

JOURNEY INTO SPIRITUAL MATURITY:
A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF TRANSPERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

by

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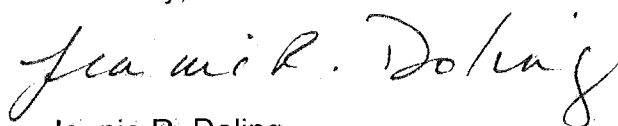
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JOURNEY INTO SPIRITUAL MATURITY:
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Abstract

The study of individual development as it reaches beyond ego identification and enters into mystical states poses a unique challenge for psychological research. Because developmental changes become less externally observable in higher, mature stages, research must often rely on reports of subjective experience. While development typically follows specific trends, there is a question as to the exact direction spiritual development evolves as it enters more mature stages. The present study explores the nature and evolution of consciousness relative to the developmental theoretical work of Ken Wilber (2006) and Michael Washburn (2003).

Previous studies by Thomas (1993), Rothberg (1998), and Grandi (2003), analyzed spiritual development in order to either isolate points of contention between these two models, or to lend support to specific elements of these models. These studies proved to have several design limitations and pointed to the importance of developing interview questions capable of capturing a greater range of experience.

The current qualitative study conducted interviews with 9 spiritual teachers using open-ended questions to elicit information about their current and previous experiences on a spiritual path. Subjects were selected from Hindu,

Buddhist, and Sikh traditions. The interview transcripts were coded according to Boyatzis' (1998) qualitative thematic analysis method, using his recommended procedures to develop and organize emerging themes.

Finally, the patterns of spiritual development that emerged—both those supporting and those challenging specific elements of the competing theories put forward by Ken Wilber (2006) and Michael Washburn (2003)—were identified. This study proposes a new synthesized self-system model that employs Washburn's polarized ego and the Dynamic Ground existing within Wilber's holarchical view of consciousness. The participants in this study also suggest the emergence of Western Yoga with new spiritual practice, community structure, and teacher/student relationships.

Whereas previous studies have attempted to determine which model is best supported by the developmental reports of contemporary practitioners, the present study explored development specific to the individual using the transpersonal models merely as reference.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Spiritual traditions such as Buddhism and Hinduism have been speculating on the evolution of consciousness for centuries. Using models or maps of consciousness, they have attempted to guide individuals to highest levels of divine consciousness. What precisely occurs during the highest stages of individual development, and what is the nature of the evolution towards these higher states? In some studies of contemporary spiritual practitioners—for example, Thomas (1993), Rothberg (1998), and Grandi (2003)—the findings do not support the traditional spiritual models.

Recently, developmental psychologists have begun to investigate how consciousness evolves throughout an individual's entire lifespan. With the emergence of transpersonal psychology in the 1960s, scientific investigation of the evolution of consciousness—specifically, what happens in the higher spiritual stages—has demonstrated that some of the traditional assumptions and models of spiritual development need to be revised.

The competing transpersonal psychological theories most relevant to the concerns of this research are the theories of Ken Wilber (2006) and Michael Washburn (2003). Each of these theorists proposes a developmental model of the evolution of consciousness, with Wilber in closer alignment with traditional Eastern views, and Washburn taking a view based more on a Western orientation. These two models disagree on several important points: (a) the source and nature of psychic energy leading to transcendence; (b) the nature and function of regression; and (c) how the self-system is related to the evolution of consciousness.

There have been very few studies exploring the life stories and experiences of contemporary spiritual practitioners in an attempt to support or disprove these two competing theories of transpersonal development. The most notable of the studies that have been conducted—Thomas (1993), Rothberg (1998), and Grandi (2003); placed significant emphasis on the points of disagreement between the models in formulating research questions. In addition, in some cases the particular choice of participants limited any generalizations that could be made. For example, one study (Rothberg, 1998) interviewed Buddhist psychologists; although these individuals were quite articulate in using psychological language, the use of such a specific group limits the applicability of the findings to other groups. Further, some of these studies (e.g., Thomas, 1993; Grandi, 2003) found aspects of development that contradicted the model with which they were being compared. This demonstrates the need for reports of the subjective experiences from a broader range of individuals who have lived through these developmental stages.

The current study is a qualitative exploration of the experiences of spiritual development of 9 spiritual teachers over their lifetimes. The developmental reports of contemporary spiritual teachers were used in a thematic analysis to find commonality in developmental experiences and potential patterns. The results of this analysis were then compared to the theories of Ken Wilber and Michael Washburn, which are covered in the discussion section. The present study was designed to generate unbiased descriptions of the course of spiritual development from the individual's earliest years to current developmental level, focusing on the changes, transitions, and developments that occurred along the way. Participants were drawn from three spiritual communities—Hindu, Sikh, and Buddhist.

To put the framework and design of this study into context, I will first describe Wilber's and Washburn's models of spiritual development. A discussion of the similarities and the differences between these models will explore areas that need to be clarified in future studies. Next, I will review the works of Thomas (1993), Rothberg (1998), and Grandi (2003), focusing on the differences between the two models they addressed. I will present my rationale for using semi-structured interviews in the methodology chapter. Finally, a description of the participating spiritual teachers and their backgrounds will demonstrate that they represent a broader sample of subjects than has been used in other studies.

Similar to the previously mentioned studies by Thomas (1993), Rothberg (1998), and Grandi (2003), this study explored spiritual development as it appears in the lives of contemporary spiritual teachers in hopes of contributing to our understanding of the nature of spiritual development and how it unfolds. This helps to verify psychospiritual developmental theories and adds to the significant absence of literature in the field.

The results of this study find support for aspects of both Wilber's and Washburn's theories and help to illuminate the few points of disagreement between these models. A new integrated self-system will be proposed that utilizes aspects from both Wilber and Washburn's theories. During this investigation, several unexpected new discoveries were made. New spiritual systems based on individual experience were developed to take the place of traditional spiritual lineages. Individual reports expose eight specific misconceptions of spiritual development that are highly propagated in traditional spiritual systems. The personal accounts represented in this study suggest that individuals may have to go through a healthy and necessary spiritual individuation. Because these

discoveries were unforeseen, they will be contextualized in the results section when they appear.

The present research may be clinically relevant in understanding the potential problems concerning transpersonal development in contemporary spiritual practitioners. The significance of this research is most relevant to clinicians who are dealing with the spiritual issues with their clients. Correctly identifying a patient's stage of development is crucial for correct interpretation of symptoms to the most appropriate guidance for spiritual transformation. Any clarifications regarding the spiritual stages of development in clinical work and symptom diagnosis will help further the range of understanding of many difficult psychic disturbances. In the "psychology of the future," Grof (2000) states: "many of the conditions, which are currently diagnosed as psychotic and indiscriminately treated by suppressive medication, are actually difficult stages of radical personality transformation and of spiritual opening. If they are correctly understood and supported, these psychospiritual crises can result in emotional and psychosomatic healing, remarkable psychological changes, and consciousness evolution" (p. 137).

Chapter II

Literature Review

Overview of Transpersonal Theory and Psychospiritual Theoretical Framing

The literature review will begin with a brief history of transpersonal theory, emphasizing concepts concerning individual developmental stages, followed by a description of Wilber's and Washburn's models of spiritual development. The works of Thomas, Rothberg, and Grandi will be reviewed, with a focus on the points of contention these studies were attempting to clarify. An analysis of the shortcomings of these studies will explain the rationale for the design of the current study.

Today, the field of psychology has found a way to coexist with spirituality and religion, but this is a recent development. For the past century, many mental health profession generally did not address or study issues of spirituality. Early theorists such as Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung had strongly conflicting views on how mental health relates to spirituality and religion. In *Future of an Illusion*, Freud (1964) pathologized religion as "a system of wishful illusions together with a disavowal of reality, such as we find nowhere else . . . but in a state of blissful hallucinatory confusion" (p. 8). Freud also pathologized mystics in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1962), in which he compares the "oceanic experience" to "infantile helplessness" and a "regression to primary narcissism." In contrast, Jung embraced the world of mysticism, incorporating it with his view regarding archetypal symbolism into his theory of personality. He proposed the collective unconscious, which he saw essentially as a storehouse of the totality of human experience through the ages (Jung, 1911/1956). Mental health professionals today

continue to struggle with how to deal with the issue of spirituality and hold widely varying views on religion and spirituality.

In Search of a Transpersonal Paradigm to Support Spirituality in Psychology

A generation after Jung's major work, Assagioli (1971) began voicing objections to Freud's portrayal of the spiritual dimension of human life. In his historical review of the role spirituality has played in psychology, Grof and Grof (1989) discussed Freud's focus on the basic instincts in human nature and Assagioli's emphasis on the positive, creative, and joyful elements of people, as well as the importance of will. Like Jung, Assagioli explicitly acknowledged and honored spirituality, incorporating the concept of the collective unconscious into his work. He went on to develop his own form of psychotherapy, *psychosynthesis*, under the basic assumption that an individual is in a constant process of personal growth, realizing his or her hidden potential.

In contrast to the more spiritually-oriented views of Jung and Assagioli, the field of psychology gained recognition as a true science as it focused on overtly observable behaviors that could be quantified and measured statistically. B. F. Skinner, who pioneered the understanding of behavior modification principles, did not publish a single word on the topic of spirituality. He approached human beings as mechanistic entities whose behavioral responses to stimuli varied depending on environmental contingencies. Skinner's (1953) psychology did not acknowledge or explore inner experience, and thus did not address or account for the spiritual aspects of being human. Behavioral psychology, based on outwardly observable and concrete behaviors, continues to largely overshadow schools of psychology that acknowledge the importance of spirituality in the

human psyche. A psychology rooted in the reductionist medical model excludes spirituality and rests on a worldview of logical positivism; since soul and spirit are immeasurable and unquantifiable, they have been viewed as topics outside of psychology.

Another paradigmatic problem challenging psychology is the emphasis in behavioral reductionism. While reducing human experience to observable actions and overt measurable categories is important for statistical analyses of large populations, it is an approach ill suited to investigate unique individual perspectives, which can vary dramatically from a statistically derived “norm.” From Schneider’s (2004) perspective, disregarding all that is not measurable results in a monological, flat perspective that leaves no room for spiritual or nonordinary states.

Ellis (1994) supported the dominant empirically-oriented paradigm and developed the influential clinical model of rational emotive therapy, which reduces human nature to its simplest elements. This model assumes that cognitive processes are the underlying foundation of behavior, that human beings can solve their problems by relatively straightforward cognitive modifications. Such reductionistic models are now widely used in cognitive-behavioral therapies. In a recent (2001) interview Ellis stated: “Spirit and soul is horseshit of the worst sort. Obviously there are no fairies, no Santa Clauses, no spirits. What there is, is human goals and purposes . . . But a lot of transcendentalists are utter screwballs.” Ellis’ personal bias against transcendentalists comes through with great clarity here; it also is a prime example of a paradigm that excludes the entire realm of spirituality.

Not all psychologists fell headlong into the dominant paradigm, which requires empirical validation for assertions and models relating to human psychology. As a strong empiricism took hold, a massive undercurrent of spiritual investigation continued, eventually resurfacing and regaining recognition in recent years. While Maslow (1971) was operating under the veil of empirical science, he began to find evidence for peak experiences of a mystical nature. He argued that peak experiences are part of the biological, genetic make up of all human beings, and that they can therefore be examined and explained empirically as well as spiritually. Rather than reducing all religions to scientific terms, or vice versa, the concept of the peak experience scientifically explained what ordinarily would have been understood as religious experience. Maslow's ideas about "transcendent self-actualization" and mystical experiences opened the doors for a renewed acceptance of spiritual phenomena as legitimate for investigation.

Gradually, through the work of such theorists as Jung (1952), Maslow (1971), Grof (1989), and others, a new transpersonal theory developed that was more inclusive of spirituality and "nonordinary" phenomena. Lang's (1989) formerly controversial work, conducted in the 1970s, gained recognition and influence in the field of psychiatry. Lang promoted a shift away from the dominant idea that mental illness has purely and only a biological basis. Rather than viewing his clients as incomprehensible and pathological, Lang could not ignore the parallels he saw between transcendental experiences he sometimes saw in his psychotic clients, and the religious experiences described in the great wisdom traditions.

Perry (1989) was also interested in the symbolic representations from other cultures such as those found in Christian mysticism, Buddhism, Taoism, Sufism,

Judaism, and shamanic traditions. As a psychiatrist and Jungian analyst, he created a treatment center called Diabasis for people having their first encounter with psychosis. Perry and his colleagues found that valuing the client's psychotic experience was sometimes enough to shift their motivation from "power and prestige" to "love and relatedness." It was through the transpersonal paradigm and the vast spectrum of cultural symbols that Perry discerned meaning in these psychotic states.

This simplified account of the history of spirituality in modern psychology has intentionally excluded concepts such as constructivism and personal construct theory because they are outside the bounds of spiritual traditions. Constructivism first appeared in family therapy literature and then in the cognitive literature of Mahoney and Neimeyer (as cited in Steinfeld, 2000). Although the postmodern perspective directly challenges reductionism, the strong version of postmodernism that all beliefs are socially constructed leads to other pitfalls. In his book, *Rediscovery of Awe*, Schneider (2004) warned against the dangers of postmodernism:

With almost fanatical zeal, there are some who would deconstruct with abandon, who would mistake anarchy for freedom, and impulsivity for spontaneity. The result is that, as much as we have a society courting spiritualism and fundamentalism, we also have a society courting nihilism and anarchism. Where are we going with all this haste, rearrangement, and impulse living, and for whose benefit? I fear that some of the very destinations that post-modern thinkers endeavored to avert (e.g., robotic living) we are headlong edging toward. (p. 4)

Wilber's Structural-Hierarchical Model

Following in the footsteps of developmental psychologists such as Piaget, Kohlberg, and Erickson, Wilber postulated that through the transitions inherent in the developmental process we ascend to higher levels of inclusive wholeness, gaining new

perspective without losing touch with the lower developmental structures (Wilber, 1999a). That is, the higher levels both include and transcend those that have come before. He used the word *holoarchy* to describe a direction of development that moves towards increasingly larger and more expansive forms of consciousness. For example, an acorn becomes a tree, but a tree can never become an acorn (Wilber, 1995).

The Great Chain of Being and the Nature of Hierarchy

Wilber's (1995) model is rooted in the perennial philosophy, a common understanding at the core of such wisdom traditions as Christianity, Buddhism, and Taoism:

So overwhelmingly widespread is the Perennial Philosophy that it is either the single greatest intellectual error ever to appear in humankind's history or it is the single most accurate reflection of reality yet to appear. (p. 9)

Central to this philosophy is the metaphor of a "great chain of being," or as Wilber (1995) puts, it "great nest of being." From this perspective, reality is a series of interconnected relationships that paradoxically embrace individual distinctions. Essentially, reality is perceived not as one-dimensional; rather, it is a "continuum of being or a spectrum of consciousness" composed of several different but continuous dimensions. It is comprised of grades or levels ranging from the lowest, most dense and non-conscious to the highest, most subtle and most conscious. On one end of the spectrum, there is simple matter—on the other is spirit or super-consciousness (Wilber 1995).

To fully comprehend this development, we must go beyond thinking in either atomistic or holistic terms. According to Wilber (1995), chains of developmental events

“can be understood neither as things nor processes, neither as wholes nor parts, but only as simultaneous whole/parts, or *holons*” (p. 33). The term *holon* refers to that which can be whole in one context, and simultaneously a part in another.

The central claim of the perennial philosophy is that men and women can grow and develop (or evolve) all the way up the hierarchy to spirit itself, therein to realize a “supreme identity” with Godhead—the *Ens Perfectissimum* toward which all growth and evolution yearns. (Wilber, 1999b, p. 39)

Wilber (1995) stated that according to modern psychology, systems theory, and evolutionary theory, a *hierarchy* is “simply a ranking of orders of events according to their holistic capacity” (p. 17). He further explained that in all developmental sequences, what is whole in one stage is part of a larger whole at the next stage. For example, a cell is part of an organ, which is also part of a biological organism. Each structure is complete in its unity, yet it is also part of a larger, more complex structure. While the lower or smaller structures are involved in production of higher structures, they do not lose their specific purpose.

Levels or Waves: Basic Structures, Transitional Structures, and States

In *Integral Psychology*, Wilber (1999b) contended that normal human development is a process of the sequential emergence of levels of a hierarchy of “basic structures.” The basic structures of consciousness in the perennial philosophy are most commonly represented as: “matter, body (emotional-sexual level), mind (including imagination, concepts, and logic), soul (the supraindividual source of identity), and spirit (both the formless ground and nondual union of all other levels)” (pp. 11-12). Each of these basic structures comes with certain capacities and powers inherent to the psyche. These are accessed in a level-by-level fashion, with the lower-level structures serving as

both foundations and functional components of the higher-level structures. Because lower levels are also used as functional components in higher levels, they are preserved and incorporated rather than discarded. These basic structures, even the higher levels, are only potentials, not pre-given molds; until they are consciously manifested, they are highly plastic and still open to being formed as development proceeds.

Wilber (1999b) further defined *structures* as, “stable patterns of events” (p. 13). Such stable patterns are seen in the structures of developmental lines such as cognition, affect, needs, and morals. The three basic developmental structures are prepersonal (pre-egoic), personal (egoic), and transpersonal (trans-egoic). In each of these three developmental structures, clear levels or milestones may be experienced or witnessed. Again, these milestones retain their holistic capacity and evolve, gradually being incorporated into higher levels, ending in Spirit and the transpersonal (Wilber, 2000).

Wilber pointed out very important distinctions between basic structures and transitional structures of consciousness. Transitional structures (Wilber 1986, 1996) are temporarily useful, but are subsequently phased out and replaced. This is very different from the evolution in the previously mentioned holarchical development, in which each higher stage of development transcends but includes its predecessors. Temporary structures are not included when the next higher stage of development is achieved. As Wilber (1996) explained using the example of Kohlberg’s stages of moral development: “When moral stage two emerges, it does not so much incorporate moral stage one as replace it” (p. 10).

When a transitional structure is present, it is as real and essential as any other structure. Such structures are designed to be replaced by higher, incompatible stages. The

earlier transitional stages cannot be accessed because they are no longer consistent with the individual's current capacity. To access the earlier moral stages of development would imply some form of regression or pathology.

Consciousness can be further divided into natural and altered states. The perennial philosophy identifies natural states as those defined by waking, dreaming, and deep sleep. The ego functions within waking consciousness. Dream states are created entirely by the psyche and therefore provide partial access to the soul and source of identity. Deep sleep states are the window into formlessness and spirit consciousness. These three states are most easily identified because they happen for every human being, regardless of stage developmental level. Everyone sleeps, wakes, and dreams (Wilber, 1999b, 2006).

Altered states of consciousness include all other nonordinary states, from drug-induced states to meditative or to peak experiences. Like the three natural states of being awake, asleep, and dreaming, these altered states can be experienced at any stage of development. How such states are interpreted will be determined by the developmental level of a given individual at the time of the experience. Wilber's model is complex because there are multiple depths of experience at each level of development (Wilber, 1999b).

With the help of a colleague, Allan Combs, Wilber (2006) created the Wilber-Combs lattice (see Figure 1) to demonstrate the complex relationship between states and structures. With seven structures or stages, and four potential states to access, there are 28 stage/state experiences.

1.

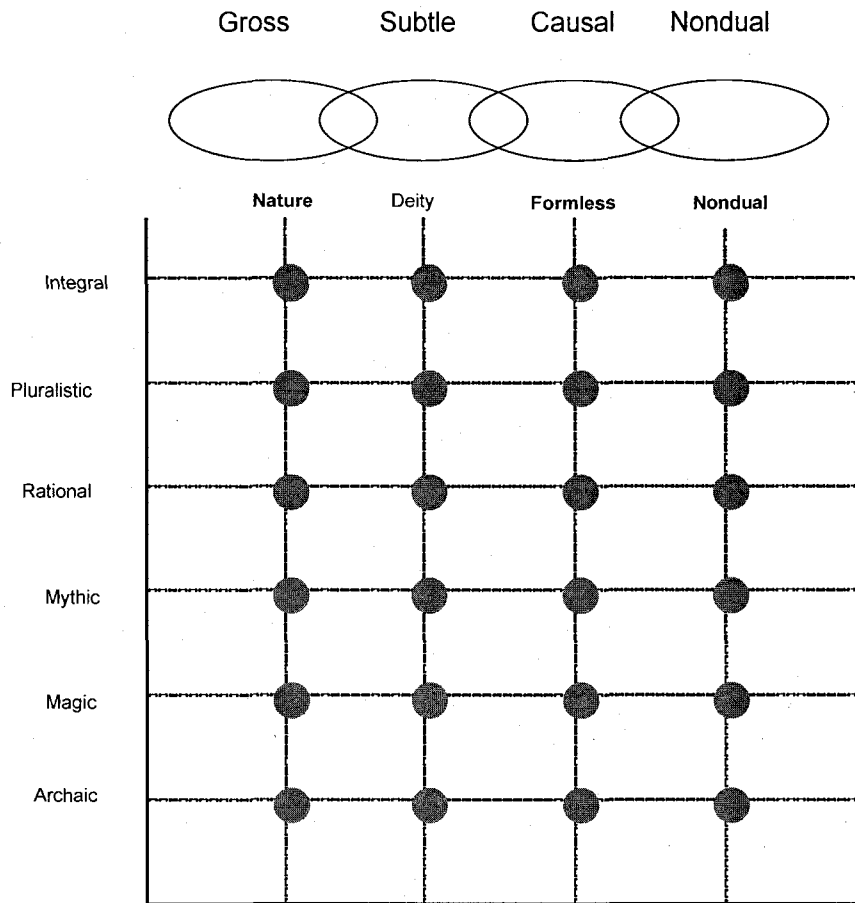


Figure 1. The Wilber-Combs lattice.¹

The relationship between states and structures is that states contain various structures of consciousness. Any state of consciousness (such as waking or dreaming) can contain several different structures or levels of consciousness. Wilber (2000) uses the

example, “the waking state can contain the preoperational structure, the concrete operational structure, formal operational structure, and so on” (p. 151).

According to Wilber (2006), understanding these distinctions and the relationships between structures and states is the single most important key to understanding the nature of spiritual development. This understanding helps to explain how a person at any stage of development can have a transcendental experience, since all human beings possess the same basic structures of consciousness. None of these state experiences become permanent stages or traits unless they are converted into enduring structures of consciousness. Typically, natural states and altered states do not show a developmental pattern; they simply come and go as temporary experiences. For states to become permanent realizations, deliberate meditative or contemplative practice over time—which facilitates access to higher realms of consciousness—is required (Wilber 2006, p. 72).

Lines or Streams: Multiple Lines of Development

Individuals possess varied capacities, intelligences, and specialized functions that develop relatively independently at different rates through the levels of consciousness. Therefore, cognition, moral development, affects, needs, sexuality, and self-identity are examples of specific lines of development that progress through the developmental levels or waves. In one individual, some of these lines may be highly developed and some poorly developed at the same time. Development in each of these lines tends to be sequential, but each line develops at its own rate. This is not to say that the development of specific lines—such as cognition—doesn’t influence the development of other lines—such

as mathematic applications. It is entirely possible, for example, to have a politician with a highly developed cognitive capacity, but a poorly developed moral sense (Wilber, 2000, p. 148).

All the developmental lines proceed through the same broad levels outlined in the Great Chain (Nest) of Being. Wilber (1999b) specifically stated that development along the lines follows a holarchical structure: “Higher stages in each line tend to build upon or incorporate the earlier stages, no stages can be skipped, and the stages emerge in an order that cannot be altered by environmental conditioning or social reinforcement” (p. 28).

The Self System

The role of the self in the overall evolution of consciousness is that of the navigator. To understand how the self navigates and traverses the various levels and lines of consciousness, we must distinguish between the types of self that are available.

According to Wilber (1999b),

The experience of “I” called the “proximate self” (ego development) is closer to “you” than the experience of “me” or the “distal self.” Together these are called the “overall self.” This distinction is crucial because the “I” of one stage can be seen as “me” in the next. (p. 33)

In other words, the subject of one stage may be seen as the object of the next. Wilber (1999b) gave the following example:

A young infant is identified almost solely with its body—the body is the infant’s self or subject (the proximate I), and thus the infant cannot really stand back and objectively observe its body. It simply is a bodyself, and as a body it looks at the world. But when the infant’s verbal and conceptual mind begins to emerge, the infant will start to identify with the mind—the mind becomes the self or subject (the proximate I), and the infant can then, for the first time, start to see its body objectively (as a distal object or “me”)—the body is now an object of the new subject the mental self. (p. 34)

Levels and lines, as well as basic and transitional structures, are navigated by the self-system. The self identifies with each level or basic structure chronologically as they become available. This identification with a given structure does not mean that the self is rigidly stuck viewing the world entirely from one perspective. The self can move all over the spectrum, using its access to the natural states of consciousness (psychic, subtle, causal, and nondual). Movement between these structures may involve either progression to higher, more inclusive structures (as in the Great Chain of Being), or regression, which brings the awareness to lower, previously experienced identifications. Each level that the self experiences is integrated, preserved, and consolidated (Eros), or confronted with negation, differentiation, and separation (Thanatos) (Wilber, 1997).

In healthy development, the self undergoes a three step process: (a) merger/fusion/embeddedness, (b) differentiation/transcendence, and (c) incorporation/integration (Wilber, 1997). The self starts out with a “center of gravity” that is identified with or embedded in a basic structure of consciousness. Then the self differentiates from and transcends its current structure in order to incorporate and integrate the lower structures into the next higher structure of consciousness. Letting go of the past structure is very difficult for the self. Wilber (1999b) stated, “the only reason the self eventually accepts death of its given level is that the *life* of the next higher level is even more enticing and ultimately satisfying” (p. 36).

The Four Quadrants

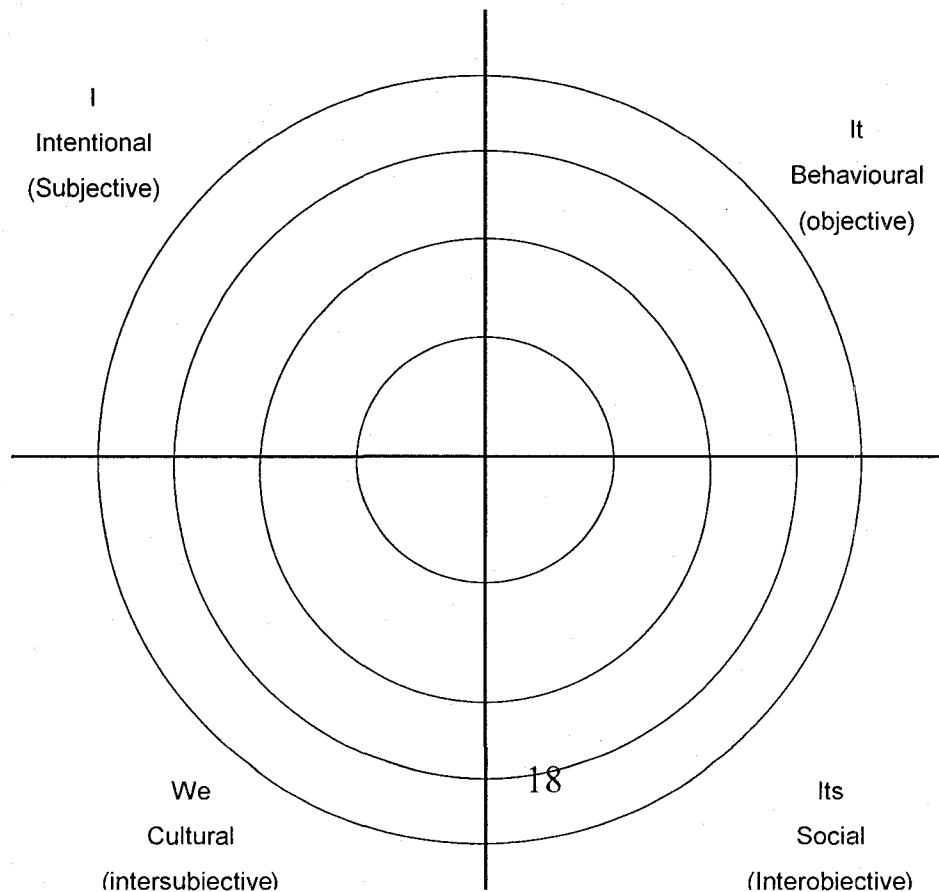
Wilber introduced four quadrants into his model to distinguish between interior subjective experience and external observable behavior. In an attempt to counteract the

dominance of scientific materialism and scientific imperialism, he further pointed to the difference between individual perception and collective social/group perception. The insight of individual experience coupled with objective study of external behavior is essential for a model including all elements of the Great Chain of Being. Wilber (1999b) pointed out the need to distinguish his theory from scientific materialism:

It was this scientific materialism that very soon pronounced the other value spheres to be worthless, “not scientific,” illusory, or worse. And for precisely that reason, it was scientific materialism that pronounced the Great Nest of Being to be nonexistent. (p. 61)

Wilber (1995) used four quadrants to provide an overview of all developmental lines and levels from these four different perspectives: interior- individual (intentional); exterior- individual (behavioral); interior-social (cultural); and exterior-social (social) [see Figure 2].

2.



*Figure 2. Four quadrant graph.*²

The upper left (UL) quadrant covers all the individual scientific perspectives, such as psychoanalysis and mathematics. The upper right (UR) quadrant is the behaviorist view, which can be empirically validated by externally observable qualities. The lower left (LL) quadrant represents the shared worldview of social and communal structures. The lower right (LR) quadrant is the exterior form of social systems; this consists of observable institutions that are built to support the worldview represented in (LL).

The example of cognition can be used to demonstrate how the quadrants can be used. In the UR quadrant, one could represent the measurement of intelligence by an aptitude test (observable results). With this exterior measurement, an interior understanding of cognition could be represented as shared subjective experience in the UL quadrant. Individuals do not exist entirely divorced from others; therefore, the LR quadrant could represent group interaction and the facilitation of cognition that might be available in a school system. The value placed on cognitive development or intelligence by the collective culture, and how that informs and structures the school system, would be shown in the LL quadrant. The quadrant system offers a visual model for seeing each developmental level and line. In order to view specific elements, it is helpful to reduce the picture to one particular quadrant, but this, of course, is only a partial view. The combined perspectives of all four quadrants provides for an integration of the various elements, facilitating an understanding of the full spectrum of consciousness.

Recent Developments: Color Spectrum

In 1999a, Wilber adopted a color scheme corresponding to 12 distinct aspects of development, beginning with sensorimotor development and ending in supermind (unity-consciousness). This color scheme—identified as AQAL, or all quadrant, all level—can be used to track the level of development of any number of lines.

These 12 levels of consciousness in AQAL are divided by identifiable shifts in focus of awareness on such aspects as cognition, values, self-identity, and worldviews, etc. These 12 levels represent a person's altitude in anyone or all of the possible lines of development. The specific colors on the spectrum match the color spectrum of a rainbow. Starting at the lowest level of consciousness and moving to the highest level they are listed as: infrared, magenta, red, amber, orange, green, teal, turquoise, indigo, violet, ultraviolet, and clear light. Each line of development reaches different altitude on the color spectrum. For example, a person at the green (midrange) level of consciousness would score cognitively at the “pluralistic mind”; they would have relativistic values; and have an individualistic self-identity (Wilber, 2006).

Washburn's Model of Psychospiritual Development

The Spiral Concept of Development

Like Wilber's structural hierarchical model, Washburn's psychospiritual model views consciousness with a triphasic design: preegoic (prepersonal), egoic (personal), and transegoic (transpersonal). Washburn's (1995) psychospiritual model, “the dynamic-dialectical paradigm,” finds its roots in Christian mysticism and is supported by Jungian

concepts of depth psychology. Essentially, the psyche is perceived as having a bipolar constitution, whereby ego functions and id/unconscious potentials are on opposing poles. Both preegoic and transegoic states are lower and higher expressions of the same nonegoic or id potentials. It is important to note that both states share the same psychic medium (Washburn, 1998).

The Dynamic Ground

At the deepest core of the psyche lies the Dynamic Ground [capitalized in this document, as Washburn, 2003, does]—the source of all nonegoic potentials. Acting like a bridge between psyche and physical matter, the Dynamic Ground is inherited and universal; all human beings participate in this collective unconscious. Psychic energy, biologically governed instincts, and autosymbolic imagination are all hosted in this inherently unconscious psychoid source. Expression of these potentials may be influenced by the ego system, yet the actual source of these potentials lies beneath the psyche and cannot be consciously viewed.

Washburn (2003) departs from the Jungian view in seeing these unconscious potentials not as inherently prepersonal or transpersonal in nature, but rather as different developmental expressions of the same psychic material (pp. 37-40).

Bipolar Constitution of the Psyche

Adapting the structural models of classical psychoanalytic and Jungian psychologies, Washburn divides the psyche into two opposing poles: the egoic or mental egoic pole, and the nonegoic or the physicydynamic pole. The ego functions are situated in the egoic pole; therefore, self-control, reflective self-awareness, cognition, operational cognition, and so on are all products of the egoic pole. Standing in direct opposition to this is the nonegoic pole, which is located in the Dynamic Ground (see Figure 3). The source of all other instinctual, creative-imaginal potentials, the nonegoic pole is credited with the power of libido and psychic energy. Washburn (1995) claims that this psychic

polarity results in our perception of duality—for example, “form and dynamism, mind and body, thought and feeling, logic and creativity, self-control and spontaneity” (p. 11).

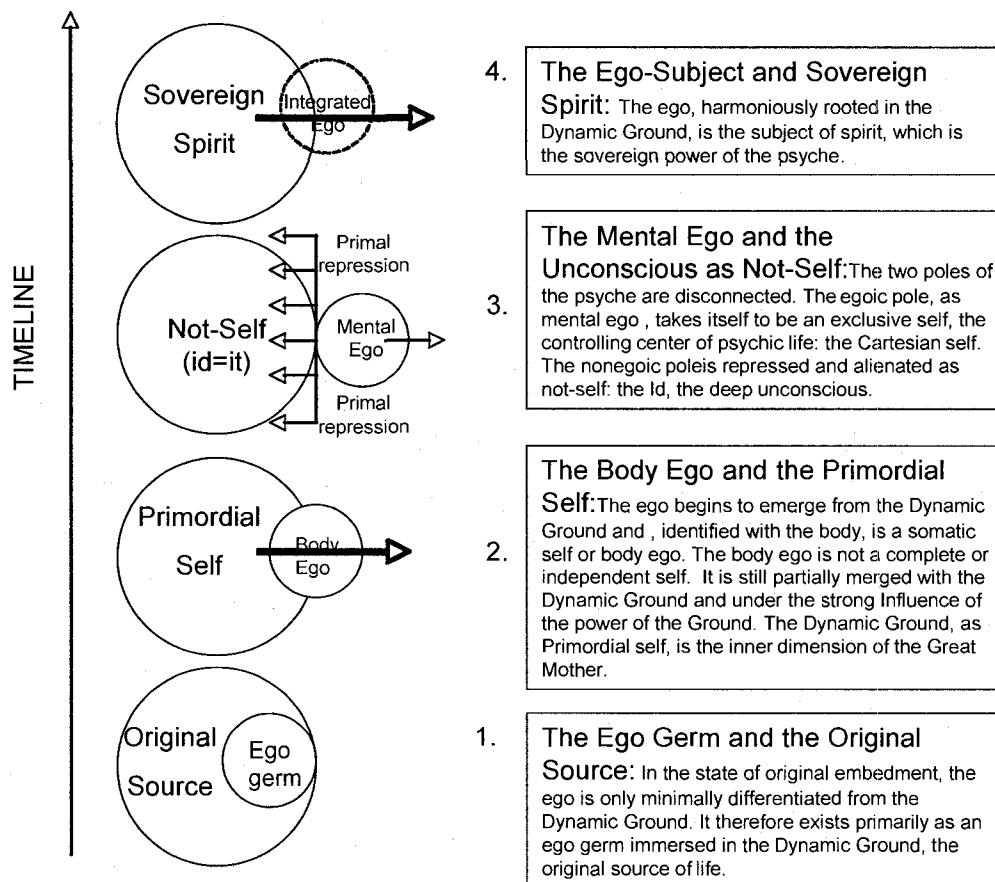


Figure 3. Unfolding selfhood: The dynamic dialectical paradigm. Reproduced from *The Ego and the Dynamic Ground: A Transpersonal Theory of Human Development*, Second Edition by Michael Washburn, by permission of the State University of New York Press. ©2003 State University of New York. All Rights Reserved.

The separation of these two poles maintains a bimodal function of active and passive capacity. The ego or egoic pole can actively assert itself as an individuated identity, or it can passively surrender itself into the larger whole of nonegoic potential.

When the ego opens itself to be influenced by nonegoic potentials, it becomes subject to instinctual feelings and vivid imagery (Washburn, 1995, p. 15).

Stage View of Development: Prepersonal, Personal, Transpersonal

Washburn's dynamic-dialectic theory assumes that development is governed by a dialectical interplay between the egoic and nonegoic poles. To properly understand this interplay, it is important to consider how they manifest in the course of human development. The span of human development is divided into prepersonal, personal, and transpersonal stages, with further subcategories in each stage (Washburn, 1995).

Prepersonal stage.

The prepersonal stage is comprised of the neonatal, early preoedipal, late preoedipal, and oedipal stages; development is marked by shifts in the relationship between the ego and the Dynamic Ground. In the beginning of an individual's life, the egoic pole and egoic functions are only minimally active and hardly differentiated from the Ground. During these first few months, the ego does exist, but only as a potential for further development (Washburn, 1995). Washburn referred to this initial condition of ego-Ground merger as *original embedment* which he further described as,

a condition of dynamic plentitude that it is a state that is contented and fulfilled, without felt lack or need, and therefore that it is a condition that is psychically (although not physically) self-sufficing. Original embedment is then a state that, subjectively speaking, is whole as well as absorbed. The metaphor that best captures this self-sufficiency of original embedment is that of the fertilized egg. (p. 49)

Approximately between 4 to 15 months of age, the child enters the preoedipal stage, in which the ego begins to emerge from the Dynamic Ground in the experience of

self-boundaries, and body boundaries. The external world is charged and highly alive for the child because the power of the Ground still flows through the psyche. This relationship influences the child's experience of the primary caregiver, who is perceived as possessing superimposed magical powers and archetypal guises. Only the slightest egoic boundaries are defined, and the child lives in an otherwise "polymorphously hedonic body ego" (Washburn 2003, p. 15). Essentially, the abundant energy of the Ground freely circulates in the child's body, amplifying pleasurable sensations.

The child's sense of security is first jeopardized in the late preoedipal stage by the realization that objects and others are separate from the self and may not be constantly accessible. The child's sense of self splits as it attempts to maintain control over its behaviors to please the caregiver. The child can now still be in the caregiver's constant favor, while all offensive behavior belongs to the split, bad self. Similarly, the child divides good and bad experiences of the world in hopes of avoiding the inevitable abandonment of separateness (Washburn, 2003).

Somewhere between 5 to 6 years of age, the child enters the oedipal stage. This final stage of prepersonal development eventually leads the ego/Ground relationship to a period of stability. At this stage, the preoedipal split is mostly resolved as the child weans itself from the primary love object and commits itself unconditionally to the primary authority figure (typically, in many cultures, the father). The realignment with outside forces is directly related to an inwardly focused psychodynamic reorganization. The withdrawal from the primary relationship with mother is simultaneously an internal end to energetic, instinctual, and other spontaneities of the Dynamic Ground. This separation from the Ground is called *primal separation* or *primal repression*. Once the child

commits to a relationship with authority, Washburn asserted that several favorable consequences occur: (a) the final overcoming of the many dimensions of preoedipal splitting; (b) the quieting of nonegoic potentials (latency); and (c) the differentiation of the ego from the body (Washburn, 2003, p. 19).

Personal stage.

The personal stage is marked by the ego's separation from the Dynamic Ground and the influence of its nonegoic potentials. The ego is free from the nonegoic pole of the psyche, which is submerged to the deep unconscious. This egoic-nonegoic dualism is a semi-permanent psychic structure in that for most people, it lasts for the rest of the life span. The personal stage begins with the latency and ends in the transpersonal realm (if that is ever reached) (Washburn, 1995).

Washburn's use of the term *latency* is much more inclusive than Freud's *sexual latency stage*. All nonegoic potentials—including instinctual drives and the power of the Dynamic Ground—are significantly quieted by primal repression. Primal repression does not entirely deactivate the nonegoic potentials; it only makes way for the young ego to grow. The Dynamic Ground disconnects from consciousness; it now provides neutral (non-instinctual) energy for active psychic process as well as becoming latent libido. The child no longer needs to project powers onto the caregiver, as these are now available in his own psyche. The new inner power allows the child to perceive itself in a new integrated way without the preoedipal split. The "bad self" concept is repressed in the unconscious only to become the "shadow." Similarly, the oedipal authority is internalized and becomes the voice of the superego. The child's psyche no longer sees the world as

magical, because it now has a functioning ego structure within a tripartite structure of id, ego, and superego (Washburn, 2003).

Sexual awakening in puberty puts a stop to the latency stage. The sexual transformation of the adolescent's body is the most dramatic physiological marker of developmental change. A new form of bodily ecstasy is experienced through sexual stimulation, culminating most dramatically in orgasm. In this way the power of Ground is accessed in the form of libido. A new externalized awareness develops, causing the adolescent to test out new identities with peers. Other people can now be objects of sexual desire, as the adolescent explores new relationship possibilities with those they find desirable. They begin searching for a person (love object) to replace the parents. Because the adolescent no longer wants to be a child, she rejects the ego ideal established by the parent. Internalized authority is rejected because it begins to feel oppressive and alien. During this period, adolescents disengage from "child's play" and begin to act out adult relationships and identities (Washburn, 2003, pp. 22-24).

By the time early adulthood begins, the mental ego is usually ready to commit to a new identity that reintegrates the components of the ego system. Washburn (2003) gave the following example:

in attempting to be a, say, a social worker, Christian, wife and mother, a woman seeks to earn a socially recognized identity (a new self-representation), and she does so in a way that is motivated by a self-chosen life ideal (a new ego ideal) and by a sense of obligation to meet the long-term commitments she has made (a new superego). (pp. 24-25)

This new sexual identity is the final stage of ego development. Self-features not good enough for this new identity are repressed and become part of a reconstituted shadow (Washburn, 2003).

Later in life, people tend to lose their sense of purpose after succeeding or not succeeding at this identity project. They enter a stage called the *crossroads*, which is a chance to be reconnected with the Dynamic Ground. Psychic energy is withdrawn from worldly goals and reinvested into a newly recharged Dynamic Ground. The ego is affected by this redirection of energy toward the Ground and in turn begins to perceive itself and its worldly identity as a “lifeless mask” (Washburn, 2003, p. 23). No longer charged by the ego ideal or the superego, the ego becomes merely a pretender with a collection of habits upholding a false façade.

Transpersonal stage.

Not everyone enters the transpersonal stage. Those who do, begin to experience this stage at midlife or later. This stage begins with a shift in values from worldly goals to spiritual possibilities. The dynamic-dialectical model of development shows the egoic pole reopening to the nonegoic pole; this leads to a dialectical synthesis that results in a fully actualized and integrated bipolarity. The ego functions and nonegoic potentials coexist harmoniously on a higher plane. This two-phase process starts with “regression in service of transcendence,” which is the return of the ego to its origins in the Dynamic Ground. Here, the ego is transformed and uplifted by the power of the Dynamic Ground, resulting in a more expansive consciousness. The ego descends into the collective unconscious, wherein it is engulfed and transformed with new power from the source. This is also seen as a redemptive process. In Washburn’s (1995) words,

This regressive return is depicted as the odyssey of a hero into the underworld, as the journey of a saint into the lower regions of hell, as the awakening of the “serpent power” kundalini, and as the alchemical reduction of base metal into prime matter. (p. 21)

Before the egoic regression can take place, the ego must go through a period of awakening. When the introverted psychic energy accumulates in the Dynamic Ground with sufficient charge, the Ground is released from the deep core of the psyche in powerful emanations. This upwelling of numinous spirit is the beginning of spiritual awakening. During this phase of initial contact with the Dynamic Ground, certain people who have already begun the awakening process become very attractive. These people have a compelling and captivating effect, as if they possess access to supernatural realms. Such people are often seen as seers, sages, or gurus (Washburn, 2003).

Regression in service of transcendence is not merely a retrograde movement to earlier, primitive functioning; it is the lifting of primal repression and the inevitable opening of the ego to the prepersonal unconscious. When the ego begins to realize that its deepest desires cannot be fulfilled by the world, ordinary tasks seem meaningless, and disillusionment can lead to alienation. At this point, there is no amount of success in ego identification that can renew interest and involvement in the world. The existential anxieties that follow this meaninglessness are inherent in the design of awakening. Because the ego, with its current system, finds this state both unendurable and inescapable, it is pushed to let go at the deepest level and accept the powers of the Dynamic Ground. In allowing the powers of the Ground, the ego experiences a creative source with regenerative powers and is spiritually transformed. Washburn (1995) asserted that if regression in service of transcendence is viewed from a transpersonal perspective, it “can be seen to be [a] natural expression[s] of human development as it moves beyond the level of mental ego” (p. 174).

The ego’s spiritual transformation is fundamentally a positive experience. In a

stage called *regeneration in spirit*, the power of the Ground infuses the ego, allowing it to finally heal the split between the ego ideal and shadow elements. The ego ideal is humanized, and the shadow is redeemed, allowing instincts back into the egoic system. These two higher and lower possible selves merge, thus putting an end to earlier dualistic perceptions. This more integrated ego-spirit system once again forms an identity, this time with more authentic features of the self. This new identity remains secondary to the new, spiritual self, which acts as an inner guide to the ego's spiritual transformation. This stage marks the end of the darkness and confusion of the regression phase (Washburn, 2003).

Finally, spirit and ego join forces, allowing both egoic and nonegoic poles integrated expression. Even though the ego is a lesser self in relationship to Spirit, Spirit becomes an expression of the ego. The ego no longer needs Spirit for guidance, because Spirit is now the ego's inner wisdom. From this viewpoint, all others are seen as spiritual beings, regardless of their own relationship to Spirit. There are no more saints and sinners, just fellow brothers and sisters on an innately spiritual path (Washburn, 2003).

In the spiral concept of development, both beginning and end share the same deep foundations. The ego reaches the end of its spiral journey and is once again rooted in the Dynamic Ground. Even though both prepersonal and transpersonal states share the same psychic medium, they are completely different expressions of egoic development. It is the ego that is different in the end, as it is now maturely developed and securely established in the world. In Washburn's (2003) words,

At the beginning of the spiritual path the unity of consciousness and life is only a primitive prepersonal unity; at the end, in contrast, this unity is a completely actualized transpersonal unity, a higher integration of a fully developed ego with a plenipotently active Dynamic Ground. (p. 36)

Wilber and Washburn Compared

Now that I have provided a brief overview of the main elements of Ken Wilber's structural-hierarchical model and Michael Washburn's dynamic-dialectic model of human development, I would like to point out the obvious differences between the two models. Both models use a triphasic structure to view human development in pre-egoic (prepersonal), egoic (personal), and transegoic (transpersonal) stages. While they have this in common, however, they do *not* agree on the following developmental processes: (a) regression vs. involution, (b) one psychic source vs. pre/trans fallacy, and (c) split self-system vs. increasing self-wholes.

Regression vs. Involution

As mentioned earlier, regression is a necessary means of mobility for Washburn's dynamic-dialectic model of development. Regression is valued as an explanation for difficulties that can arise while on the spiritual path. In this way, hardships such as Saint John of the Cross' "dark night of the soul" are seen as necessary purifications leading to higher spiritual development, rather than neurotic pathologies (Welwood, 2000).

Returning to the Dynamic Ground is an essential part of transcendence beyond ego. Because the instinctual forces of the Ground were lost via repression, they must be regained via regression. Washburn states that *regression in service of transcendence* is "a process that begins with the lifting of primal repression and the consequent opening of the ego to the prepersonal unconscious" (Washburn, 2003, p. 172). In order to do this, the ego must go through a period of withdrawal from the world and experience a kind of ego death in order to make it to the next developmental level. Regardless of how this might

torment the ego, reawakening of psychic energy is seen as healing and therefore a prerequisite to spiritual maturity.

Wilber on the other hand, saw regression as only necessary to free up pathologically repressed experiences—as just one of the many defense mechanisms put into place by the self-system when development becomes pathological. Wilber (1997) stated:

I believe that regression is common and sometimes necessary, not because the Dynamic Ground is lost at age 1, but because repression itself tends to cripple further growth in any case. The greater the repression in the earlier stages, then the more higher growth is crippled. In my view, “regression in service of ego” is thus a return to, and a recontacting of, the alienated feelings, emotions, affects or emotional-sexual energies that were dissociated in the early fulcrums. (p. 148)

These repressed aspects of the self-system must be reintegrated before higher developmental stages can be reached. This type of regression in service of ego is sometimes a prerequisite for transcendence of the ego into the transpersonal realms (Wilber, 1997).

Wilber (1990) also said that he “subsequently rejected that ‘regressive’ view of evolution and replaced it with an involution/evolutionary paradigm of descent and ascent, with the U-turn appearing correctly I believe, between them (and not in the middle of evolution itself)” (p. 135). Each stage of growth in the structural-hierarchical model is irreversible; this means that movement continues to higher stages, or it breaks down. There is no need to go backwards or devolve. More specifically, Wilber used the term *involution* to explain the moment-to-moment separation from Spirit and the inevitable return to the egoic self. This descending movement is not seen as counterproductive; rather, involution is the necessary other half of evolution into the transpersonal. Unlike

the dramatic midlife regression phase that Washburn talked about, involution is constantly occurring. In the *Atman Project*, Wilber (1979) explained:

In this moment and this moment and this, an individual is Buddha, is Atman, is the Dharmakaya-*but*, in this moment and this moment and this, he ends up as John Doe, as a separate self, as a separate self, as an isolated body apparently bounded by others isolated bodies. At the beginning of *this* and every moment, each individual *is* God as the Clear Light; but by the *end* of this same moment-in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye-he winds up an isolated ego. (p. 175)

Pre/Trans Fallacy vs. One Psychic Source

To further understand the difference between these two transpersonal developmental theories, further distinction needs to be made between the sources of psychic material. The most significant point of contention between Wilber's and Washburn's models arises from the fact that they disagree on the *nature and source of preegoic and transegoic states*. Wilber (1980) described any similarities between preegoic and transegoic states as merely superficial and misleading. He contended that these two psychic states are not expressions of the same or even similar structures. Furthermore, to confuse the preegoic and transegoic states is to commit one of two possible pre/trans logical fallacies: "the reduction of the transpersonal to the personal, which we call PTF-1, and the elevation of the prepersonal to the transpersonal, or PTF-2" (p. 8).

For Wilber (1990), the evolutionary progression from the preegoic through egoic to transegoic stages implies distinctly different potentials. Reducing transegoic mysticism to some form of reconnecting to earlier states of infantile bliss negates the transpersonal realm. Invalidating the wealth of transpersonal states because they may contain similarities to earlier unconscious process is the first form of fallacy. The second fallacy

occurs when prepersonal fusion is taken to be the same as transpersonal union that highly romanticizes an unconscious, regressive process.

Washburn (1995) believed that there is a middle ground in which both preegoic and transegoic states can be different expressions of the same nonegoic potential.

