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SURRENDERING AT THE END OF THE LINE: Embracing absolute hopelessness and total failurehood in nondual psychotherapy

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Summary

This article reviews how the nondual seeker comes to the point in the journey in which he or she realizes that the end of seeking is called for but instead begins to seek the end of seeking. As the experience of desperately coming to the end of the line intensifies with no resolution, the experiences of the rot, absolute hopelessness, and embracing total failurehood, can set the stage for a spontaneous giving up and letting go. In this surrender, the death of the separate self occurs, and the person can come to a place of seeing that “this is it,” it is all available right here, right now, and has been all along. A nondual psychotherapy case study illustrates the point that an invitation can be made by the nondual therapist to the client to simply rest in this state of nothing to do and nowhere to go. The temptation to run from this state, which we have been avoiding our whole lives, can be monumental. Resting in this desperate state of nothing to do can be a vital opportunity to see through the illusion of the separate self, and to know that reality has always been available, right here, right now.

Gary Nixon, Ph.D. is a transpersonal psychologist, Associate Professor, and Addictions Counselling Program Director at the University of Lethbridge. An existential crisis at the end of law school in the early 1980’s propelled Gary toward a quest for wholeness and embracement of transpersonal psychology in his Masters and PhD. Gary was particularly drawn to the nondual awakening process as outlined by Eastern spiritual teachers such as Osho, Krishnamurti, Trungpa, and Papaji, and the works of western transpersonal writers such as Wilber, and Almaas. Gary has been facilitating nondual groups over the last ten years as well as maintaining a transpersonal psychology private practice.

During three years of severe training
 Under the great master Gizan,
 Koshu was unable to gain satori.
 At the beginning of a special seven-day session of discipline,
 He thought his chance had finally come.
 He climbed the tower of the temple gate,
 And going up to the arhat images he made this vow:
 Either I realize my dreams up here,
 Or they'll find my dead body at the foot of this tower.
 He went without food or sleep, giving himself up
 To constant za-zen, often crying out things like;
 What was my karma that in spite of all these efforts
 I can't grasp the way?
 At last he admitted failure, and determined to end it all,
 He went to the railing and slowly lifted his leg over it.
 At that very instant he had an awakening.
 Overjoyed, he rushed down the stairs and through the rain
 To Gizan's room.
 Before he had a chance to speak, the master cried:
 Bravo! – you've finally had your day. (Osho, 1976a, p. 158)

The End of The Line

Many of us can be intensely seeking for years for awakening and true abidance in nondual being. Like the monk in the above story, despite all our efforts awakening escapes us. Although we might have had wondrous mystical experiences of cosmic consciousness, been in rapture and blissfulness and had moments of “liberation”, something is clearly wrong. We are stuck in our seeking whereby we begin to feel our existence is cursed or that we are paying off some looming karmic debt. Wilber (1986) called this a causal pathology problem in that the great death of the separate egoic self has not yet occurred as we are still hanging on in a subtle way to a sense of an independent, continuous self:

An inability to accept the final death of the archetypal self (which is simply the subtlest level of the separate-self sense) locks consciousness into an attachment to some aspect of the manifest realm. The Great Death never occurs, and thus Formless Consciousness fails to differentiate from or transcend the manifest realm. The fall into the Heart is blocked by the subtlest contrasting, grasping, seeking, or desiring; the final block: desire for liberation. (p. 124-125)

The problem is that there still exists a seeker. Many roads have been traveled, wondrous experiences had, but there is still some notion of the separate self of the seeker. There is still somebody trying to do all of this, to become awakened and enlightened. As Liquorman (2000) explained, there is still a sense of personal doership with the seeker. What is necessary in Papaji's (2000) view is for us to call off the search and give up our efforts. Yet, as Jed McKenna (2002) described, this takes us right where we do not want to go: “a swan dive into the abyss of no-self” (p. 7). And it is here where the rubber hits the road. Adyashanti (2008) and McKenna

(2002) both described that this awakening process reveals a change in occupancy, from the egoic self to no-self. It is the end of our world as we know it. What is required is the letting go and surrender “of one’s entire individual existence” (Carse, 2006, p.47).

