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BUNGEE JUMPING IN THE ABYSS: Working through issues of the mind, heart and guts after awakening

Written by Gary Nixon – Paradoxica: Journal of Nondual Psychology, Vol. 3: Spring 2011

Summary

In this article, challenges after awakening are considered. While being in the awakened flow can be very captivating, we see issues of the mind, the heart, and the guts may still emerge that need to be worked through. The mind can fixate on the witness state or attach itself to nothingness or to the concept of awakening. These fixated positions, beneath which lay the dark emotions of the heart, must be recognized, openly embraced and collapsed. By burning through the stories around these emotions, we can reclaim our openness of the heart and our ability to come from a place of love rather than from the illusion of the separate self. Connecting with all at a gut level, we can be in a place of let go, no longer grasping at self survival as we embrace existence in each moment.

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The Magic of Awakening

The magic of awakening, in which one feels blown wide open and interconnected with existence, may be experienced as an overwhelming light of ten thousands suns sweeping through a person. It can feel absolutely wondrous in the moment as a big sacred yes is declared to existence and one senses the blissful connection with all. Sometimes a person even feels electrified or drunk with the ecstasy of the experience. Life may suddenly feel very easy, with nothing to defend against and nothing to hang onto, while we are abiding in this place of love-bliss. We sense we might never have another problem as we are both immanent in love and transcendent in full emptiness with a genuine love for all beings.

There is no longer this disheartening and painful woundedness of a separate self fighting to exist and to survive against all other objects in existence. Instead, it feels like we have made our home in existence, a place that we have always been looking for, as, “to behold the mystery is to be at home” (Almaas, 2004, p. 403). McKenna (2004) expounded upon this at home state in which we have awakened beyond the demands of the ego as one of

playfulness, innocence, lack of guile, unboundedness of spirit, robust health and inner light, a natural confidence and unerring sense of right, impeturbability, a calm eye and easy good humor, balance, freedom from malice and pettiness, the absence of fear, the presence of largesse and a permeating sense of gratitude. (pp. 98-99)

In this at home state, we lose our sense of despair, and enjoy the divine humour of the mood of enlightenment. As Adi Da (1978) outlined, “This movement or tendency to survive, to continue in independent form is profoundly serious, and it is also absurd because it must be transcended. Enlightenment is to be restored to Divine humor, to realize that nothing is necessary” (p. 558). With this transcendence of despair and the desperate longing for survival, one is free to enjoy the orgasmic blissfulness, and the beauty of existence. There may be a dancing sense of ecstasy and joy while existence becomes illuminated with transparency and light.

Abiding here, existence is understood as pure subjective consciousness with the whole world viewed as a modification of consciousness that has no independent reality. One sees that she/he is simply consciousness itself. Seeking is ultimately unnecessary as it is all totally available right here, right now. With the letting go of seeking and the giving up of the goal of enlightenment, one becomes free to enjoy what is. Suddenly, a deep form of relaxation occurs as one understands in the moment that there is nowhere to go, and nothing to do. Now, true rest is possible. With the disappearance of all goals, the person disappears, and there is nobody there to be tense. This moment is enough and seen to be eternity itself.

Within the eternity of this moment, one connects with a deathlessness and timelessness. One does not become immortal, rather one recognizes that “nobody comes, and nobody goes.” As one sees through the veil of the illusionary self, it is clear there is nobody here to die. The body drops at physical death, but there is no death of the self as it has been deconstructed a long time ago.

Ultimately with awakening, there is a change of perception because there is a change of occupancy. There once appeared to be the illusion of the separate, independent self, but now there is only the absolute what is of existence. Before, one was a somebody, and now there is nobody yet, paradoxically, one is everything and everywhere. As Nisargadatta Maharaj (1985) readily pointed out, wisdom is knowing you are nobody, and love is knowing you are everything.

The Seeds that Bind

One can feel beyond the veil of separateness and abide in a wondrous place for days, months, seasons, even years. Awakening may initially occur as a swan dive into the abyss (McKenna, 2002). We can experience the beautiful no-minded transcendence of mind, the blown wide open love and connectedness with the ten thousand things of the heart, and the vastness of no-self existence of the guts. However, in a heartbeat we can dejectedly be yanked back into our separate selves, as if we are at the end of a bungee cord that extended into the abyss and now is recoiling back up into our karmic past issues, emotional wounds, and overlooked patterns. Out of mystical celebration, we can be returned to the grit of contraction, wounds, and separation. And sadly, we believed that with awakening, the healing work was behind us. We now see there is much more work to come as all of our neglected, uncooked seeds of issues wildly bloom into awareness with the energy up-grade of awakening. We now turn to this after-awakening work, which can be intuitively divided into areas of the mind, the heart, and the guts (Adyashanti, 2008).