It is entirely possible that nonegoic potentials such as dynamism, the body, instinctuality, feeling, and the creative imagination express themselves early in life in pre-ways and then express themselves later in life—that is, after the ego is mature and has been reconnected with nonegoic potentials-in trans-ways. (p. 4)

Washburn recognized that the primary matrix and spiritual wholeness are not the same thing, but believed that they may be differing expressions of the Dynamic Ground. In this way, the primary matrix is a preegoic fusion with the Ground, and spiritual wholeness is a higher reunion with the Ground. Washburn (1995) further explained:

Preegoic states and stages are developmentally inferior to egoic states and stages, and transegoic states and stages are developmentally superior to egoic states and stages. In recognizing this important difference between pre- and trans- states and stages, however, it is not necessary to conclude that there is a corresponding difference between pre and trans structures (i.e., basic structures or psychic potentials). The fact that pre and trans differ developmentally and phenomenologically does not entail that they are dissimilar structurally, that is, in their underlying psychic source. (p. 4)

Increasing Self-Wholes vs. Split Self-System

Wilber and Washburn conceived two different self-systems in their respective developmental models. Wilber's (1997) self-system unfolds through the process of identifying with each new structural level of consciousness. A new, more all-encompassing self emerges in relationship to each higher identified level. This new self-concept is mobile and has free access to the previous basic structure. In this way, the self reaches new, higher structures via transitional structures, while incorporating the lower qualities in its new identification. This development is a one-way progression of

increasingly more encompassing wholes, but the self-system does not have to stay at each higher level. “This is why the self is where the action is. It can jump ahead, regress, spiral, go sideways, or otherwise dialectically spin on its heels” (p. 146).

Washburn, on the other hand, used a split-self model with the two selves embedded in opposing psychic poles. On one pole you have the nonegoic self emerging from this pole, and the egoic self eventually return to it. These two self-concepts are not equal, because the nonegoic pole is “the original, deeper, and (potentially) higher self and the egoic pole [is] a secondary but still essential self” (Washburn, 1995, p. 22). The end result of this dialectical interplay between the two self-concepts leads to a complete union of the psychic poles and the end of the dualistic self-concept. At this point, the two self-concepts function as one with the ego joined in Spirit (Washburn, 2003).

Integrated Discussion of Research with Three Prior Exemplary Studies

The very nature of the differences between Wilber’s and Washburn’s theories can really only be measured via the reports of subjective experience of those who have been through the developmental process. Whether the transition to the transpersonal levels, for example, takes the form of a mandatory midlife regression, or a succession of smaller spirals, is hardly amenable to empirical verification. Such development is not necessarily evident from the objective eye of even a trained observer. For centuries both Hindu and Buddhist philosophers have been debating the very nature of the final stage of transcendence. This mass of theoretical speculation has only guided transpersonal researchers in attempts to either validate or challenge the aforementioned developmental theories. Three of the most recent studies—Eugene Thomas (1993), Donald Rothberg

(1998), and Adam Grandi (2003)—used interviews with spiritually advanced individuals to gain some insight into their personal development.

Two Paths of Transcendence

Eugene Thomas (1993) conducted a cross-cultural investigation of 20 spiritual practitioners for his study. He chose 10 Hindu subjects from the holy cities of Varanasi and Pondicherry in India, and 10 Christian subjects from Birmingham, England. To try to control for a higher, transpersonal level of spiritual maturity, Thomas chose subjects who were over 70 years of age.

Thomas (1993) conducted a series of semi-structured interviews to determine whether any of the participants had experienced Washburn's midlife regression phase. Each participant's life story was coded for themes relating to *regression in service of transcendence*. The actual interviews were coded by a team of five researchers using Wilber's model to assess the level of spiritual development of each participant.

The results of this study challenge Washburn's theory of midlife regression as a prerequisite to spiritual, transpersonal development. Focusing on the age of participants proved to be an unsuccessful method of acquiring truly spiritually mature subjects. The coding process found only one fifth of the subjects at the transpersonal level. Only 3 of the English subjects and 2 of the Indian subjects who had reached the transpersonal stage of development had any sign of prior regression. Participants who had experienced regression had typically experienced it during their 30s; one even reported a spiritual crisis at the age of 19 (Thomas, 1993).

How Straight is the Spiritual Path?

Unlike the previous study, with cross-cultural sample of spirituality, Donald Rothberg (1998) interviewed 3 Western Buddhist teachers in his study. His stated intention in presenting these interviews was “to help connect some of the more theoretical discussions of spiritual development to examination of ongoing contemporary Western spiritual practice, particularly in the context of Ken Wilber’s work” (p. 134). All 3 subjects (Joseph Goldstein, Jack Kornfield, and Michele McDonald-Smith) were familiar with the use of developmental models in the context of understanding transpersonal development. Rothberg was specifically interested in seeing how these teachers observations compared to Wilber’s model regarding: “(1) universality of stages; (2) coherent, structured stages; (3) an invariant sequence of stages; and (4) an underlying developmental logic in which new stages represent further differentiation and hierarchical integration of earlier stages” (Rothberg, 1998, p. 137).

Rothberg’s findings both supported and raised some questions about Wilber’s model of stage development. Rothberg found that all participants agreed that placing too much emphasis on meditation leads to the neglect of other developmental lines such as emotions, bodily awareness, and relationships. All 3 subjects also agreed that models of spiritual development, whether Eastern or contemporary Western, were only useful if used properly. These models were not considered to be as important as “trust in—and somewhat of an awe regarding—the ‘organic’ unfolding of the different parts of what Kornfield calls the ‘mandala of awakening’” (as quoted in Rothberg, 1998, p. 144).

Shedding Light on Spiritual Development

Following Thomas's and Rothberg's studies, Adam Grandi (2003) conducted interviews with 7 participants—primarily Western Buddhist teachers—to learn about their experience of being on the spiritual path. He specifically asked about their experience of change over time and what they believed to be the essence of spirituality. This inquiry was designed to further illuminate the relationship of Wilber's model to the life and reflections of contemporary spiritual teachers.

Ten themes were identified in Grandi's interviews and these themes were then compared to Wilber's central tenets of development. The 10 emergent themes were: (a) our inherent nature is spiritual, (b) the transparency of the self, (c) intimacy with all things, (d) the role of the operative self, (e) spiritual life and practice are "not two," (f) development is experienced as an unfolding but requires skillful relating, (g) the two-way interplay of psychology and spirituality, (h) the effects of practice in specific areas of functioning, (i) development is idiosyncratic, (j) there is no enlightened retirement (Grandi, 2003, p. 97). Grandi's findings in his subjects' transparency of the self leaves room for more investigation as it does not entirely fit into Wilber's view that "Self-permanence is no-self awareness." Also, there was no necessary progression of stages found that could support Wilber's model. All eight of the other themes supported Wilber's claims.

The primary limitation of this research was that, while its participants were entirely appropriate for this study, there was no cross-cultural component. All participants were Western Caucasians, and they therefore shared a similar contextual

worldview. This commonality undoubtedly influenced their responses and the themes generated as a result (Grandi, 2003).

Unresolved Issues Related to Transpersonal Models of Development

The most prominent unresolved issue dividing the two transpersonal theories regards the specific nature of the unfolding of spiritual (transegoic) development. The two philosophical camps—Wilber (perennial philosophy) and Washburn (depth psychology tradition)—have not been sufficiently validated by any of the three studies mentioned earlier. The results of these studies are insufficient to indicate which model is better supported by the real life experiences of people on a spiritual path. Actually, these studies all show that transpersonal development varies significantly from person to person. Some of the research subjects showed significant regressive periods, whereas others maintained a more progressive movement toward increasingly more developed consciousness.

These findings are a significant challenge for the theoretical formulation of the two competing models, because each unfolding pattern potentially negates the other. Washburn's "regression in service of transcendence" occurs in direct opposition of Wilber's central tenet, the perennial philosophy which shows development progressing to higher stages without a need to return to prior stages. Washburn viewed regression, which is an opportunity to redeem parts of the self, as an essential part of development that leads to spiritual maturity.

Wilber's concept of evolution is highly influenced by Eastern spiritual traditions (Buddhist, Hindu, etc.); Washburn's primary influences are Christian mysticism and

Jung's theories. Many participants in the three studies mentioned were raised with Western values, but adopted Eastern spiritual practices and traditions. The development of these individuals would then be influenced by both Eastern and Western concepts. Yet some of their developments could be best mapped using Washburn's model, while others showed clear patterns of Wilber's model.

The mixed results of these prior studies demonstrates the need for additional research that takes into account a greater number of spiritual traditions. The results of Eugene Thomas' (1993) study showed the need for cross-cultural representation in subjects. Because both transpersonal theories represent Eastern and Western approaches, it would be of benefit that both Eastern and Western teachers' life stories be taken into account. The current study interviewed teachers from Buddhism and Hindu/Vedantic traditions as well as Sikhs who live in North America. These three spiritual traditions were chosen because they were grossly underrepresented in the three previously mentioned studies.

Finding appropriate subjects for an inquiry of this nature was potentially more important than sample size. This problem was accentuated in Thomas' (1993) study, as only one fifth of his subjects were in the transpersonal level of individual development. For this reason, the current study has chosen subjects who have been recognized and established spiritual teachers for over 5 years.

All three prior studies used semi-structured interviews, giving them the flexibility to allow the phenomenological inquiry to unfold naturally. The current study also used semi-structured interviews. Interviewees were asked to talk about their entire spiritual journey, from their early lives through all stages of development up to and including the

present; these conversations were recorded on audiotape. These personal stories were later analyzed to identify developmental issues; this allowed interviews to be conducted without cueing the participants to identify any particular stages and models. The list of questions to be asked (see Appendix A, Question Formulation Process) was derived from both Washburn's and Wilber's models to optimize illumination of life events related to spiritual development.

Both Grandi (2003) and Rothberg (1998) used data analysis techniques that produced themes directly in relationship to the observed phenomena of spiritual development. Thomas (1993) used some quantitative methods of analyzing the finding in his study. These statistics emphasized the flaw in his inquiry. There is not enough known about the phenomena of spiritual development to do any kind of quantitative analysis. This study therefore used thematic analysis to find similarities and differences in order to make comparisons between the lives of this cross-cultural sample of spiritual teachers. How this sample relates to the entire population of spiritual seekers is yet to be determined.

The researcher's reflections on the spiritual (transegoic) development of the interviewees (based on their comments) were then compared to the two competing theoretical models. The research question for this study is: How do the real life experiences of spiritual development relate to the models created by Wilber and Washburn?

Participants' present-day developmental level colored their memory of past experiences of when they became overtly conscious, and the stories were analyzed taking this phenomenon into account. These personal stories were later screened for

developmental issues without cueing the participants with concepts like stages and models.

Chapter III

Methods

Design

Nine (9) spiritual teachers were interviewed using open-ended questions designed to illicit details of their spiritual journey. The interview transcripts were coded using Boyatzis' (1998) qualitative thematic analysis method. This study specifically employed a hybrid coding design (as described by Boyatzis) using both data-driven codes and theory-driven codes. All nine transcripts were imported into QSR Nvivo 7 software for extensive coding and data management. First, preliminary inductive codes were generated from the raw transcript data in an attempt to preserve the integrity of the test of each participant's spiritual journey. Then, after substantial data driven codes were developed based solely on the interview transcripts, the theories of Wilber and Washburn were integrated to create new theory-based codes. The codes were then refined to 95% interrater reliability.

Appropriateness of Design

Even with the current research supporting both Wilber's and Washburn's theories, the most recent research attempts to validate these theories in regard to the lives of spiritually mature populations have returned conflicting results. For this reason, a qualitative design was appropriate to further investigate the discrepancies and potential inaccuracies in either the prior research or the theories themselves (Creswell, 1994). More preliminary understanding of the nature of spiritual development may be of benefit before more focused quantitative study can be done to use hypothesis tests to validate

these theories. Specifically, the current study compared the lived experiences of spiritual development as reported in semi-structured interviews by 9 veteran practitioners of the Buddhist, Hindu, and Kundalini (Sikh) spiritual disciplines. The qualitative research method of thematic analysis was employed to locate themes to gain a deeper understanding of meaning of the experiences and actions in the lives of these practitioners rather than any premature attempt at establishing spiritual laws (Miles, 1994). This process is inevitably value-laden and biased, making semi-structured interviews an effective approach (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). While acknowledging that bias, with its attendant effect on study participants, is present in all qualitative research, the questions in the present study were designed to elicit the life story of each spiritual teacher, with an emphasis on perceptual change over time.

Interview Questions

The interview questions were designed to uncover the intricacies of individual lives as they are influenced by their spiritual systems. Questions specifically focused on the context surrounding spiritual development, potential difficulties, and significant influences pertaining to each personal journey. The goal was to capture the unique experience of each teacher, aside from his or her theoretical and/or religious orientation. Like Rothberg's (1998) research, the purpose of this was to study and evaluate similarities and differences between identifiable themes arising from the spiritual teacher's experience. The interview questions were adapted to fit the natural flow of conversation and were therefore not asked in specific order. This allowed participants to speak about their experiences in the organic way in which they were recalled (Mason,

2003). Finally, questions included external influencing factors such as the influence of community and teachers. Refer to interview questions in appendix A.

Data Collection

Participant Selection

When looking at the pool of teachers in the three selected traditions in North America, finding the most appropriate ones for this study became challenging. Nine participants were selected from a pool of over 50 spiritual teachers from three specific traditions (Buddhist, Hindu, and Sikh/Kundalini Yoga). Three specific criteria to best define and locate authentic teachers who could fluidly talk about their spiritual journeys in a way that would directly relate to the theoretic assumptions underlining this study. All participants (a) come from direct lineage of traditional teachings, (b) are recognized by their teacher or a spiritual community as a spiritual teacher, and (c) were willing to openly discuss their personal experience when talking about spiritual development.

While the specifics of each traditional spiritual practice and identification with traditional teachers and teachings is complex as teachers enter the transpersonal stages of development, all teachers were originally practicing Buddhists, Hindus, or Sikh (Kundalini Yogis). The researcher used his personal connection to these spiritual groups with the help of knowledgeable informants to arrange meetings with all participants in this study. Many of the teachers no longer identify with any specific spiritual tradition, claiming that they have outgrown the need for external instruction and found it too restricting for their current stage of development.

In order to avoid any self-proclaimed spiritual masters or other potentially

fraudulent claims, the teachers in this study had to be appointed by their own teacher and instructed to teach. They all have been teaching for 5 years or more. In the rare case where teachers abandoned the teaching style of their own teacher to create a more contemporary teaching, their community or followers were used as basis for legitimacy. Teachers were first observed in their formal teaching settings and then engaged one on one to assess for these specific criteria to ensure that all subjects were recognized spiritual teachers.

All participants spoke English fluently and used language relevant to Western psychology. Teachers were chosen for his or her willingness to speak about their own life and process of spiritual development. Their surrounding culture, community, and teachers undoubtedly influenced these processes. Teachers were partly selected for their ability to recall this process and explain this process of transmission to their own students. Because these participants were spiritual teachers, they had the advantage of personal relationship to other teachers and spiritual communities.

Along with the criteria mentioned above, review of extensive field notes revealed a unique process of scheduling interviews. Initial attempts to recruit teachers for this study ran into some unforeseen complications. A few teachers rejected participating in this study on the grounds that they did not think academic methodologies would provide information of spiritual value. Some potential participants even went so far as to say that objective observation of spiritual development could produce misleading information. They expressed concern that their personal stories might be taken out of context, encouraging further focus on exterior methods of seeking knowledge. Over-emphasis on technique might influence others to simply mimic actions and create more dogmatic

ritualized practice. During the participant selection, such feedback was taken into consideration and adjustments were made to three major categories: language, direction of inquiry, and most importantly the worldview of the researcher.

I had to go through a personal journey of self-reflection to prepare myself to explain the purpose of my study to potential teachers. Originally the study was framed with the focus on examining subjects (teachers) to gain generalizable information about the nature of spiritual development. Some teachers suggested that this approach was inappropriate or even offensive. One individual in particular after agreeing to participate in the study, later rejected a more formal invitation by email:

Thank you for your offer to include me in your study. An account of my experiences can be found in my books and I have no real interest in re-relating them . . . they are after all, simply personal experiences and are not in my humble opinion good for much more than entertainment.

Because several teachers rejected the study on the grounds that it focused too much on personal experiences, the scope of the study expanded to go beyond the personal stories of spiritual development. The revised purpose of this study included the practical application of all results to the lives of students and therapists struggling with spiritual issues. These adjustments were made in direct consultation with several spiritual teachers until a deeper feeling of respect and mutual trust evolved in a more authentic process of collaboration. Several spiritual teachers agreed to participate in the current study after the nature of inquiry gained a transpersonal gravity and orientation.

Participants

There were 9 participants included in this study. Eight male and one female and they were all North American citizens and mostly Caucasian except for one Mexican

American. There were eight men and one woman. Participant's age ranged from 50 to 72 with an average age was 59 years old. They came from a variety of social cultural backgrounds and were raised in a variety of Judeo-Christian spiritual traditions. They were all spiritual teachers by profession, and three of them were psychotherapists as well.

Qualitative Interviewing

An open-ended interview format was used so that all participants were able to answer all the questions given their time restrictions and limited accessibility (Patton, 1990). Participants received paperwork, including an Invitation to Participate in Research (Appendix B) and the Bill of Rights for Participants in Psychological Research (Appendix C) to remind them that their participation was entirely voluntary and they could discontinue the interview at any point if they ever felt uncomfortable. Then they were given the written Interview Consent and Confidentiality Form (see Appendix D) to further ensure that any information gained would only be used for this particular study and remain under the supervision of the researcher at all times. The confidentiality form gave them the option to remain anonymous even though none of the participants felt the need to do so.

Interviews were conducted in person and in a location designated by the participants. This created the optimum environment for the interviewing process. "The quality of the information obtained in an interview is largely dependent on the interviewer" (Patton, 1990, p. 279). Participants were first given a chance to get comfortable and to take a moment of silence if needed or brief period of meditation to help focus and set the stage for spiritual inquiry. Any questions about the nature and

direction of the study were answered. Because this was the first time that some of these teachers participated in a research study they were given as much information as they needed to feel comfortable.

Interviews started with an orientation to the focus of this research and the nature of questioning used in this study. They were informed about the four specific areas of interest: spiritual journeys, teacher's influence, work with students, and community/spiritual practice. Participants were alerted to the focus on notable change that may have occurred bringing them to the current level of maturity. Follow-up questions along with nonverbal cues were used to keep the conversation flowing while inquiring about points of interest.

As Rubin and Rubin (1995) suggested, all interviews were recorded in digital format to be transcribed later so that the researcher could focus on the delicate interview process. Interviews lasted on average one hour. All recorded interviews were stored in a locked briefcase during travel and stored in a locked file cabinet; the digital files will be destroyed within 2 years of completion of this study.

Many of the participants expressed a deep appreciation for being part of this study and actually enjoyed the interview process. In particular, having a facilitated discussion about their journey and the influential elements that brought them to the current level of maturity seemed to be illuminating for many of the participants. Some of the teachers were surprised that they viewed parts of their lives in a new light after the interview. Many of them asked to receive a copy of the transcripts and offered to invite me back for follow-up questions should anything come up during the data analysis.

Instrumentation/Materials

QSR NVivo 7 software is a qualitative research tool for sophisticated analysis and management of text data. NVivo 7 was employed during the coding process of this study for its capacity to organize the 184 pages of rich text based material in the combined nine interviews. Within the text, key points were highlighted and then assigned to specific codes to be available for easy retrieval later when searching for common themes. The “Queries” option provided the ability to search all text for key words and phrases allowing easy cross sample comparison of major identified themes, thoughts, and ideas. This software also provided a modeling feature giving the researcher the advantage of visual representation of relationships as they emerged from the data.

Coding in NVivo 7 allowed specific pieces of text to be labeled for later analysis by category (themes) or by source (specific teacher). These codes were the link between the transcribed interviews and the identified themes from the teacher’s accounts. The process of identifying codes with supportive text also revealed potential relationships between the identified concepts, which were then entered into a tree code hierarchical structure. Tree code structures organized the large number of codes into categories based on their relationship to other ideas and emerging themes. When text references were applicable to more than one code, a new parent code was created to include the related child codes. Parent codes represented themes that were present across the traditions, while the child codes tended to be more individually specific. The more encompassing parent codes eventually became the foundation for more complex theoretical conceptualization of the data.

Queries, like codes, tagged specific words or key phrases by highlighting them in the text making them easily identifiable without having to remove them from their original source document. This gave access to the total usage of specified terms along with the related context. It also provided the number of times each word or phrase was used in each document. This gave rise to subtle distinctions in language usage between individual participants that would not have been detected from coding alone.

Conceptual maps, flow charts, and exploratory diagrams were used throughout the several phases of coding during data analysis. Pat Bazeley's (2007) *Qualitative Data Analysis with NVivo* emphasized the benefits of working with visual representation of ideas:

Models serve multiple purposes during qualitative research projects. Just now modeling will provide a record of where you started from and what assumptions you have brought to the project. It may also assist with clarifying your research questions and planning your data collection. (p. 40)

When investigating relationships between codes, models were used to represent recurring codes and to depict their potential influence on other codes.

Thematic Analysis and Coding

Phase 1: Inductive Data-driven Coding

For the purposes of this study a "code" is a mnemonic device or abstract representation of an identified theme (Boyatzis, 1998). I read all nine transcripts straight through to get an overall feel for the developmental process of the participant's descriptions. Three transcripts were selected (one from each tradition) because of their richness of material and coded entirely from start to finish. The first coded transcript produced 32 codes with 59 specific text references. The second transcript was purposely

selected from another spiritual tradition to insure diverse sampling and increase the generalizability of these initial codes. This resulted in 36 additional codes with 73 text references. The third transcript produced an additional 24 codes with 55 text references. A total of 92 codes emerged from these three raw transcripts. Because there was significant overlap between emerging themes, these 92 codes were condensed into 58 codes, which represented the emerging themes from these first transcripts.

During the initial coding stage several key phrases applied to more than one code suggesting potential relationship between codes. Macrocodes were created to represent dominant themes with several micro or child codes (codes having common text entries) branching out from them. The first attempt to organize these codes involved selecting parent nodes or dominant themes in which all other codes represent aspects or relationships with the larger macrocodes. From this process, 11 parent or macrocodes were selected with a range of 2 to 7 child related codes. These 11 macrocodes were classified by their subject matter. Each child code contained more specific information than its parent code. Bazeley (2007) recommended the use of a two- or three-layered code structure of classifying and further differentiating nuance in codes.

The tree structure of code was the first movement toward the process of allowing order to rise in the large amount of data covered in the nine interviews (pp. 101-105). During this phase codes were given specific definitions according to Boyatzis' (1998) five elements of a good thematic code:

1. A label (i.e., a name),
2. A definition of what the theme concerns (i.e., the characteristic of issue constituting the theme),

3. A description of how to know when the theme occurs (i.e., indicators on how to “flag” the theme),

4. A description of any qualifications or exclusions to the identification of the theme), and

5. Examples, both positive and negative, to eliminate possible confusion when looking for the theme.

These definitions further increased the precision and clarity of the coding process itself. Creating highly defined codes increased the likelihood of interrater reliability later on. In the analysis process, defining these themes immediately increased the visibility of patterns giving rise to recognition of prior transpersonal theory represented in the text.

Phase 2: Hybrid Theory-driven Code

Up until this point transpersonal theory was not included in the coding to minimize theoretical bias that could contaminate analysis of the interviews. Boyatzis (1998) has stated that theoretical codes, “are more sensitive to the projection on the part of the researcher and to the impact of his or her cultural bias” (p. 35).

During the interview process, it was revealed that more than half of the participants no longer identified with the spiritual orientation that they started out with. Many of them rejected or greatly modified their relationship towards teachers and teachings only to find or create other teachings and philosophies separate from their original spiritual affiliation. This unforeseen discovery made it impossible to make completely distinct cross sample comparisons between Buddhists, Hindus, and Sikh (Kundalini Yogis) traditions.

For this reason, a hybrid approach was introduced. Keeping the original 58 codes from the first transcripts in order to maintain close proximity to the phenomenon, both Wilber's structural-hierarchical model of spiritual development and Washburn's psychospiritual model of development were consulted. The two theories use different language to explain developmental processes and much of this specific theoretical language did not show up in the interviews. The language used by research participants had to be given precedence, and only four codes were adapted from the existing theory.

During this phase of code development, it was important to consult the original research question for this study: How do the real life experiences of spiritual development relate to the models created by Wilber and Washburn? Taking the concepts of these two models directly related to the spiritual developmental process and applying them to the observed processes in the transcripts helped to further organize the relationships in the tree structure of existing codes. It was very affirming to note that both models were supported to varying degrees in the participant's accounts.

Phase 3: Initial Test of Validity

Three new transcripts (one from each tradition) were coded with the new code. The new data driven 58 tree codes combined with codes from transpersonal theories allowed for an even more sensitive and thorough coding process. Using the 11 categories in tree code distinction allowed quick review of all the major identified themes. Emerging themes were checked against all new codes. The addition of transpersonal theoretical codes acted as a guide. This undoubtedly led to a more accurate code.

Many of the more specific nuanced data driven codes did not show up in the three

new transcripts and as a consequence were collapsed into other codes or deleted. Other more obscure codes became irrelevant and were dropped during this restructuring. These results may be accounted for by random happenings in each individual's life. Regardless of the individual differences, a new tree code structure was developed based on the first six participants, which also accommodated the five most influential developmental processes identified from the text. Five major themes emerged representing the most prominent interrelated processes. These processes were identified as meta-codes hosting the parent-child codes under clearly defined parameters. The 58 codes were further condensed into 51 codes. Each new parent code had fewer than seven sub-categories to reduce coding error. Boyatzis (1998) has suggested working with 7 plus or minus 2 codes because keeping track of more than that will lead to imprecise coding or systematically neglecting codes.

Phase 4: Reliability and the Interrater

Five of the child codes that were more difficult to define were used to code three transcripts picked randomly by the interrater and coded until a 95% accuracy was reached. During the interrater process, the codes in question were redefined making them easier to identify in the text. Reliability of this code was determined by two factors: (a) consistency of judgment based on two separate coders, and (b) consistency over the span of nine different interviews. The first determined interrater reliability by having two separate coders code the same transcript to the 95% accuracy. Three interviews were coded (one from each tradition) using the 5 most notable themes. Having multiple coders is the best way to control for the potential biases of the researcher. The second test

brought the code to a level of saturation where all transcripts could be accounted for in the final coding structure. Boyatzis (1998) has stated, “Validity of findings cannot conceptually exceed the reliability of the judgments made in coding or processing the raw information” (p. 144).

Phase 5: Validity–The Final Code

Step one: The final three interviews were coded with the established data- driven and theoretically reliable code.

Step two: The remaining text was coded qualitatively validating the identified themes across the entire sample. This refined coding structure was viewed as sufficiently representative of the transcripts after the final three transcripts were coded with only minor changes needed to the coding structure (see coding structure in results section, and appendix E).

Step three: With all the transcript data divided into the respective codes, queries were used to search for specific key words or phrases by pulling the pieces of fragmented text together again. This final review of key concepts while viewing their coding classification revealed the interrelationship between themes with necessary supporting text. Queries revealed association between large concepts that could not be displayed by the tree codes in hierarchical structure.

Chapter IV

Results

In this chapter, I present the final coding structure that was developed during the coding process. The themes derived from the coding process were then used to create succinct summaries of each interview showing the relationship between developmental processes. Then each developmental theme developed during coding was compared to both Wilber's and Washburn's theories. Themes supporting these two developmental theories are then displayed with relevant quotes from the interviews. Careful consideration was given to any developmental process that could not be explained by either of the theories. These newly discovered developmental processes were examined in the discussion section.

Final Coding Structure

(A) Awakening

1. Types:
 - a. Peak experience (Awesome Blissful)
 - b. Dark night of the soul (Painful overwhelming)
 - c. Waking to the need for more
2. Process:
 - a. Starts an irreversible process
 - b. Awakening leads to further questioning
 - c. Awakening is ongoing

(B) Guidance and external influence

1. Spiritual practice (beginning)
 - a. Practice becomes easier
 - b. Life becomes spiritual practice
 - c. Relief from suffering
 - d. No end only beginning
2. Community
 - a. Primary supportive community
 - b. New community around teacher

3. Influence of teacher
 4. Cultural context
- (C) *Source of difficulty*
1. Psychological
 2. Emotional
 3. Physical
 4. Spiritual

(D) *Self-concept*

1. Belief system (outside world)
 - a. Early beliefs about self (things learned about self)
 - b. Early beliefs about spiritual systems
 - c. Adopt Traditional teachings
 - d. Beliefs change over time
 - i. Questioning belief system due to success or failure
 - ii. New belief system evolves from experience
 - iii. Misconceptions exposed on the path
2. Self reflexive knowledge
3. Inner teacher appears
 - a. Becoming a teacher
Embodied spirituality leads to new teachings
 - b. Finding own voice
 - c. Outgrow teacher or teachings
 - d. Relationship moves toward equality

(E) *Incorporating into liberation*

1. More expansive transpersonal potentials
2. Self-reflexive knowledge informs the transpersonal
3. Transpersonal identification
4. The Witness

During the final phase of thematic analysis, interview summaries were created to identify commonalities among participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Transcripts were distilled into succinct narrative summaries depicting common themes identified during coding. Because many of these themes were not the exact focus of interview questions, it was necessary to track and paraphrase the participants rather than attempt to piece together direct quotes. The summaries below use vocabulary and phrases true to each

interview. These summaries reflect participant's early ideas, regarding spiritual developmental process and mature spiritual concepts identified during the coding process. The exact verbatim transcripts from the recorded interviews can be viewed in Appendix F (Interview Transcripts).

Summaries of Hindus

Summary of Mokshananda

Mokshananda rejected his early Roman Catholic upbringing and was surprised to find himself on a spiritual path. He openly discussed being addicted to drugs and alcohol until going into treatment where he had the first of a series of profound spiritual awakenings. He referred to the first awakening as a heart *kriya* or heart opening that spontaneously occurred when he saw Guru Mayi. This experience led to his initial investigation into Eastern philosophy and spiritual study. Going from atheistic to self-inquiry and the study of consciousness was the most notable change in identification over the years. Eventually he stopped searching for self-understanding and consciousness when he had another awakening experience. It was an experience of pure consciousness and pure seeing which permanently removed him from the paradox of seeking understanding.

Under the guidance of guru Mayi's teachings, Mokshananda began meditating and attending satsang. Initially even a few minutes of meditation was difficult, but it got easier over time and he began meditating twice a day. This led to the second awakening, which changed his understanding of spiritual practice forever. He realized that practice was effortlessly happening and he did not need to struggle to make it happen. Eventually

life becomes meditation and there is no more need for facilitated practice.

Having awakening experiences and still remaining in contact with psychological, emotional, and physical pain caused Mokshananda to have spiritual doubts, which became his biggest identifiable difficulty. He struggled to understand the difference between heightened states of consciousness created from meditation and the inevitable return to his previous state of awareness. With much guidance from spiritual teachers, he eventually settled into what he knew is always already here: ever-present consciousness as his own Self. Accepting that each and every moment is awareness. That's all there is ultimately. Every moment things change, awareness is the constant. He called it *samsara nirvana*, meaning "heaven on earth."

Mokshananda sees himself as one amongst many on the spiritual path and does not identify with the spiritual teacher role. Three years after his awakening experience, Adyashanti asked him to teach. He felt awkward around his friends for approximately 1 year while he adapted to the role of teacher. He then separated from Adyashanti for almost 5 years so that he could develop his own voice as a teacher.

Mokshananda recommends that students start with meditation because it prepares them for the nondual distinctions of the seer and seen. Objects that are seen are not the seer, including the individual observing. He trusts his own authentic experience to guide him when dealing with students. Recognizing that there are similarities and differences in developmental states and stages all students go through, he treats each individual case uniquely. He does not have a particular vision of how his teaching will evolve, but that his teaching is evolving in direct relationship with consciousness as a whole.

Mokshananda started as one of Adyashanti's students and was accepted as a

member of their community. Mokshananda's relationship to the community shifted when he was asked to teach. He believes that his community stays small because people have their own awakenings and begin to take that understanding into their own lives and no longer need instruction from a personified teacher. He has a general feeling of increasing optimism and wants to write a book and perhaps open a retreat center. He currently teaches at and is one of the co-founders of Free Water Sangha.

Summary of Sanial Bonder

Sanial feels he did not have a true conscious awareness until he was 20 years old. He attributes this to his Jewish American upbringing, which was cultural rather than religious. Sanial was the first of his family to begin exploring spirituality. The first realization that led him into spiritual investigation occurred during the anti-war movement of the 1960s, when he began to perceive others as self-absorbed in their respective roles. This insight drew him away from political activism into a state of inner questioning and a search for guidance. He considered this to be his first spiritual awakening to a world outside his own—he realized that many beings, things, and events existed and occurred without any reference to him.

Philosophically, Sanial was first influenced by such individuals as the Beat poets, Allen Ginsberg, Ken Kesey, Martin Buber, and Thomas Martin who were active during the 1950s and 1960s. After a brief experience with the Outward Bound program, he began exploring Eastern philosophy. A theme that persists throughout Sanial's narrative is his belief that he would be part of something that would dramatically change the course of human history for the better; he envisioned himself as parachuting into "the Normandy" of this new spirituality from a Western context, not simply by tapping into

the Eastern forms, but by taking Western birth. He ultimately found a spiritual society that was socially and politically active, because he still had the urge for some kind of great revolution.

Saniel later had a spontaneous Kundalini rising experience, which he called *Nirvi-Kalpa Samadhi*. It was such a profound experience that he changed his lifestyle and made enlightenment his primary goal; he traveled to India to immerse himself in Kundalini Yoga, but he was not able to access the experience of Kundalini rising again. He thought that if he meditated hard enough he would reach a state in which he would not have to deal with the suffering of life. He abandoned Kundalini Yoga and then adopted a self-inquiry practice taught by Ramana Maharshi.

Saniel continued to search for the perfect teacher and practice, and he found Adi Da, who taught Eastern concepts within a Western orientation. He spent years trying to adapt to these new teachings, but was eventually put off by his guru's outrageous demands and need to impose hierarchy. No one in this community became enlightened, and the guru became disillusioned and struggled to remain the great repository of the divine self-nature. After 20 years, Saniel was motivated by a sense of integrity to leave.

With the help of a shaman and extensive psychotherapy, Saniel individuated from the Adi Da's community. He disproved the myth that he would have to go through hellish lifetimes for turning his back on the guru. Saniel was willing to embrace the hell of his own freedom and integrity rather than the kind of heaven he could have as a devotee. All the work he had done up to this point led to another unexpected awakening in form of a female archetype from the tantric tradition. For the first time Saniel felt that he had landed in his own shoes.

Shortly thereafter Saniel became charged with an energy that affected his friends and anyone associated with him. He seemed to literally become “contagious,” as others began to experience states of consciousness and symptoms that apparently came from contact with him. He found the position of spiritual teacher challenging because of the aversion he had developed to the guru-disciple relationship. Breaking the forms of ancient traditions, he developed a democratic culture of spiritual transmission and called it “waking down in mutuality.” With this system groups of 400 and 500 people have duplicated a basic, nondual embodiment of consciousness and found seamless oneness.

Saniel has a very practical understanding of awakening based in individual autonomy, but he takes into account the whole complex dynamic that arises when more than one awakened person tries to coexist in the same time and space. Rather than attempting to eradicate the ego or deconstruct the psyche, this new process facilitates new identity formation, post-awakening in contact with other like-minded individuals. Each new person brings an element of a more expansive view of what is possible. Saniel sees the human divine spirit as one that is spontaneously striving for integration and that accepts other beings as they are without trying to change, exclude, overcome, or transcend them. Rather, in its divine aspect, the human spirit allows the other to fully emerge. Saniel considers this approach to be an integration of the human and the divine—what he calls “self-democratizing twenty-first century enlightenment.”

Summary of Dorothy Hunt

Dorothy sees her entire life as spiritual with a series of awakenings into her true self. She recalls her mother’s death being the source for her first inquiry into spiritual

matters. This led to her first work with the homeless, drug addicts, and an AIDS hospice in San Francisco. During this service she struggled with the idea of trying to help people by getting them services and imposing her idea of what might be healthy. She eventually settled into the understanding that her will was limited in the face of divine forces.

Dorothy was raised in a Methodist family but abandoned this tradition for the teachings of Ramana Maharshi. She began a period of self-inquiry of her true identity, which was spontaneously revealed when she was looking in the mirror to see who was behind the self she was identified with. This progressed into studying with many Vedanta teachers from India, where she developed a deep intellectual understanding of spiritual concepts. The longing for awakening intensified, but as time went on it seemed that it would not happen in this lifetime. While on retreat one day she was struggling with these spiritual concepts when she had an awakening experience. Unlike her experience in intellectual studies, she saw that time and space were completely constructed; the self she identified with, named Dorothy Hunt, made contact with the true ever-present self. She quickly began to formulate an identity around this new and profound experience.

For Dorothy, this awakened identity was impressive and lasted for several years; however, when she met Adyashanti she realized that a new search had begun. Her relationship with Adyashanti was unique in that he never gave her anything, he simply pointed to her true self, which became her guide and teacher. She realized that awakening was not the end of the journey; it was the beginning of a new one. Her sense of achievement and spiritual identification began to shatter when confronted with the presence and transmission of Adyashanti.

A painful period of purification began as Dorothy became aware of the beliefs

supporting her identity. She was diagnosed with breast cancer and had to confront the reality that life was finite. She reports that all beliefs—including cultural, racial, national, and collective views—began to collapse as the fire of truth began to take over her identity. This fire burned up anything and everything that she previously believed to be relevant and important. This was not how she had imagined life after awakening; she did not wake up to a new and improved self, rather she found that *she* was, in essence, what she was looking for.

It was the opposite from what she had anticipated. Rather than her looking for a divine experience all this time, divinity was now looking for her. She describes it as a freedom to be completely here, present to the experience at hand without wishing to have or trying to have another experience. She believes that when there is no longer resistance, we can meet what is actually here in the moment with presence, with love, with our true nature. From this point of view, Dorothy does not think that her students really need help. They will eventually meet their own truth. From her perspective, her students' movement is a result of their own divine nature, not from the will or transmission of an embodied teacher. Spiritual practice is not necessary, from this point of view, unless it authentically arrives and feels genuine to the individual.

Summaries of Buddhists

Summary of Umi

In his earliest recollection at the age of 3, Umi remembers being naturally inquisitive and driven by a sense that there was something missing. He began studying to be a Catholic priest, and read the Koran and the Bhagavad-Gita, but he eventually

rejected religion because he found some of the claims—such as immaculate conception—to be unacceptable to him. He then found refuge in the worldly identity of being a cowboy for a short period. This search for meaning in the world intensified when Umi's companion was killed during a snowstorm. Umi went on to actualize what he dreamed to be the perfect life with a successful career and a family, but it was ultimately unfulfilling.

Umi's interest returned to religious studies in the hope of finding answers to his feelings of inner discontent. He began studying Zen Buddhism and doing intensive meditation practice in the lineage of Joshu Sasaki Roshi. This led to a profound but temporary spiritual experience of *satori*. During this heightened state, his mind disappeared, there was no attachment, there was no identification. His experience of *satori* didn't last, but naturally faded away, leaving him with deeper sensations of emptiness and longing. Umi left the 900-year-old Japanese Zen tradition and his life as a professor in search of a living master who could understand a contemporary mind.

Again Umi was surprised when he went to India and his expectations were not met. He studied with a master and followed all the recommended practice. When his teacher eventually died, Umi still had not reached the elusive state of awakening. After this long journey, he now had to find another awakened teacher to show him the way. Remarkably, he found that having an awakened teacher was only part of the process. He also needed community and personal understanding of what was labeled "the path of no resistance."

Because there is no formula for how to assist others during the awakening process, Umi had to go through his own unique awakening. All of his ideas on how to achieve awakening were dismantled as his ego found new identification. Once the

process began, there was no turning back. Like a “drowning man holding on to a straw,” resisting the process was futile. Then in one profound moment, Umi woke up to see that all identification was a joke. His entire identity dissolved and he found he had a new relationship with his mind and body.

Umi no longer has a personified teacher, as he is now awakened into a permanent reorientation to his true nature. Twenty-four hours of every day are now seen as spiritual practice as he now lives the practice. He teaches students many of the practices that he learned, but he does not believe that duration of time or intensity is necessary for awakening. He doesn't even think that the process has to be difficult. There is no prerequisite; one only has to see the futility of everything. There are no goals in Umi's work, and you don't obtain anything, you lose everything. He believes it's about letting everything go, because what you want, you already have.

Summary of Jon Bernie

Jon Bernie remembers being very inquisitive when he was 4 years old. This inquisitive nature remained with him; when he was 11 years old he rejected religion and refused to go to Sunday school. He was never a follower and never a believer. This natural self-inquiry led to a spontaneous awakening when he was 16. It was an enlightenment *experience*, not to be confused with sustained enlightenment. Suddenly his life made sense, and he felt a strong sense of guidance projecting into the future. He spent the next 4 years in a period of self-work, using extensive spiritual study and practice, and psychotherapy. He received a extensive amounts of support from therapists, body workers, and teachers as he worked through his personal struggles. He views all aspects

of a person as related to spirituality; therefore, he felt he had to confront his limitations in order to make spiritual progress. He believes that it is possible that various lines of development may not progress concurrently; that is, in one area one may be advanced, but in another area still at an earlier stage.

During this time Jon developed a key idea around which he decided to organize his life: he intended to allow himself as much freedom as possible so that he could find the lived path and the truth to be transformed in the world, rather than in a cave or a monastery. He then began to work with several realized teachers who changed his beliefs about spiritual practice. Whereas previously he had been practicing with tremendous effort to sort out his ego-based understanding, he came to understand that the process was happening naturally and effortlessly. He believes that his years of 17-hour per day meditation were necessary so that he could realize he no longer needed to practice so rigorously. All of Jon's assumptions of what spirituality was going to be were blown out of the water, and he reached a point where the path and life itself became practice.

From this perspective, Jon is not struggling with his lived experience anymore; this means not trying to hold onto, get rid of, or figure anything out. The whole journey from the initial enlightenment and the teacher's guidance, practice, and community all led him to his inner guru, which is the true self. Jon has come to believe that when one fully embodies awakened consciousness, one is not identified as ego anymore. Ultimately, ego is not real—it is purely a function. To be a completely actualized human being means being a human being and a spiritual being simultaneously.

For Jon, reaching transpersonal identification does not mean the end of the journey; rather, he sees that truth keeps happening and there is no end to it. There is

absolute “freedom” the energy of being just keeps on expanding. The mystery keeps on unfolding.

Jon does not identify as a teacher or student, he claims to not identify with anything anymore. Every moment is a teaching; there aren't any more teachers. He says he wouldn't even put it in those terms anymore. There is no separation anymore. With this belief in place, he does not know where his journey will end or how it will unfold. He sometimes has a vision of it, but that is “very in the moment.”

Summary of John Sherman

At the time of the interview, John was not sure if there had ever been a point in his life when he was not on a spiritual path. He had very idealistic views early on and wanted to make an impact on what he saw as a corrupt political system. He became an armed bank robber to fund what he saw as politically motivated property bombings. He was on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted list for 2 years before being incarcerated in a federal penitentiary in Colorado for 15 years.

While in prison John abandoned his lofty goals, believing that nothing useful could be done anywhere about anything. He was waiting to die, waiting to be released, waiting for anything and nothing; he was uninterested in politics, in philosophy, in spirituality, in religion—in short, he was uninterested in just about everything.

Shortly thereafter, Gangaji came to the prison to speak, and on the way to see her, John was struck by an immense terror and began to have panic symptoms. He was suddenly interested in study again and met some Buddhists; he immediately felt a mutual relationship with them. He progressed quickly in the Mahayana Buddhist practice and was given bodhisattva vows by a Tibetan lama.

John was shocked at how he was quickly becoming spiritually oriented. He felt that Gangaji and her teachings were too easy and that the Buddhist teachings were more legitimate because they were developed over thousands of years. Then Gangaji came to visit and touched his hand, and John had a profound experience where everything stopped. A profound vastness and stillness came over him. There was no way to anticipate the freedom from relationships he experienced during this immense spiritual experience. When Gangaji left, he went into a phase of lacking interest in daily activities to the degree that his friends had to take care of him. During this time, which lasted about a year, he had *samadhi* experiences of bliss, clarity, peace, and rapture.

John soon became romantically involved with Gangaji's executive director. When Gangaji found out, John was surprised that she condemned him for this betrayal, and he fell into a hell experience. All of the bliss states were gone; he felt bereft and lost, a castaway. He adopted a teaching from Ramana to help him deal with his complications. He used his skill as a Buddhist practitioner to locate the source of pain and he would chant the mantra "die, die." He was unsuccessful at this practice because the source never died, but he had a profound awakening into his true ever-present self. He outgrew the false belief that this life was the end and began to see it simply as an impermanent lens.

John no longer sees resting in a permanent state of enlightenment as the goal, and he therefore sees the classic teacher-student relationship as problematic. He believes truly authentic spiritual experience comes not by the grace of some teacher at will, but rather from real life. He points his students to the "true witness," which is constant throughout life's trials and tribulations. He does not require students to change their lifestyle or adopt

specific practices, but invites others to a mutual experience in seeing what he is seeing from their own perspective.

Summaries of Sikhs

Summary of Nirvair Khalsa

Nirvair Khalsa sees his journey as continuous, without a point of spiritual disembarkation. For him, it has been a matter of small awakenings over a period of time, and this is still happening. There seems to be no completion in it. Since there was no actual real beginning, he doesn't see that there's any end of it either. There has to be a constant self-examination and self-correction; some of his experiences, he says, have been quite dramatic.

Cultural influences played a major role in Nirvair's development. He had no connection to his Scottish/Irish heritage while growing up in the Midwest, and he embodied the American identity of student president and four-letter athlete. This led to a long journey of trying to find a place where he fit in. During the Vietnam War, Nirvair had a distinct awakening while he was in college. He went to a liberal college that encouraged the counterculture movement of the time. He began questioning everything and read *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* in which Thomas Wolfe talks about the "Merry Pranksters." So he went to find Ken Kesey in hopes that he would be his teacher.

While attempting to dodge the draft, Nirvair ended up living in a commune and attempted to do Yoga from a book. He moved to Oregon to work at a food co-op and lived with the authors he had hoped to meet. He was inspired to attend his first Kundalini Yoga class and immediately developed a deep resonance with the practice. He then met

Yogi Bhajan and was taken by his ability to artfully answer his questions. He welcomed Yogi Bhajan as his teacher and began going to every teacher that came to the area in hopes of gaining more spiritual knowledge. Nirvair did not end up taking much direction about personal matters from his teacher directly because he used his own experience as a guide. He feels personal experience is a better guide than adopted philosophies because they lead to more authentic representation of self.

Rather than simply taking teachings at face value, Nirvair taught Yoga, in part as an avenue to integrate his own experience into a belief system. Initially he practiced *sadhana*s for thousands of days in a row without missing a single day, in hopes of achieving certain states of awareness. Eventually he became much more effective in his practice and could access these states more naturally. Reaching bliss states is no longer important to Nirvair.

At first Nirvair had grandiose visions of gaining special powers from his spiritual practice, a common misconception of the time. The more he practiced, the more those lofty goals became irrelevant. He realized that the idea is to just become more yourself; you become kinder, you don't show off. You become more like a person. His goals changed over a period of time as he moved towards wholeness. During his self-healing process, he discarded the idea of who he initially thought he should be.

Nirvair has a lot of trust in the process of his identity unfolding into the future. As he establishes his new role in his community, he is no longer interested in his identity as a teacher and remains sensitive to the experience of others as they develop around him. Although he was born into and conditioned by Western culture, the result of his journey is more of an identification with Eastern cultural influences.

Summary of Gurudev Khalsa

Mexican culture significantly shaped Gurudev Khalsa's early spiritual investigation. Rather than looking to the East for philosophy and spiritual guidance as many in the 1960s did, Gurudev looked to the indigenous healing traditions of Mexico. He began his training in a contemplative tradition under the guidance of a natural doctor. Being naturally inquisitive, he experimented with Kundalini Yoga and had an experience of courage and freedom he called "zero anxiety." He was not interested in the spiritual teachings of Yoga, but when he met Yogi Bhajan, he was so impressed that he asked the Yogi to be his teacher.

Gurudev developed a unique relationship with his teacher and began studying the source of his reactivity in relationships. His teacher took years training him not to react to external circumstance and preconceived ideas. Gurudev followed his teacher's instructions, regardless of how irrational some of them seemed, until he developed his own reasoning capacity. Gurudev reported that after 10 years and many arduous trials, he developed command over his intention so that he could actualize anything. This skill became the basis for a new teaching and healing technique called *Sat Nam Rasayan*.

Gurudev does not talk about awakening, or about enlightenment or heightened realizations. The only time he talks about altered states is in reference to studying with his teacher as he died. The experience was so overwhelming that it forced him into a more expansive awareness. This humbling moment influenced his self-perception, giving him a new spiritual orientation. He attributes his position as a teacher to forces beyond himself and warns against the tendency to claim spiritual ownership. Relationships with other people are the best way to safeguard against personal distortion. For Gurudev

relationships are also the source and most significant tool of spiritual investigation.

Gurudev has a very practical approach to spiritual investigation and teaches students how to track their own process and experience. He encourages beginning practitioners to talk about their experience to encourage ownership and identification of individual awareness. Each experience is unique; therefore, he does not believe in working with maps or models of development.

Summary of Gurudass Khalsa

Gurudass Khalsa's journey began when he was 17 as he was searching for a way out of what he called depression. His father died, leaving him with a feeling of meaninglessness and disappointment with the ideals he had held up to that point. He began attending satsangs with many Eastern teachers until he met Yogi Bhajan; he felt a deep connection with this man and accepted him as his teacher. Gurudass developed a very personal relationship with the Yogi. Kundalini Yoga provided relief from his agitated mental state. It wasn't until he joined an ashram and became part of a spiritual community that he really began to identify as a Yogi.

Looking back, many of Gurudass' expectations of what would happen on the spiritual path were not met. After the initial pain subsided, he began seeking an experience in life in which extraordinary things would happen. He hoped to be rewarded for all his efforts and practice with fame, wealth, and recognition. One early belief was that he would reach a point in life where the experience of pain no longer existed and he would live in this state of perpetual bliss. This period of blind faith in the Yogic practices lasted for 20 years. During this time, he identified with egoic development and was

strongly affected by the swings between pleasurable and painful experiences.

Disillusionment was the most prominent catalyst shattering Gurudass' early identity invested in spiritual achievements. First, his view of Yogi Bhajan's infallibility was shattered as the teacher began to display a mass of interpersonal limitations and moral shortcomings. The belief system Gurudass adopted as part of the spiritual community did not match his personal experience. This was particularly visible when his son abandoned the tradition as a young adult. He had made tremendous sacrifice, as advised by his teacher and community, so that his son could be raised as a perfect Yogi. Gurudass was inspired when his son choose his own path.

Although the period of disillusionment was painful, it opened a window leading to the realization that not only the spiritual practice model, but also the actual core belief system of that model, didn't work anymore and that there were other options. Gurudass found new ways to view his identity and perspectives on life; this led to the beginning of a new seeking stage. He began looking for an ordinary life as it naturally unfolds without attempting to produce something extraordinary. During this stage of gaining autonomy from his teacher and spiritual community, he developed new teachings based on his experiences.

Gurudass is currently participating in the development of a new spiritual community in South America, which recognizes that each person's journey is unique. He has completely abandoned the form and rigidity of his past community and created a vision he feels is more heart-connected, accepting, and less judgmental, steering away from dogmatic, hierarchical approaches and helping students to realize that they too can use meditation and practice to discover their own inner sense of self. He does not see

himself as the agent of change; rather, he empowers students to embrace their own experience of divinity in their everyday existence without the distraction of extraordinary mythology.

Analysis of Results

This section focuses on the cross-comparison of nine narratives in order to derive the aggregate experience of the individual participants; it further illuminates answers to the two questions posed by this study: How do the real life experiences of spiritual development relate to the models created by Wilber and Washburn? Following the initial intention of this study to investigate the lived experience of moving through stages of individual development into the transpersonal domain, it is now important to specify which aspects of these two theories are supported by the results of this study. The results of the present study that do not support aspects of the two transpersonal theories may contribute to a revising and/or expansion of these models. In this report of the results, I pay special attention to the way in which a number of the participants in the present study adopted certain models or maps of spiritual development, only to then outgrow them later on. The unique findings of this study will inform three areas of conflict between the two models: spiritual self-concept, potential regressive experience, and the source of transpersonal states.

