

Ramana Interviewed In Tiruvannamalai

Part 1: Prior to Papaji

My name is Chris Boys, and I am sitting with Ramana on the roof of his flat in Tiruvannamalai on a beautiful December day. We have a perfect view of the sacred mountain Arunachala, which is close to both our hearts. I will be talking to Ramana about his life and about his work teaching what he calls “Radical Awakening.”

When you look back over your life, Ramana, what were the major influences and events that led you to the work of Radical Awakening, as well as to your own shift in consciousness?

Grace awarded me with good teachers, people who pointed me in the right direction. They have been the most important influence in my life. Their wisdom, care and guidance nurtured my growth and the development of my work.

When did your interest in the spiritual begin?

From very early on, for as long as I can remember, the one thing that has been present in my life is a faith in prayer. When I was young I related to something greater than myself through prayer. Now I know that the something greater is consciousness, but then I called it God.

I was brought up primarily by my grandfather, who was a Buddhist. He was a householder, a loving, quiet and pious man. The focus of his relationship to God was worship and prayer. That was his practice, and very early it was instilled in me. He was my first teacher.

My mother was a Christian; so in addition to being strongly influenced by my grandfather and Buddhism, I attended a Christian school and was also attracted to Christ. Christ was important to me in the way Buddha was. He was a great force, one to worship and pray to, and there were benefits from doing so. The power of prayer and worship has always been important to me. I still have a strong love of the devotional.

Did you feel any conflict between Buddhism and Christianity?

I didn't understand why at the Christian school they said, “Thou shall not bow to any graven images.” There were booklets for the children with pictures of the Buddha, which illustrated him as an example of idol worship. But I would look at the guy on the cross, to whom everyone was bowing and praying, and think, “This looks like some kind of graven image to me. He may not be sitting down like the Buddha, but what's the difference?” This didn't really bother me, though, because what was important was the devotion I knew, and the heart opening and feeling of real connection. There was the sense that I was never alone, that there was something great – grand even – and it was nurturing me through the whole of my youth.

How much time would you spend with your grandfather?

My parents said that I was like his shadow.

You say that you knew there was a power greater than yourself, nurturing you through your youth. What was your youth like?

There were the common challenges that everyone has growing up – family difficulties, family

dynamics, fitting in with friends. But there was something deeper. There was an innate sense that somehow I was different. I wasn't able to find any common ground for this sense of being different. Nothing I read and nobody I knew reflected what I was feeling. Unfortunately, the sense of difference began to translate to "Something's wrong with me, and I don't fit in." Around the age of twelve I felt like I was on some planet where I didn't belong. I later realized that there were other people who also felt different.

When did you find common ground with others?

In my mid-teens. Till then there hadn't been any conscious self-reflection on my part, only a feeling. In high school the things others were interested in – sports and social activities – didn't interest me. I became something of a recluse. I was suffering, and knew I was suffering.

During my junior year I found a forum for my feelings. My humanities teacher, Robert Frye, was a student of Fritz Perls, the founder of Gestalt Therapy. I remember I walked into his class and immediately recognized that Mr. Frye was different as well. I knew I didn't fit in, and I recognized that in some way he didn't fit in either. There was a mutual recognition on our parts, in fact. And even though he was just my humanities teacher, he also became my personal tutor and mentor.

Later I learned that he had terminal cancer. Often that kind of situation, a terminal illness, can push someone to search for deeper meaning in life and take risks. If you know that you are only going to live for three or four years, then you are going to do what you want and not care about conventions. He took a lot of risks. He held encounter groups.

In your high school class?

Yes, he conducted awareness/encounter groups and combined them with Gestalt Therapy. To create the setting he would often close the curtains, put us in a circle holding hands and have us speak our innermost feelings. The setting had a purpose: it created a sense of safety where we could explore and express other parts of ourselves. We met once a day for an hour, for two years. The time afforded an immersion into this exploration of the different aspects of ourselves. For a high-school humanities class in 1967, that was over the top.



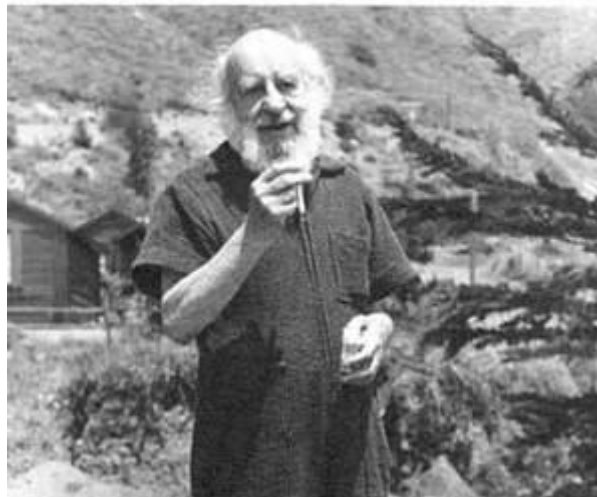
Robert Frye

How did you and your fellow students respond to this?

Most people thought he was wacky, but I loved it.

There is a premise in Gestalt therapy: that if you join all the pieces of something to form a whole, the whole will be greater than the sum of the parts. There is synergy; something new and dynamic emerges. *Gestalt* is the new wholeness. Fritz Perls asserted that in human growth *gestalt* is only possible if all parts of the person are included. Many of these parts are suppressed. They become unconscious due to trauma and the mechanisms of repression and defense. So, much of *Gestalt Therapy* is about discovering and opening up the suppressed parts of one's self.

In Mr. Frye's class the parts of myself that had no voice, the feeling of being lost and confused, the parts of myself that were just crying for deeper meaning, finally had a voice. I wasn't exactly getting the answers to my questions about life, but just being able to express myself and my yearning for Truth was a tremendous relief. I discovered others also thought and felt as I did, that I was not alone in my feelings of isolation, that at some level these feelings are common to everyone. For the first time in my life I felt a real affinity with others.



Fritz Perls

During this time – it was 1967, my junior year in high school, and I was living in the San Francisco Bay area – a spiritual and cultural revolution was occurring. This revolution was a living experiment in alternative lifestyles. The hub was the intersection of Haight and Ashbury Streets in San Francisco. Young people from all over the country were moving there. At one point the media coined the term “the hippy revolution.” An explosion was occurring that redefined politics, spirituality, the arts and sexuality. Joining everything together was the music, the “San Francisco sound,” and also Eastern philosophies. I think in 1967 or '68 the Beatles went to India and met Maharishi Mahesh Yogi.

It was the winter of 1967. I remember because I started Transcendental Meditation early in 1968, and then I met two teachers who'd returned from Rishikesh and had met the Beatles there that winter.

Yes, there was a keen interest in spirituality, and many teachers were emerging. My first spiritual teacher was Stephen Gaskin, a former linguistics teacher at San Francisco State, turned hippie drug Guru. He was fascinating, mixing insight and down-home country wisdom. His overly tall and skinny frame was accentuated by his long stringy hair and wispy blond beard, which he unconsciously stroked whenever he seriously considered a question. A true vanguard of the hippy lifestyle, Stephen lived out of a psychedelic converted school bus, participating in a four-way marriage with his two wives and husband. He was someone whom almost everyone trusted immediately. Marijuana and LSD were his holy sacraments.

He held what he called a “Monday Night Class” at the Family Dog Auditorium, where rock

concerts were held on the weekends. In these three-hour classes he would give dissertations on the world's different spiritual texts, discoursing on the *I Ching*, the *Koran*, the *Bible*, the *Tao Te Ching* and others. He'd give a dissertation, and then people could ask questions. Stephan had a real command of the scriptures and also would draw from a wide spectrum of life experience.

His class was no academic affair. Most of us smoked marijuana and took LSD during the class. The expanded state of awareness the substances afforded brought new understanding and depth to the teachings. We would start each class by chanting Om for fifteen or twenty minutes. Even now it is hard to recall an experience as completely enveloping as 2000 of us chanting together. I knew without a doubt that Om is the substratum of every manifest form.

How old were you at the time?

I was sixteen.

How did you react to the classical spiritual texts?

Stephen's classes were like nectar. All of a sudden, it was "Oh my God, there is actually a whole world, a whole universe. Here I can spend a lifetime going to the depth of what a human is, what God is, what our place in the universe is." But it wasn't until I met Suzuki Roshi that I began a spiritual practice.



Stephen Gaskin

How did you hear of Suzuki Roshi?

From Stephen. One night he said, "There is a man here who has the clearest mind I have ever encountered." He talked about a Zen monk, Suzuki Roshi, who was in our area. Suzuki Roshi was one of the first Zen monks to come to the U.S. He was giving a meditation class in Menlo Park, a suburb of San Francisco.

Is he the author of Zen Mind, Beginners Mind?

Yes, it was a very popular book. Even now, decades later, that book is still popular.

I attended some of Suzuki Roshi's meditation classes. Through meditation I often came to a space of peace and resting. The whole thing – the racket of the mind – would sort of stop for a while, and I'd go into a place where my questions were answered through direct experience of peace and expansiveness.

Was he teaching classical Zazen? I've heard that is tough meditation.

He had modified his approach for Westerners. At that time in Japan the people who had a sitting Zazen practice were primarily monks, and the practice was very strict. They would sit long hours, and the Master hit them with a stick when they lost their focus during meditation. For lay people the approach to their religion was mostly devotional. They would go to temple and pray and give money to the monks to give them blessings. It was rare for lay people to sit Zazen. In the West Suzuki Roshi met lay people who wanted a formal meditation practice. Evidently, he had discovered that strict traditional practice was not suited for such people, and so he loosened it up over time. By the time I came to him he was no longer using the Zen stick. Meditation was simply sitting in a quiet place and going within. Once a week we would go to a house in Menlo Park, and he would introduce people to sitting practice.

Honestly, at the time I did not grasp the essence of Zazen. For me it was simply a practice where my consciousness could, for the first time, go to a space that was quiet and expansive. But that is not the essence of Zen. Zen is not just a means of repose into a silent place, or a withdrawal from the outer world to the inner; rather, it is a way of realizing pure awareness, where all experience of subject-object relationship disappears into a void. This realization then informs and guides thought and actions. Life becomes an expression of the timeless, undivided, unfolding moment. It was not until my radical awakening with Papaji that I came to know this experience.

With Suzuki Roshi I was not really ready for a spiritual practice; it was too disciplined for me. I mean, I was in my teens, and the scene in the Bay area was so kinetic and alive. Naturally I was exploring it. There were concerts from Thursday to Sunday at the Fillmore and Winterland Ballrooms – the Grateful Dead, Janis Joplin, Jimmy Hendrix, the Jefferson Airplane, the Who. I loved hanging out at Haight-Ashbury.

Can you say something about Suzuki Roshi, what kind of man he was?

To be with him was like having *darshan*. I remember the first time I saw him; I was watching him walk into a room and sit down in a dining hall and eat a bowl of rice. It was total meditation for him, and he brought me right into that meditation. The biggest gift – more than his teaching and more than meditation – was he himself. His transmission was my first exposure to the power of a living teacher. It was important for me to see that Reality could be embodied. It is one thing to read a book that talks about consciousness; it is another to share the energy of someone who is the living presence of that.



Suzuki Roshi

I know that during that time in the Bay Area there was a lot of political and social unrest – peace marches, demonstrations and riots. I remember that many political activists criticized people in the spiritual movement, saying that meditation was just a way of escaping reality. Did you encounter this, and if so, how did you address this criticism for yourself?

I saw no conflict. I never felt that the “everything-is-already-perfect” philosophy presented in Eastern thought means we are not to take action. I would occasionally experience in meditation that somehow things *are* fundamentally perfect as they are. But along with this experience I would find an increased sense of clarity, and too, an opening in my heart to the circumstances of others. I knew compassion for others.

During the latter part of high school and after graduating, I was politically active. I felt the war in Vietnam was morally wrong. My military draft number was near the top of the government call list; it seemed certain I was going to war. I took part in the marches and moratoriums against the war, and made a public stand that I would not personally participate in it. Based on my convictions, as well as the help of some very supportive people, I was one of the few in my area to be granted conscientious objector status.

Mr. Frye took me to a service at Glide Memorial Church. Glide was like no other church. The Afro-American minister, Reverend Cecil Williams, had close affiliations with the Black Panther Party. His sermons were called "Tellin It Like It Is" and were accompanied by a rock band with light show. At the end of the sermon we all raised our hands and chanted, “Right on ... Riiiiight on!” to the loud electric music. A special treat was that every Easter Taj Mahal would perform.



Reverend Cecil Williams and his wife Janice

Rev. Williams enjoyed a measure of freedom in his church’s programs because of a large sum of money that had been donated by a politically active radical. The Glide Foundation was formed with the money, with which it funded politically active and radical programs. One such program was a four-day workshop called the Glide Sex and Drug Forum.

I attended the workshop. I had no idea what I was in for. I walked into the training room, and in a circle around the room were placed ten screens simultaneously showing movies of women and men, men and men, women and women, even people with animals, in every type of sexual act imaginable. I and others sat in the middle of the room watching these screens for nine hours. By the end of the day I felt that there was no sexual act that I could not confront or talk about.

What was your initial reaction to seeing these films?

I was in shock, but after an hour or so I became more curious. I found that some of them were a turn on, and others that initially were very difficult to watch, I could now view more easily. It is interesting actually: the thing functioned like a weird Zen Koan. Some of the films just stopped my mind. Then gradually I could think about them. And the thoughts I did have lacked emotional charge or provincial edge. I would look at the films of bestiality, for example, and simply think, “These are weird and not my cup of tea.”

Glide also sponsored supplying food to the American Indians when they occupied Alcatraz Prison. They had done so as a public statement against their native lands having been taken from them.

It was during my association with Glide that I became involved in a program it funded called Alternative Futures. This program had been started by a group of radical seminarians from a Paulist Seminary in Berkeley. It was housed in a flat in San Francisco, where people lived and worked as a commune. They created a project called The Urban Plunge, where they gathered representatives from different freedom movements – Black Power, Chicano, as well as representatives from the feminist and gay movement – and conducted a weekend workshop. The participants were white, upper-middleclass people who lived in the richer suburbs of San Francisco. They were “plunged” into the urban environment and showed what it was like in the slums.

I took the weekend workshop, and my eyes were opened to something totally different – to the whole aspect of political oppression and how it was happening all over the world. After the workshop I moved into the household and joined Alternative Futures as a full-time staff member for a year. I also taught at a free school – an alternative high school that was open to gifted minority and underprivileged students. I taught improvisation theater, which was one of my hobbies/studies in college.

An awareness of political oppression in the world is still a part of me, and stands as a backdrop to my spiritual life.

Did you continue your spiritual pursuits?

Yes, although I was not searching spiritually during that time. But something emerged spontaneously. On a visit to Big Sur I inadvertently encountered a self-proclaimed American Taoist monk. I met him one evening while he was sitting next to a fire on the beach. He said that he was living a Taoist lifestyle, which was simple and close to nature. He showed me the cave where he lived and the seaweed he cooked for food. He would not give me his name, saying it was unimportant.

We spent the next day together walking and talking with the magnificence of the Pacific Ocean in the background. He shared with me how all things can be learned from nature, by observing her rhythms and ways, and therefore there wasn't a need for teachers or teachings. The spiritual work in Taoism, he explained, is to live closely in alignment with nature and to flow with the harmony that is inherent in it.

