared with the much greater difficulty of actualizing it, integrating it fully into the fabric of one's embodiment and one's daily life. By *realization* I mean the direct recognition of one's ultimate nature, while *actualization* refers to how we live that realization in all the situations of our life. When people have major spiritual openings, often during periods of intensive practice or retreat, they may imagine that everything has changed and that they will never be the same again. Indeed, spiritual work can open people up profoundly and help them live free of the compulsions of their conditioning for long stretches of time. But at some point after the retreat ends, when they encounter circumstances that trigger their emotional reactivity, their unresolved psychological issues, their habitual tensions and defenses, or their subconscious identifications, they may find that their spiritual practice has barely penetrated their conditioned personality, which remains mostly intact, generating the same tendencies it always has.[1]

Of course, there are many levels of realization, ranging from temporary experiences to more stable attainment that alters one's whole way of being. Yet even among advanced spiritual practitioners who have developed a high degree of insight, power, even brilliance, certain islands—unexamined complexes of personal and cultural conditioning, blind spots, or areas of self- deception—often seem to remain intact within the pure stream of their realization. They may even unconsciously use their spiritual powers to reinforce old defenses and manipulative ways of relating to others. For others, spiritual practice may reinforce a tendency toward coldness, disengagement, or interpersonal distance. How is it possible for spiritual realization to remain compartmentalized, leaving whole areas of the psyche apparently untouched? Why is it so hard to bring the awareness developed in meditation into all the areas of one's life?

Some would say that these problems are signs of deficiency or incompleteness in one's spiritual practice or realization, and this is undoubtedly true. Yet since they are almost universal, they also point to the general difficulty of integrating spiritual awakenings into the entire fabric of our human embodiment. It is said in the Dzogchen teachings that only the rare highly endowed person attains full liberation upon realizing the essential nature of mind. For the rest of us, liberation does not follow quickly from realization. As Sri Aurobindo put it, "Realization by itself does not necessarily transform the being as a whole. . . . One may have some light of realization at the spiritual summit of consciousness but the parts below remain what they were. I have seen any number of instances of that."[a] Because problems with integration are so widespread, we need to consider more fully the relationship between these two different movements in spiritual development: realization and transformation, liberation and complete integration of that liberation in all the different dimensions of one's life.

Realization is the movement from personality to being—leading toward liberation from the prison of the conditioned self. *Transformation* involves drawing on this realization to penetrate the dense conditioned patterns of body and mind, so that the spiritual can be fully integrated into the personal and the interpersonal, so that the personal life can become a transparent vessel for ultimate truth or divine revelation.

In the traditional cultures of Asia, it was a viable option for a yogi to live purely as the impersonal universal, to pursue spiritual development without having much of a personal life or transforming the structures of that life. These older cultures provided a religious context that honored and supported spiritual retreat and placed little or no emphasis on the development of the individual.[2] As a result, spiritual attainment could often remain divorced from worldly life and personal development. In Asia, yogis and *sadhu*s could live an otherworldly life, have little personal contact with people, or engage in highly eccentric behavior and still be supported and venerated by the community at large.

Many Westerners have tried to take up this model, pursuing impersonal realization while neglecting their personal life, but have found in the end that this was like wearing a suit of clothes that didn't quite fit. Such attempts at premature transcendence—taking refuge in the impersonal absolute as a way to avoid dealing with one's personal psychology, one's personal issues, feelings, or calling—leads to inner denial. And this can create monstrous shadow

elements that have devastating consequences, as we have seen in many American spiritual communities in recent years. For whatever reasons, for better or for worse, it has become problematic in our culture to pursue spiritual development that is not fully integrated into the fabric of one's personal experience and interpersonal relationships.

Here is where psychological work might serve as an ally to spiritual practice—by helping to shine the light of awareness into all the hidden nooks and crannies of our conditioned personality, so that it becomes more porous, more permeable to the larger being that is its ground. Of course, what I am describing here is a special kind of psychological self-inquiry, which requires a larger framework, understanding, and aim than conventional psychotherapy. I am hesitant to call this psychotherapy at all, for the word *therapy* has connotations of pathology and cure that place it in a medical, rather than a transformative, context. Moreover, conventional therapy often involves only talk, failing to recognize ways in which the body holds defensive patterns and also manifests the energies of awakening. Truly transformative psychological work must also help us unlock the body's contractions and gain access to its larger energies.

Of course, spiritual work has a much larger aim than psychological work: liberation from narrow identification with the self-structure altogether and awakening into the expansive reality of primordial being. And it does seem possible to glimpse and perhaps even fully realize this kind of awakening, whether or not one is happy, healthy, psychologically integrated, individuated, or interpersonally sensitive and attuned. Yet after centuries of divorce between the spiritual and the worldly life, the increasingly desperate situation of a planet that human beings are rapidly destroying cries out for a new kind of psychospiritual integration, which has only rarely existed before: namely, an integration between liberation—the capacity to step beyond the individual psyche into the larger, nonpersonal space of pure awareness—and personal transformation—the capacity to bring that larger awareness to bear on all one's conditioned psychological structures, so that they become fully metabolized, freeing the energy and intelligence frozen inside them, thereby fueling the development of a fuller, richer human presence that could fulfill the still unrealized potential of life on this earth.

For most of my career I have explored what the Eastern contemplative traditions have to offer Western psychology—an inquiry that has been extremely fruitful. I have only the greatest respect and gratitude for the spiritual

teachings I have received and for the Asian teachers who have so generously shared them with me. Yet in recent years I have become equally interested in a different set of questions. How might Western psychological understandings and methods serve a sacred purpose, by furthering our capacity to embody our larger awakenings in a more personally integrated way? Is our individuality a hindrance on the path of awakening, as some spiritual teachings would claim, or can true individuation (as opposed to compulsive individualism) serve as a bridge between the spiritual path and ordinary life?

The Challenge of Psychospiritual Integration

The question of how psychological self-inquiry could serve spiritual development forces us to consider the complex issue of the relationship between the psychological and the spiritual altogether. Confusions about this are rampant. Conventional therapists often look askance at spiritual practice, just as many spiritual teachers often disapprove of psychotherapy. At the extremes, each camp tends to see the other as avoiding and denying the real issues.

For the most part, psychological and spiritual work address different levels of human existence. Psychological inquiry addresses relative truth, personal meaning—the human realm, which is characterized by interpersonal relations and the issues arising out of them. At its best, it also reveals and helps deconstruct the conditioned structures, forms, and identifications in which our consciousness becomes trapped. Spiritual practice, especially of the mystical bent, looks beyond our conditioned structures, identifications, and ordinary human concerns toward the transhuman—the direct realization of the ultimate. It sees what is timeless, unconditioned, and absolutely true, beyond all form, revealing the vast open-endedness, or emptiness, at the root and core of human existence. Yet must these two approaches to human suffering work in different directions? Or could they be compatible, even powerful allies?

If the domain of psychological work is *form*, the domain of spiritual work is *emptiness*—that unspeakable reality which lies beyond all contingent forms. Yet just as form and emptiness cannot be truly separated, so these two types of inner work cannot be kept entirely separate, but have important areas of overlap. Psychological work can lead to spiritual insight and depth, while spiritual work, in its movement toward embodiment, transformation, and service, calls on us to come to grips with the conditioned personality patterns

that block integration.

The question of whether and how psychological work might further spiritual development calls for a new type of inquiry that leads back and forth across the boundary of absolute and relative truth, taking us beyond orthodoxy and tradition into uncharted territory. If, instead of leaping to facile or definitive conclusions, we start by honoring the question itself in a spirit of open inquiry, it takes us right to the heart of the issue of how spirituality in general, and Eastern transplants such as Western Buddhism in particular, need to develop if they are truly to take hold in, and transform, the modern world.

As a psychotherapist and student of Buddhism, I have been forced to consider this question deeply. My initial interest in psychotherapy developed in the 1960s, at the same time as my interest in the Eastern spiritual traditions. I was inspired to become a psychotherapist largely because I imagined that psychotherapy could be our Western version of a path of liberation. But I quickly found Western psychology too narrow and limited in its view of human nature. And I wondered how I could help anybody else if I didn't know the way out of the maze of human suffering myself. Although I had one great teacher in graduate school—Eugene Gendlin, a pioneer in existential therapy, who taught me much of what has proved useful to me as a therapist—I became quite disillusioned with Western psychology as a whole.

In looking for a way to work on myself and understand my life more fully, I became increasingly drawn toward Buddhism. After finding a genuine master and beginning to practice meditation, I went through a period of aversion to Western psychology and therapy. Now that I had "found the way," I became arrogant toward other paths, as new converts often do. I was also wary of getting trapped in my own personal process, addicted to endlessly examining and processing feelings and emotional issues. In my newfound spiritual fervor, however, I was falling into the opposite trap—of refusing to face the personal "stuff" at all. In truth, I was much more comfortable with the impersonal, timeless reality I discovered through Buddhism than I was with my own personal feelings or interpersonal relationships, both of which seemed messy and entangling, compared with the peace and clarity of meditative equipoise— sitting still, following the breath, letting go of thoughts, and resting in the open space of awareness.

Yet as I continued studying Tantric Buddhism, with its emphasis on respecting relative truth, I began to appreciate many aspects of Western psychology more fully, perhaps for the first time. Once I accepted that

psychology could not describe my ultimate nature, and I no longer required it to provide answers about the nature of human existence, I began to see that it had an important place in the scheme of things. Facing some extremely painful relationship struggles, I began to do my own intensive psychological work. Despite my clinical training, I was surprised at the power of psychological inquiry to help me uncover blind spots, address leftover issues from the past, move through old fears, and open up in a more grounded, personal way, both with myself and with others. This work also helped me approach spiritual practice in a clearer way, not so encumbered by unconscious psychological motivations and agendas.

Cultural Factors East and West

Learning to appreciate the respective value of psychological and spiritual work brought up another set of questions for me: Why was it so easy to see the value of psychological work for Western people, yet so hard to imagine traditional Asian people utilizing the services of a psychotherapist? And why did most of the Eastern spiritual teachers I knew have so much difficulty understanding psychological work and its potential value for a spiritual practitioner? What accounts for this disparity?[3]

In presenting my hypotheses about this, I am not trying to advance a full- blown anthropological theory. Nor do I wish to idealize the societies of ancient India or Tibet, which certainly had many serious problems of their own. Rather, my intention is to point out some (admittedly generalized) social and cultural differences that may help us consider how we in the West may have a somewhat different course of psychospiritual development to follow than people in the traditional cultures where the great meditative practices first arose and flourished.

Some would argue that psychotherapy is a sign of how spoiled or narcissistic Westerners are—that we can afford the luxury of delving into our psyches and fiddling with our personal problems while Rome burns all around. Yet though industrial society has alleviated many of the grosser forms of physical pain, it has also created difficult kinds of personal and social fragmentation that were unknown in premodern societies, generating a new kind of psychological suffering that led to the development of modern psychotherapy.

Traditional Asian culture did not engender the pronounced split between

mind and body that we in the West know so well. In giving priority to the welfare of the collective, Asian societies also did not foster the division between self and other, individual and society, that is endemic to the Western mind. There was neither a generation gap nor the pervasive social alienation that has become a hallmark of modern life. In this sense, the villages and extended families of traditional India or Tibet actually seem to have built sturdier ego structures, not so debilitated by the inner divisions—between mind and body, individual and society, parent and child, or weak ego and harsh, punishing superego—characteristic of the modern self. The "upper stories" of spiritual development in Asian culture could be built on a more stable and cohesive "ground floor" human foundation.

Early child-rearing practices in some traditional Asian cultures, while often far from ideal, were in some ways more wholesome than in the modern West. Asian mothers often had a strong dedication to providing their children with strong, sustained early bonding. Young Indian and Tibetan children, for instance, are continually held, often sharing their parents' bed for their first two or three years. As Alan Roland, a psychoanalyst who spent many years studying cross-cultural differences in Asian and Western self-development, describes Indian child rearing:

> Intense, prolonged maternal involvement in the first four or five years with the young child, with adoration of the young child to the extent of treating him or her as godlike, develops a central core of heightened well-being in the child. Mothers, grandmothers, aunts, servants, older sisters and cousin-sisters are all involved in the pervasive mirroring that is incorporated into an inner core of extremely high feelings of esteem Indian child rearing and the inner structuralization
> of heightened esteem are profoundly psychologically congruent with the basic Hindu concept that the individual soul is essentially the godhead (*atman-brahman*). A heightened sense of inner regard and the premise that a person can strive to become godlike are strongly connected.
>
> . . . This is in contrast to the Western Christian premise of original sin.[b]

According to Roland, this nurturing quality of the Indian extended family helps the child develop an ego structure whose boundaries are "on the whole more flexible and permeable than in most Westerners," and "less rigorously drawn."[c4]

Growing up in extended families, Asian children are also exposed to a wide variety of role models and sources of nurturance, even if the primary parents are not very available. Tibetan tribal villages, for instance, usually regarded the children as belonging to everyone, and everyone's responsibility. Extended families mitigate the parents' tendency to possess their children

psychologically. By contrast, parents in nuclear families often have more investment in "This is *my* child; my child is an extension of me"—which contributes to narcissistic injury and intense fixations on parents that persist for many Westerners throughout their lives.

Certain developmental psychologists have argued that children with deficient parenting hold on to the internalized traces of their parents more rigidly inside themselves. This might explain why the Tibetans I know do not seem to suffer from the heavy parental fixations that many Westerners have. Their self/other (object relational) complexes would not be as tight or conflicted as for Westerners who lack good early bonding, and who spend their first eighteen years in an isolated nuclear family with one or two adults, who themselves are alienated from both folk wisdom and spiritual understanding. Asian children would be less burdened by what the psychologist Guntrip considers the emotional plague of modern civilization: ego weakness, the lack of a grounded, confident sense of oneself and one's capacities.

In addition to fostering strong mother-infant bonding, intact extended families, and a life attuned to the rhythms of the natural world, traditional Asian societies maintained the sacred at the center of social life. A culture that provides individuals with shared myths, meanings, religious values, and rituals provides a source of support and guidance that helps people make sense of their lives. In all these ways, a traditional Asian child would likely grow up more nurtured by what pediatrician and psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott[d] called the "holding environment"—a context of love, support, belonging, and meaning that contributes to a basic sense of confidence and to healthy psychological development in general. By contrast, children today who grow up in fragmented families, glued to television sets that continually transmit images of a spiritually lost, fragmented, and narcissistic world, lack a meaningful context in which to situate their lives.

One way these differences manifest is in how people inhabit their bodies. In observing Tibetans, I am often struck by how centered they are in the lower half of the body and how powerfully they are connected to the ground beneath their feet. Tibetans naturally seem to possess a great deal of *hara*—grounded presence in the belly—which is no doubt a result of the factors mentioned above. Westerners, by contrast, are generally more centered in the upper half of their body and weak in their connection to the lower half.

Hara, which Karlfried Graf Dürckheim calls the *vital center* or *earth center,*[e] is connected with issues of confidence, power, will, groundedness,

trust, support, and equanimity. The child-rearing deficiencies, disconnection from the earth, and overemphasis on rational intellect in Western culture all contribute to loss of *hara*. To compensate for the lack of a sense of support and trust in the belly, Westerners often try to achieve security and control by going "upstairs"—trying to control life with their mind. But behind the ego's attempts to control reality with the mind lies a pervasive sense of fear, anxiety, and insecurity.

Another difference that has important consequences for psychospiritual development is the greater value traditional Asian cultures place on being, in contrast to Western cultures, which put more emphasis on doing. Winnicott in particular stressed the importance of allowing a young child to remain in unstructured states of being: "The mother's nondemanding presence makes the experience of formlessness and comfortable solitude possible, and this capacity becomes a central feature in the development of a stable and personal self. . . . This makes it possible for the infant to experience . . . a state of 'going-on-being' out of which . . . spontaneous gestures emerge."[f] Winnicott used the term *impingement* to describe a parent's tendency to interrupt these formless moments, forcing children to separate abruptly from the continuity of their "going-on-being." The child is "wrenched from his quiescent state and forced to respond . . . and to mold himself to what is provided for him. The major consequence of prolonged impingement is fragmentation of the infant's experience. Out of necessity he becomes prematurely and compulsively attuned to the claims of others. . . . He loses touch with his own spontaneous needs and gestures . . . [and develops] a false self on a compliant basis."

Traditional Asian families often give the young child plenty of room and permission just to be, in an unstructured way, free from the pressures to respond and perform that Western parents often place on their children at an early age. Allowed to be in that way, these children would be more comfortable with emptiness, which we could define here as *unstructured being*. But in our culture, which emphasizes doing, having, and achieving at the expense of simply being, emptiness can seem quite alien, threatening, and terrifying. In a family or society that does not recognize or value being, children are more likely to interpret their own unstructured being as some kind of deficiency, as a failure to measure up, as an inadequacy or lack. Thus the Western ego structure seems to form in a more rigid and defended way, in part to ward off a terrifying sense of deficiency born out of fear of the open, unstructured nature of one's very being.

As a result of this brittle ego having to work overtime to compensate for a lack of inner trust and confidence, many Western seekers find that they are not ready, willing, or able to let go of their ego defenses, despite all their spiritual practice and realization. On a deep, subconscious level, it is too threatening to let go of the little security that their shaky ego structure provides. That is why it can also be helpful for Westerners to work on dismantling their defensive personality structure in a more gradual and deliberate way, through psychological inquiry—examining, understanding, and dissolving all their false self-images, their self-deceptions, their distorted projections, and their habitual emotional reactions, one by one—and developing a fuller, richer connection with themselves in the process.

In sum, to the extent that traditional Asian children grew up supported by a nurturing holding environment, they would be more likely to receive more of what Winnicott defined as the two essential elements of parenting in early childhood: sustained emotional bonding and space to be, to rest in unstructured being. As a result, these children would tend to grow up with a more stable, grounded sense of confidence and well-being—what we call in the West "ego strength"—in contrast to the self-hatred, insecurity, and shaky sense of self that modern Western people often suffer from.

In discussing Asian child development here, I am speaking of influences in the first few years of childhood, when the ego structure first starts to coalesce. In later childhood, many Asian parents become much more controlling, exerting strong pressure on children to conform and to subordinate their individuality to collective rules and roles. Thus Roland notes that most neurotic conflicts among modern Asians are found in the area of family enmeshment and difficulties with self-differentiation. Indeed, while Eastern culture more generally values and understands being and emptiness, as well as interconnectedness, the West values and has a deeper appreciation of individuation.

Cultivating one's own individual vision, qualities, and potentials is of much greater significance in the West than in traditional Asia, where spiritual development could more easily coexist alongside a low level of individuation. Here is where psychological work may serve another important function for Westerners, by helping them to individuate—to listen to and trust their own experience, to develop an authentic personal vision and sense of direction, and to clear up the psychological conflicts that prevent them from authentically being themselves.[5]

Buddhist scholar Robert Thurman has argued that since Buddhism is a path of individuation, it is inaccurate to characterize this tradition as not promoting individual development. Certainly the Buddha gave birth to a new vision that encouraged individuals to pursue their own spiritual development, instead of depending on conventional religious rituals. In that broad sense, Buddhism can be regarded as a path of individuation. But this is a different model of individuation from the one that has developed in the West. As Roland notes, individuation in Asian cultures was usually limited to the arena of spiritual practice, rather than supported as a general norm.

The Western notion of individuation involves finding one's own unique calling, vision, and path, and embodying these in the way one lives. To *become oneself* in this sense often involves innovation, experimentation, and the questioning of received knowledge. As Buddhist scholar Anne Klein notes: "Tibetans, like many Asians who have grown up outside Western influence, do not cultivate this sense of individuality."[g]

In traditional Asia, the teachings of liberation were geared toward people who were, if anything, *too* earthbound, too involved in family roles and social obligations. The highest, nondual teachings of Buddhism and Hinduism— which show that who you really are *is* absolute reality, beyond *you*—provided a way out of the social maze, helping people discover the transhuman absolute that lies beyond all worldly concerns and entanglements. Yet these teachings rest on and presume a rich underpinning of human community, religious customs, and moral values, like a mountain arising out of a network of foothills and valleys below. The soulful social and religious customs of traditional India and Tibet provided a firm human base out of which spiritual aspirations for a transhuman absolute, beyond human relationships and human society, could arise.

Because the traditional Asian's sense of self is embedded in a soulful culture rich in tradition, ritual, close-knit family and community life, people in these cultures did not lose themselves or become alienated from their own humanness in the way that Westerners have. And since soul—the deep, rich, colorful qualities of our humanness—permeated the whole culture, the need to develop individuated soul qualities never assumed the importance that it has in the West. Never having lost their soul, traditional Asians never had to develop any consciousness about how to find it—that is, how to individuate in a distinctly personal way.

In the modern West, it is quite common to feel alienated from the larger

social whole—whose public spaces and architecture, celebrations, institutions, family life, and even food are lacking in nourishing soul qualities that allow people to feel deeply connected to these aspects of life, as well as to one another. The good news, however, is that the soullessness of our culture is forcing us to develop a new consciousness about forging an individuated soul—an authentic inner source of personal vision, meaning, and purpose. One important outgrowth of this is a refined and sophisticated capacity for nuanced personal awareness, personal sensitivity, and personal presence.

This is not something the Asian traditions can teach us much about. If the great gift of the East is its focus on *absolute* true nature—impersonal and shared by all alike—the gift of the West is the impetus it provides to develop an *individuated expression* of true nature—which we could also call *soul* or *personal presence*.[6] Individuated true nature is the unique way that each of us can serve as a vehicle for embodying the suprapersonal wisdom, compassion, and truth of absolute true nature.

We in the West clearly have much to learn from the Eastern contemplative teachings. But if we only try to adhere to the Eastern focus on the transhuman, or suprapersonal, while failing to develop a grounded, personal way of relating to life, we may have a hard time integrating our larger nature into the way we actually live.

Spiritual Bypassing

While many Eastern teachers are extremely warm, loving, and personal in their own way, they often do not have much to say about the specifically personal side of human life.[7] Coming out of traditional Asian societies, they may have a hard time recognizing or assessing the personal, developmental challenges facing their Western students. They often do not understand the pervasive self- hatred, shame, and guilt, as well as the alienation and lack of confidence in these students. Still less do they detect the tendency toward spiritual bypassing
—using spiritual ideas and practices to sidestep personal, emotional "unfinished business," to shore up a shaky sense of self, or to belittle basic needs, feelings, and developmental tasks, all in the name of enlightenment. And so they often teach self-transcendence to students who first of all need to find some ground to stand on.[8]

Spiritual practice involves freeing consciousness from its entanglement in form, matter, emotions, personality, and social conditioning. In a society like

ours, where the whole earthly foundation is weak to begin with, it is tempting to use spirituality as a way of trying to rise above this shaky ground. In this way, spirituality becomes just another way of rejecting one's experience. When people use spiritual practice to try to compensate for low self-esteem, social alienation, or emotional problems, they corrupt the true nature of spiritual practice. Instead of loosening the manipulative ego that tries to control its experience, they are further strengthening it.

Spiritual bypassing is a strong temptation in times like ours when achieving what were once ordinary developmental landmarks—earning a livelihood through dignified, meaningful work; raising a family; sustaining a long-term intimate relationship; belonging to a larger social community—has become increasingly difficult and elusive. Yet when people use spirituality to cover up their difficulties with functioning in the modern world, their spiritual practice remains in a separate compartment, unintegrated with the rest of their life.

For example, one woman I know went to India at age seventeen to get away from a wealthy family that had provided her with little love or understanding and no model of a meaningful life. She spent seven years studying and practicing with Tibetan teachers in India and Nepal, participated in many retreats, and had many powerful realizations. She experienced states of bliss and inner freedom lasting for long periods of time. Upon returning to Europe, however, she could barely function in the modern world. Nothing made any sense to her, and she did not know what to do with herself. She became involved with a charismatic man and wound up having two children by him before she knew what had happened to her. In looking back at that time she said, "This man was my shadow. He represented all the parts of myself I had run away from. I found him totally fascinating and became swept up in a course of events over which I had no control. Clearly, all my spiritual practice had not touched the rest of me—all the old fears, confusions, and unconscious patterns that hit me in the face when I returned to the West."

Using spirituality to make up for failures of individuation—psychologically separating from parents, cultivating self-respect, or trusting one's own intelligence as a source of guidance—also leads to many of the so-called perils of the path: spiritual materialism (using spirituality to shore up a shaky ego), grandiosity and self-inflation, "us versus them" mentality, groupthink, blind faith in charismatic teachers, and loss of discrimination. Spiritual communities can become a kind of substitute family, where the teacher is regarded as the good parent, while the students are striving to be good boys or

good girls by toeing the party line, trying to please the teacher-as-parent, or driving themselves to climb the ladder of spiritual success. And spiritual practice becomes co-opted by unconscious identities and used to reinforce unconscious defenses.

For example, people who hide behind a schizoid defense (resorting to isolation and withdrawal because the interpersonal realm feels threatening) often use teachings about detachment and renunciation to rationalize their aloofness, impersonality, and disengagement, when what they really need is to become more fully embodied, more engaged with themselves, with others, and with life. Unfortunately, the Asian emphasis on impersonal realization makes it easy for alienated Western students to imagine that the personal is of little significance compared with the vastness of the great beyond. Such students are often attracted to teachings about selflessness and ultimate states, which seem to provide a rationale for not dealing with their own psychological wounding. In this way, they use Eastern teachings to cover up their incapacity in the personal and interpersonal realm.

People with a dependent personality structure, who try to please others in order to gain approval and security, often perform unstinting service for the teacher or community in order to feel worthwhile and needed. They confuse a codependent version of self-negation with true selflessness. Spiritual involvement is particularly tricky for people who hide behind a narcissistic defense, because they use spirituality to make themselves feel special and important, while supposedly working on liberation from self.

Spiritual bypassing often adopts a rationale based on using absolute truth to deny or disparage relative truth. Absolute truth is what is eternally true, now and forever, beyond any particular viewpoint. When we tap into absolute truth, we can recognize the divine beauty or larger perfection operating in the whole of reality. From this larger perspective, the murders going on in Brooklyn at this moment, for instance, do not diminish this divine perfection, for the absolute encompasses the whole panorama of life and death, in which suns, galaxies, and planets are continually being born and dying. However, from a *relative* point of view—if you are the wife of a man murdered in Brooklyn tonight—you will probably not be moved by the truth of ultimate perfection. Instead you will be feeling human grief.

There are two ways of confusing absolute and relative truth. If you use the murder or your grief to deny or insult the higher law of the universe, you would be committing the relativist error. You would be trying to apply what is true on

the horizontal plane of *becoming* to the vertical dimension of pure *being*. The spiritual bypasser makes the reverse category error, the absolutist error: he draws on absolute truth to disparage relative truth. His logic might lead to a conclusion like this: Since everything is ultimately perfect in the larger cosmic play, grieving the loss of someone you love is a sign of spiritual weakness.

Psychological realities represent relative truth. They are relative to particular individuals in particular circumstances. Even though one may know that no individual death is ultimately important on the absolute, transhuman level, one may still feel profound grief and regret about a friend's death—on the relative, human level. Because we live on both these levels, the opposite of whatever we assert is also true in some way. Jesus' advice, "Love thine enemies" and "Turn the other cheek," did not prevent him from expressing his anger toward the money changers in the temple or the hypocritical Pharisees. Likewise, our everyday experiences may often appear to be at odds with the highest truth. This creates uncertainty and ambiguity. For many people, the disparity between these two levels of truth is confusing or disturbing. They think reality has to be all one way or the other. In trying to make everything conform to a single order, they become New-Age Pollyannas or else bitter cynics.