Seeking the End of Seeking

It is after a long path of seeking that much trouble can start for the seeker (Foster, 2009). One of the tragic double binds we can get into, is that as we begin to warm up to the notion of the end of seeking, we start seeking the end of seeking. It can be quite a nasty situation and is reflected in my own experience. Typical of a robust seeker, I had meditated, utilizing a number of different approaches from watching the breath, to witnessing, to zazen, to embracing darkness. I had launched spiritual inquiries into the self, had explored the path of effort and effortlessness, had read hundreds of books, and done my tour through the fashionable “awakened” gurus. For me, the seeking of non-seeking seemed to touch on the edge of madness as I could see no way out of this mess. Was I to spend an eternity first seeking, and then seeking non-seeking? The mind spirals, as Foster (2009) observed:

As long as there was a separate person there looking for awakening, there was a separate person there! And that’s what I couldn’t seem to shake off: the separate person. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn’t seem to get rid of this ‘me’, this separate ‘me’. At one point, I’d seen it so clearly: as long as the “I” was there, I couldn’t awaken. So then the focus became getting rid of this ‘I’. Getting rid of the self at the root of it all. What I couldn’t see, then, was that it was a self trying to get rid of a self. Such vicious circles of thoughts! (p.55)

Adyashanti (2008) explained there is nothing that the “ I” can do even though surrender is called for:

So there comes a point where all techniques vanishes, where anything that we’ve learned about how to readjust consciousness into a clearer state will fail us. Our techniques will be of no use. There will come a point in time when we will have to realize that there’s nothing “I” can do to let go at the existential level; there’s nothing “I” can do in order to surrender. Yet surrender and letting go are absolutely what is called for. (p.152)

Thus, the seeker ends up in quite the double bind. There is nothing that the seeker can do to resolve the situation as this would entail further doing, and more “efforting” on the part of the seeker. As Foster (2009) described, it is here at this crossroad that the stage is set for the falling away of the seeker to reveal the oneness of existence that was already the case. We will now look at various end of the line processes that propel the seeker into the groundless ground in which the annihilation of the seeker can take place. These processes include: the rot, absolute hopelessness, total failurehood, and giving up. All point to a sudden realization that there is no separate self seeker and that “this is it,” as it has been all the way along. After exploring these processes, a nondual psychotherapy case study will follow to illustrate how the invitation to embrace “this” can be used with the exhausted seeker.

The Rot

Adi Da (1973) in his first set of discourses described the situation of the exhausted seeker:

When you no longer have any more options, when you have worn yourself out playing your game, and you have tried all the techniques and methods, paths and lifestyles, strategies and places to go, all the forms of concentration, whatever they are, then all of that begins to break down. You discover that you just do not have the jazz left to really carry it on anymore.... That is really the most hopeful sign. The ego is beginning to rot. (p. 69)

This is a profound opportunity. A point comes when a person realizes that all effort and grasping has been about the egoic seeking of the separate self. The whole approach has been wrong from the very beginning. It has been a crazy game and it all has to go as it is this self-containment that is at the core of human suffering.

Bonder (1998) a former disciple of Adi Da wrote of the rot:

The passage beyond hyper masculine dissociation and idealistic seeking really begins with the Rotting away of everything you have ever been able to do to better yourself, to succeed, to get what you want, to get free. More precisely, it begins with your fundamental loss of ultimate hope in all such things...As long as you have a path, as long as you have anxious hope, as long as you have a trajectory that you're traveling, an arc of growth to cultivate and defend, you are not yet prepared to encounter and embrace existence as the core wound. (pp. 49-50)

As long as you have a game that you are still hoping to play, an arc of growth to work towards and defend, you are still caught in the rot. Myself, I was shocked in my journey to spend so many years on a spiritual quest and to have only rot to show for it. All this time questing to be left with just the wound of unsatisfied expectations, longings, and misery. I had become a rotting form of pain, expectations, and desires.

