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FINDING THE LION'S ROAR THROUGH NONDUAL PSYCHOTHERAPY: Leaving the spiritual teacher behind to directly embrace nondual being.

Written by Gary Nixon – Paradoxica: Journal of Nondual Psychology, Vol. 4: Spring 2012

Summary

This article is a summary of a nondual psychotherapy session with a long time spiritual seeker of 40 years who had worked hard on a meditative path with a guru, but had not experienced an awakening. In the session, he is introduced to some nondual pointers to help him realize that it is all available right here, right now, he has to only see it. Over reliance on another, letting go of effort, embracing no knowing, realizing nothing can be done, coming to the end of seeking and stopping, sitting in one's own awareness, abiding in consciousness, and taking the ultimate medicine are all reviewed to invite the long term seeker to see "this is it."

Gary Nixon, Ph.D. is a nondual transpersonal psychologist and an Associate Professor in Addictions Counselling at the University of Lethbridge. He was drawn to eastern contemplative traditions after an existential world collapse in the early 1980's. After a tour through many eastern teachers such as Osho, Krishnamurti, Nisargadatta, and Papaji, he completed his Master's and doctorate in Counselling Psychology and embraced the work of Ken Wilber and A.H. Almaas. He has had a nondual psychology private practice and been facilitating nondual groups over the last ten years.

Deconstructing Reliance on the Awakened Other

I received the call from Tim (a pseudonym). He reported 40 years of intense Buddhist meditation in a Buddhist community with an enlightened teacher, all of the years trying to become enlightened, but still no awakening. He was desperate, so he booked a nondual psychotherapy session with me for the next day.

As a nondual psychotherapist, I looked forward to a session with an end of the line client. I recognized the seeker's dilemma of having a wonderful guru. People have been enchanted with Krishnamurti (1954), with Nisargadatta (1973), with Osho (1979, 1994, 2002), with Papaji (Poonjua, 2000), with Adi Da (1978), with Trungpa (1973), and now lately, Adyashanti (2008). I smiled as I had been enchanted myself with Osho at one time. Somehow, a person thinks the connection with the wondrous being is going to take you "home." So, over and over a person goes, repeating the same paths. In Osho's repertoire of over 650 books and thousands of taped discourses, there is always another book to read, another discourse to listen to, another meditation to try. And when the whole routine is concluded, the mind loves to start all over again expecting different results. Exhaustion settles in. The path begins to appear hopeless but a person may avoid processing this (Sylvester, 2005), particularly after investing so much time and effort with the guru. The longer the commitment, the larger the projection relating to the guru, and the more insurmountable the whole awakening process looks for the ordinary person. Like Tim, I know the story, "I have a wondrous guru, I could never be like him." This sets up a perpetual double bind. You believe your guru has the answer for you, but he/she is so wondrous you could never exist as he/she does. The result is bewilderment and dependency.

To get unstuck from this sticky place, if a person realizes nobody is awakened, or "only nobodies are awakened", a whole deconstruction process can occur. Awakening is not, after all, a personal thing, it is simply tuning into an awakened existence. Awakened beings, no matter how grand they appear, are actually just nobodies: nobodies inviting nobodies to realize they are nobody. This is all that is going on. To see awakening as the simple realization that there is no separate self here completely demystifies the whole process. It takes the throne away from all gurus. The open secret, Tony Parsons (2000) reminds us, is all available to us right here, right now. There is no such thing as an inner sanctuary or a privileged few. The invitation is in this moment. No amount of meditation or effort or discipline is necessary to recognize who I already am in this moment. It merely takes a seeing or recognition right here right now. The gateless gate means, that the gate is only an illusion of a boundary, in fact no gate actually exists as "the goose is already out" meaning awakening is already here, it is our own nature. Now all of this, which I could have laid out for Tim in about 2 minutes, would be too much for him, so I decided to break it down a little bit, and take my time with him and spread it over an hour.