When we parted company, he pulled out of his shoulder pouch a ruffled piece of paper and handed it to me. He explained it was a verse from the *Tao Te Ching*, the Chinese prose-text that attempts to describe the indescribable. I memorized the verse on the spot. It had such an impact, that I still remember it:

*The Tao can be found in one who sits by a fire,
takes long walks in the woods,*

*and is good to children.
The Tao is like the man who is wading across
a cold stream in the winter:
hesitant and demure.
While others enjoy their possessions,
he lazily drifts,
doing nothing,
owning nothing,
always moving closely to the land.
He does not seem to be making his way in the world.
He is different.
A wise infant
nursing on the breast of all life
inside.*

I was smitten by this man, and within two weeks I wrapped up my affairs in the Bay Area to live in Big Sur and spend more time with him. I knew he was a gift. My girlfriend and I moved there together. We found a vacant spot behind some bushes on a deserted bluff overlooking the ocean and built a small Indian teepee on it. We spent many long days over the next nine months, sharing food and conversation with him. His simplicity, patience and warmth reminded me of my grandfather. My lady and I set out to live a Taoist lifestyle. We tried the seaweed fare but found we needed to supplement it with local food. So we started playing music together for money, she on flute and backup vocals, and myself on guitar and vocals. This was part of our way of harmonizing with our environment. For the first time in my life I found how truly happy I could be, possessing almost nothing.

You seemed to have packed an amazing amount of life experience into the time after graduating high school. Did you continue your formal education?

After Big Sur I went to start college again to study music, and then changed my major from music to psychology and then to humanities.

What is humanities? I actually don't know.

It is the study of human thought and culture, and includes philosophy, literature and art. I graduated with an undergraduate degree in humanities from New College in San Francisco.

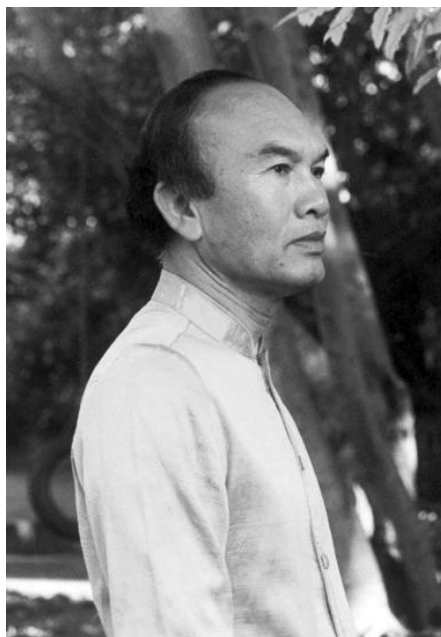
I can see how you would have chosen the subject, because in a way that is what you had been living.

Yes, in my studies I was able to reflect more rigorously on my lifestyle. The emphasis of my life was the spiritual search. After college I was introduced to a Vietnamese Theravada Buddhist monk who taught *Vipassana* meditation. His name was Dhiravamsa. The practice in *Vipassana* is to sit and watch all arising feelings and thoughts, and learn not to be identified with them. Not identifying with them opens the space to discover that which is observing them – awareness itself.

You follow the breath in Vipassana, correct?

The breath is the anchor point; it is the place to return to when your mind wanders from the task. The purpose of meditation is not to be identified with the changing nature of the body-mind. When there is no identification, there is freedom to experience pure awareness.

Dhiravamsa had an interesting take on things. He felt – much like Fritz Perls did – that a lot of repressed subjective content would arise in meditation and that it needed expression. Specifically, that repressed content is held in the body, and that without giving it bodily release, it remains. He also discovered that *Vipassana* meditation activates this suppressed material. To address this he combined Bioenergetics with meditation.



Dhiravamsa

Bioenergetics is the body-based psychotherapy developed by Alexander Lowen, a student of Willhem Reich. Bioenergetics deals directly with the energy of the body. Energy running through the body that is related to emotions is given expression and released. Dhiravamsa was a Bioenergetics therapist. He would hold ten-day meditation retreats. During the retreats we would meditate, but there were breaks and we would do Bioenergetics. We would be screaming and laughing and crying, rolling around on the floor, and then go and meditate again.

At the time, and for a period of many years, my approach to spirituality was much influenced by the idea that subjective content – knots in the psyche – must be dealt with if spiritual practice is to deepen. I understood that these knots obstruct or divert one's spiritual energy. Spiritual practice liberates a great deal of energy in the body-mind, but almost immediately it goes into dramatizing old emotional patterns. My understanding was that these knots obstruct or divert one's spiritual energy, and I was exploring ways to unwind them in order to liberate energy for spiritual practice. My exposure to Ken Keyes exponentially quickened this exploration.

How did you come to learn of Ken Keyes?

In 1976 my longtime best friend Bob Williams introduced me to Ken. I was surprised to find that Ken was a quadriplegic. When I met him, he was sitting contently in his wheelchair with a serene smile on his face. I later came to find out that in his mid-twenties he had been unexpectedly struck with polio, right in the middle of his burgeoning career as one of the biggest real-estate brokers in Florida. He had been famous for his parties and carousing, which took place on his 48-foot luxury yacht. His illness forced him to turn inward to find meaning for how such a handsome and successful man could have been struck down at such an early age. He used his fortune to search the world for teachers and answers. The culmination of his journeys landed him in Berkeley, California, as a self-proclaimed guru of the spirit and heart, in his ashram, which he called the Living Love Center.

The Living Love Center offered a 90-day residential program. He implemented in the program

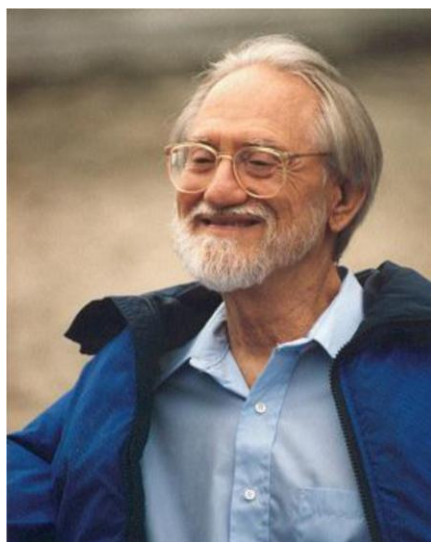
“The Twelve Pathways to Higher Consciousness,” a vehicle used to “reprogram” the aspects of ourselves that cause suffering in our daily lives.

I read Ken’s book *The Handbook to Higher Consciousness* and I was hooked. Bob was already living at the center and enthusiastically reporting the results of his participation in the program. At the time, I had a well-paying job as a cable-television technician and lived in a rich suburb of San Francisco, the very area we used to target for participants of the Urban Plunge. I was also playing *doumbek*, a Middle Eastern drum, in a belly-dancing troupe that my girlfriend was part of. But I felt my life was stagnant because of the lack of spiritual depth. So I quit my job with General Electric Cablevision, moved back to Berkeley and enrolled in the Living Love Center’s 90-day residential program.

This program was an experiment in letting go of attachments. Ken set up situations in which we were required to let go of our attachments, or suffer. For example, the first part of the program addressed our attachment to personal space. We were housed in a small space called the Govinda room, where thirty-three of us lived and slept for one month. Mattresses were lined on the floor just inches from each other, with only a small walkway between them. We shared one bathroom. To further aggravate our demand for personal space, Ken orchestrated “the partners game.” We drew lots out of a hat, and each of us was paired with another person. We were joined with our partner at the wrist with a silk scarf for a period of seventy-two hours. I was pleasantly surprised to be paired with a stunning woman from the group, but soon my need for personal space was pushed to the limit.

Ken was a crafty son of a gun. He liked to keep us off balance. There was a period where he encouraged us to explore experimental relationships. During that period I had my own room, sharing it with two women lovers. I was sandwiched between two beautiful women every night. The three of us fell in love and freely expressed our love. At the height of this triad of bliss, Ken suddenly imposed a monastic, celibate lifestyle.

To deal with the stress that arose from the enforced conditions of the program, each day we participated in Ken’s “Afternoon Training Sessions.” Ken’s understanding was that our negative responses to our new environment are really the result of past traumatic incidents. These incidents have been infused with a high degree of emotional charge, and remain locked in the psyche. It is the *intensity* that causes the conditioned behavior. He theorized that if one were able to regenerate the emotional intensity of the original incident, only then would it be possible to reprogram our behavior.



Ken Keyes

His approach seems to have parallels with Primal Therapy.

No, it was actually quite different.

Let me explain: In Primal Therapy and other similar emotional psychotherapies, the intensity of the original incident is relived and then the system is expected to normalize, basically of its own accord. The body-mind is understood to be a self-righting mechanism in that respect. Ken's approach was literally about reprogramming, and using intensity as the means for reprogramming. His approach was totally unique, and I have never encountered anything else like it.

Ken's 12 Pathways are affirmative statements, which each reflect an aspect of a basic truth designed to bring awareness at times when we are unconscious and suffering. His concept is that people need something practical and immediate to help them through life's everyday trials. Because of the conditions Ken designed in the 90-day program to bring up our personal issues, we were all brimming with pent-up, unresolved emotions. The afternoon trainings were the space for us to vent our frustrations. With all of the energy of our pent-up emotions we screamed an appropriate pathway as a means to reprogram our minds. The afternoon trainings were a sight to behold. We would pick one of the 12 Pathways that was appropriate to our situation and scream it at the top of our lungs – "I am freeing myself from security, sensation and power addictions that make me try to forcefully control situations in my life, and thus destroy my serenity and keep me from loving myself and others."

Thirty-three people screaming at the top of their lungs. This screaming soon became a problem for the neighbors. To remedy the situation Ken issued each of us "reprogramming buckets," which were small plastic garbage cans with a large sponge placed at the bottom. We'd stick our heads inside the bucket, isolating the sound of our screams. The sponge also helped to absorb the sound. I'll never forget the many times I was handed a reprogramming bucket, wet with someone else's tears and nasal mucus, and then sticking my head in it. Sometimes I thought that alone was enough to evidence complete nonattachment.

I know that Ken's work was based on Buddha's Four Noble Truths. Can you explain how this worked?

Ken's 12 pathways to higher consciousness were tooled as an alternative way to actualize Buddha's Four Noble Truths. To explain exactly how it works, I include below Buddha's Four Noble Truths, as well as Ken's 12 Pathways:

Buddha's Four Noble Truths

- 1) *Suffering exists.*
- 2) *Suffering arises from attachment to desires.*
- 3) *Suffering ceases when attachment to desire ceases.*
- 4) *Freedom from suffering is possible by practicing the Eightfold Path: right perspective, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right contemplation.*

Ken Keyes' 12 Pathways to Higher Consciousness

1. *I am freeing myself from security, sensation, and power addictions that make me try to forcefully control situations in my life, and thus destroy my serenity and keeps me from loving myself and others.*
2. *I am discovering how my consciousness dominating addictions create my illusory version of the changing world of people and situations around me.*
3. *I welcome the opportunity (even if painful) that my minute-to-minute experience*

offers me to become aware of the addictions I must reprogram to be liberated from my robot-like, emotional patterns.

4. *I always remember that I have everything I need to enjoy my here and now – unless I am letting my consciousness be dominated by demands and expectations based on the dead past or the imagined future.*
5. *I take full responsibility here and now for everything I experience, for it is my own programming that creates my actions and also influences the reactions of people around me.*
6. *I accept myself completely here and now and consciously experience everything I feel, think, say and do (including my emotion-backed addictions) as a necessary part of my growth into higher consciousness.*
7. *I open myself genuinely to all people by being willing to fully communicate my deepest feelings, since hiding in any degree keeps me stuck in my illusion of separateness from other people.*
8. *I feel with loving compassion the problems of others without getting caught up emotionally in their predicaments that are offering them messages they need for their growth.*
9. *I act freely when I am tuned in, centered and loving, but if possible, I avoid acting when I am emotionally upset and depriving myself of the wisdom that flows from love and expanded consciousness.*
10. *I am continually calming the restless scanning of my rational mind in order to perceive the finer energies that enable me to intuitively merge with everything around me.*
11. *I am constantly aware of which of the Seven Centers of Consciousness I am using, and I feel my energy, perceptiveness, love and inner peace growing as I open all of the centers of consciousness.*
12. *I am perceiving everyone, including myself, as an awakening being who is here to claim his or her birthright to the higher consciousness planes of unconditional love and oneness.*

Buddha's Noble Truth number 4 gives a prescription of how one can let go of the attachment that causes suffering. This truth addresses the real "rub:" How does one give up something that one really wants? The Eightfold Path requires that you put all parts of your life in order: your job, your thinking, a meditation practice, speaking and acting properly in all situations, making the right actions, as well as always being conscious. A tall order, maybe even impossible, but the devout Buddhist makes every effort to do what seems like the impossible. In an insane world that does not support these efforts, it is often recommended in Buddhism to cloister yourself with others who share the same beliefs.

On the other hand, Ken gave a solution in which the present upsetting situation is used to indicate to you what needs to be reprogrammed in order for you to let go of the attachment. Ken's method was to first link the suffering with the attachment – rather than anything about the situation or people involved in your upset – and then to get fully in touch with the pain of that suffering. The emotional energy contacted is then linked with one of the 12 Pathways that shed light on the suffering. The theory is that the pure force of the emotion affirming the pathway will reprogram the old conditioned pattern that caused the suffering. For instance, if you are really upset about a situation at work that is no longer bearable, you get in touch with the pain of that situation, and affirm pathway number 3 into your reprogramming bucket, screaming at the top of your lungs: "I

welcome the opportunity (even if painful) that my minute-to-minute experience offers me to become aware of the addictions I must reprogram to be liberated from my robot-like emotional patterns."

Did this stuff actually work?

It depends on what you mean by working. I participated in Ken's programs for almost three years. I noticed that over that time many situations that previously upset me no longer did. In many ways I carried far less attachments than before. Did it clear all of my attachments? Far from it. But I felt it was the most effective tool that I had at the time. But I have always been, until recently, under the "carpenter's philosophy;" that is, if you only have one tool in your tool chest – a hammer – then as a carpenter, you are limited to hammering nails. I was always looking for other tools, and the Living Love Center was a perfect place for that. The Center was a hub of spiritual and New Age thought. Teachers, Lamas and gurus from all over the world presented their work there. As a staff member of the center, I was privy to all that was offered. I studied Kundalini Yoga, visualization, Tibetan Rites, Tantra, Mind Dynamics, rebirthing, as well as other types of meditation and yogic practices.

Eventually, I took a special interest in the field of biofeedback. I trained for two years in biofeedback and became certified and worked in a private practice as a biofeedback therapist. During my training in biofeedback I was introduced to Werner Erhard, an ex-Scientologist and Mind Dynamics instructor. Werner was a charismatic, brilliant individual. He had developed his own training called *est*, which synthesized parts of Scientology with Mind Dynamics and put them in a Zen Buddhist context.

I understand you took the est training early on in the '70's.