The revisions I suggest to the two theories may contribute to the existing literature on transpersonal therapeutic approaches and the clinical relevance of these findings applied to clinical practice. The interview process and data analysis revealed important methodological issues and limitations. Both the results of this study and the

methodological issues point to important avenues for future research. At the end of this discussion, I explore my own personal reflections on the material.

Themes Relevant to Wilber's All Quadrants, All Levels Model

Use of transitional structures.

Wilber's (1997) transitional structures include worldviews, self-needs, self-identity, and moral stages. These structures come into existence but then are phased out as the individual matures into one of the more permanent basic structures of consciousness.

Worldview and self-identity were the most commonly referenced in the narratives in this research and the easiest transitional structures to identify in the present study. However, these themes were only referenced in hindsight as something that the participants grew out of or left behind as more expansive levels of consciousness became readily available. Mokshananda related an early belief stemming from a worldview that he eventually outgrew:

You hear there's supposed to be some sort of fireworks or gods or deities come out of the sky or something like that. Well, it was just like Muktananda coming out of the sky or some teacher would arrive and you'd be anointed into some heavenly realm or something like that.

This statement could be classified as fitting somewhere between Gebser's magic and the stages involving a mythic worldview that Wilber depicts in *Integral Spirituality* (2006). Mokshananda abandoned the widely propagated concept of a god or higher being arriving from the sky to save one from suffering as soon as he gained spiritual experience and negated the need for such beliefs.

Because these interviews covered the entire spectrum of development from

participants' first memories of being on a spiritual path up to their most current stage of development, the teachers in this study describe their self-identity at different levels. Most of the teachers started out in the conformist stage, in which they bought into American culture and norms. Spiritual experiences and guidance from others eventually helped them to shape new identities in autonomy and move to more complex levels of experience. Nirvair's journey is a good example of this: "So I would say I was drawing on the environment, because I grew up in a very straight, Midwestern situation and embodied all of that like student president, you know four letter athlete—I bought into the whole darn thing." He then practiced Kundalini Yoga and met with many spiritual teachers, who led him to different states.

In terms of fitting in now, it's actually not an issue because I do fit in. I'm very confident that I fit. It's not because I have authority either. It has more to do with my internal process . . . Now I found being a little bit older that I pretty much fit in anywhere, it doesn't matter where.

Identifiable states of consciousness.

Unlike psychic structures or stages of consciousness that cannot be subjectively witnessed through meditation or contemplation, states are directly available to awareness. Wilber (2006) referred to the five natural or ordinary states of consciousness as: waking, dreaming, deep sleep, witnessing, and nondual experiencing. There are also altered or nonordinary states, which are often referred to as peak experiences. It is possible to train or condition the mind through meditative practice to gain access to specific heightened states, or they may arrive spontaneously. The teachers in this study typically referred to trained peak experiences resulting from meditative practice and spontaneous awakenings.

All the participants referred to elevated state experiences and the impact that such changes in awareness had on their perception of reality.

Umi describes a distinct shift in perspective resulting from years of Zen meditative practice:

What eventually happens is, the mind literally stops and you have a Satori. This is the most profound experience in the journey—your mind disappears and you're so free and there is no attachment, there is no identification and you go and see him and he just sees, and he just says, "Okay, now you go and play. It's finished.

John Sherman reports a similarly profound experience, which arose unexpectedly when he met Gangaji:

She walked down this long sidewalk that comes from the administration building to the chapel, and she walked up to me and she took my hand and she looked at me, and she said, "You must be John," and everything stopped. I don't know how else to put it than that everything stopped. It was a whole array of opinions and understandings and relationship just kind of came to an end. I never had had any inkling of anything like this, the vastness of this and the silence of it.

Saniel Bonders was also left speechless from a spontaneous awakening into a peak experience. He uses different words to describe the experience, but clearly articulates a change in perspective:

I immediately had an experience of what I later figured out, this is what Yogananda was describing as Nirvi-Kalpa Samadhi. The Kundalini current actually got activated in the middle of my brain, rather than from the bottom, and just shot out the top. I only later inferred that there was kind of a disjunct, a glitch period in there where there was no me whatsoever, but only this immense, infinite—the words don't do justice to the beingness of it.

Three steps to healthy self-development.

Wilber (1986, 1996, 2003, 2006) has described the self-system as an aspect of consciousness that identifies with various developmental lines, states, and stages. The self-system is believed to be very fluid, identifying with available basic structures of

consciousness. A new self-identity is created each time the individual identifies with a new, more expansive structural level of consciousness. With each new identity, the self-system must go through a three-stage process of: (a) merger/fusion/embeddedness, (b) differentiation/transcendence, and (c) incorporation/integration (Wilber, 1997). The self starts out merged and fused with one of the given structures of consciousness. As new and different experience create a new perspective, the self begins to differentiate from the existing structure, only to identify with the next higher structure. Finally, the self gains a new identity when it has successfully incorporated and integrated the lower structure into the newly identified higher structure. In this way, the lower level capacities are still accessible even at the higher identified structural level.

This study shows substantial evidence of this three-stage process of identification. Although none of the participants actually mention the three stages by name, many of them refer to adopting views that they later distanced themselves from in order to actualize their own identity. This is most evident in the relationship with a spiritual teacher. As young students, they often followed instructions without asking questions until they distanced themselves enough to develop the capacity to transmit spiritual teachings of their own.

Jon Bernie initially found the support and guidance of teachers to be essential, but then he distanced himself from those teachers as he began to develop his own method of internal guidance. This ultimately changed the way he views teacher-student relationships and he now teaches accordingly. He initially states,

My first realized teacher was Jon Klein and at that part there was no more struggle, well there was no more efforting on the path there was still suffering there was still reactivity there was still all that stuff, so various teachers along the

way provided feedback but at that point I benefited greatly from the presence of their embodied clarity.

He then goes on to suggest that all students must eventually differentiate themselves from teachers:

I really encourage people to find the path within themselves not to follow me or some teaching. That's not the way it works ultimately. I mean, following a teacher or a way for a while can be very important, but eventually that all has to be dropped.

Finally, he redefines the teacher-student relationship as he enters, identifies with, and incorporates the next higher stage of development. His new level of development is evident when he says, "Every moment is a teaching, there aren't any more teachers, I wouldn't even put it in those terms anymore. There is no separation anymore."

In this statement, Gurudass explains the process of separating from his teacher and embracing his own spiritual nature:

I was obedient, I was clearly seeking his love and his approval and that was a huge motivator for me to be obedient, and then when that shift happened then my thinking became a lot more autonomous and it was definitely a teaching of love, but the power that I had turned over to him to a great extent was not there anymore—or—not there anymore, I had sorta taken it back, put it that way.

He further explains how valuable it was to adopt spiritual teachings and receive guidance from his teacher and then eventually make the shift towards trusting his own experience as guidance.

Awakening into the Wilber/Combs lattice.

As a researcher, I did not introduce the term *awakening* to study participants, yet it was extensively used by 8 of the 9 teachers in this study to indicate a notable shift in consciousness toward more expansive awareness. The term *awakening* was used to mean

three distinctly different states of awareness: (a) becoming aware of alternate ways of thinking, (b) a temporary peak experience that acts as a guiding vision, and/or (c) a permanent shift in awareness leading to a more expansive stage of consciousness.

Although the stories of awakening in this study follow a chronological order, only a few of the teachers actually make the distinction between temporary states and permanent stages of development. More commonly, they drew attention to impermanent awakenings vs. a permanent shift in consciousness.

Nirvair clearly describes the first type of awakening into alternate ways of thinking when he says, “So I just went through a real awakening at that particular time, you know, questioning about everything I did.” Similarly, Umi speaks of the second kind of temporary peak experience awakening:

Satoris don't last, they can last for hours, days, weeks, or sometimes months, but they do fade away. It's like looking through the window. You see outside, but you can't get outside through the window. So, you have the taste of outside.

Finally, Mokshananda makes the distinction between temporary awakening and the third definition of permanent shift in awareness:

The first awakening, the first enlightenment is coming to the awareness, wonderful. Then the second awakening is the nondual enlightenment. Is to see the form, your thoughts, everything is consciousness. This awakening. It's just always here, it's always waiting. It never left. It's never left.

The Wilber-Combs [WC] lattice (2006) may help to make sense of the diversity of reports of these three types of awakenings. Essentially, the Wilber-Combs lattice offers a structural way of classifying types of peak experiences while keeping track of individual levels of development (refer to Figure 1). Figure 1 depicts seven stages of development cross-sectioned by four potential state experiences for each stage. The Wilber-Combs lattice creates the possibility for 28 state experiences, depending on the

stage of development of the individual. Attempting to calculate the type and stage of development of each awakening of the teachers in this study could produce an approximation of the level of development of each teacher. However the purpose of this study is not to categorize the participants based on this single spiritual line of development. Rather, the accounts of teachers in this study are used to lend empirical support to the use of the Wilber-Combs lattice as a tool to understand the interplay of states and stages in individual spiritual development.

According to Wilber (2006), understanding the distinctions and the relationships between structures and states is the single most important key to understanding the nature of spiritual development. This understanding helps to explain how a person at any stage of development can have an awakening or transcendental experience, since all human beings possess the same basic structures of consciousness. None of these state experiences become permanent stages or traits unless they are converted into enduring structures of consciousness. Typically, altered states such as peak experiences do not show a developmental pattern; they simply come and go as temporary experiences. For temporary awakenings to become permanent realizations, deliberate meditative or contemplative practice over time is required. Higher state experiences must be converted into enduring structures of consciousness in order to become a permanent developmental stage (p. 72).

The narratives collected in this study show each teacher's journey as the effects of peak experiences are slowly integrated in a process of reaching more complex stages of development over time. Jon Bernie's experience supports Wilber's (2006) claim that each awakening or peak experience is interpreted at the individual's current stage of

development. Jon had a peak experience when he was 16 years old but could not make sense of it until he received assistance from spiritual teachers several years later. He reports,

What happened as a result of that opening which happened over a period of 4 months? It was basically an enlightening experience. It wasn't enlightenment, but it was an enlightenment experience, which meant that it was the experience of presence. I didn't know what had happened to me then, I didn't know what happened until I was 20.

He could not understand what had occurred until he reached a stage in which he had the capacity to fully embrace the level of transmission he had been given in his first peak experience awakening.

Evidence of uneven development.

A necessary distinction can now be made between the multiple lines of development observed in this study. Wilber (1999a, 2000) explained that cognitive, moral, interpersonal, and spiritual lines develop independently. Therefore it is entirely possible for an individual to be highly developed in one area, such as cognition, but maintain low or even poor development in other areas, such as morality. Sanial Bonders relates an experience of becoming a highly trained spiritual practitioner, but then realizing that he has neglected some other developmental lines. He states,

Well, after about a year and a half, it dawned on me, I can get blissful in meditation a lot of the times and have these intuitions of consciousness that's sort of what is seeing and registering the life of Sanial here, but what do I do with sex, food, career, money, family? How do I live a life on this basis?

Similarly, Jon Bernie gives a rationale for his own attempts at balancing multiple lines of development:

The human side of my experience had tremendous help from therapists who helped me with my mind and my emotional body and wide range of areas I haven't even talked about that it's not even in my bio, but it definitely was important for my spiritual path my physical health and emotional health were very important for my spiritual path, because the thing that prevents people from moving into the truth of who they are is the wounded parts of themselves that are still in the dark.

He then points out,

Some people can develop spiritually in some ways but they are lopsided and they don't know certain aspects of themselves and certain parts are not developed emotionally and they end up acting out. And we have heard so many stories of teachers who abuse people and take advantage and are horrific and they are still out there doing it.

As life challenged them in areas such as relationships and community persisted, many of the teachers in this study realized that they would have to excel in more than spiritual practice.

Themes Relevant to Washburn's Spiral Path of Development

Midlife Transpersonal Potentials

Washburn's (1995, 2003) dynamic-dialectic model of psychospiritual development focuses more on the psychodynamic interplay between ego development and other nonegoic potentials like libido rising from the Dynamic Ground. This dynamic interplay is created during the prepersonal formation of basic ego structure. It is only in the end of the personal phase of development that the two opposing poles meet, making the transition to transpersonal levels possible. The reports in this study make reference, essentially, to many of Washburn's later personal stages and the transitions between these stages into transpersonal identification. Despite the accurate depiction of psychic process and ego identification in Washburn's model, some of the findings of the present study

relative to the *timing* of when these stages become accessible is different than what Washburn suggests.

Most teachers in this study begin describing their spiritual journey in terms similar to Washburn's crossroads phase of development. Motivated by the loss of their sense of purpose due to unactualized ideas or limited vision, they become inflicted with a deep dissatisfaction with life. This sets the stage for a search for spiritual guidance. Adopting new philosophies and spiritual practices, they can only hold the inevitable contact with the true psychic source at bay for a limited time. Soon the new spiritual identity gives way to a real transpersonal identification.

Washburn (2003) sees the crossroads phase beginning in midlife; this is confirmed by the accounts of Umi and Gurudass. When Umi reached midlife and succeeded at his life's goals, he was not content. He said,

I have obtained everything that the society says you should obtain. I have learned, and so, I remember walking by the river and the red winged black birds were singing. I mean, it was so idyllic and most people would have said, "Oh, this is wonderful." And I said, "No, no, this isn't it."

When Gurudass reached midlife he felt a lack of contentment, but for the opposite reason. He reports,

When I look back on that part of my experience on the so called spiritual path was tremendous disappointment 'cause those things that I was seeking, you know, because many of them did not happen or I didn't get them in the way that I wanted, etc.

On the other hand, contrary to Washburn's (2003) assumed timing, other teachers such as Jon Bernie, Nirvair, and Gurudev started this introspective journey years before midlife, in their late teens and early 20s. They report noticing early conditioning and identification becoming transparent, like a façade. This perception led to a shift away

from worldly goals to spiritual inquiry and new spiritual identification. Jon Bernie explains,

Here I was a straight A student, concert violinist, on my way to Stanford medical school very high achieving. I felt like I was basically working really hard in school and didn't really know why I was doing this. Didn't really understand what my life was about. And I look back and nothing made sense to me and so that is when the journey started.

There were powerful environmental and cultural catalysts encouraging this kind of perceptual shift for these teachers and that will be explored later. These accounts of entering into what can be considered Washburn's crossroads phase leading to transpersonal potentials raises questions as to the exact timing of when this phase is accessible.

Awakening into Darkness

Washburn (2003) has referred to awakening as the ego's contact with the forces of the Dynamic Ground. This definition of awakening is different from the three mentioned earlier in discussing Wilber. When contact with the Dynamic Ground is made, the individual is reunited with libidinal forces, and the threatened ego attempts to create a new spiritual identity. Because this new identity is created in reaction to potentially undesirable urges, it is a mere defensive construct and will eventually be outgrown. When the ego begins to realize that its deepest desires cannot be fulfilled by the world, ordinary tasks seem meaningless, and disillusionment can lead to alienation. At this point, there is no amount of success in ego identification that can renew interest and involvement in an "all spiritual" identity. The existential anxieties that follow this meaninglessness are inherent in this model of awakening. This defensive period of

contact with the power of the ground is marked by painful psychological, emotional, and physical symptoms.

The present study documents distinct references made to early spiritual identification in the face of powerful peak experiences. After having a profound transpersonal experience in prison, John Sherman abandoned all of his daily activities and responsibilities to pursue spiritual inquiry. Eventually this newly imposed spiritual identity gave way to a phase of torment. He recalls,

I had this year of bliss, and now I went into some kind of hell. I did not know what to do. I no longer had experiences of ecstasy and clarity and openness and all of that. Now I was treated to experiences of torment and longing and self-hatred and all of that, which are equally spiritual experiences, in essence no different, as it turns out, from the rest of it.

Ready or Not, Here Comes the Guru

According to Washburn (2003), a person going through this awakening process feels the awesome dynamic presence of the spirit internally. At this point, other people who are further along in the developmental process become captivating and irresistible, as they seem to operate from the supernatural realm. Such people are perceived as seers, spiritual leaders, and gurus. All 9 participants in this study had the experience of being drawn to spiritual teachers when they felt internal energies being activated. The nature of these relationships varied in duration and interpersonal contact possibility as a result of unknown or other factors.

Most notable was the difference between those who actively sought the guidance of a teacher and those who were surprised by the immediate attraction to such powerful spiritual leaders. Mokshandana was surprised by a powerful experience called a heart

kriya and relates, “I wasn’t looking for a guru or anything like that.” The powerful heart opening lasted until he found his teacher Guru Mayi. John Sherman was his teacher’s biggest critic before he entered into the teacher-student relationship. He would go to her lectures and denounce her. He openly called her a fake and told others to “pay her no mind.” In an almost defiant way, John had planned to play tennis instead of meeting his soon to be teacher. The actual meeting between John and his teacher Gangaji was so powerful that he never played tennis again.

Several of the other participants in this study recall going out to find a teacher. Inconsistent with Washburn’s (1995) assumption that this occurs in midlife, these individuals typically started the journey of looking for a teacher in early adulthood. After having his first awakening while in college, Nirvair says, “My thing was I need to find a teacher. So I had to go out and find Ken Kesey.” He found Kesey and many other teachers and eventually met a teacher named Yogi Bhajan, and a working relationship began. Nirvair recalls, “He was very impressive. He was big. He was fiery. He was antithetical to like any other kind of spiritual person that you’d have a concept of.”

In Washburn’s (2003) view, the ego splits during this awakening period, and others are perceived as having either high spiritual tendencies or unresolved libidinal urges. When the student’s belief in a teacher’s infallibility wears off, the previously idealized perception radically changes. If the splitting between higher and lower tendencies is not reconciled in the ego’s structure, the teacher may be seen as flawed. This can be a painful experience that corrupts the student-teacher relationship or leads to a necessary individuation for the student. Gurudass reiterates this:

When the idealization I had of him and who he was and who he was supposed to be and how he was supposed to be and what he was supposed to do, what he was

not supposed to do, that got shattered, and that was very painful.

The awakening process works like a chain reaction moving away from sources of spiritual upwelling. Each person who enters the awakening process is attracted to others further in the process and similarly they become attractive to people who are even less spiritually mature. As people become attracted, the student begins to work as a teacher. After this energy arose in Saniel Bonder, he relates how his romantic relationship was affected: “the woman was completely—she was like maddened by how much energy was coming alive in her. She knew it was somehow related to me, but she could not make sense of it.” This energetic transfer continued to proliferate through the rest of Saniel’s relationships:

My friends started saying to me, “I don’t know what’s going on with you exactly. I know there’s something about consciousness, but whatever it is, I’m starting to have these experiences and these symptoms, and it’s obvious to me that it’s connected with you, so we gotta talk.

John Sherman relates a similar experience:

So I run into guys who had known me from long ago, when I was—what they knew about me was that I was an armed bank robber and bomber, and now they ran into me and I am all done with that, all done with everything. And I had great experiences and much good meetings with men who had known me in the past and men who knew me now, and even guards who in the prison began to just want to talk to me.

Reformed Spiritual Identity

As we move into the higher levels of Washburn’s (2003) spiral path of development, it becomes harder to find reports to substantiate his claims. If Washburn’s model is accurate, this could suggest that the participants in this study have not all actually reached the level of development that he is referring to. By the time an individual

begins to regenerate into spirit, the two higher and lower possible selves merge, thus putting an end to earlier dualistic perceptions. This more integrated ego-spirit system once again forms an identity, this time with more authentic features of the self. This new identity remains secondary to the new, spiritual self, which acts as an inner guide to the ego's spiritual transformation. Saniel Bonders speaks directly to this process: "It makes for a healing of the spirit matter split that brings matter to the status of full divinity, and even full reality, even though it remains finite, temporary, and changing."

Taking development further, a new identity emerges in the integration of the ego and the Dynamic Ground. Old conditioned patterns and personality characteristics still persist, but a new personal relationship develops to these individual qualities. The spirit is no longer experienced as a separate source of guidance; it is now an ever-present part of existence. There is no longer an internal divide between self and spirit, but the sense of separateness between other beings also disintegrates. John Sherman explains,

There are not two minds. There's not two anything. There's not two human minds. One of the aspects of personality is the sense of the separateness and the separation, the separative mind, but that's just an aspect of the personality. It's not true. So the idea of individual liberation is ridiculous.

Gurudass further highlights this transpersonal identification with his perspective,

What is God, consciousness identified within me as me, has made this body mind entity be this way, so something might happen in another person who has a different kind of character will respond differently than how I would respond, but the way that I look at it is that one or the other is not more enlightened, more spiritual, wiser, clearer, whatever adjectives, than the other. They both are what is. When things happen and my body mind entity reacts in that way, I've come to the place where I can say, "Look, that's how I am, that's me, I can't react any other way," and then there is no guilt or shame that then comes along to then judge that and trigger suffering.

Mature Spiritual Practice

Washburn (1995) made an important distinction between meditation before and after an individual, “crosses the threshold of primal repression and thereby comes into direct contact with the power of the Dynamic Ground” (p. 168). He referred to a potentially long process where meditation loosens unconscious layers, eventually making a radical transformation in contact with an awakening experience. At a certain point the ego no longer has to make strides and conscious effort toward making contact with spirit, rather it now, “rides the waves of power emanating from the nonegoic sphere” (p. 169).

Jon Bernie recalls spending years in regimented mediation practice. Traveling from monasteries to Zen Buddhist retreats, he spent up to 17 hours a day on a zafu perfecting his practice. After going through an extensive process with the help of spiritual teachers and a number of therapists, and body workers, he crossed the primal repression threshold that Washburn referred to. Jon Bernie gives a simplified rendition of this process:

Whereas prior to that it was all about effort and trying and it was really ego based. And after that I realized that it was one hundred percent effortless. But that doesn't happen till one has become really profoundly awakened. And has become established in awakened consciousness.

Summary

The reports collected in this study lend support to these specific concepts in Wilber's model: (a) Use of Transitional Structures, (b) Identifiable States of Consciousness, (c) Three Steps to Healthy Development, (d) The Wilber Combs Lattice, and (e) Evidence of Uneven Development. Each of these specific concepts were supported by quotes from the participants direct experience of living spiritual lives. When

it comes to finding support for Washburn's model, there were several concepts that were not represented by the sample in this study. Particularly the midlife U-turn towards reuniting with the Dynamic Ground appeared to begin much earlier than in midlife. Other than this timing problem proposes, Washburn's model accurately describes several psychological processes reported by the participants in this study.

Chapter V

Discussion and Conclusions

The unique findings of this study inform three areas of conflict between Wilber's and Washburn's models: spiritual self-concept, potential regressive experience, and the source of transpersonal states. This study uncovers aspects of contemporary spiritual life that go beyond the proposed research question of this study. Eight potential misconceptions of spiritual development were uncovered during the course of this analysis. New dynamics between students and teachers emerged as traditional teaching styles adapt to contemporary American life. New spiritual practice and new community structure also evolved from participant's direct experience. The discussion ends with the clinical implications and the use of developmental models in the course of transpersonal therapy. The numerous findings in this study also offer possibility for several new areas of research.

For the most part, the developmental theories of Wilber and Washburn embrace a perennial view of a reality that can be accessed and holds true to for all individuals. Regardless of the differences between the two theories, they both embrace aspects of psychodynamic and contextual influences. Informed by elements of both perennialism and contextualism simultaneously, these theories still leave room for the unique expression of spiritual life experiences of the 9 participants in this study. Jorge Ferrer (2002) integrates spiritual context and the perennial philosophy in what he calls a "participatory vision of spirituality": "Most spiritual traditions lead to the same ocean. However, this ocean is not a single ultimate reality, but a radical overcoming of self-centeredness which can be accompanied by a variety of transconceptual disclosures of

reality” (p. 156). This view of spiritual possibility allows for the various spiritual aspirations that seem to be individually specific in the sample gathered for this study.

Spiritual life and dreams of enlightenment, with the hope of salvation from personal suffering, did not arrive in the way anticipated by the participants in this study. Rather, individual experience of lived spiritual investigation slowly led to the disillusionment of such preconceived notions. Mariana Caplan (1999) says, “Disillusionment is not ‘bad’ or ‘negative’, but the necessary and inevitable process of dismantling the stronghold of ego” (p. 442). It can be said that many of the awakenings and insights related in this study resulted from disillusionment concerning what is possible on the spiritual path. The 9 participants mentioned eight specific areas that they confronted on their journey to spiritual maturity. These unforeseen insights range from individual responsibility to larger goals of enlightened expansive consciousness.

These insights led to the development and creation of new ways of being in relationship to spiritual teachers, spiritual practice, and spiritual community. These new standards suggest that mature spiritual practitioners may eventually have to embrace a form of spiritual autonomy as part of individual development. Da Free John (1976), also known as Adi Da, gives a rendition of a more traditional view of teacher/student/community relationship:

The individual comes to me on the basis of this teaching. Then he is turned over to the Community, and all of my conditions, my disciplines, are made known to him. He, or she, continues to come to me again and again, and as time goes on he begins to know this spiritual relationship as a living, practical matter. His approach to me becomes sacrificial and full of gratitude, surrender, submission. His approach to me becomes love, becomes sacrifice. (p. 12)

The constraints of traditional spiritual relationship are addressed in this section of the study as new contemporary ways of relating are offered.

Wilber and Washburn Compared: Closer to Transpersonal Pluralism

Is there Healthy Regression in Spiritual Development?

Regression is defined in the APA *Thesaurus of Psychological Index Terms* as “a return to earlier, especially to infantile, patterns of thoughts or behavior, or stage of functioning.” The existence and purpose of spiritual regression is part of an ongoing debate between Wilber (1997) and Washburn (2003). In brief, in Washburn’s dynamic-dialectic model of development, regression is a necessary aspect of the process of spiritual development. It is valued as an explanation for difficulties that can arise on the spiritual path. Because the instinctual forces of the Dynamic Ground were lost via repression, they must be regained via regression. In this way, hardships such as Saint John of the Cross’ “dark night of the soul” are seen as necessary purifications leading to higher spiritual development, rather than neurotic pathologies.

Wilber on the other hand, categorized regression as only necessary to free up pathologically repressed experiences. Healthy development moves towards ever-expanding levels of consciousness in an irreversible process. In this view, repression is just one of the many defense mechanisms put into place by the self-system when development becomes pathological. These repressed aspects of the self-system must be reintegrated before higher developmental stages can be reached. This type of regression in service of ego is sometimes a prerequisite for transcendence of the ego into the transpersonal realms.

Although none of the participants in this study used the term *regression* when they discussed their own spiritual development, I believe we can apply this psychological concept to their descriptions of certain aspects of their reported experience. Taking

Washburn's view of regression first, the teachers in the current study provide many accounts of difficult and challenging psychological, physical, and emotional experiences. They did not refer to a need to return to earlier behaviors or stages for the sake of psychic resolution. They *do* mention being surprised when neglected aspects of everyday life—such as earning a living and maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships—returned to the forefront. However, I believe this experience can more appropriately be explained by the term *spiritual bypassing*, coined by John Welwood (2000). This term refers to the tendency to avoid personal or emotional problems in order to focus on transcendence in spiritual practice. Wilber (2006) would explain this a case of uneven development.

As far as the necessity for regression as a response to experiencing spiritual difficulty, participants responded to the contrary. Umi distinctly says that he had to go through a “dark night of the soul” experience where he describes himself as a “drowning man hanging on to a straw.” He then says that you don't have to go through such an experience, and he recommends ways to avoid it. Many of the teachers who had difficult experiences believe that others may not have to go through such pain.

Dorothy remembers the “fire of truth” burning everything that was not part of its essence as she was cleansed of finite identification. This process was explained as more of an identity transformation coming from the inside out. This description is much more consistent with Washburn's awakening phase, yet Dorothy clearly travels through past identification with thoughts and feelings as she relinquishes them. This can be viewed as regressive in the sense that Washburn uses the term.

Wilber (2006) divided “dark night of the soul” experiences into three categories: gross, subtle, and causal. This distinction points out that such experiences are merely

temporary states and not actual stages of consciousness. In this way, an individual like Dorothy can enter the state experience of “fire of truth,” gaining its beneficial cleansing effects without having to regress to an earlier stage of development. This view also helps to explain how people can reach temporary elevated states and eventually have to return to their actual stage of development. This return may feel like regressive movement, yet structural assimilation evolves towards a permanent stage that contains more expansive consciousness.

Transpersonal Psychic Source

The most significant point of contention between Wilber’s and Washburn’s models arises from the fact that they disagree on the nature and source of preegoic and transegoic states. To Wilber (1980), any apparent similarities between preegoic and transegoic states are merely superficial and misleading. In his perspective, these two psychic states are not expressions of the same or even similar structures. Furthermore, to confuse the preegoic and transegoic states is to commit one of two possible pre/trans logical fallacies: “...the reduction of the transpersonal to the personal, which we call PTF-1, and the elevation of the prepersonal to the transpersonal, or PTF-2” (p. 8).

For Washburn (1995), there is a middle ground in which both preegoic and transegoic states can be different expressions of the same nonegoic potential. For Washburn the primary matrix and spiritual wholeness are not the same thing, and they may be differing expressions of the Dynamic Ground. In this way, the primary matrix is a preegoic fusion with the Ground, and spiritual wholeness is a higher reunion with the Ground.

When Dorothy remembers her transcendent experience it certainly seems like a reunion with the Dynamic Ground. She says,

When you wake up and have transcendent experience and so forth, there's a freedom from, but when it comes back around. It is coming back around full-circle, embodying itself. It's all the same essence. It's all the same bottom line and it's just having this unique expression of itself moment to moment.

Mokshananda uses an analogy to relay a similar experience:

The awakening experience, it just pops you into what you've already been. It just reveals to you what you've always been. It's always been here. It's like a fish being in the water, but never knowing it's in the water and then all of a sudden it realizes, "Oh, I'm in water." The water had always been there. It's not like it's been absent.

It is possible that these two teachers have fallen for what Wilber calls the retro-romantic fallacy of confusing pre-conscious bliss with transpersonal states as in Wilber's PTF-2. This would mean that they did not really have an awakening or transcendent experience, rather they experienced some form of primitive state and misinterpreted it because they were not at a developmental level with the capacity to tell the difference. While this scenario is highly unlikely, it is possible. It is more likely that these two teachers are correctly assessing and relaying an experience of acknowledging the Dynamic Ground as the original psychic source that they emerged from and are now reuniting with.

Revised Self-System

Wilber's position is based on a developmental psychological belief that self progresses along a holarchy to bigger self-concepts identifying with a larger degree of awareness. Washburn's position, on the other hand, is founded on an idea of a split self-system where both ego identification and the Dynamic Ground are destined to meet in regression. This study finds some support for a synthesized view of a self-system in

which both Wilber's and Washburn's concepts occur simultaneously (see Figure 4). In this revised self-system, there is a polarity influencing self-concept, and that polarity is the ego identification progressing along a holarchy like Wilber's model, yet this progress is governed by the witness, which is the equivalent of Washburn's Dynamic Ground. This psychodynamic awakening of the Dynamic Ground expressed in nonduality can be viewed as two sides of a coin paradoxically existing within a holarchical structure.

All the teachers in this study consistently reported their journey as a movement toward increasing reliance on inner guidance with a self-concept based in autonomy. Having originally adopted traditional views and spiritual practices, many were motivated by awakened states to move into more expansive stages of consciousness. Their self-systems shifted to adopt these new experiences into a new, more expansive self-identity. They began to identify with their own individual experience rather than the collective opinion of how things are expected to happen. Standing alone in the face of the great natural force with nothing but real-life experience, their egoic self-concepts braved the force of inevitability in nondual union, only to be transformed from what is perceived as its source, the illusion of Maya. As past conditioning gave way, they adopted a more expansive identification and an orientation of nonduality.

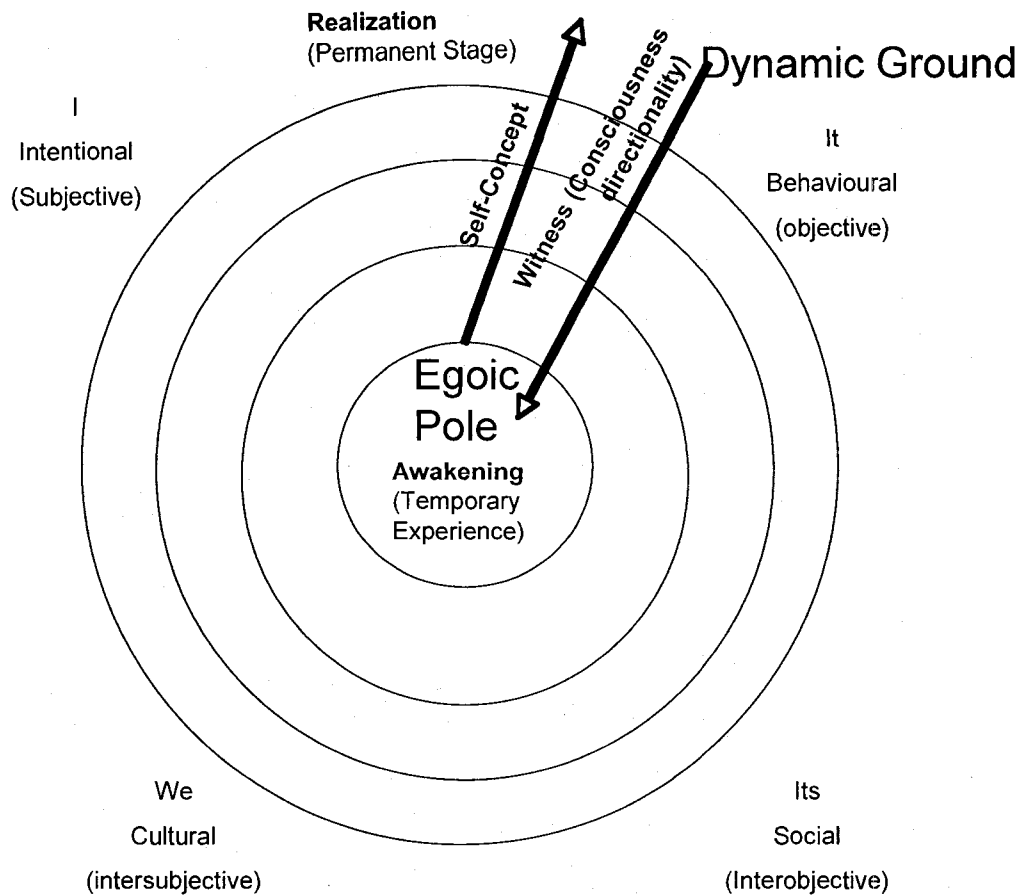


Figure 4. Polarized self-system within the holarchical structure. (Produced by the Author)

Additional Findings Beyond Wilber's and Washburn's Models and Controversies

During the data analysis and coding process several unique themes emerged that were not represented in either Wilber's or Washburn's developmental models.

First, the specific use of spiritual models comes into question. Also, the real life experiences of the participants in this study appear to contradict many common spiritual beliefs. The unique social and cultural setting in North America during the 1960s acted as a catalyst for early spiritual investigation. Finally, there is evidence for a Westernized

Yogic transformation with new spiritual practice, reformed student-teacher relationships, and progressive spiritual communities that incorporate Internet technologies.

Maps and Models beyond Developmental Theory

The participants in this study questioned the use of spiritual maps or models as they recalled their own journey into spiritual maturity. In many cases, traditional views of the developmental process did not seem consistent with the actual lived experience of being on a spiritual path. In fact, models and early ideas often turned out to be misleading or false. The widespread inaccuracy of such spiritual maps or models led the teachers in this study to modify the concepts and often create new models of their own.

The results of this study suggest that spiritual development might be so individually specific that no single map, no matter how intricate or sophisticated, could ever represent the vast expanse of consciousness unfolding. Wilber (2006) makes reference to consciousness evolving overtime allowing more people to reach higher levels today than historically possible. In the same way one could speculate that consciousness itself is evolving so rapidly that new approaches have to be created constantly. The extent of individual differences and rapidity of cultural change today may be so pervasive that spiritual models may become outdated before they can be applied by other spiritual seekers.

People who have made it to the higher stages of development tend to be the ones who create spiritual models. The beliefs and worldviews portrayed in these models are therefore consistent with a higher, potentially transpersonal relationship to divinity. When

others who are in earlier levels of development are exposed to these concepts, they will be interpreted from that lower perspective. The difference in perspective creates different interpretations and distortions of the intended meaning. For example, if a student hears an advanced spiritual teacher say that his or her relationship with practice is effortless, and the student has no reference for this kind of experience, her or his interpretation of that statement may misconstrue spiritual practice as unimportant.

This does not mean that maps and models are entirely ineffective, but it does suggest that they have limitations. The usefulness of models may depend on the level of individual development and their capacity to interpret them. Jon Bernie suggested,

I really encourage people to find the path within themselves not to follow me or some teaching. That's not the way it works ultimately. I mean following a teacher or a way for a while can be very important, but eventually that all has to be dropped.

Nirvair agreed: "There is no cookie cutter approach to this at all. That's one of the challenges along the path is that there ought to be."

Similarly, Wilber and Washburn's models are limited for the same reason. If Wilber's model is taken literally and imposed on an individual's development it could be pathologizing. Take Saniel Bonder's new spiritual system "waking down into mutuality" for example, where he proposes the abolition of hierarchy in post-awakening spiritual community. He was motivated to create this system because of a negative experience with a spiritual teacher who abused his authority. Wilber's (2006) model, if applied as literal dictum, could misconstrue this reaction coming from an arrested green level of development. The misinterpretation of Saniel's brilliant contribution would negate the healthy aspects of hierarchy unfolding in a holarchical structure of consciousness. A truly integral spiritual system according to the structural-hierarchical model would include

hierarchies. When the use of models are taken out of context in this way they potentially invalidate the insight Sanial had when he created a system where spiritual authorities cannot manipulate and abuse those of lesser social status. This is a terrific example of how individual experience when entering into more mature stages of conscious development surpasses the potentially rigid construction of spiritual maps. Wilber (2006) even warns against confusing the map with the territory.

Eight Potential Misconceptions of Spiritual Development

An important part of finding more of what spiritual development is, is finding out what it is not. Discerning fact from fiction is a necessary part of making a contemporary assessment of the so-called “spiritual journey.” Making such distinctions becomes difficult when talking about highly subjective experiences that very few people ever even have. The spiritual concepts discussed below were reported by the research participants as contradicting their actual experiences. These findings are specific to the participants in this study. I am therefore suggesting that these misunderstandings were common in this particular sample of spiritual practitioners and may not represent all people involved in spiritual pursuits.

Participants in this study eventually developed beyond earlier beliefs about the nature of spiritual development. Some participants even felt that these ideas were misleading. The eight widely held beliefs in question are categorized as: (a) beyond pain and personal responsibility, (b) necessary ego death, (c) spiritual super powers, (d) effort = spiritual reward (e) guru knows best, (f) karmic vengeance, (g) an easier road, and (h) enlightenment is for everyone.

Misconception Beyond Pain and Personal Responsibility

A common misconception for early spiritual practitioners is that if a certain level of awareness is reached, all experiences of suffering will disappear. Usually this applies to internal experiences of emotional, psychological suffering, but in some cases people believe that they will no longer have to worry about worldly problems either. They actually believe that with enough spiritual practice and devotion, they will transcend relationship problems, financial responsibilities, and physical pains related to aging. All too often these people eventually have to confront the myth that there is no meditation powerful enough to pay your eclectic bill or make your spouse happy.

Mokshananda remembered hearing,

There's supposed to be some sort of fireworks or gods or deities come out of the sky or something like that. Like Muktananda coming out of the sky or some teacher would arrive and you'd be anointed into some heavenly realm or something like that.

Similarly Saniel Bonder recalled,

I was meditating as many hours a day as I could. I was convinced that if I really meditated long and hard, I would actually realize the self, then I would be sufficiently invulnerable from all the pain of being alive. *[Laughter]*. I literally thought that. *[Laughter]*.

In the same way, Gurudass's belief early about seeking freedom from pain on the spiritual path was,

I would be rewarded for all my efforts and my practice, I would be rewarded with fame, with wealth, with recognition, also the expectation then, the part of that extraordinary thing, was there would come a point in life where I would not experience pain. I would live in this state of perpetual bliss.

Misconception of Ego Death

The misconception of a necessary ego death as part of spiritual transformation is also widely propagated. The ego is seen as the cause for dualistic perception entrapping people in the physical world of Maya and illusion. Reasonably enough the ego should therefore be eliminated, freeing the enslaved mind. The obvious problem with this plan is that a mind with no ego would cease to exist; it would lose all functional capacity. Rather than an experience of ultimate freedom, the mind with no ego would be subject to psychic invasion, inflation, and a range of pathologies with nothing to defend it. John Sherman misinterpreted one of Ramana Maharshi's teachings and attempted to kill his ego. He said,

I knew that what had to happen was that this ego had to be wiped out. That's what had to happen. That was what needed to—that was what would see me through. It had to be killed off, destroyed. That's what they all say, or so I thought.

After several weeks of pretending to be dead and meditating on the mantra "die," he gave up and realized the absurdity of this practice.

Misconception of Super Powers

Certain spiritual traditions like Kundalini Yoga talk about the capacity to gain super-human powers from extensive spiritual practice. Sometimes referred to as *Siddhis*, powers such as controlling the flow of water, the ability to levitate, see into the future, telepathy, and bi-location are believed to be potentials of a truly dedicated practitioner. These powers are not necessarily helpful and can be seen as a burden and may be used for ill deeds. After performing the most rigorous Yogic and meditative practices for over 35 years for periods up to 1,000 days at a time, Nirvair reports that such super powers are

only a misconception. He recalled that, “from all my reading and things like that, I had a fantasy imagination about how that would manifest. You could do special things. You’d have special powers.” Gurudev, another longtime Kundalini Yogi agrees and says,

If you have all the powers. Siddhis. Siddhis are only tricks. You stimulate one center then you have expansive aura. You stimulate another center and then you can see aura. You see someone that creates auras. This is all a joke, it’s not the base.

Misconception that Effort = Spiritual Reward

The concept of individual effort on the spiritual path is clearly divided between temporary states and established realization. While effort in spiritual practice seems to produce heightened sensitivity to certain states, it appears to be limited in power when it comes to final nondual union. For those who spoke of awakening in this study, they referred to it as an act of divinity arriving only after they relinquished all efforts. If effort was involved they perceived it coming from a source of divinity, not individual willpower. This means that effort in spiritual practice alone does not necessarily mean the end result of realized awakening. Similarly, there is no agreed upon formula as to how much effort one should put towards spiritual practice. While 10 hours of meditation may bring one person to the brink of realization, it may cause another person to just have a sore back. Saniel Bonder recalled that his awakening specifically,

wasn’t produced by all the effort. But the focus, the aspiration, the calling of it forth really, to me, as I then began to reckon from the awakened position with what I saw and see going on, I began more and more to understand that I and we all are inherently latently what I would call divinely human characters.

Misconception that The Guru Knows Best

There are two distinctly different ways that the term *guru* is used in spiritual traditions. First, a *guru* can be a spiritual teacher who guides people in their development. *Guru* can also refer to an inner sense of being and an internal system of guidance. Things become distorted when people confuse the two meanings. If the external guru, who is just another person, is taken more seriously than the internal voice, an inappropriate power dynamic has been established. There continue to be several mixed feelings about this guru-disciple dynamic that will be explored later. Jon Bernie illuminated this topic:

You know I remember when Pundit ji said to me: he says I am yourself, I am yourself. See *Guru* actually means “true self.” And so when they say you are not separate from the guru, they mean you are not separate from your true self, not the dude up on the stage, and if you have that projection going on then you will have to work through that at some point.

Nirvair shared a similar experience:

I was staring at your picture but it seemed like I was only talking to myself. He says that’s what it’s about. He says that’s what it is. You know, for these other people it was like messages from him or messages from beyond, that kind of thing. So I said I’m on the right track here in terms of being self-correcting and self motivating.

Misconception of Eternal Damnation for Turning your Back on the Guru

Some misconceptions are intentionally created in an attempt to create and maintain an uneven power dynamic between teachers and students. When a student wants to leave the relationship with a spiritual teacher, he or she is considered to have entered a stage of development called *shaktipad*. In this stage the student is expected to confront negative projections onto the teacher. If the student cannot handle the intensity of this experience, she or he will leave the community and relationship only to suffer lifetimes of bad karma for turning their back on the guru. This myth is used to justify why people

in a spiritual community leave when the guru is found to be a fraud and involved in corrupt activities.

Saniel Bonder left his teacher and feared being ostracized as well as spiritual disaster:

So anyway, when I left, someone even called me—an old friend called me from the island in Fiji and he said “The guru’s really upset about your leaving, and so on.” He says, “What about the prospect of hellish karmas for lifetimes?” Because that was—it wasn’t written in any of his writings, but it was explicitly part of the culture by that time, that if you left, your likely prospect was hellish karmas for lifetimes, because you violate—you broke the vows of eternal devotion and practice in his way.

Misconception of an Easy Road

One of the more common misconceptions, which is even propagated by some of the teachers in this study, is that of an easy road of development. On this view, with the right guidance and attention to detail, it is possible to become enlightened without having to go through the pains and torments of waking up to the world of autonomy and self-reliance in order to eventually embrace higher levels of connection with others. The problem here is that each teacher in this present study who made this claim went through harsh and painful experiences, yet they assume that others will not have to do the same. After suffering over a year of hellish experiences and massive existential crisis, John Sherman decided that he has a teaching that is so simple that anyone can reach the same state as he has. Umi confidently proclaimed, “You don’t have to spend the amount of time I spent meditating. You don’t have to do that. That is not a prerequisite.”

Misconception that Enlightenment Is for Everyone

It is widely believed that all people have the potential for awakening and transformation. This means that everyone possesses the right ingredients or components. One suggested reason why awakening into the highest stages of consciousness does not happen to all people relates to issues of individual responsibility. Most people do not have the right dedicated practice, the right teachers, enough commitment, appropriate garb, the new updated verses and hymns, etc. This puts the responsibility and similarly the blame on the individual. Because enlightenment is so extremely rare, we are looking at a legacy of lack of commitment, flawed people, or a potential myth about enlightenment. Saniel Bonder commented on this simple fact:

They propose that there's a way to live spiritual practice and stay attuned to the divine while handling your worldly responsibilities, and a lot of people have done that in a variety of ways over thousands of years, but "very few" in any lifetime have ever awakened, and that's pretty much across the traditions. There isn't any serious tradition of illumination, awakening, enlightenment, self-realization anywhere where great numbers of people are living an awakened life and fulfilling worldly tasks and everyday responsibilities and dealing with what "the world" throws at them.

Cultural Findings

As mentioned earlier, the stage Washburn (2003) identified as crossroads marks the beginning of a major inward shift towards eventual union between the ego and the Dynamic Ground. Washburn's view was that this stage is typically entered around midlife. Many of the participants in this study clearly began internal investigation leading to major life changes starting in their late teens and early 20s. Of course, these particular individuals were exposed to unique social and cultural phenomena that may have helped

instigate this shift. During this time they were encouraged to think differently and they had contact with teachers coming from the East to the U.S. for the first time, bringing new philosophies and perspectives. Nirvair summarized the unique cultural umbrella of the era in this brief stanza:

When I was in college, I went through a distinct awakening just even from a contemporary. Some guy said well, what do you know? That was the question. So I went into the idea along with the culture of the time which went to kind of a place which encouraged counterculture. A place called Haverford College in Pennsylvania which was a small liberal arts men's school. It was Quaker. This was during the Vietnam War in the beginning of it, so it was all kinds of free thinking was encouraged. I had a Philosophy, a French Philosophy professor that taught meditation. And I had an East Indian professor who taught Western philosophy which was very interesting.

Western Yoga Emerges

As Carl Jung (1936) predicted in *Yoga and the West*, a new Western Yoga is emerging. As the Eastern practices and teacher-student relationships prove to be limited in this particular social-cultural context, new individually specific teaching styles and practices take their place. Fewer than 100 years ago, Yoga was only taught from single teacher to single student in a direct lineage with very little variation to this system. Today in North America there are at least 12 different forms of Yoga being widely practiced by a variety of students. Rather than teaching and reteaching the ancient mystical tradition, a new journey has begun toward more expansive identification with higher autonomy and integrity with more empathy for others. As Western psychodynamic theory embraces the Eastern potentials of realization in nonduality a new Western Yoga emerges.

The days of monastic seclusion are growing few as practitioners continue to opt for an integrated life in which spiritual practice co-exists with worldly pursuits

(Welwood, 2000). With intensity and excitement Saniel Bonder related:

I later saw it, it's as if we parachuted into the Normandy of this new spirituality from a Western context. Have done it by not just tapping into the Eastern forms, but by taking Western birth. That really has just required something new to emerge. You can't graft that old form onto the new world, the new life.

According to the teachers interviewed in this study, Eastern spiritual systems have made specific adaptations in these three areas: (a) spiritual practice, (b) teacher-student relationship, (c) community structure.

New spiritual practice.

New spiritual practices emerged to take the place of traditional practices.

Motivated by the need to be more accessible, more progressive and culturally sensitive, Saniel Bonder created a process called "Waking Down into Mutuality." He invites the possibility for integration of the human and the divine in what he calls "Self-Democratizing Twenty-First Century Enlightenment." Employing a process he calls "Coconut Yoga," participants are encouraged to remain open to feedback in a system of checks and balances designed to eliminate hierarchy. Participants in this movement are encouraged to bring their own strengths and contribute to the process. This is almost diametrically opposite to the traditional teaching style Saniel received, in which the student is trained in spiritual practices developed ages ago in India.

Similarly Gurudev, a longtime student of Kundalini Yoga and Mexican shamanism, developed a system called Sat Nam Rasayan. He makes a brilliant synthesis of two traditions, which helps people come in contact with their inner world and develop language to talk about it. Like Saniel, Gurudev empowers his students to develop relationship with an inner reliance giving them the feeling of independence.

New teacher-student relationship.

The participants in this study mentioned developing an influential relationship with over 50 different teachers at some point in their journey. Each teacher used a different teaching style supported by his or her unique perspective. An attempt to accurately categorize these styles cannot be accomplished with the data available in this study. However one significant trend in teaching style did emerge in this study. There was repeated reference made to a particular authoritative style of teaching that was considered to be outdated. Both teacher and student roles were therefore transformed with a new focus on equality.

Commenting on this particular teacher-student or guru-disciple relationship as coming from “hidebound” traditions, John Sherman said,

The student is the supplicant of the teacher, the student comes to the teacher and the teacher bestows upon the student understanding or clarity or shaktipat or some transmission that will, if the student is deserving, will bring this same sudden shift to the student and clear away all misunderstanding and so forth and so on.

In this system the teacher holds the power to grant access to heightened spiritual states and can bestow or withhold them at will. The student must follow the instructions of such a powerful teacher with complete obedience. Sanial Bonder recalls there being serious consequences for not following orders like, “You could get kicked out of sanctuaries and lose a lot of access and a lot of status.”

There is a significant trend towards allowing students to evolve at their own pace with consciousness itself being the agent of change rather than the teacher. Almost in reaction to the old teacher-student relationship, the teacher is now considered to be an equal and of service to all humanity. Jon Bernie stated specifically, “I don’t have the

identity of teacher and I don't see the people with me as students, that is not what's happening for me." With this new identified role Jon allows teaching to take place while altering the dynamics between teacher and student.

What is being taught is less borrowed from ancient texts and taken more from personal experience of living a spiritual life in the modern world. Similarly, students are encouraged to embrace and trust their own experiences. Because teachers are being informed by the direct experience of consciousness as it arises, teachings are also constantly evolving to meet the specific needs of each new situation. Teachers are also bringing in a wealth of knowledge from other fields that have not previously had direct influence on spiritual investigation. For example, Jon Bernie, Dorothy, and Mokshananda are all practicing psychotherapists. These shifts in perspective put more emphasis on interpersonal contact and interaction rather than abstract philosophy that may or may not directly apply to people's lives.