I remember my shock in realizing the journey had been exclusively about me. In fact, I was the problem on this journey of egoic narcissism (Almaas, 1996). It was an ultimate trip of my specialness as I sought constantly to have total self-validation mirrored back to me. In short, the whole gig and all its various motivations were wrong from the outset as they were reflections of separate self seeking. It was an unnerving revelation to now comprehend that all my efforts had been rooted in egoic grasping. The intense seeking of awakening, all the practices and meditations I had been doing, were part of my seeking trajectory that clearly led to "rot". What this "rot" revealed to me was absolutely hopelessness, a second classical description of the seeker's double bind, which we will now explore.

Absolute Hopelessness

Sylvester (2005) likened the hopelessness at the end of seeking to being stripped of everything and then left stranded in a desert:

In the story of time a year passed by during which I was very much in the desert and still felt separate but it was no longer felt in any way that meditation or psychotherapeutic processes or transpersonal techniques had any relevance anymore.... You are without hope because it is seen that there is nothing that can move you forward. You are still unhappy but it's known now that there is no process which might bring about an end to your unhappiness. So there's no hope at all. Equally there is no help. There's no method which offers help and there's no person who can offer help. There's no belief anymore that for example sitting at the feet of the guru will somehow bring about an end to separation. The things that gave meaning to this life before are now seen to be meaningless. So hope, help and meaning are gone. (p. 4-5)

So, here in this place of profound hopelessness, nothing works. There is no technique. There is nothing to do, as everything has been tried, and only works temporarily. Understanding and techniques come and go. And now, exposed and hopeless, rather than escape from this, I accepted the invitation to just stay open, and be in this vast place of no answer, no guarantees, nothing to do. For me, discovering this hopelessness and accepting it was an opportunity to let go of a lifetime's efforts as these efforts were now revealed, in one form or another, to be separate self seeking, just "more ego." All of this egoic grasping and clutching disguised as spiritual seeking and the quest for awakening leads only to misery and suffering. This is an intense state in which to rest -- and initially a very desolate experience. It is the end of hope.

In Trungpa 's (1991) work on crazy wisdom, he pointed out that such a situation was one of absolute hopelessness in which absolute hopelessness could not be used to get somewhere. Looking for a way out is the wrong approach as, for our separate egoic selves, there is no way out of this hopeless situation. Trungpa (1991) described the process as one of giving up the hope of understanding and of finding consolation:

It is a completely hopeless situation, absolutely hopeless. We do not understand - and we have no possibility of understanding anything at all. It is hopeless to look for something, to understand, for something to discover, because there is no discovery at all at the end, unless we manufacture one... Nobody is going to comfort you, and nobody is going to help you. The whole idea of trying to find the root or some logic for the discovery of crazy wisdom is completely hopeless. There is no ground, so there is no hope. (p.84)

Even such things as hopelessness and fearlessness, if used as techniques, lead not to release but further imprisonment. We try to manufacture a situation to save us. As a result, Trungpa (1991) cautioned that hopelessness is:

Just purely hopeless. No ground, absolutely no ground... If you regard it as the path in the sense that you feel you are going to get something out of this, that won't work. There's no way out. That approach is self defeating. Hopelessness is not a gimmick. (p.88)

There is no hope for our separate self seeking. Hope has been an addiction to the illusion of salvation in the future, and as Osho (1976b) made clear, "With the disappearance of hope, future disappears. Future is nothing but the extension of hope. Future is a hope project" (p. 23). Accepting hopelessness, we now consider the total dissolution of our seeking as we see that the answer is no longer contingent upon the hope of something we may become or may do in the future. We can no longer expect a method or remedy to deliver us tomorrow. And embracing hopelessness cannot be employed as a back-door strategy either. As Adyashanti (2008) explained, it is a process similar to the addict coming to the end of personal will:

You realize that you can't change your addiction through willfulness; your will is not that strong, and you can't do it on your own. When an addict "bottoms out," what this really means is that his or her personal will has broken down. (p. 155)

As a parallel, the seeker realizes the futility of his/her seeking efforts, understanding the situation as totally hopeless and the whole seeking process has utterly broken down.