Awakening of the Mind: The End of Our World

In the journey of awakening, we employ mind to embrace the journey but soon realize that it is mind itself that is the disease. The mind can never embrace the new, but is always focused on the old, the known. Freedom is found beyond mind, but the nature of the mind is to choose and divide existence into fixed compartments, categories, and distinctions. As Krishnamurti (1954) encouraged, we need to embrace choiceless awareness of what is. But as Sosan, the third patriarch of Zen would say, “the struggle of what one likes and what one dislikes is the disease of the mind” (Osho, 1995, p.9). The key to freedom is to have no preferences however, the difficulty is the mind’s constant state of judgment. “This is good, this is bad, I don’t like this, I like that,” it says.

Once the mind has had an awakening experience, it tries desperately to recreate the experience and find a formula upon which to rely, so awakening will always be guaranteed. It wants to hold awakening firmly in its grasp, to erect a sanctuary around some mind-invented secrets of awakening to forever perpetuate the experience. Unfortunately for mind, there is no method for the mind to go beyond itself, and thus it remains spinning in an attempt to hang onto one remedy or another, not realizing that the grasping and grabbing nature of mind is itself the problem.

One needs to see, as Tilopa laid out, that the only answer is a total demolition job of the mind. “Cut the root of a tree and the leaves will wither; cut the root of your mind and samsara falls... Whoever clings to mind sees not the truth of what’s beyond the mind” (Osho, 2006, p. 180). It must become clear to the seeker that thinking cannot do the job nor can the mind, by some method of the known, embrace the mystery of the unknown. What is being sought exists

beyond mind. So, instead of believing our minds can deliver us, we become aware of the limitations of mind, and are watchful as we realize no concept, technique, or semblance of knowledge shall be our salvation. For the mind, there is no answer.

In awakening of the mind, or more accurately moving beyond mind, we move beyond all concepts and knowledge to embrace what is. Nothing can be grasped. Any answer is a grasping. We give up as we realize there is nothing to know, and nowhere to go. As Osho (1994) explained, the mind is no longer grasping onto knowledge or concepts for support:

Through having relied on nothing but the perfection of meditation, what one has to do is not to rely on anything, world or otherwise, to let it all go, to give the resulting emptiness a free run, unobstructed by any for-or-against attitude, to stop relying on anything, to seek nowhere any refuge or support – that is the real renunciation. Our separate self is a spurious reality which can maintain itself only by finding supports or props on which to lean or rely. (p. 192)

When the mind's knowledge, techniques, secret motivations, or goals are dropped, we see what remains as expressed in this story from the life of Bodhidharma.

Bodhidharma, when asked by the emperor, "Who is this Bodhidharma standing in front of me?" replied "No knowing". This is a profound teaching according to Osho (1988), as with Bodhidharma everything has been dropped, and he is left in a place of simple, pure innocence and standing in no knowing. He has gone further than Socrates who stated, "I don't know anything", as even the "I" has been dropped. Bodhidharma rests in the place of "no knowing" and embraces existence.

Similar to this no knowing, Adyashanti (2008) described awakening on the level of mind as a destruction of one's entire world:

Awakening on the level of mind is the destruction of your entire world. This is something that we can never, ever anticipate. What is destroyed is our entire world view – all the ways we are conditioned, all of our belief structures, all of the belief structures of humanity, from the present time to the distant past – all of them go into forming this particular world, this consensus that human beings have agreed upon, this viewing of this as true. (p. 135)

All concepts, knowledge, and world views go up in smoke and we are left in the full emptiness with nothing to hang onto.

Subtle Tricks of the Mind

The mind can be a very cunning trickster as it loves to co-opt things for itself. Even after awakening experiences, the mind can come through the back door, and grab concepts and fixate on labels. As Adyashanti (2008) said, "the transcendent is real, and it's very beautiful, but don't get stuck there. There is actually nowhere to get stuck; there is nowhere we should be fixated. There is no particular point of view that we need to hold on to and grasp." (p. 96)

For example, a chronic trap of the mind can be in hiding out in the witness position. As Adyashanti (2008) observed we can get stuck in the detached witness position and feel we are free of the “me” although there is an inherent dualism built in the division between the witness and the witnessing, and when this collapses, “ You can start to see the elements of ego that are using the witnessing position as a way to hide, to not be touched by life, to not feel certain feelings, to not encounter our lives directly and intimately in a gritty, human way” (p.98).

Similar to the issue of identifying with the detached witness, is the problem of identifying with nothingness. As Osho (1982) explained, a person does not realize that an attachment to nothingness has developed through making this nothingness the new object. In fact, identifying with a detached nothingness can cause a drastic split in day-to-day life. As former seeker, Foster (2008), described a time walking aimlessly around Oxford, “There was absolute nothing in existence, absolutely nothing happening at all. There was no world, no memory, nothing. There was only the Void” (p. 180). But then, Foster (2008) realized this detachment and identification with the void was in its own way a dualistic retreat from everyday reality. This realization allowed him to be released back into intimacy with life:

I abided in emptiness, but there was still a ‘me’ doing the abiding. The emptiness had not yet collapsed into fullness. I hadn’t died yet...Finally, the detachment collapsed. Everything does eventually. Finally, there was the death of the person, the person who could be detached or not, and a revelation, for no-one, that this is it. The joylessness fell away, and there was a plunge into the absolute mystery of it all....totally beyond words, totally beyond language. (p. 181)

Foster’s (2008) description strongly echoes the famous Heart Sutra, which states, “Form is emptiness and the very emptiness is form; emptiness does not differ from form, form does not differ from emptiness; whatever is form, that is emptiness, whatever is emptiness, that is form” (Osho, 1994, p. 116). With the collapse from the detached position, Foster was swept away, “There was just this, with no way of knowing anymore what this is. The person dissolved into wonder” (p. 182).