New community structure.

All the teachers in this study initially joined a spiritual community but then had to go through a process of individuation so that a new community could evolve around their unique presence and insight. These new communities have abandoned the dogmatic kind of thinking that requires others to conform to an agreed upon doctrine or party line. There is a greater focus on acceptance of others and their process regardless of how advanced they may appear to be. Also leaving behind the need for unhealthy hierarchy like a pecking order where the oldest or more senior members demand respect from newcomers, new communities pride themselves on being more hospitable. Jon Bernie has

created an environment where “people can hang together at that level because when people hangout in that way it actually facilitates others awakening and transformation.”

This new design has become a crucible for radical transformation of both students and teachers as they have entirely new possibilities for reaching more people than ever before. Jon Sherman and other’s Satsangs (spiritual gatherings) are now broadcast on the Internet so that people can watch lectures from their homes anywhere in the world. This new forum for spiritual discussion is interactive and people can email or call with their immediate questions and concerns.

Clinical Implications

This study only covers two of the nine or ten established transpersonal psychotherapeutic approaches available today. Along with the impact of works established by Ken Wilber, Michael Washburn, Hamid Ali’, Carl Jung, Roberto Assagioli, and Stanislov Grof, others continue to pioneer transpersonal methods and psychotherapies. In *Psychotherapy and Spirit*, Brant Cortright (1997) synthesized the common problems that arise in relationship to a therapist and a client’s spiritual life in psychotherapy. Although he attempted to cover a broad spectrum of potential conflict, he mentioned two specific areas that are highly represented in this study. In contemporary America, problems may arise if a transpersonal therapist is also a client’s spiritual teacher or guru, a role that traditionally demands full obedience from the student or disciple. Participants in this study view such relationships as outdated and potentially dysfunctional. Because of the authoritative posture and potential for abuse of power dynamics, such guru-disciple relationships are inappropriate for therapy. This study

offers a revised relationship between teacher and student that can be translated to therapist and patient. Rather than the therapist or teacher being the agent of change who holds the capacity to grant access or deny contact with divinity, divinity itself is seen as the agent of change. In this way, both therapist and patient work toward accessing transpersonal potential for their unitive and expansive benefit.

This study also offers some insight into the potential case of therapists prescribing spiritual practice and using such practices as meditation in therapy. From the accounts of mature spiritual teachers in this study, spiritual practice naturally evolves and changes. As an individual's perceptions expand into greater conscious capacities, they relate to spiritual practice differently. Some teachers eventually outgrew the need for meditation and no longer even recommended it to others. Taking this developmental aspect of spiritual practice into account, therapists should inform patients of the nature and limitations of such practice. On the other hand, transpersonal psychotherapists could focus on aspects of spiritual practice that have been shown to be effective in treating specific symptoms.

Transpersonal psychotherapy could be used as a navigational tool to facilitate entering and leaving spiritual traditions. Joining spiritual communities and separating from them is not always an easy process. As seen in the lives of participants, individuation is sometimes a necessary process in developing autonomy. This was particularly stressful and dangerous for individuals who were going against mythic beliefs of spiritual damnation. Differing from Wilber's concept of incorporating and integrating into higher stages of consciousness, individuation is needed when leaving a dysfunctional system. Spiritual practitioners would benefit from therapeutic support

during this developmental process.

Taking the findings of this study into consideration, first the use of the term regression in transpersonal clinical work may need some revision. While Washburn's explanation of regression suggests a healthy move towards eventual union with divinity, it implies that all people will eventually have this experience at some point in their process. For those that experience regression into the dark night experience, Washburn's model is a tremendous help to normalize and create meaning for such experiences. The reports of mature spiritual individuals in this study show that regression is not always necessary and therefore should not be encouraged in therapy.

The introduction of a revised self-system in this study suggests a synthesis of both Wilber's and Washburn's models. Because I believe that not all patients respond to one specific type of therapy, it is crucial that transpersonal therapy utilize the expansive knowledge of all traditions, incorporating and synthesizing an explanation of consciousness as it unfolds. This bipolar view of a self-system progressing through Wilber's holarchy brings in more psychodynamic understanding to help frame therapists view of the patient in therapy.

Limitations

This study was certainly limited by the sample of participants included. Christian mysticism, Judaism, and other forms of indigenous spiritual systems were not represented. Although the participants came from very different cultural backgrounds, they were all American giving them a similar shared worldview. The participants were also mostly men with the exception of one woman. While the three traditions sampled for

this study have more prominent male teachers, the lack of female representation reduces the generalizability of the findings. It therefore does not clearly provide substantive support for Wilber's (2006) claims of universal stages of conscious structures.

Like the three prior studies mentioned earlier by Rothberg, Grandi and Thomas, this study focused on the lives and experience of spiritual teachers. Teachers were selected because of their extensive experience in navigating spiritual terrain. Using only advanced spiritual practitioners and teachers limits the range of perspective and scope of the study. The role of a spiritual teacher may also suggest a particular personality style that should be accounted for. The lives of the average, uncharismatic spiritual population are clearly underrepresented in these three studies and this study.

The single interview format was limited in that it did not give the participants a chance to review the findings and then relay their feedback. Had the participants been more accessible, a follow-up interview may have further clarified the specific questions concerning developmental models. This points to the limitation of using interview questions that only focus on life sequence and significant influences. While this method of questioning elicited a clear, unrehearsed look into the participant's lives, it did not provide some of the nuanced detail about specific developmental processes.

Relying on participant's memory of experiences limits the description accuracy of event during recall. Because all events relayed in the interviews were recalled from the participant's current mature point of view, those memories were undoubtedly colored by their current stage of development. There is no way to confirm the accuracy of the participants claims.

One of the major design limitations of this method was the time, energy, and

concentration needed to carry out a thematic analysis. Testing the assumptions of spiritual development cannot be achieved by a simple questionnaire. Simply screening interviews to support existing developmental theory would not produce any new insights. For these reasons, the entire bulk of 184 pages of transcribed interview text had to be reviewed several times in the coding process. Thematic analysis is more suited for smaller research projects or an entire team of researchers.

In NVivo, free codes can be transferred in to tree code structure to show relationships between themes. This intricate system allows the researcher to keep track of increasingly larger amounts of themes while coding. However, the program does have design limitations: NVivo cannot effectively record new text references when applying them to multiple levels of a tree code structure. The program began to shut down repeatedly when the more advanced coding structure was used to code the final transcripts. This significantly slowed down the previously rather efficient coding process.

The most obvious limitation of this study is that the investigation of the phenomenon of spiritual development is still in its exploratory stages. This study is only one of many needed to eventually lead to a more systematic way to test the efficacy of these two transpersonal models of development and to offer empirical research data for the development of new models. Although there are these limitations in this study, new insights were gained and those insights should be viewed with these limitations in mind.

Implications for Future Research

The methodologies used in this study were strictly qualitative, employing thematic analysis. This proved to be an appropriate method when used to investigate the

individual's interior, subjective experience of transpersonal states and spiritual development. This study also revealed several powerful influences on these inner subjective experiences. Most notable were cultural, spiritual practice, and spiritual systemic influences. As Wilber (2006) points out, there are appropriate methodologies for the systematic study of each of these influences. Cognitive science with empirically validated methodologies would be appropriate for further investigation into the behavioral aspects of spiritual practice. Similarly, hermeneutics could be employed when focusing on cultural influences upon the meaning of spiritual practice, and some form of systems theory would best illuminate systemic influences (p. 37).

In the case of spiritual teachers, spiritual practice, and spiritual systems, there is an opening for more research into the apparent need to individuate as development moves towards spiritual autonomy. These areas of disembarkation seem to be very stressful and potentially hazardous for the individual going through transpersonal identity transformation. Specific focus on coping strategies and healthy styles of spiritual individuation could be beneficial to future spiritual practitioners.

A broader sample of participants taking into account more spiritual systems and cultural influences and a wider range of spiritual development would help the future studies to be more generalizable. Future studies should include Judeo/Christian spiritual practitioners and reach beyond the cultural confines of North America. Even though prominent women spiritual teachers are largely outnumbered by their male counterparts, future studies should make efforts to include equal number of men and women in their sampling.

Concerning spiritual models in general, there is a need to develop an effective

method of determining an individual's current stage of development. Both spiritual practitioners and anyone attempting to assist them would benefit from an accurate assessment of true spiritual capacities and limitations. This study shows the potential for individuals misinterpreting spiritual models due to their restricted level of consciousness at the time of interpretation. The models, however brilliant in design, have been exposed as having limitations as well. With this in mind, a new and improved stage model should be designed with a focus on specific stage limitations and potentials. This super-stage model would have to represent the experience of practitioners from the perspective of each developmental stage with the focus on what is working and what is not. In this way, people could follow the best process to reach each new stage only to adopt the next prepared new-and-improved map of the territory.

The documentation of these widely propagated spiritual misconceptions provides a multitude of avenues for future research. This brings into question what is a realistic goal for spiritual practice? How much pain and suffering is inherent in human existence and must be tolerated, and how much can be alleviated by spiritual avenues? Is there a more mature way to relate to egoic functioning in which necessary psychic functions can be exonerated rather than eradicated? A major exploration is needed in the area of spiritual effort to find a balanced approach that includes all aspects of individual growth. In the case of contemporary spiritual teachers, there is an amazing void of knowledge as what kinds of relationships are most effective for student's growth and awakening.

One of the more simple studies that could be inspired from this research is to find out at what age are people going through these transitions into spiritual maturity. Washburn speculates midlife as the standard time for internal shift of focus leading

towards expansive consciousness. This study shows a shift towards inner exploration much earlier and in some cases in college years. When does this initial shift occur and then at what age does the second shift towards spiritual individuation and reliance of experience take place.

Personal Reflections

This dissertation explores the nature of spiritual development as an individual moves from personal identification into the transpersonal realm of consciousness. I designed this study with the intention of finding out more about what is really going on during the more mature spiritual stages of identification. Having extensively read about theoretical spiritual possibilities, I wanted to hear about people's actual lived experience of progressing into the latter stages of spiritual development. I chose recognized spiritual teachers as the participants of this study because I assumed they would have had to go through this process themselves to be able to teach. After hearing the accounts of dedicated practice captured in these interviews I have a new found respect for mature spiritual practitioners.

With the help of my research team and a few long time spiritual practitioners who shall remain anonymous, I developed the interview questions used in this study. I intentionally avoided words that would suggest stages of development and the well-known concepts affiliated with realization and enlightenment. There has been much written on this subject, but my bias and assumption was that people were being influenced by the social, political pressures to reiterate concepts and experiences that were not actually happening. I believed that many of the classical ideas of high levels of

spiritual development could be abstractions created from misinterpreted outdated texts. If someone is elected or appointed into a position of spiritual authority, it would be in their best interest to agree with the claims and the infrastructure supporting them. This can become a cycle of subtle distortion that if left unchecked can lead to claims of all-knowing, all-seeing omnipotence.

During the recruiting phase of this dissertation and the search for authentic teachers, I ran into some fraudulent and potentially dangerous imposters that were not included in this study. I met several people who were posing as enlightened teachers, boasting impossible claims, and promising to deliver salvation and eternal freedom from suffering. While promoting magical, mythical, and archaic modes of thinking may be appropriate in some contexts, it was given very little precedence in this study.

I must admit some of my personal history with spiritual communities at this point. I was born in an ashram and started my spiritual training prenatally. Basic Yoga and meditation were everyday activities. Then at the age of seven, I moved to India without my parents with the intention of developing an Eastern mindset. Immersed in the culture, I lived in boarding schools and holy temples. During the next 9 years, I met and studied with various holy men and women, only returning to the U.S. to continue academic pursuits that will conclude with the completion of this dissertation.

With this unique experience and the related bias clearly stated, I feel very confident about the genuine attributes and authentic self-representation of the teachers who participated in this study. It is refreshing to hear teachers talk of meditating for years only to realize both the positive effects and potential setbacks of misinterpreting these same effects. I applaud all those who have helped make strides towards this more

expansive and inclusive contemporary spiritual understanding.

Conclusions

The spiritual journeys represented in this study show the natural development of young practitioners as they progress into a conscious maturity. The participants explore the unique influences of spiritual practice, community, and spiritual teachers as they move into increasingly larger spheres of consciousness. During this journey they adopt philosophies and join spiritual groups to help make sense of powerful awakening experiences. As their own understanding surpasses the temporary support of these systems, mature practitioners develop their own philosophies and ability to make meaning. Some of the participants would claim that this new spiritual understanding, which is based on experience rather than intellectual concepts, becomes the fodder for transmittable elevated consciousness.

Using Ken Wilber's (2006) four-quadrant system (each of which has both interior and exterior perspectives), there are eight possible lenses through which to view individual development. This study used interview questions intentionally designed to elicit participant responses from all four quadrants. Teachers in this study spoke of their subjective experience (upper left) as it was influenced by culture (lower left) and spiritual systems (lower right) and the actions or behaviors (upper right) resulting from these influences. This truly integral approach also took into account both interior and exterior perspectives. Rather than only focusing on internal, subjective accounts of developmental experiences, this study also included the participants work with others as they observed it from exterior perspectives.

This study made further steps towards transpersonal pluralism by including the

theoretical perspective of Wilber's greatest philosophical rival, Michael Washburn.

Washburn's (2003) spiral path model of development includes a unique description of ego identification as individuals pass through development stages. This orientation created a context for questioning and data analysis that contributed to the remarkable interviews and findings included in this study.

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Appendix A: Question Grid

	Beginning	Now	Change
Spiritual Journey	<p>What were you doing before you got on a spiritual path?</p> <p>Did you have dreams or expectations?</p>	<p>From your current experienced point of view, how would you describe where you are on the spiritual path today?</p>	<p>Please describe any changes, which have occurred in your awareness or perception?</p> <p>Did you experience difficulties if so, what were they and how did you overcome them?</p>
Teacher's Influence	<p>Can you describe the relationship with your teacher in the beginning of your spiritual journey?</p>	<p>Describe your current relationship with your teacher? How are they currently working with you?</p>	<p>How did your teacher help you with difficulties as they arose? What changes have occurred in your relationship with your teacher over time?</p>
Work as a Teacher	<p>Describe how you work with a beginning student? As a teacher, what are you trying to accomplish? What changes if any are you trying to facilitate?</p>	<p>How do you work with a mature student? What changes if any are you trying to facilitate with them to accomplish with them?</p>	<p>What are some of the problems or difficulties that come up for your students and what do to assist them?</p>
Community and Practice	<p>What role did the spiritual community or fellow spiritual practitioners play when you first got started on the spiritual path? What role did spiritual practice play in the beginning?</p>	<p>What is your relationship to a spiritual community now? Do you have any spiritual practice now?</p>	<p>How has your status as a spiritual teacher affected your relationship to your spiritual community? What do you see as the future for spiritual community?</p>

Appendix B: Invitation to Participate in Research

Dear _____,

“Let me tell you what this study means to me.”

I am a doctoral candidate in clinical psychology at the California Institute of Integral Studies and am writing my dissertation on the Nature of Spiritual Development. I was raised in a spiritual community in India and am very interested in integrating Eastern spiritual wisdom into the field of clinical psychology.

I was introduced to your teaching by _____ and after sitting with you in Satsang I am very hopeful that you would be willing to participate in this study. Currently the field of transpersonal psychology needs a more in depth understanding of the process of spiritual awakening and your lived experience on the spiritual path will provide much illuminating information. Your participation would involve an informal conversation that would last approximately one hour. The topics covered in the interview would include your experience of spiritual practice leading to your current understanding.

Perhaps you would like to meet me briefly before you decide to participate in this study.

I will be happy to schedule a time to meet at your convenience. Please contact me at (415)235-9982 or purankhalsa@gmail.com.

I am very much looking forward to meeting with you.

Sincerely

Puran Khalsa

Appendix C: Bill of Rights

Bill of Rights for Participants in Psychological Research *English Version*

You have the right to:

1. Be treated with dignity and respect;
2. Be given a clear description of the purpose of the study and what is expected from you as a participant;
3. Be told of any benefits or risks to you that can be expected from participating in the study;
4. Know I's training and experience as a psychologist;
5. Ask any questions you may have about the study;
6. Decide to participate or not without any pressure from I;
7. Have your privacy protected within the limits of the law in California, USA;
8. Refuse to answer any research questions, refuse to participate in any part of the study or withdraw from the study at any time without any negative effects;
9. Be given a description of the overall results of the study upon request;

Discuss any concerns or file an anonymous complaint about the study with the Human Research Review Committee, California Institute of Integral Studies, 1453 Mission Street, San Francisco, CA 94103.

Appendix D: Interview Consent and Confidentiality Form

Consent form for HRRC

“A Thematic Analysis of the Life Stories of Advanced Spiritual Practitioners”

I understand that I am being asked by Puran Khalsa, a graduate student at the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco, to participate in a semi-structured interview focusing on spiritual development. The completion of the interview process may take anywhere from one to two hours. I understand that this interview will be tape-recorded and transcribed by I.

I also understand that my participation is strictly voluntary and that I can discontinue at any time. All the information gathered from the interview shall remain confidential, and personal information will only be needed to categorize type of spiritual practice and current life situations. Specific personal information will not be transcribed so as to keep the identity of all participants anonymous. I am still comfortable participating in the study given these facts.

I understand I may benefit from reflecting on my experience with spiritual practice and potentially that of my students. I am also aware that there may be no direct benefit from participating in this process. If I am dissatisfied at any time with any part of the study, I may report my concerns to the Chair of the Human Research Review Committee, California Institute of Integral Studies, 1453 Mission Street, San Francisco, CA 94103 or by telephone at (415) 575-6100.

If I experience any discomfort from participating in this study, I am aware that I may contact Puran Khalsa at (415) 235-9982 for a referral to, Greg Bogart PhD, a licensed psychotherapist for a free psychotherapy session. I have received and read the “Experimental Subjects Bill of Rights.” I understand that all data collected from this study will be locked in a private file cabinet at the residence of I. These audio recordings will be transcribed for further analysis. Three years after completion of this study, all audio recordings in I’s possession will be recorded over and destroyed. I understand I have the option to read over the transcriptions before the final version of the dissertation is presented to the committee.

I have received a written copy of the Bill of Rights for Participants in Psychological Research.

I would like to consult on the findings related to my interview before they are presented to the committee.

I would like a summary of the research findings.

I consent to participation in the study conducted by Puran Khalsa in fulfillment of his doctorate degree in psychology.

Name

Date

Appendix E: Final Coding Structure

1) Awakening

1. Types:
 - d. Peak experience (Awesome Blissful)
 - e. Dark night of the soul (Painful overwhelming)
 - f. Waking to the need for more
2. Process:
 - d. Starts an irreversible process
 - e. Awakening leads to further questioning
 - f. Awakening is ongoing

2) Guidance and external influence

5. Spiritual practice (beginning)
 - a. Practice becomes easier
 - b. Life becomes spiritual practice
 - c. Relief from suffering
 - d. No end only beginning
6. Community
 - a. Primary supportive community
 - b. New community around teacher
7. Influence of teacher
8. Cultural context

3) Source of difficulty

5. Psychological
6. Emotional
7. Physical
8. Spiritual

4) Self-concept

4. Belief system (outside world)
 - a. Early beliefs about self (things learned about self)
 - b. Early beliefs about spiritual systems
 - c. Adopt Traditional teachings
 - d. Beliefs change over time
 - i. Questioning belief system due to success or failure
 - ii. New belief system evolves from experience
 - iii. Misconceptions exposed on the path
5. Self reflexive knowledge

6. Inner teacher appears
 - a. Becoming a teacher
Embodied spirituality leads to new teachings
 - b. Finding own voice
 - c. Outgrow teacher or teachings
 - d. Relationship moves toward equality

5) Incorporating into liberation

5. More expansive transpersonal potentials
6. Self-reflexive knowledge informs the transpersonal
7. Transpersonal identification
8. The Witness

Appendix F: Interview Transcripts

Interview with Mokshananda

PK: So, let me just try to orient you to how I intend to structure this thing. I'm going to guide you to just tell your story about how it was in the beginning and then what kind of change occurred up to now. I'm going to focus on these four categories: your journey, teachers experience, your work with students, and spiritual communities influence.

M: OK.

PK: Good. So, do you remember what you were doing right before or what was going on with you before you got on this path?

M: I was using a lot of drugs and alcohol. I was using a lot of drugs and alcohol and partying for many years. I was working and had friends I used to go out and party with. I got involved with cocaine for about 10 years and pot. I was doing cocaine and doing pot, plus I was working. I had a girlfriend, I was living in San Jose and then I just—the last few years of my using I knew that I was an addict and I needed to do something about it and so finally after about two or three years of knowing I had a problem with drugs and alcohol I checked myself into a treatment facility. And then when I got to the treatment facility, about two weeks into the treatment facility, I went down to the chapel, it was downstairs of the chapel I went in. I was raised Roman Catholic and so, but I had rejected it a long time ago, but I rejected it. Just something happened to me in that chapel. I just started bawling my head off. I knew it was all over for me doing—I couldn't just live by my own will anymore. And then two years into my sobriety and into AA I met Guru Mayi and she's been my teacher ever since, since 1988.

PK: Wow.

M: Yeah, so I didn't expect to find a guru, matter of fact, I wasn't looking for a guru. I thought people who had gurus were weird.

[Laughter]

M: An so, it was quite by accident that I met Guru Mayi . My therapist suggested that I go up to this talk up at Stanford University by Joseph Chilton Pearce, Connecting the Mind and the Heart and then at the end of that talk he played a video of guru Mayi, which siti Yoga, it's a Saffron blood Yoga. So it's very devotional, very heart centered, heart chakra Yoga, very devotional to the guru. And then I just was like, "What's this lady doing on this video?" She's so stunningly beautiful, something happened to me at that moment in my heart, it exploded. I don't know if I had a—it created a harsh pain for about six months.

Something major happened in my chest. Later on I was told that I had a heart opening.

PK: Wow. So, was that kind of your introduction into—

M: Yeah.

PK: Did you at that point get a vision of what it was going to look like or did you have any dream of what the path would be?

M: No.

PK: No.

M: Like I said, I never had nothing—I never had any experience with any guru stuff and no Eastern philosophy—I mean, besides just a little here and there—I was raised with Kung Fu, the TV show called Kung Fu.

[Laughter]

M: So that was about all of the experience I had with Eastern philosophy, was just that TV show. So, I wasn't looking for a guru or anything like that, I just knew that something happened that day, my chest was hurting. I had my heart checked. I thought I was having some sort kind of heart pain. My doctor said there was nothing wrong with my heart. So I went to the siti Yoga center in San Jose and people said, "Oh ya, that's nothing. You're just having a heart kriya, you're having a heart opening. The guru kissed you. It was like shaktipad" They call it Shaktipad.

PK: Oh, I see.

M: And so I became very curious about what this was, so I started going and just sitting in the back to sort like try and understand what they were talking about. They were talking about the self and consciousness and stuff like that, awakening. So it took me a long time to understand what this was all about.

PK: Ya. Wow. So, at that point would you say that you chose to be on this path or was it just happening?

M: I just sort of came to me. I didn't really look for it.

PK: So, it seems that from '88 did you say? It's been almost 20 years now. What kind of changes have you witnessed?

M: Well, the most obvious change was I was pretty atheistic. Ya know going into my sobriety I was very much like a scientist-kind of thinking. That God is just for

people that have—ya know, weak mind people. And so, the thing is—ya, that's the biggest change that happened over those years. I just became interested in what they called the self and consciousness, because I didn't know what they were talking about. I didn't know what they meant by that. So, very gradually over the years I started meditating very regularly, because that's the practice of Siti Yoga. Ya know, you do a lot of meditation and it's very hard to meditate initially. It's hard for me to sit for five minutes with myself. And then very gradually it became easier, and easier and easier through the years. And guru Mayi promised that your meditation will enter your regular life, so there was one day I remember very distinctly I went into meditation and came out of meditation and noticed that there was no difference between when I was in meditation and when I was not in meditation. The stillness that I found in meditation was in my awakening state, in my regular state.

PK: How long had you been meditating when this occurred?

M: Probably about by then four years, four or five years.

PK: Were you meditating a lot at this point or—could you make it past five minutes?

M: Ya, I made it past five minutes the first—like I said, when I first started I was really just—I didn't know anything about Yoga. I didn't know anything about spirituality at all, so I just went to the siti Yoga center. Part of the practice they have there is you meditate for about a half-hour or whatever it is before satsang began. So, I would meditate. I would just start sitting and just, ya know, just sit around. I didn't know what I was doing, but I was sitting. And then when I started sitting with myself at home, it was, like I said, it was difficult and then through time, ya know, I went from five minutes to 10 minutes to 15 minutes and then I was meditating for like 45 minutes in the morning before I went to work and when I came home I would sit and meditate again. So I started meditating twice a day for years. I became after about two or three years into this thing I was really meditating a lot. I was reading stuff by then. Slowly things started coming together, some of the things started to make sense to me, but the awakening thing still didn't make any sense to me. I didn't know what they meant by awakening. I didn't know what they meant by self-realization or God realization or anything like that.

PK: Amazing, what does all that mean from where you're at now?

M: It's very obvious.

PK: It is?

M: Ya. One of the things that guru Mayi said was, "That what you're seeking in meditation is your own self." She used to say that. "What you're looking for is your own self." And that didn't make any sense to me, but the seeker and the

sought are one, what's being sought is the seeker basically. So there came a period of time after about four, five or six years into meditating that I go, "Well, this doesn't make sense. If I'm looking for myself, any attempt to look for myself, I move away from myself." If I'm looking out there for myself or into some state of consciousness or something, I'm moving away from whose looking, so I stopped looking for something. Then I went to a satsang in November 1995 in San Francisco, guru Mia was in town and I had my awakening experience.

PK: Oh, you did at the satsang?

M: Ya at the satsang there was an awakening experience.

PK: What was that like, what was the awakening experience?

M: I just went in and I noticed everybody around me was meditating really hard, I just like I said I gave up trying to find self. I didn't know what it was, but I'm not going to try to find it because it must be a paradox because what's looking is what you're looking for. So I didn't try to look anymore. So guru Mia came down and I was there really, really early, so I was up in the front row. She came down to sit in her chair and she looked over at me, she just glanced at me, she looked in my eyes and everything just disappeared. There was just pure seeing, pure consciousness. Pure awareness and it became right at that moment I know at that moment what all the sages meant. This is what they were talking about. It was just self evident now that this stuffs aware and awake is what they've been talking about and it's always been here. It's never been absent. That the funny thing. Initially, ya know, it's just apparent and it was just—they say it's self evident known and it's true, it's true.

PK: So from this awakening experience or state that you arrived at did it stay with you and was this what you were looking for?

M: It never left. It's never left.

PK: Oh.

M: I mean my mind came in and there were doubts. It can't be this simple. Something that's always here, which is me. It's just this awareness, it is myself. So my mind would come in with doubts for a number of years and that's when I met Adyashanti and he worked with me on my doubts. Like sometimes I felt like it came and it went, ya know. There were certain time I felt the presence more than other times, if you will. But, it was just an illusion of the mind. There's something that's aware of the coming and the going of awareness, what's aware of that. There's something that's awake to every movement of mind, every movement there's something that's awake to, somethings awake to every doubt that you have, every question that you have. So that's what Adya kept on pointing me too. Adya just really helped me with my doubts that the mind generated. I just saw

Adya and I said, "Adya, do you see in me what I see in you?" and he said, "Yes." No doubt about it, no doubt about it.

PK: So would you say these doubts that came up were the biggest difficulties that you've had to deal with on this path or did you have other struggles on the path?

M: Since the awakening, ya.

PK: Ya.

M: The awakening experience, it just pops you into what you've already been. It just reveals to you what you've always been. It's always been here. It's like a fish being in the water, but never knowing it's in the water and then all of a sudden it realizes, "Oh, I'm in water." The water had always been there. It's not like it's been absent.

PK: I see.

M: And so then you just know that the water is there, but then the fish is swimming around thinking, "Well, ya know, maybe this water is not here all the time." But that's an illusion, the water is what's aware of that thought.

PK: I'm interested in what Adyashanti worked with you on. You're calling it a doubt, but what was that like? Can you remember what that would feel like and what was going on?

M: Ya. It would be like I'd be walking along down the street and then there was a sense like that sense of presence that I had in satsang it's not here right now. And what that was is there's certain states that you go into when you go into satsang. Like it gets really expansive, really quiet. It's like being drunk a little bit and that's a state and that's a nice state. It's a byproduct like God says of awakening, but it's not what we're talking about. There's something that's awake to that state. So I was sort of caught up in states. I was confusing the awareness of certain states. If I was in a very expansive open space state, that meant I wasn't aware enough, I was God. But then if I felt more contracted, then I wasn't in God and that was the illusion. That's an illusion because there's something that's aware of both, the coming and going of states.

PK: Ya.

M: So that's what was going on. I'd be walking around feeling it and then not feeling it, but the feeling of it is not what it is. It's not bad at all. It's something that always here, it's awake and present. And that's what it was sort of like at that time. Other things that the mind did, like I said, was this awareness is so simple. It's utterly simple. It's so simple that we can't believe it can be that simple. All the spiritual stuff is just about this? You hear there's supposed to be some sort of

fireworks or gods or deities come out of the sky or something like that. That's what my mind was thinking. Ya know, it couldn't be that simple and it was.

PK: Oh, so did you think that the path would end in this original idea of fireworks of some kind?

M: Well, it was just like Muktananda coming out of the sky or some teacher would arrive and you'd be anointed into some heavenly realm or something like that. I don't know, I didn't have any idea.

[Laughter]

M: It's just an illusion, it's an idea.

PK: So from where you're at with all of this experience, your perception now is that more you keep saying it's simple? Can you tell me more about what it's like now?

M: Ya, it's—each and every moment there's the realization or recognition of consciousness, of being unconscious. There's consciousness, unconscious is not quite the right word, there's this consciousness of awareness. Each and every moment. The moment is awareness. That's all there is ultimately. Every moment things change, like for instance I'm saying this, a moment ago you were speaking and yet there's this awareness of both going on. So it's like awareness is the constant. Ya know, it's very apparent to me. That's all that's apparent no matter where I'm at, what time of the day, wherever I'm going. If I'm running, it's just constant recognition of awareness. Going to sleep, there's awareness going to sleep. There's like entering the timeless place of sleep, but the awareness is like it's always there and I wake up, it's six hours later, but I never felt like I ever went to sleep. It's a sense of continuity all the time.

PK: What about suffering and torments and things? Are you still plagued by these experiences at times?

M: At times, sure. Because the personality—how do you describe this? The awareness is like a movie screen, it's always there and then there's the movie that's playing on the movie screen. You're here, I'm here, these bodies, we're talking. It's very—but the awareness is like the screen that's here. It's awareness. It's aware of space, aware of space. And then so the characters still has it's hang-ups. Less so now than ever before, but it doesn't mean that it doesn't still find one or one emerges that wasn't seen before. So, ya, there's still pain. It's psychological pain sometimes, emotional pain, physical pain. There's a resistance to experience and so—and the beauty is there's awareness of that. There's a wakefulness to that. That's the background, that's the screen. So once it's recognized how I'm causing myself suffering, then there's an opportunity to not do it anymore. Because this consciousness is not separate from me, the screen is not something other than me. Does that make sense?

PK: Ya.

M: And so once the awareness, there's this consciousness of some way that I'm hurting myself, then there's an opportunity not to hurt myself and stop doing that and ya know. Does that make sense?

PK: Ya. Definitely. It just seems very human. These qualities and the idea that in the end, Muktananda would come from the sky and be relieved into heaven. So in your current experienced understanding and point of view how would you describe where you are on the spiritual path?

M: Samsara nirvana. Nirvana samsara, it's the Zen or the non-dual school. There's no distinction between the world of form and the formlessness. There's just one thing going on. Samsara nirvana. So it's like heaven on earth. It's not like you go to heaven, you go to someplace else. Once you wake up it's like you see the bliss of the self, just being yourself while you're living your life. This is a crazy place. Ya know, there's wars, famine, people hurting each other and it's also very beautiful too—ya know, it's not like a heaven that's separate from here. This is heaven. If you're awake, it's heaven. If you don't recognize the awareness, you don't recognize your own self, what you truly are in the deepest essence, which is like the movie screen it's very difficult. If you just think of yourself as a character in the show, you don't even know that you're thinking of yourself as the character in the show, but once you wake up you see that you're just a character in the show. And there's a character in the show over there, but if you're not awake you're just so in the character that you don't even know that you're in the character. You don't even know to ask that there is—how can I say this? It just never arises to you that it could, that that's what's going on. It just doesn't. It never arose to me.

PK: So if you're aware, if what you're saying, is you experience more of a connection to the other characters in the thing or -? I think there's more—I think you're saying more than I'm understanding. That you experience a connection to the other characters or that you're aware of the entirety of the whole script? Or that it is a script even?

M: Ya. Let's just look in this present moment. OK, there's a wakefulness right here. Right? Do you get the sense, are you aware of the awake space?

PK: Yes.

M: OK. And in this aware awake space there's two what we call bodies, your body, my body and this body is speaking right now, this mind is thinking right now and yet there's awareness of speaking. Every thought is known, seen. Every experience of this body is known and seen. So that which is aware of it doesn't speak, it just knows. It doesn't have a voice, it just knows, it's just simply aware.

Yet this body is capable of speaking, but that's what's going on with that awareness. Does that make sense?

PK: Ya.

M: It just awakens space. And so this body and mind is sort of like an ambassador of the quiet. It itself doesn't have a voice, doesn't speak, it's just awake and then I don't even have to say that it's awake for it to be awake. I can stop speaking right now and it's just this awareness and when the speaking comes back—but the—I don't have to keep on speaking that there's awareness for there to be awareness. Does that make sense?

PK: Ya.

M: Ya. So this awareness is just awake and aware, if you will, and this character is here to say that and have somebody over there to laugh to it. Ya know, when I say it. And so, but before there was just no knowledge of that. Before awakening there was just being this character and I thought that's all I was. Ya know, I wasn't aware of being myself.

PK: Yes, it makes sense. Thank you, that was a very powerful example.

M: Ya, you're welcome.

PK: Wow, OK. So you mentioned guru Mayi as your—the first teacher that arrived for you and then Adyashanti you also mentioned. Can you tell me about the relationship that you had to each of these teachers when you first discovered them? What happened? I mean you mentioned a little bit about guru Mia, but maybe what happened when you first met Adyashanti?

M: Well guru Mayi is, I'm looking at a picture of her right now, she's based out of India. Ya know, her Ashram is in India, in Ganeshpuri India and then she also has a large Ashram in New York State, in upstate New York. So she has like thousands and thousands of devotees around. A million around the world total. So she's very large, she's like Ama. A lot of, a lot of devotees. Ya know, I mean when you go to a typical satsang where she's at, several thousand people are there just like at Ama's.

PK: Wow.

M: So the relationship to guru Mia was one that I would go see her whenever she came to the Bay area, which was every couple of years. She came to the Bay area sometimes once a year, or I would go to New York or I would go down to L.A. or whatever, wherever she was to see her. And it was a very informal relationship because I never really talked to her, besides when she had Darshan lines, you go up and say hello and she would say, "How are you doing?" and things like that.

So, it wasn't very like I could ask her a question. Ya know, so I would just go so video satsangs, they had video satsangs here in Santa Cruise or San Jose. They had satsangs all over the place. They have centers all over the place, all over the United States, different cities. And most of those are video satsangs and so she would give a talk in the video and there would be chanting and meditation. So that was the relationship with her, was I didn't really see her very much. She just emanated a tremendous amount of Shakti. Beautiful energy. I mean, she's just radiantly awake. Now I really say that. I mean, I knew that something was going on with her when I first met her, but I didn't know what it was. And then when—so after I woke up I went through this phase for about two or three years before Adya asked me to teach. So I woke up in 1995, that November at that satang and Adya asked me to teach in January of 1999. So that was roughly three years later.

PK: How did that happen?

M: Well I started going to different teachers locally like Ganga Ji or Isaac Shapiro, the Papaji people and there I was able to ask questions or try to address my mind. Because my mind was still like Gangaji just say, "Be quiet. Just sit in the quiet." But my mind was still trying to figure things out after the awakening experience.

PK: Um, huh.

M: So there came a time about, I was in 1998 that I saw an ad for a Satsang with Steven Grave. This is Adyashanti's name before he was Adyashanti. And there was an ad in the local weekly here and he was giving it, so I just went. As soon as I walked into the room I knew he was the real thing. He was—when you're awake you can see other awake people. It's very easy, very easy. At least I can see it very easily. And so I was able to start sitting with him weekly at his satsangs and also see him privately because his satsangs were small, eight, ten, 15 people. So we were able to ask a lot of questions and work with the mind. So that's how I met Adya. So the way I view it is I view guru Mayi as my guru, she's my teacher and guru Mia has given me everything that is necessary for my spiritual path. She gave me the practices and she gave me Gangaji, she gave me Isaac, she gave me Nelum, she gave me Adyashanti to help me all the way. So she's my teacher and Adyashanti is also my teacher, but Adya is a gift of guru Mayi to me, that's how I look at it.

PK: I see.

M: It's like I feel like these gifts are just given, they just came. I didn't expect—it was just very weird how I met Adyashanti. A friend of mine—can I tell you the story?

PK: Yes.

M: It's this weird story. But I went to dance class, my dance class on Thursday night and a friend there at dance class said, "Hey, there is this new teacher here in town.

He's a Zen teacher. You might want to go check him out." I go, "Ha, another teacher. I don't want to see another teacher." And then I opened up the local weekly rag, which is the newspaper here and there was a little ad for the same teacher, ya know, like within an hour of talking to my friend. I thought, this is weird. Ya know, twice in one moment I see this, somebody is pointing me to this guy. He was going to be there that Saturday, so I went into this satsang on Saturday, just two days later and so I met Adya. It was just like a gift. I comes just strong that way. Somebody mentions his name and then I see his ad. Had I saw just one or the other I might have just attended. Ya know, there was teachers all over the place. I wasn't interested—I was just very devoted to guru Mayi. But she just gave me Adya, and I started sitting with Adya and then Adya asked me to teach in January 1999.

PK: So Adya—you mentioned actually doing some preliminary work with a bunch of teachers, Gangaji, Shapiro—

M: These are all after my awakening. Because before that I was just only—Guru Mia was my only teacher.

PK: I see.

M: And I was like, no other teacher.

PK: Buy you needed this real experiential work to do.

M: I needed to work with somebody one on one.

PK: So, then your strongest—or would you say that your most current relationship with someone you work with is Adyashanti?

M: Ya. I still see Adya every time he comes to Santa Cruise. I have a personal relationship with him. Every once in a while we'll have lunch or—and when I say every once in a while I mean like - initially it was much more frequent like after he asked me to teach. But now it's down to like every—four times a year I have lunch with him. But after every satsang he has here in Santa Cruise I go up to his room in the back and I sit down with him.

PK: See, you guys are friends.

M: Ya, we're friends.

PK: Ah, ya. Ya.

M: And that's slowly developed over the years, because after he asked me to teach, I would still go sit with him because I was having—it was a big change teaching. Because I had been such the seeker for—or the student for so long and then there

was a huge change in my community because I was always just friends with everybody, sangha friends. Then all of a sudden Adya asked me to teach and I felt like everybody is looking at me kind of thing and I felt awkward around my friends. So it was a huge adjustment that went on for about a year.

PK: So Adyashanti helped develop you as a teacher?

M: Um, huh. Ya, he did.

PK: So, did he initially work with you on what you were saying were the difficulties of the mind? Grappling with - ?

M: Ya, when I first met him and maybe even through—I mean that didn't last very long. I mean the doubts I worked with, like I said, three main teachers: Gangaji, Isaac and Adya. And so by the time Adya asked me to teach I didn't have many doubts anymore about this awakening. It's just always here, it's always waiting. It's—so by the time he asked me to teach, the things I was working at was the change in the community because I was basically one person that used to go to satsang and see Adya and now I'm a teacher. So I had to—my whole community got all messed up, some people thought Adya made a mistake.

[Laughter]

M: I don't know. I thought Adya made a mistake, so I had this kind of new doubt.

PK: New doubts?

M: Ya. And then I didn't trust myself that I could really teach. So Adya used to say to me, "Just trust yourself. Just trust the self." I don't know why Adya asked me to teach, I just came through you he used to say. That's just—I just knew it was right. And he's always been really supportive and encouraging of my capacities and ability to do within. So there was a period there for about three years, probably about two years into my teaching that I—from two to five years into my teaching, I didn't go see him anymore. I didn't go to any of the satsangs, I didn't talk to him very much anymore. Because I knew that I had to find my own voice and he encouraged me, because that's what he had to do from his own teacher. Because he had to find his own voice rather than his teacher's voice. He had to find his own voice, so he had to not see his teacher for a little bit.

PK: Otherwise you would just be saying, "Adyashanti says, Adyashanti says."

M: Ya, I had to find Mokie's voice. So there was a real birth there with just finding my own style, my own way of conveying this truth.

PK: Wow. So this—your community, which had previously just been just as bunch of spiritual buddies along a seeking path had to transform and now there's kind of a spiritual community building around you. Is that the case?

M: Yes. It's small, but it's there. The satsangs have been very interesting. Initially there was a lot of people who came because I was like some kind of novelty or something. I don't know, there were a lot of people coming. There was 30 or 40 people coming here in the house. There was a lot of people. Through the years it just became smaller and smaller and smaller and smaller. It's smaller now than ever. I think it's just because the novelty wore off. I think Adyashanti's novelty is sort of wearing off. His satsangs were small and sort of grew and now they're sort of, ya know people just go for the newest thing and they're getting smaller and smaller here in Santa Cruise even though Adya has a lot of new people, but a lot of the people that I was in—that I grew up with around Adya, I don't see much more at the satsangs. They don't go to the satsangs anymore. It's interesting. Because they had their own awakening and they're living it. They're—so it's just interesting to see the communities changing through the time. And then a lot of the people used to come to my satsangs for years, it's just that they're just slowly just go on their own way.

PK: The way you're talking about the development of the sangha going through these shifts. But then also the students, when the students are developing and then they eventually just end up living in their own awakening.

M: That's right. It's just like—that's one thing that's been one of Adya's teachings for a long time, he says, "Christ didn't come here on the planet to create more Christians, he came here to create more Christ's." And Buddha didn't come here to create more Buddhist's, he came here to create more Buddha's. So it's not about maintaining a following, it's—that's what a lot of organized religions do. They want to make sure that their members stay around. But if Adya is like—his impulse and same thing with guru Mia, it's just like he just guru Mayi used to say, "Don't come to the Ashram, stay at home. Be a house home." Now we stand by that because it's not about following, it's about living the truth, living what you are. It's not about coming to the satsang forever and becoming some sort of devotee forever. No. Take what's offered. Take—learn, take the gift what you are.

PK: So when you work with students, do you work with students based on where they're at? Would you work with a new student as opposed to someone who has been to the satsang or in the sangha for years? Is there a difference in the way you teach?

M: Sure.

PK: Ya? What's it like with a new student?

M: Well, the spiritual path to me can be summed up in one line, or this three line stanza that Shankara came up with. I don't know if you know Shankara?

PK: I've heard of him, for sure.

M: He says three little lines. He says, "The world is an illusion. Brahman alone is real." That's the second line and the third line is, "Brahman is the illusion or is the world." So the world is an illusion. So initially what happens when a new student comes in they're so attached to their lives and their form and their thoughts that you have to sort of—it's like it's not that. Why? Because you can see that. Anything that you can see you're not. So for instance I can see my hand, I'm not my hand. I can see the T.V., I'm not the T.V. I can see my feelings, I'm not my feelings. So it's not—it's all—first of all it's all temporary, feelings, thoughts, T.V.s, bodies, they're all temporary. So they can't be who you are. There's something that's awake to what that is. There's something that's aware of everything that comes and goes, everything that's seen is not the seer, everything that's seen is not the seer. Who is the seer? What's her name? So the world is an illusion and what remains after you strip away everything is the lone real. It's the things that's always here. Awareness if you will or consciousness, the Self. So for a lot of newcomers it's about you can see your thoughts, you can see your body, you're not that. What are you then? If you can see your thoughts, you're not your thoughts. If you can see this thought, you're not this thought. If you can feel your feelings, you're not your feelings if there's something that's feeling them. And so there's something that just remains. It's just awake, awareness. I don't know how else to say it. It's the words we use for it.

PK: So then when you begin to work with an advanced student, who has been around for a long time, does that work then—what are you trying to do with them?

M: They're attached to the awareness.

PK: Like how you used to struggle after the awakening.

M: Ya, they're attached to maintaining—first of all awareness all the time, because they get attached to a certain state. And then they think it comes and goes. So it just depends on where they're at in the phase, but they can get attached to emptiness, to awareness. So you might have to kick them off that. In other words, that's what Adya had to do with me. Bring back the world, bring back the world. He used to go to me, "OK, now Joe, do this." So I would do that and I would bring back the world. I got so attached to the awareness at some point that I had to bring back the world. Because you can get into this sort of spacy, airy, vaporware kind of spirituality. Then you have to bring back the world. Brahman is the world. That's the third line. So that's the non-dual. The first awakening, the first enlightenment is coming to the awareness, wonderful. Then the second enlightenment is the non-dual enlightenment. Is to see the form, your thoughts, everything is consciousness. The movie playing on the movie screen is the screen.

It's not separate from the screen. You can't have the movie without the screen. The screen can exist without the movie, but the movie can't exist without the screen and the movie is the screen because you can't see the separation between the two. You ever go to a movie house and look at the screen real closely? Where's the movie and the screen and where are they separate? Try it, I did it once. I went up to the screen after they turned the movie on, I was like—it's just one thing. So that's the non-dual enlightenment. Samsara is nirvana enlightenment. A lot of spiritual traditions it's about ascent, it's just into emptiness and that's it. The first enlightenment and that's all they are. I think a lot of, like Christianity, it's just about leaving. The earth is bad, seven deadly sins and that kind of stuff and blood and more women and all that kind of stuff is bad. It's the same spirituality, but the non-dual tradition is just about, it's just all one thing. It's just one awareness, one consciousness. This is consciousness. Consciousness is one.

PK: I see. So, yes. You do work with different students depending where they're at.

PK: Ya. And it sounds like, I think what I'm hearing you say, is that your own work and your own journey is somehow guiding the work you do with other people. Ya know?

M: Ya. Adya told me when he asked me to teach that you teach from your own experience. That's—your teaching the awakening in your own experience.

PK: Ya, it seems so obvious.

M: Ya, because then you have the words of authenticity. They're backed, there's authority in the words. That's what he used to tell me.

PK: That was the word that I—after the satsang that I found your work to be authentic.

M: Thank you for saying that and that's what Adya—the first year or so when I was transitioning into being a teacher, Adya was just always telling me, “Speak from your own experience. Trust yourself. Trust your own path. Trust what you know.” And that's what I did. I started trusting it more and more and more and then I had to go away from him to really, really root myself in my own teaching.

PK: So your teaching has taken on this whole Mokie quality? Right? It's the Mokie teaching.

M: Um huh. Every teacher has their own teaching. It's the same—it's like God used to say it's like a diamond. Ya know, a diamond has any number of facets. So it's like, or He used to say it this way too, it's like grapes produce—it's just only grapes that produce wine, but there's a lot of different kinds of wine, but it all comes from grapes. So it's just like what's my wine, what's my facet? Trust in

that. And it would be for you too. Ya know? You'll have your own teaching. You'll be able to say it your own way because you've had your own experience.

PK: What about your—you mentioned early on about your spiritual practice from that you were doing, the meditation at guru Mia's, right? And what has happened to that now, where you're at?

M: I don't sit very much now. It's just like life is sitting.

PK: It's just what happens to everyone.

M: Ya, I mean I still sit every once in a while. I can sit and I do every once in a while in bed at night sometimes or I go out into nature, but it's just like always meditating because that's all that's going on is meditating. It is. Guru Mia used to say meditation will become your life and it's true. It becomes your life.

PK: So you no longer have to sit and do a spiritual practice?

M: No. And yet I—for people that are new, I always recommend meditation for spiritual practice, because that was my path. It's like tenderizing the meat. You pound the meat before you cook it and so, but once you cook it, you don't have to tenderize it anymore, once it's been cooked. But a lot of our personalities when we arrive here in the spiritual path, they need tenderizing, they need some stillness, they need some quiet time. We need to give ourselves that. We need to let our self sit with our self for the first time maybe in our whole life. Because a lot of times we just live our life and we don't really sit with our self and not live life. In other words we're so used to motion, doing this, doing that, doing this, doing that, going on a bike ride, doing that. So how about just feeling those impulses be going to do something all the time, but not do anything. Just sit with yourself. Ya know? Just sit with all of the impulses to do and just not do. Just feel what it feels like to just sit with yourself. Feel the frustrations, but not do anything about it. Feel the feelings, but not do anything about it. Hear the thoughts, but not do anything about it, just let yourself sit. That's what I recommend to students because that's what I do.

PK: That's where this spiritual practice has evolved now.

M: After—and then, ya. I know what enough is, we've practiced it forever enough is, then it becomes you. It's like when I was in high school I played football. You practiced all week long and then you played the game on Saturday. And so it's like you practice all you life long and then you're playing the game now. Ya know, there's no more practice.

PK: That's great.

M: You're playing the game. It's not like you're practicing anymore. You are—

PK: You're in the game.

M: You're in the game. The meditation is living you, not living for meditation.

PK: Ya, I get it. I get it.

M: Good. Great.

PK: We've almost covered everything. Let me just double check to be sure. I think—I just want to ask about your students. Do you have any particular goal that you're trying to bring them to? Is there somewhere that you're headed with them?

M: First of all, my students—one thing that I learned in AA early on is that my AA sponsor used to say to me, he said, "When you become teachable the teacher will appear in all forms." So I don't consider myself a teacher at all in some sense unless somebody comes to me and says, "I'm interested." Do you know what I'm trying to say? They're teachable, then the teacher appears remarkably. So I've had very few people every say to me, I think maybe even a hand full of people say, "Would you be my teacher Mokie?" In all these years, in all these years. So my students, it's a hard thing for me, for people to come to satsang, if you will, I guess I can call them my students. I don't know, but they're just people who come to satsang. It's like Gangaji says, nobody gives satsangs, nobody. Not even I can—no teacher gives satsang. We all attend satsang.

PK: Oh, I see.

M: Everybody attends satsang. We attend to the quiet that's into the presence. So first thing, it's like, OK is there a goal? Well if their—I do a talk upfront about spirituality stuff, I do a talk of satsang and then if they have a question that they want to go in some certain direction, that means they're looking for some sort of guidance, they're teachable. So then I'll help them as best I can.

PK: So your direction is their direction, or the quiet's direction.

M: Ya. They're wanting something. It's the question, they're wanting something.

PK: So you don't have a preconceived idea of where everyone should go?

M: No. Well, I look at it case by case. Of course in my general talk I'll give a general description of maybe my path. The general overall, ya know, the world is an illusion, the true Brahman is the world kind of thing. Overall I talk about that repeatedly, just in a different form or a different way of saying it, but it's all the same. There's just this quiet and then individually it just depends on what that particular persons—

PK: Do you say—would you say that you've seen, over the years, students go through similar unfolding patterns in a way? Do you see any similarities between their journeys?

M: Ya, there's similarities. There's like a deep structure, like Wilber would say. A deep underlying structure to the path, if you will. But then it's like we all have 208 bones, or whatever it is, it's the deep structure. Good thing we all have different soft tissue on top of the bones, we all look different. So everybody has sort of like this underlying structure to the path and yet everybody has a different look and how it looks and how it shows up. It looks different.

PK: Ya. Would you say that the pattern that you see is like the one that you went through with the awakening and the questions? Is that how - ?