Embracing Total Failurehood

Realizing the absolute hopelessness of one's seeking can be accompanied by the sense of total failurehood, a feeling that paradoxically needs to be embraced. Adyashanti (2007) described this process as accepting that all of the seeking has been an absolute failure. You are laid bare with nothing to do, nowhere to go, and no strategies to employ. Here, at this place one sees that all this so-called 'spiritual work' has been a complete mirage. It is from this place that one sees all efforts were those of separate self dreams. The separate self was trying to succeed at 'spirituality' and going beyond itself, and yet the 'me' had utterly failed in this quest as there remained a 'me' stubbornly asserting itself in the middle of the process.

I had this experience in my own journey. After years of meditating, seeking, trying every version of non-dual secret, finessing surrender, attaining, non-attaining, and employing every strategy under the sun, I reached a point of seeing that separate self seeking was a complete failure, a total grasping of the separate self. There was nothing to do but see it for what it was based upon: "the failure" as Osho (1976a) called it. Osho (1976a) outlined this acceptance of total failurehood as a pivotal opportunity: "When you are a failure, a total failure, many things happen within you – the ego evaporates... The ego cannot exist in ultimate failure" (p. 178). In total failurehood, the illusion of 'me', trying to succeed in getting beyond the 'me', falls away. It becomes apparent the separate self ego cannot succeed at awakening despite all of its desperate efforts. Adyashanti (2007) warned that if one attempts to make total failurehood a new strategy, one is back to the same game of pursuing success, only this time through achieving total failurehood. It must be recognized nothing can be done, even failurehood, in order that all egoic strategies fall away to reveal reality as it is.

Giving Up: Letting Go of the Goal of Awakening

Out of absolute hopelessness and total failurehood, one realizes there is no answer to save a person. Nothing works. In my own experience the day arrived that I became totally exhausted, and just felt the incredible wound of seeking. I realized that there was nothing I could do. Everything I did was wrong because it was me doing it and so, on that day I gave up. But not as a technique. At that moment, I clearly understood that it was not in my control. Before that point, I had tried everything under the sun on my journey but nothing ever lasted because it was all just 'me' and my egoic grasping. So I stopped grasping. As Osho (1994) said, "Nothing is needed to be done on your part. Just be... and let things happen. Don't try to manage, don't try to manipulate. Let the breeze pass, let the sunrays come, let life dance, and let death come and have its dance into you too" (pp. 45-46). It seems very difficult for us to realize and accept that the grass grows by itself.

Pivotal to his spontaneous surrender and transformation, Adyashanti (2007) described coming to a place where he realized "I can't do this." Similarly, Paul Lowe (1998) recalled how he finally came to a place of giving up, "I never felt that intangible, deep sense of fulfillment. 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" (p. xix).

How can giving up set the stage for a dramatic shift? One realizes the futility of grasping and grabbing. Nothing can be grasped. Any answer is a grabbing. Our narcissistic selves want props to support it. A mind seeking awakening is a mind not at rest but desiring. It is a tense mind because it can't relax in this moment. It is busy trying to get somewhere. As Osho (1975) stated, "I have come to realize that there is nothing to be realized, nothing to be known, nowhere to go. This moment is enough" (p. 39). We give up as we realize there is nowhere to go. As Osho (1976b) described, this no goal state leaves us in a place of crystalline absence:

When all desires have gone and you are left alone, in that beautiful aloneness, pure aloneness, crystal clear aloneness, there is desirelessness. Not even a trace of desire.... No goal, nowhere to go. Then for the first time you live what life is. (p. 36)

Giving up the goal of enlightenment and awakening puts us right back into the present moment so we can see what actually is. The monk in the opening story came to a state of total giving up on his goal of enlightenment, which put him into the present moment for the first time. Osho (1976a) explained:

There was no greed in the mind, not even for satori. There was no ego in the mind, not even for religious achievement. The future had completely dropped, because it exists only with desires. Desire is future, longing is future. Only one longing had remained there inside him- for satori. That longing was creating future and time, that longing was the last barrier. The last barrier had dropped. Now there was no future, no desire. Only this moment existed. (p. 182)

Eventually, it is seen that seeking awakening is a tremendous barrier as this separates the

seeker from existence. By giving up and letting go, no obstacle remains as there is no longer a barrier between the seeker and existence. In letting go, we are passive and available to existence no longer demanding, searching and seeking. In giving up, we let go of our “efforting” and now are open to existence. We have the opportunity to become aware of reality as it is, and embrace “what is.” Like we saw with seeking the end of seeking, and absolute hopelessness, letting go and giving up does not work as a strategy. We must see that there are no goals and no answers. We must not make the notion of no answer or letting go our new answer or technique. It must be realized that nothing can be done.

Death of Self: A Spontaneous Surrender

So, in the moment with absolute hopelessness, and total failurehood, and letting go of the goal of awakening, I am truly at the end of the line. I have tried everything, and nothing has ultimately worked. Now I realize that holding on is only prolonging the misery. As Adyashanti (2008) laid out, this is a pivotal opportunity if a person is willing to die for the sake of truth:

In order for that to happen, it must be seen that there is no way you can do it. You must come to the end of the line; you must come to the end of your rope. Only then can spontaneous surrender happen. The only thing we can do as human beings is to see that all holding on is futile; all holding is a veiled form of rejecting who and what we really are. When you surrender the grasping at the level of the gut, it may feel like you are going to die. But you don't die; the illusion of a separate self dies. Still, it may feel like you are going to die. Only when you are willing to die for the sake of truth can that grasping truly and authentically let go. (pp. 152-153)

Here, one can see that it is time for the death of the self, which has been hanging on for a long time. As Osho (1980) encouraged, “You have known only miseries; you are a bundle of miseries and dreams and hopes and frustrations and expectations- you are a bundle of all these things. Let this bundle be drowned” (p. 234). And this is at the heart of spirituality according to Adyashanti (2008) who wrote, “Ultimately the whole of spirituality boils down to letting go of the illusion of the separate self, letting go of the way we think the world is and the way we think it should be” (p. 163).

This letting go is paradoxically not a “doing” but instead accomplished by a seeing through of the illusion of the separate self. As Sylvester (2005) explained:

Awakening for this character was a split second event. In that split second what was seen clearly was there is no-one, there is no person. The personal identity simply dropped away suddenly and completely and what was left was awareness without any person mediating it. (p.1)

Osho (1994) elaborated further that this surrender of the self is not a doing but a seeing:

Surrender is not something that you can do. If you do it, it is not surrender, because the doer is there. Surrender is a great understanding that, “I am not.”

Surrender is an insight that the ego exists not, that, “I am not separate.” Surrender is not an act but an understanding ... There is nobody to surrender! There never has been anybody to surrender.... Here is the only time, the only space. Now is the only existence. In that now, there is surrender. (p.41-42)

Thus, even after a long journey, I see in this moment there is no separate self, and realize that there never was a separate self.