Because we live on two levels as human beings, we can never reduce reality to a single dimension. We are not just this relative body-mind organism; we are also absolute being/awareness/presence, which is much larger than our bodily form or personal history. But we are also not *just* this larger, formless absolute; we are also incarnate as this particular individual. If we identify totally with form—our body, mind, or personality—our life will remain confined to known, familiar structures. But if we try to live only as pure emptiness, or absolute being, we may have a hard time fully engaging with our humanity. At the level of absolute truth, the personal self is not ultimately real; at the relative level, it must be respected. If we use the truth of no-self to avoid ever having to make personal statements such as "I want to know you better" to someone we love, this would be a perversion.

A client of mine who was desperate about her marriage had gone to a spiritual teacher for advice. He advised her not to be so angry with her husband, but to be a compassionate friend instead. This was certainly sound spiritual advice. Compassion is a higher truth than anger; when we rest in the absolute nature of mind—pure open awareness—we discover compassion as the very core of our nature. From that perspective, feeling angry about being

hurt only separates us from our true nature.

Yet the teacher who gave this woman this advice did not consider her *relative* situation—that she was someone who had swallowed her anger all her life. Her father had been abusive and would slap her and send her to her room whenever she showed any anger about the way he treated her. So she learned to suppress her anger and always tried to please others and "be a good girl" instead.

When the teacher advised her to feel compassion rather than anger, she felt relieved because this fit right in with her defenses. Since anger was terrifying and threatening to her, she used the teaching on compassion for spiritual bypassing—for refusing to deal with her anger or the message it contained. Yet this only increased her sense of frustration and powerlessness in her marriage.

As her therapist, taking account of her relative psychology, my aim was to help her acknowledge her anger and relate to it more fully. As a spiritual practitioner, I was also mindful that anger is ultimately empty—a wave arising in the ocean of consciousness, without any solidity or inherent meaning. Yet while that understanding may be true in the absolute sense and be valuable for helping dissolve attachment to anger, it was not useful for this woman at this time. Instead, she needed to learn to pay more attention to her anger in order to move beyond a habitual pattern of self-suppression, to discover her inner strength and power, and to relate to her husband in a more active, assertive way.

Given that compassion is a finer and nobler feeling than anger, how do we arrive at genuine compassion? Spiritual bypassing involves imposing on oneself higher truths that lie far beyond one's immediate existential condition. My client's attempts at compassion were not entirely genuine because they were based on rejecting her own anger. Spiritual teachers often exhort us to be loving and compassionate, or to give up selfishness and aggression, but how can we do this if our habitual tendencies arise out of a whole system of psychological dynamics that we have never clearly seen or faced, much less worked with? People often have to feel, acknowledge, and come to terms with their anger before they can arrive at genuine forgiveness or compassion. That is relative truth.

Psychological inquiry starts there, with relative truth—with whatever we are experiencing right now. It involves opening to that experience and exploring the meaning of that experience, letting it unfold, step by step, without judging it according to preconceived ideas. As a therapist, I find that allowing

whatever arises to be there as it is and gently inquiring into it leads naturally in the direction of deeper truth. This is what I call psychological work in the service of spiritual development.

Many people who seek out my services have done spiritual practice for many years. They do not suffer from traditional clinical syndromes, but from some impasse in their lives that their spiritual practice has failed to penetrate: they cannot maintain a long-term relationship, feel real joy, work productively or creatively, treat themselves with compassion, or understand why they continue to indulge in certain destructive behaviors.

I have often been struck by the huge gap between the sophistication of their spiritual practice and the level of their personal development. Some of them have spent years doing what were once considered the most advanced, esoteric practices, reserved only for the select few in traditional Asia, without developing the most rudimentary forms of self-love or interpersonal sensitivity. One woman who had undergone the rigors of a Tibetan-style three- year retreat had little ability to love herself. The rigorous training she had been through only seemed to reinforce an inner discontent that drove her to pursue high spiritual ideals, without showing any kindness toward herself or her own limitations.

Another woman had let an older teacher cruelly manipulate her. She had a habitual tendency from childhood to disregard her own needs and feelings, which, using "dharma logic," she lumped in the category of samsaric hindrances. I have also worked with seasoned spiritual teachers who felt conflicted, guilty, and hypocritical because they were not embodying the teachings they were imparting to others. Often in the course of our work, they would discover narcissistic motives underlying their spiritual ambitions: Holding a position of power and knowledge was a way to be seen as special and important, and to avoid facing their own psychological wounding.

Spiritual Superego

In addition to spiritual bypassing, another major problem for Western seekers is their susceptibility to the "spiritual superego," a harsh inner voice that acts as relentless critic and judge telling them that nothing they do is ever quite good enough: "You should meditate more and practice harder. You're too self- centered. You don't have enough devotion." This critical voice keeps track of every failure to practice or live up to the teachings, so that practice becomes

more oriented toward propitiating this judgmental part of themselves than opening unconditionally to life. They may subtly regard the saints and enlightened ones as father figures who are keeping a watchful eye on all the ways they are failing to live up to their commitments. So they strive to be "dharmically correct," attempting to be more detached, compassionate, or devoted than they really are. In trying to live up to high spiritual ideals, they deny their real feelings, becoming cut off from their bodily vitality, the truth of their own experience, and their ability to find their own authentic direction.

Spiritual seekers who try to be more unemotional, unselfish, or compassionate than they really are often secretly hate themselves for the ways they fail to live up to their high ideals. This makes their spirituality cold and solemn. Their self-hatred was not created by the spiritual teaching; it already existed. But by pursuing spirituality in a way that widens the gap between how they are and how they think they should be, they wind up turning exquisite spiritual teachings on compassion and awakening into further fuel for self- hatred and inner bondage.

This raises the question of how much we can benefit from a spiritual teaching as a set of ideals, no matter how noble those ideals are. Often the striving after a spiritual ideal only serves to reinforce the critical superego— that inner voice that tells us we are never good enough, never honest enough, never loving enough. In a culture permeated by guilt and ambition, where people are desperately trying to rise above their shaky earthly foundation, the spiritual superego exerts a pervasive unconscious influence that calls for special attention and work. This requires an understanding of psychological dynamics that traditional spiritual teachings and teachers often lack.

Overcoming Praise and Blame: A Case Study

The following case study illustrates both how spiritual teaching and practice can be used to reinforce psychological defenses, and how psychological work can be a useful aid to embodying spirituality in a more integrated way.

Paul had been a dedicated Buddhist practitioner for more than two decades. He was a husband, father, and successful businessman who had recently been promoted to a position that involved public speaking. At first, he took this as an interesting challenge, but after a few experiences in front of large audiences, he started feeling overwhelmed by anxiety, worry, tension, sleeplessness, and other physical symptoms. At first, he tried to deal with his distress by

meditating more. While these periods of practice would help him regain some equilibrium, the same symptoms would start to recur when he was about to face an audience again. After a few months of this, he gave me a call.

From the Buddhist teachings, Paul knew the importance of not being attached to praise and blame, two of the eight worldly concerns—along with loss and gain, pleasure and pain, success and failure—that keep us chained to the wheel of suffering. Yet it was not until his fear of public speaking brought up intense anxiety about praise and blame that he realized just how concerned he was about how people saw him. Recognizing this was extremely upsetting for him.

At first Paul waxed nostalgic about his periods of retreat, when he felt detached from such concerns, and we discussed how living in the world often brings up unresolved psychological issues that spiritual practice is not designed to address. As our work progressed, he realized that he used detachment as a defense to deny a deeper, underlying fear about how other people saw him.

He had developed this defense in childhood as a way to cope with not feeling seen by his parents. His mother had lived in a state of permanent tension and anxiety and regarded him as her potential savior, rather than as a separate being with his own feelings and life apart from her. To shield himself from her pain and intrusiveness, Paul had developed a defensive stance of not feeling his need for her and, by extension, for other people in his life.

Having tried all his life not to care about how people regarded him, he was particularly attracted to the Buddhist teachings of no-self when he first encountered them. After all, in the light of absolute truth there is nobody to be seen, nobody to be praised, nobody to be blamed—and Paul found great comfort in this. Yet on the relative level he carried within himself a denied and frustrated need to be seen and loved. In denying this need, Paul was practicing defensiveness, not true nonattachment. He was using spiritual teachings as a rationale for remaining stuck in an old defensive posture.

How could Paul be truly detached from praise and blame as long as he had a buried wish to be loved and appreciated, which he couldn't admit because it felt too threatening? Before he could truly overcome his anxieties about praise and blame, he would first have to acknowledge this wish—a prospect that was frightening and risky.

Along with his conflicted feelings about being seen, Paul also had a fair share of buried self-hatred. As his mother's appointed savior, he had desperately wanted her to be happy, and felt guilty about failing to save her. In

fact, he was stuck in many of the ways his mother was stuck. His guilt and self- blame about this made him hypersensitive to blame from others.

So Paul was doubly trapped. As long as he could not acknowledge the part of him that felt, "Yes, I want to be seen and appreciated," his frustrated need for love kept him tied in knots, secretly on the lookout for others' praise and confirmation. And his inability to say, "No, I don't exist for your benefit," kept him susceptible to potential blame whenever he failed to please others.

Yes and *no* are expressions of desire and aggression—two life energies that philosophers, saints, and psychologists, from Plato and Buddha to Freud, have considered particularly problematic. Unfortunately, many spiritual teachers simply criticize passion and aggression instead of teaching people to unlock the potential intelligence hidden within them.

The intelligent impulse contained in the yes of desire is the longing to expand, to meet and connect more fully with life. The intelligence contained in no is the capacity to discriminate, differentiate, and protect oneself and others from harmful forces. The energy of the genuine, powerful no can be a doorway to strength and power, allowing us to separate from aspects of our conditioning we need to outgrow. Our capacity to express the basic power of yes and no often becomes damaged in childhood. And this incapacity becomes installed in our psychological makeup as a tendency to oscillate between compliance and defiance, as Paul exemplified in his attitude toward others—secretly feeling compelled to please them, yet secretly hating them for this at the same time.

As long as Paul failed to address his unconscious dynamic of compliance and defiance, his spiritual practice could not help him stabilize true equanimity, free from anxiety about praise and blame. Although he could experience freedom from praise and blame during periods of solitary spiritual practice, these realizations remained compartmentalized and failed to carry over into his everyday functioning.

There were two defining moments in our work together, in which Paul connected with his genuine yes and no. These two moments are also of interest in highlighting the difference between psychological and spiritual work.

Before Paul could find and express his genuine yes—to himself, to others, to life—he had to say no to the internalized mother whose influence remained alive within him: "No, I don't exist to make you happy, to be your savior, to give your life meaning." But it was not easy for him to acknowledge his anger and hatred toward his mother for the ways he had become an object of her own narcissistic needs. Quoting spiritual doctrine, Paul believed it was wrong to

hate. Yet in never letting himself feel the hatred he carried unconsciously in his body, he wound up expressing it in covert, self-sabotaging ways. I did not try to push past his inner taboo against this feeling, but only invited him to acknowledge his hatred when it was apparent in his speech or demeanor. When Paul could finally let himself feel his hatred directly, instead of judging or denying it, he came alive in a whole new way. He sat up straight and broke into laughter, the laughter of an awakening vitality and power.

Articulating his genuine no, the no of protection—"I won't let you take advantage of me"—also freed him to acknowledge his hidden desire, his dormant yes—"Yes, I want to be seen for who I am, the being I am in my own right, apart from what I do for you." The second defining moment happened as Paul acknowledged this need to be seen and loved for who he was—which triggered a surge of energy coursing through him, filling his whole body. Yet this was also scary for him, for it felt as though he were becoming inflated. And for Paul, with his refined Buddhist sensibilities, self-inflation was the greatest sin of all—a symptom of a bloated ego, the way of the narcissist who is full of himself.

Seeing his resistance, I encouraged him to explore, if only for a few moments, what it would be like to let himself become inflated, to feel full of himself, and to stay present with that experience. As he let himself fill up and inflate, he experienced himself as large, rich, and radiant. He felt like a sun king, receiving energy from the gods above and below, radiating light in all directions. He realized that he had always wanted to feel this way, but had never allowed himself to expand like this before. Yet now he was letting himself be infused by the fullness that had been missing in his life—the fullness of his own being. To his surprise, he found it a tremendous relief and release to allow this expansion at last.

As Paul got over his surprise, he laughed and said, "Who would have thought that letting myself become inflated could be so liberating?" Of course, he wasn't acting out a state of ego inflation, but rather feeling what it was like to let the energy of desire, fullness, and spontaneous self-valuing flow through his body. In this moment, because he was according himself the recognition he had secretly sought from others, he did not care about how others saw him. Nor was there any desire to lord his newfound strength over anyone. He was enjoying the pure radiation of his inner richness and warmth—let others respond as they may.

Many spiritual seekers who suffer, like Paul, from a deflated sense of self

interpret spiritual teachings about selflessness to mean that they should keep a lid on themselves and not let themselves shine. Yet instead of overzealously guarding against ego inflation, Paul needed to let his genie out of the bottle before he could clearly distinguish between genuine expressions of being such as power, joy, or celebration, and ego distortions such as grandiosity and conceit.

Since *need* was such a dirty word in Paul's worldview, he had used his spiritual practice as a way to overcome it. However, trying to leap directly from denial of his need for love to a state of needlessness was only spiritual bypassing—using spiritual teachings to support an unconscious defense. When he stopped fighting his need, he was able to connect with a deeper force within it—a genuine, powerful yes to life and love—which lessened his fixation on outer praise and blame. Paul discovered that this essential yes was quite different from attachment and clinging; it contained a *holy longing*[h] to give birth to himself in a new way. Indeed, as Paul discovered his inner fire, value, and power through unlocking his genuine yes and no, he became less defensive, more open to others and to the flow of love.

Differentiated and Undifferentiated Being

This case example illustrates how unconscious psychological issues can distort someone's understanding of spiritual teachings and interfere with truly embodying them. In addition, Paul's ambivalence, self-denial, and self-blame cut off his access to deeper capacities such as strength, confidence, and the ability to connect with others in a genuinely open way. We could call these capacities *differentiated expressions of being* or *qualities of presence*. If the absolute side of our nature—undifferentiated being—is like clear light, then the relative side—differentiated being—is like a rainbow spectrum of colors contained within that light. *While realizing undifferentiated being is the path of liberation, embodying qualities of differentiated being is the path of individuation* in its deepest sense: the unfolding of our intrinsic human resources, which exist as seed potentials within us, but which are often blocked by psychological conflicts.

While realization can happen at any moment, it does not necessarily lead, as we have seen, to actualization. Although I may have access to the transparency of pure being, I may still not have access to the human capacities that will enable me to actualize that realization in the world. I may not be able to access

my generosity, for instance, in situations that require it, if it is obstructed by unconscious beliefs that reinforce an identity of impoverishment and deficiency. If these subconscious beliefs are not brought to light and worked with, generosity is unlikely to manifest in a full and genuine way.

In the Buddhist tradition, differentiated being is often described in terms of "the qualities of a buddha"—wisdom, great clarity, compassion, patience, strength, or generosity. Although some lineages do not emphasize these qualities, others, such as Tibetan Vajrayana, have developed a wide range of transformational practices designed to cultivate various aspects of them.

Since these deeper capacities are often blocked by unresolved psychological issues, working with these conflicts directly can provide another way, particularly suited to Westerners, to gain access to these differentiated qualities of presence and integrate them into our character and functioning. After all, most problems in living are the result of losing access to those capacities—power, love, flexibility, confidence, or trust—that allow us to respond creatively to the challenging situations at hand. In the process of recognizing and working through our psychological conflicts, these missing capacities often become unveiled.

Because Western seekers generally suffer from a painful split between being and functioning, they need careful, specific guidance in bridging the gap between the radical openness of pure being and being in the world. Unfortunately, even in spiritual traditions that emphasize the importance of integrating realization into daily life, special instructions about how to accomplish this integration are often not very fully elaborated. Or else it is not clear how the instructions, formulated for simpler times and a simpler world, apply to handling the complexities of our fast-paced world, navigating the perils of Westernstyle intimate relationships, or overcoming the apparent gap many people feel between realizing impersonal being and embodying it in personal functioning. By helping people work through specific emotional conflicts that obscure their deeper capacities, psychological work can also help them bring these capacities more fully into their lives. This kind of work is like cultivating the soil in which the seeds of spiritual realization can take root and blossom.[9]

The more we cultivate the full range of human qualities latent in our absolute true nature, the richer our quality of personal presence can become, as we begin to embody our true nature in an individuated way. This type of individuation goes far beyond the secular, humanistic ideal of developing one's

uniqueness, being an innovator, or living out one's dreams. Instead, it involves forging a vessel—our capacity for personal presence, nourished by its rootedness in a full spectrum of human qualities—through which we can bring absolute true nature into form: the "form" of our person.

By *person* I do not mean some fixed structure or entity, but the way in which true nature can manifest and express itself in a uniquely personal way, as the ineffable suchness or "youness" of you. How fully the suchness of *you* shines through—in your face, your speech, your actions, your particular quality of presence—is partly grace, but also partly a result of how much you have worked on polishing your vessel, so that it becomes transparent. Thus, individuation, which involves clarifying the psychological dynamics that obscure our capacity to fully shine through, is not opposed to spiritual realization. It is, instead, a way of becoming a more transparent vessel—an authentic person who can bring through what is beyond the person in a uniquely personal way.

In the secular humanistic perspective, individual development is an end in itself. In the view I am proposing here, individuation is not an end but a path or means that can help us give birth to our true form by clearing up the distortions of our old false self. As we learn to be true to our deepest individual imperatives, rather than enslaved to past conditioning, our character structure no longer poses such an obstacle to recognizing absolute true nature or embodying it. Our individuated nature becomes a window opening onto all that is beyond and greater than ourselves.

Conscious and Subconscious Identity

Spiritual traditions generally explain the cause of suffering in global, epistemological terms—as the result of ignorance, misperception, or sin—or in ontological terms—as a disconnection from our essential being. Buddhism, for instance, traces suffering to the mind's tendency to grasp and fixate—on thoughts, self-images, egocentric feelings, and distorted perceptions—as well as to ignore the deeper source of our experience—the luminous, expansive, and creative power of awareness itself. Western psychology, by contrast, offers a more specific *developmental* understanding. It shows how suffering stems from childhood conditioning; in particular, from frozen, distorted images of self and other (object relations) that we carry with us from the past. Since it understands these distorting identities as relational—formed in and through our

relationships with others—psychotherapy explores these self/other structures in a relational context—in the healing environment of the client-therapist relationship.

Since the spiritual traditions do not generally recognize how the ego identity forms out of interpersonal relationships, they are unable to address these interpersonal structures directly. Instead, they offer practices—prayer, meditation, mantra, service, devotion to God or guru—that shift the attention to the universal ground of being in which the individual psyche moves, like a wave on the ocean. Thus, it becomes possible to enter luminous states of transpersonal awakening, beyond personal conflicts and limitations, without having to address or work through specific psychological issues and conflicts. Yet while this kind of realization can certainly provide access to greater wisdom and compassion, it often does not touch or alter impaired relational patterns, which, because they pervade everyday functioning, interfere with integrating this realization into the fabric of daily life.

Spiritual practice exerts a powerful global effect on the psyche by undermining the central linchpin of the ego—the identification with a fixed self-concept, which I call the *conscious identity*.[i] The conscious identity is a self-image that allows us to imagine that we are something solid and substantial. From a Buddhist or ontological perspective, this egoic identity also functions as a defense against the reality of emptiness—the open dimension of being, with all its uncertainty, impermanence, and insubstantiality

—which the ego interprets as a threat to its existence. Yet if we look at it more psychologically, we can see that the conscious identity also functions as a defense against an underlying sense of inner deficiency, which we originally felt in childhood in response to lack of love, connection, or acceptance. Even though our conscious identity is designed to overcome this sense of deficiency, inadequacy, or unworthiness, we nonetheless tend to identify subconsciously with the very lack we are trying to overcome. This deeplyembedded sense of deficiency—originating in our childhood helplessness in the face of primal fear, anxiety, or pain—is what I call the *subconscious identity.*

The ego structure as a whole thus contains both a deficient, subconscious identity and a compensatory, conscious identity. Because subconscious identities are more hidden and threatening than conscious identities, they are also much harder to acknowledge, dislodge, and transform. If we are to liberate ourselves from the whole compensatory/deficient ego structure, it seems necessary to address the interpersonal dynamics that are embedded in

its fabric. The relational context of psychotherapy can often provide a direct, focused, and precise method of working through the subconscious dynamics that keep this whole identity structure intact.[10]

Paul, for example, had developed a conscious identity based on being in control of his life and "not caring what people think." This defensive control structure was a way of compensating for an underlying sense of deficiency that caused him to feel overwhelmed in interpersonal relations. His spiritual practice had partially undermined this compensatory identity by giving him direct access to his larger being. But because he also used spiritual practice as a way to bypass, or not deal with, his subconscious identity—his deeper sense of deficiency, stemming from childhood—it could not totally free him from the grip of his whole identity structure.

Since Paul did not like to feel his deficient identity and its associated feelings of anxiety, frustration, and tension, he was happy to practice spiritual methods that helped him move beyond, and thus avoid, this aspect of his ego structure. Indeed, it was much easier for him to be present with the open, spacious dimension of being than with his anxiety and helplessness when they were triggered. Yet since his capacity for presence did not extend into the totality of his psyche, it was not of much use to him when he was up against his worst demons.

Through the psychological work we did together, Paul was able to acknowledge his underlying sense of deficiency and open to the feelings of vulnerability and helplessness associated with it. Always before, when overwhelmed by obsessive thoughts of praise and blame, he would try to let go of these thoughts as he would in meditation. This was certainly of value in its own way. But our work together also gave him another way to work with this situation. He learned to bring his attention into his belly, feel the sense of deficiency directly, and bring attention to the subconscious belief at its core: "I can't handle this." In this way, he began to work directly with his subconscious identity when it became activated, instead of just trying to move beyond it. In conjunction with his meditative practice, this kind of psychological work helped Paul loosen his larger identity structure, so that he could begin to relax in situations that triggered his deepest fears.

Of course, some might argue that Paul's problem was that he failed to truly understand or apply the spiritual practices and teachings he had received. That may well be. But I don't believe his spiritual practice was a failure. It served him well in many ways. It also brought him to the point where his most

primitive, unresolved psychological issues were fully exposed and ready to be worked with. Yet he needed another set of tools to address these issues directly, to penetrate the unconscious roots of his tendency to distort and compartmentalize the spiritual teachings he had received, and to become a more integrated human being.

In the end, Paul felt that both his psychological and spiritual work were of great benefit, in complementary ways. The psychological work also had a clarifying effect on his spiritual practice, by helping him make an important distinction between absolute emptiness—the ultimate reality beyond self—and relative, psychological emptiness—his inner sense of lack and deficiency. Because he had previously conflated these two types of emptiness, his spiritual practice had often served to reinforce his underlying sense of unworthiness.

Toward a Further Dialogue between East and West

The essential difference between Western and Eastern psychology is their differing emphasis on the personal and the impersonal. Unfortunately, contemporary interpretations of the Eastern spiritual teachings often make *personal* a synonym for *egoic*, with the result that the capacity for richly expressive personal presence often becomes lost. Although personal presence may not be as vast and boundless as impersonal presence, it has a mystery and beauty all its own. Martin Buber saw this "personal making-present (*personale Vergegenwa¨rtigung*)" as an integral part of what he considered the primary unit of human experience: the I-Thou relationship.[j] Indeed, to appreciate the power and meaning of personal presence, we only need to look into the face of someone we love. As the Irish priest John O'Donohue once remarked, "In the human face infinity becomes personal." While impersonal presence is the source of an equal concern and compassion for all beings (*agape*, in Western terms), personal presence is the source of *eros*—the intimate resonance between oneself, as this particular person, and another, whose particular suchness we respond to in a very particular way.

We in the West have been exposed to the most profound nondual teachings and practices of the East for only a few short decades. Now that we have begun to digest and assimilate them, it is time for a deeper level of dialogue between East and West, in order to develop greater understanding about the relationship between the impersonal absolute and the human, personal dimension. Indeed, expressing absolute true nature in a thoroughly personal,

human form may be one of the most important evolutionary potentials of the cross-fertilization of East and West, of contemplative and psychological understanding. Bringing these two approaches into closer dialogue may help us discover how to transform our personality in a more complete way— developing it into an instrument of higher purposes—thus redeeming the whole personal realm, instead of just seeking liberation from it.

Buddhism for one has always grown by absorbing methods and understandings indigenous to the cultures to which it spread. If psychotherapy is our modern way of dealing with the psyche and its demons, analogous to the early Tibetan shamanic practices that Vajrayana Buddhism integrated into its larger framework, then the meditative traditions may find a firmer footing in our culture through recognizing and relating to Western psychology more fully. A more open and penetrating dialogue between practitioners of meditative and psychological disciplines could help the ancient spiritual traditions find new and more powerful ways of addressing the Western situation and thus have a greater impact on the direction our world is taking.

In sum, we need a new framework of understanding that can help us appreciate how psychological and spiritual work might be mutually supportive allies in the liberation and complete embodiment of the human spirit. We need to re-envision both paths for our time, so that psychological work can function in the service of spiritual development, while spiritual work can also take account of psychological development. These two convergent streams would then recognize each other as two vitally important limbs of an evolving humanity that is still moving toward realizing its potential as

—the being that can open, and know itself as belonging to the universal mystery and presence that surrounds and inhabits all things, and

—the being that can embody that larger openness as human presence in the world, through its capacity to manifest all the deeper resources implicit in its nature, thus serving as a crucial link between heaven and earth.

PART THREE

The Awakening Power *of* Relationship

Introduction

THE THIRD AND FINAL PART of this book draws on understandings developed in the previous sections to illuminate what is undoubtedly the most challenging area of many people's lives—personal relationships, intimacy, love, and passion. One of the most painful ways in which the spiritual crisis of our time affects each of us is in the alienated quality of our relationships with others. In this time of wide-scale dehumanization, all kinds of relations—between friends, lovers, colleagues at work, parents and children, teachers and students
—need to be revitalized and revisioned.

It is unusual to include the topic of intimate relationship in a book of this kind. Most books on spirituality, meditation, and psychospiritual issues focus on the transpersonal dimension of our nature, our spiritual essence. While the literature on meditation is vast, nowhere, East or West, do we find a richly articulated tradition that addresses how to remain conscious and awake in an intimate personal relationship. Tibetan Buddhist Tantra perhaps comes the closest, with its teachings on the union of consorts. Yet Tantric principles are quite esoteric and do not address the personal interaction that is the hallmark of modern intimacy. Aside from general recommendations about compassion, generosity, and kindness, spiritual teachings rarely address what comes up between two people who are intimately involved with each other, or how to work with it. Few works in the spiritual literature, and hardly any writing before I first published *Journey of the Heart,* have even considered interpersonal intimacy to be an important or valid vehicle on the path of awakening. To help correct that oversight, I considered it important to include these chapters on relationship in this book.