In 1976 I took the *est* training. I was blown out by this four-day, 60-hour experience; it was such a brilliant and effective piece. I was fascinated how Werner brought people to the space of *sunyata* (emptiness) and thereby enabled them to disidentify themselves as primarily the personality/body-mind. This early introduction into a type of enquiry laid some of the foundation for my later understanding of Ramana Maharshi's self-inquiry.

So Werner was doing atma vichara? [Both laugh.]

No, but it had its parallels. *Atma vichara* investigates thinking and specifically the root thought – "I." Ramana Maharshi would ask people to enquire, "Who am I?" This enquiry was most often recommended in the context of meditation practice. For example, if thoughts arise in meditation, Ramana first instructs the practitioner to ask, "To whom do these thoughts arise?" The answer is "They arise to me, to 'I'." The second part of the enquiry is to investigate the subject itself – "Who is this 'I'?" or "From whence does it arise?" This question, however, is left completely open. It is a process in consciousness itself and not to be answered by the verbal mind. In fact, Ramana was once asked if *atma vichara* eventually becomes more a feeling enquiry rather than a verbal enquiry, and he said that it does. Ramana sometimes commented that *atma vichara* is for the advanced practitioner, whose mind is steady and able to focus on the question.

Est was a theater demonstrating, in increasingly intense ways, the automaticity of behavior. It is like you have a skyscraper – just layers and layers of conditioned responses. Ultimately all of these responses rest on a single assumption – the act of separation, the assumption that I exist as a separate entity. This is the ground floor, so to speak, and *atma vichara* deals directly with the ground floor, with the "I" thought itself. *Est* made you see the entire skyscraper, and believe me, you had no idea of the magnitude of the thing before you went through those three days. And then, at the height of the process of seeing, the entire building just implodes. And more importantly, after the implosion

there is conversion to that which is not conditioned.



Werner Erhard

Is this the classic est moment when you “get it?”

Yes, but it is a paradoxical moment, because people would say. “I got it, but there is no ‘it’ to get.”

Ramana too said that the answer to the question “Who am I?” is not something concrete or anything that can be put into words.

Yes, it is a paradox.

The moment of spiritual conversion is sometimes described in harrowing terms. For example, Ramana went through an intense death experience that initiated his awakening. Da Free John describes a similar death experience in his autobiography. It seems that est was designed to initiate this type of crisis.

Yes it was. And in a very clever way. For example, you were made to see – actually experience in a visceral way – a certain aspect of your conditioning. And then there would be a process you would be taken through that seemed to handle the conditioning. You would experience relief, the moment of exhale, so to speak. But, immediately, another crisis was initiated that was even more intense. A deeper conditioning was revealed. Again, you would be helped through this new conditioned response, only to encounter the next crisis. After a few rounds of this over three days, you began to lose hope.

At the apex of the training, you were brought to realize how *all* of your responses to life are automatic, even the attempts to be relieved and free. I well remember that moment in the training. The trainer screamed at the top of his lungs, “We are all machines!” I was completely available to his statement and just collapsed stunned and hopeless. Then we were given two hours to be alone. This was the only break allowed in the training. Those two hours were not fun.

When I came back to the group, the trainer asked us to consider if there is perhaps something that is operating outside of the conditioning. It was at this point that *est* became more classical enquiry. The trainer said, “You know it is not anything to do with this body or the mind. It is not your thinking or personality.” And no one was arguing anymore. I may have felt fucked, but I was not complaining. I was paying attention. I just followed the consideration and found myself opening to the possibility. Then I landed in a totally different space that was free and relaxed.

When you describe the crisis moment, you talk about hopelessness. This is an important point.

Exactly, because what is hope? It is the mind going to another time and circumstance that represents the possibility of relief. It is precisely the movement of attention from source. As long as there is hope, ironically you have no chance. Hope is the engine that keeps the entire system of conditioning going. It is a primary obstruction, and when it is destroyed the natural Self emerges. In *est* hope is like the “I” thought. The last thing to go. And the two-hour break was much like the “dark night of the soul” the mystics talk about. It was just total desperation, hopelessness and ultimately despair.

It sounds like est turned the story of Pandora’s box on its head.

I like to think of it as correctly interpreting that story. After all, the Gods clearly stated that the box contained all of the evils of the world. And the last one to pop out was hope.

After the training I went on to do the *est* graduate courses and the leadership-training program, and later I staffed part-time as a manager in the Berkeley/Oakland *est* office. In 1979 I was part of a development group that helped Werner remake the *est* training into what was to be called The Forum. Werner felt that the hard edge of the training, which was designed to break open the shell of the Western mind, was no longer necessary. Plus, to be frank, by that time *est* had become the new whipping boy of media, and I think Werner had tired of dealing with that intractable mess. So, the Forum was introduced as a self-enquiry process designed to be “an ontological investigation into what it is to be human.” This investigation questions what lies behind the personality, revealing the nature of being.

I heard that Werner went on to sell the Forum and then live rather privately.

Well, there is a lot of scuttlebutt about that. I remember Werner telling us during an advanced training that he had to stop personally giving the basic *est* training because at the particular crisis moment I have described, he could not present the piece – meant to be the most serious moment in the training – without laughing hysterically. He said that when he looked out and saw everyone’s frozen, blank stares, he could not control his laughter. He said everyone looked like cows. Werner retired at that point from presenting the *est* training. That moment of the training was later coined “the cow process.”

The *est* philosophy was rooted in eastern spiritual thought. A remarkable confirmation of this fact was when Werner was invited to a remote Zen monastery, situated on the top of a mountain. In a “dharma war” – a traditional testing of one’s realization by the elder monks of a monastery – Werner was challenged. At the end of the ordeal, the head Rishi gave Werner one of his few possessions, a beautiful silk fan, along with his blessing to carry his message to the West.

The Est Foundation also funded a U.S. tour of the Indian Guru, Swami Baba Muktananda. Muktananda was a lineage holder from the Siddha Yoga tradition, which includes the powerful saints Swami Nityananda and Paramahansa Shivananada. Werner and Swami Muktananda did a weekend workshop together in Berkeley, after which Baba decided to stay in the Bay Area. He took residence in a nearby town, Emeryville, where he started his center, the Siddha Yoga Foundation, and gave daily *darshan*. Having a saint of such stature practically in my own backyard was a rare gift. A group of us from Ken’s center would often cut out from our afternoon training to receive Baba’s *darshan*.

What was Baba’s darshan like?

I will never forget the first time I came to *darshan*. The air in the room felt thick, with some sort of

potential power, a sense of an essential vitality underlying matter, existing the moment before matter manifests as form. I took a seat in front of Baba to get a good look. He had a husky build, not like the thin Lamas whom I'd previously been exposed to. As he looked out at the people in front of him, his eyes were glaring and intense, like searchlights scanning a field.

When it was my turn to approach him, I felt some fear. His power was something that I had not experienced before. As I bowed before him, he took a long, colorful peacock feather, which he held in his right hand, and hit me on the head with it. I immediately felt a buzz of energy move throughout my whole body, like I had just touched a source of electricity. I stood up and was acutely aware of every inch of my body, and at the same time felt my awareness reaching out to the corners of the large hall. A sense of peace pervaded, as if I had just woke up from a pleasant dream, still half-asleep.

I remember reading in Da Free John's autobiography of his experiences with Baba. They were extraordinary.

People were rolling around on the floor, making noises like animals, eyes rolled back in their head. Baba called his transmission *shaktipat*, but from what I saw he could have called it freight-train *darshan*.



Muktananda

Were people actually transformed by these experiences? Beyond the intensity of the moment, were they becoming wiser?

It was a personal matter, and I cannot make any blanket statements about it. But I can say that for myself I was not transformed. And I began to intuit that I would not become transformed. Obviously, such a being as Muktananda is a very rare phenomenon. His power is not to be discounted. The experiences I had with him were precious and I am grateful for them. It is just that they did not deal with me fundamentally. I mean, I was flabbergasted how often I would return to being the regular, contracted Yukio again.

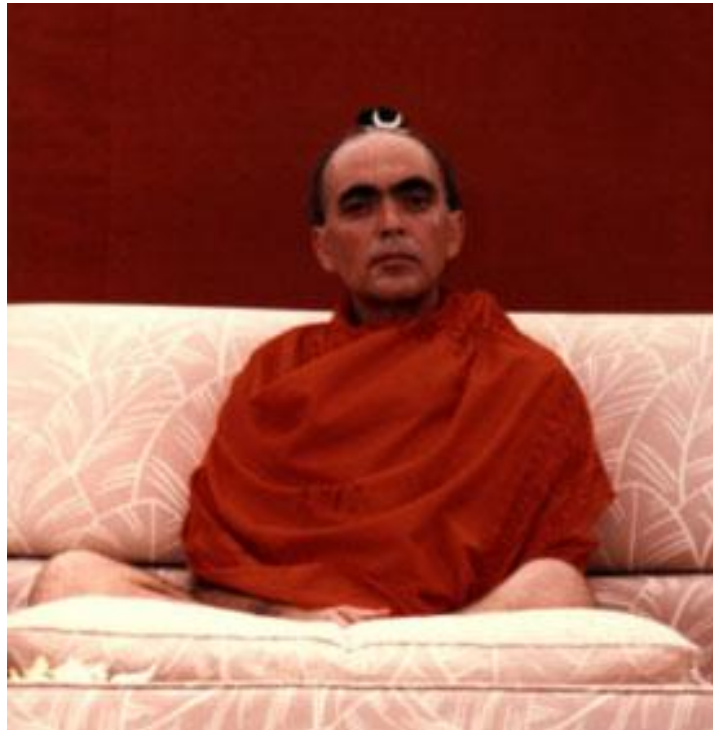
Then what were these experiences? I mean, they were spiritual, and yet you say they did not fundamentally transform.

They were the Self! Unfortunately, the Self still had a little problem called Yukio [Both laugh.]. It goes back to what I have said about tendencies. Somehow, the energy of *darshan* would leak off into my normal behavior patterns.

I know that later you had Da Free John's darshan and something similar happened.

That's a good story. Da Free John was always a very private teacher. He only gave like four or five public *darshans* in his life. In 1986 I learned that four public *darshans* were scheduled in Clear Lake above San Francisco, and I wasn't going to miss them for the world. This was about six months after he'd had a sort of nervous breakdown or death experience. Afterwards he had gone on a long, extended juice fast, so that when I saw him he was not the round, muscular man I remembered from pictures of him. He was quite thin really.

When he walked out in front of the about 1000 people present, I saw sheets of dazzling silver light radiating from him; to this day it is the most brilliant light I have ever seen coming from a human being. Then, when he put his attention on me and on my friend sitting next to me, the power of his transmission literally knocked me to the floor. I looked over at my friend and he too was on the floor. We were pinned to the floor by the bliss we were experiencing. [Ramana starts to laugh.]



Da Free John

What are you laughing about?

Like I said, four *darshans* had been scheduled, but Da Free John canceled the next three, saying that no one knew what to do with his transmission. He was right because I sure didn't. My body was so overloaded with energy, I didn't know how to handle or conduct it. Luckily, the next day I picked up a young gal hitchhiking. I have no idea know what the karma was between us; perhaps she'd come from a heaven *bardo* to save me from the nuclear reactor I was experiencing. We hit it off instantly and ended up having sex almost constantly for the next three days. That took the edge off things, and I managed to get back on the planet. Back to benign Yukio, therapist/spiritual seeker.

Let's break from freight-train darshan, and return to Ken Keyes. Ken's center, with so many different influences, seems like an ideal growth environment. How long did you stay, and why did you leave?

I was at Ken's Center for three years, from 1976 through 1979. Towards the end I became involved with Leonard Orr and Sandra Ray's rebirthing movement, an innovative therapeutic method employing *kriya yoga* breathing to heal birth trauma. I was volunteering ten hours a week at the Berkley/Oakland Est Center and also training in biofeedback. I could not keep up my commitments with the Living Love Center. My other interests were a growing concern for the staff. I no longer fit in. The Center also became more dogmatic and less tolerant of other paths. During my final months at the Center, Ken imposed new rules and converted it into a strict, less personal ashram. And to be honest, I'm not really cut out for strict ashram living. Never have been.

I felt so free after I left, and my creative juices flowed. I had more time to devote to my study of dance, which I'd started during college. I taught classes in jazz dance, performed in a show-jazz dance company, and continued with my training in classical dance. A group of us from the Center formed an electric band, and I was performing and recording original material.

I wanted to share the things I had learned. I joined with some other "renegades" from the Center; who included Tolly Burkan, the firewalking teacher to Tony Robbins; Shakti Gawain, author of *Creative Visualization* and *Return to the Garden*; Marcus Allen, now the owner of New World Books; and Deva Lewis, a trainer for Ken Keyes' afternoon trainings. We started our own growth center, called The Fellowship of the Awakening, and we opened up shop just around the corner from Ken.

Each of us taught a weekend workshop in our area of expertise, and also conducted a four-day training where we worked collectively. That training was based on a manual of experiential exercises that the staff had developed. It was later reworked by Shakti and Marcus into the book *Creative Visualization*. My contribution to the curriculum was a Rebirthing Workshop, processes from my work with *est*, as well as biofeedback training. Part of my own biofeedback training had been working with ex-scientologists, many of whom were then working for Werner.

Did you study Scientology?

Not in the organization itself. But I did a good deal of the course work with people who had been well up in that organization.

I took the Scientology communication course myself, and I also read Hubbard's book Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health. I found the communication course very useful. The book is especially well written, and in its day was something of a breakthrough in its field.

Yes, Hubbard created a real breakthrough in theory and technology. Some of his ideas and terminology are taken from earlier work done by Maxwell Maltz in Psychocybernetics, but he greatly expanded on those ideas and developed a far-reaching and inclusive system that is uniquely his own.

For example, he uses the term *engram* to indicate stress locked in the mind, and also the term *valence* to indicate the level of that stress. But he expanded theory into working technology with the use of the e-meter. This is a sensitive biofeedback meter, which measures galvanic skin response. The e-meter can locate an *engram* by picking up the physiological charge associated with it. Hubbard discovered that if a person is carefully and repeatedly led through reliving the details of a traumatic incident, then the charge dissipates, and the e-meter shows a neutral response. He also developed an exhaustive schema for locating *engrams* from all types of experience. This schema is

processes in which you confront your immediate environment, whether it is the simple objective environment of your living space, or your interaction and communication with others, or your subjective environment of thinking and emotions. The processes explore six areas progressively and are called the grades.

Much of my biofeedback training worked with Scientology technology, and I completed the grades. This was a valuable time, and as a result I noticed I was less riled about many things and much less attached to having people and circumstances be a certain way. So in this respect, it was another tool to free me from the suffering caused by attachments, referring back to Buddha's' Four Noble Truths. When I completed the grades I was deemed "clear," which means that I was able to work on another level of processing that focuses less on content of the personality, and more on how we as spiritual beings effect our physical environments.

Scientology is a controversial subject with the general public. Many consider it a mind-control cult. Would you care to comment about this perception?

I never had any formal interaction with the Scientology organization, so I cannot say. My teachers in biofeedback who had been Scientologists warned me about getting involved with the organization, but they also heralded the benefits from working with Scientology technology.

I knew a fellow who was Hubbard's personal valet on his boat. He praised Hubbard as a researcher, and said he was brilliant and totally devoted to his exploration of the mind. He also said that Hubbard was somewhat paranoid and that it had not been easy to leave the organization, and he had to carefully craft his exit from it.