This pattern of grasping onto a transcendent nothingness witnessing position and becoming a detached observer of life is so common, Parsons (2000) has granted it specific attention, describing it as a particularly male pattern. In my own personal experience and also that of working as a nondual psychotherapist, it appears the only remedy is to, firstly, observe the calamity of this position and, secondly, embrace the absolute failurehood of it. This working through can usher in an experience of total beingness dismemberment and crash the fixed position, resulting in a collapse back into life. In the following case study, we shall examine how this might fully unfold.

Collapsing the Superior Withdrawn Man

Like Foster (2008) and Parsons (2000) described, many seekers, particularly men, may find themselves stuck in the void, attached to this state, possessing a sense of superiority about it all. They reluctantly arrive to therapy realizing at a deep level that life is not working. Paul (a pseudonym) was this type of man. He was detached and uninvolved in his relationships. His

girlfriend was about to leave him. His work relationships were also typically sour. Paul worked as a counsellor and found that, over the last few years, he experienced a never-ending cycle of preliminary excitement when he started to work with new counselling agencies, then quickly thereafter the agencies began to distance themselves from him, did not renew his contracts, and ultimately released him from their employ. He found this strange as he felt he had embraced the teachings of loving kindness, and yet, in his aloofness, he was in fact closed off from life. By Paul's understanding, he felt that life was continually betraying him.

Paul's girlfriend had asked him to attend a counselling session or two with me. He arrived with an air of nonchalant superiority. When I asked Paul how it was going, he relished in telling me stories of encountering people, and spinning them, with his superior stance. I could see the problem. He was attached to his nondual state. In each moment, even the personalization of awakening has to be let go of. In the stillness of this moment, there is no concept of enlightenment or awakening, just the mystery of existence. There are no formulas to follow. The mind loves to co-opt things, and hang out in nondual land. Tragically, through the use of nondual formulas and clichés, there can be a withdrawal from facing and loving what is in each moment. There are no more slippery concepts other than the concepts of awakening and being in the void. Paul was fixated in his detached nothingness and his idea of himself being an awakened being.

Life usually gives us our transformational opportunity and it was not long before one was given to Paul. Not only had he just gone through a round of counsellor job applications, with no job offers at all, but he was even laid off from the current job he had. Paul was devastated and looking for answers. In the counselling session, we tried examining his pattern to see what the world was mirroring back to him. Foster (2008) captured the essence of the superior man, "I believed that I was a real man, not one of those ignorant folks who were still lost in the 'relative' world, those unspiritual people who were ignorant of their 'true nature'" (p. 180). This statement aptly reflected Paul's perspective. He knew he was better than everyone because of the "nondual" place he had reached in his journey. "The other fools don't know what is going on," was his attitude.

To help crack open Paul's heart, I had to confront him with the total failurehood of his strategy. I could see plainly that Paul had made the void an object to be grasped. Paul had to learn to let go of his fixed position of attachment to the void and his superior nonchalance. I invited him to see that this was the same old game of narcissism set up in a new fancy way. It was his chance to feel superior to the other. I pointed out to him, "You have become attached to the void, and that has become your new identity. You feel that you are this awakened person coming from the absolute." As Almaas (1996) would ask, "Can you see that this pattern is the empty shell of narcissism?" I wanted Paul to see the fakeness of the self-representation of appearing special; to deconstruct the "I am an awakened, nondual guy hanging out in the void" stance.

My initial invitation did not stick so I followed up with a pointer, described by Foster (2008) as realizing that there was only "this."

When all the concepts in the world are seen to be just concepts, when thought falls back into its natural rhythm, when the futile seeking of the 'monkey mind' comes to rest at

last, what is there? Beyond awakening, beyond enlightenment, beyond the real and the unreal, beyond existence and non-existence, beyond what is and what is not, beyond self and no-self, beyond duality and nonduality, beyond life and death, beyond all beyond, what shines?...this. Only this! Always this! Forever this! (pp.7-9)

In the intensity of this, everything in existence is enlightened. Like the tenth Bull of Zen described, “I go to the marketplace with my bottle and return home with my staff. I visit the wine shop and the market, and everyone I look upon becomes enlightened.” With this tenth Bull, Osho (1996) explained that one realizes, “You are surrounded by an enlightened universe. The whole existence, the rocks and the rivers, the oceans and the stars, all are enlightened beings...If your energy is celebratory within, the whole becomes a symphony of celebration” (pp. 292-294). So with this realization, everything is enlightened, it is all just this.