M: Ya. It's like the general pattern is seeking the self and finding the self or waking up and then integrating the self. Integrating the path. So there's some from like there. They don't know what an awakening is just like I didn't know what it was and then there's awakening and then all of the issues around the awakening. And then there's integrating the awakening into life. So there's three categories because usually you can get stuck in any of those places.

PK: Ya, I see why you also say, "It's so simple." Ya know? 'Cause when I'm hearing you describe it, I'm like, "Wow, this is it? This is easy."

[Laughter]

This is great.

M: It's not complicated. It's just like they say, it's extraordinarily ordinary. Another one of the saying is 'Before we chop the wood we'll carry water after we chop the wood, we carry water'. It's not the same, they're different, but it's still different, chopping wood and carrying water.

PK: Ya. Wow. Well so about this spiritual community that is evolving, developing around you, with you.

M: Actually I have quite a number of places I travel to. I just got back from Toronto. When I travel I get a lot more people. Like I was in Toronto, there was 60 or 70 people. Or Boulder, 60 or 70 people come out.

PK: Oh.

M: Portland, which is smaller. Portland is around 40. So there's different communities around the States where a teacher is more of a novelty. Ya know what I'm trying to say? There isn't many teachers here. In Santa Cruise you can go to a satsang every day of the week. There is so many spiritual teachers here in

the Bay area in general. I mean it's just flooded. You can have your choice of any kind of tradition. You can go Theravada. You can go Tibetan. You can go, every kind of tradition here in Santa Cruz there's just every day dharma zen center or there's a Santa Cruz Zen center. There's a Vajrapani if you're Tibetan. I mean you could go, there's just so many teachers and centers. It's not a novelty. Spirituality is like second nature here. But in a lot of these other places, like I just got back from Toronto, they're just like the students are so eager because it's so new. There's nothing like Advaita Vedanta. Nondual teachers there. They just come out in droves.

PK: Is guru Mia a Vedanta teacher?

M: It's Vedanta and it's also Kashmir Shaivism. That's what we call it, but it's nondual.

PK: Wow, so are you still identified as a Buddhist?

M: Well my roots are more Kashmir Shaivism and Advaita Vedanta.

PK: And Buddhist?

M: And Buddhist. Because really when you look at the deep structures of each of these traditions, it's all the same. I mean, they're just all the same. In between the two. Because there's definitely a mix. A lot of Buddhism and a lot of Vedanta.

PK: I'm finding that to be the case with a lot of people. Ya know? It's no longer just one source tradition seems to be—ya at least later in people's development other influences come in.

M: That's right. That's why I like Ken Wilber so much. He's truly like immigrates East, West, all the different schools. Because they're basically, if you really look at the underlying structures of these schools, they're all saying the same thing. They just use different words. Buddhism uses emptiness or the void or the abyss or whatever you want to say or the no self. And then, of course, in Vedanta they use Self, capital S, consciousness, schools and there's a bridge schools and then there's this really strict like Mahayana Buddhism, which is neither this nor that. They just don't land anywhere. Have you ever heard of those schools?

PK: I have.

M: They're just like anything you say it's neither self or no-self, either both or neither. Can't say—but of course then the bridge schools, like the consciousness schools out of Vedanta or the Tibetan schools of Vajrayana - we're so used to being in a self, ya know, or small self, then they go to no self. Or they go to consciousness, ya know. Before you get to see that it's either self or no-self. But first, because ya know Isaac's teachings are about no-self. There is no self.

Because we're so attached to there being a self, we don't see the no-self, but then really you can't say. It's just self, no-self. What is this self, no-self? And your essence is just wakefulness.

PK: I can definitely see self.

M: And yet is it localized anywhere?

PK: Ya, I can see clearly small self and then I can also see like the generalized self? Everything self.

M: It's the transcendental self generalized self, ya. That's my experience too. It's paradoxical and that's why Mahayana Buddhism is very like, you just don't say anything. You just shut up.

[Laughter]

PK: That's great. OK, the last question that I need to ask you is, is there any vision you have for what's the future of, ya know, your teaching and what is going to happen from here on out? Do you know?

M: No. When I met Adya, I knew I could do what Adya was doing. I even told him once, I said, "I could do what you're doing." Being a little cocky. And he mirrored for me that he sensed it in me or saw it in me. I don't know. And so, but I never had any dreams that I'd be teaching. I didn't know that that was what was going to happen. Adya just surprised me one day. And so I don't know where anything is going. I don't know. I think I might write a book, ya know personally I might write a book at some point. Some people are encouraging me to write. I don't record my satsangs, I don't have transcription, I don't have a book, I don't have any—I'm very much—I just go about my work with my psychotherapy practice and I just let—

PK: What psychotherapy practice?

M: I'm a psychotherapist.

PK: Oh.

M: That's how I make my money.

PK: Surprise. Wow.

M: I have my Masters in clinical psychology. So I've been in private practice for a lot of years now, about 10 years. That's my bread and butter. So maybe, I don't know, I just don't know. I'm not looking. I don't know where it's going to go. I mean, I've been asked to go to new places. I just got asked to go to Rhode Island

to do satsangs there and things like that. So it's expanding that way, I mean traveling more.

PK: It's clear that there's possibilities coming, development happening. But as far as a vision—

M: Well, I mean I had a vision of like a retreat center maybe someday. It would be interesting to have a retreat center and have people come and do five-day retreats or something like that.

PK: But you don't know what this consciousness will look like or what this will—

M: Fold into.

PK: Ya.

M: No. I have a general feeling that the consciousness is the whole of the planet is open and it's getting, it's in subtle ways, I think life is getting better all the time. I'm more of an optimist. I just like feel it back to like 200 or 300 hundred years with widespread slavery on the planet. Virtually slavery has been abolished on the planet. And all continents to if that was the case. There was no documents to human rights until a couple hundred years ago now and a lot of constitutional democracies going on around the world and stuff like that. So I just feel like the consciousness, there is some movement towards freedom, whether it's political freedom, or spiritual freedom. There's just a movement towards that. Things are just moving in that direction. I'll participate with my part in it. I don't know what my role is other than what I'm doing. That's my apparent role. Working with people in private practice and doing satsang every once in a while.

PK: Wow. Well that's great. Thank you so much for taking the time to do this. I have no idea what's going to happen from this study. I mean I guess we're done. Perfect in a hour. It's exactly.

[End of audio]

Interview with Saniel Bonder

PK: Essentially, I want to ask you about your spiritual journey, and your teachers' influence, your work as a teacher, and how spiritual community and spiritual practice have influenced this journey.

SB: Okay.

PK: Where were you and what you were doing, before you embarked on this spiritual path? And what first attracted you to this path?

SB: I had no conscious spiritual awareness until I was 20. Was it 20, or—it was—yeah, starting when I was 19. Nineteen, 20. I was in Cambridge, Massachusetts. I was a student at Harvard, and my first year was a big student strike there. I was involved in the anti-war movement, politically active, and also advocating for changes in the educational process.

When I came back from the summer after my freshman year in the fall of my sophomore year, I just had no more juice for political activity at that time.

What had somehow arisen in me—and I don't remember incidents, or I can't date it—but by the time of my sophomore year, as I moved into the sophomore year, an insight had grown in me. To back up a little bit, I was raised Jewish by kinda classic first native born in America generation, first generation American Jews. Most of my parents' generation, I would say, didn't really have a significant religious center of their Jewishness. Their Jewishness was cultural, and they were very committed to it. So that was their identity. They were Jewish, but there was no God at the core.

So I went to conservative temple, eventually bar mitzvah, and went to Sunday school every week when I was a kid to learn the Bible and Jewish history and culture. But there was never any active relationship to or recognition of God at the center of the religion. I didn't have any perspective on that. It didn't really occur to me. My family's from New York. When I was seven, we moved to North Carolina, which—where my father got a job in a garment industry company as an executive.

So I was raised mostly in a very small Southern town in North Carolina, where there were only three Jewish families out of a town of 7,000 people. The only other Jewish people were in Raleigh, which was 45 minutes away. That didn't really bother me, either. I mean, I was comfortable and made friends quickly.

But my spirituality only began to emerge, then, when I was 19 or 20. I was a student at Harvard. I had gone through that tumultuous first year there, and came

back—and this was the insight that arose. It just had become obvious to me that everybody on every side of every issue was pretty much equally self-absorbed.

The image that I had was like we were all on the inside of a cage of nerves, so we were only seeing ourselves, or like walking around in a shroud with mirrors on the inside.

So every now and again, you'd actually see another being out there, but mostly, everybody was in it for themselves. It was me, the other student radicals, the police, the administration people, the war protesters, the government people, the police, whoever. It was a really disabling insight, in terms of my capacity to continue to pursue a political life of activism. I knew I wanted a great change to occur, and though I didn't have spiritual experiences as a child, sometime from early in my life, I felt I was going to be part of something that really changes the course of human history for the better, period. That sense was there. That was always there.

This particular insight reduced me to a place where I realized that there was no way out of this cage. I just didn't see it. I wasn't attracted to try to do this psychologically. I had no sense that it was possible through that kind of context. That then led to a very primal, "God, if you're there, better show up, because if you don't exist and can't take me out of this, I'm sunk." [Laughter].

I began, then, to have experiences that were suggestive to me of a greater intelligence that was somehow mysteriously showing up and guiding me. That was the beginning of a religious opening. In the early months of that time, late '69 and especially the beginning of 1970, there was more of just a sense of an awakening to a world that was actually outside my cage, realizing that things and beings existed without reference to me, Saniel, the guy here.

That itself was a kind of opening. Then after a few months—I was introduced to the work of the beat poets, Ginsberg, and those guys. Ken Kesey was an influence on me, the *Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, their whole thing. I remember at the time feeling, "Oh, man, all the great experiments have already come and gone." [Laughter]. "I'm too late to the party." A number of my friends were getting into Yoga and things like that, and I just kept saying, "Maybe sometime, but I'm not there."

Other major influences were Martin Buber, whose teaching *I And Thou*, *The Recognition of the Other*, which then became very prominent much later in my life, and Thomas Martin, a Catholic monk who also wrote about Zen.

So I started edging into these—to that level of things, but then, in the Summer of 1970, I went to Colorado Outward Bound School. Have you ever heard of that, Outward Bound?

PK: I have.

SB: So I did *Outward Bound* that summer. When I came down from the mountain, I felt, “Okay, it’s time to do East.” Even though Buber’s approach and the whole I Thou thing and become very important, and there was a sense of a God somehow guiding me, it wasn’t going to be enough just to have a relationship to some divine reality. I had this great urge to somehow become identified with the divine.

That turned me to the East. I read Yogananda’s book, *Autobiography of a Yogi*. It was a total eye-opener for me, as it was for so many of our generation. I later wrote about it after awakening and beginning my own work, just a sense of so many of my generation, but really of our time, which would include you guys and your chronological generation. It’s not just the Boomers, but it’s people who are kind of a vanguard of a time that, as I later saw it, it’s as if we parachuted into the Normandy of this new spirituality from a Western context. Have done it by not just tapping into the Eastern forms, but by taking Western birth. That really has just required something new to emerge. You can’t graft that old form onto the new world, the new life.

So that’s getting ahead, but my feeling immediately after reading Yogananda’s book was, “Okay, this is the world I’m looking for here. I wonder if Yoga’s gonna be part of my path. I was thinking that just as I was going to sleep. I was at a friend’s house in Boulder, Colorado after coming down from the mountains. I immediately had an experience of what I later figured out this is what Yogananda was describing as NirviKalpa Samadhi. The Kundalini current actually got activated in the middle of my brain, rather than from the bottom, and just shot out the top. I only later inferred that there was kind of a disjunct, a glitch period in there where there was no me whatsoever, but only this immense, infinite—the words don’t do justice to the beingness of it. But it was real, and I got very motivated. [Laughter].

I thought, “Okay, Yoga is supposed to be part of my path.” I wanted to find out—Yogananda says the great masters can activate this at will. How do I do that?

So I got attracted to Kundalini Yoga. Just to sort of try to rocket through this—because we could go on and on about the whole story, but that Samadhi really was so powerfully life-changing that I had to rearrange my life on its basis. Because it really was a union with the divine of an immense impact.

PK: Did you have any idea at that time what your life on the spiritual path was going to look like, or what you were going to do from this point on?

SB: Well, I just knew that I had to find the ultimate maximum access to that first. So enlightenment became the number-one priority of my life, which was—I later figured out—and some of you—I’ve met now a number of folks of your generation. Just ran into a guy the other day, he spent his first 9 years as a Child of Esalen.

PK: Oh, wow.

SB: And I thought, “Wow.” So I’ve met several of you who grew up in India, children of my generation doing this thing.

PK: Yeah.

SB: Yours is a different world, and if you stay associated with this current, you’ve got a different context you’re relating to in different ways. For me and many of my generation, there’s more of kind of being the only person in the family who’s remotely like this, and everybody else is like “The weirdo mystic in the family.” We all figure out how to live with each other, but we’re the odd ones out.

So my family didn’t know what to make of it, and I began making it very clear that I was going to do whatever it took, even if it meant disappearing in India, becoming a monk. Who knew? None of which I’d ever had the slightest thought of in my life. But like John, your dad, others of our generation, I mean, we just got possessed by this thing, and it would not take no for an answer.

So I wound up finding a spiritual society that was sufficiently socially and politically active, that it held that part of my impulse, because I hadn’t lost the urge for some kind of great revolution. Became a practitioner in that, and went to India, and had lots of adventures, which is more story than I can tell here.

But within about a year and a—when I came back from India—and this is after having been involved in that for a little over a year—already, I knew that a Kundalini-oriented Yoga was just not gonna do it for me. For one thing, having had that tremendous kind of fulfillment event at the very beginning, and yet, not having access to it anymore, I knew the difference between how that actually happened and how much energy I was accessing in my attempts to get things going. [Laughter]. So it was like if I were to plot that out on a graph, I was not gonna get above my navel. [Laughter].

So somehow, I began to really despair in that, and I also had this feeling that if the true self was really myself, I ought to be able to find access to it all the time, even if I was growing and maturing in the quality of that access.

That eventually led me to Ramana Maharshi’s teachings, and that was a major event for me. That was where the real—I always had a primary movement toward the Hindu/Indian stream of the Yogas. I wasn’t attracted really strongly to Zen or Buddhism or the Sufi paths or the other things that were available.

But through falling into an attraction to Ramana Maharshi’s teachings, and then very—again, as with the Yogananda book, as soon as I read a portion of—it was called *The Collective Teachings of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi*, and he was

talking about doing the self-inquiry into consciousness, and the foundation of the I, capitalized, self, the ego self.

But he was pointing to a place that he said was the seed of consciousness in the heart, but it wasn't the central chakra, the anahata chakra. It's a place, he said, in the right side of the chest. I'd never heard of such a thing. I'd only heard of the chakra system, more or less centrally arrayed.

But when I tried the meditation, the self-inquiry who am I that he suggested, and feeling into or towards a place in my heart, there was—after not a very long time, there was this sudden flashing infinitesimally of this sort of super bright white-hot fire right in this place in my chest. I did not even—I didn't know that the heart had any—I'd always heard that the heart organ was basically on the left side of your chest, so I didn't know what the hell it was. It was very blissful, very intense, and I immediately felt this is the center. This is the place.

So that then became my practice for a couple years. I regarded Ramana Maharshi as my guru. Hardly anybody had ever heard of him. I mean, the West at that time was into Trungpa Rinpoche and the other Tibetans who were coming through. There was a lot of Kundalini Yoga. Sufis, Kirpal Singh. So there were many streams. There's a lot of Zen going on, Theravada, the—what was his name? Goenka. And the Vipassana. Cornfield and those guys were getting started.

PK: Oh, right that was quite a creative period.

SB: But hardly anybody had heard of Ramana Maharshi. I mean, there was nothing like now. Twenty years later, after I had awakened, Gangaji and the stream of people from Papaji, and also the streams from Ramesh and the Nirsargadatta started coming through. But back at that time, it was like nobody knew anything about it, and I was just head over heels into it.

Through that, there was the beginning of an intuition of consciousness itself, that impersonal ground of being that felt associated with this place in the heart, which just seems very different from the Kundalini ascent.

PK: Right.

SB: So I didn't really know how to make sense of the difference between the two. Ramana talked about it a little bit in his talks, but in any case, I was into that. Well, after about a year and a half, it dawned on me, I can get blissful in meditation a lot of the times and have these intuitions of consciousness that's sort of what is seeing and registering the life of Saniel here, but what do I do with sex, food, career, money, family? How do I live a life on this basis?

I was hoping still to get money together. I was teaching school at the time in New Orleans, and really very disassociated from life. I was meditating as many hours a

day as I could. I was convinced that if I really meditated long and hard, I would actually realize the self, then I would be sufficiently invulnerable from all the pain of being alive. *[Laughter]*. I literally thought that. *[Laughter]*.

PK: Right. *[Laughter]*. Right.

SB: *[Laughter]*. Okay, fully established in samadhi, no more pain. It was at that time, though, that I began to despair. I was planning to go back to Tirvanamali where Ramana's ashram was. I figured that would help, even though he had died before I was born.

But I then came upon the teachings of this guy named Franklin Jones who said he had been a Kundalini Yogi with Muktananda and Nityananda and that tradition, but then had somehow gotten onto Maharshi's work, and regarded Ramana Maharshi as a kind of spiritual father. I knew he had a book out. I'd seen it advertised, *The Knee of Listening*, but I didn't want to pay the extra money for the hardback edition, so I was waiting for the paperback to come out. When it did come out, there was another book that came along with it that I found in a bookstore one day, both in paperback, called *The Method of the Siddhas*, it was called.

So I picked them up and just spent a whole weekend devouring his books, and immediately recognized, okay, here's the man for me. Because he proclaimed to be a realizer of that same Heart consciousness as Maharshi, but living it in a much more Western format, and made it very clear that he was really here to deal with people's lives and get into it. And he'd just started his work. He was only 32 or 33 years old at the time.

I mean, this was beyond my wildest hopes to find such a guru. So I became his devotee in late '73, early '74, and was there for almost 20 years.

PK: Wow.

SB: I left in August of 1992. It's interesting. I just recently—I'm just now completing a kind of summary of sort of the essences of my spiritual history. As part of a kind of laying out of what I feel are the, the foundations for an optimal self-democratizing 21st century enlightenment. In other words, what can we get access to that embodies that ultimate realization or whatever ultimate realization is available to us as directly as possible for as many people, and gives us a way to live it, and an orientation to living it, that really goes beyond the old world frameworks? Because I'm no less a political revolutionary than I was back in the day.

PK: What was your relationship like with your teacher and his teachings in the beginning.

SB: And in my years with Adi Da, I mean, a lot happened obviously in 20 years. It was not a dull time, to put it mildly. But there was also a lot to it that had to do with trying to adapt myself to his format.

PK: Right.

SB: When I first came to him, he was going by the name Bubba Freejohn, and it was deliberately trying to be brotherly and friendly to people, and so on. From early on he was really a wild tantric character who dared to do all the forbidden things. He had sex with students. He drank with us, and we eventually wound up doing various drugs together and things like that. He was a wild man, and he always was just free to take whatever risks he felt had to be taken, and challenged us to do the same.

But increasingly, he became oriented toward the very traditional social and cultural politics of eastern society, the lord with subjects. When years later I started doing my own teaching work, my observation was the apparently tragic irony that some of the most profoundly activating evolutionary accelerators available to human beings—mainly the superior realizations of great mystics, sages, Yogis, and so forth, tend to be brokered through the most reactionary, archaic politics.

So you have these lords and ladies showing up and creating these whole hierarchical society in which everybody's arranged like that, a la the Tibetan formats. So much—I mean, this is again later in retrospect—I saw that Adi Da, who had hoped there would—I mean, by this time in his work, 35, seven years later, whatever it is, he would've—back in the early days, he was assuming that long since, there would've been thousands upon thousands of people who were fully awake in the context he was assuming was possible, but all in the context of being his devotees.

That never happened, so he became more and more bitterly disappointed, and more and more conservative in his expectations, and more and more blaming of people, a la “You say you're interested, I'm giving it to you, you don't want it.”

But later, it dawned on me that what he didn't do was give us access to his actual process. He gave us some of the content of it, which he called radical understanding, a kind of a way of directly realizing consciousness in relationship to manifestation, but in terms of the context, he insisted upon an absolute kind of fealty, if you want to use political terms. It's a sorta feudal vow to the lord that you see in various traditions, but it wasn't how he awakened.

PK: I see.

SB: The way he awakened was he presumed the freedom to go where spirit being guided him, and when it was leading him to the feet of a guru, he was flat. I mean,

“Okay, you’re my god. Tell me what to do, I’ll do it.” And he did. I don’t deny that. But when the spirit moved him elsewhere, he was outta there. No later he said “I always got the permission from my gurus to move on,” if you asked the people associated with those gurus what that was all really like, Muktananda, Rudi—I don’t know if these names are familiar to you. [*Crosstalk*]

PK: They’re very familiar, yeah.

SB: Okay. Muktananda and Rudi, yeah, they agreed, “Sure, you can go see Muktananda. Sure, you can go to Nityananda.” But they grumbled and mumbled about Franklin for the rest of their lives, because he was one of their great potential protégés, and he went off and did his own thing. Well, he never gave us the “Go off and do your own thing” permission. So some of us who took that permission, because we had to, then wound up going through our own awakenings, but the people who stayed have continued to try to do it in his format, where he remains the great repository of the divine self-nature, and they don’t get to own it. They get to be replaced by it.

PK: That’s right.

SB: That’s a very, very different world.

PK: Can you remember the shifts that you went through with during these early years of study?

SB: So what happened for me, then, was there was a unification of the Nirvanic principle, we could say, that had been revealed to me above and revealed to me at the heart, and I didn’t have any way to unite that with my human life that was reliable, that the years with Adi Da worked in me. That—I was humanized. I became a stronger man, more of a man.

I mean, I went into his work when I was 23 and was still in many ways a boy. Emotionally, I was, I think, quite immature. I never had a job. I mean, when I left there in 1992, in some ways, I was like a guy in his early 20s, although I was in my early 40s, because I had been a—unlike a lot of people. I mean, a lot of people in that work had jobs and so on, but I had been an editor and writer, and mostly had been kind of on staff and supported and lived on sanctuaries most of the time or a lot of the time.

PK: I see.

SB: So I didn’t really have a worldly, real world life to speak of until I left. Later, I figured out what had happened, and I think the best way to summarize that is to stay chronological.

There were important developments that occurred spiritually during the years with him, but a lot of it was adapting to his practices, doing the things as best I could that he recommended, and he definitely had, a kind of command and control sadhana approach. I mean, “My way, and there is no highway, but if you take it, good luck to you.” He didn’t even—he wouldn’t wish good luck. *[Laughter]*. There was really no option.

So, I mean, it was all—it was an immense adventure, and so little of it is, from my point of view, really worth recounting—I mean, I’m writing a memoir kind of part-time now and again, and I’m finding that I’m not very moved to tell many of the stories.

PK: Why is that?

SB: Because the stories just—they don’t have enough central significance in what I regard counts in the telling of my own life to others.

PK: OK.

SB: And there also is—because he was a hardball kinda teacher, crazy wisdom. I mean, he considers himself the great master of crazy wisdom. Basically fuck with your ego to get you to open beyond it, transcend it, surrender it, et cetera.

PK: Well, did that—you mentioned really early on that one of your biggest struggles was running into how do you deal with this whole worldly existence, right?

SB: Yeah.

PK: And then when you came out of that world with Adi Da, this was still something you ended up having to confront.

SB: Yeah.

PK: So then do you think that was your biggest struggle, or did your teacher help you with some other struggles that might have been really paramount, had you not had a teacher?

SB: I think that, to me, is a big struggle. I think that’s really—my life mission is integrating the human and the divine, starting right here.

PK: Okay.

SB: So is it possible to have the divine be totally obvious in a really human life? Because the previous formats have tended to propose an either/or. Either you do the divine thing, or you’re worldly. They propose that there’s a way to live spiritual practice and stay attuned to the divine while handling your worldly

responsibilities, and a lot of people have done that in a variety of ways over thousands of years, not just hundreds. But “very few” in any lifetime have ever awakened, and that’s pretty much across the traditions. There isn’t any serious tradition of illumination, awakening, enlightenment, self-realization anywhere where great numbers of people are living an awakened life and fulfilling worldly tasks and everyday responsibilities and dealing with what “the world” throws at them.

I feel like that’s our multi-generational—I don’t want to even call it task. It feels like the job we signed up to do this time around. It’s very gratifying to me to see guys like you coming through who are a whole lot younger than me and John and your dad, and no less consumed with the impulse, but presumably through whatever we’ve been able to provide for you and everything else, able to get down to the really transformational work younger and more effectively, and with better resources available.

PK: I agree in the second generation, there are definitely more resources available.

SB: Yep.

PK: And there’s an ownership that just comes with the being born in it.

SB: Yeah. Being born in it, and also, I think you guys—nobody knew—I mean, there was a great article in Wired magazine. I don’t know if you’ve read it. But if you haven’t, it would actually be really interesting. I don’t know if it’ll relate to your thesis, but for your life.

It was written in I think late ’95 on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Netscape IPO, initial public offering.

PK: Oh, okay.

SB: This is like—that’s considered to be the beginning of the Internet.

PK: Oh, yeah, okay.

SB: So this is 10 years later. It was written by a guy who was one of their senior editors, and had been following the whole emergence all along, from before it looked like it was going to be anything significant.

It’s called “We are the Web.” So he’s writing—it’s a fantastic article, because it starts out with basically nobody expecting the Internet to amount to much more than a kind of the next version of citizens band radios. Adolescent, pimply-faced boys, geeks with toys.

PK: Yeah, yeah.

SB: It became, instead, this other thing that is marked by having been created mostly on a volunteer basis by the participants, to the degree that it's now become more and more the case that big companies let their customers redesign their companies from within.

Great story about when eBay had its annual convention and wanted to get the customers to use their internally-designed payment plan, and everybody revolted and insisted on PayPal, and PayPal became the convention.

PK: Yeah.

SB: So the thing about it to me is the participatory democratic impulse is winning big all over the world.

PK: Interesting.

SB: No form of monarchy, tyranny, imperialism, feudalism, in any sector of society, is gonna survive this pulse.

PK: Yeah.

SB: It's just not gonna work. And spirituality has been one of the last hold-outs.

PK: I see what you mean.

SB: Because it seems like the big wizards literally are like existential superiors.

PK: Yeah.

SB: Kings and queens of Dharma. Linda and I watched fantastic first part of Elizabeth the First with Helen Mirren. Great movie. She's saying again and again, "I'm dealing"—she's having to consider having her cousin executed. And she said "You don't realize I am dealing with an anointed sovereign with royal blood in her veins." So spiritually, we've still been possessed by the royal blood vision based on the power of the transmissions, and the amazing skills, the powers, the capacities, the precognition, the read your mind, the work, the healing miracles, all of that.

So we're in that generation of change. What—to kinda come back to my story here, what happened with me, with Adi Da, among other things, was that I got to see someone who had an impulse toward something more friendly and participatory, but never really, and he wound up becoming, in some ways, the biggest throwback on the planet. I mean, if you look at how he presents himself: "I'm it. Nobody else counts. Nobody else has. Nobody else ever will. I'm the divine emperor. Bow to me." That's his story. "Sign on the dotted line. Let's get to

work.”

It sounds absurd, but, of course, it’s so justified by all that kingly power and radiance and wisdom and brilliance and genius and all the rest of it. Love, etcetera.

So what happened for me—and there’s actually a—there’s a piece of me from my parents, both my parents, and from a prep school I went to—I went to a private school in Tennessee, which was an old founded after the Civil War, in some ways quaint, at the time, a boys’ school. It had this hokey honor system where you had to pledge your word of honor as a gentleman that you would do or didn’t do all kinds of stuff, a lot of which is ridiculous. I won’t leave the property after 6:00 p.m., stuff like that.

But you had to put your name on it. The integrity thing just got drummed in there, and the personal individuated—the primacy of being true to your self, and your integrity and honor. That really was—it was—as I later figured it out, it was like all those years of practicing that, and eventually, I was on the Honor Council in that school, and if people broke the rules, we had to, in effect, try their cases and make recommendations to the Head Master.

PK: Some kinda ethics committee?

SB: It was an ethics committee. We wound up kicking a lot of our friends out of school. Interestingly enough, at that particular place, most of the people who participated on both sides felt it was one of the most important things we ever did. There are guys who are bigger donors far than I who got kicked out, because of what it woke up in them about their own integrity. *[Laughter]*.

PK: Yeah. *[Laughter]*.

SB: But anyway, it was like I shot an arrow from that time in my life that pulled me back in from giving myself entirely away to a guru. So 20 years later, I began to feel, after my years with Adi Da—he was losing me—he wasn’t treating me like I was even a viable candidate for awakening anymore, and I had not gone to him to become a devotee. I assumed that devotion Satang with an awakened guru was the best way to go.

PK: Right so what happened later in your relationship with this teacher?

SB: So it was natural to me to take that route. But that was the means to the end of my liberation, not me being the good devotee and not caring, which is where he got as he had less and less indication that anybody was going to awaken.

So at a certain point, I began to have conflicts with him. I had been very much the good devotee type. I was not the rebel kind of character. I tried to do it by the rules.

At a certain point, I couldn't anymore. There came a point where he was insisting that everybody become celibate, so he gave up on us trying to become sexual tantrics. So he wanted all the leaders to just give up their relationships, renounce all that, become celibate, and that way, we could really live life in Satsang and do the path.

I tried several times, but then I had to renege, because it just—I knew it wasn't gonna happen. So he was over on the island in Fiji. I was in California at the time, so all this was going through communications by computer and phone and all that. But it essentially became a kind of pitched battle. That was the first time I'd ever done anything like that with him. But I just had no choice.

By the time it was done, he'd kind of given up on trying to make us all do this celibate thing, but I was like falling out the bottom, because I realized something died here. It was like when he would ask us to do full prostrations, I used to be able to do it with full intent. But at this point, it was like two thirds of me was still standing up with my arms crossed across my chest saying "No way."

I had a lot of respect for what he was trying to do. When he would say "You guys shit or get off the pot here. Either do it or not. Come on," I began to feel more and more "I'm not doing it, and I'm starting to feel like I'll never do it again."

I was—me leaving there, because I had written his biography and gone on world tour with that, and had been—I wasn't in the really inner circle, but I was like in the next ring. So among 1,000 people, I was in like the closest 50 maybe, and very well-known, because I was an editor and writer. For me leaving, it was like a cardinal leaving the Vatican.

I mean, it was really—it was a big deal. But I had to go, and at the time, when I finally did decide, "Okay, I'm outta here," a friend of mine, who I'd gone through some of the really intense struggles with him with—I mean, it was always very hard being one of the leaders of his work, because his demands were off the charts impossible. You had to live with trying to deal with that, and he used to have a motto. "Only tell me the truth, and only tell me good news." *[Laughter]*.

Well, the way I related to that—and I think most people would cop to it, at least off the record—is what you wind up doing in that kind of context is you tell the best news you can and you try to make it as true as possible. *[Laughter]*.

PK: Right. *[Laughter]*.

SB: There were heavy consequences around that. You could get kicked out of sanctuaries and lose a lot of access and a lot of status, so to speak, and respect from other people and all that.

So anyway, when I left, someone even called me—an old friend called me from the island in Fiji and he said “The guru’s really upset about your leaving, and so on.” He says, “What about the prospect of hellish karmas for lifetimes?” Because that was—it wasn’t written in any of his writings, but it was explicitly part of the culture by that time, that if you left, your likely prospect was hellish karmas for lifetimes, because you violate—you broke the vows of eternal devotion and practice in his way.

I had seen people leave and go into kind of a—almost like a spiritual backwater, because—

PK: You’d seen their own process become convoluted and [*Crosstalk*]—

SB: And they could get out, but getting out, they mostly felt “I’m a failure, and I can’t go forward.” And they were just haunted by the kind of divine romance with him, which was very, very intense. He was a tremendously appealing magnetic, charismatic character. And he really played it. He played the Krishna thing to the hilt. To the hilt.

SB: So anyway, what then wound up happening for me was I just—I began to get that I could not stay, and as completely—I mean, all through the years, I was one of the people who talked to people who were leaving, tried to talk them out of it.

PK: Right, so you felt you had to leave the tradition and did that lead to a new awakening?

SB: I mean, nobody would’ve ever imagined that I would leave. But leave I did. The most remarkable thing about that was that that was when my awakening process just shot into high gear.

PK: Wow.

SB: I mean, I’ve told a lot of stories—I don’t know how relevant it is to your study—but there were several aspects to it. One was—well, that was when I met Brooks, and shortly after that, John. You know about Brooks Barton?

PK: I do, yeah.

SB: Okay. So Brooks was a shaman, and Brooks had been a friend of Adi Da’s work who had never really gotten involved. And then he had gone on and completed his shamanic training, and he was doing these journeys with various substances. I got invited by a mutual friend, who had been a devotee of Da’s for a while who was a

therapist down in San Francisco. Got in touch with her, and she invited me to consider the journey thing.

So that became my next approach. Really, for me, the hellish karmas for life times clause was very real. It wasn't just a political threat. This was nothing that I could just say, "Well, that was a bunch of bullshit." No, I knew that I was going to have to disprove it by realization. But I had no—getting out, I mean, Brooks said to me, "Look, Da ceases now to be your preceptor and becomes an example. You have to be as free to pursue your process as he was to pursue his."

But I had no guarantee that any great thing was gonna happen, but it very quickly did—I mean, I left Da's work in—formally left in early August of '92, did my first journey with Brooks at the end of that month. I did a couple journeys; then, and I think the next one was in early November. They were helpful, but they were pretty secondary. It was really more Brooks's simple confident "You can do this, and this is what's next" and my own drive. In some ways, that hellish karmas for lifetimes threat was just what I needed. Kept me very alert.

What I wound up doing was gravitating back into my own investigation of consciousness, which we'd gotten into now and again over the years with Adi Da, but at this point, I was a lot freer to really go into it. I was also doing therapy, psychotherapy, which was very, very helpful. There was—though I wasn't able to recognize it until my awakening, which came in early December of that year, there was a whole activation with the goddess. The Shakti among initiates is not a concept. She's real.

I later figured out it was as if my striking out for my own freedom—because, you see, nobody was telling me "You're kicked out of the work." I got up and walked out of the damn thing. I did it for my freedom, as I told the guy who called me and asked me about the hellish karmas. I said—basically, I said "I'd rather have the hell of my own freedom and integrity than the kind of heaven I can have as a devotee, giving myself away. I mean, I'm willing to risk it."

Honestly, I mean, I have to say this whole thing of the goddess to me, it's very important to approach that as code. It's not—I mean, that right there on the wall is a representation of the archetype that's most significant for me, Chinnamasta, one of the 10 Kali manifestations of the Indian tantric tradition.

But it's code for something of the mystery of our total nature, self and other, and this dance that goes on. I mean, lately, I more say the she mystery. I don't know what to make of it. But I know that she takes all these different forms, and I have to listen up, and I love it.

So all of that kind of became a confluence, and what then happened was that I very rapidly moved into a quality of witness awakening that was at the same time profoundly embodied. So it wasn't—it was the transcendental witness that was

beyond the ego, but it coincided with me, as ego, landing here much more than ever before.

So there's already an integration of the divine and the human going on that wasn't really in the books. I remember telling Brooks—it was on my way down to Matilaha, actually, that this happened. I was on my way that mid-October to spend a couple of days, few days with Brooks. This transition took place early on in the drive, and I knew it was a big deal, and when I got there, he said "How you doing?" I said, "I don't know. Something's really cooking." I said, "I feel like I've landed in my own shoes." So that was a very big part of it.

And then about six weeks later, early December, through—I mean, at first, I thought for actually a couple years, that it had taken place during sexual union with a woman who right then was becoming my first partner since leaving Adi Da's work about six months before. Later, I figured out that the transition really is better described as having taken place when I recognized it as—after a couple of nights in the beginning of this new relationship, which was obviously, to me, a level of tantric sexuality unlike anything I had ever experienced. This was just spontaneously—spontaneous enjoyment rather than a practice or an attempt to hold back from ejaculating or anything like that.

PK: Right.

SB: After the second morning of the beginning of this new relationship, in which the woman was completely—she was like maddened by how much energy was coming alive in her. She knew it was somehow related to me, but she could not make sense of it. She really didn't have a tantric background, or anything like that. From where I was coming from, I knew that she was, in effect, possessed by the she mystery. She was enlivened beyond her ordinary state. So it was a very kinda crazy dance that happened between us.

After the second morning, I'm sitting in a restaurant—she had gone to work—and I looked up—happened to look up, look out the window, and immediately saw that the inner consciousness that had already become so clear was in no way any different from what is being everything. The word that came to me was seamless. It was just—I mean, unity doesn't do it justice. I later came up with the term "onlyness", because it's just what is. It was obvious that I am that ocean of what is, and at the same time, still this local body-mind guy. So that was the beginning. It was in early December of 1992.

PK: So in this tantric sexual experience that it was spontaneous, and you're saying the rest of your awareness, it spread out like a seamless—

SB: Yeah.

PK: How was this affecting your current experienced point of view of—

SB: Affecting everything, but not immediately changing. You know, to me, I mean, there's a way in which I feel that—what I call 21st century enlightenment. I feel a much more dramatic paradigm shift is underway than I think most people are aware of who are even talking paradigm shifts.

I'll explain a little bit more about that as we go here. But a key piece of it was that even though I felt that all of the work I had done had helped make this apparently spontaneous transition possible, right, it didn't cause it. I didn't like finally, after doing the 500,000th prostration, "Good, now I'm awake." It wasn't produced by all the effort. But the focus, the aspiration, the calling of it forth really, to me, as I then began to reckon from the awakened position with what I saw and see going on, I began more and more to understand that I and we all are inherently latently what I would call divinely human characters.

The realization identity isn't at the top of some Mount Everest out there, but it's also not just freely floating around inside us, so one day we can wake up and say, "Okay, I'm awake now. This is the true me. And just by affirming it, I am it."

So there is this ordeal we have to go through to fully activate, or in a most fundamental way, fully activate that potential, so that the obviousness of this only non-finite identity is equally as evident as having fingers and toes and feeling bad about what someone said to me, and all the other things that are so local.

So it's like the oceanicness has to become as obvious as the wave. But it doesn't, in 21st century enlightenment, to me—less and less is it gonna be not just tolerable, but possible for people to somehow assume that the wave is supposed to be obliterated.

That, to me, is not the ego death that's coming through anymore. The death is the notion that we are the separate thing. That notion, that—and it's not just a thought. I mean, it's a whole being—it's kind of a force field, and it dissolves. But we remain these individuals, and that's where, to me, the kind of work that you're doing, which is investigating the interpenetration of the psyche, the various levels, the qualities of the psyche, with what we might otherwise consider to be beyond the psyche or the ground of being of the psyche.

That, in a Western context—and this is where—I mean, there's a lot about Buber's work that doesn't really sing to me. But there's so much of it that I love, because he really has come up with a way of formatting it all so it all fits on the same page. Draw a couple lines there, and you've got a reality that includes all the basic pieces.

PK: Right.

SB: That's what we've seen. Because, in brief, what then happened for me—I'll just summarize it quickly, and then we can go into more of the details. What then happened for me was within a very short time, like a week, there was a specific kind of infusion, you could say, of the Shakti of this, that I—from the years of my together and exposure, it was totally obvious to me that my transmission work had gotten activated.

So sure enough, my friends started saying to me, "I don't know what's going on with you exactly. I know there's something about consciousness, but whatever it is, I'm starting to have these experiences and these symptoms, and it's obvious to me that it's connected with you, so we gotta talk."

I realized, "Okay, I'm becoming contagious here." Then, very shortly, as I began to contemplate what had come through, and to feel, essentially, that the goddess, as soon as she sniffed that I was willing to risk everything for my own freedom and integrity, it was like she couldn't get close enough to me. So what made the difference was not my investigation of consciousness, although that was certainly more kind of potentiated than it had been in the earlier years, when I didn't really have access to own it. I couldn't have owned it with Adi Da. None of his people own it. They're all perpetual devotees. The really good ones are the most self-surrendered. That's different from self-ownership in a very real way.

But the Shakti, the she mystery, the actualizing manifesting force then somehow mysteriously united with me and became effectuating for others, and that's the dance I've been doing ever since. It dawned on me, well, I just spent 20 years in the court of the great king, and I don't have the slightest inclination for that. I want company. I don't have it in me to lord it over people that way. I mean, I can get a little arrogant at times, but that's not my dance. I'm a Jeffersonian Democrat here, and so let's see if we can Johnny Appleseed this thing. Which is pretty much what I've been doing ever since.

PK: So is this where your teaching began?

SB: Yeah.

PK: And did you have any clue what—I mean, I hear that you're saying that you didn't want to structure it in any way like your teacher's, Adi Da's, work.

SB: Yeah.

PK: So then did you have a vision of how you were going to do it, or [*Crosstalk*]

SB: Well—

PK: —how has your teaching evolved?

SB: Well, it's evolved quite spontaneously. Really, even the language that I did carry over from my previous time—there's a period there where Brooks and my journeying time with him. I continued journeying for a couple years, which was very helpful in taking me down into the—not just the earth of a deeper embodiment, but also the soil of my own deeper psychological and emotional material.

That was—that—it became evident that that was like a first stage of what had to happen next. There were pieces of Da's charting out of what he foresaw would be likely to happen in the awakened stage that, because of—the stream there, through Maharshi and him, is this basic foundation of the realization from the heart, that includes the upper mysteries, but isn't located up there.

So it starts right here at the heart of both spirit and matter, and that's a very different foundation in and of itself. It makes for a different view of the world. In my view, though neither he nor Maharshi went there, it makes for a healing of the spirit matter split that brings matter to the status of full divinity, and even full reality, even though it remains finite, temporary, and changing. It's like there's one great aspect of reality that's finite, temporary, and all the time changing, another part that's non-finite, apparently eternal, seemingly changeless, and the two are in perpetual dance.

This is—if you take that, at least for me, if you follow that trail, you keep sniffing that scent, it takes you ultimately—I mean, from a historical sourcing perspective, you're not willing to make any assumptions about what was previous to the Big Bang, as if it was just spirit then, and then matter erupted. Who knows? And in terms of what's happening right now, the both end is just lived. So more and more, what has emerged over the years has been, yeah, pretty much a kind of, well, where do we go with it next? What's the baby from the old traditions and from what I got that we bring forward? Transmission, aversion of the guru-disciple relationship?

SK: What is your relationship to your teacher now?

SB: Well, I was talking about the beginning of my work, and you asked if I had a map, or how I proceeded. I was starting to say that my orientation was always—because I do have—I'm not just a revolutionary. I do have the kind of devotional loyalty theme in me, as well. It remains to this day. I mean, I still have dreams of Da, where I'm in more the devotee position. It's just—it's part of my totality.

But I'm also, in so many ways, like a Jefferson or a Washington to his King George III, and I'm very intent on bringing in a new format. So over the years—and by the way, to skip ahead at this point, I mean, that was late 1992 when I awakened. I began informally working with people within a week or two.

That next summer, I started formally teaching. It was, as I told Brooks' Barton at the time, I said, "I'm very content"—I'm breaking taboos right and left here, because the Bay Area is kind of a Adi Da central, for both his community, and also, a whole community of ex-practitioners who remain loyal. So for Bonder to leave the work and six months later, put out a shingle saying "I'm awake and I can help you awaken. Oh, by the way, you don't have to do that whole guru thing." [Laughter]. I mean, I had to really work through my own. I mean, I had seen people proclaim awakenings in the past, and it was just ridiculous to all of us. So I knew how I was being observed and encountered, and had to work with that and be willing to deal with it.

But what then occurred was over these now approaching 15 years, I've helped many people have—hundreds—I mean, somewhere I think between about four and five hundred people have duplicated that basic non-dual embodiment of consciousness that I found that seamless onliness. A lot of them don't have anything like my training to appreciate it, which, on some level for me, is a little bit like—I mean, I just outfitted them with a Formula One racer, and they drive it off as if it was a subcompact Ford. [Laughter]. At some level.

It is not to say—I mean, I don't want to give a wrong impression. That's a piece of it. I love the fact that we really aren't creating a democratic culture. A big theme of it, the main name for it that's developed over the years is waking down in mutuality.

Over the years, again just skipping ahead and summarizing here—I mean, at this point, probably one or two people get confirmed in their basic awakening every week. At least a few people every month, sometimes more.

PK: Somehow, there's a confirming of awakening that goes on? What does that mean?

SB: Well, we found it's helpful for people to talk this through. After—Linda's one of the teachers now who does these—we call them confirmation interviews, but it's basically a relatively informal discussion in which a person says "Here's what I'm living. Here's what I'm experiencing." And the teacher, like—if Linda's doing this with someone, she's looking for them to express certain elements of this basic—we call it the second birth. In fact, there's a book I should give you, be happy to give you, that's titled *The Second Birth*. It has about 38 of those stories in it.

PK: Oh, wow.

SB: Yeah. And people, as you'll see, they express it in their own terms. They come from different backgrounds. Some of them can't relate to my language at all. Others really get into it. But the function of a conversation—which not—people aren't required to go through it, but it's helpful because the challenges post-awakening become much more twisty than pre-awakening.

The levels—to come back to a theme that I know is central to you—the levels of what you have to deal with psychologically and emotionally in yourself, and what you have to encounter in the world, pre-awakening, it's a little bit like learning how to scuba dive in a lagoon. Post-awakening, you're in the Marianas Trench sometimes, and you've got to have your wits about you. One of the functions of a “confirmation” is that the quality of awakened presence, in this context especially, which is so embodied and it's so—it doesn't involve a preliminary—a kind of ego death that—in certainly the old schools, you'd go through a training that would pretty much obliterate any identification with the person. In other words, the classic abidance would say “I've reached the stage of no mind.”

They could refer to an I, but there wouldn't be any internal sense of me left. That was considered to be one of the hallmarks of true liberation. But from this perspective, that's a dissociated state. *[Laughter]*. That's a big change in the way it's all registered.

PK: Definitely.

SB: It's a big change. Just to tell a little anecdote about this, I don't know if you're—are you aware of Genpo Roshi's Big Mind teaching?

PK: Yeah, definitely. I've sat with *[Crosstalk]*.

SB: Yeah. And Genpo and Linda and I made a great connection, in part, because we have such a similarity. As he said to me, he says “My traditional Japanese teacher from his culture could never have gone here.” I said, “Well, Genpo, I had an American who was a revolutionary, but he couldn't have gone here, either.”

Part of the where we're going is that the different voices in the psyche are all welcomed in. You know? It's not just that you go through—and Genpo's thing, you go through the protector and the controller and the critic, so then you can get to Big Mind and get rid of all those.

PK: You mean you kick them all out? *[Laughter]*.

SB: No, it's like everybody's welcome to the table. Now who are we? So what we've seen is this thing really is replicable. We've created a process for it. We've gone through a huge, really interesting process that I think is going to become someday very interesting for people to study.

Because when I started, it was just me. And I was associated with people like Brooks Barton and John and others, but I knew I was bringing through a particular formulation that I had to take sole responsibility for. I had friends and colleagues who were doing, in some ways, similar things, but I didn't have anybody who was a team player.

So I became the progenitor of this particular stream. I didn't have founding brothers, or brothers and sisters. Over the years, then, early on, I had to create a structure. We created a nonprofit corporation that was the format within which we pursued this. But then, over a period of time, by the early years of this decade, moving toward 10 years out into the work, that structure was becoming outmoded.

People were saying to me at one point—I remember at a certain point, what is enlightenment, Andrew Cohen and those people started talking about evolutionary enlightenment, and the world was talking about incarnational non-dualism. A bunch of my friends said, “Yeah, you ought to be in there. They should be interviewed. They sound like you.” I—“Well, why don't you write a letter to the editor or whatever?” I said, “Well, I could conceivably do that.” But I said, “There's a bigger problem here, and that is that what we're doing is so much about not just embodying a subjective realization, but mutually living a bunch of them.”

PK: What do you mean?

SB: In other words, what's the politics when you've got two or more who are really free?

PK: That's the first thing I thought about. So what does this work look like?

SB: So our work became waking down in mutuality, and the mutuality factor really is the ass-kicker here. I feel—I'm not trying to put on airs or boast, but actually, to make note of something that I think will bear scrutiny, and needs to be scrutinized, I think we are among—certainly we are among the world leaders in the mutual living of radically awakened states, where a whole bunch of people are living it, and not only are they living it, but they're really freed up from as much of the residual deference to the great one as possible.

That's—it's an interesting dynamic. All these paradoxical dynamics show up where you've still got teachers. I mean, I'm still like the grandfather of this thing. Don't treat me like I just got here yesterday, or like I don't count. But on the other hand, it's so much more important for all of us that everybody gets their own empowerment, even if it means that they leave the work, so-called work. People would use that phrase. They'd say “So-and-so's talking about leaving the work.” And I'd say, “What do you mean? They're alive in the process. That means that the work is taking them somewhere else. Let's not create those walls.”

So another couple of key pieces of this that I do want to mention is that—at one point, I was talking with Barton when I was still doing the journey with him, which I only—I kept doing that for a couple of years, and really, I have to say that among the influences, ayahuasca, the spirit of Mother Earth through ayahuasca, as

Brooks used to say—he says “ayahuasca seeps into the wounds”—took me down into the nooks and crannies.

Because that’s what happens post-awakening. We have a thing we call the wake-down shakedown, where post-awakening, you plunge into some of your most cut-off places, the parts of yourself that you hate being triggered into, you get out of as fast as you can, you know if you spend a lot of time there, you’re going to unravel, and they get integrated. I quickly recognize it’s the genius of the whole being. It—as soon as a basic conscious presence is established in and as this onliness, that actually gives you the strength of a whole being character to encounter the parts of yourself that previously, you had to wall off, cover over, suppress, in order to survive and to create a functioning ego presence in the world.

PK: Right.

SB: All of that was great survival skill.

PK: I see.

SB: But now—and again, it relates very directly to your considerations—now, those other pieces, it’s as if they come rushing forward to claim their place at the table, at the banquet of being. They cannot be—I don’t want to say they can’t be—yeah, you can continue to suppress and you can continue to kind of dodge and dance and weave and work on them and try to fix them and blah blah blah blah, but it looks to us like the real integrative process—and I use the word integrative because I’m—I have a great affinity with Ken’s work.

We’re a part of the integral spiritual center. But I wouldn’t quite use that same language. I like to refer to it and honor it, but integrative works. Because it’s also—it’s very much a verb, you know?

PK: Of course.

SB: I mean, it’s ongoing. It looks like what being is trying to do, what the human divine spirit is spontaneously striving for, is an integration that doesn’t try to make those other parts something other than what they are. Doesn’t try to exclude them, doesn’t try to overcome them, doesn’t try to transcend them, but actually allows them fully to emerge.

Then when you get to know them—and this is such an interesting thing. We have a version of work that Linda and I do. It’s something like a voice dialogue process. I had not heard of that when I started doing this. It was just natural for me, and began dialoging with the really-cut off parts, that people were feeling like we’re actually sabotaging their work, even trying to kill them sometimes.

So you finally get into a conversation where I would be working with that person, and they would trust what we were doing enough so that they, in their ego identity, could step aside and welcome that other—the dangerous other forward into the room, and give it a name and so forth. I would start talking to the other. Those were maybe dicey conversations. *[Laughter]*.

But almost invariably, what was felt to be a threat by the ego self speaks itself as a protector or guardian, that actually was often present. Usually, those cut-off parts are fiercer proportionate to the degree of abuse and shocking trauma that the individual has suffered. So that voice would say something like “I was the one who fucking stuck around. I lived through it while she disappeared. She came back 10 years later. I was here the whole time. I was holding the ground for her. A little respect, please.” It makes me emotional to talk about.

PK: I know exactly what you’re talking about.