The truth is that many spiritual seekers find it much easier to feel balanced, conscious, and centered in themselves when living alone than when living with another person. When we live alone, it is easy to avoid looking closely at our habitual patterns because we live inside them. In a relationship, however, since our partner inevitably mirrors back to us how our conditioned personality affects him or her, we cannot avoid having to face all our rough

edges. Intimate person-to-person contact also stirs up a whole range of unsettling feelings, along with all our fears, going back to childhood, about love, power, abandonment, betrayal, engulfment, and a host of other interpersonal threats.

Thus it is not surprising that the search for spiritual awakening has for centuries been mostly a solitary affair, often pursued in monastic, celibate, or otherworldly situations. Nor is it surprising that spiritual communities usually suffer from the same kinds of interpersonal neurosis as any other group, and often even more so. The growing consciousness that develops through spiritual practice is often not fully tested or refined in the crucible of interpersonal engagement and dialogue.

The chapters in this part focus primarily on intimate relationship as a sacred path, but also include two that address the relationship to a spiritual teacher, which in many ways resembles the connection between lover and beloved. No doubt other kinds of relationship could have been addressed here as well, since the principles essential for a conscious relationship between lovers— openness, presence, willingness to examine one's emotional reactions, communicating in a truthful and self-revealing manner—certainly hold true for all relationships. Yet I have limited my focus to intimate relationship because it is such a provocative and powerful meeting place, where the psychological and the spiritual come together in a particularly potent way.

As the Russian mystic Vladimir Solovyev wrote, erotic love "differs from other kinds of love by its greater intensity, greater absorption, and the possibility of a more complete and comprehensive reciprocity."[a] While inspiring us to open ourselves fully to another, it stirs up all the most reactive patterns of the conditioned personality at the same time. This is precisely why it can be such a potent transformative force: It forces us to face and work on our most deeply entrenched personality patterns, in the light of our love for another. Intimacy as a transformative path calls on us to become real persons— capable of real meeting and engagement—and at the same time, to root the personal in the larger ground of being, which stretches far beyond the person. It requires us to grow up *and* wake up.

My approach to relationship as a sacred path has been largely shaped by my study of meditation and Tibetan Tantric Buddhism. The Tantric perspective, as distinct from many other Buddhist and Eastern approaches, is based on an appreciation of the love affair between absolute and relative truth, heaven and earth, emptiness and form, realization and embodiment. This love affair is

graphically portrayed as the erotic union of male and female deities—eyes wide open, arms waving, and smiling fiercely—surrounded by a radiant halo of energy. These lovers are obviously not just enjoying each other but also waking each other up!

This is one of the most powerful symbolic representations of the human condition that I know. Over the years I discovered that Tantric Buddhism also contained most of the principles necessary for living—and loving another being as well—in a sane, wide awake, spiritually vital way. However, in the Tibetan tradition these principles are often articulated in esoteric ways that are not always clearly applicable to personal relationships. Since I was in desperate need for guidance in the area of relationship myself, I took it upon myself to tease out and interpret some of these principles in a new way, interweave them with certain psychological understandings, and apply them to the interpersonal arena. So while my writings on relationship only fleetingly refer to meditation or Tantric Buddhism, that tradition was a main source of inspiration for the approach I developed in *Journey of the Heart* and *Love and Awakening.* The challenge of bringing meditative principles to bear on the issues of relationship also impressed on me the importance, especially for Westerners, of integrating the impersonal realization of buddha-nature into the whole fabric of our personal embodiment.

Chapter 15 is a concise overview of my vision of intimate relationship as a path of awakening, along with its evolutionary, personal, and sacred significance.

Chapter 16 looks at relationship as a dance of polarities, which requires the capacity to move flexibly between different positions without hardening into a fixed stance. I also suggest some ways in which meditation is excellent practice for learning this kind of flexibility.

Chapter 17 looks at how the psychological obstacles in an intimate relationship can become spiritual opportunities, enabling us to gain access to deeper powers and resources of our being. This then becomes an alchemical process—refining the ore of personality in order to recover the gold of our true nature.

Chapter 18 addresses certain widespread confusions about the nature of unconditional love. It also shows how unconditional love can be a path in its own right, starting out with the first spontaneous flash of falling in love and ripening into an ongoing practice of expanding our capacity to accept all that is human in ourselves and others.

Chapter 19 sets out a new appreciation of the nature of passion that goes beyond the historical Western ambivalence toward it, which has oscillated between fascination/idealization and repulsion/condemnation. Distinguishing between conditional and unconditional passion, I try to show how passion is an awakening force in its own right. Particularly interesting are the parallels between romantic passion and the devotion of a student toward a spiritual teacher.

Chapter 20 considers the great pitfalls and the great promise of the relationship between spiritual master and student—another area of tremendous confusion in our culture. Growing out of a yearlong research project, this chapter explores characteristics of pathological cults and the nature of spiritual authority. It also discusses the important differences between problematic teacher-student relationships and beneficial ones.

Chapter 21, a concluding conversation with writer Paul Shippee, brings together many themes of the book. Here I propose that the work of conscious relationship between two individuals is a powerful force that can help not only to awaken two individuals but also to regenerate greater heart and soulfulness, along with a renewed sense of community, in the world.

15

Intimate Relationship as Transformative Path

All genuine love . . . is based on the possibility the beloved offers to the lover for a fuller unfolding of his own being by being-in-the-world with her.

—MEDARD BOSS

TWO PEOPLE SEEKING to fashion a life together today face a unique set of challenges and difficulties. Never before have couples had so little help or guidance from elders, society, or religion. Most of the old social and economic rationales for marriage as a lifelong relationship have broken down. Even the old incentives for having children—to carry on the family name or trade, or to contribute to family work, providing an economic asset—are mostly gone. For the first time in history, the relations between men and women lack clear guidelines, supportive family networks, a religious context, and a compelling social meaning.

Until recently, the form and function of the male/female relationship, and marriage in particular, were carefully prescribed by family, society, and religion. One's family always chose or at least had veto power over one's choice of a marriage partner. Every couple had a set of defined roles within an extended family, which in turn had a place in a close-knit community or village where people shared similar social, moral, and religious values and customs. Marriage had a central place in the community, providing a stabilizing influence and supporting the social order. And society supported it in turn: if a marriage was unhappy, community pressure held it together.

Only in the last few generations has this situation changed. Now that marriage has lost most of its traditional supports and couples are increasingly cut off from family, community, and widely shared values, there are few convincing *extrinsic* reasons for a man and a woman to sustain a life's journey together. Only the *intrinsic* quality of their personal connection can keep them going. For the first time in history, every couple is on their own—to discover how to build a healthy relationship, and to forge their own vision of how and why to be together.

Those of us who are struggling with questions of love and commitment today are pioneers in territory that has never before been consciously explored. It is important to realize just how new this situation is, so we do not blame ourselves for the difficulties we face in our relationships. In former times, if people wanted to explore the deeper mysteries of life, they would often enter a monastery or hermitage far away from conventional family ties. For many of us today, however, intimate relationship has become the new wilderness that brings us face to face with all our gods and

demons. It is calling on us to free ourselves from old habits and blind spots, and to develop the full range of our powers, sensitivities, and depths as human beings—right in the middle of everyday life.

Toward a New Vision of Relationship

Traditional marriage achieved stability by serving a prescribed societal function. Modern marriage, by contrast, is based on *feeling* rather than *function*. No wonder it is so unstable. Romantic feelings, while inspiring, are notoriously fickle. Long-term relationships clearly need a new foundation, beyond social duty and romantic intensity. We need a whole new vision and context that can help couples find fresh direction and inspiration.

If we are to cultivate a new spirit of engagement in our intimate relationships, I suggest that we need to recognize and welcome the powerful opportunity that intimate relationships provide—to awaken to our true nature. If relationships are to flourish, they need to reflect and promote who we really are, beyond any limited image of ourselves concocted by family, society, or our own minds. They need to be based on the whole of who we are, rather than on any single form, function, or feeling. This presents a tremendous challenge, for it means undertaking a journey in search of our deepest nature. Our connection with someone we love can in fact be one of the best vehicles for that journey. When we approach it in this way, intimacy becomes a path—an unfolding process of personal and spiritual development.

If form and feeling, duty and romance, have been thesis and antithesis in the historical dialectic of marriage, the new synthesis we can now begin to contemplate is *marriage as a conscious relationship*, which joins together heaven and earth. Since men and women have only rarely looked at each other eye to eye, as equals, as whole human beings, apart from roles, stereotypes,

and inherited prescriptions of all kinds, conscious relationship between the sexes is a radical new departure.

The Greek myth of Eros and Psyche suggests what the journey of conscious relationship may entail. Eros becomes Psyche's lover by night on the condition that she must never attempt to see his face. Things go smoothly between them for a while. But never having seen her lover, Psyche begins to wonder who he really is. When she lights a lamp to see his face, he flies away, and she must undergo a series of trials to find him again. When she finally overcomes these trials, she is united with him again, only this time in a much fuller way, and their love can proceed in the light of day.

This myth points to the age-old tension between consciousness (Psyche) and erotic love (Eros). Traditional Western marriages have been like love in the dark. Yet now that relationships no longer function smoothly in the old unconscious grooves, they require a new kind of awareness. Like Psyche, we are presently undergoing the trials that every advance in consciousness entails.

The Nature of Path

Path is a term that points to the great challenge of our existence: the need to awaken, each in our own way, to the greater possibilities that life presents, and to become fully human. The nature of a path is to take us on this journey.

Becoming fully human involves working with the totality of what we are— both our conditioned nature (earth) and our unconditioned nature (heaven). On the one hand, we have developed a number of habitual personality patterns that cloud our awareness, distort our feelings, and restrict our capacity to open to life and to love. We originally fashioned our personality patterns to shield us from pain, but now they have become a dead weight keeping us from living as fully as we could. Still, underneath all our conditioned behavior, the basic nature of the human heart is an unconditioned awake presence, a caring, inquisitive intelligence, an openness to reality. Each of us has these two forces at work inside us: an embryonic wisdom that wants to blossom from the depths of our being, and the imprisoning weight of our karmic patterns. From birth to death, these two forces are always at work, and our lives hang in the balance. Since human nature always contains these two sides, our journey involves working with both.

Intimate relationships are ideally suited as a path because they touch both these sides of us and bring them into forceful contact. When we connect deeply

with another person, our heart naturally opens toward a whole new world of possibilities. Yet this breath of fresh air also makes us more aware of how we are stuck. Relationship inevitably brings us up against our most painful unresolved emotional conflicts from the past, continually stirring us up against things in ourselves that we cannot stand—all our worst fears, neuroses, and fixations—in living technicolor.

If we focus on only one side of our nature at the expense of the other, we have no path, and therefore cannot find a way forward. This also limits the possibilities of our relationships as well. If we emphasize only the wonderful aspects of relationship, we become caught in the "bliss trap"—imagining that love is a stairway to heaven that will allow us to rise above the nitty-gritty of our personality and leave behind all fear and limitation: "Love is so fantastic! I feel so high! Let's get married; won't everything be wonderful!" Of course these expansive feelings are wonderful. But the potential distortion here is to imagine that love by itself can solve all our problems, provide endless comfort and pleasure, or save us from facing ourselves, our aloneness, our pain, or ultimately, our death. Becoming too attached to the heavenly side of love leads to rude shocks and disappointments when we inevitably have to deal with the real-life challenges of making a relationship work.

The other distortion is to make relationship into something totally familiar and totally safe, to treat it as a finished product, rather than a living process. This is the security trap. When we try to make a relationship serve our needs for security, we lose a sense of greater vision and adventure. Relationship becomes a business deal, or else totally monotonous. A life devoted to everyday routines and security concerns eventually becomes too stale and predictable to satisfy the deeper longings of the heart.

Once a couple loses a sense of larger vision, they often try to fill the void that remains by creating a cozy materialistic lifestyle—watching television, acquiring upscale possessions, or climbing the social ladder. Curling up in their habitual patterns, they may fall entirely asleep. After twenty years of marriage, one of them may wake up wondering, "What have I done with my life?" and suddenly disappear in search of what has been lost.

Neither of these approaches leads very far or provides a path. The illusion of heavenly bliss may allow us to ascend for a while, until we finally crash when the relationship inevitably comes back down to earth. The illusion of security keeps us glued to the earth, so that we never venture to reach beyond ourselves at all.

Love is a transformative power precisely because it brings the two different sides of ourselves—the expansive and the contracted, the awake and the asleep —into direct contact. Our heart can start to work on our karma: rigid places in us that we have hidden from view suddenly come out in the open and soften in love's blazing warmth. And our karma starts to work on our heart: coming up against difficult places in ourselves and our partner forces our heart to open and expand in new ways. Love challenges us to keep expanding in exactly those places where we imagine we can't possibly open any further.

From the perspective of bliss or security, it seems terrible that relationships confront us with so many things in ourselves we would rather not look at. But from the perspective of *path*, this is a great opportunity. Intimate relationships can help free us from our karmic entanglements by showing us exactly how and where we are stuck. When someone we love reacts to our unconscious patterns, these patterns bounce back on us and can no longer be ignored. When we see and feel the ways that we are stuck, in the context of a loving relationship, a desire to move in a new direction naturally begins to stir in us. Then our path begins to unfold.

So even though the current upheavals going on between men and women may seem daunting and perplexing, they are also forcing us to become more conscious in our relationships. In looking beyond comfort and security needs, we can begin to appreciate the pure essence of relationship, its capacity to bring together the polarities of our existence—our buddha-nature and our karmic tendencies, heaven and earth, unconditioned mind and conditioned mind, vision and practicality, male and female, self and other—and heal our divisions, both inner and outer.

Tapping Larger Qualities of Being

If our heart is like a flame, our karma or conditioned habits are the fuel this fire needs in order to blaze brightly. Although the burning of old karma creates great turbulence, it also releases powerful resources within us that have been locked up in our habitual patterns. As these patterns start to break down, we gain access to a wider spectrum of our human qualities.

All the most universally valued qualities—such as generosity, tenderness, humor, strength, courage, or patience—allow us to be more fully human by enabling us to meet whatever life presents. Each of these resources allows us to engage with a different facet of reality. The more of them we have access to,

the more we can embrace the whole of life—in its joys and delights, as well as in its difficulties and sorrows.

We each have access to a whole spectrum of these human qualities, at least as seed potentials. Yet most of us have developed one type of quality, such as strength, at the expense of its opposite, such as tenderness. In this way, we are lopsided and incomplete. This sense of incompleteness is part of what draws us to relationship. We often feel most strongly attracted to people who manifest qualities we lack and who challenge us to develop a greater fullness and depth of being than we have yet discovered.

As our habitual patterns burn in the fire of intimate relationship, our genuine human qualities become released. For instance, when we can no longer maintain our old guardedness with someone we love, we may feel quite naked and vulnerable without this old shield to hide behind. Yet this nakedness also makes us more transparent to our true nature. The less we need to hide, the more we can come forward as we really are. And this deeper connection to ourselves also provides access to the inner resource we most need in letting down our guard: true strength, which comes from within, rather than from having the upper hand. This is how love's alchemy works.

Three Levels of the Path: Evolutionary, Personal, and Sacred

The path of conscious love has three different, interrelated dimensions. At the collective level, it has evolutionary significance. Centuries of imbalance between the masculine and feminine ways of being have left a deep scar in the human psyche. No one can escape the effects of this wound—which pervade both our inner and outer lives. Inwardly we experience it as a split between heart and mind, feeling and thinking, tenderness and strength; outwardly it manifests in the war between the sexes and in the mindless ravaging of nature that is endangering our planet. Until human consciousness can transform the ancient antagonism between masculine and feminine into a creative alliance, we will remain fragmented and at war with ourselves, as individuals, as couples, as societies, and as a race.

Developing a new depth and quality of intimacy in our relationships today is an important step in healing this age-old rift and bringing together the two halves of our humanity. As we begin to move in this direction, the man/woman relationship takes on a larger purpose, beyond just survival or security. It becomes an *evolutionary path*—an instrument for the evolution of human

consciousness.

Secondly, as a *personal path* relationship involves moving through our individual barriers to openness and intimacy, contacting deeper levels of our being, and gaining access to the full range of our human resources. By helping us become more fully available to the creative possibilities of our life, intimate relationship refines us as individuals and can transform us into more awake, fully developed human beings.

Beyond that, the love between man and woman presents a sacred challenge —to go beyond the single-minded pursuit of purely personal gratifications, to overcome the war between self and other, and to discover what is most essential and real—the depths and heights of life as a whole. Through helping us heal our alienation from life, from other people, and from ourselves, relationship becomes a *sacred path.* I don't mean to suggest that a relationship in and of itself is a complete path that can substitute for other spiritual practices. But if we have some aspiration and dedication to wake up to our true nature, along with a practice that helps us do that, then in that context, relationship can be a particularly potent vehicle to help us contact a deeper level of truth.

In this light, the difficult challenges that men and women encounter in joining their energies together are not just personal travails. They are also invitations to open ourselves to the sacred play of the known and the unknown, the seen and the unseen, and the larger truths born out of intimate contact with the great mystery of life itself.

16

Dancing on the Razor's Edge

INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP is a dynamic, often dizzying dance of contradictions that is sometimes delightful and seductive, sometimes fierce and combative, sometimes energizing, sometimes exhausting. This dance requires being able to flow continuously back and forth between polar opposites—between coming together and moving apart, taking hold and letting go, engaging and allowing space, yielding and taking the lead, surrendering and standing firm, being soft and being strong. This is not an easy dance to learn. Many couples quickly lose the flow, fall out of step, and wind up deadlocked in antagonistic positions, struggling for supremacy, pushing and pulling, attacking or withdrawing. Teachers of the dance are few, and as the years go by the conventional dance steps we learned from the culture seem increasingly stiff and outmoded. How, we may wonder, can we learn to dance with grace and power?

The back and forth begins as soon as we find ourselves attracted to another person who moves us. On one hand, we long to break out of our separateness and go out to meet this person who represents a whole new, unexplored world. Yet at the same time, we also experience trepidation. Going out to another entails some big risks, and we find ourselves hanging on for dear life to the very separateness we long to overcome. In our attraction to another, we seem to be expanding and contracting at the same time, or at least in rapid alternation.

Meditation practice can teach us a great deal about how to flow with the dance of relationship, because it is designed to overcome the split between self and other—within ourselves, first of all. Sitting quietly, following the breath while letting thoughts and feelings arise and pass away, we start to overcome our separation from our own experience, which we often keep at arm's length. We see how the struggle of grasping experiences we like and rejecting experiences we don't like keeps us stuck in reactive mind and prevents us from being fully present. In releasing ourselves from this struggle with our experience, we discover our larger nature, which is able to be with

what is, free of reactivity.

Meditation also helps us work with the basic polar tension of human life—between heaven and earth, emptiness and form—which all relationships intensify. By learning to keep our seat regardless of what is going on in our mind, we come down to earth. We find that we cannot escape this form, this body, these needs and feelings, this karma, these characteristics and traits, this personal history. Following the breath, letting go of mental fixations, and resting again and again in the present moment, we also connect with openness and space—the heaven principle (for a fuller discussion of the heaven and earth principles, see chapter 1). And as we keep our seat and let go with the breath, the whole soft front of the body, through which we let the world and other people in, starts to open up. This soft, open front represents our humanness, which joins together heaven and earth.

In a relationship, keeping our seat might mean maintaining our own sense of integrity in the face of outer demands and manipulations, or inner fears and compulsions. And the meditative practice of letting go of mental fixations might correspond in a relationship to not becoming locked into any fixed position, not making our ego a solid fortress, but being willing to soften our heart, let down our guard, and risk ourselves in love.

The Buddha likened meditative awareness to tuning a musical instrument— the strings must be neither too tight nor too loose. If we hold on too tight or let go too much, we lose our balance. This kind of balancing act is crucial in relationships. While it is important to respect our own needs (the earth principle), we must also be able to let go of being too identified with them (the heaven principle). While we must be able to meet another with engagement and commitment (form), we must also be able to let go of the relationship, drop all our agendas and ideas about it, and give the connection room to ebb and flow as it may (emptiness). And though we must loosen our boundaries to unite with another person, if we simply merge with the other, we may lose ourselves in the relationship—which usually spells disaster. Relationship is full of these contradictions. We want freedom, yet we also want stability and commitment. Can we have both? Can we remain loving when anger and critical feelings arise? How can we surrender in a relationship without losing our power and being controlled by the other person? How can we come to know another yet continue to see him or her with fresh eyes?

It would be so much easier if we could just maintain a safe distance and a clear set of boundaries to protect us from risking too much, or if we could

simply merge with the other person and lose ourselves in the relationship. But neither of these alternatives is possible or satisfactory. In learning to swing back and forth between too tight and too loose, our movements become more fluid, and the dance begins to develop grace and vigor.

The path of working with the polarities and contradictions of being human— in classical Buddhist terms, "the middle way"—involves not identifying with anything: either pleasure or pain, separateness or togetherness, attachment or detachment. The middle way is not some bland middle ground. Rather, it requires us to be alert and awake at all times, so that we do not harden into any position, no matter how righteous it may seem. Not solidifying a position keeps us sensitive to what is needed at each moment, so that the dance of relationship can continue to flow fluidly. When two people become too invested in their positions (for example, "I need more closeness" versus "I need more space"), they become polarized and the dance grinds to a halt.

The middle way is not about weighing one thing against another so that the scales even out. It is a much more dynamic and immediate process, which involves becoming aware of how we lose our balance. In losing our seat, the very act of falling out of it wakes us up; and in waking up, we regain our seat. Regaining our seat means coming back to the present, letting go of identifying with this or that position, and taking a fresh look at what is going on and what the situation needs right now. Not that we should never take a stand; indeed, right now the situation may require me to stand up for what is important to me, even fight for it if I have to. But tomorrow, circumstances may call on me to let go of this stand, give in, and let my partner's needs take precedence over mine. The paradox of relationship is that it calls on us to be ourselves fully, to express who we are without hesitation, to take a stand on this earth, and at the same time, to let go of fixed positions and our attachment to them. Nonattachment in relationship doesn't mean not having needs or paying no attention to them. If we ignore or deny our needs, we cut off part of ourselves and therefore have less of ourselves to offer our partner. Nonattachment in the best sense means not being identified with our needs, our likes and dislikes. We recognize certain needs, yet we also have a connection with our larger being, where those needs do not have a hold over us. Then we can either assert our desire or let it go, according to the dictates of the moment.

Tantric Buddhism describes the middle way—living in the present without fixed strategy or agenda—in sharper terms, as a razor's edge. Whenever we solidify or identify with any position—exclusively arguing for closeness or

space, separateness or togetherness, freedom or commitment—we fall off this edge and can harm ourselves because we lose touch with the whole of what we are, in favor of one isolated part. We need to keep coming back again and again to the open-ended quality of the present moment, which is as sharp and thin as a razor's edge.

Finding our way back to fresh, unpredictable nowness is a dynamic rebalancing act, which gives us a slight jolt that wakes us up from our daydreams and imaginings. These little moments of waking up to the present— of beginner's mind—are pulsing with uncertainty. In the split second of nowness I realize that I really don't know what's going on. How could I? I only just arrived here! When I wake up from my fantasy of the relationship and look freshly into my partner's eyes, I suddenly realize, "I don't know who you are." And further, I don't know who I am, I don't know what this relationship is. In such moments there is freedom to start fresh all over again. We don't have to become stuck in our hopes or images about who we are or where this relationship is going. At the same time, we can't make not knowing into a fixed position either.

Dancing on the razor's edge involves living from the ground of our larger being, which enables us to welcome and allow all of what we are as human beings. After a fight with my partner, part of me wants to nurse my anger, and another part of me wants to drop it and show my love instead. This uncertainty brings me once again to the knife's edge of the present. Feeling all that I feel at this moment—I am angry, and I also love you intensely—can be quite unsettling. Yet in such moments we also taste what it means to be human: we have these emotions, and we do not have to deny or transcend them. Nor do we have to get stuck in our angry thoughts, using them to build a solid case that allows us to justify ourselves or attack the other person. Here on the edge of uncertainty, where we are simply present with what is, we can only respond freshly to what is happening. The challenge of feeling all that we are, expanding to include it all, and not settling into a fixed position stretches the heart and allows a larger love to flow, free from confinement to any viewpoint. Some people would rather meditate in solitude than relate to other people, while others would rather relate than meditate. Personally, I consider meditation and relationship both indispensable for developing the full range of our human capacities. And meditation is the most powerful practice I have found for learning how to handle the challenges of relationship—practice for the further practice of loving another.

Both of these practices are equally

challenging.

17

Refining the Gold

THE POET RILKE once wrote, "For one human being to love another, this is the most difficult of all our tasks, the work for which all other work is but preparation. It is a great, exacting claim upon us, something that chooses us out and calls us to vast things."[a] In these few words Rilke addresses the totality of what an intimate relationship presents us with: the most difficult work of all, and at the same time, a calling to vast things. A deep, loving connection with another being always leads in both directions—bringing up tremendous challenges, while also inspiring us to expand in new, unforeseen directions. We cannot separate the difficulties from the vast things—they go hand in hand.

Now that the traditional rationales for marriage have withered away, and the modern dream of living happily ever after in romantic bliss has not borne fruit, we need to re-envision the purpose of intimate relationship from the ground up. It is time for couple's consciousness-raising, starting with the most basic questions: What is a couple? What is the purpose and meaning of intimate relationship? What are two people actually meant to do together?

One way to approach these questions is by considering what makes being in love such a powerful experience. When I ask people what they most value about falling in love, they mention qualities such as joy, truth, passion, acceptance, vitality, surrender, innocence, power, magic, openness, curiosity, aliveness, creativity, awakeness, purpose, genuineness, trust, appreciation, and expansiveness. When we recognize that these qualities are facets of our true nature, it becomes clear that falling in love can provide a powerful glimpse of who we really are. Opening to another in love gives us a taste of what it is like to be fully present and awake, with access to a rainbow spectrum of human resources emanating from deep within. Falling in love is an act of grace that stirs our dormant seed potentials. Though some people regard falling in love as an illusion or temporary psychosis, that is true only when we imagine our partner to be the source of these larger qualities, and then grasp at the other to give us what is already ours.

For most of us, our deepest potentials are like seeds that have gone dormant or become deformed in the course of our development. To the extent that we were not received with unconditional love, or never felt truly seen or encouraged to be ourselves, we had to shut down as children to protect ourselves from the enormity of that pain, which threatened to overwhelm us. Emily Dickinson wrote of this in one of her poems:

> *There is a pain so utter It*
> *swallows Being up.*
> *Then covers the abyss with trance, So*
> *memory can step*
> *Around, across, upon it.*[b]

As children, the pain of not being truly seen or loved is so *utter* that we contract and thus disconnect from the original openness of our being. This loss of being leaves behind an abyss, a gaping hole, which we cover up with trance —with beliefs, imaginings, and stories about who we are. Our ego structure develops as a survival strategy, as a way of getting by in a world that does not see or support who we really are. It is a protective shell, which diverts our attention from the abyss of loss of being, so that our mind can "step around, across, upon it" without falling in. Yet the shell of our self-constructed identity also blocks access to the deeper seed potentials—for passion, vitality, joy, power, wisdom, presence—contained in our basic nature.

Later in life when we experience a deep loving connection with someone, it is like letting in the warmth of the sun, which stirs the dormant seed within the shell. This might happen with a lover, a spiritual teacher, or a friend. Yet as the seed starts to swell, this expansion brings us up against the hard shell in which we are encased—our conditioned ego structure, which now functions as a soul cage.