I think it boils down to how interested you are in becoming free. There are no guarantees in the quest for freedom. It is an open-ended affair. Really, you are putting your life on the line. In that respect, I think every true seeker comes up against what he is willing to do to gain knowledge. Wisdom doesn't come cheap. The upshot of all that work is it led me into biofeedback, which was instrumental in designing the Radical Awakening process.

I understand that you sometimes still use biofeedback in your work.

Yes, during Radical Awakening sessions I've discovered that the e-meter will accurately track stages of the process. Radical Awakening is about consciousness and the Self; I want to make that clear. It is not about psychological or physical effects. Nonetheless, there are noticeable secondary effects. Actually, these "secondary" effects say something about the nature of Reality. Reality is non-dual; it is inclusive. And it is not separate and sterile. When one opens to Reality, it penetrates the entire being, down to the cells. Thus, galvanic skin response is a good measure, via a bodily parameter, of what is happening in consciousness.

For example, thoughts, just everyday random mentation – you don't have to be terrified in a concentration camp, or tearing your medicine cabinet apart looking for the last Xanax tablet – carry an emotional charge. The e-meter registers the charge as a vacillating needle. It is amazingly sensitive to each thought and the charge it carries. During Radical Awakening, when the shift in consciousness occurs, the space of consciousness itself becomes primary, so that thoughts are noticed as simply objects in that space. A thought could be about cancer, what's playing at the movies tonight, or the "I" thought itself. They all take on remarkable neutrality, and the e-meter no longer vacillates from one extreme to the other, but "floats" in a neutral zone. There are some subtleties to my use of the meter, but it basically helps me direct a person's attention at key points of the process.

It sounds like the Fellowship of Awakening was your first exposure to teaching. Did you continue teaching from there?

The Awakening Fellowship had a very short life span. I am not sure why. I think that all of us involved were just going different directions. So, in 1981 we closed down the Fellowship, which was my only venue for teaching. I opened a full-time biofeedback practice in Berkeley. During that time I connected with a group of teachers presenting the Enneagram of Personality, a Sufi typology system designed to open yourself to your true Being, a way of “self-remembering.”

I am rarely, if ever, attracted to typology systems, but this one grabbed me and captured my attention and held it there for the next fifteen years. The system is too complex to explain in this venue, but I will do my best to give a basic outline. To follow the thread going through this interview, I was graced to be able to study with some of the most outstanding teachers – who were also among the early developers of the Enneagram of Personality – Kathleen Speeth and Helen Palmer.



Kathleen Speeth



Helen Palmer

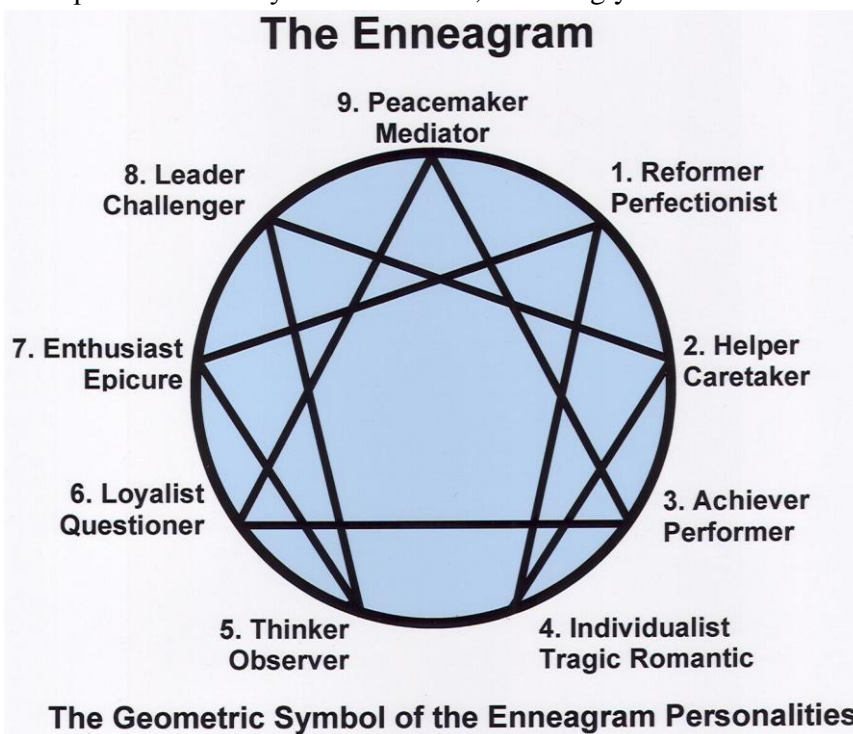
The basis of the Enneagram is that everything in the universe is made up of an invisible, non-tangible, conscious substance – which is pure awareness – and it gives life to all things. When this substance moves into the physical plane, it becomes fixed into nine patterns, each with its own distinct characteristics. As it moves through the body and personality, nine patterns of behavior are

formed into what are called “fixations.” The basic premise of the Enneagram of Personality is that with this typology you see the various ways these fixations manifest in different situations. You are given the freedom to recognize yourself as the silent witness/pure awareness in these situations.

As opposed to most spiritual paths, whose approach is to disregard or transcend the ego, the Enneagram *uses* the ego – specifically the observation of its fixated behaviors – as a lever point to a more aware state of consciousness. The beauty of the Enneagram is it shows you the diverse ways you are asleep, and brings consciousness to the areas where you are most unconscious. The challenge of any *sadhana* is to remain as the witness consciousness, to not get hooked into the story. The Enneagram is like having road signs warning you of the areas where you are about to go unconscious, and it allows you to remain conscious at the times when self-reflection is the most difficult.

I received a tremendous amount of benefit from my study and work with this system. When I identified my own fixation, it was like a light was turned on in a room where I was “up to” unconscious no-good. It exposed so many facets of my underlying subconscious, self-serving intentions. They were detailed so clearly, it became very difficult to continue the unconscious behavior. My girlfriend at the time, who was also studying the system with me, commented when she learned of my fixation, “Oh my God! It was like someone secretly followed you around your whole life with a notebook, and wrote down the ways that you bullshitted yourself and others. How is it possible it can be so accurate?”

Everyone has a fixation, and no one is immune from the patterns of unconscious behavior. The Enneagram teachers even typed the “enlightened” folks – gurus and the such – often demonstrating their demises through examples of their Enneagram fixations. When you realize that you are fixated, just as everyone else is, it is much harder to lay judgment on another; even though what a person does looks bad, you see that they are doing their fixation, just as you are. From that point, there develops greater compassion for everyone’s condition, including your own.



At this time I was also engaged in Neo-Reichian therapy – a parent therapy to the bioenergetics work I had done with Dhiravamsa – which was developed by Wilhelm Reich. Reich asserts that a person’s character structure defines what he calls their “body armor,” which restricts their freedom of expression. Reichian therapy helps a person to become aware of the unconscious patterns of the

character structure, as well as helps to break that, unravel that structure. The therapy uses the breath for this unraveling. I was familiar with this approach from my previous work of rebirthing and bioenergetics, as well as the various bodyworks I had received over the past decade: Rolfing, Postural Integration, Lomi Lomi work, Aston Patterning, Feldenkrais, Trager and Jin Shin Do.

It kind of amazes me that you could do so many different things, be involved in so many studies, as well as have time for creative, artistic endeavors.

It is amazing how much you can do if you never have a job. [Both laugh.] Somehow I have always found creative ways to support my studies and interests. During this time my private biofeedback practice provided a good deal of my income and required very little of my time. My girlfriend, who was also the director of the dance company I was in, and I received free rent in an apartment complex for just a few hours a week managing the building. I was also receiving a stipend for teaching jazz dance in four different studios. Even as early as 1970 I had been teaching a massage and meditation class. Throughout my life I have had reaffirmed over and over again how, if I loyally follow my search for truth, it will always be supported.

Did you continue your studies?

Yes, I completed my graduate degree in Transpersonal Psychology.

Which university did you attend?

I started at John F. Kennedy University, which at the time had the only accredited degree program in Transpersonal Psychology. I finished my Master's Degree at Norwich University in Vermont. The program at Norwich was set up like those at Oxford University in England, and I had a mentor.

You say that your degree is in Transpersonal Psychology. What is Transpersonal Psychology? Is it recognized as a legitimate school of psychology?

Absolutely. In fact, it is a longer course of study than a degree in Clinical or Counseling Psychology. In addition to meeting all of the requirements of a traditional psychology degree, an additional year of study is required to study the effects – both positive and negative – of expanded awareness on the human psyche.

Transpersonal Psychology is considered the “fourth wave” of psychology, the first three being Analytic Psychology, Behavioral Psychology and Humanistic Psychology. Transpersonal Psychology takes off really where Humanistic Psychology left off. Abraham Maslow, the developer of Humanistic Psychology, took issue with humans as just being animals, like dogs, that are only products of our programming. He believed that within the human psyche there is a higher order. He argued with Freud's analytic assumption that we are basically a seething pot of animal tendencies – called the *id* – which we have to always keep a lid on in order to function in society.

In the last part of his life Maslow pointed to a higher order, which he did not investigate, which he termed transpersonal, and which goes beyond his model of man's hierarchy of human needs. In the mid-sixties, when the gurus, saints and *rishis* of India were discovered by western Humanistic psychologists, the transpersonal realm of consciousness was finally explored. In that study, Transpersonal Psychology was born, and a new, enlarged spectrum of consciousness was charted. Practitioners of Transpersonal psychology view and treat a person in the wholeness of all aspects of their consciousness, taking into account the challenges and rewards that come from the development of higher awareness.

An entire field of Transpersonal Psychology – called Spiritual Emergence – is dedicated to treating people who become psychologically unbalanced as a result of being unprepared for higher states of awareness and how they can produce symptoms that look like a mental disorder.



Abraham Maslow

In my study of psychology, I was influenced by Arthur Janov, the founder of Primal Therapy. However, as brilliant as Janov is, he doesn't like to get close to anything spiritual. In fact, he sometimes denigrates spirituality outright. To him there is only biology, and neurosis can always be explained by some event in a person's history that caused pain in the biology and triggered repression. The earliest trauma that he acknowledges is birth trauma.



Arthur Janov

Later, I happened to pick up a book on Transpersonal Psychology that had a chapter by Stanislav Grof. He recounts his experiences working with schizophrenics when he was head of the psychedelic research program at the Psychiatric Research Institute in Prague, Czechoslovakia. This was in the 1950s before Janov had written The Primal Scream. His descriptions of what happened with these schizophrenics tracks almost exactly the theory in Primal Therapy. And like Janov, he too was willing to accept that birth trauma must be the end of things. He discovered, however, that there is more.

He was working with LSD and giving very large doses to his patients. After they had processed each of the repressed traumas in their life, including birth trauma, he continued to give them LSD. He discovered that some of these people experienced a final crisis, a sort of psychic death, which he later understood to be the death of the ego. This crisis couldn't be explained by any event in the patient's history. He also concluded that it was a crisis in the psyche itself, perhaps beyond biology and the nervous system.

Grof describes how this final crisis produced the most remarkable change he had ever encountered in his patients; that they were some of the happiest, sanest people he knew. He kept track of them for years after they'd left his care, and they reported that their state stayed firm and was characterized by inherent peace and happiness.

Stanislav Grof is perhaps the most important theorist in transpersonal psychology. He was the first to construct a comprehensive theoretical framework for prenatal and perinatal psychology. Later, he expanded his work to encompass a vast spectrum of non-ordinary states of consciousness, which culminated in his understanding, or what he calls “cartography” of the human psyche. He has written several books on this subject. His method for exploring non-ordinary states no longer involves LSD but Holotropic Breathwork.

In 1973 Grof was invited to the Esalen Institute in Big Sur and lived there until 1987 as a scholar-in-residence. In about 1985 I tried to enroll in the first certification program he offered in Holotropic Breathwork. As it turned out, that program was already fully booked, but in 1987 I worked with Alexander Lessing, one of his trainers, in Maui learning Holotropic Breathwork.

Grof is a warm, engaging man. When I watch him give a lecture on his life and what he has come to understand, I always notice how he is one of the few speakers I have encountered who is completely present and where communication is coming from Source. He moves easily through a discussion of any field of psychology, as well as an understanding of shamanistic cultures and classic Hinduism and non-duality.



Stanislav Grof

With your spiritual and psychological studies, have you had any experiences of the mystical and other-worldly realms? Do you believe that these realms exist, and if so, how do they fit into spiritual life?

Yes, and there is no doubt in my mind that these other realms, other dimensions, really do exist. I am not sure, though, how useful they are for the spiritual aspirant.

I completed training in psychic development with a teacher from the Berkeley Psychic Institute during the time I was with Ken Keyes. In the psychic-development training, we learned how to create a light-body outside of our physical body for the purpose of long-distance healing, as well as

remotely viewing places and situations. We also learned to sense information in a client's psyche, thus being able to see things about their past and possible future. I was amazed at how accurate and effective these readings and healings were; it defied any kind of logical thinking. But the question as to whether or not these tools and approaches actually aid in the spiritual search, I am not sure.

Perhaps you could make a comment or two here about atheism. Recently there has been a surge in atheism with the so-called New Atheists: Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris. These men dismiss spiritual and religious phenomena and acknowledge nothing beyond a rational, material understanding of man and the world.

I don't see anything new in what they are saying. When I was in college, there were always professors with that point of view. I don't understand really how anyone intelligent can give credence to atheism. I mean, how long did it take you, Chris, to discover the mountain of evidence supporting the spiritual point of view?

About two years into my quest. You're right, it isn't something arcane or hidden in a monastery. All you had to do was look and there it is.

Atheists specialize in not looking. They consider themselves rational, and are anything but. They cabin investigation to an infantile level, then blather on about the irrefutability of their point of view. Hitchens and Dawkins are particularly egregious examples of this phenomenon. Hitchens was mostly a political writer, and also an alcoholic who later in life found a good whipping boy in conventional, downtown religion. He discovered he could make money at his racket. Dawkins is sort of Hitchens in drag. He has good credentials in his field and also a seemingly benign, self-contained approach when he speaks. But it only takes about five minutes to see that he is really a "gotcha" prig.

Sam Harris is the more interesting of the three. He practiced *Vipassana* meditation seriously for a couple of years and says he still meditates. He doesn't dismiss spirituality outright. He distinguishes it from conventional religion and says it has value. I think Harris knows a lot more about spirituality than he lets on. I'm privy to some inside information about him and know that he met a couple of spiritual heavyweights in his life. Perhaps he is trying to open up the subject for rationalists by putting it in an atheist framework – that although these phenomena are only products of the brain and nervous system; nonetheless, they are worth investigating.

Harris is something of a paradox. You have to respect how hard he tries at times to stretch the limits of the atheist paradigm. He is also a good speaker and a good debater. Some of his books are interesting; *The Moral Landscape* in particular is something of an original contribution on the subject of morality. At the same time, he can be jaw-dropping stupid. Some of the categorical statements he makes about the supremacy of science make you wonder if he realizes what he is saying. In fact, I've never encountered any other so-called rationalist who writes the way he does. Literally every other page there is some over-the-top, categorical statement, almost none of which survive serious inspection.