Before we proceed to the nondual therapy session discussion portion of this article, it should be noted that this research uses a single case study to illuminate the client's process of embracing the direct path through nondual psychotherapy. The use of the case study method is recognized as a valid research approach when a thorough, in-depth study of a phenomenon is of interest (Patton, 1990). It is accepted that one person's experience may be so fertile and rich with meaning that it stands alone as a powerful, unique expression of the phenomenon under study. Thus, reliance upon a single case is highly appropriate when the individual under

discussion represents a “revelatory” case (Yin, 2003) and when that case might maximize what can be learned about the phenomenon (Stake, 1995). And now, we turn to look at this unique case of a long-term seeker who had worked with a teacher and meditated for 40 years and yet reported having no experiences of awakening during that time.

Confronting One’s Own Situation Directly

When Tim came in the next day, I listened to his story. Early in the 1970’s, just after graduating from teacher training at college, he had been drawn to the work of Chogyam Trungpa (1973). He became involved with Trungpa and began attending meditation camps, and retreats. When Trungpa left for Nova Scotia, Tim settled into working with a newly arrived “enlightened” Buddhist teacher from overseas who heavily focused on silent meditation retreats. Tim participated in numerous week long and 30 day meditation camps. At one point, he even attended a 90 day camp. He had experienced some wondrous blissful states, where he felt himself so high that it seemed he would never come down. Eventually, however, all of these experiences and states would pass, and he would return to his perpetual state of misery and seeking. Only recently had he begun to think that there might be something amiss with the whole picture. He noted that he had been repeating the same steps over and over again, and getting the same results over and over again, too. His expressed reason for this long-term defeating behaviour was he had thought if he just stayed true to his guru, enlightenment would eventually find him. I initiated the process of shaking him out of this pattern by reading him a quote that once helped me to shake off “the spell” of Osho. It was from a former Osho disciple, Kirtan, who had worked intensely for many years with him. At one point, even though Osho was only a few miles away, Kirtan decided to just relax into his own being:

I came to know that I was making a mistake by going to somebody, by asking for the way, by sitting at somebody’s feet, by waiting for something to happen, or by desiring that realization may happen with the help of effort and spiritual practice. (Thompson, 2002, p. 191)

Upon hearing this quote, Tim looked at me with a quizzical “so what?” expression on his face. I decided to dig in a little deeper. I read another quote from Kirtan:

I began to understand that the desire, the effort, the doings and practices, were the actual disturbances of my peace. The seeking was the obstruction to realization. Osho had told us many times that we had to drop all our doings and efforts. He said that we had never lost our enlightenment- that it was already our nature. (p. 191)

I explained, “So, Tim, like Kirtan said, there comes a point when a person realizes relying on another, or making some sort of effort, is merely an obstruction. The answer is already directly available within, yet a person somehow thinks another person can give it to you. The question becomes after so many years, has that strategy of relying on somebody else to take you there, has that worked? Isn’t it actually hopeless because you go around and around the merry go round and you never actually confront your own situation directly? You thought you had found a path, but actually you are lost as you have never seen into your own nature. You never embraced your own path.”

I looked over at Tim to see if this was making any sense to him. By the painful look on his face it was clear I was getting through. Tim was in the difficult place of having to face truth and give up his investment in lies. Forty years of seeking through relying on a wondrous guru is a huge investment, but what was needed was to move beyond this strategy; to let it go, and move towards a direct confrontation with existence itself. One must be willing to confront existence directly.

I decided to review with Tim some insights of A.H. Almaas (2011), as this over-reliance on the other can be a huge roadblock on the nondual path. As Almaas (2011) explained, it can be an enacting of the central object relation between the central ego and the ideal other, which is “ideal in the sense that the object — the parent or the teacher or the teaching or the school or the breast, whatever it may be — is comforting, satisfying, fulfilling, nourishing, supporting, and giving” (p. 262). That these perceptions are not found in reality is the problem. And as Almaas (2011) summarized, it all involves “living through images, through a projection” (p.262) as the person is still imagining reality as something that is not the way it actually is.