Paul and I meditated on the “isness” of the moment with nothing to hang onto. As we sat there in the translucent light, it became obvious in a very ordinary way, that all of existence was illuminated and enlightened. There was nothing special to grasp, and no claim to be made. Paul found in the moment his sense of superiority was swept away. Suddenly, as his heart broke wide open, his beingness was hurled against the rocks of existence. He could see clearly that, “I am not the answer or everybody is the answer.” The bottom had dropped out and he could no longer hang onto his superior position. He was interconnected and ordinary all at once.

As we sat there embracing the mystery of this, we could see the concepts of awakening and enlightenment disappearing. One becomes ordinary again in a total acceptance of existence. There is no more a distinction to be made between self and others. With a smile, Paul explained that he could see that he no longer needed to try to practice “Loving Kindness.” He had collapsed his superior position into an embracement of what is. The utter failurehood of his superior stance had blown his heart wide open and now he felt much more free to love. We left our sessional work there, fortified by my invitation to Paul to keep blown wide open with nothing to hang onto in each moment. We will now explore more fully the issues of the heart.

Awakening of the Heart: Working Through Our Emotions

The awakening of the heart involves a total opening up of the heart to all things and beings of existence, so that we become this loving presence interconnected with existence. Everything becomes an extension of ourselves. This is a movement away from the typical affairs of the heart in which we have learned to be object focused. Typically, we love one person exclusively but as Osho (1982) observed, “When love excludes nothing then it reaches to its ultimate peak, that is the moment when one experiences life, that is the moment when life becomes not just an ordinary existence, it takes a new flavor, it becomes godliness” (p.295). Love then becomes a spontaneous flowering of being.

By allowing love to open up in our hearts we can begin to enjoy the simple things of existence; the sheer joy of the sunrise, the vast ecstasy of flowers unfolding to reveal their vibrant colours and the birds’ magnificent songs of unfettered bliss. Even an ordinary table can seem wondrous in the moment. Here, all duty, responsibility, virtue, morality are dropped and we totally enjoy what is available in the moment.

With this opening up of love, one moves beyond the confines of lust and typical romantic love to become friendly with all of existence. Gone are the typical ways of animal love and of exclusive romantic love. One becomes non-possessive, with no jealousy and no desire to dominate, as we give total, unconditional freedom to the other. We live in thankfulness and gratitude, embracing the many gifts of existence with no demand at all.

Spiritual Bypass: Escaping Our Dark Emotions

Working with the heart, however, can reveal a whole new set of problems. As Greenspan (2002) observed, humans tend to avoid and escape dark emotions such as grief, fear, and despair. In our attempts at spiritual transcendence we can ignore obvious emotional issues as Welwood (2002) observed, “there is often a tendency to use spiritual practice to try to rise above our emotional and personal issues – all those messy, unresolved matters that weigh us down” p.12). This spiritual bypass often leaves a host of unresolved issues hidden under our new spiritual identity. These issues need to be brought forth into awareness and worked through. Adyashanti (2008) recommended that people come out of such hiding:

Stop avoiding things. If there is anything that is unresolved in yourself, turn toward it. Face it. Look at it. Stop avoiding it. Stop moving the other way. Stop using a moment of awakening as a means to not deal with something that may be less than awake within you... This sincerity isn't something we can impose; it's inherent within reality itself.
(p. 49)

Hate, envy, jealousy, greed, fear, shame are all flags of our emotional underbelly. And these are invitations to look at our illusion of separation that is arising in the moment. The most negative emotions can be tracked to anger, fear, and judgment, which stems from believing our thoughts and means we are perceiving from a state of division. Adyashanti (2008) urged us to unpack all of this:

As soon as one feels emotional conflict, the questions that should be asked are: In what way am I going into division? At this moment, what's causing this sense of separation, isolation, or protectiveness? What is it that I'm believing? What assumptions have I made that are being reproduced in my body and made manifest as emotion?" (p.142)

We can have all sorts of uncooked seeds to deal with, especially our unfinished emotional business that tends to be exaggerated and intensified with the dawning of awakening energy. Myself, I have worked on recognizing occasional patterns of grasping at my “university professor gig” in which I switched from a loving presence to a clutching, nonacceptance of the insecurity of the situation. I looked at the stories I was creating and could see that the only releasement from this was to let go, to burn though each story as it surfaced in the moment. I had to surrender all, including my university position.

Other common patterns I have explored with clients in my nondual psychotherapy practice are such stories as not accepting the death of a loved one, the story that I need to be loved by somebody, nonacceptance that a relationship could be over at any point in time, not accepting that others don't appreciate you, and not accepting the death of the separate self in the

moment. That is merely the tip of the iceberg regarding the stories we can create from a separate self stance. We will now consider a recent case involving a person who had a very sudden awakening experience and his resultant injustice stories that needed to be worked through.