Seeing It Is Just This

As relayed in Osho's (1976a) monk story, one can totally relax into the stillness of the moment, and realize it is all right here, right now, nowhere to go, and life is beautiful:

At the moment when Koshu lifted his leg slowly, all time stopped- no past, no future; no past because life had been realized as useless; no future because there was no longing, even for satori. That leg lifted up, time stopped. That leg lifted up, mind stopped-because there was nothing to achieve, nothing to think. At that moment he crossed out of time. At that moment he transcended time. At that moment his being became vertical, no longer horizontal. No more past, no more future-all the waste disappeared. At that moment of lifting, not only did he lift his leg, his whole being was lifted up. The vertical dimension started. And suddenly, there was satori. (p. 182)

No past. No future. Just this moment. The whole journey has been a mirage as nondual being has been always already here from the beginning. Spiritual growth and seeking has been a grand illusion as there was no place to go, nor has there ever been. All our efforts were in fact an avoidance of what is. It has all been a ridiculous affair. As Osho (1978) explained:

There is nothing to grow to, there is nowhere to go to, there is no goal. To think of goals is to think of toys. Spiritual growth, spiritual evolution, spiritual progress, all is just holy cow dung. You are already there where you want to go, so you can never reach if you try to reach there. Because you are already there---the very effort is ridiculous, it is absurd. Hence so much misery in the world, because you are trying to reach somewhere you are already. Naturally you cannot reach. Not reaching, you become panicky. Not reaching, you become more and more frustrated. Not reaching, you become more and more ridden with anxiety and anguish. Not reaching, you start creating a hell around yourself-that you are a failure, that you are nobody. The more desperate you are, the more effort you make to reach. You cannot reach where you already are. (pp. 74-75)

So, here I am in absolute hopelessness and total failurehood, with nothing to do, and nowhere to go, and here in this moment it is obvious, it is all here. The miracle is just “this”.

Foster (2009) eventually realized that what he was seeking was already here, just “this”. His efforts at grasping had been getting in the way:

What was seen so clearly was that it was already here, already complete. The awakening, Oneness, whatever you want to call it, was already here. But it wasn't something that I could have. It couldn't be possessed, it couldn't be grasped. And it was in the grasping, in the attempt to possess it, that I'd apparently lost it. (p. 56)

And so, this leaves us right here, right now. People try to reach, and in their striving they continue to miss the mark. As Parsons (2000) recognized, the open secret is "All that is is this right now, and this is the infinite expression- there is no other" (p. 85). So, the search took us on a wild goose chase only to eventually deliver us back to this moment.

We now turn to regard how nondual psychotherapy may be used as an invitation for the seeker at the end of the line to let go and embrace "this".

A Nondual Psychotherapy Case Study: The Invitation

Colin (pseudonym) came to our psychotherapy session, desperate. Nothing was working anymore. He had been on a journey for many years, and had done many meditative practices. He had been one of the early members who worked with Eckhart Tolle (1997) and his insightful teachings on the power of now. Colin had embraced the "waking down" process of Saniel Bonder (1998), and had gone to the workshops of many other touring nondual teachers. In more recent years, he had some profound moments with a nondual teacher in which he was able to embrace formless consciousness in the moment. These experiences were more a form of unity consciousness however, as they occurred while sitting with his teacher. Curiously, he had never experienced nondual opening on his own. Presently he was in a situation where he felt desperately trapped in the limbo land of having had some profound opening up experiences, but was also stuck in his seeking. Colin was starting to realize nothing worked any more. All he had to show for his efforts was the rot that Adi Da (1973) and Bonder (1998) talked about. So, despite that we lived in different cities, he requested a nondual session with me. I was more than happy to oblige him.

As we sat together, he continued to talk about his frustration, and how he had tried everything and nothing worked. He described the situation as "very screwed up." Yet even in his panic and desperation, he felt there might be somebody in eastern Canada who could 'help' him. Rather than coming up with "yet" another plan, I asked him to simply sit in this place that he had been trying to avoid. As Adyashanti (2007) described, the typical response in this situation is to run like hell. We come up with another desperate strategy, another plan, another teacher, another book....