Here is where the rubber hits the road as living this way sets up a dependence. As Almaas (2011) so nicely laid out:

The more you experience your teacher or the school as giving you what you want, nourishing you, telling you what you need to know, the more you get into that dependent position. The more the teacher doesn't push you to be independent, the more you identify with that positive object relation. That's why the perspective that I'm presenting now, of being grown-up, mature, and independent, will challenge that object relation. You might feel, “Do I really have to go out and do it all myself? Why not just be taken care of? Why not just get all the understanding, the nourishment, and the blessing that 's available and things will be okay?” (p. 263)

I carried on after reading the quote. “It is like what Almaas talks about here. You have been using the other, in this case your teacher, to take care of you, nourish you, bless you, and also, in a sense, expecting him to deliver the path and enlightenment to you. Your teacher has become your big breast that you soothe yourself with. And like what Almaas says, you have refused to become mature and figure out existence for yourself.”

Tim looked startled and I continued on with vigour as I myself had been a victim of this dependent thinking. “You are relying on the other, your teacher, to lead you to awakening, but this keeps you in a dependent position, in which you are hopelessly lost, waiting for further goodies from your teacher. Instead, you need to rely on your own awareness. It is only your awareness which will allow you to be mature and wake up. So, rather than escaping the lostness and the hopelessness, why not let it in directly? Just sit in your own hopelessness and start from there.” With this, I seemed to be getting somewhere. I looked over at Tim, and his desperate state was clearly evident in his face. It seemed like the horror of what he had been trying to escape from all of these years was now right here. He was in the blackness of being totally lost and hopeless but still struggling for an answer as a way out.

For myself, I had discovered that rather than trying to avoid the fear and misery of my own personal hell of hopelessness and lostness by relying on another to help me escape, I had to stop running, embrace this hell and fully accept the dark night of the soul. Getting to acceptance, however, is a ripening process of progressive disillusionment. I knew a few more insights would be discussed with Tim before he would be in this place of embracing what is with his own awareness. So, I summarized where we were at. I said, “All of those years of seeking and you have not moved a square inch as you were dependent on somebody else’s awareness. This can be so hard to see but I invite you, Tim, to let it in.” I gazed at Tim and saw tears trailing down his cheeks. I thought to myself, “I have to keep going, the door is opening.” And with Tim’s wonderful, albeit painful, realization that despite 40 years of seeking he had stayed cemented at the spiritual starting gate, I decided to proceed to a second realization knockout punch.

From Nondual Concepts to No Knowing

I continued on, “So now, Tim, as you let in how hopeless and lost you are, and how you actually have not moved an inch, I want you to realize one more thing.” “What’s that?” he asked. “How much do you know about the awakening path, Tim?” He paused and then began blurting out descriptions of the different types of meditations he knew, and the different stages of awakening. I waited while he ran out of steam and then said, “Here is a shocking thing to realize. You actually don’t know anything.” Tim was stunned. I continued, “It can be a shock to the system when one starts to realize they do not know anything about spiritual awakening even though they have been on the path for decades. It is all borrowed knowledge. Garbage.”

I let that settle in for a minute, and then said, “I wouldn’t worry about it. It is something we all have to eventually face.” I recounted to Tim a story about Bodhidharma, the first patriarch of Zen, when he was confronted by the emperor. As retold by Osho (1988), when the emperor asked Bodhidharma, “Who is this Bodhidharma standing in front of me?”, he replied, “No knowing”. We see with Bodhidharma everything has been dropped, and he is left in a place of just pure innocence and standing in no knowing. In my own experience, the insight of no knowing can be profoundly relaxing as it is seen one does not have to hang onto knowledge. One can simply drop it all, and just be one with existence directly.