The tension between atheism and spirituality is best understood as the difference between two ways of knowing. The scientific way – no matter how broadly you define science – emphasizes reason and separation. The scientist does not allow himself to participate unreservedly in the phenomena he investigates. To some degree he maintains his distance from phenomena, his separation from phenomena. The tools of science are basically the left-brain and the empirical method. And there is always doubt, especially when it comes to phenomena that are not easily explored with scientific instruments. So far, the product of this way of knowing has been an almost exclusively reductionist, material understanding of man and the world.

Spirituality, on the other hand, emphasizes direct participation in phenomena. Especially when it comes to the subtler dimensions of man and the world, only by direct participation with the human instrument – the body-mind and psyche – are these phenomena experienced and understood. This is the way of the ancient wisdom traditions, and their conclusion is that man and the world are, at their root, conscious phenomena, that the reality of existence is pure consciousness.

I've never given atheism the time of day. It was always clear to me that when atheism produces a being like the Buddha or Ramana Maharshi, then it will be worthy of consideration.

Hot damn.

The subject brings out the James Brown in me. [Both laugh.]

But it's good that we discussed it, because after I moved on from Ken Keyes I began to work more with the magical dimension of consciousness, something atheism cannot fathom. My exposure to the Native American and Hawaiian shamans showed me that the shamanic way is a path into the depth of consciousness.

So you have worked with shamans?

Yes, for a number of years I worked with a medicine man from the Arapahoe Nation, Henry Tyler, who was both the chief and elder of the Western United States. The Kahuna I worked with tied me into an entire community of Kahunas, the native shamans of Hawaii, on the Big Island.

I understand that these people are not that easy to study with, or get next to. How did it happen?

It started when I was living in Santa Cruz in the mid-eighties. A small group of friends of mine had an interest in the Native American, shamanic rituals, but we knew nothing about them. We built a teepee on our land, took peyote and sang Beatles songs. We were pretty pathetic. But then, one day someone in our group brought in an audio tape of Arapahoe Indian peyote chants. We all diligently learned them to the best of our ability. A native American saw our sincerity and showed us how to make a Native American water drum, like the one used on the tape. With the drum we were able to duplicate the songs with some accuracy. The peyote was a real aid. At one point the peyote chants came easily, as if I had known them my whole life. Further pleased with our efforts, our Native American friend showed us some of the rituals that are done in an Arapahoe healing-circle ceremony. In time, he introduced us to his elder, Henry Tyler, and we were the first non-native people to join Henry's peyote circle.

I was told that the purpose of the circle, called a prayer meeting, is for a particular individual's physical or emotional healing. Natives would sometimes travel over state lines in order to attend a meeting for a friend who needed healing. The prayer meeting started with a day of fasting and praying, as well as a cleansing, which took place in an Indian sweat lodge.

I was led into the sweat lodge – a simple structure of wood, shaped like a turtle's back and covered with blankets and animal skins. Hot rocks heated in an open fire outside the lodge were placed in the middle of the lodge, and when water was poured on the rocks, it created an intense sauna effect. It was completely dark in the lodge, except for the glow of hot rocks. There were four "rounds" of entering and exiting the lodge, and at each round more hot rocks were added. At one point during the fourth round, I thought that I was going to pass out from the heat. I went through an entire experience of having a heart attack and dying. We were finally led out of the sweat lodge, and as they poured cold water over my overheated body, I felt so pure, so clean, I was newly born.

The next night, about nine pm, I took my place in the teepee with about thirty other people. We were asked not to leave that spot for the next twelve hours; I wondered how my back and kidneys

were going to handle the long sit. I nodded in agreement. A fire was started in the middle of the teepee. As we chanted, peyote was passed around the circle. The peyote came in three forms: fresh buttons, dried powder and powder suspended in liquid. Every time the peyote was passed to me, I took either the liquid, fresh buttons or swallowed a small ball of the dried powder I mixed with my saliva. I was surprised to see that the peyote was passed freely and continuously throughout the night. At one point I felt that my head was spinning to such an extent that it was going to come off of my neck. I realized that this ceremony was not for the average white-boy lightweight.

Henry spoke with the authority of a man who lived the concepts he spoke about, and from a compassionate heart that knew true suffering – both for himself and his people.

“My ancestors have been sitting in circles and praying like this for the last 20,000 years,” he said at the beginning of the meeting. “The place where I am sitting is where my grandfather sat, as well as all of his grandfathers, since the first circle. And the spot where you are sitting is empowered by all the people who previously sat in that spot for the last 20,000 years.”

I momentarily reflected on how ridiculous it was for me and my friends to be sitting in the teepee singing Beatle songs, thinking we were really doing the native thing.

What was your experience of the effects of the peyote?

At times I felt a strong and rising presence of consciousness, and I recognized it as the deity that presides over peyote. I experienced it as a guide, as well as a fountain of power. At midnight a ceremonial pipe was lit and passed, as Henry explained that tobacco was the most sacred of all substances – including peyote – since it carried our prayers on the smoke to the Gods in heaven. My prayers felt empowered by the presence of this consciousness.

A “talking stick” was passed throughout the night, and we were given the opportunity to either share our experience, pray for the recipient of the meeting, or simply chant to the sound of the water drum. A frail, elder man took the stick at about 5 am. He was reporting how his energy was drained from the long journey to the meeting, and how it was really hard on his bad heart. He also said that he felt his heart beating hard and fast, like it was overworking to keep it from stopping. All of a sudden, he fell over, apparently of a heart attack. Henry leapt up from his spot to come to his aid. He instructed someone in the circle to force some peyote water into his mouth. An inordinate amount of peyote was poured down his throat as Henry chanted and shook a rattle over his head. Amazingly, the man came right back into alert consciousness, feeling fine.

It was at that point I realized that peyote *is* a medicine – they called it as such – and a powerful one at that. The reality of using the guidance of the spirits in living things, such as plants and trees, as well as “inanimate” things, such as mountains and the wind, was opened up to me. I saw how living close to the land keeps us in touch with the elemental energies of the earth. I was experientially shown that earth itself is a living substance with consciousness, which can even be supplicated to. I clearly saw that through prayer to these elemental forces, a tuning into God is realized. Over the next few years I continued my study with Henry. His way was like a Taoist path, with its simplicity of life and living harmoniously and consciously with Mother Earth.

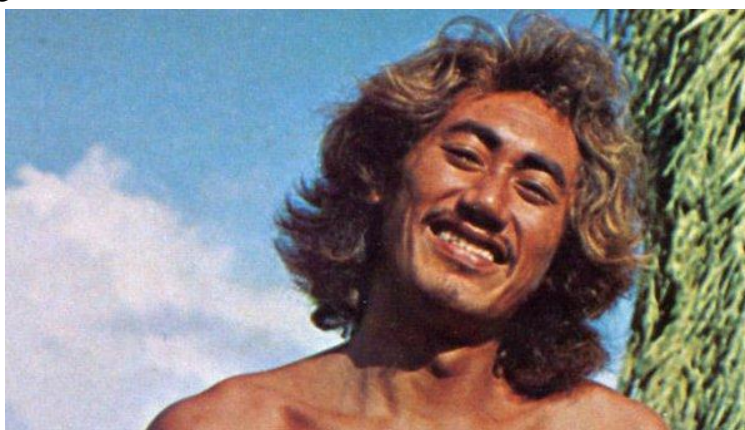
Years later, I was introduced through one of my hypnotherapy students in Hawaii to a native shaman, a Kahuna named Tiger Espere. The word *Kahuna* means master in Hawaiian, and each Kahuna is a master in a particular area. Tiger was the master of spirit possession. There were also the Kahunas of herbs, of navigation, of dance and ceremony etc.

Tiger and I made an immediate connection. We spent the whole night together drinking some heady herbal concoction out of a coconut shell made into a cup, and swapping stories and experiences of shamanic healing and other dimensions. Tiger’s personal story was fascinating. He’d

been initiated by his grandfather, a senior Kahuna of his tribe. Tiger had been schooled in the native Hawaiian ways since childhood. On his grandfather's deathbed, his grandfather instructed him to bring his mouth next to his. His grandfather's dying breath went into Tiger's mouth.

Tiger explained that Hawaiians believe that the most essential spiritual energy, which is called "ha," is contained within the breath. In fact, the word "haole," which I came to know as a tourist means "white person," is actually the Hawaiian word for "that which is without *ha*, or spiritual energy." He said that the native Hawaiians, when they saw the first white-skinned people arriving on their shores, were amazed at how they were not breathing, and how they immediately felt this absence of *ha*. Little did they know at the time how this was a prophetic sign of the downfall of their culture.

Tiger and I became like brothers. I was taken in as family and participated in some of the Kahuna rituals and teachings. I also had the good fortune to work briefly with Makua, the teacher of the Kahuna community on the Big Island, who lived in the depths of the rainforest. I was blessed to be part of their tree-cutting ceremony, where a boat was made to transport the ancient spirits from the Polynesian Islands to the Hawaiian Islands. The Kahunas understood that the ancient spirits are critical in reclaiming their taken islands.



Tiger Espere

Are you still in communication with Tiger and the Kahunas in Hawaii?

No, when my yearly visits to India started I never made it back to the Hawaiian Islands. Because of our long talks, Tiger was taking a keen interest in studying the Native American ways for himself. The last that I heard, he was participating in the Native American Sundance ceremony in New Mexico, where you do an inner journey for guidance from a power animal. The altered state is induced by being hung overnight from a tall pole by two ropes, which are attached to animal teeth pierced underneath your chest muscles. At the end of the Sundance ceremony, you are lowered to the ground, and required to run from the pole at full speed, ripping the animal teeth from your chest, in order to free yourself from your tether.

Was there a point where all of the psychological and shamanic studies you had in your life somehow integrated into a whole?

Yes, and it came together in such a magnificent way.

In the mid to late eighties, I was studying Neuro Linguistic Programming, or NLP, along with hypnosis and hypnotherapy. NLP is a fascinating study of how to bring someone into a particular state of consciousness or experience. In other words, if I wanted to bring someone into a state of confidence and lack of fear in a situation, such as an examination, an NLP process could be implemented to bring the person to that state. The primary requirements needed to accomplish this

are that the person leading another into the state know, or has a personal, direct experience of the state; and that the components of that state have been studied and examined to the point that the state can be duplicated, step-by-step. NLP is based in part on the principles of Gestalt Therapy and the work of Milton Erickson, and I found it an amazingly effective tool in leading a person from one state to another.

In 1988 I also learned and later became an instructor for the Alchemical Institute of Hypnosis, developed by an eccentric, eclectic psychic reader named David Quigley. Like myself, David loved combining and working with different therapeutic approaches. His synthesis of hypnosis with early childhood and past-life regression, Assagioli's Psychosynthesis, archetypes, and John Bradshaw's inner-child work was brilliant.

In 1990 I split off from the Institute and started the Transpersonal Hypnotherapy Institute in Boulder, Colorado. It was during this time that all the knowledge I had acquired in my spiritual and psychological studies came together. Transpersonal Hypnotherapy gave me the forum to teach, integrate and innovate new pieces of work.

In Transpersonal Hypnotherapy we used an amazing variety of tools – the most effective I could find – to free attention that is tied up in old behavioral patterns. My working premise was that once attention is freed from old patterns of the mind, then it naturally turns to the Self. I always had my ear to the wind for any effective means of clearing knots, and then integrated it into my program. The work I developed included visualization, affirmation, dream work, past- and early-life regression, Psychosynthesis, the Enneagram, different breath works including Kriya Yoga, rebirthing, holotropic breathwork, hypnotherapy, NLP, biofeedback and various meditations.

Your working premise has parallels even in classical Hindu scriptures where they talk of sanskaras.

Yes, and spiritual practices can cause *sanskaras* – unresolved past issues – to surface, and even intensify them. The classical texts refer to the importance of having an enlightened teacher to help you through these transitions – a tall order for someone in the West. This repressed stuff can make you pretty opaque. If you have a father or daddy complex and you see everything as an authority threat because you have unresolved issues with your father, you can even project it onto your spiritual teacher. But your teacher is definitely not your daddy! You will miss entirely the purity of the teacher in Truth. You have to work through that complex, unwind that knot, so you are actually seeing what's in front of you rather than dealing with some projected image.

This is an important point. When you read stories about devotees of Ramana Maharshi, they came from a fairly traditional culture. They didn't seem to have a lot of subjective content. Westerners discover – sometimes through the school of hard knocks – that they just can't avoid the knots and that there must be some way of dealing with them if spiritual practice is to progress further.

That is true, but only to a point.

Up to that time I believed that if I could keep undoing the knots, I would reach a level where things were fundamentally clear, so to speak. But there was a fault in my premise, which took decades, as well as tens of thousands of dollars to discover and be confirmed: there is no bottom, nor end to either the patterns or the unconscious mind, and therefore the mind can never be free.

I discovered that when I worked on a problem in my life – and believe me I really worked on this stuff – and was sure I had handled it, a new level of the problem would pop up. Often it was just a subtler aspect of the same issue I was sure had already been handled.

At a certain point I realized that I could be working on these emotional/psychological patterns forever. This realization came to me especially strongly when I was studying hypnosis, and found

that past-life karma needed to be handled. There is much more going on than this life only. I was contacting experience from past lives. When you start going into past lives, then all of a sudden you have God-knows-how-many lives to clear. So there was the realization that there is no getting to the bottom of it. And further, I was working directly with the unconscious mind and finding myself contacting not just individual consciousness but also collective consciousness. I mean, perhaps I could clear the personal content (though I was having my doubts), but I was not going to clear the collective unconscious. It is just too big..

I was in a dilemma. I could no longer in good conscience continue to teach what I now felt ultimately could not work. This dilemma came to a head when I attended a training called The Sedona Release Method, a piece of work that came highly recommended to me by several people I trusted. When I attended the course, I was amazed by the simplicity of the method. It was simply to let go of what you are holding on to.

The trainer asked the question, “If I want to let go of this pen, how do I do it?” To answer his question, he simply let go of the pen as we watched it drop to the floor. “That is how you let go of something you no longer want to hold on to!”

“Could it be as easy as that, as letting go of a pen you are holding in your hand?” I asked myself silently.

Then, we went right into the Sedona Method. We were given an area to explore, and chose something we wanted to release. There were a series of questions: If you could let go of this, then would you let go of it? If the answer was affirmative, a third question was posed: When? If the answer was now, then you were simply asked to let go, and to check if anything remained of what you were holding onto. If there was, the questions and instructions were repeated.

I remember working on an issue of avoiding domination, when all of a sudden – it had kind of crept up on me – I was overpowered by an enveloping, blissful feeling. Not only that, but the issue I had been working on completely released. When I went home that night, I was puzzled about how, without any examination of the components or history of the issue, without confronting or working something out, the issue could actually be gone. In retrospect, after my Radical Awakening I saw how this could be the case.

This is an important understanding, because many people run into the question of how much time and effort they should devote to these processes before they reach a point where they can know that energy and attention are fundamentally free for the spiritual process. Can you say anything instructive about this?

That’s a really good question, and it takes me right to the work of Radical Awakening. There is a point where you get – and you must get to this point for there to be a complete shift – where consciousness is experienced directly, without the filters of the personality. It is only then that it is possible to experience yourself as consciousness as it is – timeless, infinite and omnipresent. Once that point is reached, the impetus for pursuing the objectives of the personality begin to diminish; priorities begin to shift, and the desire to keep one’s attention on that natural state takes precedence over achieving worldly desires.