Cam's Sudden Awakening: Haunted by Injustice

Cam (a pseudonym) had lived a life of turmoil. He felt he never really fit in the game of life. He bounced around a lot. He was a survivor though, and managed to hang in there. He had a lot to deal with from childhood trauma, to living on the streets, to addictions and mental health issues, to a failed marriage, and to a host of unsatisfying jobs. He took the plunge to finish university in his mid-40's, and completed his social work degree in his late 40's. Cam believed this would be a monumental achievement. To his surprise, he found that within a few days after graduating it seemed an empty accomplishment. This left him in a state of an identity crisis of meaninglessness and feeling caught in an existential vacuum. As the time seemed right, he did, however, openly embrace an invitation to a nondual workshop and also registered for a nondual conference set to occur a few weeks later.

Cam found the nondual workshop to be intense and energetic, but he remained unsettled within his being. Despite a mounting sense of existential crisis and nihilism, he allowed a friend to co-opt him into attending the conference. At that time, he was in a low state, feeling quite desolate as things were not working out for him as planned. During the conference, however, he felt an intense swelling of energy inside himself that he could not explain. He found himself moved to joyous tears. Afterwards, perhaps intensified by the calamity of leaving his cell phone in a coffee shop the day after the conference, he was plagued by the burning question: "Who are you? Really?" The question seemed too hot for Cam's consideration at that time so he deferred it for a few days. Later in the week, he returned to it when he had a sudden epiphany about a tenant dispute over laundry access issues, an ongoing conflict he had been experiencing for over a year. Without warning, Cam abruptly understood how much he had been blindsided by his own self-interest and narcissism regarding the conflict. When returning home that day, just moments after his insight about the laundry issue, he suddenly felt his whole world come crashing down on him as he revisited the question again. "Who are you?" In that moment, for the first time Cam could see that he had been a complete narcissist his whole life. Everything, even gestures of empathy and compassion, and feigning an understanding of narcissism, all of it was motivated by his own ego. This insight swept through him like lightning and he felt the ground beneath him turn into a huge abyss. He sensed himself plummeting through the abyss and, in the moment, his whole world changed as he actually saw the truth of his lifelong narcissism. Cam's life, filled with self-righteousness and vested self interest, bloomed and crashed like a falling star leaving him a totally changed being. As he sat in a chair in his apartment, new insights about his life poured through him rapidly over the next several minutes.

This wild opening up of energy continued for the next few days. Cam felt he had so much energy it was similar to a manic episode. However, unlike a manic episode, in this intense energy he could see that he was not the answer. He was one with the void and he was able to let go of a lifetime of misguided seeking and searching. This experience was shocking to him as it did not come through effort but seemed to naturally sweep over him in a moment of true seeing. He found himself in a state of bliss and rapture, and surreal ecstasy for several weeks following.

After a month, a report was made to university security regarding Cam's odd behavior related to him driving slowly and watching deer dance in the sprinklers at night. He was called in for a security investigation. Despite that the investigation went no further, the intense, institutional police-styled questioning plunged him into the anger and the sense of injustice and betrayal that he had been carrying his whole life. As he drove home after the interview, he found himself tormented and angry and his blissfulness soon disappeared. This recent injustice reminded him of many other injustices in his life.

He came to my office the next day, and together we worked on seeing this recent event as a transformational opportunity. I pointed out to him that he was still carrying a lot of old stories about injustice and betrayal, and that he needed to burn through them. This incident could be the catalyst for this, I suggested. He needed to re-author his life according to his nondual awakening. Cam said he wanted to combine Michael White's (2000) re-authoring work with Byron Katie's (2002) work on the four questions to facilitate burning through his stories. He stated that he had been inadvertently looking for this nondual place his whole life as he never fit in. But now I could see Cam still had some old tapes to burn through and we agreed he would commence work on the sense of injustice and betrayal that he had been carrying since a child.

When I followed up with him a week later, Cam said he was in the middle of the process of what Jed McKenna (2002) called spiritual autolysis. This is a journal writing process to let go all that is false. Cam could see that he had a whole variety of stories, some creepy crawlers, some big trees, and some little trees. From a place of no self, he was able to let go of these stories and realize that freedom was found in the perfection of each moment. His recent incident of injustice led to him to discover that there were about seven or eight incidents of injustice he was still carrying around. Cam was able to let these stories go, seeing them as false, and he became light and ecstatic once again.

As Cam resolved his stories of injustice, other intense emotions emerged. For instance, he found himself revisiting his fear. He had made some professional counselling commitments before his awakening, and now he could see much of those commitments were made with the motivation of being validated by an agency. Now in his free flowing state, he could feel himself falling into the fear of having to manage those commitments. He wanted, in this moment, to make the next week facilitation of a counselling group totally secure now, as well as guarantee his good rapport with the agency.