I looked over at Tim, and said, “You remind me of what a spiritual teacher said to me once. She said, ‘You have a vast light within you but all around that is a bunch of mind concepts still floating around just like space junk orbits the earth.’ What she said hit me hard. Like you, I was hanging onto a bunch of nondual concepts, which were actually blocking me from seeing the infinite vastness of the light.” What is needed is a total embracement of no knowing, similar to the destruction of one’s entire world. As described by Adyashanti (2008):

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)

I said to Tim, “All concepts, knowledge, and world views have to go up in smoke. There is just no knowing with nothing to hang onto.”

Tim seemed to be getting this. It is amazing the openness that total exhaustion can give a person. I needed to try for a third realization knockout punch to set the invitation for Tim to stand directly in awareness.

No Effort, Nothing Can Be Done, No Escape

Continuing on, I said, “Now, Tim, here is where I have to hit you hard. All of those years of seeking and efforting, they have been a waste of time. You have been trying to get somewhere, but there is no where to go, and no place to get to. You need to see that nothing can be done.” Tim looked puzzled by this, so I tried to clarify by asking him a question. “When you have been going to these meditation camps all these years, what was your goal?”

Tim sat there for a moment, and then responded, “I was trying to become enlightened.”

I laughed to myself, and muttered, “beautiful”, under my breath. Aloud, I proceeded slowly. “Tim, can you see trying *always* involves moving towards some future goal, where in reality you have only this present moment, so it is impossible to become enlightened?” At first, Tim looked shocked and amazed but then he seemed to absorb my words. At this stage of energy depletion, being totally exhausted through effort, falling down sometimes just happens. Effort has served as a way to escape this moment, to strive towards a future moment, but this moment is all that we have. One needs to reverse the pattern, and rather than try to escape this moment, be prepared, as Renz (2005) invited, to embrace this moment forever. In my own journey, embracing what is with no effort to change anything, and being willing to be here forever, totally opened existence up in the moment. The key was being in this moment, with no agenda, allowing existence to actually reveal itself.

I could see Tim was in that exhausted place already. Totally spent, rotting, and seeing the futility of his efforts. It is a hard place to be after so many years of seeking, and believing that one had the inside track with an enlightened great guru by one’s side. I then read another quote from Kirtan, the former Osho disciple, who described this so well:

You will know and feel that you have done everything possible, and that in spite of all your efforts, nothing has happened. Then you come to the point of total frustration. This will lead to total surrender. At that point, you say, “Oh, I can’t do anything anymore. I am finished.” (Thompson, 2002, p. 196)

Similarly, Lowe (1998), another ex Osho disciple said:

I had spent years and years and tried everything, and still that state eluded me. After years of being total in everything I tried, I gave up; I really gave up. Then suddenly it happened. There was nothing dramatic, it just happened. And I cannot say what the “it” was. I cannot even say exactly when this awakening started because when it did, I realized that “it” had been there all the time. This place is with everyone, always....but because you are looking for what you think it should be, you do not recognize that it is already there. (p. xix)

Tim was clearly coming close to this boiling point of total exhaustion and desperation and was ready to accept the end of seeking. However, I knew that we were at a critical point. I needed to introduce him to the direct path of awareness which required no effort, just his own awareness. But first, one final assumption needed to be challenged.

Nothing Needs to Happen

At this point, Tim had a blind spot that seems to plague many seekers. For so many years, Tim had been waiting for some grand event. He had been conditioned to think he needed some bone-jarring awakening experience to set himself free. He had heard so many stories of miraculous awakenings, with wondrous experiences, that he had set up a secret demand of existence: “Give me a miraculous awakening experience.” This demand for a special enlightenment experience can keep a person in a begging rut for eternity. Waiting for something to happen means anticipating a future event, and that is the wrong approach as it is all here right now. Does one need an experience to see and be who they already are? By doing or having some wondrous experience, can one actually get any closer to their own nature? I read Tim a hilarious statement from the end of a book by Tony Parsons (2000):

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)

It seemed this quote from Tony Parsons really pushed Tim over the edge. I could see the madness in his eyes. The whole seeking journey was deconstructing right in front of him. He was seeing there had never been a place to go. It had all been a mad, wild goose chase just to get back to this moment. The ground underneath the illusion of the journey was falling away leaving him with this moment.