SB: Yeah. So it’s just—I mean, to me, I have to tell you—how do you pronounce it, Puran?

PK: Puran, yeah.

SB: Puran. *[Gasp]*. It’s just—it’s so exciting. One of the things that Barton said to me, at one point, he says, “Well,” he says, “You didn’t waste any time in your years with Adi Da. Well, not much, anyway.” *[Laughter]*. Because, you know, I was like “How come I stayed so long?”

But I realized what I stayed for—and this is a really key piece that I’m now more and more expressing as really crucial in my understanding of our work. What’s really cool about our work is it really is very democratic. There are pieces of the practice of mutuality—like we just—just this weekend, we had our annual teachers’ retreat.

It was very exciting, because—I didn’t actually finish the story. What we did after a certain point, it was like I had created this house where everyone could have a second birth, and then a second childhood, a second—an infancy and childhood and adolescence. And really, people show up with those qualities. Awakened adolescents are a really thorny gang, I can tell you from personal experience. *[Laughter]*.

But at a certain point, it was like the house was full to the rafters with all these people. We really needed a different house.

PK: Yeah.

SB: So with Linda and me having a very major role in calling for it—I mean, I wanted this. It wasn't like I was over-outvoted or something. We all worked together to completely redesign the structural foundations of the work.

So the nonprofit that we founded originally that was chartered for Saniel's work, Saniel Bonder's work, in mid-2005. We didn't want to dismantle it, and I'm more and more glad that we didn't, because I think it'll have a different use in the future, especially for Linda and me. We've continued to develop our own work in a variety of ways.

But the shared work now has a fully incorporated teachers' association, which just met this past weekend, and a fully incorporated 501(c)(3) school called the Institute of Awakened Mutuality, which puts on the more advanced trainings and some of the major retreats for the national, and more and more international, community. And eventually, a community network will incorporate that hasn't quite gelled yet, but I'm sure it will.

So all of that has become the structure, and really, by our mutually-chosen design, we've taken me out of being anything like the executive leader, and are allowing Linda and me together to be more our natural role of kind of spiritual visionary leaders. I mean, as the founder, there's a certain—kind of a tone setting of the whole transmission, that's not just something I did in the past, but continues to be a part of the presence that we bring, Linda and I together, really, to the whole community of the work.

But other people teach their own stripes of it. Some don't resonate with some things that I consider to be really important, and we love the fact that we don't have a catechism. I mean, there are some basic things we agree on, most definitely, but there are lots of refinements that people are really free to really originate their own expressions, bring in infusions from all kinds of different sources. We have integral people, we've got human design people, we've got Enneagram people. We've got shamanic people, we've got deep psychological people. DUP

There's all kinds of streams that continue to come in and get integrated by people into their own work, and then some aspects of those different pieces may move into being more and more shared, but what's really shared is an orientation where none—in order to become a teacher of this work, the shared work, you've not only got to be clearly awake and activated as a transmitter yourself—so, I mean, the question of being awake is long since behind you.

PK: Oh, OK.

SB: You go through a very serious training, and what our protocols are and aren't, and how mutuality works. You've got to be really good, for example, at what we call coconut Yoga, which I learned early on I had to be very good at. It's everybody's

least favorite thing to do, but if we have an argument—let's say I'm teaching you and you feel like I totally missed what you were trying to say, or I neglected you, or whatever it may be, instead of a lot of the classic routine, which is, "Well, just deal with it. It's your own ego. I'm the awakened one. I must know better," et cetera, et cetera.

PK: Right.

SB: You are encouraged to step up to the plate and say, "Hey, Sanial, I really feel like you totally dropped the ball." My job, then, coconut Yoga, is let my head drop to the rocks like a ripe coconut. My thoughts and assumptions of any kind of superiority, or "I really know what's going on here," leave that on the ground and sit back up in the mode of "Tell me more. I'm listening."

Those little rituals happen here, despite everybody's best intentions, because that's what relationships take.

PK: Yeah.

SB: Whether they're differential relationships, like between parents and children, or equal relationships, lovers and lovers, friends and friends.

PK: Yeah.

SB: But even between teachers and students, this is really crucial, and we occasionally have situations where a teacher just can't do it, and that's when things get really thorny around here.

PK: I see.

SB: Because it's not allowable in the culture for a teacher not to be able to do that. The interesting thing about it is how much it empowers people when it happens. You'd never go looking for it, but I know, having done this hundreds of times over the years, when a situation comes up where I've got to do that apology, and—it's really a depressurization and a restoration of a superior balance.

The trust between the two parties gets taken to a whole other level. The individual who was in the apparently weaker position comes out tremendously stronger. The individual who's in the apparently stronger position also comes out tremendously stronger, but equalized, humbled, harmonized, and we really get to chew on "What the hell was that?" Rather than "What the hell is that in you, while I'm superior as the teacher."

PK: Right, defense and—

SB: Yeah.

PK: –whatever.

SB: Yeah, so it's–

PK: It's great.

SB: It really is–

PK: It's just great.

SB: It's a very exciting new model. Well, the one other thing that I wanted to say—and we've gone in circles a bit here, but–

PK: We've completely gone far beyond the reaches of that, and so it's great.

SB: Good. Thank you. The other thing that I wanted to say was that when Brooks Barton said to me, “Well, you didn't waste any time there. Not much, anyway,” I really—it became clear to me that there was actually a unification of the Nirvanic principle and the Samsaric, we could say, or the unconditional and the conditional, that I had to stay with Adi Da for, until I got it from him, and I didn't even know.

This is what's so beautiful about this. This is part of the sweetness of the mystery. I didn't even know that I had gotten it until after I had left and awakened. I didn't know I was wanting it or even hoping for it while I was still there.

But—and this is part of where I feel—like one of the things, again—it's fun to talk to somebody who's got a different kind of genealogical spiritual connection to Brooks, because he contributed some very important things.

One was when I first had that embodied witness awakening, and got down there and spent that week with him, and it was obvious that this time, it wasn't going away, he—at one point, I said to him, I said, “Brooks, I don't get it.” I mean, I left my guru more or less in disgrace, and not merely because I had been labeled, but I was feeling pretty bad about myself. I had not become a great success in that Yoga. And yet, I'm going through this—I mean, obviously, I've been initiated into a stage of an awakening process that's extraordinary. I don't get how this is happening.

He says, “Well,” he says, “The best I can tell”—and I've quoted this ever since—“Spirituality is not just evolutionary. It is itself evolving.” That's a cornerstone. Well, there's an evolution that Da brought forward in his own subjective embodiment.

In other words, his realization is one that's held in the self place, and he assumes the whole universe—the technical word is not so much narcissism as solipsism. He assumes the entire universe to be subsumed within his great self-nature.

PK: Right.

SB: Where we're going forward is into the paradoxes of simultaneous all selfness and otherness. So the self plus other paradoxes are really, really exulted here. *[Laughter]*.

PK: It's so obvious. I've never heard it put into language this way.

SB: Yeah. So this is—what I had to stay with him for was that he took—and as a writer in his work—this is one of the gifts to my work that he gave me. I went through a writer's Yoga around Adi Da, and anybody who's done it will tell you, it is an ass-kicker. You sign up for that, you're in for a lot of trouble that's going to keep you up a lot of nights and give you a lot of heartache and make you feel like shit a lot of the time, and you get quite a training out of it. *[Laughter]*.

So I was very—I mean, I had not realized any of it, but I had to become very expert in not just what he had to say, but which words to capitalize and which not, and when.

PK: Yeah.

SB: All that. Over the years, as he furthered his own process, which, you see, took a traditional advaita transcendental self-realization, and god realization, and brought it into a muscular, vigorous embodiment.

Over the years, he clarified that there was a stage beyond what he called—using language from the old tradition, Sahaj Samadhi. Sahaj Samadhi is typically translated—Sahaj means natural. The natural state. In other words, living in an awakened Samadhi condition as part of your natural everyday life. It's just a given.

So the richer meaning of that word Sahaj is twinned, which means that the conditional and the unconditional are, as if fraternal twins, paired together somehow. But he said there was—he had realized a condition beyond that, and he began calling it Bhava, which means rapture, or Moksha Bhava, the rapture of liberation. Moksha Bhava. Nirvikalpa Samadhi In other words, a formless Nirvikalpa. Beyond forms, beyond perception, beyond cognition. Beyond any residual sense of a limited self, any subject-object experiencer.

So these are the ultimate conditions that traditionally had been arrived at, and this is part of his discrimination. I think it's very beautiful, even if it's spontaneously generated, like my first one was. So it wasn't any sense of trying to get beyond

subject-object phenomena and worlds. There was a sense of having blown out the top of all that into something alternative to it, and then coming back down into it, and losing that. Later, there was a version of the Nirvikalpa Samadhi that I experienced in the heart consciousness that was more like a being reduced out of the subject-object structures.

But this next Samadhi that he began talking about, the Bhava quality of it, was he said—he basically felt it's such an extremity of love, of union of the opposites, that all sense of distinction among them, like in a Sahaj state, walking around with, as he called it, open eyes, is completely dissolved.

So it's—I later came up with language for it. I began calling it the white heat. My way of describing it is if Sahaj is a sacred marriage between consciousness and phenomena, then the—using his language, or for me, since I don't really—I don't want to be in the business of trying to say I've realized what he's talking about. That's just my own authentic truth, and I call it the white heat.

The white heat is something like the consummation of that marriage. I mean, there's a very different energy between the bride and the groom in the marriage ceremony, compared to what happens when they're making love on their wedding night. Ideally, this is relatively cool, this is really hot. And they surrender into each other so profoundly that they become kind of oblivious. You know?

So that's what he began saying, there is this further Nirvikalpa Samadhi that is made out of absolute love. It's not in any way a leaving of the worlds of phenomena, but it's such a union of the being consciousness and the phenomena that all sense—all capacity to notice differences dissolves.

Well, I had, in my last—my later years with him, in late 1989—I left in Summer of '92. In '89, there had been a particular darshan that I knew was the biggest event I had ever had with him spiritually. I knew that I had entered into being the divine world with him. I came out of it getting “Okay, that's where the notion of the ohm sound comes from.” I mean, it was tremendously cosmic, but not like having visions. It was just a total beingness.

Then years later, after I awakened and began doing my work, about eight months after my awakening—so I was now living in my own version of that natural universal expandedness—I remembered that something else had happened in that incident. I had not been able to remember it. My mind had not been able to bring it back and cognize it until the mind was functioning in the context of the awakened consciousness.

PK: I see.

SB: What had happened was that I had flashed into that white-hot love oblivion. So then, I—and I realized this had occurred while I was still with him, but I hadn't

duplicated it yet. So it actually took, then, the next year going—going again to India—as it turned out, I figured out I’ve got to get this again. But it was quite a crisis for me, actually, because I already knew that my work was going to be about this mutuality thing in a big way, and it was going to be very democratic. I was trying to Johnny Appleseed this to everybody. I wasn’t going to—it wasn’t going to be the old world structure.

Brooks, by the way, was someone who talked about mutuality a lot, though I don’t know how much he ever got into living it with people. But I knew that if I didn’t regain that white-hot realization autonomously—because there was no way I was going to, even at a distance, turn around to Adi Da and say, “Okay, Gurudev, I need this peace here. Help me out.”

I mean, never at any time have I even inwardly and spiritually been at liberty to relate to him that way, except kind of in dream time, where it’s like later. Oh, right. Okay. I wasn’t in my deliberate mind. I might bow to him in a dream, but it’s a split second, you know?

So I knew I had to recover this, and for a while, I was stumped. Well, how is it going to happen? Then it dawned on me that it was going come through the tantric process, this dance with the goddess.

To not really tell the story, that is essentially what happened. It came through, I now see, fairly rapidly. Because my feeling was “If I can’t access this”—I was already starting to teach. “If I can’t access this, I don’t think I can justify continuing to teach.” Because if people go through what we call the second birth awakening, and then they say, “Well, is there more? I mean, this is nice. What else?” And I say, “Well, yeah, there’s this white-hot thing, and I remember access to it with Adi Da, but I’m not there yet myself, and I don’t know where else to send you, because it has to be based in this heart unification of spirit and matter.”

PK: Right.

SB: So my feeling was “If I can’t get access to this in some relatively finite period of time, I’m going to have to hang it up as a teacher and go figure it out.”

Well, as it turned out, interestingly enough, it was when I went to Ramana Maharshi’s ashram in 1994, the following year, with the woman who was then my tantric partner, and while we were there was when that white-hot quality crystallized again. It was really dramatically obvious that a huge shift had occurred, and that was the point, I came back, I began speaking about the work as *The White-Hot Yoga of the Heart*. Wrote a book by that title.

Since then, interestingly enough, even some of the senior teachers in the work that I founded—I won’t even call it my work. [*Laughter*].

PK: Right, right.

SB: *[Laughter]*. Yeah. They're great about that. One of them was saying this weekend, he said, "You know, I ran into one of my old Advaita teacher friends, and she said, "Are you still doing Saniel's work?" and he said "What are you talking about? I do my work. I mean, no disrespect intended." We love that. I'm *[Crosstalk]* for it.

PK: It's like a co-op of work that you just happen to have founded.

SB: Yeah.

PK: That's brilliant.

SB: Yeah. But what I see is that this white-hot realization of the heart, and the unification of spirit and matter, and the—really, it makes possible the true mutuality, because it's only when we can completely—I mean, in a fundamental way, completely go beyond a kind of residual spirit bias that we can actually encounter and assume the sovereign mystery of the other, and really relate to them. Really see them as, in some ways, not just a subset of what we've already realized, but as someone who is uniquely manifesting that.

It's a very quantum recognition, as well. That's something that's really come through to me. It's accepting each one truly as a quantum hologram of the totality, and living on that basis. What's the politics between sovereign quantum holograms? This is what it's going to take.

PK: Yeah, that's kind of a long way from your original shroud of mirrors experience.

SB: Isn't it?

PK: It's like the exact opposite of that.

SB: Yeah. *[Laughter]*.

PK: It's like—

SB: Thank you. I hadn't thought of that. That's true.

[End of audio]

Interview with Dorothy Hunt

PK: All right, we're recording. Well, okay, do you remember what you were doing and what life was like before you got on this journey?

DH: I think the whole of life is a spiritual journey so you know I mean there are various things that probably pointed me in the direction, not the least of which was my mother's death when I was a child that sort of brought up the big questions of life and death and that sort of thing. So it feels like that was a catalyst in some respects or interest in those deeper questions. At that time the question was more like who's the God that can give life or taken it away?

PK: What were you, were you religious at the time? Or what was it that originally attracted you to the spiritual path?

DH: My grandfather was a Methodist minister, but I wasn't particularly a religious kid. I went to Sunday School and church, not every week. But I spent a lot of time in nature, love to sit in trees, you know watch birds and the changing of the seasons. I mean I was a normal little kid too, play with my friends and went to school and all that jazz. And I probably didn't begin any kind of formal meditation until, and this wasn't even formal, until I was I would guess in my '20's at that point so in between my life.

PK: What kind of meditation did you start doing?

DH: Well, at the time I was in the Christian tradition and so they all really, at least where I went, didn't teach you much about meditation. There was a moment of silence you know in the church service which was literally a moment, that was it. But I got interested in the silence part of it so I read this little book on if you were Christian you could meditate on a Bible verse. I actually choose one at that time which was "Be still and know that I am God." It was from the Psalms. And later of course when Ramana Maharshi appeared that was one thing he said. That's the whole of it, you know, "Be still and know that I am God."

PK: Ramana appeared?

DH: Yes.

PK: How was that, what was that like?

DH: He appeared in a dream and at that point I had worked for about 10 years with Mother Theresa of Calcutta so I had that and I had been on some retreats with Thich Nhat Hahn in Buddhist tradition. But this particular event after this had all

began was just an incredibly powerful dream where his face appeared in a dream. I didn't know who it was, whether he was dead or alive, but those eyes were so powerful that I knew I had to find something out about this person so as often as the case we know, or are drawn to things we know before we are drawn to them or for what purpose. I discovered I had a book on my bookshelf, the Spiritual Teaching of Ramana which I had never read. I bought it probably for St. Ives, but I didn't remember I had it.

But I found it after this dream and began to read it and that began what I would call the years of self-inquiry because that was the path that he recommended. Reading that book was probably the first awakening to true nature, the first glimpse maybe I would say more than an awakening was a glimpse while reading the book. So of course that made me even more interested in Ramana and his teaching. So self-inquiry began spontaneously. It wasn't like a sit down time. I had done meditation both on that Bible verse and a mantra had appeared so I had many years of sitting practice, fairly regularly, but not everyday before then. But this was different. This was just a spontaneous inquiry like who's sitting here talking right now? Who's listening? Who's looking? Who's seeing her face in the reflection of the mirror? Really interesting to find out.

And so that happened for about three years just spontaneously. Every day it wasn't an intellectual practice at all, it was much deeper than that. And then one day the mind became quiet enough that it woke up to its true nature.

PK: Oh, wow. So he was in a way your first teacher was he?

DH: Well—

PK: What was that relationship?

DH: In terms of spiritual teachers I would say Mother Theresa was probably the first "spiritual teacher" I had. That was another thing that just sort of appeared. I was meditating and something said you need to be doing something with Missionaries For Charity and I didn't really know that they were in San Francisco. So I got up from the meditation and went to call information to see if they had a number for Missionaries For Charity. And they did, and I was surprised so I called the number and said I don't know what I'm suppose to be doing with you, but I think I'm suppose to be doing something with you. That was how they, people came to them all the time just like that. The spirit just moves. They said oh we were just in the chapel praying for someone with a car. Do you have a car? And I said yes I have a car. They said somebody who had a car who is free on Friday, you know are you free on Friday? I said yes you know. And they said come at 3:00 so that began. We would go to the Tenderloin and visit with people on the street, you know, prostitutes, drug addicts.

And that was a great teaching because my background was in mental health and so my first inclination was really to, you know, have you tried this clinic or what about meds or you know kind of that whole thing. They let me know there is nothing wrong with doing that, but that is not why we were there. We were there to just give love at the moment without any expectation or any change. So we took food, sandwiches, and coffee.

That was my beginning with Missionaries For Charity and then I worked with them for many years in the AIDS hospice. There was a home for homeless pregnant women, a soup kitchen, a children's summer camp, things like that. So that was all previous to the Ramana days.

PK: Yeah. So you had the three years of self-inquiry.

DH: Yes. And you see the question who am I is not an intellectual question. What it does eventually is it stops the mind because you can't find out, it's a mystery. Just like right now. What is really looking? Can you say?

PK: I feel like I could.

DH: What would you say?

PK: I think I know the answer to this question only because I'm familiar with Vedantic studies. Like I could say that what or who is looking is awareness or consciousness, but those terms have various connotations and associations that I feel are taking us away from right here. So to answer what and who is looking I guess I'd have to say I'm looking right now.

DH: That's the inquiry.

PK: I mean so far we got to the days of, or the years of self-inquiry. And then what happened?

DH: Well during that time I ran across a book by Ramesh Balsakar called *Consciousness Speaks*. And that book really spoke to me in one particular way. He said at some point it's easier to make a million dollars by your own will than to become enlightened. And for me it was like a stab in a wound or something. It allowed deep relaxation of the search. The search didn't end at that point, but I started writing to him in India and he wrote back on occasion. I would write long letters and he would write back very short little letters, mostly with the question back who wants to know? Same thing, same inquiry, you know who wants to know? I would have these questions and these experiences and various things I would report you know on the so called journey.

And so there was just this relaxation. And the experiencing of awakening actually came on a private retreat. I would say the first awakening. There are many and

they keep deepening, but the first and most important one. I was on a private retreat and it was at Oleana, the Vedanta Society. And so I was meditating in the women's meditation, the women's dorm. And there's a picture of Rama Krishna on the wall who I really didn't have much connection to. I had maybe read a little bit about him and I had been at Elena before, but this particular night I had this—this to me was very humorous eventually, it wasn't so humorous at the time. But I had this moment while I was meditating if you could say awake until 10:00 something very important is going to happen. You know, I'm all excited. Of course I can stay awake until 10:00. And I'm thinking maybe this is the big moment. You know, just like—and so sometime before 10:00 the experience was, and of course now I can see. This is all happening in mind just like this interview is just happening in mind. Life is happening in mind, we're creating it as we go.

But, this creation, this night was that the experience was an image of Rama Krishna actually came out of the picture, out of the picture that was in the wall, came over to me, hit me right on the third eye and I went unconscious. It was the experience. I went to sleep, I don't know, but it was before 10:00. I couldn't stay awake until 10:00. So I woke up at about 10:15 and I was not so happy, you know. I was like, you know. And the next day you know I can see the humor, I woke up and can see the humor. We're not in charge as a mind, you know as something we imagine is separate. We're just not in charge.

So this is a beautiful example. Of course you can stay awake until 10:00, no, I couldn't you know. So the next day something was just very quiet so I went up to this place called the Temple Site. It's just an area; it's a grassy area with trees and a circle. And I just sat on a stump and wondered what the lesson of the day would be, that's how it came to me. What's the lesson of the day, you know. And it was time and space. So just sitting looking at a tree somehow it was just very, very clear all of a sudden that time and space were total constructs so that this that I am, that you are, that we are, can see itself, can meet itself, can love itself. That this divided itself so it could see itself. The this was not this Dorothy Hunt person at all, but the only thing that ever was, was just powerfully known, it just revealed itself; it just woke up to itself.

And from that moment on I never could forget that. You know, lots of things hadn't happened at that point that happened later in terms of the journey, but that was the first awakening. And there was no need for anyone to confirm it. You know, like it was the knowledge that was so profound. It was self-affirming. That awakening was self-affirming. And it was a great joy and delight because it felt as though this is what I had been searching for, it was there. I had found what I had been searching for basically. But really it wasn't and I imagined I was, it had found itself really. It just had awakened to itself.

And from that point on I knew, and I would still say the same thing, there is no one to awaken because the awakening is not about a person, it's not about an ego, it's not about someone who wakes up. It's this process of awakening, the mystery

does itself. That's all it's ever been. So it's very funny at that point to discover that you are what you have been searching for, that's what you are, you've always been. All the time you thought you were different, separate, longing, searching, that you're it.

PK: So when you were searching did you have a vision like what it was going to be and like did you have an idea or an expectation of what this spiritual journey was?

DH: Well we think we do as minds, but really until it happens you don't know. You have this idea.

PK: Right.

DH: And I had read lots of things and you know I had read everything Ramana had written about him and Ramesh and so forth, but you know the mind only—how do I say it—the mind can only function in a sense in the known. I mean it only goes to the known. That's as far as it—that's its limitation and that's why the mind is never going to take us to enlightenment because that is just the known. So when the mind comes up against the unknown that's when it stops and that's what happened that day, you know, this who am I question had been or so it seemed, had been really slowing down thought, had been slowing down the search. It still was engaged, but the relaxing part. Like well maybe it won't happen in this lifetime. And that's okay; I had a good life you know. I was married; I had two kids at that point. You know, I have grandkids.

You know, it was okay. And yet still something in me actually thought I would die physically and kind of prepared for it before this awakening happened. I actually thought I would die. I didn't want to die. There was nothing suicidal in it, I just thought I would and I was willing to. That's how much I wanted the truth.

And it was very powerful. I look back and kind of have to smile, but at the time it felt very earnest. I would lay on the floor like Ramana imaging my death and really have some sense of how it is that mind moves, you know this mind—the mind stream would be more accurate but the mind stream moves. At any rate, you know, these experiences would come and they would go and I would make something out of them. But I was willing to die for the knowledge of who am I, the truth of it.

PK: It sounds like you had a pretty strong understanding of what might happen or what this process might be like.

DH: Actually not. I don't really think anyone really knows until. You know we think we do.

PK: I do.

DH: But it's never what we think. I have yet to imagine, or I have yet to encounter a single person who says, "Gee, this is just like I thought it would be." And mostly it's because of what happens after awakening. Before awakening, I don't know about you, but I certainly imagined that was it. And for quite a long time after that first awakening it was. The search was over. I mean I wasn't seeking at all. That was it. If I died the next day I felt like I would die fulfilled. You know, it would be all right because this is what I came for is how it felt. And so it was very, it was very calm and peaceful.

But about how many years after, 4 years after that I happened to be speaking at a conference on ideal wisdom in psychotherapy. And I was the first speaker and Adayashanti was the keynote speaker for the evening so he was there for my talk and I was there for his. And as soon as he began speaking, just immediately there was energetically for me the experience of the light from the third eye connecting here. And I just knew there was some transmission that was taking place that was needed and prior to that I hadn't gone to see any spiritual teachers. You know a lot of spiritual teachers, a lot of my so-called spiritual friends you know were oh come see Byron Katie or come see Adayashanti, he's really cool. I had no interest at all you know. It truly felt like it was over and one level it was.

But Adaya came in to my life at that point and really it was like a torch to dry grass. What he was to me was certainly an embodied teacher because waking up is just step one which I discovered. It's just the first thing, it's not the last thing. It's like the beginning of the true spiritual journey starts then, it doesn't end then. And I always thought it ended then. That would be it and then like walk off into the sunset, you know, bliss, peace, joy, whatever, you know from then on. And the minute I met him as like—and the universe worked it out so that very unexpectedly I got to go on a private retreat with him just like that after meeting him. And lots of people wanted to go and it just worked. I don't know how those things work. Someone dropped out and I had mentioned it might be nice to be considered if he ever did another one of these and somehow I got to go on that retreat at Lone Pine in July of 2001 so yeah just about six years ago almost this month.

And once I met Adaya it was hard to describe. It's hard to describe actually. It's just that everything that wasn't—anything that was still sticking started to burn. You know, ideas, core beliefs, things I thought about myself. A lot of arrogance, there was spiritual arrogance that just, you know, that I had something that someone else didn't have. Just awakening. There was something in me that was claiming it at that time. And even though I knew at the time it happened there's no me, but over time it became more of a memory than it did an ongoing, living, fresh thing moment-to-moment. So when Adaya came into the picture it was like I met—I had so many past—I call them past dreams now, but at the time they seemed like past lives, memories of being with him as a teacher. It was just immediate. I saw us in Buddhist Zendos in Japan and Cheyenne and Tibet. It was just sort of an acknowledge of here we are again is how it felt.

But he never really kind of allowed me to stay in this past life thing. It was always like see behind those masks you know. It's all a dream, it's all a dream.

PK: Would you say that Adayashanti is your teacher?

DH: The self is a teacher, the true self. That's the true teacher. And if we need a teacher the inner teacher will manifest an outer teacher. That's how I would say it.

PK: Okay. I kind of picked up that you had a lot of, I mean a lot of your teaching that you received was from this. Would you say the self teacher is an inner teacher?

DH: Yeah. Ramana says God, self, guru, all the same. That's what we eventually discover you know. I mean there were a lot of ways I didn't ever, I mean I never wanted a guru ever. I felt sorry for people who were looking for gurus. And then Ramana appeared and various circumstance which I could explain, but I don't need to, I asked the question of Ramana, you know are you my guru? And the answer back was the self is your guru and then I knew that was true, you know, that is the end teacher. It's just an expression of that. The true is inside each one of us, teachers inside each one of us. So the outer teacher sort of ignites the inner teacher and the inner teacher manifests as the outer teacher if it's needed. Like Ramana had a mountain as a teacher. It doesn't have to be human.

PK: I see. So do you have any outer teachers at this point in where you're at?

DH: Well Adaya will always be a teacher. I don't go to things that he does much anymore because I have the Sangha that I'm involved with—and teaching myself at this point. But I will always consider him a teacher. But, as a teacher and you know, like it may sound funny to speak of it this way, but the thing that made him such a great teacher is that he gave me nothing. And there will be forever gratitude for that.

PK: Did you have any struggles, like identifiable difficulties throughout this journey?

DH: Oh yeah, sure. I mean I met Adaya in 2001 July and September my son was working right near the World Trade Center. He watched the planes go into the building. I didn't know for a long time whether he was dead or alive, what had happened to him. He was pretty shook up as you could imagine. Later that month I was diagnosed with breast cancer so I had surgery. I had never been in the hospital except to have babies. And that was incredible because it just felt like there was some opening that happened in that whole experience where a lot of, what we might call past life tendencies of mine just got poured out in that whole experience. I would say a lot of arrogance because I had been so healthy and had such a relatively easy life except for my mom's death. You know, there were a lot of ideas of why other people were ill or not ill and this or that. And having that experience myself was just a beautiful thing. Looking back it wasn't so beautiful

in every moment at the time, but it was a beautiful thing to begin to really question so many of those beliefs that we hold.

We all hold about why things happen and they're just beliefs. Every single one are just beliefs. I'm not saying there are not things that are relatively true in the relative world, but they're not absolutely true, not a single one of them. And when you really begin to look into the structure of mind and see just how this thing is propped up by belief. You know, it's just an amazing thing to see how each one of us brings a whole host of things, you know cultural, racial, national, I mean you name it, humanity beliefs, collective beliefs of humanity. But yeah, there were a lot of difficult times. It was what we would call the fire of truth burning and it burns up whatever it doesn't need once it starts to embody itself in a body mind so it's not anything that anyone imagines. You know you've had this wonderful awakening and yes there's a certain freedom, yes you're not trying to get anywhere anymore and so forth and so on and then boom, you know, things start coming up that you thought that you dealt with in therapy a million years ago or whatever, you know. Or things that you weren't expecting at all to have to deal with.

And then two years ago my daughter who is married and at the time had a two year old who is now 4 now was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Lymphoma. That was a very challenging time for our family. And the thing that I found if we can call it personally, impersonal, whatever, the thing that I found so challenging about that period of time was that I actually could not pray for her to be well. Certainly my hope as a mother was that she would survive the chemo and all of that and that would make a difference. But the truth in me I didn't know what was needed. You know like in the big scheme because truth life moves in service to itself. So I didn't really know what we needed. So it was not like a personal preference. Certainly there was a personal preference as a mother that she become well, but in truth—I don't know if this is making any sense.

PK: No, I'm following.

DH: Okay. But in truth there was just a deeper scene and a deeper letting go and that was a really tough thing to let go because earlier in times of crises or whatever I had something to go to. But you discover you're it and everything else is it too. So there's not an other and this truth from my perspective now is something that can be trusted completed. Trust in the movement of life. Trust in the movement of truth itself.

So during that time, you know, there were moments of beauty and moments of sadness and you know, the whole nine yards and also the willingness. I think this is the other thing that came to me so clearly in that period. You know we have a sense that we're human beings looking for the divine. But it really feels to me like it's the other way around, we're divine having human experience. So the freedom is not just freedom from. You get that when you wake up and have transcendent

experience and so forth, there's a freedom from, but when it comes back around. It is coming back around full-circle, embodying itself. It's not any longer a freedom from, it's a freedom to. It's a freedom to be completely here, present to the experience at hand. Not trying to have another experience. So whatever that experience is our true nature is simply not awake to it. It loves itself in that experience. So there was ample opportunity to really be so present to share in the experience at that time. Every day there is opportunity, but that was particularly powerful.

PK: How tremendous. This was exactly the point I was talking about where your particular language is in a way outside of whatever assumptions I've come in here with. This kind of map of questions is helpful, but when we enter a place like this it's kind of difficult to stick with the assumptions that I walked in the room with. I believe I am tracking you pretty consistently. And where you're at, your description of your -- what I was calling difficulties. You mentioned that it was the burning of truth or something.

DH: The fire.

PK: The fire.

DH: The fire of truth.

PK: And I know I'm supposed to ask you now what teacher helped you with that. You know, except that your description of a teacher is outside of the typical personification of teacher.

DH: Yeah. To me the truth, I consider Adayashanti a true teacher and Ramana a true teacher. Many others also, but in my own experience, but the true teacher is always pointing us back to truth. Not holding an answer, but really inviting what is true, what must be true, look and see.

There is sort of a roadmap and many different variations of the roadmap. And there are many different awakenings that people experience as well. The mind can wake up and know what it is, but the heart may not be open yet. See love hasn't actually been let out of its chamber or whatever. I mean I always think of love as it is always right here and see it's been knocking at the inside of our door for however long you see. It's kind of like the door may be open somewhat, but not wide open. So you know there's open mind, open heart. There's openness down much deeper than that. Like really down, experientially in the body. In the Zen tradition we could call it Hara. It's low down and it's a place more of existential, an existential opening you know because we tend to hold on to an identity for as long as we do and it's very, you know, can feel very powerful. There's a place in which that falls away and it's much, I can't really describe too well, but it's like in Zen they talk about the bottom falling out of the bucket. At least that was an experience here where just like everything in the being fell out into openness, into

the mystery. Which doesn't mean here's the body and here's the mind and here are feeling and here's a mom and a grandma and a therapist. You know, functioning happens, but who is it? It's such a mystery.

PK: Was this unfolding ever overwhelming to the point where it felt like a problem to you?

DH: Well definitely there were times where, you know, I would call the burning. It literally would feel like burning.

PK: Like on your skin.

DH: More like inside. More like it's difficult to actually bring it up in memory right now because it's passed. It's sort of like, the words are not easy, it's sort of like sometimes for instance, this would be an example. I would go on a retreat and it's very easy to keep your heart open and have it right. You're sitting there having blissful little experiences and the world is one and it's a beautiful nature and you have no demands on you, you know, it might be easy to have a nice time. But it could be a different retreat all together where you're really grappling with some of these core issues and one of them for me was around separation and being a victim of my mother's death and lots of other death's and past live memories of death and separation. You know, sort of incredible sadness because there was a story link to all of those.

So keeping our heart open in ongoing sadness or terror or anger or whatever is up, you know, whatever might be up in the moment. That is where this fire keeps burning, the fire of what's really true. So at some of those difficult times it would be like something was taking my head and just putting my face right into, what's the truth about this and then you just like, you sit with it. What's the truth about this? And you realize that so much of what you imagine was based on a lie, the lie of separation. Do you know the story of it? However, whether it's mothers and children or partners or separation from God, whatever.

So those are challenging times, but there's a place where you're kind of running after the divine and then the divine starts coming back this way. And then part of what I love about Adaya as an embodiment teacher for me at least is that the frame that he helped put this in for the mind that could be a little off kilter when some of this stuff starts erupting that we thought was all past and gone is really that it's the movement of love that is coming back for every single part of its own. Your mind may know you're awake and who you are and what not, but maybe there is some kind of grip of emotion. It doesn't know yet or the body doesn't know yet. It's still holding on to, you know, something here or there that is based on a belief that hasn't been unwound.

Now it's not a project for the mind because it's just a movement of truth. It's not like now I have to do something about this embodiment process, but it's more like

no truth does that itself, but we're willing. You know someplace the mind is willing not in resistance. And so it feels like that's a huge turning point when we stop refusing our experience because it's not spiritual or because it shouldn't be or whatever judgment we have about it. It's like no that's when it gets rich because then we're no longer in resistance, we can actually meet what's here, we can meet it with presence, with love, with our true nature.

PK: Yeah. You seem to have really integrated these experiences in a way that comes very natural for you to talk about it. I am wondering what you do with your students? How do you help them with their respective journeys? What are you trying to accomplish with them?

DH: Well first of all I don't say that anyone needs help.

PK: Oh.

DH: So right there to me there's a gift, but it's a true gift. You know because when I see who you really are then I know what's actually behind your journey you see. Now that doesn't mean that no one feels help, but I don't see like they need it.

PK: I see. Like the Tenderloin people at the mission.

DH: Whatever, you see. Even those days where there was in my experience separation, but even Mother Theresa would say you know I'm so grateful to the poorest of the poor because they give me a chance to serve Jesus. You know that was her language of seeing Jesus in the poorest of the poor, it gives me a chance to serve.

PK: I see.

DH: But how it would seem more accurate to me is just that truth moves in service to itself. You know, love loves itself. However that moves spontaneously in the moment is what this openness is continually open to. It's kind of a mystery of how it works, a big mystery.

PK: Okay. This mystery, do you ever recognize a similarity or a pattern that your students go through?

DH: Sure.

PK: What is that like?

DH: Well, some people are looking for that first awakening, you know. And so it's a matter of pointing what is already here. As a teacher, in Adayahsanti's lineage we teach what is called the direct path. There is not a gradual path to awakening; it's a pointing out that it is already here just like right now. You can't say what this is, this space, this listening, it's awareness, it's awake, but it's just meeting it so.

Yeah. So that's how it transmits itself not because there is somebody doing something called transmission, it just sees itself. And that over there recognizes itself back and then here we are, whatever wants to happen next.

So some people have had awakenings and they're not at all prepared for the fact of what was beautiful and blissful, you know yesterday or last month has now turned into terror. I mean that's putting that in an extreme, but that may be. Because at some point, you know we face this, what Adaya calls radical emptiness. It isn't necessarily my term, but it's a good term so I'll use it. But there is a way in which this sees its own emptiness, I mean really empty, like nothing. Nothing you can define, nothing you can describe in that place which isn't really a place. You know there's nothing of the qualities that we usually associate with awakening or enlightenment or whatever. It's quality and when it isn't moving there's nothing. And some people get terrified to experience that. The world disappears. They disappear, the world disappears, everything disappears. Some people are terrified. So, that can be part of you know, well this is part of the territory. You know, it's helpful to have someone who has journeyed through these various places.

PK: Yeah.

DH: Or maybe Kundalini starts moving. See, some people have that as part of their journey, I did. Some people don't from the perspective. Like from the then perspective it's not relevant at all and if you were talking to the Kundalini people that is the only thing that is important. You know, from my perspective you know some people experience that and some people don't. To be awake doesn't mean it has to have happened, you know nothing has to have happened for us to be who we are.

PK: What do you do with someone who comes and is in this terror, you know, of awakening and it's not making sense? How do you guide them?

DH: Just helping the mind relax. Because you know on some level you've invited this falling part. You wanted it. So when their mind can relax a little bit, you know, sometimes it's a matter of framing it, sometimes it's a matter of—it's hard to say because each moment presents it's own unfolding. But like I say, you know there are these various—you know different traditions have different stages and blah, blah, blah. It's all ways of dividing a pie that's really whole and undivided you know. But sometimes it's useful, sometimes it's helpful. And then there are people who think, you know, they're all finished, but there's a lot of ego in this all finished business you know. And we see teachers like this all the time. So the job in that case for a teacher is to pull that rug you know.

PK: So from your current experienced point of view, can you describe where you are on the spiritual path today.

DH: There's nothing to finish, which doesn't mean there's not an ongoing deepening. I mean in the infinite that we are how can there be a finish? How can there be an end to the deepening. What in my own experience has happened is that there's no more refusal. Life, every single spec of it is what it is and this that it is, is this that is empty. It's nothing and it's something. It's divine and it's whatever else we want to call it, but it is all the same. It's all the same essence. It's all the same bottom line and it's just having this unique expression of itself moment-to-moment-to-moment-to-moment-to-moment. So, you know our job is to stay open to the moment of it. Not because it's the task of the mind, it's just this is what is already here. You know you recognize what is already here; it's already open to everything. So when you're not refusing the moment and it's all this mystery it's really about being here now, it's not about getting someone.

PK: Do you think the spiritual community and your spiritual practice was directly helpful towards this understanding?

DH: Well, what I would say is, you know, is we can trust the movement of truth so if truth is moving in you or me or anyone else to do a practice and that's what seems authentic and genuine and that's what is in our integrity, great. Does it mean it's required? No. Maybe.

PK: But for you was spiritual practice, was it part of it?

DH: Sure. I had a meditation practice for years and years and years. But I wasn't sitting at the window at 4:30. For me when I felt like meditating I would meditate. It was genuine and authentic. You know, and often I would feel a little guilty because I felt I should be doing this every day and at a certain time and sometimes I would and sometimes I wouldn't. But you see all of that I don't think is nearly as important as the intensity of our desire, what's most important. And that to me is one of the most important questions a seeker can ask and answer, what's the most important thing. To find that out because that's moving us -- on a level of being. I'm not talking about what does the ego think is the most important thing, what really is the most important thing. And if it's to be, you know, a Major League baseball player, that's still a divine movement. You see it's not about making one thing better, at least not for me. It's all God. All of it. And that doesn't mean the divine is equally conscious or equally in the deepest level of truth moving, but it's all truth moving, it's all God moving, it's all the mystery moving. There's no two, but neither is it just one, you see. Not one, not two.

Because clearly there you sit, here I sit, very different expressions. I don't know your thoughts, you don't know mine. But, once awake and it's awake over there, it's awake over here, it's awake to this. So, to come back to your question what I think was very useful for my own so called because there isn't any my own, but the journey as it showed up here. What was useful about the Sangha, the open gate Sangha which is where Adaya teaches which is the level of honesty that people share. As long as you identify with an image you're going to protect an

image. You're going to want people to know this part about you and not this part about you. And sometimes it's a negative imagine so you know, nothing positive can get it.

PK: Right.

DH: But the honesty that I saw, you know going into Satsang and going to intensives and retreats and so forth with Adaya where a big part of what happens is people come and talk to him. And this all came out of his experience sitting around with one of his two teachers. They would go to sit for a period of time on Sunday mornings at her house. And then they would have tea and they would sit around and talk. And she would send her Zen students off to Zen centers for sessions and other various things and they were just kind of—to hear the tale, I don't know if it's true because I wasn't there—you know they were just like popping up all over the place and it's like what, wow, why is this happening with these folks? And whether this was part of it or not I don't know, but I suspect it was, is that there was a place in this forum around the kitchen table to actually talk about experience, to talk about questions. In the Zen tradition there's not a lot of talking.

PK: About one's—

DH: It's about figure it out for yourself, go sit more. I'm not saying that the teacher doesn't dialogue with students, but this was like it was kind of an open sharing and then you got to see that this person was questioning or struggling with the same thing you were.

PK: Like an equality amongst peers, a kinship or something.

DH: Yeah. And I think that's a very useful thing wherever. Whether we're talking about an AA meeting or a Satsang or whatever, we find out we're not so very different.

PK: So has this helped guide the community that is now around you and your Satsang?

DH: Well, I don't know because it feels like there's just a movement to offer this or that or have a group or do Satsang. It's not a planned out thing, but my Satsang's are patterned after Adaya's because I found them so helpful. I have a longer time of silence than he does usually in his. We usually sit for 30 or 40 years and then a talk arises spontaneously. I never know what I'm going to say. Part of this whole journey is learning to live without knowing, which really is the truth of existence. Anyway, we just pretend that we know, but really it's to live from the unknown so clearly that isn't going to be everything a mind imagines because that's all known.

Anyway, a talk is delivered out of the emptiness. And that is maybe 20 minutes, 30 minutes, or whatever, and the rest of the time would be questions and answers

- or reports or whatever. And I feel like that is very important. It's a time that, like I say you know one person's question is another person's question. And one person's process is instructed for lots of folks. So that is how it's moving right now.
- PK:* Do you know, do you have any kind of vision of what's going to emerge from all of this?
- DH:* None. No. It could end tomorrow. It could go on for a long time.
- PK:* You don't know where your teacher and your students are all headed?
- DH:* Yeah, actually they're all headed toward truth. How long it will take, how many lifetimes, no I couldn't tell you. But people don't show up to those kinds of places without being touched in some way by the truth. Now they may be looking for lots of things that aren't being spoken like the anti-suffering or the relationship issue. They may be coming for something else besides truth, but life brought them there. It feels like everyone is heading home.
- PK:* That's kind of a warm analogy.
- DH:* And when we come home we realize we have always been home you know. And it's always about right now, it isn't about tomorrow. It's just here, it's being here now. That's the beauty. In Buddhist terms Nirvana and Samsara are the same, absolutely the same.
- PK:* Wow.
- DH:* Form exactly emptiness, emptiness exactly form which doesn't mean there isn't something that we call awakening which is a realization of that.
- PK:* If Nirvana and Samsara are the same why do people, why are they always chasing Nirvana? They're always in search of the utopia, the deliverance from.
- DH:* You tell me. We've both tried, haven't we?
- PK:* Yeah.
- DH:* Sure.
- PK:* Do you think it is just the, like the perfection of the design that makes it so and then because of course you end up failing at your quest towards the realization of Nirvana.

DH: What you discover is the whole is what you are and the whole was the only thing that ever was perfect because it's whole. Yeah. The part doesn't become the whole, the whole is the part.

PK: I see.

DH: So you see what you are, you see deeply what you are and you see what everything else is as well.

PK: In a totality.

DH: A totality, yeah.

PK: As opposed to the elitist Nirvana crew that we were going to get to.

DH: Right. And eventually, and when you said even though we fail blah, blah, blah that's sort of the joke I guess of this thing called awakening is it's really much more like a failure, you know? Your mind hasn't figured anything out. It doesn't mean you don't have insights, it doesn't mean there isn't clarity. It's just that the mind that is trying to be in charge and figure it all out and get someplace and have certain experiences and not have others and all of the rest, it surrenders eventually or not at the feet of the unknown. What else can it do? It sees it's own limitations. And then this begins to inhabit much more fully and consciously, you know when we're not imagining ourselves separate and in control.

PK: I find your language to be comfortable yet disarming in a way. You know just your perception of this inquiry makes it difficult for me. And I've been unable to at this point get rid of my assumptions. Even though they just become so obvious when I come in here and do this. I'm like wow. I did my best to get rid of all the assumptions, but a lot of the wording about teacher-student relationship, beginning and end and all of that. You know, it becomes very apparent whether you're sitting in an authentic experience or not. And so I have run out of material in any avenues that I felt needed to be taken care of.

DH: Then we've succeeded, haven't we?

PK: Absolutely.

DH: You know I like to use the word mystery because the deeper we go the more it is a mystery, this can't really be known conceptually. And the mystery just moves itself and I am forever amazed, and you know, someone might have come to Satsang a number of times and I don't really know them, I haven't had a one-on-one or anything. I will have them come in and they'll say what's been going on. You know, sitting on this side it will be amazing. They will say every time I've been at your Satsang's my mind stops or something like that. There is no way I

would know. I am not doing anything. This is how the mystery is moving in that individual.

PK: Yeah.

DH: Right? And it has nothing to do with anything I'm trying to do or planning to do. And some others I'm sure come and say who is this lady? You know, I don't have residence with her at all, bye-bye. Beautiful. See, there's no sense in trying to keep students or whatever. Someone asked me the other day, well what's your—how did he put it, something like what is your role as a teacher and I said to make myself irrelevant. And to me a true teacher, it just keeps pointing back to the one that is there.

PK: Yeah.

DH: It's not over here, it's in each of us in the world. The world will give us a mirror, right. Our relationships are a mirror. Where we are, it gets reflected back so the whole of life becomes that teacher. It's like Tao and Zen, to study Buddhaway is to study the self, to study the self is to forget the self, to forget the self is to be enlightened by the 10,000 things, the 10,000 things are it. And they are this life, this moment, this challenge, this feeling, this beauty. You know, this ladybug walking up the stem of the flower we're looking at.

PK: You know what I find fascinating is how many teachers use this real time in space as an example in the interview. Like how you were just naturally referring to this meeting.

DH: The whole thing and it can create. Your heart beats faster, you're trying to scream. It is all happening in your consciousness and it feels so real. This is happening in our consciousness and it feels so real. And I'm not saying it's unreal, I'm just saying those two when you see it's not different it's all real and it's all unreal simultaneously. It's all a creation of mind and it's all expression of the divine.

PK: You know, I'm really pleased that we met. I found this meeting to be absolutely authentic and totally perfect.

DH: Well it's a pleasure to sit with you and talk.

PK: Thank you.

DH: Thanks for the inviting change.

PK: Yeah, definitely.

DH: This dissertation is part of your journey, isn't it?

PK: Oh yeah. It's amazing. I didn't even realize that—

(End of audio)

Interview with Umi

PK: Okay, now I have a general format of questions. We'll try to deal with it as best we can. I realize it's going to be challenging. And so whatever comes out of it, that will be great. I really, I want to ask you about basically your spiritual journey and then the relationship you had with your teacher or teachers along the way. The work you do with your students. And then how your spiritual community has been apart of that.

Umi: Okay.

PK: Do you remember what it was that you were doing, or what you were involved in before you got on the spiritual path?

Umi: Are we recording?

PK: Yeah.

Umi: Oh good, okay. So as I said, it started when I was three. I left home. I was found walking along the railway track. And my mother brought me back. So this was the beginning of searching. As a child, I was always feeling there was something missing and that there was something going on in the world that didn't quite tally. And even, see we, we traveled a lot because the war, the second World War made us leave England and we came to America and we were evacuees and so therefore, there was very little money and we were looked after by different people, so we moved around a lot.

And I used to think there were always the same people, but it didn't make sense so there was always this question going on. And then when I became 12 I decided I wanted to become a Roman Catholic. I just love their singing. There was this Abbey near where we lived called Printage Abbey. And the chanting and the singing and the incense and the stained glass windows just intrigued me. I used to love going there for the music and for the incense and just for the whole feeling of the place and the monks in their white robes and there was something that really attracted me.

PK: Can you tell me more about what originally attracted you to this spiritual path?

Umi: Sure, I used to go and visit this priest and start learning all the things you have to learn to become a catholic. And then two days before the ceremony when I would be made into a Roman Catholic, I decided I couldn't do it. I went to the priest and said, "You know, I can't accept this Immaculate Conception. I can't accept that the wine becomes blood and that the bread becomes the actual flesh of Jesus. And

so many things that you accept, I can't accept. So, I'm not going to do it, finished."

And he was very upset, but I'd decided it would be dishonest. I'd be just going blindly into something that I didn't accept. But then my curiosity had become very strong so I went and read the Bible. I really studied the Bible from cover to cover. The Old and the New Testament and so on. And I said, "It's not here." The answer is not in the Bible. This is an interesting history of the Jews and there is all kinds of interesting things. I mean, there are some beautiful words and beautiful writing and beautiful stories, but it's not here, the answer wasn't here. So I read the Koran and I read the Bhagavad Gita, the poem of the Gita and so on and I still wasn't content.

So, I gave up. Now I'm a teenager and I said, "To hell with it. There is nothing. All these religions are nonsense." And so, I decided I wanted to be a cowboy. So, I was just going to do a very basic thing. So, on my 18th birthday, which is the age your allowed to be free, legally, I sailed from England to Canada. I hitchhiked across Canada. Got to Alberta and got a job on a ranch as a cowboy. So I rood the range and I did all the things that cowboys do. And after the season was over when the winter comes they lay off all the cowboys.

I said, "Well that's that. That's okay. I've finished with that." I didn't need to do that anymore. I'd enjoyed it. I'd enjoyed all the different aspects of cowboying at that time. And then I went, I decided that I would go into a lumber camp for the winter and I met this Indian and he said to me, "How would you like to work for me." And I said, "Doing what?" And he said, "Fishing." I said, "Fine." And then over a long journey, I didn't know what kind of fishing and I wasn't concerned, it just seemed interesting.

I finished up in place called Hay River, which is near the Artic Circle off on a lake called Great Slave Lake in the Northwest Territories of Canada and that winter, we started to go out onto the lake, which is frozen up to about five miles out. It's a big lake 350 miles across and we were fishing through the ice. And then one day a storm blows up and we drift off into the ice. And the Indian I was with died and the three dogs he had helped keep me warm and I stayed standing up and I knew that if I fell asleep I would die. And I'm 18, so I'm coming face to face with death. My companion had died and I was strong enough and young enough to be able to cope with the demand of the weather. And this was my really first thing about really wondering about death.

Because up till then it would have been a search of who am I, what is all this about and so on, but suddenly there is a finality which had occurred and I was out there two days and two nights and then drifted ashore and I was picked up by some trappers and taken to the nursing station in Hay River and recovered and so on. And I wrote a book about that called Beyond the Great Slave Lake, which expresses this, explains this whole adventure. And, but still I was very much into

doing my own thing and this went on now for many years from many different process I went through in getting married and having children and accumulating and going after the so-called American Dream.

And I eventually, after many adventures which would take many hours to tell you, I arrived at a situation where I was teaching at a college in London, Ontario, Canada. And I had a little hobby farm. We had organic garden and maple syrup trees and we had a river running through and I had this beautiful job. I had arrived. I had everything. I had two months vacation every year. I had an easy teaching job. I was training people to be recording engineers and record producers and I was running the program. I was the, sort of the person in charge of that program called music industry arts, still going.