Thus, at the outset of a relationship, we expand, until we hit the imprisoning shell of our self-concepts, based on our early transactions with adults in childhood: "I'm a bad boy . . . I'm a good girl . . . I'm special . . . I don't need anyone . . . I'm helpless . . . I'm inadequate . . . I need to maintain control . . . I need to please."

As the expansive force of love threatens these outmoded identities from the past, this brings us to the razor's edge. Here in this zone of uncertainty that emerges when we move from the known into the unknown, we can no longer bear to continue playing out our old patterns, yet nothing new has emerged to

take their place. This provides an opportunity to experience what it is like to simply be, without knowing who we are. It can be a scary place to be. At this point people often start to feel, "I don't know if I can handle this relationship. This isn't what I bargained for—not knowing who I am!"

A Hasidic master quoted by Martin Buber describes this in-between zone: "Nothing in the world can change from one reality into another unless it first turns into nothing, that is, into the reality of the between-stage. And then it is made into a new creature, from the egg to the chick. The moment when the egg is no more and the chick is not yet, is nothingness. This is the primal state which no one can grasp because it is a force which precedes creation. It is called chaos."[c] We all experience these moments of chaos when an old identity, with its sense of safety and security, is threatened. This is one of the most creative moments in a relationship, since it is where something really new can happen. As Chögyam Trungpa once said, "Chaos should be regarded as extremely good news."

The deeper a relationship goes, the more it brings old darkness and pain to light. A genuine soul connection between two people always challenges any identity that interferes with the free flow of love, such as "I can't really have this" or "I don't deserve it." Even if we are discovering a depth of connection we've never known before, if we have a subconscious belief that we don't deserve to feel this good, it's not going to last. The undeserving identity will cut it off. Therefore, true love calls for the death of this false self. As the Sufi poet Ibn Al Faradh wrote:

> *Dying through love is living;*
> *I give thanks to my beloved that she has held this out for me. For*
> *whoever does not die of his love*
> *Is unable to live by it.*

Of course, the prospect of letting go of our old, cherished identities inevitably brings up tremendous fear and resistance. Yet if we can let our resistances—which are signs of where we are attached to an old identity— come up and be worked with, this will allow us to take real steps forward on this path. Just as all forward movement—foot against ground, wheel against pavement—requires resistance, so too love advances through encountering and overcoming resistance. In this sense, every psychological difficulty in a relationship provides a spiritual opportunity—to work through the obstacles presented by our conditioned patterns and gain greater access to essential inner

resources.

The Sufis make an interesting distinction between what they call “states” and “stations.” A state is a temporary moment of access to an essential human quality—such as aliveness, joy, strength, kindness—that arises and passes away spontaneously, beyond our power to call it up or hold on to it. A station is the same essential quality when we have fully integrated it, so that we have permanent access to it whenever it is called for.

In love’s early grace period, we experience the *state* of love and presence, but we are not yet installed in the *station* of love and presence. We glimpse the gold of our true nature, but soon discover that we don’t have full access to that gold. It is still embedded in the iron ore of our conditioned patterns. If love or any other quality of our being is to become a station in our lives, rather than just a passing state, we must go through a refining process, in which the gold is extracted from the ore. This refining is the journey of conscious love.

18

Love, Conditional and Unconditional

EVERY HUMAN BEING INTUITIVELY recognizes at their core the value of unconditional love. We experience the greatest joy in loving when we can open to another without reservation, suspending judgments and fully appreciating the other just for who he or she is. And we feel most loved when others recognize and respond to us this way as well. Unconditional love has tremendous power, awakening a larger presence within us that allows us to feel the vastness and profundity of what it is to be human. This is the presence of the heart.

We often experience flashes of unconditional love most vividly in beginnings and endings—at birth, at death, or when first falling in love—when another person's pure suchness shines through and touches us directly. Tough, frozen places inside begin to melt and soften as love's spontaneous arising warms us like spring sun. Yet soon enough, especially in intimate relationships, we come up against inner fears, restraints, or cautions about letting our love flow too freely. Will we get swept away? Can we let ourselves feel this open? Will we get hurt? Can we trust this person? Will we be able to get our needs met in this relationship? Can we live with the things that irritate us in the other? These cautions lead us to place conditions on our openness: "I can only be this open and vulnerable with you *if* . . . I get my needs met; you love me as much as I love you; you don't hurt me . . ."

This pull between loving unconditionally and loving with conditions heightens the tension between two different sides of our nature—the unconditional openness of the heart and the conditional wants and needs that are part of our personality. Yet this very tension between conditional and unconditional love, if clearly seen and worked with, can actually help us learn to love more deeply. The friction between these two sides of our nature can ignite a refining fire that awakens the heart to the real challenge, the outrageous risk, and the tremendous gift of human love.

Unconditional Love and Conditional Love

It is the heart's nature to want to circulate love freely back and forth, without putting limiting conditions on that exchange. The heart looks right past things that may offend our personal tastes, often rejoicing in another's being despite all our reasonable intentions to maintain a safe distance, play it cool, or break off contact if the relationship is too painful. Love in its deepest essence knows nothing of conditions and is quite unreasonable. Once the heart has opened to someone who has deeply touched us, we will most likely still feel some connection with that person for the rest of our lives, whatever form the relationship takes. Unconditional love has its reasons, which reason cannot know.

Unconditional love does not imply that a relationship must take a particular form. We may love someone deeply, yet still be unable to live with that person. Inasmuch as we are not just pure heart, but also have conditioned likes and dislikes, certain conditions will always determine how fully we become involved with another. This is inevitable. As soon as we consider the *form* of relationship we want with someone, we are in the realm of conditions. Because we are of this earth, we exist within certain forms and structures (body, temperament, personality characteristics, emotional needs, likes and dislikes, sexual preferences, styles of communication, lifestyles, beliefs and values) that fit with someone else's patterns more or less well. For an ongoing relationship to work, certain kinds of "chemistry," compatibility, or communication must be possible.

Conditional love is a feeling of pleasure and attraction based on how fully someone matches our needs, desires, and personal considerations. It is a response to a person's looks, style, personal presence, emotional availability
—what he or she does for us. This is not something bad, but it is a lesser form of love, because it can easily be negated by a reversal of the conditions under which it formed. If someone we love starts acting in ways we don't like, we may not like him as much anymore. Conditional liking inevitably gives way to opposite feelings of fear, anger, or hatred when our personality is in conflict with another's personality.

Still, love in its deepest essence knows nothing of these conditions. Beyond both conditional yes and conditional no lies the larger unconditional yes of the heart.

Confusing the Two Orders of Love

We often feel most strongly attracted to another when the two orders of love are in accord: this person not only touches our heart but also fulfills certain conditions for what we want from an intimate partner. It can be extremely confusing when these two orders are in conflict. Perhaps this person meets our conditions but somehow does not move us very deeply. Or else he or she touches our heart, so that we want to open and say yes, yet our personal considerations and criteria lead us to say no.

A common mistake at this point is to try to impose our conditional no on the yes of the heart. For instance, if we have to end a relationship because the other cannot meet certain essential needs of ours, our heart may still want to keep right on loving this person just the same. To deny or cut off the love that is still flowing can be quite damaging, for this would constrict the very source of joy and aliveness inside us. Whenever we forcibly try to close our heart to someone we love, even in times of separation, we only create greater suffering for ourselves and make it harder to open up again the next time we fall in love.

Similarly, whenever someone we love hurts us, and we feel disappointment, anger, or hatred toward that person, we may try to stop loving, to shut down the heart, as punishment or revenge. But the truth is, because we still love this person, denying it by trying to close the heart hurts us just as much as it hurts the other. Unconditional love means being able to recognize our love for another even in the midst of our hate.

In fact, it is not really possible to close the heart. What we can do is to *close off* the heart, by building a barrier around it. The danger here lies in closing ourselves off from people in general and shutting ourselves in. Damming up the natural outflow of the heart creates a pool of stagnant energy that breeds psychological dis-ease.

I am not suggesting that we should stay in a relationship that doesn't work just because our heart is open to the other person. We may indeed have to break off contact and communication with someone in order to recover from the pain of a separation. But this does not mean that we have to constrict the love that still flows from the heart. Even if we feel hatred for the other, this is possible only because the heart has been so open, because we have felt so vulnerable with this person. Understanding this can help prevent our feelings of hatred from freezing solid and allow them to pass through us without turning into a weapon or doing real harm.

The other common way of confusing the two orders of love is by trying to impose the yes of the heart on the no of our personal considerations. A common misconception of unconditional love is that it requires putting up with everything someone does. An article in *Scientific American* illustrated this misconception when it stated, "Unconditional love and support can be damaging to the development of a child's self-esteem. . . . Most parents are too concerned with making life easy for their children."[1] The confusion here lies in equating unconditional love with undiscriminating acclaim, permissiveness, or indulgence.

Imagining that we should tolerate unconditionally that which is conditioned —another's personality, behavior, or lifestyle—can have very painful or destructive consequences. Unconditional love does not mean having to like something we in fact dislike or saying yes when we need to say no. Unconditional love arises from an entirely different place within us than conditional like and dislike, attraction and resistance. It is a being-to-being acknowledgment. And it responds to that which is itself unconditional—the intrinsic goodness of another person's heart, beyond all their defenses and pretenses. Arising from our own basic goodness, unconditional love resonates with and reveals the unconditional goodness in others as well.

The parent-child relationship provides our first experience of the confusing ways in which conditional and unconditional love become mixed up. Although most parents originally feel a vast, choiceless love for their newborn child, they eventually place overt or covert conditions on their love, using it as a way of controlling the child, turning it into a reward for desired behaviors. The result is that as children we rarely grow up feeling loved for ourselves, just as we are. We internalize the conditions our parents put on their love, and this internalized parent (the "superego" or "inner critic") often rules our lives. We keep trying to placate this inner voice, which continually judges us as never good enough.

In this way we become conditional toward ourselves as well. We think we have to earn love, as a reward for being good. We like ourselves only *if*—if we live up to some standard, if we don't have this fear, if we're firmly in control, if we prove ourselves, if we are a good boy or girl, a good achiever, a good lover, and so on. We come to distrust that we could be lovable just as we are, just for being ourselves. Internalizing the restrictions placed on love in our family, we create an elaborate system of dams, checks, and blockages, armoring and tensions in the body that constrict the free flow of love. And so

we perpetuate and pass on to our children the pain and confusion that results from putting conditions on the love whose nature is to flow freely from the heart.

Nonetheless, underneath these distortions of love, and all the disappointment or anger that may exist between children and parents, most of us can find at the core of this connection a larger, choiceless caring and concern that has no why or wherefore—it simply is, and it never entirely disappears, no matter what happens. No matter how their love gets distorted, parents and children cannot entirely cut off the unconditional openness of their hearts toward each other.

Trusting in the Goodness of the Heart

As a spontaneous outflow of the heart, unconditional love is often most obvious in the early stages of an intimate relationship. But it often becomes obscured by two partners' struggle to see if they can fit, communicate, meet each other's needs, or create a working partnership. It may also get buried beneath preoccupations with the stresses of everyday life, family responsibilities, and work demands. How then can we stay in touch with the revitalizing presence of unconditional love in an ongoing way?

The most obvious answer is to learn to trust in the heart. Yet how do we do this? We need an actual way to develop this trust, not as an article of belief or hope, but as a living experience.

The best way I have found to develop this trust is through the practice of awareness and inquiry, both through meditation and focused self-reflection. At first, we need to become conscious of the mind's desperate attempts to *prove* that we are good by fulfilling certain conditions, and to see our tendency to beat ourselves up when we fail to live up to those conditions. All the things we dislike about ourselves—the tight, constricted, shut-down parts of us that give us the most trouble—are like children in need of our attention, whom we have cut off from our unconditional caring. Seeing all of this also helps us feel the tremendous suffering that whole project causes us. Out of that, it becomes possible to recognize the importance of opening our heart to ourselves without conditions.

We have to start with ourselves. As long as we are conditional in accepting ourselves, we will inevitably be conditional with others in a similar way.

Breaking Open the Heart

Through activating the flow of unconditional love within us, intimate relationship can be profoundly healing, as we learn to open our heart to parts of ourselves and others that have been wounded, cut off, or deprived of caring. Yet the heavenly perfection of unconditional love, which we may know in our heart, rarely translates into perfect love or union with another on the worldly plane. Human relationships are always a work in progress. They are like clay we are continually reworking, so that it embodies and expresses the perfect love that is our very essence. Because two people live in space and time, with different experiences, temperaments, timing and rhythms, likes and dislikes, they can never actualize absolute unconditional union in any conclusive, uninterrupted way.

In fact, the very openness two lovers feel with each other also stirs up all the obstacles to that openness within them: conditioned fears, unrealistic hopes and needs, unconscious identities and shadow elements, and unresolved issues from the past. So while intimacy awakens a deep longing for perfect love, the conditions of our earthly natures conspire to frustrate its perfect expression and realization. Although we may experience moments, glimpses, waves of total openness and union with another, we can never expect a human relationship to give us the total fulfillment we seek.

The pain of this contradiction between the perfect love in our hearts and the imperfections we encounter on the path of relationship breaks the heart—wide open. The pain of love, in Sufi master Hazrat Inayat Khan's words, is "the dynamite that breaks open the heart, even if it be as hard as a rock."[a] It reveals the essential rawness of being human, of reaching for heavenly perfection while forever having to grapple with earthly limitations. Yet the heart itself cannot break, or break open, in that its essential nature is already soft and receptive. What *can* actually break is the wall around the heart, the defensive shield we have constructed to try to protect our soft spot, where we feel most deeply affected by life and other people.

Though encountering the obstacles to love may bring sorrow and anger, the only way to move through these disappointments without doing harm to ourselves or others is to let the heart open up *further* in those moments we would most like to shut it down. Just as rocks in a stream accentuate the force of the water rushing against them, so the obstacles to perfect love can help us feel the full force of our love more strongly.

How can we keep the heart open in those moments when the pain of loving makes us want to withdraw or shut down? It is important not to deny the pain or try to be artificially loving. That only pushes the hurt and anger deeper inside. Instead, we have to start where we are—which involves *being with* our hurt or anger and *letting that be,* without having to fix it. In opening to the pain of loving we bleed, yet this bleeding itself, when met with warmth and caring, helps awaken the heart, allowing the larger force of love to keep flowing.

So in encountering the obstacles to love, we discover what is most alive in us—the rawness and tenderness of the broken-open heart. The painful fact is that no one else can ever give us all the love we need in just the way we want. But when we can hold our own pain and rawness with compassionate awareness, then the unconditional love we most long for becomes available.

Letting the heart break open awakens us to the mystery of love—that we can't help loving others, in spite of what we may dislike about them, for no other reason than that they move and touch us in ways we can never fully comprehend. What we love is not just their pure heart but also their heart's struggle with all the obstacles in the way of its full, radiant expression. It's as though our heart wants to ally itself with their heart and lend them strength in their struggle to realize the magnificence of their being, beyond all their perceived shortcomings.

Indeed, if those we love perfectly matched our ideal, they might not touch us so deeply. Their imperfections give our love a purchase, a foothold, something to work with. Thus, the obstacles in a relationship are what force our heart to stretch and expand to embrace all of what we are. In this way, unconditional love can ripen further, beyond its spontaneous arising in the first flash of falling in love. It becomes an ongoing practice of courage and humility, of learning to be fully human.

Breaking open the heart is the transmuting force in the alchemy of love that allows us to see the unconditional goodness of people in and through all the limitations of their conditioned self. It helps us recover the beauty in the beast and realize how the unconditioned and conditioned sides of human nature are always intertwined, making up one whole cloth. The overflow of the broken- open heart starts with kindness toward ourselves, then radiates out as compassion toward all other beings who hide their tenderness out of fear of being hurt, and who need our unconditional love to help awaken their heart as well.

19

Passion as Path

No better love than love with no object.

—RUMI

If man fails to recognize his true nature, the true object of his love, the confusion is vast and irremediable. Bent on assuaging a passion for the All on an object too small to satisfy it, his efforts will be fruitless, a terrible waste. How much energy do you think the spirit of the earth [thus] loses in a single night?

—TEILHARD DE CHARDIN

ALTHOUGH THE DANISH PHILOSOPHER Kierkegaard claimed that the modern age was lacking in passion, perhaps we are not so much lacking passion as squandering it, by failing to understand its true nature and thus failing to channel it in a direction that can bring true satisfaction.

Passion can take two very different forms. In its initial upsurge it radiates energy and fire, lifting us out of ourselves and generating powerful, fresh inspiration. Yet it can also be a force that leads us down into addiction and delusion. We can easily become obsessed and emotionally enslaved by the object of our passion. This can happen both with worldly passion—a temporal love affair—or with spiritual passion—attachment to a spiritual teacher or teaching. Passion can either uplift us or drag us down into obsession or self- destruction.

So it is not surprising that our culture is ambivalent toward passion, alternately viewing it as a stairway to heaven or a pathway to hell. During most of Western history, passion has been regarded with suspicion and fear, as an animal drive, a base, irrational impulse that pulls you down into your lower nature, down into hell. This has led to repression, the attempt to hide it underneath a civilized veneer.[1]

In trying to break away from this repressive attitude, the modern temperament has gone to the other extreme, glorifying romantic passion as

life's ultimate experience. Absent a sense of the sacred, a love affair or a sexy evening is the closest many people come to an experience of transcendence. Most of our advertising and pop music is geared toward filling people's spiritual hunger with fantasies of salvation through passion: if you just use the right shampoo, Mr. or Ms. Right will come along and sweep you away; you won't be lonely anymore and your life will finally have meaning. Advertising agencies are all too cognizant of passion's addictive lure.

These divergent views of passion reflect an inner division between the two sides of our nature; between heaven—the expansive, visionary side—and earth —the sensuous, concrete, grounded side. Glorifying and inflating passion is a way of trying to rise above our earthly nature and the sorrows and limitations of worldly life. Yet this emphasis on heaven at the expense of earth makes passion manic, ungrounded. On the other hand, denigrating passion, condemning it as a primitive instinct that will deplete or destroy us, leads to depression. For when we deny or suppress our passion, we lose touch with our expansive, heavenly nature as well. Our spirit can no longer soar, and we lose our inspiration.

We clearly need a more balanced understanding of passion, one that can lead beyond the manic/depressive attitudes in which our culture is caught. For passion is, at its core, the experience of life energy in its raw, naked state. The question is how to relate to this energy. If passion is like electricity, how can we draw on it for light and warmth without being electrocuted? What can we use this energy for? Will we use it just to run our domestic appliances—our hair dryers and toasters—and thus fritter it away? Or will we utilize it for larger purposes—to nurture greater aliveness, awakening, wisdom? How can passion become fuel on the path of becoming more fully human, more fully who we are?

Unconditional Passion: Pure Resonance with Life

Passion often awakens in response to someone—for some a teacher, for some a lover, for some a distant movie star—who stirs our desire to feel more fully alive. Often we make the mistake of seeing the one we fall in love with as the source of our passion. Yet the real source of our passion is our basic nature— our openness to reality. We can fall in love only because our nature is so permeable to begin with. Inherent in this basic openness is a desire to reach out and connect with the world, with other people, with nature, and with life in

all its wild beauty. Our nature is an opening through which what is out there can come in here and penetrate us, pierce our usual armory of defenses and facades, and stir our heart.

This is why passion is such a central human experience. Usually we protect all our doors and windows with heavy padlocks and alarms. When passion strikes, however, reality can slip right past all our defenses, get to us, and shake us to the core.

Passion is, in essence, unconditional, because it is an immediate, unfabricated resonance with life, the life inside us connecting with the life outside. This resonance with reality is an essential constituent of our being. We come upon a spring meadow carpeted with wildflowers, and out of our mouths springs the primordial sound: "Ahhh!" We exchange glances with someone who is beautiful: ahhh! We hear the words of a spiritual teacher that strike us to the core: ahhh! When something pierces us like this, passion arises and takes our breath away.

Conditional Passion: Obsession and Enslavement

Passion is *energized presence*. We feel it as a richness, a wealth of feeling that fills us up and overflows. Since we don't normally feel so fully alive, our ordinary life seems impoverished by contrast. And so we readily imagine that the object of our passion is the cause of this richness. "Yesterday I was lonely and unhappy. Today I have met this person and suddenly feel so full and alive. It must be because of her." It is easy to fall into seeing things this way, to imagine that we need this person, this job, this sport, this drug, this house in the country to feel fully alive. This is the first step in converting passion into delusion.

We don't realize that our passion is the life within us radiating out and illuminating the life all around. All we see is the object illuminated, not the illuminating power itself. This distorts our perception. Our unconditional passion becomes converted into a conditional attachment to the object on which our light is shining. Fixating on the object leads to obsession and addiction. We can't stop thinking about how to securely possess the object of our passion.

If passion is our life energy naturally radiating outward, then fixating narrowly on the object of passion is like filtering the energy of the sun through a magnifying glass. The situation becomes too hot and soon goes up in smoke.

So it's important to realize that when our passion fixates on another person, we are projecting our own radiance, which the other reflects back and helps us to experience. Usually we don't see how this radiance is coming from us. Of course, we may also be recognizing the radiant beauty in the one we love. But when we start to idolize or become addicted to those we love, it is because we're giving them so much of our juice. As a result, they appear larger than life, while we feel poverty-stricken. And the more obsessed and addicted we become, the more impoverished we feel. In this way, passion becomes destructive when we fail to understand its true nature and origin.

This fall into impoverishment is also common in corrupt spiritual communities, such as Jonestown or Rajneeshpuram. The corrupt spiritual leader sets himself up to take advantage of his followers' projection and idealization tendencies. He practices black magic, transforming something potentially positive (the student's capacity for devotion) into something destructive (enslavement). He derives his power from inducing his followers to give him their juice, while making himself appear to be the one who is dispensing the juice. (Interestingly, Jonestown ended with the leader dispensing poison juice, as though he were saying to his followers: "I am giving you back the juice you gave me. When you give away your juice, it turns to poison.") Clever charlatans enslave people by reinforcing their followers' dependency and sense of poverty. (Rajneesh would daily parade by a lineup of his devotees in one of the many Rolls Royces he purchased with their donations.) As the followers become more depleted, the only way to feel good about themselves is by basking in the leader's reflected glory. Eventually they wind up acting in strangely destructive ways just to stay connected to this imagined source of their feeling good.

Ordinary love affairs can also have bizarre, destructive consequences. How many times have we compromised our integrity or bent ourselves out of shape so that the object of our desire would approve of us? How many a jilted lover has killed himself or his beloved "because he loved her so much"?

Passion and Transformation

Despite its dangers, passion can also be a tremendously creative, transformative force. This was true in twelfth-century France, the birthplace of romantic love. Suddenly, in the midst of a dark medieval world, a new kind of sentiment appeared in the love songs of the troubadours and quickly spread

through the courts of Provence. One of the main influences behind courtly love was the Sufi tradition of devotional love songs to the Beloved. The Beloved in Sufi poetry is the divine, in the form of God, the soul, or the spiritual master. The troubadour songs secularized this devotional passion, addressing it to a worldly beloved—the Lady—instead of to the divine.

Courtly love in its pure form was governed by strict rules. A knight would fall in love with a lady who was already married to another noble, and they would have a clandestine love affair. Since their love was not supposed to be sexually consummated, the passion that was generated could be used for personal transformation. The knight would undergo for his lady tests and trials that refined his character. Courtly love had an enormous civilizing influence on medieval culture. Women were appreciated and honored for the first time, while many a brutish male became transformed into the era's new ideal: the *gentle man.*

Passion can lead in this kind of creative direction only when its spiritual potential is recognized. Although courtly love was a secularized version of the Sufis' devotion to the divine Beloved, it nonetheless retained a spiritual cast because it provided a path of purification and character development. Since the knight could never fully possess his lady, his unrequited passion became transformative. Instead of degenerating into addiction, it ripened into pure devotion.

Wholehearted devotion, whether directed toward a loved one, a spiritual master, or ultimate truth, is a powerful refining fire that can work magic on the human soul. Recognizing this, many religious traditions have developed devotional practices that harness this energy for spiritual purposes. Since we cannot possess the object of devotion—God or the spiritual master— devotional practice requires us to relinquish fixation, so that we may discover the fullness of love as *the treasure of our own heart.* This awakens us from the poverty of depending on others to the richness of celebrating our true nature, which we can then begin to share more fully with the world at large.

Devotion to a genuine spiritual master—a central feature of many sacred traditions—is like courtly love in that it is, in some sense, unrequited. Although genuine teachers have their own kind of devotion toward their students, nonetheless students cannot expect to have their teacher respond to them in the way they want, give them the validation and approval they would like, or make them feel good. Genuine spiritual masters neither hold out promises and rewards nor encourage projection and idealization. They

continually throw you back on yourself. This cuts through the student's tendency to conditionalize passion, to be a good student in order to win the teacher's praise, affection, or approval. In this sense, the student comes to experience the brokenhearted quality of unrequited love.

The Brokenhearted Love Affair

Experiencing a broken heart brings a choice. We can shut down, out of pain and resentment about not getting what we want. Or if we pay attention to what our heart truly desires, we find it wanting to break open, despite the pain we feel. When we let our heart break open, a sweetness starts to flow from us like nectar. As the Sufi teacher Hazrat Inayat Khan put it, "The warmth of the lover's atmosphere, the piercing effect of his voice, the appeal of his words, all come from the pain of his heart."[a] This is one of the great secrets of love. Instead of trying to ward off this pain, which is futile anyway, the lover can use it to transform himself, to develop invincible tenderness and compassion, and as the troubadours discovered, to become a heroic warrior in the service of love.

This brokenhearted quality of pure devotion has a particular poignancy, like the sadness that is often present in the most moving love poems and songs. This is what Chögyam Trungpa called "the genuine heart of sadness."[b] It is a fullness of feeling that arises in response to loving someone we can never finally possess. The one we love is going to die; we ourselves are going to die; it's all going to pass away. Even if we marry, the marriage will change and finally pass as well. There's nothing to hold on to. Nothing can save us from our aloneness. The more we love our life, our sweetheart, our spiritual teacher, the more brokenhearted we will feel, sooner or later.

The sweet quality of this sadness is interesting. The word *sad,* being related to *satisfied* and *sated,* reveals that genuine sadness is a fullness, a fullness of heart that wants to overflow. As Trungpa puts it, "This kind of sadness is unconditioned. It occurs because your heart is completely exposed You would like to spill your heart's blood, give your heart to others."[c] From this arises a desire to melt all the barriers between oneself and others, the life in here and the life out there.

All our ideas about romantic love grow out of the discovery of the power of devotional passion by the courtly lovers of Provence. Unfortunately, our culture no longer understands the devotional dimension of passion; instead we

look at passion as a vehicle for "getting ours." We have lost the original sacred meaning of passionate love.

We have also lost the original sacred meaning of the spiritual path, which involves surrendering to a transcendent principle that is greater than ourselves and that guides our lives. When you meet a teacher who really strikes to your core, when you fall in love with a teacher and a teaching, this pulls you out of yourself, draws you out of your cozy little world of habitual patterns. Although you may be drawn to that teacher and teaching, you can't possess them in any conventional way. So meeting a genuine teacher brings up all your conditional grasping along with your unconditional passion. This allows you to work with passion as part of your path.