The work of Radical Awakening is about bringing someone to this experience of consciousness as Self-nature. In Radical Awakening the content of the mind is known as transparent to consciousness. You see – just as clearly as you see a chair – that the mind is not real. Once you reach this point, further investigating subjective content almost becomes useless. There is the realization that you are not doing it, that you are actually being done. Then, change becomes realized as something that finds us, not something that we personally implement.

Part 2: Coming to Papaji, with Papaji and post Papaji

How did this awakening occur for you? Was it with Papaji?

Absolutely

How did you come to Papaji?

It was through Andrew Cohen, the first person Papaji asked to give *satsang* in the West. At the time, I was helping Eli Jackson Bear, who with his partner Toni Varner founded The Institute for Advanced Hypnosis in San Francisco. The Institute conducted month-long NLP and hypnotherapy certification trainings at Esalen Institute.

Eli was very excited about Andrew. I remember at one training during a month-long certification program, Eli carted the class to Andrew's *satsang* in Corte Madera, a solid four hours from Esalen. Although I never really took an interest in Andrew, I was fascinated by both his stories and his love for his teacher in India, Papaji.

The next year, which I believe was 1988, I was working with Eli at one of our trainings in Esalen. He had just returned from seeing Papaji in India. My interest in Papaji became stronger because of the change I saw in Eli. My relationship with Eli had always been difficult, even though I was spending a great deal of time with him and Toni, both in work situations and personally. What was astounding to me was how so many of Eli's sharp edges – which I knew so well – had been smoothed out, and that we were able to speak together in an honest and heart-to-heart way, I believe for the first time. I could only attribute the dramatic change in such a short time to Papaji.

A particular interaction with Eli during that time stands out for me. We were outside of the dining hall at Esalen. We had just finished a Shiva meditation. We were sitting in silence knee to knee, making eye contact with each other. As I looked deeply into his eyes, I felt an incredible expansion of my consciousness, accompanied by a great sense of peace. There was a merging of my consciousness into a larger consciousness; it was a beautiful, quiet and loving space.

I told him, "Eli, I feel I am experiencing your teacher."

He said, "No, you are not experiencing Papaji. You are experiencing yourself."

Even though I knew what he said was true, at that moment I also knew that I had to meet Papaji.

So did you go to India to see Papaji after that?

Quite frankly, Chris, I would have if I had not been stung by the demon of ambition. I saw a great future shaping up for me. Eli said after his return from India that he was renouncing everything, including his worldly businesses. In my mind, I was being groomed to step into his position. Eli had such a sweet scene: teaching at Esalen, the premiere growth center in the world, as well as teaching at some of the universities and other growth centers in California. He also did a European teaching tour, something I had always wanted to do. I was completing my graduate degree in Transpersonal Psychology and had great plans for utilizing it. My desire was to have a successful, world-wide Transpersonal Institute.

My ambition kept me from Papaji for five years. During that five-year period I had a falling out with Eli, which led me to teaching at the Alchemical Institute of Hypnosis, and then to the building of my empire, the Transpersonal Hypnotherapy Institute. My stint with my Institute was peaking in 1994. Materially, it was sweet Jesus – living in a 5,600 square-foot, custom home in the Rockies, which was backed up against 90,000 acres of national forest. I spent two months a year in each of the locations of Sedona, Hawaii, and the Northern Californian and Colorado Rockies – places I

carefully chose, as I loved each of them for their beauty and power. I skied world-class powder; went scuba diving and windsurfed in aqua-green, pristine oceans; hiked in beautiful red-rock canyons; rock climbed in premiere climbing areas – all while teaching and developing work that I loved. I was making a ton of money and living the good life.

Sort of the transpersonal psychologist's version of the American dream.

Right, but like you say – a dream.

Yet throughout this time, the pull to see Papaji continued to grow. Many of my friends had been to Lucknow to see him. With every one of them, I saw fundamental changes. One of the most dramatic was Eli's wife, Toni, who returned with the name Gangaji and started giving *satsang*.

Did you attend some of those satsangs?

Yes. At some of the early *satsangs* I primarily went just to support a friend. There were only about six to ten of us in the room with her, and she seemed a little nervous. But the fundamental change I saw in her was her taking her power as the person in the *satsang* "seat." Previous to that, in her teaching role she was primarily in Eli's shadow. But I had always seen her as the clearer teacher of the two, and I was happy to see her coming out. I later experienced in her *satsangs* what Ramana Maharshi calls "the transmission of Silence," much like what I had experienced with Eli previously.

Yet it still took another four years before I took the trip to the other side of the world to see Papaji.



Gangaji

What gave you the final impetus to see Papaji?

The final push occurred when a friend brought back from Lucknow a video about Papaji. In it a young man interviewed is asked about his experience of Papaji. I was transfixed by his face. Although present, his eyes seem to be fixed upon somewhere else, somewhere vast and infinite. His knowing smile communicated a something I could not identify. One of the comments he makes on the video still sticks in my mind: "When you find the complete expression of 'It' in a single person, how could you not go to that person?"

I found myself saying to myself, "Yes, how could I not?" That was October, 1994. My institute was closed for a three-month holiday, and within weeks of seeing the video I was on a plane to Lucknow.

What was it like meeting Papaji for the first time?

Before I left, a number of people encouraged me to stay for a minimum of six weeks, even if I felt like leaving. That was an important piece of advice. Although he was kind and charismatic, somehow the first few weeks there I spent asking myself, “Why did I invest so much time and money into this trip?” But after about three weeks, I began to feel a powerful presence and silence in him, which calmed my whole nervous system. It was blissful just sitting with him. I found my meditations deep and profound.

He would often say, “No practices; practices reinforce the ‘doer,’ which will just get you into trouble!” I had no idea what he was talking about, and continued my meditations.



Papaji

My ego was probably not allowing me to see who he really was and what he had to offer. I was riding high and full of myself. In my delusional dream, I felt I was so close to total enlightenment. I had done so many years of practice and study, and with good teachers. I had so much confirmation for this from my hundreds of students; people were transforming around me. My doubts about the futility of untying the knots of the endless unconscious were lost in the haze of material success and admiration.

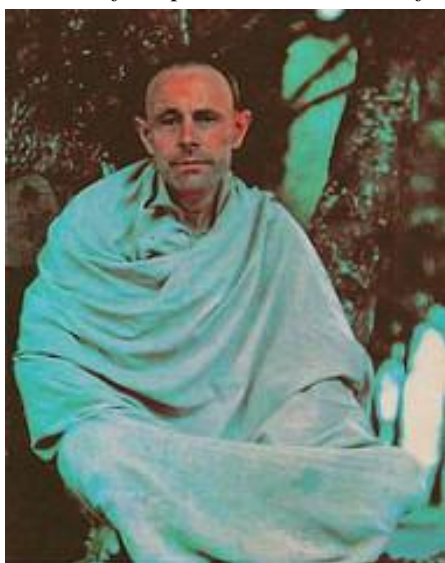
In my mind I only had one question that I needed to ask Papaji: “Since I am almost there, what do I need to do to go all the way to enlightenment?”

I did not know how to approach Papaji with my question. The answer came when I was reading through some of David Goodman's galley proofs for a book he was working on about Papaji's life. In these transcripts there was the story of how Papaji went all over India searching for someone who could show him God. He would march into the ashrams of various teachers, even in his army boots, and say, “I want you to show me God.” This kind of possibility intrigued me – that you could just go to a teacher and demand something like that.

There was also an account of a French Monk who asked Papaji, “What is it that I need to reach

full realization?” And Papaji told him, “Throw your bag away.” The bag contained his most precious possessions – the Bible and objects he used to perform Mass.

He was Swami Abishektananda. He was living in a cave on Arunachala. He remained close to Papaji throughout his life, but he could never drop his attachment to Christianity until right near the end of his life when he had a heart attack and a near-death experience. He wrote the book The Secret of Arunachala, which contains the first published account of Papaji.



Swami Abishektananda

I understood that Papaji had asked him to throw away the bag because it represented his attachments and all of the mental baggage he carried. After reading both of these stories I figured I would go for it – try a similar approach.

I went to Papaji and said, “I have read the account of this monk, and you asked him to throw his bag away and he would be free. I want you to tell me what is the bag that I need to throw away so that I can be fully realized.”

Papaji said, “Okay, well let’s check out your attachments. I will ask you about some attachments, and you will tell me about them.”

I said, “Okay.”

Papaji asked, “Do you have any attachment to work?”

My work was, as I mentioned, very successful. I was at my zenith and wanting for nothing. I said, “No, I don’t really have any attachment to work. It is satisfying, creative, and innovative. There is opportunity to grow in many ways. I don’t feel any attachment to it.”

“Okay, that’s fine. So what about attachment to money?”

I was making close to \$300,000 a year and felt that, as far as money was concerned, I was flush. I said, “No, I don’t have any attachment to money.”

“Okay, well what about attachment to women?”

I had just come out of a nine-year relationship with my partner at the Institute. We had broken up a couple of months before I came to Lucknow. I was feeling free. I didn’t feel any attachment. I thought, “If I have a relationship it’s great, and if I don’t it’s great.” I said, “No, I don’t have any attachment to women.”

Papaji asked, “What about attachment to freedom?”

I wanted to give him the right answer. If I was truthful to myself, I would have said, “I don’t have attachment to freedom. If I have it it’s good, and if I don’t it’s fine. I just thought that I would ask.” But I wanted to give him the right answer and said, “Yes Papa, I am attached to freedom.”

He replied, “Okay, this is good. So you have an attachment to freedom, and this is your black bag. If you let go of it, then you will be free.”

I thought, “Fine,” and that was the end of our interaction.

The next morning I woke up and I was enlightened! I mean, it sure seemed like I was. Every description I had read of enlightenment I was living. There was the moment-to-moment feeling of great peace and a sense of knowing the Self deeply, feeling just solid in it.

And I was living in a world of magic as well. Every thought I had materialized or appeared instantly in some reflection of my surrounding circumstances. I remember I went to *satsang* that morning, and as I was riding my bicycle, I had the feeling that my past was totally over. Everything about Yukio was over. I looked over to a building I was passing, and it said, *Mount Eden Trust*. That was so off-the-wall – because Mount Eden is the area in the San Francisco Bay area where I lived as a young child.

I was reading esoteric texts like the *Ribhu Gita*. I had read them before but found them heady. Now I was reading them, and they were my soul being sung. There was such a feeling of love and connectedness, day after day after day – for two weeks.

Occasionally there would be a thought floating by: “I did it. I let go of my attachment to freedom, and that was the final push I needed. I am living enlightened, as fully realized consciousness.” Yet even that was just a thought that floated in consciousness, not even identified as myself.

The day before I was to return to the West, enlightenment, realized consciousness – the whole thing – stopped cold. It was over. There wasn’t even a trace. It was as if it had never happened. I had a memory of it but couldn’t contact a thing. I freaked out.

Did you wake up in the morning and it was gone?

No, it was during the day, and all of a sudden it just stopped.

I wrote a three-page letter to Papaji and described everything that was happening. I said, “I am leaving tomorrow, so you need to help me. This is really bad, horrible. I have lost everything. I have lost the greatest gift I ever had, and you have to help me with this.”

I gave the letter to Chandi Devi, who lived in Papaji’s house, and she said that she would get it to Papaji.

An hour later she came back to the guesthouse where I was staying. Papaji had written right on my note his response – BAD LUCK! in capital letters, underlined, with an exclamation point. Beneath that he wrote, “Don’t know if it is going to come back. In fact, I don’t even know if it is going to come back in this lifetime or even in your next lifetime. Your next lifetime may not even be human.”

I was shattered, really falling apart. I went to a friend and respected elder, Premnat, and I showed him the note.

He said, “We really need to talk.”

“Great, I need to talk, because I feel that Papaji just cut me off.”

I’d heard that Papa could see people’s future lives, and I thought, “Oh God, he is seeing right into my future life. This is terrible. I might as well get a job in a factory or something. It’s over. What’s the use at this point?”

Premnat told me to come back after dinner. I returned at the appointed time and was surprised to find a group of people there.

He said, “I have gathered these people together because we all agree that you shouldn’t leave, that this is really an invitation from Papaji.”

I scrunched up my forehead and said, “What do you mean an invitation? This is no invitation, it’s over.”

“No, we have been watching this whole thing going on between you and Papaji. We haven’t seen Papaji work somebody over like you in a while. It is important that you stay.”

I told him, “I can’t stay. You don’t realize that I have responsibilities. I have to go back.”

Rena, Premnat’s wife, sympathetic to my pleas, turned to Premnat and said, “You know, sometimes people have to go and settle their affairs before they can come back and stay.”

But Premnat remained strong in his position: “No, no, no, this is an invitation, and you just don’t turn away an invitation like this from a Master. You just don’t do that.”

Frankly, the space I was in was “This is all bullshit. What kind of teacher is he anyway to give me this thing and take it away like this? This is bullshit. Even if I could stay, I wouldn’t stay. I’ve had it with the whole Papaji thing.”

The next day I left, thinking, “I am not coming back. There is nothing here for me. The guy is full of shit. He has some kind of power, and he just fucks with people. Who needs this? I have enough to get through my life. I can just do it without him.”

You actually thought that, in spite of the experience you’d had, you could do it without him?

Well, I felt that even if I couldn’t, that it wasn’t an option with him. He had already told me that my life was over.

But actually, there were some things that I hadn’t wanted to listen to in the group meeting with Premnat. I remember someone had said – I believe it was my friend Shambu, “Papaji is very impatient with people who don’t listen to him. What was his instruction to you? His instruction was to let go of your attachment to freedom. And here you have written three pages crying about how you lost it, and demonstrating to him all of your attachment to freedom. That is directly the opposite of what he told you to do. No wonder he calls you a coconut head!”

I remember Papaji would call me “coconut head.” During the group meeting I was definitely in my coconut mode [Laughs.].

What happened when you returned to the U.S.?

Just prior to leaving for Lucknow, I’d sold my shares in The Transpersonal Hypnotherapy Institute to my partner, and agreed to work for a salary of \$6000 a month. I was glad to be out of the administrative aspect of the business. Teaching was what I liked anyway, and the salary was fine.

When I returned from Lucknow, I get back and the first thing my partner does is fire me. I had signed a non-competing agreement, so I couldn’t teach anymore. I tried to fight that agreement and spent a lot of money. It was drained at a frightening rate by legal fees and lawyers. I was so angry about the whole thing, I was just losing it. I was blowing up in front of my students, losing all my credibility as a teacher.

All that in six months?

Yes. But it occurred to me that all the things that I had told Papaji I wasn’t attached to, now I was suffering the loss of. It was easy not being attached to them when I had them, but when I didn’t, it wasn’t so easy. I had been attached to them all along.

Then I had a dream in which I was in a room and a huge sixty-foot Nataraj, the dancing Shiva, was coming after me while a drum was playing. Every time the drum played, he would move towards me. I tried to escape from the room, but it had no doors and no windows; there was no place for me to go. As the drum was playing he was coming after me. Then I looked over to the corner of

the room and saw Papaji playing the drum.