Accepting Exhaustion and Letting Go of the Whole Tim Project

I decided to carry on. “In this moment, can you just give up the whole Tim project? See that it is impossible. It can't be done. You have been trying to become what you already are. There is nowhere to go, and nothing can be done.” I then told him my story of coming to the place of letting go of my whole awakening project.

I remember what it was like. A few years ago, I came to the end of the line. I joined a completely different realm of existence....very extraordinary.....and yet intoxicatingly relaxing and ordinary. Leading up to that day, all my years of effort and seeking for this lifetime, and preceding ones as well, were bottoming out, as if I was coming to the end of the line. A total uncontrollable exhaustion swept over me and a hopeless feeling of not being able to do one more thing overtook me. It had all started decades ago with feverishly high hopes as Osho had

interrupted me in the middle of law school in my early 20's. Over the years, I added a few other teachers such as Krishnamurti, Nisargadatta, Papaji, Trungpa and Western people like Adi Da, Wilber, Grof, and Almaas. So, after approximately 20 years and thousands of books read, and countless meditations and retreats, and a multitude of psychotherapy session, what did I have to show for it? Complete exhaustion and nothing else.

I began to see that maybe my whole strategy had been wrong right from the beginning for this lifetime, and perhaps many lifetimes. I had been striving for enlightenment and happiness, and instead experiencing perpetual misery and unhappiness. It became apparent I had no choice but to give it all up, stop, and simply enjoy being in the moment with no effort and no demands. Striving and seeking seemed to be the problem.

I felt I was in a place of total hopelessness. There was literally nothing left to do. I had exhausted all techniques, read every book on the subject. And right then, effort fell away. It stopped dead. I watched myself submerge quietly, without splashing around or making a fuss, and be totally drowned in existence. Things were over for me, and I sat calmly in this place where I was no more. I relished in the painless joy of no effort. Almost immediately, I looked around and laughed. I could see eternal existence itself.....lit up in clear light and very bedazzling the eternal interconnected light, the suchness of existence. This was extremely strange though, because I had contributed no active part in the experience. This me seemed to just drop by itself, leaving behind a vast translucent stillness like a big black Titanic ship of effort falling into the horizon of the ocean, forever, gone. "Clear, brilliant, stillness", it had been called (Carse, 2006). I had visited this hundreds of times over the years but never made it my home. The grand paradox was I could see that it had been here, available all of the time. I could not see it, as I had been too busy trying to become awakened to understand it was already here. It was so simple! This is it.

Tim seemed to enjoy my personal story. I asked him, "So Tim, are you prepared to give it all up, right here, right now...accept your exhaustion and let seeking stop?" There was hesitation in his eyes. I said, "Well Tim, maybe just by standing in awareness you can see this."

Standing In Awareness

Tim was in agreement, so I carried on. "Now, the great irony is all of this seeking and coming to the end of seeking is just a preparation for the direct path of inquiry, of standing in awareness. You do not need to ride on the coattails of somebody else but can encounter existence directly, the direct path." I paused to let my words sink in, and then added, "You need to use your own awareness and higher reasoning to investigate the difference between objects that arise in awareness and awareness itself."