And I was exploring with my students another level of working in the music business and I had been very involved with Marshall McLuhan and Buckminster Fuller. I don't know if those names mean anything to you.

PK: Yes, so these were your early years as a teacher. Can you also tell me about your own teacher or teachers and how that relationship began?

Umi: Yeah, so what I was teaching then was a deeper level of how to cope in the music business using some of the processes of these Buck Minister Fuller researched into what he called the Generalized Principles. Things that hold true under all circumstances and Marshall McCullen was about media, how the medium that you have predominately are using affects the senses and therefore changes your perceptual balance. And therefore, your concept of reality and therefore your values and so on, so I was teaching this.

One day a student comes to me and he says, "You might be interested in this book. It's similar to what you're saying, but just a little different." And he gave me this book and it was called *Cycle Therapy East and West*, by Allen Watts. So this is my introduction into Zen. I had, up until then I had been, I had put religion on the back burner in the search. I started to read about Zen and it was the first time I came across anything that didn't say you had to believe in something. I didn't have a dogma. And yet there was something really that touched me in this, in this writing from Allen Watts.

So, I went into the local bookstore and I started reading all these books on Zen, many, many different books on Zen. And then one day I'd go in there and I would find this little pamphlet with 10 discourses by a Japanese master called Joshu Sasaki Roshi. And I said, "I've go to go and see him." So in my two month vacation I got into my car and I drove down to Mt. Baldy, which is by LA and this man is still alive. He is about 100 now. Still down, there is a little Zen center down there. I went up in the mountain and I spent a month with him at that time Leonard Cohen was part of that center.

And I, we used to get up early in the morning and we'd sit and then there would be the sessions which we would do which would go for seven days and a session is you start at 3 in the morning and you go to 10 at night and you have a koan, are you familiar with a koan?

PK: Yeah, a phrase—

Umi: It's an illogical question.

PK: Oh, I see.

Umi: It's a question that cannot be answered logically, but it's a question, they say in zen, the question must become so intense that it's like a red, hot boiler stealing your throat. And so you work on the question and four times a day you go and see the master, four times. And so getting up at three, and between that and breakfast you have to go and see him and then between breakfast and lunch you go and see him and between lunch and supper you go and see him and then supper to going to bed at 10 you go and see him. Four times a day you've got to see him with this question.

And of course, every time you come up with some answer that your mind had created he says, "More zazen." Or he slaps his stick down or he gets angry with you or so on till eventually you don't want to go and the soji drags you, you have to go and see him with this question. And what eventually happens is, the mind literally stops and you have a satori. And this is, this is the most profound experience in the journey is your mind disappears and your so free and there is no attachment, there is no identification and you go and see him and he just sees, and he just says, "Okay, now you go and play." It's finished. It's like you've touched this thing.

Satori's don't last, they can last for hours, days, weeks, or sometimes months, but they do fade away. It's like looking through the window. You see outside, but you can't get outside through the window. So, you have the taste of outside, you have, your mind comes in there and then says, "I want more of that, how do I get it?" So, now the real emptiness for the search really begins with the satori. So, I went back, carried on teaching. Reading all these different zen books on my farm and feeling more and more discontented. More and more feeling there is something else, there is more to it than this.

I have obtained everything that the society says is what you should obtain. I have learned, and so, I remember walking by the river and the red winged black birds were singing. I mean, it was so idyllic and most people would have said, "Oh, this is wonderful." And I said, "No, no, this isn't it." And one day I go into the bookstore and I said, "You've got anymore books on zen?" He said, "You've read them all." And so I was leaving and as I was leaving he said, "But there is this guy in India, he keeps on writing these books." And I said, "Yeah, but does he

talk about zen.” He said, “He talks about everything.” I said, “Well, show me one of his books on zen.” So he brought me a book called *The Grass Grows By Itself*. And so I bought this book, brought it home and read it and I said, “Ah, here is a living master who understands the modern mind.” Because what I was doing was Roshi Joshi Sasaki was a 900-year-old Japanese mind. And it was fine for that, but here was a man who understood today’s mind. Because, the mind is always changing. The different cultures and different mind set and so I was really intrigued reading this and so I went back and I started buying all his books and reading them and reading them and so on.

And then one day I’m sitting in the living room in my farm and I’m looking at my book case and that all the books I’ve read of this man in India and I said, “Gee, I’ve spent a lot of money on his books. I wonder how much I’ve spent.” So I added it up and it was a ridiculous amount of money I’ve spent on buying his books. I said, “This is crazy. The man’s alive. Here I am reading his books. I’ve got to go. I’ve got to go to India.” So, I quit my job at the college. I call up the real estate people. I sell the farm and so on, get rid of everything. I had a lot of beautiful antiques. I sent them down to Sotheby’s in New York. Got rid of, cleared everything, just a backpack and some money in a money belt and went to India. I didn’t know what was going to happen or anything, but I was willing to cut all ties and my children were teenagers and so when I arrived in India, I had concepts of how this would be.

PK: So at this point did you have a vision of what the spiritual path was going to look like?

Umi: Yeah, but what I would have to do and how it would be.

PK: Oh okay.

Umi: I walked into the ashram and it was nothing like I imagined. I thought, “Oh my goodness, how is this going to work? How are we going to be?” But I just stayed there and I started going through the processes that had been arranged there for this work. And the meditations and there were groups and different experiences and so on. And so, this went on, I was there in India for two years and then the master moved to America and I followed him and eventually he died.

And then I was open not knowing what to do because no awakening had happened. There had been some satoris, yes, there had been satoris during that time, but no awakening.

PK: What was the ashram that you were at in India?

Umi: Osho.

PK: Osho, yeah.

Umi: And then, one day I think I was living in England. I was living in England, was I over here when you called me?

Umi: I had been coming back for these people in California, were bringing me over to do some kind of group work and so on, but I was living in England and the backs and forths. And Delphi called me up from England and said there is this young guy who, from Osho who has become awake and he is doing a satsang at this time, this date. I said, "I want to go." No question. His name was Mackie. He was from New Zealand and he was doing these satsangs and so on so I just became his disciple and worked with him and just totally was available to him, the whole secret of this work is to be available, totally available. You can't study it. You have to open and be willing to let go of all your concepts, all your beliefs, everything. And particularly, the things that you have created as a child for survival.

PK: Can you describe any changes in your perception or awareness that occurred? Or how do you see this process unfolding?

Umi: See, what happens is when your born you have a DNA program called survive. Every animal, every species has this program, survive, how, you don't know. The child doesn't know how to survive. The child has to learn and the programmers had to learn really quickly. And you learn from the parents and the people around. These big things must know how to survive, their so big. And so, you pick up not only words and behaviors, but emotions like some even happens and the parents are upset, it is teaching you to be upset. Something else happens and the apparent is excited, it's teaching you to be excited.

The child absorbs all these emotions and behavior and we call it character. We call it personality. But it's a program. It's like a computer program of the mind and then you have the different programs of different cultures, different countries and so on. So, all that process isn't real, but it is this thing about survival, so as you do this work what you get in touch with is fear of dying because your touching the very core of the structure you have created in your mind to survive and this is now, needs to be let go of, so the mind says, yeah, but you'll die. You have to do this and that.

At first, they seem just rational things that you are, I just keep this and I must do this and I like that and after a while you get down to really the core and that is when the real work begins. The willingness to say, I'll let that go. Buddha gave us three jewels about this process. He called them the three jewels. Now, the first one is I go to the feet of the awakened one. What that means is, I give up. I go to the awakened one and I said, "I don't know, but whatever you say, I do." Because the awakened one has no agenda.

See, the mind actually comes in and says, "Do you mean you are going to be subservient to a person?" No, that's not what happens when you go to the feet of the awakened one. Cause, there is no agenda. An ego, a person with an ego has an agenda once you've subservient to it. If you join the army, they want you to get rid of your personality so you become subservient to the sergeant, major or the general or whatever it is. There is no one there, so therefore, I go to the feet of the awakened one the first jewel. You lose all your concepts of how to be open and available.

PK: But this happened to you after trying almost everything.

Umi: Well, that's just cause I'm stupid. Somebody can be much more intelligent, I mean, it can happen to young people. You don't have to go through what I went through. You don't have to spend the amount of time I spend mediating. You don't have to do that. That is not a pre-requisite. It's just the more you can see the futility of everything, the quicker it will happen. So that is the first jewel. I go to the feet of the awakened one.

The next one is, I go to the feet of the Sangha. That is a hard one because the sangha is full of ego's. All people also trying and it's about surrendering to that. To really letting go of all that so this ego is happening and they're telling you to this and that and stuff and it is like, "Yes, okay. Yes, yes, yes." And what happens is all your processes, all your structures of survival start to dissolve. This opens you to the Buddha field. See what happens with an awakened one is there is a vibration and when you open you will get in tune with it, the same way that two strings that are turned the same way, when you strike will, the other one will start to vibrate. There is a sympathetic vibration it is called in physics that start to vibrate. And that, you become open, you become available and you start to pick up the energy in the Buddha field. That's the second jewel.

The third one is I go to the feet of the dharma. Now, the dharma is the natural law. It's not the law that Einstein and so on tried to figure out, it is the natural law. It's the law of what is happening. It is what the mind cannot grab. The mind cannot understand, science will never understand the dharma. It's the natural law, but it's what is happening every moment here. It is the natural flow and because the mind moves and jerks and tries to understand it suffers because it doesn't know how to flow with the natural law. It's as if you're in a river and your grabbing onto the bank all the time or pushing from stones instead of just lying on your back and floating down the river. That's the natural law of the flow of the river. This is the invitation.

So that is the process. So this is the work I was doing with Mackire. I was doing with Osho and then Mackire, this work of being available and going to the feet of the awakened one, going to the feet of the sangha and being available to go to the feet of a dharma. Most people want to take a short cut and go straight to the dharma, that is called the New Age. It doesn't work. It just becomes a mind trip

and a new concept and a new dogma and it's just the same as all the other institution religions. It doesn't do anything. And this is what I was doing.

And the thing is, as you become more open, the master will become more severe. Because there is not much left but you hang on dearly to what is left. You're like the drowning man hanging on to a straw. And so, with that, it becomes depending on how much you hang on, so it becomes difficult. It's been called the dark night of the soul, but the dark night of the soul doesn't have to be. You don't have to go through the dark night of the soul.

PK: But you went through a dark night. Is this the part of your journey where you had the most difficulty?

Umi: Oh, absolutely, absolutely.

PK: What was that like?

Umi: It is terrifying, but there is the same time, that's okay. That's okay. It is like there are two things, but you don't need to go through it. The way you don't go through it is you just say, "Okay." And if there is any resistance it is difficult. No resistance, no resistance at all and it is easy.

PK: But in your case, it was difficult. Did your teachers help you with this? I mean, did the master help you?

Umi: They are always helping you and sometimes you think they're not taking notice of me and that's the help.

PK: I see.

Umi: So, see, it's not, there isn't a formula, there isn't a technique. And what the master is doing works with the people that are with the master. What religions have done is they have said, "Okay, this is what the master said to these people, therefore this must be the way." And it is not, it was just for those people at that time. And now these people, it is totally different with these people at this time. It is always changing.

PK: Yeah, that makes sense.

Umi: You can't tie it down and therefore what was happening with Mackire and I was moment to moment. Unpredictable from my point of view. I didn't understand what was happening, but I knew something was happening. And then one day we were going to this place, there was a place called Glastonbury in England. And we were doing a satsang there and we went to the well. What is the well called? The Challis Well, and he was just doing this thing with the water and when he poured

the water over me, it's like everything disappeared and all I can say is, to use words because they don't really describe it is that it is like everything that I had hung onto, everything that had been of any relevance dissolved and all my lives came flashing through, all thousands of lifetimes came through.

They say when you die your whole flashes, when you awake, all your life times flash in front of you and it is such a joke. And I just started to laugh and laugh and laugh and laugh and I had to be helped back to our place because I was just in such joy in such euphoria, wow. And it was everything had gone and I could, it was such a joke. I mean, world and life is a joke, but nobody sees it. It is like in a sitcom. If you take a sitcom and you take all the laugh tracks out, it is pretty aggressive. If you, I used to do that with the students. I would take some sitcom and I would eliminate the laugh tracks and put only sounds in there where I could and play it.

And it is really disturbing listening to a sitcom without any laugh tracks.

PK: It is.

Umi: Yeah, because what we call awful or terrible or difficult or tragic and so on, is funny. It's really funny, but people don't see it unless you put it into a sitcom and you put the laugh tracks in.

PK: And so this experience by the well, what was that?

Umi: That was just the trigger. That was just the trigger. It was just the last thing. It was the, you know the straw that broke the camels back so to speak.

PK: How old were you at that point?

Umi: I don't know, how old was I? It was 1998, January the 10th, 1998.

PK: So 9 years ago.

Umi: I am 71 now.

PK: Oh, 60 maybe, no, you were like 62. You were 62. That is 9 years ago.

Umi: Yeah. So I mean, Osho it happened when he was 21. So it is nothing to do with years. It is nothing to do with time. There is no formula. It said that it happened with when he was a baby. You know, so you can't tie it down. It's, see what happens is that when you identify with the mind, the mind's energy forms different forms, according to what you believe and what you've suffered and what you've dreamed of and if you go into an old person's home and listen to what they are saying, they are talking about the past. They are talking about what they did, what they didn't do, what they wished they had done, what they regret. What they are

angry about. Who they're angry about and all these different things. It is all this, right.

And notice, they become very obsessive, in other words, the mind has got stronger and stronger. The body is getting weak and falling apart, but the mind has got stronger and stronger. I don't mean the intellectual mind. I don't mean that they would be good at mathematics or something, but just this aspect of it has become more and more obsessive.

PK: Yeah.

Umi: When you die, this energy is what goes into a womb. So this is what you bring from lifetime to lifetime is the energy of the mind. It's a very powerful energy that you bring into the womb and so, if you do work in a lifetime and this starts to open, that comes back and that's how it can be at a different age, depending on how much you need, what have you brought? What fears have you brought? What mindset are you carrying with you? What prejudices are you, not thought prejudices, but just what things that you look at a little child, they have, they already have something they've brought with them. There's a difference. Any mother will tell you that all their children come different when they are babies, in fact, that effects and with that, you're attracted or against whatever is happening. You move in this direction, as well as the influence of the parents.

So this is the mind that goes from generation to generation.

PK: From your current experienced point of view how would you describe where you are at on the spiritual path?

Umi: Dissolved.

PK: Do you mean your mind, in 1998--It dissolved.

Umi: Totally dissolved.

PK: Has it returned in a way?

Umi: It is now, now it is just a tool.

PK: Oh. Hmm.

Umi: Put it away, most of the time I put it away. I need it, I bring it out, use it.

PK: Yeah, I mean, we couldn't have this conversation without it, right?

Umi: Yeah, exactly. So were bringing it out.

PK: Yeah.

Umi: If I want to go shopping, use the mind. What do we need, go and write it down, push the cart, okay, here it is, this is all mind. This is what the mind is for. It is very useful for this, but when you start using the mind for the meaning of life for, who I am and so on, you get lost.

PK: Or come up with very creative things.

Umi: Yeah, yeah.

PK: That's for sure.

Umi: But real creativity, there is two kinds of what we call creativity, there is mind creative, which is usually replicating something else or variations on a theme. And then there is true creativity which just comes through when your not. Just from the—

PK: Yeah spontaneous.

Umi: Yeah, it's been called inspiration, it's called, some people say it happens in the night. It can happen when you doing something, suddenly it comes. And it's, it's not a thought. Einstein said that the greatest things happened, like when he was a child he used to imagine riding on sunbeams, what would that be like to ride on this sunbeam. To become part of the light. He used to play with this idea. And he said, when he was an adult one day he was sitting on the hill and these sunbeams came through the clouds and so on and suddenly he got relativity. Suddenly it came.

He wasn't, he wasn't trying to figure it out and doing a lot of laborious mental stuff, he just suddenly came. Then the mind comes in afterwards and puts in a language and puts it in some kind of order and so on. It is the same of the inspiration of the poet, then he has got to use the words and so on and the mind, the mind becomes a tool. But then what happens with a creative person is they want that back. And so it's very stressful for them because they're not having it. They're not having it all the time. They're not living there.

That is why so many creative people drink or take drugs and so on and have such a dramatic life, or like Van Gough, eventually kill themselves and so on because they have these moments and then it's gone and they use the moments, but then it's gone. And if they were with the master, see the master would take them through that, through these processes until the awakening. With the awakening, it is finished.

PK: Do you still have a master?

Umi: No.

PK: No?

Umi: My Osha is dead and Mackire is gone back to New Zealand and is not working with anybody.

PK: Hmm.

Umi: Masters do that. Bodhi Dhama one day left China, he was, he was last seen walking towards the Himalayas with one sandal on his head.

PK: That's a great image.

Umi: Yeah, yeah, they thought they had buried him and somebody said, no, no, you didn't bury him. I saw him walking through the Himalayas with a sandal on his head. And they said, "Yeah, but we buried him here." So then went down and they dug up the grave where there was an opened the coffin and all there was, was the other sandal. So nobody knows.

PK: Wow, so you know, here you are. You've arrived at this state, or at this experience and now you work with students like myself and the people that arrive at your satsang. And what do you do with us? Are you trying to accomplish anything with your students?

Umi: Well, first of all, I teach you to meditate. And meditating is being a witness so the first step is to watch the breath. Just watch the breath. And when you sit with your eyes closed watching the breath without breathing and without stopping the breath, just watching naturally as it goes in and out, then you find yourself off in thoughts. And then you come back and watch the breath, and then your off in thoughts. And you get better and better at being with the breath and less and less thoughts. It gets easier and easier to doing, and we do this every morning. We sit here for an hour and just, with our eyes closed and just watch.

And what you're doing is your stilling the inner because the inside right inside it is stilled and then there is this chaos around of thinking, of fears, of concerns, of desires, of excitement and so on. And it is like allowing that to settle. It is like if you have a bottle of water that is muddy, just let it settle. It will slowly settle. If you get impatient with it, try to push it down, you make it muddy again. So, it's like that. And then, then we do very simple things. Now we do gardening and fixing up the house and simple things taking that same watching into the activities.

PK: What if, what if one of the students is very advanced, like say you were when you arrived at the feet of your master?

Umi: Uhmhm.

PK: It's in a very different state than suppose myself walking in needing this more, rudimentary exercise, right?

Umi: Uhmhm.

PK: What would you do with such a student that arrives and he is actually at your feet?

Umi: Just be here and do what we're doing and if they are more open, then they get more.

PK: I see. So the teaching would be the same. But the experience of the person is very different.

Umi: Uhmhm. It's like, it's the same as you take a flower to a group of people, they will all have a different experience depending on them.

PK: Do you yourself have a spiritual practice anymore?

Umi: I'm, it's all the time, 24 hours a day.

PK: But you don't have to do like in your early days of sesshin.

Umi: I, we come and sit here every morning. We sit here. And then we have the satsang.

PK: But is it different for you sitting here like everybody else?

Umi: Different than what?

PK: Than say in your early days when you had—

Umi: But then there was a lot of mind going on and a lot of agitation and a lot of desire, yeah, and that doesn't exist anymore.

PK: Yeah.

Umi: The third Zen patriarch Sozan said, "The great way is not difficult for those that have no preference." That's it in a nutshell.

PK: Now we're back to here.

Umi: Yes.

PK: Yeah.

Umi: But Sozan says that the great way is not difficult for those that have no preference. It is preference that drives you crazy. See, if you have no preference, you're here. If somebody says, go here, okay. So this happens, okay. Earthquake happens, the building falls down, okay. And you start picking things up. See, there are no problems, there are only facts. Right? If a stone comes through the window, you do what is necessary, you jump out of the way or you do whatever. An earthquake happens, you do what's necessary in the moment. And the more you're in the moment you will do what's necessary. But most of the time people are in the past or the future.

They're remembering the past and they are trying to take what they liked about the past and have it more of that in the future. What they didn't like about the past and avoiding that in the future. And therefore they are worrying or they are getting excited and they are missing the moment.

PK: We're all coming in here in this condition, right?

Umi: Yeah.

PK: And so, what is the, do you see your students come through a similar kind of a progress?

Umi: Umhm.

PK: Of dealing with this predicament.

Umi: It depends on what has happened with them before. Some don't go through certain places, some do and so on. The thing is that each one brings their own thing with them. It is like, if you're teaching students at a university. A good teacher starts with the student, not with the subject. I'll give you an example. When I was at school, I was very good at mathematics. I didn't like mathematics. So, my mathematics teacher asked me, he says, "What are you interested in?" And I said, "Square rigged sailing ships." You know what they are the old fashioned square rigged sailing ships, with the big square rigs, three masts and so on.

PK: Yeah, yeah.

Umi: I used to draw them. I knew all the names of the sails and so on and I would read books about them sailing around the world and so on, the old romantic stories and so on. And he said, "Okay," said, "Now you're a captain of one of these ships, okay, you're a captain. And you've got to take some, you've got to go from South Hampton to Bombay and you've got to pick up tea and spices and all kinds of things in India, right, and bring that back. How you gonna get there.

And so I said, "Well, would go around here." I showed him the map, I'd go here. And he said, "Yeah, but see, you could have gone right across here. You would have had to follow the coast line, besides the coast line is dangerous, storm, you can get washed on the rocks." Said, "Go around, across there." How you gonna do that? I said, "I don't know." He said, "You realize when you get out so many miles you cant see anything it is just water all around you, would you know what direction to go?" I said, "No." He said, "Would you like me to show you how you would know?" I said, "Sure." He started to teach me navigation and trigonometry. Way ahead, no one else was learning trigonometry. I started to learn trig, got really excited. Now I can know how to navigate a ship, right? This is you start with a student.

PK: I see, absolutely.

Umi: Yeah, yeah.

PK: Yeah, absolutely. So this is the way that you approach your students.

Umi: Yeah.

PK: Meeting at the student-

Umi: Where ever they are we go from there.

PK: Oh.

Umi: And nobody is encouraged to be here. Nobody is discouraged to be here. If they're here and they want to work, fine. They get whatever, whatever is happening. And if somebody wants to go, fine they are welcome to leave because there is no agenda. See, there is no, nothing to obtain. That's the difference. See, when you go to college you want to obtain something. You want a degree so you get a job so you can make money, so you can buy a good house and have a family and live a certain lifestyle so you can get a pension.

PK: Right.

Umi: There is all these goals. But here, when you do this work, you don't obtain anything, you lose everything. It's about letting everything go, because what you want you already have. But, it's covered and it is just a matter of letting all that go. So, you bring all the rubbish and you give it to the master. All your rubbish. If you're having emotional problems, bring it to the master.

PK: Yeah. Would you call this-

Umi: Satsang.

PK: The satsang and the people that are—

Umi: The sangha. The sangha.

PK: The sangha.

Umi: And sangha is a community around an awakened one, it is called a sangha. Satsang is being near the truth.

PK: There seems to be a sangha developing around you.

Umi: Yeah. It has been going for now since '99. It started in San Francisco.

PK: But originally you were part of a sangha.

Umi: Yeah, and my master told me, “You go to America and give satsangs.” Wow, that’s scary. I said, “Okay.” Because he told me to do that so I came and did it.

PK: So do you have a vision at this point of what, what is going to happen?

Umi: No. No. It is not important. See, there is, it is evolving the way it should in every possible way. Everything is perfect. There is no imperfection unless you have an ideal. And there is no ideal. Ideals always create stress. It is when you have an ideal and things don’t match up to it, you become tense. So there is no ideals in truth.

PK: You said, you said that this wasn’t going work, that this method of inquiry might not amount to anything. I forget what you said right in the beginning that this might not, it wouldn’t reveal what I was looking for, but something is happening to me just sitting here in this conversation. Something is occurring.

Umi: But that is because of what is happening to you. It is not because of the mind.

PK: I’m not sure what is happening to me.

Umi: See, there are two kinds of awakened ones. There are people that wake up and they just remain silent. They just carry on with what they are doing. They don’t say anything and they just carry on. And then there are the ones who decide to speak and work with people. And then the majority of so-called awakened ones are phony. They have, they have studied, they know the words and so on, but it is not coming out of them. It’s not their experience so when their with a situation of working all they can do is fall back on the thoughts, on the concepts.

PK: So all of your experience that got you to where you’re at is what’s informing you to do?

Umi: No.

PK: What does inform you to—

Umi: I have no idea. It is just with no mind it comes, it just comes. It comes through.

PK: Ah, like those moments of creativity you were talking about.

Umi: It is a continual moment of creativity.

PK: Oh, fascinating.

Umi: Yeah, all that happened before was to let all of what happened before go.

PK: You don't miss the attachment to things like wanting a new white Mercedes or wanting your youth back? No? You don't miss all of that?

Umi: Because there is no identification with a me. There is no experience of a person. There is no, there is only a presence here. Buddha called it, "Tufeta." Suchness. Just this, here. That is all there is. I mean, in this moment. There is hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, it is all these things that are happening. But try to find somebody that's doing it, you have to create a thought.

You have to create an illusion. You have to create a concept called There is no experience of I. Descartes said, "I breathe, therefore, I am." But he is already in the eagle. There is no I there's just this, me. But what is really happening is just happening. See our language deceives us. We've created this illusion called nouns. There is no such thing as a noun. Physics has discovered that nothing is static and everything is always changing. I mean, the glass in your window is continually falling. They find the bottom gets thicker and thicker and the top gets thinner and thinner, nothing is static. Everything is changing and moving. There is no such thing as a tree. It is treeing, it is a process. It is processing, nothing is static, but this is our language has created this concept with nouns. You know, there's a tribe that lives on the water off Burma and they have no word in their languages for want. No word in their language for goodbye or hello. They're just here. They just live now.

PK: Wow.

Umi: See, the language creates the difficulty.

PK: I see that.

Umi: The langue programs you.

PK: In this conversation right here. I actually, intellectually, completely understand what your saying. I have no idea what that experience is like.

Umi: Yeah, yeah.

PK: I'm used to having my language be coherent with what I feel and what I've done and where I'm at and this concept that you're speaking about is incongruent with what I know.

Umi: Yeah, and yet you know it.

PK: I do know it.

Umi: Yeah, exactly.

PK: I do.

Umi: But and every culture lives in a different mindset. Like for example, we take the word sun and we take the experience and then we make word SUN and then we take letters and we take one for su-uh-un and we write that and we say, that is how I write this experience, put it on paper. And we do the same with moon. You know how they do it in Chinese language? They do a picture. The picture looks it is a square with a line through it. It looks more like a sun. Moon, it is one line a little line, a little squiggle and looks like a half, like a crescent moon, so they have those two sides. Now, what they do, how they write the experience of bright is they put the sun and the moon together. That's the word in Chinese for bright. Is written with the sun and the moon together.

You see how different their mindset is going to be if you're brought up reading that way and learning that way than if you're brought up with the phonetic alphabet. It is going to totally, totally change your mindset.

PK: But the mindset would change, the creation of the mind absolutely still persists though.

Umi: Yeah.

PK: Either way.

Umi: Yeah.

PK: Right?

Umi: Yeah.

PK: Then leading us to this original predicament.

Umi: Yeah.

PK: That I came in with and I'm gonna leave with. Oh wow. Even so, I know you felt like it wasn't going to work, something is working.

Umi: No, no, I just wanted to eliminate some of the intellectual concepts that were in the way.

PK: Oh right, that was in my request. That is where I scratched out my original letter and wrote, "I'm having problems with assumptions. I need your help." I had typed up this letter on this CIIS letterhead. I felt, oh, this really represents where I'm at. You know, I thought, this is a great letter and then I sat in here and by the end of satsang I was like oh, this is ridiculous. My concept of this whole spiritual path needs revision.

Umi: And if it all goes, that is fine too. I mean, there is the beautiful story of the Sothian lightened master who was a beggar. And he was, he was just working in the street with people and so on, but he was begging and so on. He had nowhere to live and one day the king really likes him and says, "I want you to live with me. I don't want you to be living out here. I want you to come with me."

He says, "Okay." So he takes him into the palace and he gives him lovely clothes and he gives him a beautiful room and so on and he is there enjoying all these wealthy clothes and things and he even goes and sits on the throne and talking to the people and doing the things and so on and one day the king says to him, "What's the difference between you and me. You've got the same luxury I have. You've got the same respect from the people I have. You've the same beautiful food and the same beautiful people to be with and so, what is the difference between you and me? I thought you were an enlightened master."

He said, "Come with me. I'll show you the difference." He says, "Come with me." So they go for a walk. They go for a walk and come to the edge of the kingdom and there is a little stream with a bridge over. The Sothian master takes off his robes underneath he has his old rags on and he says, "I'm going across, come with me. Let's go off into the wilderness together." He says, "I can't do that. I've got a kingdom to run." He says, "That's the difference." And off he goes. No attachment.

Umi: As long as the master's alive and as long as this is working the master will be here. If the master dies then one of two things can happen. It can all dissolve and fall apart or it can become some stupid institution. Some memory thing. Or if there is not enough people here, the master may go somewhere else, wherever is happening because it's just like the master puts out his banquet and says, "Your welcome to share. You don't have to eat it, but your welcome to share." And if there is nobody there then it's fine.

PK: Oh wow. Well, I'm so thankful that you gave me this time to do this and I don't know what will come of it, but I will definitely share with you the results of my study and we can have a big laugh about it.

Umi: Sure, and come back any time.

PK: Okay, thank you.

[End of audio]

Interview with Jon Bernie

PK: Let me just tell you basically what I'm going to ask you about and how I'm going to direct this and then how it actually goes we'll just see how it actually goes.

Jon: OK.

PK: Essentially I'm going to ask you about your own spiritual journey and your teacher's influence, and your work as a teacher, and how a spiritual community has played any part in that and-

Jon: When you say spiritual community do you mean my own or do you mean the communities that I've been a part of in my journey or both?

PK: Well that's the next part I want to ask you about these four areas when you first figured out that you were on a spiritual path or before or when you were figuring it out and then your relationship to being a teacher, and then your own journey where you are at right now, and then just potentially what has shifted between your expectations in the beginning and where you are at now.

Jon: Well let's see 15 hours from now, how much time do you have on that thing. I think that we can narrow it down to about an hour, but if not you know I like to tell stories, you don't know me. I'm a schmoozer

PK: Well let's see how far we can get.

Jon: Cool whatever, go for it.

PK: OK so do you remember what you were doing before you got on the spiritual path? And perhaps what first attracted you to spiritual investigation?

Jon: Sure I do. I was 11 years old. Actually when I was four I remember looking up at the stars and saying what's going on here. And when I was 11 I found myself arguing about the existence of god with the Sunday school teacher cause I wasn't buying it. I was also a concert violinist. And I came home and told my mother that I was not going to Sunday school anymore cause I was too busy practicing the violin. And at 11 I became an agnostic and I decided that when I saw god I'd believe it. And I also felt that all my friends and their respective religions were being brainwashed. So that's what was going on at 11. By the time I got to be 16 I was reading every bit of existentialism that I could get my hands on. And that led me to a sense of questioning the meaning of life. Here I was a straight A student, concert violinist, on my way to Stanford medical school very high achieving. I felt like I was basically working really hard in school and didn't

really know why I was doing this. Didn't really understand what my life was about. And I look back and nothing made sense to me and so that is when the journey started. I was not religious and I knew nothing about meditation. But basically to make it very quick. A series of inner explorations which were not influenced from adults or anything I was reading led me to a profound spiritual awakening that happened at 16 and changed my whole life.

PK: At 16.

Jon: Yes well between 16 and 17. At that point I started meditating I was drawn to meditation I was drawn to Raja Yoga, Kundalini Yoga there wasn't very much written there wasn't a lot available at this point. And then I started doing by the time was 19 I was doing three hours of Yoga a day I was in college but I dropped out and hitch hiked across the country. I was looking for some kind of spiritual community and at the time my dad was playing golf with Mike Murphy who started Esalen they were friends and Mike was over for dinner and he said why don't you go to the Zen center. So that's how I got to the first practice place that I went to was the san Francisco Zen center which is a half a block from this apartment. Cause I've lived in this apartment since I moved back from Tassajara in 1978 which is a Buddhist monastery. So my spiritual practice began with Zen training from Suzuki Roshi's lineage. And I was eventually lay ordained in that tradition. I was meditating a tremendous amount doing sasshin and basically was living there. And then after the awakening that I had when I was 16. I don't know if you want to interrupt me. Do you want to ask me something?

PK: Yeah I do. When you were 16 did you get any idea of what this spiritual path was going to look like from then on?

Jon: What happened as a result of that opening which happened over a period of four months? It was basically an enlightening experience. It wasn't enlightenment, but it was an enlightenment experience which meant that the experience of presence. I didn't know what had happened to me then, I didn't know what happened till I was 20. When I met Anne Armstrong who is a very well known and respected psychic got what happened and she told me what had happened to me. I didn't know and it wasn't until I met John Klein who was the first realized teacher that I had a relationship with who embodied the truth that I realized what had happened to me. Cause he was living and coming from that place of awareness but that is what awakened. I profoundly awakened at 17. So I felt and saw the light which was very clear and very powerful and also my life had complete meaning my whole history when I looked back as far as I could remember everything made sense to me. And I felt the trajectory into the future and have felt guided ever sense then. So those were the things that shifted from that awakening. I knew also that I had a lot of Karma cause I was hip to that term and that I had a lot of cleaning up to do. I spent a long period of time after that in various practices and therapy where I was in a sense working on my self.

PK: So that's why from this awakening at 16 you went on and you said you...

Jon: It was very clear to me and then I realized when I became steeped in these traditions I knew that I wanted to be free. That was the most important thing to me in my whole life in the work that I developed and way that I was in the world was completely oriented around that focus. Most of my life.

PK: All these practices they were so you could be free?

Jon: Well in other words my private practice what I did for a living I was self employed so that I could go off and do pilgrimage I could go on retreats I was living basically as a monk in the world. I chose not to be a priest. I didn't want to do that. I didn't want to wear that drag; I really wanted to be an ordinary person. One of the influences that I had had while growing up in my spiritual training was Sri Aurobindo in the "life divine". And I really felt that living in the world was really what I wanted. I really wanted to find the lived path and find the truth and be transformed in the world not in a cave or a monastery/ I did that and I did that lifestyle for a long time so I know what that's like it was valuable and really helpful and there is no question about it but I realize that my path was in the world.

PK: Did you get an idea of where your spiritual journey was headed?

Jon: No I think that real awakening is that you don't live in the realm of conclusion it's not possible. I know that I had preconceived ideas but those eventually got blown away one after another and people who have to hang on to belief structure get very rigid in religious traditions. I have never been a follower and I have never been a believer just like when I was 11 that's why I told you that story. I'm still not and I don't attract students who are either. I attract people like my self who think for themselves and don't need some authority to tell them what's happening. I mean we can talk about the role of teacher. I really encourage people to find the path within themselves not to follow me or some teaching. That's not the way it works ultimately. I mean following a teacher or a way for a while can be very important, but eventually that all has to be dropped

PK: Is that what you do with a beginning student? When some body arrives?

Jon: Usually I get pretty mature students I've found, people who have been around the block quite a bit. Done a lot of therapy a lot of spiritual practice there usually pretty mature. I'm not saying that I have a preconceived idea I just meet each person as they are and then we find out pretty quickly what's appropriate for them.

PK: Can we talk about that for a minute?

Jon: We can talk about anything you want to talk about. I'm sure you will sort all this out.

PK: Well so-

Jon: Can I say something?

PK: Please.

Jon: My idea of so-called spiritual practice and enlightenment when I first started Zen practice. When I finally met John Klein was completely turned on its head and turned 180 degrees my understanding shifted 180 degrees. Whereas prior to that it was all about effort and trying and it was really ego based. And after that I realized that it was one hundred percent effortless. But that doesn't happen till one has become really profoundly awakened. And has become established in awakened consciousness. Then those are just concepts and there is no way one can understand that. Cause it's not a concept to understand it is experiential it has to be experienced to be understood otherwise it's just another spiritual concept.

PK: So is that why when you were 19 you were doing 3 hours of Yoga a day?

Jon: All of that I mean there was value in that and there was value in doing 18 hours a day when I was in Sesshin and every day of my life for god knows how many years of my life doing at least three to six hours a day of meditation on a zafu. I literally meditated for years; I spent years on a zafu. Years and years sure, and I'm sure it was valuable. But ultimately what I'm saying is along the way when you said what was your perspective initially and how did it change it completely changed. All the way to the point that it disappeared and even you know there are god knows how many books in that room on the shelf that I never look at anymore, all the spiritual books I read you know and I needed that just people do along the way they need the help that kind of help but I got to a point where that didn't help anymore.

You get to a certain point where the path is right in your face, it isn't on a page, it's not coming out of some bodies mouth it's right in your face. Any way again every person whether they are just starting or they are absolutely at the end or so to speak at some major transition of transformation it's always the same. It's no different for the beginner or the advanced it's opening to what's in front of you it's being available to what's being giving that's what surrender means. Like in Zen they say beginners mind which is a mind that is open and ready it's available it doesn't have preconceived idea about what's happening it doesn't have a filter getting in the way of direct experience. So ultimately this idea of being enlightening people say well what are you? I have absolutely zero identity about that and being a teacher those don't exist for me. See and as John Klein said that when there is no one taking themselves to be a teacher and no one taking themselves to be a student then teaching takes place and that is the high level of

transmission teaching and that is only understood when one is awakened and one is available to that extent of unity or oneness then that makes sense otherwise it's like what the hell are they talking about or they project something that they think it means. Right. I mean that's what psychology does. I mean you are going to put it into some kind of frame. Any way I'm sorry I hope this is useful for you.

PK: This is perfect. I'm going to continue with this frame of inquiry that I intended to start with even though it's very rapidly becoming apparent that your current experience is definitely not (pause) I'm just having a difficult time even continuing with this interview.

Jon: [Laughing] good.

PK: [Laughing] I'm going to continue with the interview anyway.

Jon: See I don't have the identity of teacher and I don't see the people with me as students, that is not what's happening for me. I mean I know that it's not like I'm stupid or ignorant or unaware that that may be some peoples perception and I try to respect that but that's not my experience.

PK: I'm going to have to still refer to teacher and student.

Jon: That's fine whatever you want, I know the limits of what you are doing, I respect that.

PK: Well you have mentioned so many teachers that have influenced you and your experience and so how have all these teachers helped you along-

Jon: Oh great they have all been important every one of them.

PK: Have you had any significant difficulties along the way?

Jon: With teachers?

PK: Do you remember having significant difficulties and then how did you overcome them?

Jon: What do you mean significant difficulties? [Laughing] You mean like being human. Like being a human being and having suffering I mean who doesn't suffer as a human being are you kidding me. Of course. I mean I'm a fairly functioning person, I'm intelligent, I'm healthy, I did years of psychotherapy too, I did a lot of work on my self. Emotional work, and physical therapy, and body work and not to mention all the spiritual work I was coming at this from every angle possible. I needed all the help I could get. I had all kinds of challenges: physical challenges, emotional changes, psychological challenges, energetic challenges I had all kinds of things along the way that I had to face and learn how to be available to and

work with and allow and be transformed by and be broken down by I mean it was a huge range of things, Yes.

PK: Yes, and so did you overcome them on your own by some natural means or did you seek guidance from teachers.

Jon: What do you mean overcome on my own?

PK: These struggles, difficulties.

Jon: I think it's important to first make a distinction between the so-called human process or the process of our humanity and the process of our organism our actual physical organism and also the spiritual process, which is. Not separate from that at all which is contrary to many people's belief structures and I think people get very confused with this stuff. They start confusing spiritual dynamics with psychodynamics and various things so as far as the human side of my experience had tremendous help from therapists who helped me with my mind and my emotional body and wide range of areas I haven't even talked about that it's not even in my bio, but it definitely was important for my spiritual path my physical health and emotional health were very important for my spiritual path, because the thing that prevents people from moving into the truth of who they are is the wounded parts of themselves that are still in the dark. And that is why where some people can develop spiritually in some ways but they are lopsided and they don't know certain aspects of themselves and certain parts are not developed emotionally and they end up acting out. And we have heard so many stories of teachers who abuse people and take advantage and are horrific and they are still out there doing it and people go how is that possible I thought they were enlightened. Well yeah they have a lot of spiritual power and a lot of charisma but it doesn't mean you should trust them, Right, so yes there were lot of obstacles emotionally all kinds of early wounding stuff that had to be faced and worked with in a range of ways so that all those therapists were very spiritual people they weren't enlightened but they were very awakened and had a deep spiritual understanding. They were very important people along the way. And some of those people were psychotherapist and other alternative therapists and various kinds of hands on healers so there was a range of that and then there were the spiritual teachers and the first batch of them were not realized, they were good they were useful they were good technicians and they had a certain understanding and I benefited from it but it wasn't until I met who I considered my first realized teacher and that was Jon Klein and at that part there was no more struggle, well there was no more efforting on the path there was still suffering there was still reactivity there was still all that stuff, so various teachers along the way provided feedback but at that point I benefited greatly from the presence of their embodied clarity. So I utilized that energetic space to supercharge my own energy system to allow it to move forward but my then I already knew how it worked. John really basically pointed out to me very experientially and in a very intimate way how it

worked and that I understood that. So it's just that you need to hang in there and it will finish itself.

That happened a long time ago but it wasn't done then just the clarity of how the path really worked was absolutely clear. And that was probably back in 1988 or 87 maybe and it took along time after that, and had various teacher I was with Punda ji in India and Robert Adams in Sedona another really close disciple of Ramana Maharshi and probably Adyashanti were the main people, Adya I became quite close and I was pretty far along at that point and didn't need much didn't need much feed back. So everybody gives you something and even I realized that some of them were giving it to me back then I just couldn't hear it I wasn't ready to really get it. The truth is it keeps happening there is no end to this stuff there is no location called freedom the energy of being just keeps on expanding. And the mystery keeps on unfolding and anybody who is truly a student of the mystery realizes that they don't have a clue of what's going on. Any body who tells you they know what's going on I would say please excuse me I need to run the other way as fast as possible. I think anybody who is really honest about the process will tell you that it's a mystery that we are one with this infinite mystery of the universe. You think people really know what's going on, give me a break.

PK: So there are a lot of people that continue to influence you and continue to be a teacher if I can say that, can I say that at this point?

Jon: Every moment is a teaching there aren't any more teachers, I wouldn't even put it in those terms anymore. There is no separation anymore.

PK: I don't quite get that even though when you said it before I got it intellectually but now where we are at. I don't get that there is no distinction between teacher and disciple. Well you said that there is no more student and there is no more teacher.

Jon: I said that the true teaching takes place when there is no more identity of teacher or student functioning. As long as you feel like you are there and I'm over here, it ain't happening. That is some intellectual process call learning which is not what I'm talking about at all. That is not what I'm talking about. Yes there is that kind of learning and that quite OK and maybe that's what you do when you learn facts and you gather information and you process it and integrate it in some way but I'm not talking about that I'm talking about a much deeper process, it's not verbal.

PK: And that's what happened when you first met that awakened teacher.

Jon: It is what happened when I was 16 before I met any teacher.

PK: Oh I see, OK.

Jon: And that is the truth of what we all are and until one has that experience what I'm talking about makes no sense at all or is turned into something that it isn't. And

that is the problem with most spirituality and most religious people is they basically turn the truth into something it isn't. And that's why we people killing each other beliefs called I have the truth. And you are the infidel and I'm going to kill you that's why people do that

PK: From the fundamental misunderstanding?

Jon: You either get it or you don't. In Zen they say if you don't have it we will give it to you and if you do we will take it away and then the teacher hits you over the head with a stick and tells you to go wash your bowl.

PK: Well, has your personal experience shaped your perception and the way that you teach?

Jon: Completely and it keeps, that keeps happening and there isn't any thing out there doing it, there is no one out there doing it so all I'm saying is the process of expansion that leads to the end of suffering most people relate to enlightenment. Most spiritual paths that are out there that are in this direct teaching there are all talking about enlightenment, they are all saying freedom. They are talking about freedom from suffering, what does that mean? Does that mean freedom from being a human being, no? It means not struggling with what is anymore which means not trying to hold on to it not trying to get rid of it not trying to figure it out. Those are the three basic realms of how people suffer. Freedom is the end of that that doesn't exist anymore. Why? Because One doesn't identify with ego as who one is anymore. When one fully embodies awakened consciousness one is not identified as ego anymore that is the end of it ego is just a function it isn't real. That is not a concept to believe in. It's useless it doesn't help. So once that has happened that's the end of suffering. That process of energy and connected sense of when one is consciousness aware of itself and one perceives everything as consciousness which is not separate from one self. It's not a concept. It's actually experienced, it's an intimacy. That's the reality that I perceive in.

PK: Well I saw you doing that at satsang with your students and that was a very unique interaction. I had not seen it before and I want to know more about what it is that you do with your students and where you are going with this.

Jon: Nothing I don't do anything. It does it. I don't do anything. Well I'm teasing you a little bit, but I'm telling you the truth too. Because actually this awareness is not it's not willed it is what we are. A teacher is basically a mirror of what you already are so if you are in a struggle in a psychological struggle that is what you will experience even here. So if you come to satsang or even here and you are uncomfortable there is something going on. That presence is light and will illuminate that which is resisting or having a hard time. You can feel it in your body. I know I'm aware of it. (Jon is referring to an uncomfortable feeling I am experiencing) So this cant not be a teaching situation ultimately even though you are interviewing me cause you have a deep longing for the truth otherwise you

wouldn't be doing this I don't think. If you are willing to face what is coming up in you right now. Then you find the doorway to this big realm and I'm here with you whoever whatever one hundred percent. I don't have an agenda. I don't have a this is what is supposed to happen I'm not in outcome mind I'm not in a linear realm of thinking I'm not in thinking at all. There is no thinking going on about this, none. When I go to teach I have know idea what's going to come out of this mouth

PK: You don't have a plan?

Jon: Never, some one said to me, actually this friend of my who is a psychologist asked me, so do you do lesson plans, I said what? What are you talking about; she has no idea what I do. Crack me up. No of course not. Once in a while if I'm on retreat and there is a whole theme cooking and there may be some inspiration that comes through and I will come and talk about it. But no I don't plan it ever.

PK: Has your own evolution that has come along with all of these numerous awakenings instructed a very original interaction with people?

Jon: There was guidance like I said it was not planned. I had no idea that I was going to meet all these people. Seems to be true and people feel that actually and that's why they are writing a book and doing all this stuff, it's all in the early stages but we have got a non profit organization there is a lot of ground work happening and it's helping people. People are saying it's helping real transformation happening. It's beautiful, so it seems to be working.

PK: What is going on?

Jon: *[Laughing]* Good! Good, I don't know if it will help you with your dissertation, but that is good. Because if you did know that could probably get in the way. If you knew what was going on you would know more than I do, you already do know more than I do I'm sure. *[Laughing]* I mean we can conceptualize it and I've got a fairly highly developed analytical mind and I could give you some analysis that would satisfy your cognitive interests and you could write about it and we could talk about it on that level to some degree, but I don't know how useful that is.

PK: I'm doing my best to pull the reins in on this conversation and keep it in alignment with the questions I came in with, but, I'm...

Jon: But you are finding out that you cant on some level

PK: I'm finding out actually sitting with you that I....

Jon: It might be useful having this experience in terms with how you proceed with your project. So you got various information from various other people how you

have been interviewing, but ultimately what are you really doing? What is this about ultimately? See you are in a deep spiritual space, you do tune in. you really do understand what I'm talking about and this is you. You know I remember when Pundit ji said to me he says I am yourself, I am yourself. See Guru actually means true self. And so when they say you are not separate from the guru, they mean you are not separate from your true self, not the dude up on the stage, and if you have that projection going on then you will have to work through that at some point. You get this, you do deeply understand experientially. And that understanding is what John Klein called being understanding. And then he said live in not knowing cause being understanding is living in not knowing. It's awake. It isn't struggling with what I have to understand it's this you are open. See?

PK: I suppose I am witnessing something.

Jon: So my job as a teacher if you will is if somebody is struggling emotionally, physically my job is to help them bring compassion and very much like in therapy and acceptance which is really the essence of psychotherapy is acceptance to the struggle and in that there is an emotional healing often a psychological healing and a spiritual opening. So that is where the transpersonal is. That is where it steps off into the infinite realm of complete human being. Complete actualized human being. Means human being and spiritual being simultaneously. So in some ways it's no different from what psychotherapy does. But it is coming from this perspective of wholeness and this deep sense and how great that you have this awareness cause when you are a therapist how great for your clients that you will be able to be seen. At the level that you are able to see. Even regardless of whether you become free or not doesn't matter. That you will be able to bring to that listening this deep presence. That is why I invited you here cause I sensed that right away with you.

PK: Well do you have any spiritual buddies that have come along and been a part of this journey with you?

Jon: Sure, Well Adyashanti is one of my spiritual buddies. I mean we feel like brothers and even though he has been a teacher he is also a dear friend I would say he has been one of the most, I mean when we met we felt instantly like brothers. It felt like we were on the same page. We had very similar background in a lot of ways how things shifted. We had different backgrounds too, but very similar and then I'd say that yes there are a few people in my life who even though some of them consider me as their teacher are profoundly open spiritually and we really do hangout yeah for sure absolutely.

PK: And they have been a part of this journey with you even till today?

Jon: Yeah and to see the students with me who have really become liberated and awakened, you know I hangout with those people. So that is wonderful it is a

great blessing. So yes I'm very grateful. So this community now is motivated me to do what I'm doing is to really in a sense have that environment where people can hang together at that level because when people hangout in that way it actually facilitates others awakening and transformation. That's what sangha really means.

PK: You are affiliated with or you come from many spiritual communities, but it sounds like there is a spiritual community developing around you.

Jon: That's right.

PK: Is that what is happening?

Jon: Oh yeah that's definitely true. They asked me to do this, every thing I have done is because people asked me to do it. Starting to teach leads retreats all of it. It's wonderful.

PK: What do you see for the future of this, do you have a vision of what is possible?

Jon: Well you know that's a good question. There is always an intuitive sense and that creates a direction and that's the direction we are moving in right now. Where it will end up and how it will unfold I don't know. Some times I will have a vision of it but it's very in the moment so if people want more retreats and satsang or they want more availability then there needs to be more people to support that in some way and so we are working on publications and recordings and having a non-profit organization and we will see what happens. If it creates more interest and more people come then I guess there will be more of it and maybe a small group of people could be supported by it. People that are close to me and doing the volunteer work we will see if it works and we hang out I would enjoy that.

PK: Do your students typically get some kind of awakening and then suffer restriction after that. What happens to them?

Jon: That is pretty common for most teachers and students yes of course I mean that is a natural part of the process where once someone awakens, I mean awakening is just the beginning. Awakening is the beginning for a few very unusual cases when awakening is also simultaneously is enlightenment. But that is not usual. You hear about those cases occasionally, but mostly awakening is the glimpse of the truth; it's the motivator. That's what happened to me. It definitely got my attention. It was a big experience it definitely got my attention. Of course once one awakens, once one has a glimpse of the light and the truth then of course the dark side gets more illuminated. The bad news is you can't really as I say put the genie back in the bottle, you can't really go back. Once you get started, I'm sorry you got to hang in there one way or another it seems to be the truth otherwise it thinks it creates a tremendous suffering.

PK: Trying to retract into a smaller self?

Jon: Or trying to go back you just cant but the genie back in the bottle you cant put the flower back into the bud. You just cant. You know sometimes people will get stunted and get stuck somewhere and maybe that's this life maybe the whole life is like that. They have a certain level of understanding and that's it and there is no guaranty of what is going to happen in X amount of time or X amount of years or X amount of lives who knows no body know that. Maybe some profound psychics know it, but I don't know it.

PK: There is one thing that I want to know about. I want to know if you see a certain pattern of struggles occurring with your students. Do they all come across certain landmarks of discovery or difficulty?