I presented Colin with the invitation, "Nothing can be done, and there is no place to go. There is nothing you can do to save yourself. Give up, let go, stop trying." As Osho (1978) stated, "Maturity is to know that nothing can be done. Maturity is acceptance of existence as it is" (p.73). Expanding on my invitation, I said to Colin, "There is nothing that the mind can do. Nothing can be done as there is no answer for the mind. The situation is absolutely hopeless; there is nothing you can do to save yourself." As Colin heard these words he was noticeably slowed down, something he reported he had been missing over the last few months. He also said

that he felt lots of energy: the vastness of existence was beginning to flow through him.

Looking closely at Colin though, I could still feel his desperation. “He is still searching for a grand answer to rescue him out of his dilemma,” I thought to myself. I invited him to look right here, right now, to see that he was seeking. “You are still seeking some answer,” I said. “What if you allow that there is nothing that you can do? That you have been seeking your whole life, and now you’re screwed, nothing works, and there is no answer? Just let that in, Colin. There is no answer. It is totally hopeless. Stop trying to save yourself as nothing can be done. There is no answer.” I sat back and watched the magnitude of horror distort his features. His mind seemed to be still spinning to try and come up with some answer. I repeated to him, “It is hopeless, there is no answer.”

I could feel the black horror of the moment as suddenly Colin’s mind started to confront itself in the realization that there was no answer the mind could produce. But in this intense chaotic moment, with his mind spinning, he suddenly seemed to be able to accept the news. It was as if his mind stopped struggling, and the black, annihilating abyss energy abruptly shifted into what Almaas (1996) called the loving black chasm of being.

A smile broke over Colin’s face. He realized he could let it all go and was okay in this space, relinquishing his mind’s effort to find an answer, while also accepting the hopelessness of finding a remedy. Colin told me he could see that he had been seeking and trying to find an answer for a very long time, but now he realized that there was no answer for his seeking. He rested in serene beingness, laughing at himself and his goal of finding an answer. We sat for fifteen minutes in sublime silence and then he said to me with a soft smile, “There is nothing more needed, this is it.” I laughed and confirmed his insight. Colin had clearly been able to accept my invitation in the session.

As Adyashanti (2007) described, all seekers eventually come back to a place of being on their knees on the floor, a total failure, as nothing has worked. The actual trick is to not move away from this place of failurehood and hopelessness but rather remain with nothing to do and nowhere to go. When the seeker no longer “efforting” and trying to succeed, reality has a chance to present itself.

This is the place where Colin and I rested – and the continual invitation that I left with Colin was for him to see that nothing can be done and there is nowhere to go, just be present in this place of utter desperation, and resist the temptation to embark on another plan or ploy to save himself. See what is. And as I wrapped up the session with Colin, I realized that although we had a breakthrough together, it was now his turn to sit in his aloneness, and let go of all seeking and just be present and see what emerges. Could he sit in this place of the desert with no answer? Or would he succumb to the temptations as others do, running like hell to find some technique or something else to grab onto? In this moment I understood that my invitation to Colin was embraced. The question was, could he accept the invitation in the next moment as well?

A Concluding Note

I have not heard from Colin since that day. I suspect that there were still a few more strategies and books up his sleeve, and that my invitation was something soon forgotten. Foster (2009) commented it was in the total desperation of his seeking that the seeker dropped away and life revealed itself. We cannot know if this, too, will be Colin's destiny. At some point, the rot, absolute hopelessness and total failurehood of seeking can set the stage for the annihilation of the seeker and the revelation that all is this right here, right now. As we saw with the opening story about the monk, the seeker at some point gets exhausted with all strategies of doing, and faces the end of the line, and in this state of surrender reality reveals itself. However, as we saw with Colin in nondual psychotherapy, the invitation can merely be extended, it is up to each person to sit in the state that we would all rather avoid, where there is no hope, only total failurehood, and in that spontaneous surrender, the illusion of the separate self is seen through, and reality reveals itself.

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