As you learn to distinguish between grasping and devotion, you begin to understand the deeper nature of passion—as a doorway into the experience of surrender. The spiritual path is a brokenhearted love affair because the ultimate teaching, which is no other than life itself, is about relinquishing, not acquiring. The spiritual path is about "losing it." From the perspective of ego, this seems shocking or threatening. Yet for our being, which feels encumbered by the weight of our self-centered compulsions, it is a relief. That's what makes passion so intriguing: Losing it—dropping old, confining personality patterns—is totally frightening and exciting at the same time.

Just as the flame of the courtly lover's unconsummated passion purified his heart, so our unrequited love for a spiritual teacher can intensify our desire to be one with the greater life that he or she represents. The only way we can do that is by joining the teacher in the awakened state that he or she inhabits. And the only way to do that is by devoting ourselves to that greater life, and to removing our inner barriers to greater openness, awareness, and genuineness. Once we stop trying so hard to get the spiritual goods, the warmth of unconditional passion can begin to illuminate every aspect of our lives.

Passion and Surrender

The ultimate goal of passion is surrender. This is the heart's true desire. The fruition of sexual pursuit is the moment of orgasm, a moment of total letting go. The French call it "the little death" *(la petite mort)*. Similarly, the fruition of the spiritual path is to realize complete openness, beyond all grasping. This brings unconditional joy, arising out of experiencing the intrinsic richness of our being.

Passion is a stream of life energy passing through us, like a river that must finally empty into the sea. It is a passage between two worlds, leading from the world of the known self to a greater world that lies beyond—as represented by a lover, a guru, a teaching, or by life itself. Arising as inspiration and culminating in surrender, the path of passion reveals the essence of life as well as death.

In one of his poems (as translated by Robert Bly), Goethe recognizes the transformative impulse contained in passion as a "holy longing":

I praise what is truly alive,
what longs to be burned to death.

He describes how, like a moth drawn out of the darkness toward the flame of a glowing taper,

a strange feeling comes over you
when you see the silent candle burning.

Carried along by your longing to connect with what is truly alive,

a desire for higher love-making sweeps you
upward.

Then, as your hesitation falls away, the current of passion carries you into the act of surrender:

and, finally, insane for the light,
you are the butterfly and you are gone.

The conclusion Goethe draws is simple and unequivocal:

And so long as you haven't experienced this: to die
and so to grow,
you are only a troubled guest on this
dark earth.[d]

20

Spiritual Authority, Genuine and Counterfeit

Just as a goldsmith gets his gold
First testing by melting, cutting, and rubbing, Sages accept my teachings after full examination And not just out of devotion to me.

—SHAKYAM UNI BUDDHA

Counterfeiters exist because there is such a thing as real gold.

—RUMI

IN THE PRESENT AGE of cultural upheaval, declining morality, family instability, and global chaos, the world's great spiritual masters may be among humanity's most precious resources, serving as beacons of illumination in a darkening world. Yet at the same time, the intense spiritual hunger of our times has set the stage on which countless false prophets have appeared, issuing self-important proclamations and commands that often wind up damaging their followers and leading them astray. Thousands of well-meaning seekers, from a wide range of educational, social class, and ethnic backgrounds, have been attracted to disreputable teachers, only to end up with their lives in ruins. At the extreme end, widely publicized cult meltdowns, such as Jonestown, Waco, or Heaven's Gate, enacted everyone's worst fears of what could happen when a self-styled religious zealot gains control over people's lives. And this has led to widespread debunking of spiritual teachers and communities that fall outside mainstream Western religion.

It is important to distinguish intelligently between misguided and authentic spiritual teachers, between unhealthy groups and genuinely transformative spiritual communities. The false prophet and the genuine master both undermine the habitual patterns of self. Yet one does so in a way that creates bondage, while the other does so in a way that promotes liberation. What is this important difference? How does genuine spiritual authority operate?

Characteristics of Pathological Spiritual Groups

A number of years ago I participated in a study group on authority patterns in nonmainstream religious movements, sponsored by the Center for the Study of New Religious Movements and funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. As a group of psychologists, philosophers, and sociologists, we interviewed participants in many different spiritual groups, covering a wide spectrum ranging from the totally pathological, such as Jim Jones's People's Temple, to the mildly deluded, to communities that seemed genuinely wholesome, sane, and beneficial. From these interviews, as well as from my own personal observations of spiritual groups over the years, I found that groups with the greatest potential for pathological or destructive behavior had a clearly recognizable set of characteristics in common.

1. *The leader assumes total power to validate or negate the self-worth of the devotees, and uses this power extensively*. The leader in pathological groups is usually a magnetic, charismatic person who exudes, in the words of Eric Hoffer, "boundless self-confidence. What counts is the arrogant gesture, the complete disregard of the opinion of others, the single-handed defiance of the world."[a] Something about this unflappable self-assurance especially appeals to those lacking in self-esteem, who often become mesmerized by the self-proclaimed cult leader's grandiose displays. As Hoffer points out, "Faith in a holy cause is . . . a substitute for lost faith in ourselves."[b] The false prophet and the true believer are made for each other; they are two sides of the same coin. Through their mutual collusion, the leader gains power and control, while the followers gain reassurance and security from his guidance and approval, as well as vicarious power through identification with him.

Corrupt leaders prey deliberately on their followers' sense of personal inadequacy. For example, meetings at the People's Temple often included degradation rituals where members' flaws and failings were paraded and ridiculed in front of the whole group. After thoroughly degrading a follower in this way, Jim Jones would often build the person back up, as one survivor of Jonestown describes:

> First you become nobody. They tear you down and strip your mind, you don't know anything. And after that, whatever he do, then you have to thank him for what he did. And then you'd become totally dependent on him, because you don't have anything else yourself. Everything

you had was bad. I mean, he said, "You will listen to me and I will instruct you of things that was good," and most people actually believed that..... He made everybody think like they was somebody.[c]

Chuck Dederich, founder of the cultlike group Synanon, had a similar way of operating, according to a former member's description: "You get a group of people around you, and you say to them, '*I* am very happy. *My* life is wonderful. I have done an enormous number of good things, and I love it. How are *you?* Now you ain't so good. Now who would you rather be, you or me?' We have just established that you feel lousy, and I feel fantastic, so you answer, 'You.'" At first Dederich impressed this member with his boundless self- confidence: "He was charismatic, he was funny, he was bright, he was involved, his instincts were unbelievable. And I really fell in love." In admitting he would rather be Dederich than himself, he handed Dederich power over him. Dederich then tightened his control by confirming the follower's value: "And because Chuck Dederich said that I was fantastic, now it's wonderful. Because he said it, I believed it. And it changed my life, no question about it. And I would say to people, 'Who would you rather be, you or me?' And they would say, 'You.' And I would think that was just fine."

In this way leaders such as Jones and Dederich take away a person's old (already weak) ego supports, replacing these with their own attention and approval, which makes their followers feel important and special—"like you was somebody." Instead of an adult, eye-to-eye relationship built on a respect for human dignity, the relations between cultic leader and follower are those of parent and child. (The members of Jonestown even called Jim Jones "Dad.") The follower takes on a new identity as a satellite of this larger-than-life parent figure. And the more the followers give the leader power to validate the worth of their existence, the more he can up the ante and force them to do anything he wants in order to maintain his approval. As one ex-member put it: "If you have that experience of love [from the leader], and then you're cut off from it, it's like being put in quarantine—there's a tremendous motivation to get back to it, tremendous desire to reconnect with that love. And you'll do anything to get back to that love. Because it makes you feel good and makes you feel like you're a good person."

2. *The central focus of the group is a cause, a mission, an ideology that is not subject to question*. The leader lays out the ideology, while the followers accept without question the beliefs handed down to them. The leader often

maintains his position by claiming to have special access to God or a source of authority that is not accessible to the followers. This increases their dependence on the leader for "The Word"—for interpreting events and telling them what to do. Because they depend on the leader to tell them what is so, their own intelligence begins to atrophy. Groupthink prevails.

The central ideology is treated with such deadly seriousness that the members are unable to have any humor about themselves or their leader. They are caught in what one ex-member called "an airtight worldview, an intellectual maze." As Eric Hoffer describes this:

> All active mass movements strive . . . to interpose a fact-proof screen between the faithful and the realities of the world. They do this by claiming that the ultimate and absolute truth is already embodied in their doctrine and that there is no truth or certitude outside it. The facts on which the true believer bases his conclusions must not be derived from his experience or observation but from holy writ. . . . It is startling to realize how much unbelief is necessary to make belief possible.[d]

The effectiveness of such an ideology derives from its absolute certitude, as the one and only Truth, rather than its inherent truth or meaning. For a doctrine to have such certitude, it must be believed in, rather than understood or tested out. If the followers were to try to understand the doctrine or test it out, they would have to trust in the validity of their own experience; but inasmuch as they join the group out of low self-esteem to begin with, they have little inclination to appeal to the truth of their own experience. The more that self- trust is broken down, the more the followers try to model themselves on the prevailing image of the ideal group member, often imitating the actions, mannerisms, and thought of the leadership.

In this environment, a high level of suspicion exists among the members, lest any of them betray the Cause. Any independent frame of reference is interpreted as heresy, disloyalty, or betrayal of the group's mission. And spy networks may exist to report members who dissent from the central mission. Members who have given up their own intelligence and autonomy resent and feel threatened by independent thinking from fellow members, and so become willing informers. As Hoffer points out, "Strict orthodoxy is as much the result of mutual suspicion as of ardent faith." One ex-member described this situation:

> If you were in a group with me, I couldn't say to you, "Boy, that was really an awful meeting," because I couldn't be sure that you wouldn't call [the leader] as soon as you left and say, "Betty

> just said that was an awful meeting." And these were good friends. But you couldn't be sure, even between husbands and wives, that you wouldn't get turned in. That was a really important dynamic of control. For good friends, we did some terrible things to each other, I would say.

In a group where self-esteem depends on the Cause, doubt is a deadly sin.

And because allegiance to the Cause is based primarily on belief, as well as on emotional needs for belonging and approval, rather than on a genuine search for truth or a discipline of self-knowledge, the ideology is easily used to justify morally questionable behavior. The Cause takes precedence over common decency and respect for human dignity.

3. *The leader keeps his followers in line by manipulating emotions of hope and fear*. The coin of the realm governed by the cultic leader is the promise. The leader promises his followers rewards—that they will reach salvation or attain a special status above the rest of the world if they remain true to the Cause. This "carrot approach" appeals to the greed, vanity, and impoverished self-esteem of the followers. The future rewards of allegiance to the Cause take precedence over any appreciation or enjoyment of present experience.

To insure that the flock stays in line, the cultic leader also uses the "stick method," intimidating members with threats of doom, vengeance, or damnation if they stray from the Cause. A wall of terror surrounds the group. Members who try to leave may even be threatened with persecution or death. A survivor of Jonestown describes this tactic of Jim Jones: "He'd say, if you leave the Temple, he had connections with the Mafia, he had connections with the CIA. He said, 'If you leave, forget it, 'cause they'll find you in a hole somewhere.'" An ex-member of another pathological group observed, "The 'transpersonal carrot in the sky' was: this is the way to salvation. If you deviate in any way, you're going toward your evil part, you're making it bigger. So that became very frightening. And another thing that became frightening was that if you thought about leaving the group, you had to face the fact that in the system you'd be spiritually damned."

Absurd as these fears may seem, we must remember that cult members have given up any connection with their own intelligence, leaving them prey to this kind of emotional manipulation. As Hoffer puts it: "The estrangement from the self, which is a precondition for both plasticity and conversion, almost always proceeds in an atmosphere of intense passion. . . . Once the harmony with the self is upset . . . a man . . . hungers to combine with whatever comes within his reach. He cannot stand apart, poised and self-sufficient, but has to attach

himself wholeheartedly to one side or another."[e]

4. *There is a strict, rigid boundary drawn between the group and the world outside*. Being in the group is defined as good; being outside the group is seen as debased or corrupt. Such groups often maintain a notion of absolute evil, defined as the world outside its boundaries. As Hoffer points out, "Usually the strength of a . . . movement is proportionate to the vividness and tangibility of its devil."[f]

To discourage independence, members of the group are often prevented from spending much time alone or with their families. Pair bonding between couples may also be deliberately undermined to foster greater dependence on the leader, as happened at Synanon.

5. *Corrupt cult leaders are usually self-styled prophets who have not undergone lengthy training or discipline under the guidance of great teachers*. Many religious traditions have clear lineages of spiritual transmission. Those who are to teach others are usually tested by their own teachers before they are allowed to represent themselves as masters. This is especially true in Buddhism and other Asian traditions. The process of testing and transmission serves as a form of quality control to ensure that given teachers do not distort the teachings for their own personal gain. But most of the dangerous cultic figures of our times are self-proclaimed gurus who sway their followers through their charismatic talents, outside the stabilizing context of tradition, lineage, or transmission. They may make ridiculous, spurious claims to authenticity, as did one leader, for instance, who recruited new followers by advertising a list of his past lives as an enlightened being in the great traditions.

Relative Spiritual Authority

The above analysis addresses only the most extreme, unhealthy dynamics that occur in spiritual groups. Beyond this, however, many spiritual teachers and communities function in more of a gray zone, often mixing genuine teachings with questionable practices and behavior. In truth, there is often a very thin line between a brilliant teacher and an unscrupulous one. So it is not enough to make lists of problematic features, for this only shows what false teachers do wrong, without telling us what genuine teachers do right. To take this

discussion further, we need to consider what true spiritual authority is and where it comes from.

Great teachers manifest in a wide range of different ways. Some are saintly and pure, others are wild and provocative, and still others are so completely ordinary that they would barely stand out in a crowd. It is impossible to set up an ideal model for what a true spiritual teacher should look like, any more than we could elevate one style of therapy as the model that all others should follow. Carl Rogers, Fritz Perls, and Milton Erickson, for instance, achieved therapeutic results in strikingly different ways. Each had a different personality type, style of working, and probably a different type of client with whom he might be most effective. Spiritual teachers also come in many different forms and guises, and it is fruitless to try to spell out exactly how a good guru will behave.

Instead we need a more subtle analysis that looks at what goes on between teacher and student. Two questions are particularly important here: How does spiritual authority operate in the relationship between teacher and student? And what is the source from which a teacher derives that authority?

Spiritual authority is, in part, interrelational; that is, a given teacher has such authority only for those who respond to his or her presence and teachings. A disciple—literally, a "learner"—is one who recognizes that he or she has something important to learn from this particular teacher. Often the choice of a teacher is as unpredictable and mysterious as the attraction to a potential lover. You sense that you have something essential to learn here, something that no one else has ever imparted to you before. And this recognition is what allows the teacher to take on a certain authority for you.

Many people today question the need for spiritual teachers at all, claiming, in the spirit of democracy, that everyone should be his or her own master. Many traditions do in fact assert that the true teacher is found only within. Yet in the early stages of one's development one does not know how to find or listen to the inner master, or to distinguish genuine inner guidance from more superficial wishes and preferences. Just as one would turn to an acknowledged master in any field one wanted to pursue in depth, so a person who seeks to overcome the limitations of egocentricity will naturally be drawn to someone who has actually mastered that work. The role of effective teachers is to instruct, encourage, and correct the student, as well as to provide an example of what is possible. Effective teachers also try to see what individual students most need at each step of their development, rather than trying to fit the student

into a preprogrammed agenda.

Thus spiritual teachers derive a certain *relative authority* through the actual help they offer their students. This is not unlike the authority that clients grant therapists in their work together. Although I may feel uneasy with the authority clients grant me as a therapist, I am willing to accept it, especially in the early stages of the work. I understand that clients can more readily enter into the process of shedding old patterns if they grant me the authority to guide them. Beyond the conventional authority granted by professional training and certification, or by transference idealizations, the real source of my authority is my focus on clients' well-being and my capacity to help them find a deeper relationship with themselves. Granting me this authority can be a step toward recognizing their own authority—that they are indeed the "authors" of their own experience, rather than passive victims of circumstance.

In a parallel, though far more profound way, a genuine spiritual master's presence may serve as a mirror that reflects back to students qualities of their awakened being: openness, generosity, discernment, humor, gentleness, acceptance, compassion, straightforwardness, strength, and courage.

Absolute Authority

Beyond the relative authority that teachers assume through the help they give their students, true masters also have access to an absolute, unconditional source of authority—awakened being. Since this is a universal source of wisdom that is available to everyone, the genuine spiritual teacher is more than willing to help others find it themselves, if they are ready.

The genuine teacher is one who has realized the essential nature of human consciousness, usually through practicing a self-knowledge discipline such as meditation for many years. In contrast to false teachers, who often create a condition of dependency in the student by claiming special access to truth, authentic teachers delight in sharing the source of their own realization with the student. This often involves giving students an awareness practice, along with instructions that help them directly recognize their own nature. This kind of guidance sharpens students' perceptions so they can better discern whether the teacher's words are true. Without a practice or method that gives them direct knowledge of what is true, students are totally dependent on the teacher to define their reality for them.

The more the students' discrimination and discernment grow, the more they

can recognize and appreciate the teacher's mastery, just as when we study and practice any art, we come to recognize the skill of an accomplished master much more than we could have before. When the teaching leads to a deeper connection to one's own being, this appreciation often grows into natural feelings of love, respect, and devotion.

Such devotion may look like slavishness to the secular eye. Yet true devotion does not aggrandize the teacher or debase the student. Rather, it is a way of recognizing and honoring wisdom, awareness, and truth as higher realities than the egoic realm of confusion, ignorance, and self-deception. Devotion is a sign of a shift in allegiance—away from the petty tyrant of egocentricity toward the call of our larger being, whose wisdom the teacher embodies in fully developed form. Yet devotion can have its own kind of dangers, especially in our culture, and can lead to certain pitfalls on the path unless it is grounded in an awareness practice that cuts through self-deception and sharpens the student's discernment.

Surrender and Submission

To appreciate the potential value of commitment to a spiritual teacher and teaching, it is essential to distinguish between mindful surrender, which is an opening to a deeper dimension of truth, and mindless submission, which is a deadening flight from freedom. The notion of surrender is widely misunderstood in our culture. It often conjures up images of "come out with your hands up"—waving a white flag, admitting defeat, being humiliated. For many people today, the idea of surrender implies giving up one's intelligence or individuality and adopting a weak, dependent, submissive, "one-down" position. True surrender, however, is never an enslavement, but rather a step toward the discovery of real power. It is the act of yielding to a larger intelligence, without trying to control the outcome.

True surrender is not blind. It requires real discrimination—the capacity to recognize the necessity of completely opening oneself and letting go. Surrender does not have a finite object; one does not give oneself to something limited and bounded. If one does, then it is most likely submission—to the teacher's personality or the Cause.

Submission is a handing over of power to a person one idealizes, based on the hope of gaining something in return. One seeks approval from an idealized other in order to feel good about oneself. This is a symptom of weakness rather

than strength—"I give myself to my guru because he is so great and I am so small." The more one depends on another for validation, the more one is likely to act in ways that compromise one's integrity. And the more one's integrity becomes compromised, the less one trusts oneself, which increases one's dependency on the leader.

Critics of gurus see all involvements with spiritual masters in this light, failing to distinguish between submission as a developmentally *regressive* retreat from maturity, and genuine surrender, which is a *progressive* step beyond egocentricity toward a fuller connection with being. They fail to distinguish between the giving of surrender, which brings increase—of love, intelligence, wisdom—and the giving of submission, which results in decrease and loss.

With a genuine spiritual master, surrendering means presenting oneself in a completely honest, naked way, without trying to hold anything back or maintain any facade. How rarely we let anyone see us as we are, without hiding behind a mask of some kind. Being in the presence of a true master is a rare opportunity to let down all our pretenses, to unmask and reveal all of what we are, our egocentric failings as well as our strengths. This is quite different from submissively trying to be "good" or "devoted," to please someone in order to feel worthy.

Submission has a narcissistic quality, in that followers seek to bask in the reflected glory of their leader as a way to inflate their self-importance. The authentic teacher-student relationship leads beyond narcissism by teaching students how to devote themselves to a greater power that lies within yet beyond themselves.

The acid test is not how well the students please the master but how fully they meet and respond to life's challenges. Through becoming more responsive, transparent, and open with their teacher, they learn to approach all people and situations in the same way. Devotion to a spiritual teacher serves a much larger purpose than just creating a beautiful relationship between two human beings. It is a way in which spiritual aspirants can learn to develop devotion to what is greater, more intelligent, and more authoritative—within themselves—than their own ego. The essential surrender is the ego's yielding to this larger wisdom. In opening to this higher wisdom within, the student becomes more pliable and available to others. In this way, genuine surrender helps one open toward all beings, instead of enslaving one to the parochial perspectives of an in-group.

In Search of a Genuine Master

How then does one recognize a master one can trust? Certainly no single teacher or teaching could be expected to appeal to all people, any more than any single psychotherapist or school of therapy could be effective for all potential clients. The ultimate criterion for judging teachers is whether they guide their students toward a more authentic, transparent quality of human presence and being-in-the-world.

Genuine teachers encourage self-respect as the basis for self-transcendence. And they are willing to reveal the source of their authority and wisdom to their students, so that the student's path is based on experiential realization rather than on ideology or belief. They also recognize ambiguity and paradox, rather than insisting on absolute certitude in the One and Only Truth. They do not give their disciples any privileged status above the uninitiated. They do not manipulate the emotions of their students but appeal to their innate intelligence. Instead of promoting herd behavior, they recognize the importance of solitude and inner inquiry. And their own realization is based not just on dramatic revelations but on extensive testing and practice.

A teacher's embodiment of love, truth, and living presence is a much more reliable gauge than whether his or her lifestyle, appearance, or personal quirks fit our image of what a spiritual person should look like. The annals of all spiritual traditions include examples of masters whose behavior and lifestyle challenged the prevailing conventions.

Great teachers also have their share of human foibles. Often they are effective precisely because they are so human, because they are so deeply in touch with the nature of the human sickness in themselves. The Buddhist sage Vimalakirti, to whom many bodhisattvas came for teachings, was always sick in bed, and when asked about this, said, "I am sick because all beings are sick." If the spiritual path is about transforming our core sickness and neurosis, then we can hardly expect spiritual teachers and communities to manifest in a totally pure, spotless way. Human development being the complex tapestry that it is, islands of unfinished business may remain intact even within a genuine teacher's stream of spiritual realization (as discussed in chapter 14). If we expect total perfection from spiritual teachers, this can also lead us astray, as the American Zen teacher Philip Kapleau points out: "In the West a roshi is expected to [have] flawless conduct. . . . But this idealistic view can blind one to the merits of a teacher. . . . A Japanese long experienced in Zen once told

me, 'My roshi does have character flaws, yet of the teachers I have had he is the only one who has taught me real Zen and I am exceedingly grateful to him.'"[g]

Undoubtedly the most important guideline in evaluating a teacher is the effect he or she has upon us. In replying to a question about whether a master should be "a man of self-control who lives a righteous life," the Vedanta teacher Nisargadatta Maharaj replied: "Such you will find many of—and no use to you. A guru can show the way back home to your Self. What has this to do with the character or temperament of the person he appears to be? . . . The only way you can judge is by the change in yourself when you are in his company. . . . If you understand yourself with more than usual clarity and depth, it means you have met with the right man."[h]

The Buddha responded in a similar vein when approached by a group of villagers, the Kalamas, who had been visited by various monks expounding their different doctrines. They asked the Buddha, "Venerable sir, there is doubt, there is uncertainty in us concerning them. Which of these reverend monks spoke the truth and which falsehood?" To which the Buddha replied:

> It is proper for you to doubt, to be uncertain. . . . Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition; nor upon rumor; nor upon what is in a scripture; nor upon surmise; nor upon specious reasoning; nor upon a bias toward a notion that has been pondered over; nor upon another's seeming ability; nor upon the consideration, "The monk is our teacher." Kalamas, when you yourselves know, "These things are good, these things are not blamable; undertaken and observed, these things lead to benefit and happiness."[i]

The Buddha specifically advised the Kalamas that they could recognize a worthy teaching by how much it helped them reduce the afflictions of attachment, aversion, and delusion.

In sum, the question of spiritual authority is a subtle and difficult matter that permits no easy answers or hasty conclusions. Although I have focused on the extremes of true and false teachers, these are but two ends of a broader spectrum of more or less spiritually mature human beings. Some teachers may have genuine realization that is not fully integrated, so that their teaching remains incomplete. Some start out with good intentions but are not ripe enough to avoid leading their followers astray. Others may be quite wise but lacking in the skillful means necessary to communicate their wisdom in a way that truly helps their students.

The tendency commonly found in mainstream Western media to discount

nonmainstream spiritual teachers because of the acts of those who are unripe or unfit is as unprofitable as refusing to handle money because there are counterfeit bills in circulation. As Nevitt Sanford stressed in the classic study *The Authoritarian Personality*, the abuse of authority is hardly any reason to reject authority where it is useful and legitimate. Failing to recognize important distinctions between true and false teachers only contributes to the confusion of our age and retards the growth and transformation that are required for humanity to survive and prosper in the times to come.

21

Conscious Love and Sacred Community

A Conversation with Paul Shippee

PS: In your books *Journey of the Heart* and *Love and Awakening* you say that it's important to realize how new it is to consider the possibility of conscious relationship. What is so new?

JW: While we might imagine that the capacity to create a close, loving relationship is programmed into our genes, and that we should instinctively know how to go about it, personal intimacy is actually quite a new idea in human history. Being genuinely intimate in a personal way has never been part of the marriage ideal until recently; in fact, most couples throughout history have managed to live together their whole lives without engaging in personal conversations about what was going on within and between them. As long as family and society prescribed the rules and roles of marriage, individuals never had to develop much consciousness in this area. Although marriage has often been regarded as sacred, it still wasn't personal.

We are only now beginning to understand what goes on between two intimate partners, and can only now begin to talk or think clearly about it.

PS: What about the great lovers of history and legend, such as those of the courtly love era, or the Tantrics?

JW: The romantic love ideal of the twelfth century was mostly about burning in your passion for someone you worshiped at a distance—which served as a kind of spiritual purification and refinement.

PS: Like Dante and Beatrice.

JW: Yes. This was a fabulous invention, but it was still not intimacy as we know it. The beloved served as a vehicle for the lover's projections. Courtly love did not involve a day-to-day relationship that went on between two real human beings. Romantic love was originally regarded as a heavenly delight that was incompatible with marriage and its earthly demands.

PS: So romantic love is not necessarily about real intimacy.

JW: No. Nor was Tantra, which focused on spiritual ritual and realization, rather than personal intimacy. To reveal yourself personally to your beloved— rather than just falling in love with a beautiful face—this is something quite new in history.

For thousands of years couple consciousness remained in an undeveloped, childlike state, in that couples lived at home, in the extended family, and did what they were told. This changed with the Industrial Revolution, as the family started to disintegrate and children sought more freedom—which led to a radical new invention: dating.

With this new freedom, couple consciousness grew from childhood into adolescence, which was marked by rebellion against tradition and by romantic idealism. This development reached its peak in the 1960s with the sexual revolution and the soaring divorce rate. Yet two important developments in the sixties laid the groundwork for a more adult stage of couple consciousness, which is becoming possible only now. The women's movement cast off old stereotypes and made relationships more egalitarian. And the dissemination of psychological ideas into the culture—mostly through popular psychology books—started to give people a new set of language and concepts, unavailable to previous generations, to talk about what actually goes on in relationships.