That's a pretty prophetic dream. You don't ignore something like that.

I called my best friend Bob, who was a long-time devotee of Da Free John. Bob and I used to have arguments about Gurus because I wasn't into Gurus.

He would say, "It is just your ego holding you back from understanding – surrender to the Guru." He really liked the idea that I had gone to India to connect with a Guru – "Finally, you are waking up to how things really work." He supported me in that.

When I told him about the dream, he said, "Isn't it obvious?"

I replied, "Well, no."

"He is your teacher. He is your Guru. He is orchestrating this whole thing. Nataraj coming after you is just this stripping you of everything. There is no escape, and the only thing you can do is to go back to him."

Then the light went on, and I thought, "That is totally true."

But I had no money; I didn't even have the money to buy a ticket. The money had gone to wild living with my girlfriend, furnishing our house and attorney fees. So I did a renegade transpersonal training. I had the participants promise they wouldn't tell my ex-partner that I was doing the training. It got me enough money to go to India. I returned in a totally different space.

I was on my knees, like "Okay, I've got it." Being shattered was what I really needed to be able to hear what Papaji was saying and receive what he wanted to give. My second trip to Lucknow, I was there to stay.

Papaji said, "You don't leave until you are well cooked."

I said, "I have no return ticket, and I am here until I am well cooked."

What was the primary motivation for coming to Papaji?

Here was a man who was becoming known as the man who could "wake you up." Forget blissing out, gaining powers, developing abilities. What you got was to wake up out of your dream of illusion, and he seemed to be doing that. How could you not want to check it out?

How did he teach?

When someone would come to Papaji under the apparent grip of the ego, he would guide them to what they were not noticing – the Self. To Papaji, any complaint that the Self, or peace, is not present was ridiculous. The Self is perfectly present, it was just that the person was missing something because it was too obvious. He would say, "People miss it because they are looking past their nose, when who they are is closer than their own nose."

He would lead a person to the expansiveness of the space that all events take place in, and point out that this space is always at peace; it is consciousness itself at rest. He did this in a particular way, by getting them a few feet in, so to speak, what he called "a half-step." He rarely used the words "The Self" when working with someone; he didn't necessarily start out with the big word, the Self. He would instead simply point to some peace they felt, or the space between thoughts. And then he would beat the mind to the punch, and render it ineffective.

Before the mind could default to denial or "Yes, but" mode, Papa led the person into a deeper level of awareness. No matter where Papaji started with a person, it always ended in the same place. You couldn't resist him. All of sudden, just that little peace had opened, and you were established. I remember, again and again I would see people relax and smile; their whole being would change, and they were right there.

You mentioned that part of your work came about from this way Papaji worked with other people.

Yes.

Will you talk about that?

I saw the mind starkly in front of me, this machine running. It is a processing unit, which takes in perception coming from the sense organs, makes meaning out of the objects it perceives, and then comes up with a directive or comment. I saw that this whole processing is largely invisible, and the components being processed are moving way too fast to be noticed, and the only thing noticed is the final result: a thought. Upon closer examination, I realized that usually even the thought is not noticed. Instead, it is the experience of a voice being present, with the distinct but unexamined feeling "I am the one speaking, and at the same time, I am the one that is listening."

I remember smiling a huge smile when I saw how I had missed something so obvious: all the time I was talking to myself, it was really only mind talking to mind, in an ongoing conversation with itself. It was almost laughable.

The other day I went to a chai shop, and for the first time this season they had a big clay pot with fresh buttermilk. I thought to myself, "Oh, good, they have buttermilk." It was ridiculous, as you say, how I said something in my head about it and to myself too, instead of simply seeing it. Can you imagine a deer or a dolphin having an internal conversation like that?

The lack of a verbal mind is part of what gives animals their grace and why we are attracted to them. Or when you have a dog, and how it will come up to you overflowing with happiness and wagging its tail and shaking all over. It doesn't have a mind that interferes with happiness.

What was your awakening like with Papaji? How did you get past the ego's resistance? Did the awakening stay firm?

First, I want to clarify that for me there are still more than a few forays into the mind, where a dominating mind is the primary experience. Only now the presence of consciousness is seen clearly being lost and enraptured in the "Yukio experience." Something then stops, and attention is drawn to the space of awareness that contains all experience. I do not know if this answers your question. I honestly cannot say that there was a getting past ego or resistance; I can only report that something was very different, and yet at the same time hauntingly familiar.

My awakening with Papaji allowed me to live from a new point of view. I remember in the video I watched before coming to Lucknow, a woman was describing her awakening. She said that the "I" disappeared, the assumption of the separate subject disappeared. She said she then went to look for it as if she would look for a misplaced ring. She looked for it underneath the table and behind the door.

I was thinking, 'My God, this is a very strange report. What is this?' I just didn't get it.

But then in Lucknow the same thing happened to me. Some time after the moment with Papaji, I had the thought that perhaps I'd disassociated. But because of the strong sense of presence and peace I felt, I knew it could not be a classic dissociation, which usually happens under traumatic situations. Then I remembered the work I had done with the Berkeley Psychic Institute where we would create an energy body that was outside of the physical body and move it to different places. I thought, "Perhaps I am unconsciously doing the light-body exercise." I started looking for this energy body, and I was looking for it under the table and behind the door, just as the woman had described in the video!

There was a lot of humor to the whole affair. I mean, there was no identification with my investigation. I was awake as consciousness, and consciousness was playing a funny game: "Well, just to be on the safe side, let's look to see if I am still dreaming." During this game I also noticed that there was no sense of locality. I'd be looking in different places, but there was the tacit intuition – to the point it became wonderfully obvious – that there was no place, or to be precise, there is only one place: the space of awareness itself.

To be more specific, what was it in Papaji's work with people that parallels your own work, what you call "the perceptual shift?"

In Papaji's presence people behaved in a variety of ways. Some were quiet and focused on the inner experience they were having. Others smiled and laughed. Some wept in gratitude. Some were eager to ask him questions. As for me, I was fascinated by the way he worked with people. I attended hundreds of *satsangs*, and I couldn't take my eyes off him. I realized that I was watching the greatest transpersonal psychologist on the planet. Of course, he wasn't really that at all, but I couldn't help but watch him through the lens of my past training, my profession. At a certain point, I relaxed any ideas about how you should act in the presence of such a being, and I let myself explore him from that point of view.

Over time I noticed a thread that ran through his encounters with people. It goes back to what I said about him beating the mind to the punch. A person who approached him came with a certain question, which they expressed in words. Often what they were saying seemed to make a good deal of sense; they expressed in a cogent way a dilemma they were experiencing. But I noticed that Papaji wasn't really interested in their story. It's not that he cut them off; in fact, he was almost always sweet and attentive. But I saw that he could see the real problem, which was a problem of attention. The person's question was important to them and seemed to be clearly about something, and they would express it in words. So, where was their attention? It was in their mind.

Papaji was always looking for the moment, what he called a half second, when he could get the person to shift their attention to what he wanted them to notice. Now, you have to understand that the person sitting in that chair in front of the people in *Satsang Bhavan* was in a unique circumstance. They knew that this was perhaps the most important moment in their life. They were vulnerable. You went up there with your head in your hand, so to speak. I hardly ever saw anyone take that seat with their ego hanging out. Sometimes Papaji would ask the person for that half second, and they would stop and give it to him. They were also next to his extraordinary transmission. For a being like Papaji it only did take a half second. Once a person's attention shifted, then Papa would do the rest.

So I began to understand that what people are really up against is the habit of attention. This habit is so entrenched that it becomes an assumption about the way things are. Anything else is not noticed or is discounted. There are times for everyone, just quiet moments in between thoughts, but there's no sensitivity to that. It doesn't even get noticed.

When I saw Papaji working with people, I understood that he was interfering with this habit of attention. He would get people to notice the space of expansiveness and peace, maybe only a little bit to begin with, and then before the mind could begin to operate, before attention could revert to its habit, he had established the person in that space. That was the magic taking place. And there was more, because Papa would give the person what he called "the tap on the shoulder," the pivotal realization that they were not having an experience, that it wasn't an "I" having an experience, but their true identity was the very space of consciousness itself.

After my own awakening I noticed a change in my sensorium. Previous to awakening all of my

feelings were experienced as originating down the center of my body, starting at my neck and down to my pelvic region, like a tube. But after awakening the tube had been exploded, and awareness, which had been localized in that tube, was now scattered everywhere. Of all my senses, my conditioned way of seeing had shifted the most dramatically. Previously the location of where the sense of sight originated was the middle of my head, or behind my eyes. This location gave credence to the experience that I am someone who lives in the head, looking out the eyeballs at the world.

So the sense of sight, which before seemed to originate within the head, was no longer located there?

It didn't seem to be located anywhere. It's hard to put into words. There was an aware space that was noticing everything, and I couldn't even begin to identify how or where. I mean, if I was hearing a voice, the primary sense was no longer an "I" hearing a voice coming from a specific place, but rather that the voice, and all sound was instead perceived *within* the space of consciousness.

In The Transmission of Doubt Da Free John has an interesting talk along these lines, in which he discusses the question: How would the room look from every possible point of view?

Yes, I remember that talk; it is a brilliant piece, like a lengthy Zen Koan. He is pointing out that the room can never be seen as it really is, as long as the point of view is the limited self. Of course, at the same time, he is talking to people who see themselves as limited. He seems to meet them where they are, with examples, logic and analogies. But his talk is about frustrating the limited point of view. It is something like what I have said about the habit of attention. The ego, the assumption of the limited, separate self, is reinforced by many habits – habits of attention, point of view, emotion, reasoning, etc.

At that time in Lucknow I had two things that impressed me: the way Papaji interfered with the habit of attention, and this change in the way I perceived things visually. I spent a lot of time considering these things and how they might come together. I considered them especially with what I had learned in NLP and from some of the things Milton Ericson had written about how a new state of behavior comes about. It was like a detective story and I became fascinated by it.

So, this is the origin of Radical Awakening?

Yes, but not really, because I am not sure I would have done anything with it except that one day Papaji asked me to teach.

Tell me about that.

It happened at a small group while we were eating lunch with Papaji at his home. He said that some people were having trouble with self-enquiry. He asked me if I could help them. I said of course, I would do what I could. And then he pointed to several people and asked them to work with me. He said, "You work with Ramana."

When I look back, there was a lot of chutzpah on my part because, though I had tried diligently to practice self-enquiry, I had struck out completely. It just never worked for me. When the people came to me, they said the same thing: "I just get nowhere." So what was I doing agreeing to teach something I hadn't mastered myself? In fact, my first thought was: "What am I to do with these people?"

But there were several things that prompted me to give it a try. One was my time of observing Papaji and how he worked with people. Another was the changes in my sensorium after awakening

which I have described. Finally, I realized that Papaji had never taught self-enquiry either. In all the *satsangs* I attended I had never seen him go through the technique in the way it is taught by Ramana Maharshi. I knew the story of Papaji's life and awakening with Ramana Maharshi. Papa was a Krishna *Bhakta*; he had never practiced self-enquiry. He really didn't have any truck with non-duality. In fact, judging from his initial resistance to Ramana's advice it's not clear if he even knew about the idea of the Self. His purity and his extraordinary desire to know God were what allowed Ramana's grace to enlighten him. I thought, "Okay, perhaps Papa sees something in me; perhaps I can be a tool to help others."

There was an "aha moment;" it was like the detective story suddenly had a plot line. I intuited that I had the resources to teach self-enquiry in a different way. I would try and teach from the top down. Let me explain. The traditional way is that the practitioner starts from where he is at, whether it be a relatively peaceful or agitated state, and then deals with his thinking and the source of the I thought. I call this the bottom-up approach. But I had seen how Papaji preferred to directly establish a person in the Self, or at least in a much expanded state of awareness. Like that, I reasoned that if those who came to me could somehow become more permeable, become aware of a greater dimension of themselves, then self-enquiry from that space should be easier. I call this the top-down approach

An important part of my beginning work was considering space and awareness. I noticed that when I contemplated space it had a magical quality. When I became aware of it, it became filled with awareness; it was not just empty. Awareness of space became the space of awareness. I designed an exercise where others could experience this also.

Physics has had a number of different understandings of space. Originally it was thought that space was a substance called aether. Aether was necessary in order to explain the propagation of light waves, just as water is necessary for a wave in water and air is necessary for a sound wave. However, experiments eventually showed that aether does not exist. As a result, space was considered empty, a sort of nothing.

Later, when Einstein formulated his general theory of relativity, he showed that space is curved. Space has a specific curved geometry depending on the matter, energy and radiation that are present in it. The general theory of relativity explains many phenomena that Newton's theory of gravity cannot, and it has become the accepted understanding of space. Because it is very difficult to see how a nothing can be curved, space must have some elemental quality.

General relativity deals with the cosmological scale. Quantum mechanics deals with the micro-scale of atomic and subatomic particles. Here too, space is no longer understood to be just a nothing. It seems best understood as a field of potential that gives rise to the appearance and disappearance of particles in complicated and paradoxical ways.

Perhaps the best word is "permeable," especially when space is explored with the human instrument: the body-mind and psyche. Space has a seamless quality. When you sense the space around you and then close your eyes, you quickly pick up on the inner space. In fact, it is not really possible to find a boundary between the two.

Much later, after I had developed Radical Awakening, I came across some comments by Ramana Maharshi about the body. Generally Ramana was dismissive of the body, describing it as *jada*, which means "inert." However, in the passage I discovered he admits that the body is filled with awareness, but that it is very subtle and difficult to locate. I took what Ramana said about the body as confirmation for my work, because it's easier to locate awareness when dealing with space.

When you said, "Awareness of space became the space of awareness," there is a similar saying in

the general theory of relativity: "Spacetime tells matter how to move; matter tells spacetime how to curve."

And here's another one: "When you are aware of the stillness of space, your inner space is also still." This one became another exercise. It is easy really: When the person becomes aware of the space of a room, I point out the stillness in the space. And then I ask the person to notice their inner state and how it too is still. The exercise has a magnetic quality to it; some people will sit for extended periods with the stillness.

In the Vedas the word for space is akash. Akash is the first element that arises out of the unmanifest; the others being air, fire, water and earth. It has two principal qualities: all-pervading and stillness.

I found that pointing a person's attention to space was the first step to getting them to the place where the emerging of awareness could occur.

I already knew that the quality of a person's experience defines to a great degree their sense of self. I looked at my own experience after awakening and asked: "How is it that I am seeing and hearing and sensing and feeling the world and myself that is different from the way it was before awakening?" And what I noticed was that it wasn't a me inside my head looking out anymore, but my head was like a window – it actually felt empty – which consciousness was looking through.

This became step two in Radical Awakening. Step two followed from the first step. I developed a way for the person to move the locus of perception from the head looking out the eyes to originating from the space behind the head. When the person begins to perceive in this way, the limited sense of self tends to collapse. However, this way of perceiving is also somewhat confusing; it isn't entirely clear how to locate the new sense of self. The next two steps of Radical Awakening answer that question. They give the experience of vast awareness as the perceiver. People I worked with in Lucknow reported that they really opened up to these exercises.

Step five was trickier. It too was developed in Lucknow, but I have spent a good deal of time refining it. Step five is very much the "tap on the shoulder" moment I recognized with Papaji. I have to be very careful in this step with my use of language and how I guide the person. Step six is the fruition of all I had intuited: yes, self-enquiry becomes much easier when practiced from an expanded sense of self.