As we worked on this issue, I asked Cam if he could see how he was grabbing at the self in a future moment in an attempt to make next week secure. Furthermore, his pattern of begging for validation from the agency counsellors was also causing him to lose his flow. I presented him with the challenge, "Can you see that you are begging for self-other validation, and trying to make the future moment secure? With all of this, the self is trying to grab at some secure place which is psychologically impossible. Can you see the prison you are creating for yourself, and let it all go once again right here, right now?" With this, Cam smiled, and he told me, "Yes, I can let it all go," and he laughed giddily as he realized, "The knot in my stomach is gone." Away he went, realizing that this work would be an ongoing process. Cam had worked on his judgments and stories of injustice, and now he was revisiting fear. And he understood there was more to come. Cam was just embarking on the path of learning to live from nondual being.

We now turn to further consider how this deep work can inevitably lead to working in the “guts”, letting go of the self-contraction and seeing there is no self in each moment.

Awakening of the “Guts”: Accepting Death of the Self in Each Moment

Adyashanti (2008) summarized awakening in the mind as symbolizing no knowing, spaciousness and transcendence, and awakening in the heart as love and compassion and the connection with the ten thousand things. But, it is in the guts where things get really interesting. Adyashanti (2008) pointed out that a person can have some tremendous awakening experiences but still face problems around the embracement of no-self in the belly. In the guts, we can face our primal rudimentary need to survive as we face no self, and nonexistence. As we become aware of our primal grasping at survival, we can experience desperate panic attacks in which the fear of no-self can be overwhelming. As we open up our bellies, we can feel the vastness of existence and the reality of the sense of self-annihilation. We can become overwhelmed at our fear of not existing in the moment and desperately grab onto some sense of self in the knot of our belly as we defend against the oceanic abyss of no-selfhood.

McKenna (2002) cut through the layers of dogma around awakening by clearly stating the central issue is learning to abide in the abyss of no-self. In my own journey, this amounted to a huge problem. How can the “me” move beyond the “me?” The problem for a while can be, “I know I need to die, but how do I do that?” How is one to manufacture a death? How can the self put an end to the self? How can an illusion orchestrate its own end?

Thus, we can have had many profound death experiences, but as psychiatrist Hawkins (2006) laid out, we have to experience the great death of our individual existence. He wrote the following account of his own death of individual existence:

The necessity to abandon and surrender the identity of self as the source of one’s existence was a powerful knowingness. The will to live, the seeming core of life itself, was then surrendered to God, followed by a few moments of terrifying agony and then the experience of death itself. This was unlike bodily death where one finds oneself suddenly free and looking at the body lying there, which had happened several times previously. No, this is the first and only time that death can be experienced. The finality of death was overwhelming. At last, the agony was over and was replaced by splendor and magnificence – infinite stillness, silence, the peace of profound Infinite Love. The mind was dumbfounded and overwhelmed with awe. I then became silent and disappeared. (p.22)

While Hawkins’ experience of the great death seemed profound, there seemed to remain an element of ‘doing’ in it. At some level, he was still ‘doing’ his surrender of individual existence.

In contrast, Foster (2008) pointed to a great death that arises through simply seeing that no one is there, and in the absence of self there is an extraordinary fullness:

You have to lose your life to save it. And so when there is no-one, there isn’t an empty void, a lonely and joyless black space devoid of all qualities, no, no, no. That void is full,

it is bursting with life. With the sea roaring, and seagulls screeching, and the wind crashing against your face, and a steaming cup of tea, and... life, damn it life! The emptiness is fullness, the void is fully alive, the nothingness is life in all its magnificence, and that is the freedom that the so-called 'individual' could never, ever find. (p. 199)

In my own journey, I was hoping I could set up a Hawkins like experience but this was met with failure. I manufactured many death experiences of surrendering mind body and individual existence to existence itself. I had wondrous moments of awe and intensity ...but still unfortunately it did not resolve my fundamental dilemma. At some level I was still doing it. After a few hours, days, or weeks, I would be back in the dilemma of existence.

Finally I came to a point of realizing any effort or 'doing' to resolve this was not helpful. This just became more doing, more grinding, more grasping, and more ego. Realizing that I was hopeless, helpless, and that nothing could be done, I was left in the suchness of the moment. Nothing could be done. This was very relaxing for me.

And here, miraculously, the whole gestalt changed. In my non-doing, it became apparent that I assumed there was a problem. It became obvious that this was a wrong assumption. As I looked into this moment, with no effort, it became clear that the goose was already out of the bottle! I was already free. There was no person, just the vastness of existence. I did not need to go anywhere, this was already it. I could now just relax into awareness of this.....and enjoy this moment.

I saw that there was nobody there in the first place and freedom was already here. As Osho (1994) observed, surrender is really a case of not some experience but seeing that there is nobody there to surrender. In this moment, there is no self, there never has been a self. As Osho (1994) stated:

If you are intelligent there is no need to think about what I am saying; you can simply see into it this very moment! Where is the ego? There is silence, and there is no past, and there is no future, only this moment... and this dog barking. This moment, and you are not. Let this moment be, and you are not. And there is immense silence, there is profound silence, within and without. And then there is no need to surrender because you know you are not. Knowing that you are not is surrender." (p.43)

There is silence, and it is apparent there is no-self.