So it is only now that we can begin to envision the transformational potential of conscious relationship, in which two partners value their connection as a vehicle for cultivating their deeper capacities and awakening from the prison of their past.

PS: So this new development is a shift from being guided by external form to basing relationships on inner, spiritual values?

JW: Yes. While the early stage of the couple was characterized by duty, and the adolescent stage was characterized by freedom and rebellion, the mature, adult stage is marked by consciousness and responsibility.

PS: And that's why relationships are so difficult today?

JW: There's no reason in the world that we should know how to have a conscious intimate relationship with another person, because it's never been done before! We have no history, no guidance, no models. Our families and schools never taught us anything about this. We're the pioneers of a whole new possibility.

PS: The subtitle of your book *Love and Awakening* is *Discovering the Sacred Path of Intimate Relationship.* It sounds like you're offering a vision of how

the sacred can enter daily life and find expression in relationships.

JW: For thousands of years institutional religion held the sacred at the center of human life. Now that the sacred is no longer at the center of our lives, humanity has lost its bearings. Although we can no longer rely on religion, the new possibility is that individuals could develop a more conscious relationship to the sacred in their own lives.

PS: Individuals, rather than institutions, are now being called upon to be holders of the sacred.

JW: Yes. And one way we can start to rebuild our connection to the sacred and integrate the sacred into the community is through conscious relationship. Since the culture at large no longer nurtures soul, one place we can start regenerating soul is in our connection with those we love.

PS: How do you define *soul?*

JW: Different traditions have used this term in different ways. In my understanding, soul is not some kind of metaphysical entity that inhabits the body. It's not a reified *thing*.

Soul is a way of speaking about the individual way that our larger being manifests in us, through us, *as* us. Soul is the human element in us, an intermediate element between the absolute or divine, which is our ultimate nature, and our conditioned ego, which spiritual traditions regard as the source of delusion. It is our individual consciousness, in contrast to our divine nature, which is universal, the same in everyone. Soul is true nature as it unfolds and develops in time and space, during the course of a lifetime. It is the principle of *becoming*, unlike the absolute, which is timeless: "as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be."

Soul has a double yearning. It has one eye on the absolute, like the drop that wants to dissolve into the ocean. Yet as Rumi wrote, "the ocean too becomes the drop." The individual is also a vehicle of the highest truth. There is a line from another Sufi poet, Yunus Emre, that describes this individuated quality of soul: "I am the drop that contains the sea. How beautiful to be an ocean hidden within an infinite drop."

Our absolute nature is what allows us to have universal compassion and love everyone equally, as many sacred traditions urge us to do. But on a personal level, on a soul level, we do not love everyone in exactly the same way. When we have a deep soul connection with someone, we love *this* person in a way that we love no other person in the whole universe. There's a particularity to it. This is *eros*.

PS: Christianity describes the universal "love everybody the same" as *agape*. Do spiritual traditions tend to undervalue the individual love of another individual—the *eros?*

JW: Some spiritual traditions discount or discredit individual experience. They regard what you go through as an individual as a dream, of no particular significance. One of the unique contributions of modern Western culture, and this is especially true in America, is the appreciation of personal experience. And this is what intimacy is about—the genuine, personal meeting of I and Thou. Then intimate relationship becomes a vehicle for the sacred, a crucible in which to forge soul.

PS: What is the relation between eros and sex?

JW: Eros is the whole of the dynamic interplay between two lovers, of which sex is but one expression. Sex is naturally sacred, for it is an expression of the subtle life force that animates the whole body and the whole universe. When we make love, our subtle energies interpenetrate in a way that is much finer than our contact at the gross body level. Only human beings make *love* through sex because only human beings lie and linger face to face, with the softest parts of our bodies—belly and heart—fully exposed and in contact.

When the modern mind reduces sex to a gross bodily function or animal instinct subordinated to the rational ego, it engages in a form of sacrilege. The more we try to capture or manipulate sexual experience, the more we lose touch with its capacity to unveil the mystery of human experience. As D. H. Lawrence wrote of this mystery: "The sexual act is not for the depositing of seed. It is for leaping off into the unknown, as from a cliff's edge, like Sappho into the sea."

PS: Can you talk about the roots of your vision of the sacred psychology of love? Where did it come from and how did you draw on the spiritual traditions?

JW: I started out, like most of us, coming from unconscious relationship. My first marriage was based on love, but I didn't have much understanding of the dynamics going on between us. When it ended, I felt a strong need to understand what relationships were really about. I explored various traditions, East and West, but couldn't find any teachings about the sacred psychology of the couple. There was mundane psychology—how to have sex, how to communicate, how to fight—but nothing about the subtle, multidimensional play between two individuals as a mysterious blend of body, mind, soul, and spirit. And there were spiritual teachings, containing universal principles such

as compassion, loving-kindness, and putting others first, but not saying much about the sacred dimension of eros or the nitty-gritty work of becoming genuinely intimate with another person.

In crafting a sacred psychology of the couple, I have tried to draw on, adapt, and bring together principles from the sacred traditions as well as from Western psychology.

PS: The title of your book, *Love and Awakening,* seems like a tautology. One could say that love *is* awakening.

JW: No, not entirely. Although we might like to believe, with the Beatles, that "love is all you need, it's easy," love is not all you need, and it's not easy. By forcing us to see the ways we continually play out our unconscious patterns with those we love, intimate relationship offers us the opportunity to wake up from these patterns.

PS: Is this spiritual work?

JW: In the broad sense. But I make a distinction between spiritual work in its purest sense—which involves realizing our absolute nature—and soulwork, which involves embodying this larger nature in our personal lives, bringing it through this body-mind vehicle. Relationship is a kind of soulwork, which is also sacred.

PS: We've defined soul and spirit; can you define *sacred?*

JW: What is sacred is the movement toward deeper truth, deeper connection, deeper understanding, and whatever helps us move in that direction. It is the meeting of the human and the divine. In this sense, intimate relationship is full of sacred possibilities.

PS: So when the divine shows up in here-and-now personal experience, that's what is sacred. Connecting with the sacred means acknowledging that flow from something larger than you into you.

JW: Yes. If you're just resting in pure, absolute being, the issue of the sacred doesn't come up, because self and other are not operating there at all. You are just "That." It's only when we take up our lives and have relationships with our wife or husband or children, that this question arises. In relationship, the sacred manifests as I-Thou communion.

To find the sacred in personal relationships requires working with our interpersonal conditioning from the past—what I call *self/other setups*— which obstruct and distort the deeper I-Thou communion. When two people bring love and awareness to bear on these conditioned patterns blocking their love, their relationship can truly be a vehicle for embodying the sacred in their

lives.

PS: Bringing together heaven and earth?

JW: Yes. That's where the sacred enters, right at that meeting point.

PS: So love by itself does not necessarily bring awakening?

JW: Love is an awakening power, but it doesn't always dissolve our defenses. Love is like the light and warmth of the sun that starts to wake up a dormant seed within us. Soul is that seed, which wants to grow, blossom, and bear fruit, to become all that it can be. But often the shell around the seed is so thick that it blocks those expansive possibilities.

These deeper potentials often start to come alive through a soul connection —a loving relationship that kindles a recognition of what is truly possible in this lifetime—whether this is with a lover, teacher, or friend.

PS: So one of the ways we can wake up from the trance of ego, that sleep, that wound, is through love.

JW: Yes, through relationship, since it was in our relations with others that we first learned to shut down. As we expand in love, we inevitably come up against our old tendencies to shut down and play it safe.

PS: And that's the obstacle?

JW: To be stuck in these conditioned self/other setups is a prison, a soul cage. Perhaps you learned to be tough in order to survive in your family, or to gain respect or approval. So you come to think of yourself as "someone who's in command"—and that becomes your soul cage. When you find a good, loving relationship, it will confront you with how this identity obstructs an open, direct meeting between you and the one you love. Your compulsion to be in control also cuts you off from a whole range of inner resources—spontaneity, trust, receptivity to love, letting go, facing the unknown, and genuine strength. If you want to be fully present to life and to another person, this identity has to dissolve.

But of course, you're likely to feel tremendous resistance at that point, because your whole sense of self—your survival, strength, and self-approval —is so tied up with being tough and in control.

PS: When you hit the walls of your prison, and your resistance comes up, what can you do then?

JW: The operative principle is to start where you are. We need to feel and open to the pain of being stuck inside the prison of our old self-concepts. And we need to recognize that our love is calling on us to break out of this prison and become the vast being we truly are.

We often feel tremendous resistance to letting love all the way into us, because love is a power that can break open the shell of the false self. We start to think, "I didn't get into a relationship to have my most precious strategy for security and survival threatened like this!" At this point, we imagine something is desperately wrong—with ourselves, with our partner, or with the relationship. Yet this is actually a tremendous opportunity to break through to a larger and truer sense of who we are.

PS: What you're saying is that the suffering is actually the key that can open the door of your prison.

JW: Not just suffering—because everyone suffers anyway—but *conscious* suffering. Making your suffering conscious. Having to maintain control is suffering, but you may not realize that until your love for another shows you how trapped you are in that identity. Because love makes you want to expand and connect, it also lets you see what's keeping you contracted and isolated.

PS: Everyone suffers; *conscious* suffering is the difference.

JW: Normally you act out your conditioned patterns unconsciously. But now you have a chance to feel what it's like to be a control freak, and see how that cuts off your openness to love, the sunlight that will help you develop into a genuine human being.

PS: How do you do that?

JW: We need to develop the capacity to see and open completely to where we actually are—through *unconditional presence.* The two limbs of unconditional presence are awareness and loving-kindness. In this case, awareness involves becoming conscious of our unconscious setups and the conditioned beliefs that keep us stuck.

PS: So you're saying that identity structures are made of beliefs. This is important. A lot of people don't make this connection.

JW: When we put an identity structure under the microscope of awareness, we find that it is made of a number of little beliefs linked together. Each of those beliefs needs to be exposed. If you always have to be in control, for instance, what beliefs are behind that? Maybe you imagine that if you're not in control, others will control you. Or maybe you think that being in command is the only way you can get respect. It helps to understand what purpose this control identity serves—because it *did* serve a useful function at some point in the past. Becoming free of that structure requires this kind of inquiry.

PS: In *Love and Awakening* you say that when you're up against the walls of your conditioned identity, you're likely to encounter threatening feelings, such

as helplessness. And you say that's an essential part of the process: If helplessness starts to come up, let go of your bias against helplessness.

JW: Yes. Now we're talking about loving-kindness. If you're starting to feel helpless, the challenge is to actively allow that and bring your presence to bear on it. That also starts to dissolve the control structure, which was built as a defense against feeling helpless.

PS: You're saying that loving-kindness involves being able to fully experience negative or difficult feelings.

JW: Yes. Fully, directly. It's an absolutely essential element of this work.

PS: Of soulwork.

JW: Yes, and of conscious relationship. This kind of compassion is essential for developing a more conscious relationship with yourself, with the whole range of your experience. This means opening our heart to ourselves—which helps us overcome self-hatred and connect with ourselves more deeply. As Rilke wrote, "Perhaps all the dragons in our lives are only princesses who are waiting to see us act just once with beauty and courage. Perhaps everything terrible is, in its deepest essence, something helpless that needs our love." When we relate to our inner dragons with beauty and courage—by being fully present with our experience—something wakes up inside, and we gain access to hidden resources.

PS: Doing battle with your inner demons—is that the spadework for conscious, intimate, sacred relationships?

JW: Yes, our conditioned patterns are the demons and dragons we need to slay. PS: So we're recovering the chivalry of romantic love, but making it much more conscious.

JW: Conscious romantic love. Absolutely, that's it. Romance, in its original meaning, was an adventure. *Roman,* the French word for novel, was originally a tale of heroic deeds the lover performed for his beloved. In this case, the heroic deeds involve breaking out of our soul cage and becoming who we are. That's conscious romantic love. Men and women can relate to that equally. It's a warrior's path.

PS: So we have to be really courageous to do this work on ourselves. Then not only will we blossom, but our relationships will blossom too.

JW: Yes. And if couples do this work together, it could help our whole world blossom. This is where we can start to regenerate our world—between one person and another. How can we hope to create a better world if we can't even relate to our partner when we come home at night?

Conscious relationship can be a vehicle for regenerating soul in our culture, for rediscovering community and sacredness in daily life. Through learning to speak truthfully and listen respectfully to one other person, we start to practice genuine meeting and dialogue—which is exactly what our world most needs on the collective level.

PS: So conscious relationship provides a vision of our larger possibilities and a path toward realizing them. In that way, people can become more awake through the secular form of conscious relationships—

JW: The *sacred* form of conscious relationships.

PS: Sacred, but in a secular setting. And that is what could help rebuild community and create a saner society.

JW: Yes. Community is born in the relationship between I and Thou. If large numbers of couples and families start relating in that way, it could spread from there.

PS: Can you say more about this larger social significance of conscious relationship?

JW: Conscious love could play an important part in regenerating the planet and awakening humanity from its collective trance. As two partners become devoted to the growth of awareness and spirit in each other, they will naturally want to share their love with others. The larger arc of a couple's love reaches out toward a feeling of kinship with all of life, what Teilhard de Chardin calls "a love of the universe."

As two lovers break open their hearts and cultivate greater soulfulness through their connection, they will also experience the soullessness of the modern world more keenly. Here is where they as a couple can give something back to this world: by extending the heart and soul they kindle in each other to all beings. They might start by making their home a sacred environment, nurturing the deeper potentials in their children, or cultivating a community of caring friends. They might extend further by bringing greater humanness into their everyday dealings with people, by helping others wake up from the numbing and soullessness taking over the world, by caring for the place on earth they inhabit, by turning away from soul-depleting influences like television and devoting more time to real conversation, meditation, spiritual practice, or creativity, or by dedicating their lives to serving the forces of awakening and renewal in our society at large. These are but a few of countless ways that lovers could start to expand their vision and their love. Sharing with others what they discover as they heal their own inner divisions

is the greatest gift they could offer our fractured world.

Notes

Introduction

1. "Therapy and meditation have their own proper domains, which should not be confused. People often ask me if I teach my therapy clients to meditate. I generally do not try to mix these two paths. Since meditation is the most powerful method I know for dissolving ego-clinging, introducing it as a purely therapeutic technique for feeling better would be to risk making it into a mental health gimmick. As the British psychologist Robin Skynner points out, 'The more powerful a technique is, the more dangerous it can be in preventing real change if it is misused.'

   It is important not to blur the distinction between therapy and meditation, for this may lead to confusing self-integration and self-transcendence. This confusion could weaken the effectiveness of therapy to help us find ourselves, by trying to make it achieve something more than it is designed for. And it could dilute the power of meditation, diminishing its unique potential to open our eyes to a radically fresh vision of who we are and what we are capable of" (Welwood 1980, pp. 138–39).

Part 1 Introduction

1. Although I use the term *Eastern psychology* in this book, strictly speaking, there is no Eastern *psychology* in the Western sense of this term: the objective study of psyche, self, and behavior as they develop through time. The Eastern understanding of the mind is arrived at mostly through intuitive knowledge, based on direct, nonconceptual recognition of different states and dimensions of consciousness.
2. Of course, these three levels could be further differentiated into further sublevels, as Ken Wilber, for one, has done in his work. I limit my investigation here to just these three levels because they are the most readily demarcated in our ongoing experience.
3. The Buddhist teaching of the three *kaya*s is much vaster and more profound

than my description here. The three levels of mind, as I articulate them here, are but one way of looking at the three *kaya*s.

4. For a further discussion of this, see Welwood 1979a.

5. There are many schools in Western psychology that have also focused on the body-mind; for example, the existential/humanistic tradition, which has given special attention to prereflective felt experience and its meaning. The Jungian tradition has also illuminated this level of mind by studying its archetypal patternings.

   Eastern psychology focuses on the body-mind through energy practices such as tai chi chuan, hatha yoga, dream yoga, and inner yogas that work with chakras and subtle energy flow. However, the special focus of Eastern psychology is on the still deeper level of unconditioned, nonconceptual awareness, which is accessed through meditation. To study this level of mind, Western psychologists would also have to engage in contemplative disciplines—which is in fact finally beginning to happen.

Chapter 3 Ego Strength and Egolessness

1. This description of the *skandha*s is not the traditional formulation found in Abhidharma psychology, but grows out of a more Vajrayana-style interpretation that was set forth by Chögyam Trungpa (1973).

2. These three strategies correspond to Karen Horney's analysis of the three basic styles of defense mechanism: moving toward, moving against, and moving away from.

3. Of course, this is true only for those who already have an intact ego.

Chapter 4 The Play of the Mind

1. In terms of the Buddhist teaching of the three *kaya*s, we could say that the contents of consciousness belong to the *nirmanakaya*, the realm of manifest form. The pulsation of the mindstream, with its alternation between movement and stillness, belongs to the *sambhogakaya*, the realm of energetic flow. And the larger open ground of awareness, first discovered in moments of stillness, is the *dharmakaya*, the realm of pure being itself, eternally present, spontaneous, and free of entrapment in any form whatsoever.

Chapter 5 Meditation and the Unconscious

1. Of course, the essence of meditation can never be grasped through conceptual understanding alone, precisely because its very nature transcends the conceptual mind, which functions through dualistic constructs based on the self/other split. Meditation is not a particular delimited experience, but rather a way of *seeing through* experience. For this reason, no psychology of meditation could ever be a substitute for the personal understanding derived from actually engaging in the practice.
2. The id remained an unconscious region separate from the ego, and Freud continually fell back into the topographic language whose implications he himself repudiated.
3. Freud, for instance, conceived of mind as a psychical "apparatus to which we ascribe the characteristics of being extended in space" (1949, p. 14).
4. Jung admits the separation between mind and universe as a basic feature of Western thought: "The development of Western philosophy during the last two centuries has succeeded in isolating the mind in its own sphere and in severing it from its primordial oneness with the universe" (1958, p. 476).

Chapter 6 Psychological Space

1. A couple of exceptions to this are James 1890 and Matte Blanco 1975.
2. Strictly speaking, all three types of space should not be called *psychological*. Inner, feeling space is psychological in the proper sense of the term, while outer, orientational is *somatic*, and the space of being is *ontological* (prior to felt experience). I use the term *psychological space* loosely in this chapter, as a synonym for *lived space*, space as experienced.
3. This kind of limitless openness is different from the relative openness of "self-actualization," which is often taken as the goal of psychotherapy and personality-based psychologies. While self-actualizing individuals may be able to move fluidly from one feeling space to another, they still move in a world of limits, boundaries, and self-referentiality. While they may have some mastery in the area of feeling space, the fully awake being is a master of open space.

Chapter 14 Embodying Your Realization

1. Certainly under the right circumstances spiritual practice by itself can totally transform the personality—for instance, under the close personal tutelage of a great teacher, or in a person with strong innate aptitudes, or in spiritual retreat of many years' duration. (In Tibet, certain kinds of transformation were said to require a twelve-year retreat.)
2. Although living an otherworldly life was a common and accepted lifestyle in traditional Asia, I am not suggesting that all or even most Asian spiritual adepts display this otherworldly strain. Many have lived in the world with a high level of personal integration. What is true in general is that the essential Eastern teachings focus on realizing absolute true nature, rather than on cultivating an individuated, personal expression of that nature. Of course, different Asian cultures and traditions, and even different schools within a single tradition, such as Buddhism, differ greatly in how much they stress the impersonal element. I have chosen not to address these distinctions here, which would require a much longer, more scholarly treatment.
3. This is of course a generalization. I am speaking here of most Tibetans who have grown up in a traditional family/community context. I do know some modern Tibetans, even teachers, who suffer from personal, psychological wounding, for whom psychotherapy might be of benefit. I have also spoken with one Tibetan who has a sophisticated understanding of Western psychology and recognizes its benefits for Tibetans who live in the West. In his words:

> Tibetans will need more psychological care as they come into the modern world, even in India. We are seeing more disruptive behavior as well as cognitive problems in children coming out of Tibet.
>
> For myself, since I've chosen to live in the West, rather than in a monastery, I find that Buddhist teachings alone are not adequate to meet my own needs to function effectively in this world. I have to turn to Western psychology for basic things like interpersonal skills, learning to communicate well, and having meaningful relationships.
>
> Considering how some Tibetan monks who come to the West deal with emotional and relationship problems they encounter here, we can infer that the traditional spiritual practices alone are not enough for helping them deal with these problems. In many ways Buddhism does not have the specificity that is required to handle the emotional and relational situations that they encounter in a Western cultural context.

4. One telling sign of the difference between child-rearing influences East and West: Tibetan teachers, who traditionally begin compassion practices by instructing students to regard all sentient beings as their mothers, have been surprised and dismayed by the difficulty many American students have in

using their mothers as a starting point for developing compassion.

5. Roland reports an interesting case of two Indian women married to American men with whom he worked, for whom "it took many years of psychoanalysis with a warm, supportive analyst gradually to be able to have a more individualized self" and thus function normally in American society (1988, p. 198).
6. This is not to say that most Westerners are truly individuated or even interested in this. Unfortunately, individualism—which is a lower-level approximation—is the closest most modern Westerners come to individuation. Nevertheless, genuine individuation is a real possibility here, and often the most alienated are those who feel most called in this direction.
7. As Karlfried Graf Dürckheim points out, for most Eastern teachers, "the individual form acquired in the process [of spiritual awakening] is not taken seriously as such. . . . This, however, is the very thing that counts for Western masters . . . [freedom] *to become* the person that one individually is. For us in the West, it is more important that a new worldly form should emerge *from* true nature and witness to Being . . . than that the ego should dissolve *in* true nature and *in* Being" (1992, p. 100).

   Speaking of the Japanese Zen masters he studied with, Dürckheim notes: "As masters, they appear in a supreme form in which every personal element has been converted into something suprapersonal, almost remote from the world, or at least not involved in it. One rarely, if ever, meets the happy or suffering individual, through whose joy-filled, sorrow-filled eye the otherworldly glimmers in a unique personal sense. . . . Is such a master a person in our sense of the term?" (p. 101).
8. Teachers from the Far East—often from China, Japan, or Korea, who work with the body-mind, emphasizing the connection to the earth in their teaching—are one major exception to this. For example, teachers of tai chi, chi kung, and aikido always stress the importance of the belly center and good grounding. Many Zen teachers also rarely speak of spiritual realization, but instead have their students attend to the earthy details of chopping wood and carrying water.
9. Of course, personal psychological work is not in itself sufficient for spiritual transformation or for the integration of our larger being into our personal functioning. In addition to finding a spiritual teacher or practice that strips away egocentricity, particular individuals may also need to work

on their body, their livelihood, their intimate relationships, or their relation to community. But psychological work can help people recognize the areas where they need work and clear away some obstacles in these areas.

10. The relationship with a spiritual master can also address these dynamics, especially for those rare students who have a close, personal connection with a teacher who carefully supervises them.

Chapter 18 Love, Conditional and Unconditional

1. This was quoted in *Brain/Mind Bulletin* 9, no. 10 (May 1984).

Chapter 19 Passion as Path

1. Many of the great cathedrals of Europe were built on pagan power spots and dedicated to St. Michael, the slayer of dragons, which represent this "lower" nature.

Glossary

Included here are short definitions of Buddhist terms as well as some of my own terminology, as used in this book. All non-English terms are in Sanskrit, except where noted.

AWAKENING The process of (a) waking up *from* unconscious tendencies, beliefs, reactions, and self-concepts that function automatically and keep us imprisoned in a narrow view of who we are and what life is about; and (b) waking up *to* our true nature as the free and spontaneous, transparent presence of being.

AWARENESS As used in this book, this term points to something much larger than the ordinary meaning of "I am aware that . . ." *Awareness* here indicates the very essence of the mind—a larger, direct knowing that is not dependent on concepts. This *nonconceptual awareness* is the larger, fluid, dynamic, expansive ocean that both underlies and constitutes all the various mind waves of thought and feeling.

Awareness in this larger sense is self-existing, for it is always present as the very core of our experience and thus cannot be fabricated. It also has its own experiential qualities of clarity, presence, energy, responsiveness, alertness, fluidity, spaciousness, and warmth.

BASIC GOODNESS The translation of a Tibetan term that refers to the wholesome nature of our being, as well as the intrinsic wonder and delight of reality when things are seen in their suchness. This is not a Pollyanna term meant to gloss over the evil, greed, and aggression in human behavior; instead, it signifies the unconditional awakeness and responsiveness that constitute our very essence. Basic goodness is nonconceptual and unconditional, having nothing to do with concepts of good versus bad. It is what we perceive when the doors of our perception are cleansed of egocentric fixation, bias, and grasping.

BEING A Western term that indicates our fundamental, essential nature, which is a living presence within us. As the Indian teacher Poonja said, "Being is

presence. To recognize this is wisdom and freedom." As a noun, the word *being* can sound static or abstract. But if we consider it as a verb form—*be-ing*—it denotes the living process that we are, an immediate coming-into-presence and engaging with what is. This nameless, formless presence—in, around, behind, and between all our particular thoughts and experiences—is what the Eastern traditions regard as our true nature, or home ground, and the Western traditions regard as the essential self or holy spirit. Because being is present in all things, our being is also, in Thich Nhat Hanh's words, *interbeing*. (In this book I avoid capitalizing *being* except in cases where the syntax could otherwise be confusing.)

BODHICHITTA Although this term has different specific meanings in different Buddhist contexts and traditions, it generally refers to the mind that is turned toward awakening. Sometimes translated as "the mind of enlightenment" or "awakened heart," this term is also usually associated with compassion and the genuine desire to help others. In many contexts it means the aspiration to awaken fully to our true nature, so that one can help others also awaken in this way.

BODY-MIND *See* MIND.

BUDDHA-NATURE Literally, our awake nature, embryonically present in all human beings. Although most people do not recognize their fundamentally awake nature, it nonetheless remains active and alive behind the scenes.

COEMERGENCE A term from the Mahamudra tradition that indicates the tendency of absolute and relative, clarity and confusion, true nature and ego to arise together as two inseparable aspects of human experience. From this perspective, the self-referential ego is not some separate principle, but only a limited version of true nature. Therefore, it need not be rejected, but can instead be transmuted into its essence, which is buddha-nature.

DHARMA The way reality works, the basic law of the universe. It also refers to the teachings about the nature of reality, as in the term *Buddhadharma*.

DZOGCHEN (Tibetan) Literally, the great completion or perfection. The ultimate nondual teaching found in the Tibetan tradition, oriented toward the pure nature of nonconceptual awareness. Dzogchen is often known as the path of self-liberation because it emphasizes allowing whatever arises in one's experience to arise just as it is without reacting to it in any way; when one can meet one's experience in this fresh, nonreactive way, it spontaneously releases any fixation or tension, revealing itself as none

other than pure awareness itself.

EGO In this book I use this term broadly, to refer to the habitual activity of grasping onto images and concepts of oneself, an activity that separates us from our true nature. In Western psychology, *ego* has many different meanings, but generally refers to (a) the managerial capacity of the psyche that balances different impulses and demands and governs worldly functioning, and/or (b) the self-representational capacity that maintains a stable self-image and thus a consistent, continuous sense of self. Eastern and Western psychology could probably agree on a broad definition of *ego* as a fabricated or constructed sense of self, which provides a sense of control that we seem to need in our early development for survival and protection (see chapter 3).