Goode (2009) had nicely summarized the direct path:

You examine the gross and subtle worlds, as well as the body, senses and mind. You come to see that they are experienced as objects in witnessing awareness and cannot exist apart from witnessing awareness. You then investigate the witness itself and come to see that it is an ever-so-subtle structure superimposed upon awareness. When this is realized,

the witness gently and peacefully collapses into awareness itself, which is pure consciousness. Higher reason establishes that pure consciousness is the truth of the world and your experience at every moment, and leaves you unshakably established in this truth. (p. 10)

Simplifying this even more, I said to Tim, “So, having given up seeking, we will just stand in awareness. In this moment, can you see that all you are is consciousness? That chair over there is just arising in consciousness. Every object in the world is just arising in consciousness.” Tim nodded, so I carried on. “Now can you see that your body is just an object in consciousness, temporarily arising and then fading away?” Tim smiled in agreement. “And now Tim, we can use our awareness for thoughts. You have no mind per se, just thoughts, but notice only one thought at a time. They rise and they fall away, and are only temporary arisings in consciousness.”

I let this settle in, and then stated, “So, you are really just the vast consciousness and are free in this moment.” With that, Tim seemed pleasantly surprised. He had been on a journey for 40 years, and he had never broken free to simply embrace consciousness. Now the opportunity for total freedom was right here, right now, as it has always been.

A Seeing Beyond Understanding

I continued. “Just to be clear, what is being pointed at here is beyond understanding. Intellectual understanding is important, but this is a seeing beyond time, concepts, and thoughts.” By Tim’s bewildered expression, I sensed I was losing him again. I reminded him, “Remember that no knowing we discussed a few minutes ago? Now, in that place, with open eyes, with nothing to do, and nowhere to go, just relax into the moment. Try it.”

Tim sat with his eyes partially open, in no knowing, with nothing to do, and nowhere to go. Within a few seconds I could see by the way his eyes were shining brilliantly he was fully in the experience. He laughed out loud, and said incredulously, “This is it.”

“Yes, Tim, this is it. As I said earlier, it is an open secret, and is available right here. Nothing needs to be done, it is all right here. It is just a seeing, beyond words and thoughts, a recognition right here right now, this is it. So, now we can have a cup of tea, and a good laugh at all the foolish nonsense we have gone through to get to seeing when it is all here right here, right now.” Looking at Tim, I could feel our interconnected beingness in the moment, and by the light and laughter in his eyes, he seemed to be enjoying the hilariousness of the situation as much as I was.

The Ultimate Medicine

I celebrated Tim’s realization by saying, “So, Tim, here you are and now, in this place, you have received the ultimate medicine of realizing your nightmare and problems have been illusionary. So, along with this it is easy to see that no help was necessary as your problems were illusionary, and you were actually okay all the way along! You have found your ultimate medicine of never born, never died. As Zen Master Ikkyu would say, ‘Not to come, not to go.’

And with this also is the realization that, along the way, no help was needed.” As Osho (1979) himself said:

Ikkyu calls it “the great medicine.” No help is needed. At the most you need an awakening. ...that moment, you will open your eyes and all the nightmares that you were suffering from will disappear. And the disappearance of the dream is the only way to know that which is. The disappearance of the dream is the appearance of God. (pp. 241-243)

Tim was shining in agreement. “So Tim,” I said, “this eternal now is your home and it is not dependent on anybody else.” We sat there in relaxed light and love for ten minutes and then, I sent him on his way. I knew this would be our only session as I did not want Tim to grab onto the other by using sessionwork with me as his new guru dependency. As he left, I invited him to sit in this all on his own and take his ultimate medicine by himself in celebration of his freedom.

A Concluding Note

After Tim left, I sat there in my chair chuckling to myself. In a single session, we had managed to review so many nondual pointers that had taken years in my journey to figure out. All of these pointers were an invitation for Tim to realize that it is all available right here, right now. He had only to see it for himself. Deconstructing the reliance on a teacher, letting go of effort, embracing no knowing, realizing nothing can be done, coming to the end of seeking and stopping, sitting in one’s own awareness, abiding in consciousness, and taking the ultimate medicine, are all nondual invitations for the long term seeker to see what was available all the way along. Simply: This is it.

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