Sylvester (2006) observed that after 30 years of seeking, it just took a split second to see that there was nobody there. This experience came to him in a railway station:

Then at a central London station on a warm summer evening the person, the sense of self, suddenly completely disappears. Everything remains as it is—people, trains, platforms, other objects--- yet everything is seen for the first time without a person mediating or interpreting it.... In that instant it is seen that there is no one. The sense of there being a person has been a constant up to this point and given meaning to this life. For so many years it never has been questioned. It has been so thoroughly taken for granted as me, my

centre and location, that it has not even been noticed. Now it is seen as a complete redundancy. Suddenly it is known that I never had a life because there never was an “I”. In a split second of eternity it is known that without an “I” everything is being seen for the first time simply as it is. I do not live, I am lived.” (p. 15-16)

For this body mind, the dilemma was resolved through what Osho and Sylvester described above. There was a seeing that there was never anybody here. There was total freedom all the way along, I just did not realize it. As Osho (1994) so aptly observed, “There is not a thing to be done- not a thing, I say because you are already that which you want to become ...Seeing is enough.” (p.45)

The paradox is seeing the great death has already happened, never born, never died. Seeing is instantaneous... it only take a moment. As Osho (1978) described:

Relax in this moment, let this moment be. And suddenly all starts exploding in you. In that moment you are mature. And that moment can become your very tacit understanding. Then you live as an ordinary man, but you live extraordinarily. Then you live in the marketplace but you are no more part of it. In a subtle way you have transcended it, and without any effort. Without striving you have transcended it. You can go on playing games, but they are all games, you are no more serious. It is all a drama—it is good, enjoy it, but don't get engulfed by it. (p. 76)

Then one realizes, as Osho (1978) stated:

All beings are Buddhas from the very beginning. You have been a Buddha in the beginning you are a Buddha in the middle, you will be a Buddha in the end. ...It is your inner nature. It is you. (p. 41)

This realization can be an absolute shock. Enlightenment or awakening was there all the way along, it was just never seen. Pivotal to all of this was to see that in the absolute intensity of this moment, there is no self. There is no person here. And there never has been. It is just a seeing. Suddenly as I relax into no person here, this full emptiness becomes the whole of existence.

The key is to understand that waiting for something to happen is the wrong approach. This creates the need for something to happen over time when, in fact, it is all here right now. One can enjoy the humor of Tony Parsons' (2000) statement:

Firstly, you can't get quickly to where you already are (laughter). But really take this in. Live with it and try to see deeply what it is really saying. The problem is that you think something has to happen. You are waiting for something to happen. It is actually happening continuously, and you simply don't see it. I don't have anything that you don't have. The difference is that I am no longer looking for anything. This is it, and that's the end of it. Give up the search for something to happen and fall in love, fall intimately in love with the gift of presence in "what is." Here, right here, is the seat of all that you will ever long for: It is simple and ordinary and magnificent. You see, you are already home. (p. 138)

In this place, there is nowhere to go, no knowing, and nothing to be done. One is simply present in this moment, and already home.

This is it and that is the end of it. I have done it all, tried so many techniques, and there is just this. As Sylvester (2006) would say, there is nobody here, just empty space. How can nobody do anything? There is no problem, no dilemma with nobody to create such. In the freedom of no answer, there is just this.

We now turn to consider a case study that illustrates the need for a seeing that there is nobody here in each moment.

Tom's Fearful Folding Before His Nondual Presentation

A person can enjoy the freedom of many experiences when abiding in nondual beingness and yet, at the same time, still have many uncooked seeds which give life to a separate self. At a subtle level, there can be seeds of what Almaas (1996) would call internalized self-other object relations. In my experience, lecturing on transpersonal psychology and nondual being has its own special transformational opportunity. One can feel they are flowing along in nondual beingness but when presented with the opportunity of publicly speaking to abidance in this state, uncooked seeds may emerge as one can inadvertently demand to be appreciated or to be understood.

I have seen clearly that one needs to be prepared to die in the moment, even when giving talks or lecturing. As Osho (1999) said, "Don't accumulate anything whatever; power, money, prestige, virtue, knowledge, even the so-called spiritual experiences. Don't accumulate. If you don't accumulate, you are ready to die any moment because you have nothing to lose" (p.30). I have found that one has to let it all go and to accept death in this moment. There is nothing to cling to, no knowing, and no self, and one is free to embrace the isness of the moment. Talking about failurehood, Adyashanti (2007) expressed it well by explaining that when he gives a talk he comes from a place of accepting his total failurehood in conveying what he has to offer. He lets go of demanding a certain type of response from the other and embraces his failurehood, and sometimes from that place a certain magic and transmission can happen.