EGOLESSNESS A translation of the Buddhist term *anatman*, which literally means no-self. This term is not meant to deny the conventional existence of a functional, working ego or self, but rather to point beyond it to our larger being, which is inherently free of egoic self-concern. Egolessness, then, is the ground of ego, just as an open hand is the basis for making a fist. In this analogy, the hand is more basic, more fundamental, more real than the fist, which is only a transitory contraction that arises out of the open hand (see chapter 3).

EMPTINESS This term, which has many levels of meaning in different Buddhist contexts and traditions, does not refer to some *thing* that can be pinned down, or to a definite attribute of things, like hot or cold, large or small. *Emptiness* is a word that points to what is beyond all words and concepts —the dimension of reality that cannot be pinned down as something definite, solid, fixed, unchanging, or graspable. It is the spacious boundlessness of being, or in Herbert Guenther's term, "the open dimension of being." It is being experienced as spaciousness, which is both pregnant with possibilities and intrinsically free of conceptual obscurations. Because it is what allows things to be, to manifest as what they are, it is also a fullness. And because of this spacious quality of being, no mental fixation or emotional compulsion can finally stick to us. Therefore, it forms the basis for spiritual liberation and awakening.

Other terms that approximate the meaning of emptiness: *fathomlessness, expansiveness, the undefinable, the unknown* or *unknowable, ever-changingness, potentiality.*

HEART Our basic openness and responsiveness to reality, which expresses

itself in human tenderness and warmth. *Heart* is one possible way to translate the Buddhist term BODHICHITTA. In contrast to soul, which unfolds in time and space, like a seed developing its potential, heart is like the sun—already full and radiant.

IDENTITY A self-concept fashioned out of our childhood relations with others, which we identify with, imagining that it accurately represents who we are. This is like looking in a mirror and taking the image we see there as an accurate and complete picture of who we are, instead of recognizing that it is only a partial, superficial image of our bodily form. The identity structure is generally comprised of two halves: the *conscious identity*—a positive image of self that we actively try to promote in order to compensate for an underlying *subconscious identity*—a sense of deficiency that we try to cover up because it threatens our security and self-esteem.

IDENTITY PROJECT The continual attempt to establish our conscious identity as something solid, definite, and worthwhile. This is an endless project because identity is only a mental concept and can thus never be finally established. Part of the driving force behind the identity project is our need to establish and prove our conscious identity in order to counteract a subconscious, deficient identity that is threatening. For example, "I am in control" covers up the underlying fear that "I am helpless"; "I am independent" covers up "I am too needy"; and so on.

INDIVIDUATION The path of embodying our absolute true nature in an individual way that expresses our unique calling and unique gifts. Becoming a fully developed individual involves cultivating a whole range of our basic human resources, which exist as seed potentials within us, but which are often blocked by unconscious psychological patterns. Individuation in this sense has nothing to do with individualism—compulsively defending and reinforcing our separate individuality. Instead, it involves forging a vessel —the authentic individual—through which we can bring absolute true nature into form—the "form" of our person. The authentic individual is fully transparent to the larger ground of being.

KARMA The chain of cause and effect, conditioned responses, and habitual patterns. More specifically, the transmission of tendencies from one mind-moment to the next, the process of one thing leading to another, usually without much consciousness on our part. The path of awakening is often seen as a process of bringing consciousness to bear on this unconscious

functioning of habitual patterns from the past, so that they no longer rule our life.

KAYA Literally, body; used in Buddhism to refer to the three bodies of the Buddha, the three ways in which reality manifests: as form *(nirmanakaya),* energy *(samboghakaya),* and space *(dharmakaya)* (see introduction to part 1).

KLESHA Emotional fixations that accompany the activity of ego clinging, namely, pride, aggression, greed, jealousy, and indifference.

MAHAMUDRA Literally, the great gesture. The complete, spontaneous opening to reality as it is through recognizing reality as no different from oneself, no different from the awareness that is opening to it, so that there is complete interpenetration of self and world. *Mahamudra* also refers to the Vajrayana tradition that practices this teaching.

MAITRI Loving-kindness, unconditional friendliness; the willingness to allow ourselves to feel what we feel and have the experience we are having, without judging ourselves for it. This is the basis for real growth and change, for as long as we stand in judgment of ourselves, we remain divided and cannot move forward in any wholesome, unified way.

MIND As generally used in this book, this term refers to the whole of our experiencing, not just mental functioning. What we usually call *mind* in the West refers to the surface level of conceptual activity. Yet beyond the *conceptual mind* we also can find two larger levels of mind always operating. *Body-mind* is a more subtle, holistic way of sensing, knowing, and interacting with reality that usually operates outside the range of normal consciousness. At this level, I am not just my fleshly body, not just my thoughts, not just my feelings, and not just my bounded ego, but a larger field of energy, which is intimately interconnected with the whole of reality and can therefore tap into subtler ways of knowing and being. Body-mind is a bridge between the form-oriented functioning of surface mind and the deeper, formless dimension of *big mind*, nonconceptual awareness. Nonconceptual awareness is the larger essence of mind itself, an eternal, living presence that gives rise to all the mind activity at the other two levels. These three levels of mind correspond to the gross, subtle, and causal bodies in certain esoteric systems and to the three KAYAS in Buddhist psychology (see part 1 introduction, and chapter 4).

MINDFULNESS Clear attention to what is happening in one's MINDSTREAM, in

one's activity, or in the environment. This involves noticing what is happening without reacting to it or becoming identified with it. Mindfulness meditation is a practice that deliberately cultivates this kind of nonreactive witnessing.

MINDSTREAM The ongoing stream of mind activity, whose dynamic is an alternation between movement and stillness, between differentiated mind-moments (thought, feeling, sensation, and perception) and undifferentiated mind-moments (open spaces, gaps, silence, and nondoing) that point to the larger, unconditional stillness of the ground of being, which lies behind the mindstream altogether.

NONDUAL Refers to the highest level of the Eastern spiritual teachings, which emphasize that our relative self is not essentially different or separate from the absolute ground of being, the true nature of all things. Nondual teachings take the absolute perspective, where individual differences are recognized but not regarded as fundamental. For example, there are countless forms of gold jewelry in existence, yet they are all fundamentally gold. Whether we judge their particular shapes and forms beautiful or ugly does not alter the fact that they are all equally gold.

Thus, from a nondual perspective, personal and suprapersonal, body and mind, individual and universal, matter and spirit, are only different expressions of a more primary, fundamental reality, which, strictly speaking, cannot even be named. Because this fundamental reality is our very nature, we cannot stand back from it and objectify it.

NONMEDITATION A term from the DZOGCHEN tradition that refers to completely resting, without meditation technique, in the pure, transparent presence of self-existing awareness. From this perspective, formal meditation methods still remain within the sphere of conceptual mind because they involve some directed intention or method. Nonmeditation is the fruition of meditation practice and goes beyond the conceptual mind altogether.

OBJECT RELATIONS A technical term that refers to the self/other imprints that form in the course of our development and shape our sense of identity. To say that our identity is based on object relations means that it is constructed out of our reaction to how significant others saw us, treated us, and responded to us.

Every object relation consists of three elements: a view of other, a view of self in relation to other, and a feeling that accompanies this particular relation. For example, if we see our parents as caring and supportive, we

may develop a view of ourselves as worthwhile, and the corresponding feeling might be confidence or self-respect. If our parents are abusive, we may come to see others as threatening and ourselves as a victim, and our life may be permeated by a mood of fear, distrust, or paranoia. From this perspective, every view of other implies a view of self, and every view of self implies a view of other. A less technical term I use for object relations is *self/other setups.*

ONTOLOGY The study of being. An ontological approach looks at things in light of our essential being, rather than in light of more contingent conditions that have shaped us. Psychology, by contrast, is the study of developmental, environmental, temperamental, and organic conditions that shape human life, in contrast to the more fundamental perspective of ontology, the study of being itself and how it infuses our life.

OPEN GROUND, OPEN SPACE The fundamentally open nature of awareness underlying all conditioned states of mind. This open background awareness—somewhat analogous to the screen on which a film is projected—can be glimpsed in the spaces between thoughts and moments of mind fixation. Meditation provides a more formal way of noticing these gaps in the MINDSTREAM.

PERSON When I use the term *true* or *authentic person,* I am referring to the way in which absolute true nature can manifest and express itself in a uniquely personal way. The person in this sense is the uniquely human vehicle through which true nature shines. It is not a solid, substantial structure, but rather a particular quality of presence. The true person develops through inner work, through stripping away the dross—the conditioning and obscurations that prevent us from embodying our individual seed potentials. The true person is the fruition of the process of individuation. Person is the outer manifestation of this fruition—how we manifest. SOUL is the inner manifestation—how we are. The true person is the capacity for personal presence, personal contact, and personal love —which makes it possible for personal intimacy to become a transformative path.

PERSONALITY The whole complex of our conditioned nature, including the managerial ego, the ego identity, and all the habitual patterns that arise out of taking ourselves to be this identity. Conditioned personality is thus quite different from the true person.

PHENOMENOLOGY Literally, the study of phenomena; the study of the structure of experience and how it works. Thus, a phenomenological psychology does not start with theories or hypotheses but stays very close to experience. Its concepts are experience-near. For example, defining ego as the synthesizing activity of the psyche is not phenomenological, because we cannot actually experience this synthesizing activity. Ego in this definition is merely a theoretical construct, what the philosopher F. S. C. Northrup calls a *concept by postulation.* Defining ego as the activity of grasping, by contrast, *is* phenomenological because we can actually experience this grasping activity as a tension in the mind and in the body. This is what Northrup calls a *concept by intuition.*

Of course, concepts by postulation have their place and their usefulness. But in the realm of psychology they can become problematic, especially when they are jumbled together with experiential realities. The psychoanalytic concept of ego, for example, is often confusing because it mixes hypothetical and experiential elements together.

SAMSARA The way that the mind creates a deluded view of reality through mistaken or false ideas. In Tibetan, this terms implies "going around in circles." Samsara is the confusion and suffering that results from not recognizing our true nature, but instead basing our life on the fiction of the constructed self, imagining that our thoughts about who we are represent reality.

SKANDHAS Literally, aggregates of tendencies that form the building blocks of EGO. These five constituents of ego activity include: *form* (the tendency to contract against the open ground and solidify self as separate from other, as well as separate from Being itself), *feeling* (taking positions for or against, based on that initial split), *impulse* (grasping, rejecting, ignoring), *conceptualization* (developing elaborate story lines and beliefs about self and other), and *consciousness* (the ongoing stream of mind activity, the busy mind).

SOUL Our true nature as it unfolds and individuates in time and space, soul is, in Rumi's words, "a growing consciousness." In Aurobindo's words it is a "spark of the divine" that contains a double yearning: (a) to connect with our ground, to realize our deeper essence as pure, open presence; and (b) to embody our larger nature *in this world,* to know ourselves *in this human form.* Thus, soul is an intermediate principle or bridge, which allows a living integration between the two sides of our nature: the

individual and the universal, the embodied realm of personal experience and the formless presence of pure being.

Soul is like a seed, an embryonic potential of authentic humanness that may or may not sprout and develop in a given individual. In this sense, soul needs to be cultivated if it is to reach its full potential. Soul is the inner side of the authentic person.

SUCHNESS The pure, ineffable isness of things, which can only be known directly and wordlessly. For example, how could anyone ever put into words the particular youness of you, the quality of your unique presence, which no one else manifests in just the same way? Suchness means *as it is in itself, just so.*

TANTRA, TANTRIC BUDDHISM *Tantra* literally means *continuity,* referring to the continuity and coemergence of absolute and relative truth, heaven and earth, spirit and matter, emptiness and form, awakening and SAMSARA. From the Tantric perspective, samsara and awakening are woven together as two sides of one cloth. That is why confused emotions and mind-states can suddenly transform into awakened consciousness, and why Tantra is known as the path of transformation. Therefore, one does not have to try to escape or avoid impurity, confusion, pain, darkness, aggression, fear, and all the other difficult states. In fact, the more one flees these states or tries to fix them, the more one distances oneself from the potential awakening hidden within them. *See also* VAJRAYANA.

TRANSMUTATION A process of psychological transformation that involves dissolving negative, harmful states of mind back into their true nature as pure, awake AWARENESS.

TRUE NATURE That which is intrinsic and unconditioned; roughly synonymous with BUDDHA-NATURE and *ground of being.* This term is an attempt to name the unnamable. Our essential nature is a presence that we can directly experience but cannot capture in words, any more than we can really describe what a peach tastes like. For this reason, some Eastern teachers prefer not to use any word to name our fundamental nature, using only the term *That.*

UNCONDITIONAL PRESENCE The capacity to fully acknowledge, allow, and open to our immediate experience just as it is, without agenda, judgment, or manipulation of any kind. Here we are at one with our experience, without the subject/object barrier. This is an innate capacity of our being,

yet we usually have to learn to cultivate it at first, because the habitual tendency of EGO always involves grasping and rejecting, which reinforce separation and counteract authentic presence.

UNDERSTANDING In the context of psychological work, this term is meant to indicate empathic knowing, rather than purely intellectual comprehension. For example, if your child is crying, you can be understanding without having to know the exact cause of the tears: "I can see you're hurting. I understand you're having a hard time." That type of kind understanding is what we need to extend to ourselves when we are caught up in our various conditioned mind-states. As a blend of both wisdom and compassion, it has a clarifying and liberating effect.

VAJRAYANA Literally, the indestructible path; this term is roughly synonymous with TANTRA in the Buddhist tradition. This path is considered indestructible because it works directly with all the energies of the psyche and the phenomenal world, transmuting negative forces and emotions into qualities of awakened AWARENESS. Vajrayana Buddhism developed mainly in Northern India and Tibet, though it can also be found in all the Himalayan countries, as well as in Japan.

Sources

Chapter 3. Ego Strength and Egolessness

a. James 1890, p. 339.
b. Ramana Maharshi, in Godman 1985, p. 53.
c. Becker 1973, p. 55.
d. Masterson 1988, pp. 23–24.
e. Ramana Maharshi, in Godman 1985, p. 52.
f. Jung 1958, p. 484.
g. James 1890, p. 299.
h. Cox 1977, p. 139.
i. Freud 1959, p. 57.

Chapter 4. The Play of the Mind

a. James 1890, p. 255.
b. James 1890, pp. 243–44.
c. James 1890, p. 244.
d. James 1890, p. 240.
e. James 1890, p. 253.
f. James 1890, p. 252.
g. Mozart quoted in James 1890, p. 255n.
h. Trungpa and Hookham 1974, p. 8.
i. Tarthang Tulku 1974, pp. 9–10.
j. Capra 1975, p. 210.
k. Guenther 1959, p. 54.
l. Wangyal 1997, p. 29.
m. Quoted in Guenther 1956, p. 269.

Chapter 5. Meditation and the Unconscious

a. Kretschmer 1969, p. 224.

b. Jung 1958, pp. 501, 508.
c. See Miller 1942.
d. Jung 1933, p. 185.
e. MacIntyre 1958, p. 45.
f. Jung 1958, p. 496.
g. Jung 1958, p. 484.
h. Trungpa 1969, p. 55.
i. Jung 1958, p. 485.
j. Trungpa 1969, p. 52.
k. Dhiravamsa 1974, p. 32.
l. Guenther and Trungpa 1975, p. 22.
m. Jung 1958, p. 502.
n. For more about diffuse attention, see Ehrenzweig 1965.
o. Gendlin 1973, p. 370.
p. Grof 1975.
q. Dhiravamsa 1974, pp. 13, 31.
r. Wilber 1975, p. 108.
s. Traherne quoted in Huxley 1944, p. 67.
t. Chaterjee 1971, pp. 18, 19, 22.
u. Suzuki 1930, p. 197.
v. Trungpa 1973, p. 122; 1976, p. 58.
w. Matte Blanco 1975, p. 230.
x. Trungpa 1973, p. 122.
y. Trungpa 1973, pp. 223, 219.
z. Kirsch 1960, p. 85.
aa. Guenther 1975, p. 27.
bb. Horsch 1961, p. 148.
cc. Hisamatsu 1968, p. 31.
dd. Van Dusen 1958 p. 254.
ee. Trungpa and Hookham 1974, p. 6.

Chapter 6. Psychological Space

a. Minkowski 1970, p. 400.
b. Rilke, as quoted in Bachelard 1964, p. 203.
c. Govinda 1959, p. 117.
d. "Records Mirroring the Original Source," as cited in Hisamatsu 1960.

e. Trungpa 1976, pp. 153, 145.
f. Jung 1959, pp. 356–57.
g. Van Dusen 1958, p. 254.
h. Rilke 1975, p. 28.

Chapter 7. The Unfolding of Experience

a. James 1967, pp. 295–96.
b. For a fuller discussion of my holographic analogy, see Welwood 1982.
c. Pribram 1971, p. 150.
d. For Gendlin's work on Focusing and its philosophical underpinnings, see Gendlin 1962, 1964, 1978; for the research background of Focusing, see Gendlin et al. 1968; Rogers 1967; Walker et al. 1969.
e. Levinson 1975, p. 12.
f. Picard 1952, pp. 173, 36.
g. Bohm 1973, p. 146.
h. Gendlin 1978, p. 76.
i. Levinson 1975, p. 18.
j. Hillman 1972, p. 290.

Chapter 8. Reflection and Presence

a. Poonja 1993, p. 33.
b. Koestenbaum 1978, pp. 35, 70.
c. Krishnamurti 1976, p. 214.
d. Kunsang 1993, p. 114.
e. Nishitani 1982, p. 128.
f. Quoted in Izutsu 1977, p. 140.
g. Marcel 1950, p. 101.
h. Lodro Thaye quote in Nalanda 1980, p. 84.
i. Nyima 1991, p. 129.
j. Koestenbaum 1978, pp. 73, 82, 100, 101.
k. Heidegger 1977, p. 127.
l. Merleau-Ponty 1968, pp. 38–39, 139.
m. Merrill-Wolff 1994.
n. Nishitani 1982, p. 124.
o. Guenther 1977, p. 244.

p. Lodro Thaye quote in Nalanda 1980, p. 84.
q. Trungpa 1973, pp. 218–19, 221, 222, 234, 235–36.
r. Trungpa 1976, pp. 70–71.
s. Gendlin 1964.
t. Paltrul Rinpoche quote in Kunsang 1993, p. 120.
u. Nishitani 1982, pp. 165–6.
v. Nishitani 1982, p. 154.
w. Nishitani 1982, pp. 154–55.
x. Norbu 1986, p. 144.
y. Tarthang Tulku 1974, pp. 9–10, 18.
z. Nishitani 1982, p. 130.

Chapter 10. Vulnerability, Power, and the Healing Relationship

a. Hume 1888, p. 252.
b. Sartre 1957, pp. 100–101.

Chapter 11. Psychotherapy as a Practice of Love

a. See Welwood 1986.
b. Thurman 1987.
c. Thurman 1976, pp. 56–57.

Chapter 13. Making Friends with Emotion

a. Hillman 1961, p. 289.
b. René Dubos in Needleman 1979, p. 59.
c. Trungpa 1973, pp. 68–69.
d. Trungpa 1976, p. 69.
e. Tarthang Tulku 1978, pp. 54, 52; 1975, pp. 160–61.
f. Benoit 1959, p. 143.
g. Trungpa 1969, p. 23.
h. Suzuki Roshi 1970, p. 36.
i. Trungpa 1976, pp. 69–72.

Chapter 14. Embodying Your Realization

a. Aurobindo n.d., p. 98.
b. Roland 1988, p. 250.
c. Roland 1988, p. 226.
d. See Winnicott 1965.
e. Dürckheim 1977.
f. Greenberg and Mitchell 1983, p. 193.
g. Klein 1995, p. 26.
h. For a further discussion of holy longing, see Welwood 1996, p. 100
i. For a further discussion of conscious and subconscious identity, see Welwood 1996, chapter 3.
j. See Schilpp and Friedman 1967, p. 117.

Part 3. Introduction

a. Solovyev in Welwood 1985.

Chapter 17. Refining the Gold

a. Rilke 1975, my slight retranslation.
b. This version of the Emily Dickinson poem can be found in M. D. Bianchi and A. L. Hampson, eds., *Poems by Emily Dickinson* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1957).
c. Buber 1947.

Chapter 18. Love, Conditional and Unconditional

a. Khan 1962, p. 164.

Chapter 19. Passion as Path

a. Khan 1962, p. 164.
b. Trungpa 1983, p. 46.
c. Trungpa 1983, pp. 45–46.
d. Goethe poemtranslated by Robert Bly 1980.

Chapter 20. Spiritual Authority, Genuine and Counterfeit

a. Hoffer 1951, p. 107.
b. Hoffer 1951, p. 75.
c. This and all other cult member quotes in this section are from the Center for the Study of New Religious Movements, 1980–1981. Unpublished seminar transcripts. New Religions Research Collection, the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, Calif.
d. Hoffer 1951, p. 114.
e. Hoffer 1951, pp. 79–80.
f. Hoffer 1951, p. 86.
g. Kapleau 1979, pp. 31–32.
h. Nisargadatta 1973, p. 14.
i. The Kalamas Sutra as translated in Thera 1963, pp. 6, 8.

Bibliography

Aurobindo. n.d. *Letters on Yoga.* Vol. 1. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Birth Centenary Library.

Bachelard, G. 1964. *The poetics of space.* Trans. M. Jolas. New York: Orion Press.

Becker, E. 1973. *The denial of death.* New York: Free Press.

Benoit, H. 1955. *The supreme doctrine.* New York: Viking Press.

Bly, R., ed. 1980. *News of the universe.* San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.

Bohm, D. 1973. Quantum theory as an indication of a new order in physics. Part B. Implicate and explicate order in physical law. *Foundations of Physics* 3:139–68.

Boss, M. 1963. *Psychoanalysis and daseinsanalysis.* New York: Basic Books.

_____. 1965. A *psychiatrist discovers India.* London: Oswald Wolff.

Buber, M. 1947. *Tales of the Hasidim.* New York: Schocken Books.

Capra, F. 1975. *The Tao of physics.* Boston: Shambhala Publications.

Casper, M. 1979. Space therapy and the Maitri project. *J. Transpersonal Psychol.* 6, no. 1. Reprint in J. Welwood, ed., *The meeting of the ways: Explorations in East/West psychology.* New York: Schocken Books.

Chaterjee, A. 1971. *Readings on Yogacara Buddhism.* Banaras: Hindu University Press.

Cox, H. 1977. *Turning East: The promise and peril of the new orientalism.* New York: Simon & Schuster.

Dhiravamsa. 1974. *The middle path of life.* Surrey, England: Unwin.

Dürckheim, K. G. 1977. *Hara: The vital center of man.* London: Unwin.

_____. 1992. *Absolute living: The otherworldly in the world and the path to maturity.* New York: Arkana.

Ehrenzweig, A. 1965. *The psychoanalysis of artistic vision and hearing.* New York: Braziller.

Freud, S. 1933. *New introductory lectures on psychoanalysis.* London: Hogarth Press.

_____. 1949. *An outline of psychoanalysis.* New York: Norton.

_____. 1961. *Collected papers.* Vol. 4. New York: Norton.
Gendlin, E. T. 1962. *Experiencing and the creation of meaning.* New York: Free Press.
_____. 1964. A theory of personality change. In P. Worchel & D. Byrne, eds., *Personality change.* New York: Wiley.
_____. 1973. A phenomenology of emotions: Anger. In D. Carr and E. Casey, eds., *Explorations in phenomenology.* The Hague: Nijhoff.
_____. 1981. *Focusing.* New York: Bantam Books.
_____. 1996. *Focusing-oriented psychotherapy.* New York: Guilford Press.
Gendlin, E. T., J. Beebe, J. Cassens, M. Klein, and M. Oberlander. 1968. Focusing ability in psychotherapy, personality, and creativity. In J. Schlien, ed., *Research in psychotherapy.* Vol. 3. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.
Godman, D., ed. 1985. *Be as you are: The teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi.* New York: Arkana.
Govinda, Lama. 1959. *Foundations of Tibetan mysticism.* London: Rider.
Grof, S. 1975. *Realms of the human unconscious.* New York: Viking Press.
Greenberg, S., and S. Mitchell. 1983. *Object relations in psychoanalytic theory.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
Guenther, H. V.1956. Tibetan Buddhism in western perspective: The concept of mind in Buddhist Tantrism. *J. Oriental Studies* 3, no. 2: 261–77.
_____. 1959. The philosophical background of Buddhist Tantrism. *J. Oriental Studies* 5:45–64.
_____. 1977. *Tibetan Buddhism in western perspective.* Berkeley, Calif.: Dharma.
Guenther, H. V., and C. Trungpa. 1975. *The dawn of Tantra.* Boston: Shambhala Publications.
Heidegger, M. 1977. On the essence of truth. In D. F. Kreel, ed., *Martin Heidegger: Basic writings.* New York: Harper.
Hillman, J. 1961. *Emotion.* Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press.
_____. 1972. *The myth of analysis.* Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press.
Hisamatsu, S. 1960. The characteristics of Oriental nothingness. In *Philosophical Studies of Japan.* Vol. 2. Tokyo: Maruzen.
_____. 1968. Additional note to: On the unconscious, the self, and therapy. *Psychologia* 11:25–32.
Hoffer, E. 1951. *The true believer.* New York: Harper.

Horsch, J. 1961. The self in analytical psychology. *Psychologia* 4:147–55.
Hume, D. 1888. *A treatise on human nature.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.
Huxley, A. 1944. *The perennial philosophy.* New York: Harper & Row.
Izutsu, T. 1977. *Toward a philosophy of Zen Buddhism.* Teheran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy.
James, W. 1890. *The principles of psychology.* New York: Holt.
_____. 1967. *The writings of William James.* Ed. J. McDermott. New York: Random House.
_____. 1976. *Essays in radical empiricism.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
Jung, C. G. 1933. *Modern man in search of a soul.* New York: Harcourt Brace.
_____. 1958. Psychological commentary on the *Tibetan book of the great liberation.* In *Collected works.* Vol. 11. *Psychology and religion.* New York: Pantheon Books.
_____. 1959. *The archetypes and the collective unconscious.* Vol. 9 of *Collected works.* New York: Pantheon Books.
Kapleau, P. 1979. *Zen: Dawn in the West.* New York: Doubleday.
Khan, H. I. 1962. *The Sufi message of Hazrat Inayat Khan.* Vol. 5. London: Barrie & Rockliff.
Kirsch, J. 1960. Affinities between Zen and analytical psychology. *Psychologia* 3:85–91.
Klein, A. 1995. *Meeting the great bliss queen: Buddhists, feminists, and the art of the self.* Boston: Beacon Press.
Koestenbaum, P. 1978. *The new image of the person.* Westwood, Conn.: Greenwood Press.
Kretschmer, W. 1969. Meditative techniques in psychotherapy. In C. T. Tart, ed., *Altered states of consciousness.* New York: Wiley.
Kunsang, E. P., trans. 1993. *The flight of the garuda: Five texts from the practice lineage.* Kathmandu: Rangjung Yeshe.
Levinson, E. 1975. A holographic model of psychoanalytic change. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis* 12, no. 1:1–20.
MacIntyre, A. 1958. *The unconscious: A conceptual analysis.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
Marcel, G. 1950. *The mystery of being.* Vol. 1. *Reflection and mystery.* Chicago: Regnery.
Masterson, J. F. 1988. *The search for the real self.* New York: Free Press.