Can you clarify how you came to teach Radical Awakening? Did Papaji appoint you personally as a person to go out and carry on his work, or carry on a lineage? Did you receive confirmation from him to teach? Do you consider yourself a guru?

Papaji made it very clear that there was no mantle or lineage. And philosophically, he did not approve of teachers, whose existence is predicated on having a student who is below the teacher, and a teaching that ultimately is co-opted by the mind into concepts.

Papaji, along with being known for waking people up, was also a "trickster" as it is referenced in shamanic traditions. He would set up a little "theater" staged to make a point, get a lesson, so to speak. In that regard there was a very interesting moment between the two of us.

Vasanthe was working at the bookstore, and I got to know her by hanging out there. She had heard that I had a good deal of experience with the Enneagram and said that there were some people in Lucknow who were interested in learning about the Enneagram. She asked if she could put together a workshop for me. I said sure, I can do that. The first thing I did about this was to ask Papaji for his blessing to give the workshop. He gave me his blessing, and then he really surprised

me by asking me to do it in *Satsang Bhavan*. At the time I thought I would do it at a guesthouse of one of my friends. Then he went further and asked me to give the workshop while sitting in his chair in *Satsang Bhavan*.

Wow.

Yes, that was my reaction too. I said, “Well, I don’t know about that, Papaji.” I mean, it didn’t seem right that I could teach in the place where *satsang* was held. We both left the matter hanging. Now I see how I escaped by the hair of my chin.

He had given you enough rope to hang yourself.

Exactly. The lesson was that I could teach but I better be damn sure I remained humble and always close to my sources.

To answer your question more exactly, Papaji never approved of any of the people who became teachers. He approved of them as messengers: both of the truth of his teaching that suffering is not necessary, as well as to tell what had happened in Lucknow in his presence and that the opportunity was available for others too. But he definitely did not authorize any teachers, let alone gurus.

Just about all of the Papaji teachers have come to Tiruvannamalai over the last twenty years. None come any longer. They have been a motley crew, if I can be frank. They are what Da Free John calls “the talking school.” The biggest one, at least in terms of his following, was basically run out of town by Ramana Ashram.

You mean the guy who is now Sri Rat Tat Tat Baba?

Yes, that one.

Papaji was following what I was doing in Lucknow. On one occasion, we were speaking about the work of Radical Awakening, and he commented that a direct experience would be so much better than a person asking repeatedly in their head, “Who am I?” There was another important moment. On one of the rare times I was alone with him, we were in his back room watching bad Indian television after I had spent the afternoon washing dishes. As we were eating peanuts together, he leaned over to me and said, “Be as Ramana.” His comment left me wondering how that could be possible. Ramana was a saint, a renunciate and a fully realized being. It was not until some years after Papaji’s death that it became clear to me what he meant: Ramana himself was a messenger for the silent transmission of Arunachala.

It is good that you mention the talking school because I definitely was not going to do that. I was going to teach, but it was the experiential process of Radical Awakening. It was the steps of that process, which I guide a person through.

Did you teach the Enneagram workshop?

Yes I did. I even used some advice that Papaji gave me. Shortly afterward, I asked Papaji for his blessing to leave and to go back to my girlfriend, who was freaking out that I was in India “finding myself” rather than being at home with her. Somehow I felt complete, and already had plans to return the next year. He gave his blessing. Neither of us knew that this would be the last time I would see Papaji in his body.

And at this point you returned to Boulder?

Yes, and it was an interesting situation to return to. My girlfriend and I were totally estranged; I had no money, no established business and a non-compete contract with my former business partner in the transpersonal institute we had co-founded. I was also in debt for my services to the many people who had supported me by purchasing my ticket to India the year earlier. So, I started with what I had. I had a rich source of sincere people to work out the pieces of Radical Awakening, which I was still refining. My intention was to go back to India the next year and tell Papaji about my work and get his final approval, if he would give it.

When that time came and I had purchased my ticket to fly back to India, I learned that Papaji had died. I didn't want to go back to Lucknow if he was not there, so I decided to change my ticket and fly to Chennai and then go to Tiruvannamalai. I wanted to see the mountain Arunachala and the home of Ramana Maharshi.

Before we go to that phase in your life and how it developed into you bringing others to Arunachala, I know that there was a time in Lucknow where you experienced great gratitude and love for Papaji. Talk about that.

There were some ladies who used to go to Papaji's house everyday and stand outside and look through a window at him in the morning. One morning I found myself going to join them. I couldn't help myself. I just never wanted to take my eyes off of him. I did this every day for weeks, and I actually began to feel like a teenage girl in love. Occasionally I would experience a bit of doubt, because I had never had feelings like that for a man. But it didn't matter; just to see him was overwhelming and I let it happen.

You know, something similar took place between Papaji and Ramana.

It did?

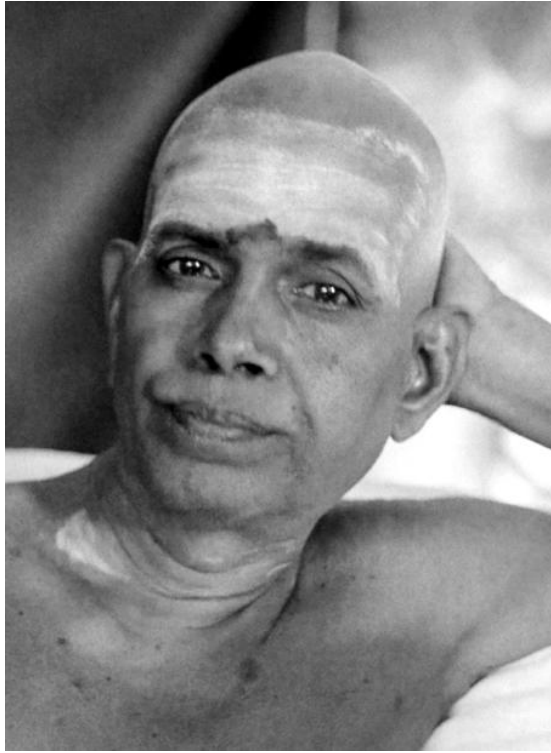
Yes, after Papaji's enlightenment he was so in love with Ramana that he too never wanted to take his eyes off of him. In the ashram from noon till about two o'clock was the time when Ramana was left alone in the old hall. But Papaji found a crack in one of the walls where he could see Ramana's couch, and he would stand there the whole time. He said that he couldn't see his Master, except just occasionally Ramana would move his arm in such a way that he would catch a glimpse of it and that was enough.

Papaji also spoke with great approval of the poet Muruganar because he too never took his eyes off of Ramana and then he wrote thousands of poems in praise of his Master.

What you are saying is really affecting me, because when I went up to receive my name from Papaji I first recited to him a poem by Muruganar. Papaji had my new name written on a slip of paper, but after I recited the poem he changed it and gave me the name Ramana.

David Godman has said that from all his research he has concluded that self-enquiry was not the primary teaching of Ramana Maharshi. The Guru-devotee relationship was primary and to be in the presence of the Master and receive his spiritual transmission.

Yes, that is the where the great physics of the universe is found. It is a love relationship.



Ramana Maharshi

That is how it was when I came to Tiruvannalai and saw the mountain Arunachala. There was such stillness, and something opened in my heart. There was a period of months where I would get up at about four in the morning each day and walk to the top of it. And in the evenings, sitting on top of a guesthouse under the night sky, I would gaze at it. I had access to the library at Ramana Ashram and I read all the books I could find about it. I learned the things Ramana said about this mountain: How it is the spiritual heart of the earth and has attracted sincere spiritual seekers from time immemorial. How from the time he was a child, even before he could conceptualize with the verbal mind, somehow he knew of Arunachala and that it was something immense and holy.

That is actually the first verse in Eight Stanzas to Arunachala, isn't it?

Yes:

Hearken; It stands as an insentient hill. Its action is mysterious, past human understanding. From the age of innocence it had shone within my mind that Arunachala was something of surpassing grandeur, but even when I came to know through another that it was the same as Tiruvannamalai I did not realize its meaning. When it drew me up to it, stilling my mind, I came close and saw it stand unmoving.

Ramana wrote many verses in praise of the mountain. The most important for me has been the first verse in *The Marital Garland of Letters*:

Thou doest root out the ego of those who meditate on Thee in the Heart, Oh Arunachala!

Everywhere around the mountain there is history. You can retrace Ramana's entire time here. All of the places he stayed still exist, except for one mango orchard. Almost all of them have been restored by Ramana Ashram. I learned how Ramana praised the circumambulation of the mountain, called *giripradakshina*. It is such a gift. When the whole non-dual rat tat tat gets too dry and too much, you can take a break and walk around the mountain. It is especially peaceful at night. There are small temples all along it, dedicated to practically every Hindu God. Each will be attended by a

swami and often alit with ghee lamps. You can stop for a tea at one of the chai stands. Ramana said that *giripradakshina* should be done slowly.

"Walk like a pregnant queen in the ninth month."

Yes.

And, of course, always walk on the outer circumference of the giripradakashina road.

So you know that one too [Both laugh.]. But he said it, didn't he? – How Arunachala attracts not just human devotees but other spiritual beings not physically embodied or visible. They too come and do *giripradakshina*. When you stay on the outside of the road then you are also doing *giripradakshina* of them and gain the benefit of that.

I am a sucker for that stuff [Both laugh again.].

Ramana never held back about Arunachala. Perhaps his favorite description of the mountain, however, is taken from Jnanasambandar, the seventh century Tamil poet saint, who described Arunachala as "a condensed mass of *jnana*." *Jnana* is the word for Reality, the Self, consciousness itself. Over time this has become my understanding, too.



Arunachala



Arunachala

When you talk of history it is kind of amazing because the history is so intertwined and almost endless. When Ramana journeyed to Tiruvannamalai at the age of sixteen from Madurai he made a mistake in buying his train ticket and as a result his journey took three days and was something of a minor adventure. Notable was that he spent an evening in the small town of Tirukkoilur at the Ariyaninallur Temple, where Jnanasambandar had first sighted Arunachala over a thousand years before.



View from the Ariyaninallur Temple where Jnanasambandar sighted Arunachala.

I have been teaching Radical Awakening for twenty years now, all over the world. But in my heart, right from the start, I wanted to bring others to Arunachala. And every year I bring a group of about twenty people here for a two-week retreat. This is probably the most rewarding part of my life as a teacher.

It keeps you close to your roots.

Yes, and there have been two important incidents in that regard. The first happened with Yogi Ram Surat Kumar. He was a Saint who lived in Tiruvannamalai, and he was still alive for the first three years I came here. I had the opportunity to talk to him. At the time, though I had been given the name Ramana, I was too shy or unsure of myself to actually use it. I went by the name Yukio Ramana instead. But Yogi Ram made it very clear I should go by the name Ramana. I remember him leaning right into me and saying, “You use the name your Guru gave you!”



Yogi Ram Surat Kumar

The other happened when I met Nanagaru. Nanagaru was a saint from the neighboring state of Andhra Pradesh who often came to Tiruvannamalai and gave *darshan*. He was pure love, and his *darshan* was a beautiful, melting transmission of that. He eventually built an ashram here, and for several months of the year when he was not here himself you could rent a room there. The building became where the groups I bring to Tiruvannamalai stayed and still do.

I really warmed to Nanagaru, and he took kindly to me. There was a period where he took me to visit some families in Tiruvannamalai in the evenings. Each of the families had a history with Ramana Maharshi, and the evenings would pass with them telling stories of him. These stories were told with the classic Indian *bhava*, or mood, that is present when devotees recount *leelas* of their Master. I was humbled. Then Nanagaru made it very explicit: that I should stay humble and always have the attitude of a devotee. That I must never forget my spiritual sources.



Nanagaru



Ladies on one of my retreats; picture taken on Chinese new year from the roof of Nanagaru Ashram

Perhaps it's time to wrap things up with a final question. It goes back to the time when you were a seeker and all of the effort you expended. When you look back at your efforts prior to meeting Papaji, how do you assess them? Do you consider them of value, or were they a waste of time? I ask this question because many teachers dismiss the value of effort, of techniques of any kind, even those of classic spiritual scriptures.

[Long Pause] Whether you know it or not, there is only one thing that is going on in life. Life is the love affair you are having with yourself. Every moment of love – when you know “This is love” – is the gift of your Self. At first, love appears to be coming from a source outside of you. That is how it was for me. When I was young, my grandfather was the source of love, and I was captivated by him. My attention was always on him. I thought about him constantly and wanted to be with him. When I was with him, I didn't want to be anywhere else. I remember I felt in his company that I was at the center of the Universe.

When I moved into the explorations of the next twenty-five years of my life, it was the same thing. When I worked with Ken Keyes and Werner Erhard what was I doing? Really doing? I was working with geniuses for one thing. These were not ordinary men. They were brilliant, charismatic beings. It was marvelous to be around them. It is marvelous to be around the Self. Each was a ray of the Self. Some may have shined more brightly than others, but each was alit and apparent to me as a gift.

The methods of these men I now see differently than at the time I studied with them. Then I understood things in a linear way: there are obstructions, and I have to work through the obstructions. But now I don't think in terms of obstruction; I think of inherent freedom. And so, I remember the times I landed in the space of no obstruction. I remember walking out of Ken's afternoon session living the Truth of one of his statements. I remember the last day of the *est* training and the peace and freedom I felt. These moments were part of the love affair. How can you begin to love if you do not touch and allow yourself to be touched? In those moments I was touching and being touched by the Beloved – The Self. I was becoming familiar with its ability to transform

anything, to wipe away the crunch of the ego in an instant.

The period with the Native American Indians and the Kahunas of Hawaii, I was not working with obstructions at all. I was involved with magic and extraordinary displays of consciousness. This too was the love affair. I was falling in love with the impersonal aspect of the Beloved. I was falling in love because these things were displayed in a traditional context. The native people knew and had preserved the sacred ways of initiation. And thus the Beloved was met and witnessed in the proper context – of intimacy and respect. It was free to dance and show its extraordinary display.

Every teacher I studied with and every method I employed served its purpose – to bring me to Papaji. Papaji was the great Master. He was the one who communicated the final teaching – of perfect intimacy. He showed me that this affair of love is not confined to a particular circumstance, that it is inherent in this moment and in the place that I am. He showed me that it is my very nature.

People think of Papaji as a strict non-dual teacher, but Papaji was one of the greatest forces of devotional love that ever walked this Earth. His love had literally consumed him. It leaked out of every pore, every gesture. And if he ever actually talked of the matter ... well, he couldn't. It just overwhelmed him and he would be reduced to choking. He hid his devotion, actually.

Papaji's non-dual teaching is just the beginning. People think that when he talks of awakening, that is the end of things. But if you read carefully his words, he makes clear that awakening is only the beginning. When one awakes then the real affair of love begins and it goes on forever. It is as if you are finally qualified for the depth of love.

I can't imagine we need go further. What you said is perfect. A beautiful way to close what has been a wonderful evening together.

Yes, it has been good, hasn't it?

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Pilgrimage to Arunachala, India video:

[Ramana's Pilgrimage to Arunachala, India \(7 minutes\)](#)