The mind can be tricky. When preparing for a lecture or talk, the mind can start grasping at security. The mind in this moment demands a guarantee that the lecture a few days away will be totally secure. Krishnamurti (1954) spent much time teaching about the wisdom of insecurity

in that there is no such thing as psychological security. He said, “wherever there is a desire for self-protection, there is fear. When I see the fallacy of demanding security I do not accumulate any more.” (p. 84) The paradox is that, “Whatever the mind does to get rid of fear causes fear.” (p. 85) The strategies that we act upon to fend off fear, actually create fear. The more we try to be secure, the more fearful we become. So, like Krishnamurti, I have seen the fallacy in demanding security for a future moment. I have found one has to surrender all, die to this moment, and let it all go. We must further understand this needs to be done over and over again in each moment at it arises.

Now, to turn to the nondual psychotherapy case study, a nondual associate of mine Tom (a pseudonym) was preparing for a presentation on nondual transformation. A few weeks earlier he phoned me to discuss his intentions. Over the last ten years, Tom had many groundbreaking nondual experiences, and even in the last year had moved into spending increasing amounts of time in a place of extraordinary absence with cessation of self. During our telephone conversation, I told him to be prepared to let it all go, saying that when one speaks of the nondual it becomes clear there is no sanctuary to be found anywhere. He did not entirely grasp my meaning, interpreting my words to mean that perhaps he could let go of all the powerpoints he was intending to present.

Tom came to see me on the day of his presentation. He had not slept the previous night. Instead, he had lain in bed with his mind spinning fiercely. Fear had shown up in a sudden and profound way and he found himself grasping at a sense of self and security. In the moment, he wanted a guarantee that his presentation would go well, be well received, and culminate in an appreciative acceptance by his peers. As he frantically scrambled for some security in the moment, he found that there was nothing available to grasp onto. He had spent the whole night spinning, with lots of intense energy racing through him. Tom was shocked by this sleepless night as he had an experience of extraordinary absence and no-self the previous summer, and believed he existed in that place on a regular basis since that time. And now, his mind was spinning like mad.

It was clear to me that, even though Tom was coming from a place of mostly abiding in nondual being, there was a subtle seed in himself whereby he had the desire to give an impressive talk and be appreciated by others. Tom, in his own way, was still demanding and hoping for mirroring back from the appreciative other. In short, he had not fully let go of his desire to make a good impression. Since the presentation subject was the nondual, the stakes were even higher as Tom would be interacting with nondual colleagues with whom he already had established relationships. As Krishnamurti would say, Tom was caught in the illusion that he could create psychological security, and his mind was churning over in a desperate bid for that elusive sense of security.

When Tom came to see me for an emergency session that day of his presentation, he was experiencing a heightened state of panic. He felt like he had a monkey mind in the moment, grasping desperately for some semblance of security. As he sat down in a chair in my office, he announced, “I am folding... I can’t pull this talk off today.”

I looked over at Tom and invited him to, rather than resist the feeling that he was totally collapsing and folding, consciously accept it. I asked, “Can you accept there is no answer for the mind and let yourself die right here, right now?” To die consciously in the moment was his task. Tom needed to embrace death, right here right now, and let go of his desires of the self for appreciation, and positive mirroring, and of having his wisdom recognized.

As he sat there and allowed himself to die in the moment, I could see Tom frightened and struggling with an overwhelming darkness and death. However, within a matter of seconds, he stopped trying to save himself and a sudden deep calm and vast flowing presence came over him. He was in an oceanic translucent energy as he moved into no-self being. His being had a shining radiance to it. He laughed with the ecstasy of the moment as he was no longer clinging to self. He said, “I’ve let it all go, I am okay, I can do this presentation.” He sat there relaxed in a let go state, feeling paradoxically fearless when just a few minutes earlier he had been overwhelmed by anxiety. I left him alone in my office in his let go state so Tom could just be with the stillness of dying to all of these demands of impressing others. Fifteen minutes later he met me in the hall, smiling in serene suchness, and said, “I’m ready to go.” And as he walked toward the nearby presentation room, I could see he was in a sublime place, with no self there to grab onto and protect. His task of awareness would be to remain in this place of no-self during his talk. After his presentation, Tom reported that he was able to stay in this place for most of his talk, except for a few moments of mind spinning and grabbing in response to a difficult question. However, he was once again able to let go quickly and abide in the present moment. Overall, Tom had found this whole “dying to his talk” experience to be a huge transformational opportunity.

Conclusion

We all secretly hope that after awakening we are in a place so continually profound that our fire of awakening burns through all of our issues. Like the famous nondual mystic, Ramana Maharshi, we want to celebrate an awakening which does not require us to keep working on our issues. Unfortunately for almost all of us, that’s not the case and we have much more to process. The invitation to realize that there is nobody here, and to be free in our mind, heart, and guts is always available. However, there is the tendency to be pulled back into our patterns of the separate self. Each moment affords us the new invitation to surrender and work through the fixated mind pattern, or the judgmental feeling, and come back to embracing no-selfhood in our guts; allowing us to come from a place of full emptiness, and loving presence in the moment. Rather than hiding our issues under the concept of “awakening”, the invitation is here for us to keep working through our issues so we can abide in a place of the natural state of awakening, fully participating in the mystery of an embodied life.

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