Matte Blanco, I. 1975. *The unconscious as infinite sets.* London: Duckworth.
Maupin, E. 1969. On meditation. In C. T. Tart, ed., *Altered states of consciousness.* New York: Wiley.
Merleau-Ponty, M. 1968. *The visible and the invisible.* Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press.
Merrill-Wolff, F. 1994. *Experience and Philosophy.* Albany: State University of New York Press.
Miller, J. 1942. *Unconsciousness.* New York: Wiley.
Minkowski, E. 1970. *Lived time.* Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press.
Nalanda Translation Committee, trans. 1980. *The rain of wisdom.* Boston: Shambhala Publications.
Needleman, J., ed. 1979. *Speaking of my life: The art of living in the cultural revolution.* San Francisco: Harper.
Nisargadatta 1973. *I am That.* Vol. 2. Bombay: Chetana.
Nishitani, K. 1982. *Religion and nothingness.* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
Norbu, N. 1986. *The crystal and the way of light.* New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
Northrop, F. S. C. 1946. *The meeting of east and west.* New York. Macmillan.
Nyima, C. 1991. *The bardo guidebook.* Kathmandu: Rangjung Yeshe.
Picard, M. 1952. *The world of silence.* Chicago: Regnery.
Poonja, H. L. 1993. *Wake up and roar.* Vol. 2. Maui, Hawaii: Pacific Center.
Pribram, K. 1971. *Languages of the brain.* Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.
Rilke, R. M. 1975. *On love and other difficulties.* Ed. J. L. Mood. New York: Norton.
Rogers, C. R. 1959. A theory of therapy, personality, and interpersonal relationships. In S. Koch, ed., *Psychology:* A *study of a science.* Vol. 3. New York: McGraw-Hill.
_____. 1967. *The therapeutic relationship and its impact: A program of research in psychotherapy with schizophrenics.* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
Roland, A. 1988. *In search of self in India and Japan: Toward a cross-cultural psychology.* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
Sartre, J. P. 1957. *The transcendence of the ego.* New York: Noonday Press.
Schilpp, P., and M. Friedman, eds. 1967. *The philosophy of Martin Buber.* La-

Salle, Ill: Open Court.
Solovyev, V. 1985. Love evolving. In J. Welwood, ed., *Challenge of the Heart: Love, sex, and intimacy in changing times.* Boston: Shambhala Publications.
Suzuki, D. T. 1930. *Studies in the Lankavatara Sutra.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
Suzuki, S. 1970. *Zen mind, beginner's mind.* New York: Walker, Weatherhill.
Tarthang Tulku. 1974. On thoughts. *Crystal Mirror* 3:7–20.
_____. 1975. Watching the watcher. *Crystal Mirror* 4:157–61.
_____. 1978. *Openness mind.* Emeryville, Calif.: Dharma.
Thera, S., trans. 1963. *Kalama Sutra: The Buddha's charter of free inquiry.* Ceylon: Buddhist Publication Society.
Thurman, R. 1987. Dharma talk. *Wind Bell* 22, no. 2.
Thurman, R., trans. 1976. *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakirti.* University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.
Trungpa, C. 1969. *Meditation in action.* Boston: Shambhala Publications.
_____. 1973. *Cutting through spiritual materialism.* Boston: Shambhala Publications.
_____. 1976. *The myth of freedom.* Boston: Shambhala Publications.
_____. 1983. *Shambhala: The sacred path of the warrior.* Boston: Shambhala Publications.
Trungpa, C., and M. Hookham, trans. 1974. Maha Ati. *Vajra* 1:6–8.
Tsoknyi Rinpoche. 1998. *Carefree dignity*: *Discourses on training in the nature of the mind.* Kathmandu: Rangjung Yeshe.
Van Dusen, W. 1958. Wu-Wei, no-mind, and the fertile void in psychotherapy. *Psychologia* 1:253–56.
Walker, A., R. Rablen, and C. R. Rogers. 1959. Development of a scale to measure process change in psychotherapy. *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 16:79–85.
Wangyal, T. 1997. *A-Khrid teachings.* Vol. 2. Berkeley, Calif.: Privately published.
Watts, A. 1961. *Psychotherapy East and West.* New York: Pantheon.
Welwood, J. 1974. A theoretical re-interpretation of the unconscious from a humanistic and phenomenological perspective. Ph.D. diss. University of Chicago.
_____. 1979a. Self-knowledge as the basis for an integrative psychology. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 11, no. 2: 23–40.

_____, ed. 1979b. *The meeting of the ways: Explorations in East/West psychology*. New York: Schocken Books.

_____. 1980. Reflections on focusing, psychotherapy, and meditation. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 12, no. 2: 127–142.

_____. 1982. The holographic paradigm and the structure of experience. *Re-Vision* 1, nos. 3–4 (1978): 92–96. Reprint in K. Wilber, ed., *The holographic paradigm and other paradoxes.* Boston: Shambhala Publications.

_____. 1983. *Awakening the heart: East/West approaches to psychotherapy and the healing relationship*. Boston: Shambhala Publications.

_____. 1985. *Challenge of the heart: Love, sex, and intimacy in changing times.* Boston: Shambhala Publications.

_____. 1986. On compassion and human growth. *The American Theosophist* 74, no. 9.

_____. 1990. *Journey of the heart: The path of conscious love.* New York: HarperCollins.

_____. 1992. *Ordinary Magic: Everyday life as spiritual path.* Boston: Shambhala Publications.

_____. 1996. *Love and awakening: Discovering the sacred path of intimate relationship.* New York: HarperCollins.

Wilber, K. 1975. Psychologia perennis: The spectrum of consciousness. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 7, no. 2:105–32.

Winnicott, D. 1965. *Maturational process and the facilitating environment: Studies in the theory of emotional development.* Madison, Wis.: International Universities Press.

Acknowledgments and Credits

I would like to thank my wife, Jennifer, as well as my editor, Joel Segel, for carefully reading the manuscript and giving me helpful feedback. Thanks also to all the friends and editors who read and commented on the original versions of the material in this book, and in particular, Barbara Green and Miles Vich. Finally, I would like to express my deep gratitude to all the great Dharma teachers who have imparted to me their wisdom, understanding, and blessings along my path.

The original sources of the material in this book are as follows:

Chapter 1 is a revised version of "Principles of Inner Work: Psychological and Spiritual," which originally appeared in *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 16, no. 1 (1984).

Chapter 2 is a revised version of "Personality Structure: Path or Pathology?," which originally appeared in *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 18, no. 2 (1986).

Chapter 3 is a completely new chapter based on some material that originally appeared in "On Ego Strength and Egolessness," a chapter that was cowritten with Ken Wilber and published in my first book, *The Meeting of the Ways: Explorations in East/West Psychology* (New York: Schocken Books, 1979).

Chapter 4 is a substantial revision of "Exploring Mind: Form, Emptiness, and Beyond," which originally appeared in *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 8, no. 2 (1976).

Chapter 5 is a condensed and revised version of "Meditation and the Unconscious: A New Perspective," which originally appeared in *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 9, no. 1 (1977), and which grew out of my doctoral dissertation at the University of Chicago.

Chapter 6 is a substantial condensation and revision of "On Psychological Space," which originally appeared in *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 9, no. 2 (1977).

Chapter 7 is a substantial revision of "The Unfolding of Experience: Psychotherapy and Beyond," which originally appeared in *Journal of*

Humanistic Psychology 22, no. 1 (1982).

Chapter 8 is a revised version of "Reflection and Presence: The Dialectic of Self-Knowledge," which originally appeared in *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 28, no. 2 (1997). Copyright © 1997 by The Transpersonal Institute.

Chapter 9 is a revised version of "The Healing Power of Unconditional Presence," which originally appeared in *Quest*, winter 1992.

Chapter 10 is a revised version of "Vulnerability and Power in the Therapeutic Process," which originally appeared in *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 14, no. 2 (1982).

Chapter 11 is a revised version of "Psychotherapy as a Practice of Love," which originally appeared in *Pilgrimage,* June 1988.

Chapter 12 is a revised version of "Depression as a Loss of Heart," which originally appeared in *Journal of Contemplative Psychotherapy* 3, no. 1 (1987).

Chapter 13 is a revised version of "Befriending Emotion: Self-Knowledge and Transformation," which originally appeared in *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 11, no. 1 (1979).

Chapter 14 is a completely new chapter.

Chapter 15 is a revised version of "Intimate Relationship as Path," which originally appeared in *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 22, no. 1 (1990).

Chapter 16 is a revised version of "Dancing on the Razor's Edge," which originally appeared in *Yoga Journal,* September 1984.

Chapter 17 is a revised version of "The Path of Conscious Relationship," which originally appeared in *Shambhala Sun,* January 1997.

Chapter 18 is a revised version of "On Love: Conditional and Unconditional," which originally appeared in *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 17, no. 1 (1985).

Chapter 19 is a revised version of "Passion as Path," which originally appeared in *Pilgrimage,* March 1993.

Chapter 20 is a revised version of "On Spiritual Authority: Genuine and Counterfeit," which originally appeared in *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 23, no. 3 (1983).

Chapter 21 is a revised version of "Love and Awakening," which originally appeared in *Gnosis*, April 1997.

Index

Note: Index entries from the print edition of this book have been included for use as search terms. They can be located by using the search feature of your e-book reader.

Absolute
  impersonal
  phenomenalization of
  soul and
Absolute consciousness
Absolute emptiness
Absolute nature
Absolute reality, beyond self
Absolute truth
  vs. relative truth
Actualization
Addiction
Agape
Aggression
Aikido
Alaya-vijnana
Alcoholism
Alienation
Aliveness
Amrita
Anger
Angst
Anxiety
Archetypes
Attachment
Attention

diffuse
disciplined inner
focal
mindful
reflective
Aurobindo, Sri
Authentic presence
Authenticity. *See also* Spiritual authority, genuine forms
Awakened being
Awakened mind
Awakening
dialectic of
within experience. *See also* Transmutation
levels of
love and. *See also Love and Awakening*
movement toward
path of
psychology of
spiritual
transpersonal
Awareness. *See also* Consciousness; Mind
characteristics
egoless
fleeting
levels
as mirror
nonconceptual
nondual
nonpersonal
pure
self-knowing
unconditioned
Awareness practice. *See also* Meditation

Basho
Beauty
Becker, Ernest

Behavioral analysis
Being
  awakened
  differentiated qualities
  ground of
  loss
  modes
  pure
  space of
  split between functioning and
  undifferentiated
  undifferentiated qualities
Being-as-emptiness
Being-in-the-world
Benoit, Hubert
Between-stage (Hasidism)
Bioenergetics
Blanco, Matte
Bly, Robert
Bodhichitta
Bodhisattvas
Bodily felt shift
Body
  centeredness in
  energy shifts in
  mindfulness of
  subtle
Body-mind. *See also* Mind
Body-mind knowing
Bohm, David
Bonding, mother-infant
Boundaries
Buber, Martin
Buddha
  bodies of
  four noble truths
  on meditation

qualities of
Buddha-nature
Buddhism. *See also* Tantra; Tibetan Buddhism; Zen
growth of
Mahayana
as path of individuation
on suffering
and the West
Buddhist meditation
Buddhist psychology
contemplative
and living in the moment
quantum physics and
three marks of existence

Camus, Albert
Catharsis
Chaos
Child development and child rearing. *See also* Bonding
in modern West
in traditional Asia
Chinese philosophy
Coemergence
Cognitive analysis
Communities and communes, spiritual. *See also* Spiritual groups
Compassion
Conceptual mind
freeing oneself from
poles
vs. pure awareness
Conceptual truth
Conceptualization
Conditioned self. *See* Mind, conditioned
Confused mind
Consciousness. *See also* Attention; Awareness; Mind; Stream of consciousness; Unconscious
absolute

divided
as no-thingness
transitive and substantive parts
without ego. *See also* Egolessness
Contemplative approach to psychological work
Contemplative inquiry
Contemplative practice
Contemplative psychology, Eastern
Contemplative teachings
Contemplative truth
Control
Couple consciousness
Courage
Cox, Harvey
Creativity
Cults. *See* Spiritual groups, pathological
Cultural factors East and West

Dalai Lama
Dan, case of
Death, fear of
Dederich, Chuck
Defenses. *See also* Psychopathology
narcissistic
schizoid
on spiritual path
Depression
and emptiness
as loss of heart
treatment
Descartes, René
Desensitizing
Despair
Detachment, used as defense
Dharma
Dharmakaya
Dhiravamsa

"Diamond path"
Dickinson, Emily
Discipline
Dis-ease. *See also* Psychopathology
Distraction
Dogen, Zen Master
Doing
Dreams
Dualism(s)
  of subject and object. *See also* Self/other split
Dualistic divisions
Dualistic fixation
Dubos, René
Dürckheim, Karlfried Graf
Dzogchen tradition. *See* Mahamudra/Dzogchen tradition

Earth
Earth principle
East and West
  as complementary
  cultural factors
  dialogue and convergence between
  differences between
Eastern psychology
  and body-mind
  contemplative
  introverted prejudice in
  meaning
Ego. *See also* Self; Self-image
  Buddhist view
  constant births and deaths
  defensive nature
  dissolution. *See* Egolessness
  domains
  functional, managerial
  grasping
  nature and function

self-representational
as way of trying to be
Ego activity
Ego development
Ego identity. *See also* Identity
Ego-self
identification with
Ego strength
Egocentricity
Egoic mind
Egolessness
Emotional entanglement
Emotional release
Emotion(s). *See also* Feeling(s)
entering
meditative approach to
psychotherapeutic approach to
reacting to
transmutating
in Western psychology
Emptiness. *See also* Being-as-emptiness; *Sunyata*
absolute
Buddhism and
as domain of spiritual work
and fabricated self
flight from
form and
as frightening
as mark of existence
meaning
pure
relative/psychological
as unstructured being
Empty fullness of being
Enlightened mind
Enlightenment
heart/mind of

romantic fantasy of
root of
vulnerability and
Eros
Eternal Now
Exhibitionism
Existence. *See also* Ontology
vs. nonexistence
three marks of
Existential anxiety
Existential choice
Existential heroism
Existential psychology
Existential therapy
Experience(ing). *See also* Consciousness; Felt experience
acknowledgment of
allowing
being with
giving in to
having one's
as holographic complexity
impure
meeting it directly
as multilevel texture
nondualistic
opening to
phenomenological reflection and
as pre-articulate
pure. *See also* Presence, pure
shutting down to
Experiential field. *See* Figure-ground relationship
Experiential truth

False self. *See also* Self, fabricated
Families. *See also* Child development
extended
Fear

shutting out of awareness
Feeling (s)
and emotion. *See also* Emotion(s)
frozen
ground of
Felt experience, spectrum of
Felt sense/meaning
Felt shift
horizontal
vertical
Figure-ground relationship. *See also* Ground
Fix-it mentality
Fixation. *See also Klesha(s)*
becoming free of
dualistic
ego
letting go of
on outer praise and blame
parental
Focal attention
Focusing method
Form
and emptiness
Formal operations
Freedom
Freud, Sigmund
on ego
on psychoanalytic treatment
on the unconscious
Friendliness, unconditional

Gap between thoughts
Gendlin, Eugene
on felt meaning/sense
on felt shift
Focusing method
as mentor of Welwood

Gentleness
Gestalt psychology
Goethe
Goodness, basic
Govinda, Lama
Grasping
Ground. *See also* Figure-ground relationship; Open ground/space
  of being
  of feeling
  personal
  situational
  transpersonal
Grounding
  and coming into form
Grounding practices
Guenther, Herbert
Gurdjieff, G. I.

Hara
Harding, Esther
Hatred. *See* Anger
Healing
  unconditional presence and
Heart. *See also Journey of the Heart*
  awakening
  and basic goodness
  breaking open
  loss of
  mind and
  openness
  trust in
Heart-mind
Heaven, earth, and man
Heaven and earth
Heaven principle. *See also* Letting go
Heidegger, Martin
Hillman, James

Hinduism
Hisamatsu Shin-ichi
Hoffer, Eric
Holding environment
Holy longing
Homosexuality, fear of
Horizontal dimension
Horizontal shift
Horizontal unfolding
Horney, Karen
Human nature, essential/divine. *See also* True nature
Human principle. *See* Heart, awakening
Human stance
Hume, David
Humor

"I," the. *See also* Ego
  control and
  dissolution
I/it separation. *See also* Dualism(s)
I-Thou relationship
I-thought
Ibn Al-Faradh
Identification. *See also* Reflection
  with ego/self-concept
  prereflective
  stepping back from
Identity. *See also* Ego identity
  conscious
  as contraction against pain
  interpersonal nature
  as network of beliefs
  "spiritual"
  subconscious
Identity formation
Identity loss and identity crisis
Identity project

Ignorance
  Buddhist view of
Impermanence
Impingement
Implicit felt sense/meaning
Impulse
Independence, exaggerated
Indian child rearing
Individualism
Individuation
Inner child
Integration, psychospiritual
Internet
Interpersonal level
Interpretation
Intimacy
Intimate relationship(s)
  new vision of
  sacred nature
  spiritual dimension

James, William
  on central self
  on continuous self
Jesus
Jnana
Jones, Jim
Journey of the Heart (Welwood)
Jung, Carl G.

Kalamas
Kapleau, Philip
Karma
Kayas
Khan, Hazrat Inayat
Kierkegaard, Sören
Klein, Anne

Klesha(s)
Koestenbaum, Peter
Kretschmer, Wolfgang
Krishnamurti

Lawrence, D. H.
Letting go. *See also* Surrender
Levinson, Edgar
Liberation. *See also* Self-liberation
Lodro Thaye
Longchenpa
Love
  addition to
  as awakening power
  conditional
  distortions
  erotic
  falling in
  romantic/courtly
  as transformative power
  true/genuine
  unconditional
Love affair
  brokenhearted
Love and Awakening (Welwood)
Lovemaking
Loving-kindness
Lying

Machine, the
Mahamudra/Dzogchen tradition, Tibetan
Maharaj, Nisargadatta
Maharishi, Ramana
Maitri
Manas
Mandala
Marcel, Gabriel

Marriage
Masculine-feminine antagonism
Masterson, James F.
Mastery
Materialism
  spiritual
Meaning
Meaninglessness
Meditation. *See also* Mindfulness
  aims
  awareness, insight, and
  benefits
  Buddha on
  Buddhist
  cautions regarding
  depth psychology and
  figure and ground and
  misconceptions of
  and path beyond dread
  psychotherapy and
  and relationships
  as royal road to unconscious
  for seeing through stories
  thought and
  Tibetan
  as training for psychotherapists
  transmutation and
  and unconditional friendliness
Meditative awareness
Meditative presence
The Meeting of the Ways (Welwood)
Mental chatter
Merleau-Ponty
Middle way
Mind. *See also* Attention; Awareness; Body-mind; Conceptual mind;
  Consciousness
  big

conditioned
definitions
essential nature
heart and
space and. *See also* Space
three aspects
Mind-moments
Mindful attention
Mindful surrender
Mindful witnessing
Mindfulness
of body
and constructing stories
enhancing
as witnessing
Mindfulness practice
Mindstream
Minkowski, Eugene
Mipham
Music
Mysticism

Narcissism
Nature. *See* Human nature; True nature
Need
Neurosis
transmuting
Nietzsche, Friedrich
Nirmanakaya
Nirvana
Nishitani, Keiji
No-mind. *See also* Open ground/space
Nondoing
Nondual awareness
Nondual presence
Nondual realization
Nondual teachings and practices

Nondualistic experience
Nonduality
Nonmeditation
Nonthought. *See* Awareness, nonconceptual; Emptiness
Norbu, Namkhai
Nothingness
Nowness

Object relations
O'Donohue, John
Oneness. *See also* Ground, transpersonal
Ontology
Open ground/space
Organism. *See* Body-mind
Orgasm

Padmasambhava
Pain. *See also* Suffering
  as mark of existence
Paltrul Rinpoche
Passion
  conditional
  and devotion
  as path
  and surrender
  and transformation
  two forms
  unconditional
  Western ambivalence toward
Path. *See also* Spiritual path
  of love, dimensions of
  nature of
Paul, case of
People's Temple (Jonestown)
"Perfections"
Person
Personal level

Personality
conditioned
Phenomenology
Picard, Max
Plato
Poonja, H. L.
Power, and vulnerability
Praise and blame
Prajna
Preconscious
Presence
authentic
and healing process
impersonal
maintaining
meditative
nondual
personal
pure. *See also* Transmutation
qualities
spontaneous
transreflective
unconditional
unified field
ways of manifesting
"Presence in the gap"
Pribram, Karl
Pride
Problem solving
Psyche
functioning
integration between spirit and. *See also* Integration
myth of Eros and
psychotherapy and
spiritual principle in
structure
Western

Psychoanalysts. *See also* Freud
Psychological health
Psychological self-inquiry
Psychologist's fallacy
Psychopathology. *See also* Dis-ease; Neurosis
  causes
  larger intelligence hidden within
Psychotherapy. *See also specific topics*
  aims and benefits
  based on conceptual reflection
  contemplative *vs.* traditional approach
  critique
  deterministic models
  dialogical nature
  meditation and
  pitfalls
  presence-centered
  vs. spiritual practice
Psychotherapy East and West (Watts)

Quantum physics

Ray, case of
Razor's edge
Realization
  defined
  difficulties integrating into real life
  impersonal
  nondual
  spiritual
  and transformation
Reference points
Reflection
  conceptual
  higher
  mindful
  phenomenological

psychological
Reflective witnessing
Regression
Relationship. *See also* Intimate relationship(s)
conscious
nonattachment in
Relationship practice
Relative point of view
Relative truth
Repression
Resistance
Rigpa
Rilke, Rainer Maria
Rogers, Carl
Roland, Alan

Sacred, defined
Sadness
Sambhogakaya
Samsara
Sanford, Nevitt
Sartre, Jean Paul
Satori. *See also* Awakening; Enlightenment; Liberation
felt shift and
mini-*satori*
Schnabel, Artur
Seat, finding one's
Self. *See also* Ego
central
continuous
conventional
division
fabricated/constructed. *See also* False self
illusory continuity
transcendent
true/real
Self-actualization

Self-blame. *See also* Superego
Self-concept
  in childhood development
  identifying with
Self-doubt
Self-hatred
Self-image. *See also* Ego
Self-judgment. *See also* Superego
Self-knowing
Self-liberation
  ongoing
Self/other setups
  as obstacles in relationships
Self/other split
Self-reflection
Self-representations
Self-sense, separate
Self-transcendence
Sense. *See also* Felt sense/meaning
Sexuality
Shadow
Shame. *See* Self-blame; Self-hatred
Silence
Skandhas
Solovyev, Vladimir
Soul
  defined
Soul cage
Soul qualities
Soul sadness
Soulwork
Space. *See also* Open ground/space
  of being
  feeling
  inner and outer
  in intimate relationships
  as lived

in nature
as nonconceptual awareness
psychological
in psychotherapy
secret
as support
between words
Spiritual authority
absolute
genuine forms
pathological
relative
sources
Spiritual bypassing
Spiritual emergence
Spiritual groups, pathological
Spiritual leaders
corrupt
mistakes made by
Spiritual master(s)
devotion to
Spiritual path. *See also* Path
psychological ramifications
Spiritual powers, used defensively
Spiritual practice. *See also specific practices*
difficulties integrating
levels
psychological health and
psychological work as ally of
Spiritual teachers
different kinds
need for
Spiritual transmission
Spiritual work. *See also specific topics*
States and stations
Stories
and feelings

Story lines
Stream of consciousness
  form and emptiness in
Subject-object split. *See* Self/other split
Submission
  defined
  as narcissistic
Subtle body
Suchness
Suffering. *See also* Pain
  causes/roots
  conscious
  nature
  working with
Sufism
Sunyata
Superego. *See also* Self-judgment
  spiritual
Suprapersonal level
Surface mind
Surrender. *See also* Letting go
  defined
  and submission
Suzuki, D. T.
Suzuki, Roshi
Synanon

Tai chi chuan
Tan tien
Tantra and Tantric Buddhism
Tara, case of
Tarthang Tulku
Ted, case of
Therapeutic aggression
Therapists
  investment in their clients changing
  training

Thought. *See* Conceptual mind; Conceptualization
Thought chains
Thurman, Robert
Tibet. *See also* Mahamudra/Dzogchen tradition
Tibetan Buddhism
Transcendence
  attempts at premature
Transformation
  defined
  realization and
Transhuman
Transmutation
  of emotions
  through unconditional presence
Transmuting neurosis
Transpersonal awakening
Transpersonal ground
Transpersonal interrelatedness
Transpersonal psychology
True nature. *See also* Human nature
  absolute
  failure to recognize
  individuated
  as naked awareness
  realization of
Trungpa Rinpoche, Chögyam
  on basic goodness
  on chaos
  on ego
  on emotions
  on mandala
Truth
  direct knowledge
  levels

Uncertainty, moments of
Unconditional friendliness

Unconditional positive regard
Unconditional presence
Unconscious
  collective
  as holistic process
  traditional model
Unconscious contents
Unconscious process, new model of
Understanding
Undoing
Unfolding
  horizontal
  therapeutic
  as zig-zag process

Vajra
Vajrayana Buddhism. *See* Tantra
Van Dusen, William
Vertical dimension
Vertical emergence
Vertical shift
View
Vijnana
Vimalakirti
Vimalakirti Sutra
Vision, need for new
Vulnerability
  basic
  mutual
  power and
  in therapeutic process

Waking up and growing up
Wangyal, Tenzin
Watts, Alan
Welwood, John
  Journey of the Heart

Love and Awakening
The Meeting of the Ways
Western psychology. *See also* East and West
and body-mind
developmental understanding offered by
limitations
meditation and
Wilber, Ken
Winnicott, D. W.
Wisdom energies
Witnessing. *See also* Mindfulness
reflective
Working through, therapeutic
World collapse
Wounding

Yes and no, saying
Yoga
Yunus, Emre

Zazen. *See* Meditation; Mindfulness
Zen Buddhism. *See also Satori*

About the Author

JOHN WELWOOD, PH.D., is a psychotherapist in San Francisco and associate editor of the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*. He received his Ph.D. in clinical psychology from the University of Chicago, where he studied existential psychology with Eugene Gendlin, and has been a student of Tibetan Buddhism and other Eastern spiritual traditions for more than thirty years. He has published more than fifty articles on relationship, psychotherapy, consciousness, and personal change, as well as six books including the bestselling *Journey of the Heart: The Path of Conscious Love; Love and Awakening: Discovering the Sacred Path of Intimate Relationship; Awakening the Heart: East/West Approaches to Psychotherapy and the Healing Relationship;* and *Ordinary Magic: Everyday Life as Spiritual Path.* John and his wife Jennifer offer a range of different trainings, workshops, and meditative retreats on the integration of psychological and spiritual transformative work, as well as on conscious relationship. If you would like to be on their mailing list, please contact:

John and Jennifer Welwood
P. O. Box 2173
Mill Valley, CA 94942
415-381-6077

Books by John Welwood

Awakening the Heart: East/West Approaches to Psychotherapy and the Healing Relationship

Challenge of the Heart: Love, Sex, and Intimacy in Changing Times

Journey of the Heart: The Path of Conscious Love

Love and Awakening: Discovering the Sacred Path of Intimate Relationship

Meeting of the Ways: Explorations in East/West Psychology

Ordinary Magic: Everyday Life as a Spiritual Path

Perfect Love, Imperfect Relationships: Healing the Wound of the Heart

Toward a Psychology of Awakening: Buddhism, Psychotherapy, and the Path of Personal Freedom