Jon: When you say certain landmark are you saying everybody has the same landmark?

PK: Yeah, is there any recognizable phenomenon that you've seen that everybody comes to the same awaking or a similarity in this?

Jon: There is universality in it but there is also very unique qualities in every bodies case. So there is both. And I've seen this with other teachers and students it's pretty much the same across it doesn't even matter who the teacher is or what their background is. I think that maybe psychologically different teachers will attract a different kind of student because of there own dynamic. People tend to attract similar types, so I tend to attract people who are fairly independent. They are more free spirits in a way. Or someone else might attract people who want to be devoted to the teacher and the teacher wants to be devoted to. You can get that dynamic. So I get people who are more resonating with the path that I had to go through. So I tend to attract people who have had to go through a range of emotional stuff. Where they have had dysfunctional family systems there is a lot of trauma and various things they have had to go through and I've had a lot of experience in this area so can help them quite a bit.

PK: So does your own life's journey end up in some way being a guide for them?

Jon: Certainly, absolutely, no questions about. Most people when they have the awakening they want to know how that can become permanent. That is the number one questioning. Like how come I have to keep going back into my stuff how come I have to keep experiencing my struggle. That is 99.9 percent of what people ask generally. That is the general way they talk about it after they have had a spiritual awakening and they sort of get what's happening. And then the specificity of it in each case would be helping someone bring consciousness to where there fundamental bind spot is in terms of what I would call there primary resistance to what is. So I guess in psychological terms it would be called there core issue. That is basically the fundament dynamic of there ego structure right?

That is what I help them see. That is not easy to do on your own usually you need a teacher to help you do that. Because that is what is completely unconscious and yet for me it's glaring at me and my skill and what I'm learning, as a teacher is to help somebody get that. And that can be an ongoing process.

Like I had someone here yesterday who was here who was really dealing with a lot and they got to another level of understanding which was amazing which they have been growing towards for years and it will be really interesting to see how he is doing after that. So sometimes you have to go through a certain amount before you are ready to get another level of understanding

PK: So is it just pure witnessing of this?

Jon: That's right you, that's right you can't know how the flower is going to unfold. Everybody is a unique flower a unique fragrance. Yes the presence, some peoples presence is unbelievable. I mean sometimes when I'm with my students and they are opening I'm just grooving. It's like Buddhaville. For me it's just like this incredibly fragrant garden. Even when someone is in touch with their pain when they start bringing awareness to it for me it's just more energy, it's like food, it's like manna.

PK: Do you think in some way that your work as a teacher now is teaching you? Like you are a student of being a teacher?

Jon: Of course all the time, focused, absolutely totally, it's great. It's amazing I love it. Yeah I learn from my students all the time. The dynamic shows me how to do it; I don't know how to do it. There are certain things that are really obvious that are clear that is why Adya said to me that for you not to teach would be nothing less than holding back and so there is that essence is very clear for me and that essence guides, me. This guides everyone whether they know it or not. You understand this actually. That's great.

I think it is important that people who are in the therapy profession who are awake like you are to find out how to do that and you will. I know you will. Whether or not you can write it down. I don't know how you will conceptualize it now but probably in 10 years from now you will look back and go Oh that's funny I wrote it that way then but now I see... that was then that OK that's just a form.

PK: I have no idea what's going to come of this it has been hugely valuable. I'm done asking you questions.

Jon: Yeah I was really looking forward to meeting you. I did feel from meeting you when you came up after satsang when you showed up that day and with your emails I sensed from your emails you are really committed and I honor that. You can ask me any question you want. You can fill in more from on the phone. If you

didn't get all the things you want. If you get a different sense later. Maybe it will become more clear later.

PK: I'm sure that it will but I'm sure that also I think what has happened here in this interview is exactly what was supposed to happen and from that something will emerge.

Jon: I agree it's clear that definitely what happened here is untakawayable. You see I'm basically a mad scientist and I tell people that my approach on the path has been explorer and scientist. Explorers are people going into uncharted territory; you don't know where you are. Scientist are observing phenomenon with out a preconceived idea. If you have those attitudes while on the path you will discover the way. It's true that our being together you cant take this away. People often think that when they have an experience or awakening and then they go back into their habitual functioning that somehow that negates what happened to them. It doesn't. Cause guess what life does not go backwards. Even if you think you lost something or that you don't have the insight. It doesn't mean that it's not there or that it wasn't developed. May mean that it's dormant or not conscious at the moment, yes that is very possible. But just because it's a cloudy grey sky out there today doesn't mean there isn't a sun just cause you cant see the sun.

PK: Do you still consider yourself a Buddhist?

Jon: Well I'm really not a Buddhist at this point. I mean I'm not a card carrying Buddhist even though I had a lot of Buddhist training, I'm not identified as a Buddhist. I mean I certainly can relate and utilize and refer to Zen and various teachings but I'm not. Have you read that book "Shantaram" that crazy book? That head movement reminds me of this great description of the Indian head movement. Anyway it was quite an amazing story. (He yawns)

PK: Well, we will see what is really being investigated here.

Jon: Good, good.

(End of audio)

Interview with John Sherman

PK: Good Morning. I'd like to have a conversation with you about your spiritual journey, and your teacher's influence, whatever that has been along the way, and then your work as a teacher and how community and practice has been a part of that whole journey.

JS: Okay.

PK: What you were doing before you got on the spiritual path?

JS: If you really have no idea what my history is I'm certain you're gonna be quite surprised.

PK: Oh, okay

JS: What was I doing? Well, you know I'm not sure there was ever a time when I wasn't on a spiritual path. It took quite a long time for me to see that that was the case. In the 15 years prior—I don't know how to start. I don't where to begin.

I met Gangaji. Are you familiar with Gangaji? She's southern and I met Gangaji in 1994 in federal prison in Colorado. She had come to the prison. I don't know why she came to the prison; she just did. And she came to meet with a small group of people who had invited her. The first time she came was in September of '93, and a friend of mine came to me and asked me if I would like to come and attend this meeting with this exotic, this gorgeous, blonde, American, southern woman with an exotic teaching from India.

I had no interest in anything like that, except for the gorgeous, blonde, southern woman part of it. So I said, "Sure, be happy too." I mean duh, yeah. And when I was on my way to the chapel to attend this meeting with Gangaji I was taken by a huge terror that just took me. I have no idea. You know, it's tempting to tell spiritual stories about these things, but I generally resist that temptation because I think we have enough spiritual stories already to go around.

But the fact is that I was taken by this immense terror. My heart was pounding. I was sweating. I had shortness of breath and I thought maybe I was having a heart attack, although I had no pain. So I sat down on a bench in what's called the upper compound, which is a place where you could be during certain times outside for recreation, and I sat down on a bench and sat there, did not go to the meeting. And I sat there and gradually the thing faded, as these things do, and my mind began to rationalize it, as minds do, and in the end I said, "Well that wasn't so bad."

But I was still sitting there when my friend came out of the chapel with the people who had been meeting with her, and he came to me and asked me what had happened, and I said, "Oh, I had something better to do." And that was the end of it as far as I was concerned, except that, and I have to say that I don't have a clear memory of, and I don't have a clear memory of what story I was telling myself to explain this at the time, but I began to go to a group who were meeting once a week in the chapel with people who were coming from Naropa Institute. This was in—the prison's in Englewood, Colorado, and Naropa of course is in Boulder, and they were students of Trungpa Rinpoche, who may have been dead by then, but he was quite a—I don't know if you're familiar with the work of Trungpa Rinpoche, but he was quite a character and has a lot of mixed—there's a lot of mixed stuff in people's minds about him.

But he, in my view, pretty much single handedly brought Tibetan Buddhism to this country. He was the founder of Naropa Institute, and although he was certainly crazy and had problems with alcohol and womanizing and other things, he nevertheless was, in his teaching role, he was a shining light that was unlike anything I had ever come across.

PK: So was he your first spiritual teacher? And what was that relationship like with the teachings?

JS: I began to go to these meeting with these Tibetan Buddhist students, the first meeting I went to the Buddhists or at least these people, they were expounding the teaching by way of reading from a book. When I went to the first meeting they were—I forget what they were talking about. But whatever it was they were talking about, from the very moment that I stepped into the room it was all very familiar to me. It was like I had always known this and hadn't known that I knew it, which was a huge surprise to me since prior to this I had been in prison for about 15 years. I was in prison for a series of armed bank robberies and politically motivated property bombings in the early '70s, as a part of my communist convictions, Marxist/Leninist convictions.

So I wasn't very spiritual, and all that prison had done for me was kind of wear away my sense that anything useful could be done anywhere about anything. And by the time these events transpired, I was pretty much just waiting to die, waiting to be released, waiting for whatever, and uninterested in politics, uninterested in philosophy, uninterested in spirituality, uninterested in religion, uninterested in just about everything except that I had developed a pretty good tennis game by then.

So now I'm in this group of Buddhists, about which I knew nothing, I thought, and I'm receiving these teachings and they are like speaking my own mind, just without me ever having known it. It was just like I knew it all and it was shocking to me. It was shocking to them, too. There was a mutual relationship between me and the people that were coming into the prison, in which we were quite surprised

at what we had seen in each other and so forth. So I began a meditation practice and I began going every week to see the Buddhists, and I began reading Trungpa Rinpoche's teachings and I progressed very quickly. And it wasn't too long before they brought a Tibetan Lama in to give me refuge and Bodhisattva vows, which were the significant beginning steps in a Mahayana Buddhist practice.

And at the same time, all of this was utterly stunning to me. It was all unfolding and it was so clear and so obvious, but it was also just stunning. It was shocking. I couldn't make any sense of it and I really made no effort to.

At the same time I was attending the meetings of the people who were involved with Gangaji. The people from the Gangaji Foundation were also coming in every week to bring videotapes and discussions of Gangaji's teachings and so forth. Now Gangaji, her teachings at that time were pretty much unclassifiable, but we could attempt to classify her as Advaita. She would reject that, but that's pretty much all that can be said about it. Her teacher was Papaji. Do you know Papaji, Poonjaji?

PK: Yes, I've heard of him. Was he also an inspiration for you?

JS: He was this amazing, crazy, wild force that appeared in India, in Lucknow. He had a business and a wife and family and so forth, but he was just kind of amazingly powerful, forceful, his personality and his presence. And for a short period of time he became kind of famous in Advaita circles.

Andrew Cohen went to him, came from him, later renounced him, but came from him, and Gangaji likewise came from Papaji. And Papaji had been a disciple of Ramana Maharshi. Now I didn't know anything about Papaji or Ramana Maharshi, but I had some sense of what Gangaji was teaching, which was—I hesitate to characterize it, but it was fundamentally to do nothing. There is nothing you can do and there is nothing you need to do, so just stop doing and see what happens.

Well, I would go to these meetings with the Gangaji folks, and I would go there and tell these men that this woman was a fake, that they should pay her no attention whatsoever, that the Buddhists had been at this for 2,500 years or more and they know what they're doing, and that it takes a lengthy, disciplined, structured practice, perhaps for lifetimes in order to attain liberation, and this woman comes in here and tells you need do nothing. This is foolishness. Pay her no mind. I think I saw myself as there to save these men from this evil teaching. This went on for six months.

In the interim I'd go to the Buddhists and I was very Buddhist, and then I would go to Gangaji's teachings and denounce her. And in the interim, the man who had initially invited me was really the trigger for all of this. He was the prisoner there, who had been kind of the liaison between the prison administration and all these

Eastern spiritual types, and he was transferred and that role fell upon me, because I had become kind of noticed in that realm.

So that in June, when it was time for Gangaji to return, it was my job to make the arrangements and make sure that everybody knew about it, and set up the chapel for her, and meet her when she arrived, to take her and her entourage to where they were going and get them set up and so forth. And I didn't mind that. That was okay.

And the evening that she was to arrive I went to the chapel. I had sent out the notices and took care of everybody knowing that they had to be there, making the arrangements for them to be able to come. And the evening she was to come I went and set up the chapel and then I waited outside the chapel for her to arrive, and what I had in mind was I was gonna go play tennis. I wasn't interested in going to her meeting.

And she came and she walked down this long sidewalk that comes from the administration building to the chapel, and she walked up to me and she took my hand and she looked at me, and she said, "You must be John," and everything stopped. I don't know how else to put it than that everything stopped. It was a whole array of opinions and understandings and relationship with my mind just kind of came to an end. I never had had any inkling of anything like this, the vastness of this and the silence of it.

So I went and of course I attended the meeting with her. And after the meeting I spoke to her and I told her, "You know, I always hated your videos," and she laughed and she said, "Yeah, I know. They told me." And we talked for a while and I was just—I was head-over-heels in love by then.

And then when it was time to leave I walked her out and we held hands walking down the sidewalk, and then there comes a point when I have to go this way to go into the prison, the main prison area, and she continues on that way to go to the administration building and out. And I left her and then when I lost sight of her my heart just broke. I just was—I don't know. My heart broke.

So I had no idea what was going on. I was taken by really immense spiritual experiences and spiritual states. I was so lacking in interest in the normal routines of the day that a friend of mine finally kind of took responsibility for me, to make sure that I would get to the mess hall and get to work and get back for count, all of those things, and this went on for some time. I never played tennis again, actually.

And I was really quite lucky in those days, because about at the same time that my meeting with Gangaji occurred I had been fired from the job I had, which was doing computer work for the facility department, and the reason I was fired was because I knew too much about computers. I mean that's literally the case, so that I was not even allowed to work. So I had a lot of free time and I started writing to

her, and she wrote back, and we exchanged quite an enormous correspondence over the next year or so.

She told everybody about me and she would talk about me everywhere she went, and read letters from me. And she came back one more time in September of '94, and we were able to spend some time kind of alone together at a table outside before the meeting started. And then she left and then I was transferred from Englewood, Colorado to Florence, Colorado, and I began to—from the beginning I had people coming to me. I don't know what exactly they wanted, but they'd come to me and I would talk to them about what had happened to me.

And this continued in Florence and I began to run into people in Florence who—you know the federal system is such that everybody gets transferred a lot, because they have an enormous system, and it is in their interest not to let people stay in any one institution for any length of time, where they can form friendships and maybe even friendships with the administration and so forth. So I run into guys who had known me from long ago, when I was—what they knew about me was that I was an armed bank robber and bomber, and now they ran into me and I am all done with that, all done with everything. And I had great experiences and many good meetings with men who had known me in the past and men who knew me now, and even guards who in the prison began to just want to talk to me. So this lasted for about a year after my transfer to Florence, and I was subject to many experiences, spiritual experiences, Samadhi experiences, experiences of bliss and clarity and peace and rapture and all of that.

And of course they came and they were here for a while, and then they left, as things do. And after about a year I became involved with a woman who was the executive director for Gangaji's foundation, who was married, but the marriage was pretty much defunct. And she started visiting me and a romantic attachment occurred, and there was a lot of—of course there's not much you can do about a romantic attachment when you're in prison, and where you're seeing each other is in the prison visiting room.

But I also have to say just this as an aside thing that might be of interest to you, given the nature of this study, is that I also spent some time with a psychologist from Boulder, who eventually came in and gave me a series of psychological tests for the purpose of writing a recommendation to the parole board. And he gave me a Rorschach and a Thematic Apperception and a whole bunch of things like that, right, and was quite impressed with what he found, whatever that means.

But then Gangaji found out about this attachment to this woman and was enraged, which really took me by surprise. I mean enraged. So Gangaji wrote to me in a fury telling me to stop this, that this was wrong and that I was betraying what I had received, and some really quite startling condemnation. What happened as a result of that was that I had this year of bliss, and now I went into some kind of hell. I did not know what to do. I no longer had experiences of ecstasy and clarity

and openness. Now I was treated to experiences of torment and longing and self-hatred, which are equally spiritual experiences, in essence no different, as it turns out, from the rest of it.

And during that time, still, people would come to me, and I spent a lot of time and people—there were many people who were out on the streets of course in Colorado who knew about me, and some of them were visiting me there and many of them knew about me, and they would send me—like if Gangaji talked about me, they would send tapes of that to the chapel, so that I could go and listen to them, and I would do that. I would go to the chapel and listen to tapes, and I would actually conduct meetings there, too, with men who had gained an interest in this. But my own personal experience at that time was of bereftness and being cast away and lost.

PK: So now you began to suffer. Can you tell me about the experience of this suffering and how you coped with it? Did your teacher help with this process?

JS: I had—until that time I had paid great attention to Papaji, because Papaji was so close to Gangaji, I had paid very little attention to any teachings having to do with Ramana. And the reason for that was that as far as I knew, what Ramana had to offer was too simple for me. I mean I was beyond that. Who am I? I knew who I was. I was infinite, eternal, pristine consciousness, empty and clear. I knew that, so I didn't need Ramana.

I still knew that, but it didn't feel like that anymore, and I became filled with desperation to end this torment. I came to the point where I hated the fact that I had ever met Gangaji, and that if I could have gone back and not met her and be left to my kind of uncomplicated, dissociated state of everything's cool I would have done so. I'd gladly have traded all of the sweetness and all of that for an end to this torment.

And finally, in desperation really, I have to—just let me digress a moment here. While I was in Florence, even while I was in Englewood, but more so in Florence I had access to an enormous range of spiritual writing and spiritual utterance. And in some cases people would send me books, but in other cases it was just inexplicable how I would find this stuff in prison. I walked into a guy's cell one day and this guy was a—well, he wasn't spiritual at all, had no spiritual interest or involvement. And on top of his locker was a book called *Secret Instruction in a Garland of Vision*, which is a Dzogchen text teaching. Dzogchen is probably the most advanced teaching in Buddhism.

And it's advanced. It's probably the most advanced, like the Dalai Lama's Dzogchenpa, but Dzogchenpa never will tell you that they are Dzogchenpa, and it is an extremely esoteric and hidden, secret teaching, except that in these days the Buddhists have begun to release all their secret teachings, because they sense the

oncoming of a dark age, and they want them to be out so that they will survive this.

But in any event, here is this book, which is a teaching that is secret, or used to be secret until very recently, an incredibly esoteric and advanced teaching of Buddhism, and it's this guy's—sitting on this guy's locker. I said, "Where'd you get this?" He said, "I don't know. I found it somewhere. You want it?" So I took it.

The point of that is that I suddenly had had access to all of these spiritual utterances. I had spiritual writings about Hinduism, spiritual writings about Advaita, about Vedanta. I had the Upanishads. I had a lot of Buddhist stuff. I had a lot of Sufi stuff. And it all had just kind of come down on me.

But not Ramana. I had read all of those and gained a very advanced spiritual understanding, which did me no good in this torment, this hell. It just mocked me.

And finally in my desperation I said, "Well, let me see what Ramana has to say. I mean I kind of know what he has to say, but let me see Ramana has to say," and I read Ramana, and I carried it around—I stopped reading anything except Ramana. There's a book called *Talks*, and I carried that around everywhere I went. And I still was unable to work, in a way I had a charmed life in that prison. I would walk around the yard and read Ramana. I would go back to my cell and sit and read Ramana.

And what I heard from Ramana, which isn't what everybody hears, but what I heard from Ramana was so radical and so startling that it got my attention. I first got from Ramana was his incessant, persistent return to one question only. Who are you? For whom is this problem? Look and see who has this problem. Don't pay any attention to spiritual understandings or spiritual utterances, whatever. Don't confuse yourself with philosophical subtleties. Just find what it is within you that is hurtful and hurting and contractive, and wanting and not getting, and filled with loathing and need.

And Ramana explicitly talked about that as ego, what he calls the I-thought. And Ramana would ask for you to find that with your attention and get a hold of it. Don't let go of it. Grab it by the throat. And these are so unspiritual ways of speaking about anything. Everybody knows, who has any spiritual understanding at all that ego is inexistent, and here is this saint telling you to get a hold of ego. Hold it by the throat. Grab it. Look at it. See what it is. And that was so stunning to me that I did it.

And I would actually—I know I felt that since my spiritual understanding was so deep, I knew that what had to happen was that this ego had to be wiped out. That's what had to happen. That was what needed to—that was what would see me

through. It had to be killed off, destroyed. That's what they all say, or so I thought.

So I'd sit on my bunk and I had gotten good at meditation with the Buddhists, so that I was able to bring some one-pointed attention to an experience that was inside me. And I would find something inside me that felt contracted and needing and self-hating, and felt like the heart of this pain, and I would hold it with my attention. And I would say to myself, "Die, die, die," and I would do this for a long time, and I did it over a long period of time maybe a month, maybe a month and a half. Every chance I got I would sit on my bed and grab a hold of this experience of me and this infantile, narcissistic me, and I would command it to die. With every ounce of energy I could bring to bear I would command it to die.

Of course this really wasn't Ramana's recommendation. This was my—it's what I did with Ramana. And I was sitting there one day doing that, and all of a sudden it hit me. It was so obvious. I said aloud, I said, "Well this fuckin' thing ain't never gonna die." And I laughed and laughed, and that kind of broke the fever.

And then I began to really read Ramana, and I began to get a sense of the simplicity and the power of what Ramana has to offer which is still growing in me. You know, you're never finished. And I never finished in the sense of being finished with being able to understand what is offered.

But over time, and it took me a long time before I could articulate it, but over time I began to see just how simple and how radical what Ramana has to offer is. I began to see that the practice of self-inquiry, which goes through the process of the question, "Who am I?" really is just one aspect of what he's suggesting. At the heart of his suggestion, the heart of what he proposes, and you have to understand that Ramana did not come from a spiritual tradition. He didn't.

He was a 16-year-old boy when he was taken by a sudden fear and certainty of imminent death, and in that horror instead of doing what one would expect of a 16-year-old boy, he laid down on the floor and pretended that he was dead, and looked to see who dies and what remains. He literally pretended that rigor mortis had overtaken him. He stiffened his body and went through all the things that he imagined to be would happen to the body upon death, looking to see what remains.

And what came out of that was a long time before he began to even talk to us, but he came out of that and he stole some money from his uncle and went to Thiruvannaamalai, where there is a temple, and he fell silent there for 12 years, and he refused to talk.

And after 12 years he began to talk again because we—by we I mean those people who were hounding him and trying to get him to say something about what had happened to him, they had chased him from cave to cave in the hills around

Thiruvannaamalai, and he finally gave up and said, “Oh, okay, all right. Do what you will.” So what Ramana’s central insight is this: it is that nothing whatsoever that occurs within your life is a problem, nothing, that the only problem, really, is the belief that you are your life. And by your life I mean the totality of your personal consciousness, not some aspect that arises within it like a desire or an ego, sense, but the totality of it. That everything you see, everything you touch, everything you taste, everything you understand, everything you don’t understand, every arising of the movement of getting, every arising of the movement of keeping away, all of these things are your life, and you are afflicted with an invisible belief that can’t be seen that there’s no way that you can look at it and manipulate it, but it’s a false belief that this life is all that you are. It’s the lens through which you see everything.

And that being the case, anything that’s done within the life, although there are things that can be done within the life to make it better or to calm the mind or to draw those things, the root problem, the fundamental underlying problem that causes all the suffering, all the misery, all the sense that I am at stake here, that there’s something at stake for me, in what thoughts I think, and what I want and don’t want and so forth, what I’ve done, what I will do, that that is all predicated on this unseen and unseeable belief that I am this life, and that the only thing that can be done about that, to rid yourself of that is to look at the reality of what you are, repeatedly, as often as it occurs to you to do so.

And that is really easy, because after all you’re never absent. You’re always here. You’re always accessible to yourself. This reality is ineffable and nothing can be said about it, but you can see that you’re here. You know that, and looking at that repeatedly over time destroys this belief before you know it’s gone. You don’t even know it’s here. You don’t even know it’s gone, and in the end everything’s just the same except YOU are not at stake here. You are in this life the eyes and ears of awareness. That’s all. And this internal warfare that is endlessly in play, which keeps us ever-vigilant, lest we have a bad thought or do the wrong thing or want the wrong thing, or look the wrong way or are involved with the wrong person, that’s gone.

Tendencies continue until they don’t. The life continues until it doesn’t. Things change, but not in a way that you can say, “Oh, now I’m enlightened,” because the truth is that there is never ever a moment and never has been where you have not been fully aware of reality. You just don’t know what that awareness feels like until you look at it often enough.

So that’s finally what I heard from Ramana, and it’s that that I teach now. And I have no—I don’t have any problem or opposition to psychological therapy or physical therapy or any of that, because all of that has its place. The only thing that creates a problem is when we are doing things to the personality, expecting satisfaction in reality. And that can never happen, ‘because the personality, it’s not you. You do things in the personality to make the personality better, sweeter,

clearer, whatever. That's okay, but it can't finish the sense that you are at stake in this.

PK: So after this experience of Ramana's teachings, was that the end of that hell, suffering period for you?

JS: Yeah, that fever broke.

PK: The fever broke, right. Could you say more about that?

JS: Yeah. Then I could see what Ramana actually was pointing to, which is this reality that's always here. You know Ramana's very clear. He says, for example, he says, "The only thing standing between you and self-realization is the belief that you're not already realized." Ramana says to an aspirant who comes to him once, he said—and the aspirant's old, you know, like, "When? When? When?" And Ramana said, "You know, there'll come a day when you will laugh, and that day is exactly the same as this day, nothing different."

PK: So what do you do with your students to help them in their own fever, in their own struggles? Are you trying to accomplish anything with them?

JS: You know, what I do is really a mystery to me. I've been in this role now for about eight years, and in the beginning I really didn't want it. In the beginning I really felt that I didn't have anything to add. I didn't have anything to say that was really of any more use than what Gangaji was saying or pretty much anybody else, right. Stop, you are what you seek. But I didn't have much choice in the matter. As it happened, every possibility of earning a living outside of offering spiritual teaching was closed to me. Every time I tried to do something else it was closed to me.

This is an interesting aspect of this. And so I just kept doing it and people kept coming and we kept going to different places, and I began to see that my world, really, we are—it's very difficult to see through hidebound traditions about the way things are and the relationships, for example, between teacher and student. There is a deep seated belief structure about proper relationship between a teacher and a student, and it contains, among other things, a sense that there is such a thing as enlightenment, which transforms personality, and once and for all, and that therefore the teacher, the teaching of the teacher remains the same no matter how long they do it.

And another aspect of it is that the student is the supplicant of the teacher, that the student comes to the teacher and the teacher bestows upon the student understanding or clarity or shaktipat or some transmission that will, if the student is deserving, will bring this same sudden shift to the student and clear away all misunderstanding and so forth and so on.

What I see and what I came to see over the years of doing this is that that is really what's wrong, for one thing, and it's self-defeating for another. The truth is that I have something that I'd like to offer you, and I have no idea how to say it. I have no idea how to bring this to you, because what I have to offer is so simple. It's so unspeakably simple and so radically different from anything that can be imagined within the bubble of consciousness that you—I'm not speaking about you personally—but that you believe to be all you are that I don't know what to say. But if we talk for a while I will learn how to speak with you about this, and if I speak with enough people over enough time I will learn better and better. It will be revealed to me what it is I'm trying to say over time.

So what I came to say is that the real and proper role of the spiritual teacher is as a servant, and it's the responsibility of the teacher to find a way to make clear to the student what it is he's trying to give them, and it's not the other way around. As that has clarified to me over time, I've found that I really have learned a lot about what it is that I'm actually trying to say, about what it is that actually is my experience with this. And I now get these spontaneous reports from people that are—in which it's obvious that it's authentic, that they are reporting not from a spiritual understanding, but from their own experience and their own life of relief.

So last year as this really began to become clear to me—it takes time. You know, I mean if you're gonna be a tennis player it takes time to get your body conditioned enough that it can do what it needs to do in the way it needs to do it. It doesn't matter how much you understand tennis; it takes time and practice to do it. It's the same thing with this role. It takes time and practice to get effective at this role. And those who make themselves static as if they were once and for all, that nothing whatsoever can be added or subtracted from what they said or had to say five years ago, I just don't have much time for that.

And finally about last year it began to become really clear what I wanted to bring to people, and that stripped of all the spiritual nonsense that if people would just do this it really didn't matter what else they were doing. It doesn't matter what else you're doing. You don't have to stop your practices or change your practices or choose this practice over some other practice, you know, whether the practice is spiritual or religious or material or whatever. All you have to do is just do this whenever it occurs to you to do so and everything will turn out right, which is what Ramana says, and which really irritated me when I first heard it. Just do this and everything will turn out right.

And since then I've seen that that's what people report. Like they will fight with me and wrestle with me, and I constantly bring them back as best I can to the taste of this reality that underlies it all. You haven't changed. You're the same. Go there. In the midst of all of your glory and wonder or all of your torment and hell, stop for just a second and see if this reality is changed or touched or affected, helped or hurt by any of it, 'cause just looking at it is all it takes, looking again and again.

And as I began to see that, the clearer I was in actually offering what I had to offer. The more the infallibility of this practice revealed itself in the lives of people who didn't know why they were doing it except for the fact that they trusted me.

PK: So this has become your teaching and your practice?

JS: Yes, that's right.

PK: Away from your previous meditation and your Buddhist training and—

JS: Yes, that's right.

PK: Is this practice something that you continue to do now and how do you see your students progressing through their own process?

JS: There is never a moment where I am not aware of this reality, but that's true for you, too. The practice persists as a separate activity until it doesn't anymore, but nothing's changed when it stops. You've just—you are always aware of this reality. All that's happened is that this belief for which there is no basis that you are this life and that's all you are has somehow or other stopped—sometimes I talk about this as medicine. Sometimes I talk about it as termites. But somehow or other has disappeared and this certain awareness of reality that always is here is always here, and the war is gone.

And those are the reports I get from people more and more, astonishment, you know, like, "Wow. Who knew this? I've been fighting all this time with spiritual stuff," and I tell them it doesn't matter. You know, the spiritual understanding's okay. It just isn't going to fix anything. It isn't going to rid you of this belief, because the spiritual understanding is within this belief. So just look at yourself, just that, repeatedly.

The other amazing thing about this practice is, which I discovered long ago back in Florence in prison, is that once it starts it kind of takes over on its own, because what's seen is that that this is what you've always been looking for, the taste of this reality, and that all of the effort and all of the agony, and all of the struggle, and all of every thought you've thought, every action you've taken, every understanding you have taken onboard or rid yourself of is done only for one purpose. That is to see yourself, to create some entity that's a satisfactory version of you, and since what you're working on is personal consciousness that cannot ever work, so that it's an endless, futile, but what else are you gonna do. My God, there's something driving me, right.

PK: Right.

JS: And it's that energy that is gone. Once this belief is gone the energy's gone and here you are, and quite paradoxically and unexpectedly, given the state of much of the spiritual discourse, quite paradoxically what happens is an ability to relax into the life itself with an intimacy that's unimaginable, when you have to watch everything and keep track of everything, and the life itself reveals itself to be sweet. I mean sometimes hard, but sweet nevertheless, sometimes difficult, but still sweet to be here, resting in this personal consciousness, uncomplicated or unconfused by the conviction that it's you.

PK: So from this, your experienced point of view, do you have a vision of where this is all going?

JS: Well you know, here's another thing that I've seen more and more of late, and that is that there are not two minds. There's not two anything. There's not two human minds. One of the aspects of personality is the sense of the separateness and the separation, the separative mind, but that's just an aspect of the personality. It's not true. So the idea of individual liberation is ridiculous. So long as there persists in the human mind the idea that I am bound, it persists in me.

What's happens if everybody is finished with that belief? That would be really kind of wonderful to find out. And I see that the actual teaching is so easy and so simple. It's much easier to offer to people who are without spiritual understanding than it is to people who are with spiritual understanding. The teaching itself is so simple and so easy to communicate. Once you see how simple it is, it doesn't need to be surrounded with all kinds of spiritual stuff.

And we live in a time unlike any time in the history of the species, in that it really is literally possible to reach every human being on the planet within one generation. It really is literally possible to reach every human being on the planet. And what else do I have to do with my time? So that's what I say.

Last year, as it really began to clarify to me what I had received, I mean I wasn't—I just received. Last year I stopped charging for anything and I did that—some of the people who still charge sometimes have indicated that there's some implication there that I think it's wrong to charge, but that's not true. I don't have anything against anything. I stopped charging because I want to speak to everybody, which includes those who either cannot or will not pay, and I have confidence and faith that those who have seen the value of this work in their own life will, as I do, see the value of bringing this work to everybody else.

Now we have worldwide online live satsangs. We have that pretty much every other week, which is amazing. We have people meeting together from all over the world. I mean literally India and Malaysia and Czechoslovakia, Finland, New Zealand, Australia, China, Korea, meeting together online, and we conduct it just like satsang. I speak for a while and then I have conversations with people, and I'm very excited about that. I just am really alert and looking at anything that

comes my way that gives the possibility, with the least cost, because everything costs, but the least cost being able to reach more people with this incredibly simple possibility that it doesn't take anything to do.

It's not like I'm telling them to go into an ashram or to give up their firstborn children. I'm just asking them to look at themselves, so that anything that comes my way, including this, that gives me the opportunity to speak to anybody in any venue in any form about this, I am happy when it appears, 'cause I'd really like for every human being to hear this. And maybe it won't happen that every human being hears it, but what if, oh, I don't know, 10% of humanity just heard this and actually did it, or 20%. What would happen? I'd like to see.

PK: Absolutely. Whatever happened to your relationship with Gangaji? Did that repair? What is your relationship to your teacher now?

JS: Yes, yes. In fact, when I got out of prison I went to work of the Gangaji Foundation to begin with. And I came out of prison in '98, went to a halfway house and worked for the Gangaji Foundation in Boulder. I was in the halfway house, and then the day I was released from the halfway house, after I had taken some time for us to get around to doing this, but it happened that on the day of my release from the halfway house the foundation was moving to California.

And somehow we were able to reach my—we had been trying to get permission for this for some time and unable to make contact with anybody. But somehow—because of the fact that I was—when you're in the halfway house you're still in the Bureau of Prisons, and it's only when you're released from the halfway house that you're actually the ward of the Parole Commission. So the day I was released from prison we managed to track down my parole officer and got him to approve my moving to California.

So I moved to California with the Gangaji Foundation and stayed with them until the summer of '99. Carla and I were married in June of '99, and my relationship with Gangaji is strong and loving. I see very—Gangaji brought me the real first taste of reality. Who knows how that was? It's not important. It was her appearance that brought me this first real taste of reality, and it was my relationship with her, which continues to this day, that revealed to me that it was really possible even for somebody like me to be finished with this madness. So that never can change. Our relationship is strong, loving, and we see her from time to time, whenever we can.

PK: So you have this satsang, because you were initially kind of part of a Buddhist community, then the Gangaji Foundation, and now here you are and there's a kind of community that seems to be developing around you.

JS: Yeah. What a trip, huh.

PK: Did you ever anticipate this being the result of your spiritual investigations?

JS: No. No, I had no idea that this is what it was gonna be about. Carla and I were both quite surprised.

PK: Oh, okay. Well, you know, you definitely answered way beyond what I came here to ask.

JS: Well, imagine that. I'm very pleased.

PK: It's funny. I really just wanted to know about your process, and initially you said something like, "Well if you don't know my history you'll be quite surprised," or something, to say the least. I didn't know anything.

JS: I was on the Ten Most Wanted list for two years.

PK: No way.

JS: Yeah.

PK: That's amazing.

JS: That is amazing. It's beyond belief.

PK: Wow. It's been quite a journey.

JS: Yes, and I never left where it began. That's the truth.

Interview with Gurudev Khalsa

PK: We are recording. The way that I've framed this kind of semi-structured conversation is just around your spiritual journey, and then your teacher's influence, whatever that has been along the way, and then your work as a teacher and how community and practice has been a part of that whole journey.

GK: Let me first tell you that you cannot take a spiritual path, which is not in your karma. We give too much power to the ability to decide, and that's not true. You cannot have any option that is not in your karma. Nobody can take any spiritual path that is not in his or her karma, and the imposition of the spiritual path to somebody is an essential mistake, is impossible.

I was born in Mexican tradition, and then spirituality was a normal process in the relationship. We recognize the sacredness and everything moves in this ambivalence between very cosmopolitan worlds in the ritual of family life. At the same time in this spiritual role we recognize the flow and the tendency of the spirit who put us in this specific location in space and time, here and now.

PK: OK great, can you tell me more of what you were doing before you got on the spiritual path? Like what you expected was going to happen?

GK: After 68 when the big repression came, many of the Mexican young people, began looking for a spiritual path. In that time India or the Tibetans seemed too far away for us. Then what we did is we came back to the Mexican tradition to the Indians. It was kind of difficult because almost all of the Mexicans are mixed at that time more than now. The Indians don't really relate or accept the mixed Mexicans.

Everybody went to the native tradition and it happened that I met this man and he was a natural doctor and man of power. And I studied with him for a few years. And really, what he did was he gave me a sense of self in my Mexican tradition. He was a contemplative. He showed me the way to see in a contemplative way.

PK: Oh so was this your first teacher? Can you tell me more of how he worked with you in the beginning?

GK: At that time I would go to the city and come back to the mountains just to crop some business in Mexico and then I would have to go to Mexico and make some money and come back to the mountains. In that time all of the students of Yogi Bhajan had opened an ashram with big words like Kundalini Yoga. We knew about it by reading the Serpent path and the path of the Fire, etc. We were all

there and this man was a very nice man, very straight, and not very intellectual, but very clear in what he wants.

He tortured us for a while, then what happened is by this technique my level of anxiety went down. I was not interested in the spiritual teaching, because I have spiritual teaching, but what was interesting is that you do Yoga and you go in this place of zero anxiety, the sensation of freedom with courage, and it is very balanced.

I kept doing this until one day I met Yogi Bhajan. When I met Yogi Bhajan it was a very deep impression because he has this fantastic aura, and this path of no games. No matter how many tricks I took out and how many games in the first meeting he beat each one. When I left the games, I recognized I found somebody who can break through. I asked him to be my teacher and he sent me to hell.

PK: What does it mean "sent to hell"?

PK: He said, you do magic and you do all these things, you have to many girlfriends. But after he asked one of his students to teach me I started to learn with him and I spent many years in study with him. The study with him was very simple. I visited him, he provoked me and every act ended the same. When I would come back the next day, it was the same game. And until He says so, the game keeps going.

He can only react in a positive, negative, whatever. Our private game would happen always. Each time I would arrive, I would react, he looked at me, you lost the chance, next time.

One day I came back and he was very sick. He asked me where I was from? And I said where I come from and tried to talk to him. What he said was very simple, "It's over." I said, "What is over?" "Everything is over. Now you only need to take care of my body." And he didn't provoke me anymore and I didn't react. And I spent the last year of his life taking care of him participating this intense experience as a teacher is preparing himself for the Mahasamadhi.

PK: But was that teaching?

GK: Sat Nam Rasayan.

PK: Oh Sat Nam Rasayan. Is it at this point that you developed a vision of what it's like? But you were teaching before this.

GK: No, no, no. No, no, no. You were asking me what's my relationship with my teacher. I used to study with him and the training was based in reaction.

PK: I see.

GK: He would always check, do you react. The thing is you are living a normal life and have preconceptions and we move by preconceived rules in the game. He has no rules. It's funny because always he talks about rules. But to approach reality you cannot preconceive a rule with reality. That was his game. Like he would ask me, Gurudev please come tomorrow at 8:00 because something very important will happen. Then when I arrive at 8:00, he says it happened at 7:00 at night. Then he says, it's kind of late, why don't you go to rest. I asked, what is important thing here? You were not here when it happened. No I was here.

He proposed something and you do a preconception of the proposition and you behave like it's expecting to happen. Then he will take the carpet out. It was one day I was in Hamburg and he was there and it was on a Sunday night and he said to me, "Gurudev, You are needing to go to India next weekend. We need to meet Friday because there is a big meeting." And I said, "I'm sorry sir, but I'm teaching here Saturday." He said, "Okay, I understand."

Then Narinyan his secretary comes and says, "You need to come with me. This will be fantastic. He said you need to teach Saturday." And then he said, "I am asking my son to come with me in India and you are in the middle." That was on Monday. By Tuesday in the morning I just had to go to India. I ran to the ambassador in Germany who didn't want to give me a visa because I'm an Italian resident. I tried to find my passport. My passport is lost. Then I go out and beg the ambassador to give me a new passport. I Find the passport, get another passport, go to the airport, this is Tuesday, beg to the ambassador to give me a visa. They give me a visa. Wednesday night I take the airplane. I arrive Thursday in Delhi. Thursday night I'm in Amritsar. Friday morning is this meeting which is not so important by the way.

And I said, "Sir, I'm sorry. I need to leave." He said, "Yeah, you can leave, but before give a speech to the community but in your language." I said, "Okay," Everybody said wahe guru wahe guru. What I said in Italian was, "It was very nice to come, but I need to leave." He says, "Okay, leave."

Then I go and pick up my few things and I go okay, I will pay you only if you take me to the train, because I'm going to miss the train. And the guy put everything in the scooter, took me to the train, push me in the train, and I arrive the next day at 10:00. My airplane landed at 4:00 in the morning. No hotels in the area. I spend \$400.00 in a suite in the Ashoka for three hours. Got to the airport. I get to my airplane and it was the same crew. And they said, "Sir you are back." I said, "I hope you didn't wait for me too much."

Then I learned whatever I want I can do it. Whatever. You stick to your intention it will happen. Four days I have not one distraction. And that was his way.

PK: This is your relationship with him? How did he help you with difficulties as they came up? And how do you help your students with difficulties.

GK: There was no limit in the relationship

He never lost his temper with me, but everything was in a question until when there was no question. Then became stable in silent. And one day I am stable and silent, I'm giving a foot massage to him and he lose mental state and I recognize it.

He didn't initiate me. He fell in this mental state and I recognize the mental state. The next day was the same. Third day same, and then I realized there is a specific mental state and he asked me if I would heal the brain of his secretary.

From then on his teaching change in relation with me. He would ask me to do things that were a little illogic. And there were many samples, but I recognize it as a mental state which we can call the meditative mind, or transcendent projective. And then I started training with him and it took me like 10 years to master it.

And when he came to Europe he check on all my students and he said now you are the master of this technique, this is the mantra, this is the Mudra, and this is the name you will call it Sat Nam Rasayan. Then I asked if he expect me to teach to one or two persons. He asked me to change the way of the teaching from a science teaching to an open teaching. And then what I developed were the tools to express a mental state, to give a map to the students so that they can have right access to that place.

PK: So this is your teaching now? What are the changes if any that you are trying to accomplish?

GK: That's what I teach. The main teaching of awareness and Kundalini Yoga. That's the main tool, but also speech. With speech, you induce the student to be aware of the process. It is my position that you need to recognize the process of change, not only change itself. You can only express it and share this knowledge if both process and awareness of the process are present. You go and meditate and you get high, no necessarily you know what happened to you but that you are aware and trying to figure out what is happening that put you in that state so you can share it.

See when I am teaching I always say okay guys look where you are now in this moment and then with a little movement I say okay, look where you are and recognize the point of modification. Because if the people learn that they can share it and also they can recognize the mental state of somebody else. That's what Yogi Bhajan spoke about.

PK: I am experiencing some state right now.

GK: Yeah, because I'm high. You are simply tuning into this mental state. See in his last year, the treatment as experience. I used to go work on him for two or three hours and come back to sleep for eight, wake up and work on him and come back to sleep. The intensity of his state when he was going to Mahasamadhi, my body couldn't hold it. My nervous system couldn't hold it.

I used to meditate only to have like a positive state. Because you have two choices when you are in the presence of a man of his caliber, you block or go through the trip. Because to go through the trip you need to have the strength to do it, and I didn't have enough strength.

GK: Any other questions before we finish?

PK: Of course, just a few. I wanted to know this work that you do with your students, how do you help them when they come to the difficulties? Like your process with Yogi ji, how he helped you become the teacher you are today.

GK: Yeah, but my role is different. I am sticking with one point of the consciousness. The quality of human beings Yogi Bhajan and define it, you're human in the moment you don't react. The difference between a dog and you there is no difference. Dogs sometimes are more intelligent than you. The only problem with a dog is he reacts always. He doesn't react because he has a condition to react, who is a reaction itself. If you teach your dog to don't eat the bread from your hand and he wants to eat the bread, but he recognize that he has a negative reaction to the bread, then he won't eat it, but it is only reaction.

Human beings, is the only being we know that can extend himself and lose more reaction. The base of what I teach is mainly you only can extend your label of awareness and the moment you can extend your space to somebody else, and that requires a state of non-reaction, and that state Yogi Bhajan called it the zero point.

What else?

PK: Okay, thank you very much. I am also interested in what it is that this spiritual practice that you have done up to this point, whether it's meditation or something like that, what has that become for you now? Do you still need to do such a practice?

GK: Sure. Sure. I'm very disciplined. Do you take a shower every day?

PK: Yes.

GK: Meditation is a shower.

PK: Well you said that when you were with your master going into Mahasamadi then you had to do more meditation just to maintain.

GK: Like you are doing the sport, how many showers do you need?

PK: Yeah, yeah, I get it.

GK: You need to recognize that you are influenced by your relationships. You cannot produce such conditions, but the conditions are proposed to you constantly. What do you do, you meditate.

PK: How has your status as a spiritual teacher affected your relationship to your spiritual community? What is your relationship to a spiritual community now?

GK: No I don't think myself like that. I think I teach. People come and ask me what they can do to do it better. I teach them. No, I don't think—I am not very concerned of any of the formation of the spiritual path.

PK: Personally?

GK: I don't know if I can hold that position. Because I don't think I can hold it, I don't try. I wake up and all of a sudden people say here comes the big master and that big master is me. Come on. I don't know any people who can do that and keep themselves healthy. I don't think I can do it. One day you start to believe it and that's terrible. The problem is the pain you produce around such misleading. This is a mistake. Always a mistake has to do with the wrong perception of this unique inter-relationship and that you never can be distracted with your relationship.

Define a master.

PK: Perhaps somebody who everybody recognizes—

GK: That's wrong. That's completely wrong, because I can trick my students so they consider me a master. Students can never certificate you as a master. In the moment your student can give his opinion about you, he's not your student anymore.

Suppose all the masters here, they recognize me as a master. It's wrong. Because a relationship with them is as an equal. The only person who can recognize it as a master is your master. And what is that? It is something that you cannot pay, steal, or seduce. In one moment your teacher says you're the teacher, and the matter is over. Everybody who does not arrive in that way is a fake, or your Buddha.

You can be a trainer, you can do spiritual work, but the master, only your master can confirm this. These people who start to believe they are masters because they

have a lot of students, you count the heads and say how many heads I need to count to be a master.

PK: Is 100 students enough?

[Laughter]

GK: There's a story, Yogi Bhajan went to see his teacher. His teacher says Harbhajan now you are the master. No question asked. He left the room and all the classmates said okay, what did Sangi told you? He said he told me I'm the master. They went ah and bow. Everybody bow, see I'm the master.

This process is nothing—but the big mistake is you start to have students and you are charismatic. Charisma, doesn't means you are a master. I am a very charismatic guy. I don't miss anything. I use my charisma to help the people learn. But if I have a hundred students, what tells those students I am a master? No.

Mastery come only by imposition of your teacher. There is no way out. Yogi Bhajan dies and everybody start calling themselves the master, now he's coming, the master? Give me a break. It's funny.

[Laughter]

If you have all the powers. Siddhis. Siddhis are only tricks. You stimulate one center then you have expansive aura. You stimulate another center and then you can see aura. You see someone that creates auras. This is all a joke, it's not the base.

We don't need cults. We need teaching. We need to teach a kriya to somebody so they can live a better life. This is a practical matter. If someone bowed to you a 100 times, there is nothing will happen. Do you eat by bowing?

PK: Well what is your vision for what is going to happen? What will happen to this spiritual community? Do you know?

GK: Whether I have a vision or what will happen where?

PK: What is going to happen with this teaching?

GK: The teaching will survive. I know what my role is in the teaching. I don't know what's the role of everybody else. But we will survive.

I teach his teaching. In the spiritual realm, in the spiritual space, and by training you can relate to that spiritual space. In this tradition they call the Golden Chain, it's like you are hooked with a computer. And you teach from there. It is not a

gift. You work it out. There are no maps, there is no path to arrive to have this relationship, and this relationship is used for helping everybody else to develop.

PK: But once you reach to this relationship, right, you work, you train to arrive there – once you arrive, then does the work continue or you've just made it.

GK: You learn a telephone number? You will remember as long you keep calling, but when you stop. It's difficult to talk to this because I don't see this as a belief system.

PK: Okay if it's not a belief system, from your experienced point of view can you describe where you are at on the spiritual path today.

GK: It's in a state of experience and then you are growing this transcendent relationships where you find this estate almost of undifferentiation with the flow and you can express it as you want. The work of the teacher, not the master, the teacher, is to translate the experience. Provide the tools that is the Yoga, meditation, and silence.

PK: Thank you.

GK: Gracias.

PK: This is great. Excellent.

[End of audio]

Interview with Nirvair Khalsa

PK: All right. We're recording. So do you remember what you were doing before you got on this spiritual path?

NK: Actually, it's such a continuity that I don't actually have a point of disembarkation, like when I met a particular person. I would say that maybe—and I'd have to go back to early memories, I mean really early memory. And what I'm just remembering right now is imaginary friends.

When I was really little I had imaginary friends and I actually really didn't need anybody else. So I don't know how to interpret that, but it's a lot of comfort, a lot of conversation. It kept me from being isolated. I had kind of older parents and I was pretty much on my own.

So I just figured they were, whatever it was, maybe something from other planes of existence and they were, you know looking back on it, it was just giving me information and comfort and someone to talk to or whoever it was at that time. Although in a certain sense, I don't separate that from myself and my own process.

But it's kind of interesting to end up with an Eastern mindset, which is natural for me, but being born into a Western body and to be totally trained in the Western mindset. So I think that was all part of it. I just think I was that way. It's like an essence thing.

Even as kind of a young man when we were hippies but in between college and before becoming Yogis, I remember there was a guy that we lived with in a big household for awhile who was uneducated, had never gotten through the third grade.

But he was one of the smartest people I ever knew because what he did was, he never worked either. Just only day jobs and things like that and he spent all his time reading in the library. He grew up in a warehouse in Louisiana, in New Orleans; interesting guy.

But he'd look at me and he says you're a priest. You know that's the whole thing. This is who you are and that kind of thing. I didn't ever think of myself that way. That kind of thing was an essence thing. So it's a continuity. It's just a matter of small awakenings over a period of time and it's still happening.

There's no completion in it. Since there was no actual really beginning, I don't see that there's any end of it either.

SK: What originally attracted you to the spiritual path?

NK: I think it was a lot of self discovery. When I was in college, I went through a distinct awakening just even from a contemporary. Some guy said well, what do you know? That was the question.

So I went into the idea along with the culture of the time which went to kind of a place which encouraged counterculture. A place called Haverford College in Pennsylvania which was a small liberal arts men's school. It was Quaker.

This was during the Vietnam War in the beginning of it, so it was all kinds of free thinking was encouraged. I had a Philosophy, a French Philosophy professor that taught meditation. And I had an East Indian professor who taught Western philosophy which was very interesting.

So I just went through a real awakening at that particular time, you know questioning about everything I did. So I would say I was drawing on the environment because I grew up in a very straight, Midwestern situation and embodied all of that like student president, you know four letter athlete—I bought into the whole darn thing.

A significant thing during that time was for me reading *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, you know Thomas Wolfe talking about the Merry Pranksters. So my thing was I need to find a teacher. So I had to go out and find Ken Kesey.

But on the way out from the east coast to the west coast I ended up in San Francisco waiting to be drafted and inducted in the Army. So I was going to protest it, go to Canada or get a CO. I ended up getting a conscientious objector so I didn't have to serve. I did alternative service.

But in the meantime, I was either waiting for the FBI to arrest me or go to Canada or do something. It all worked out, you know Hand of God worked it out. But while we were waiting to do that, you know in that counterculture in San Francisco in the '60s did run into some people that took us to a thing called Monday night class which was Steven Gaskin.

So I think he was kind of the first formal teacher we had. And he was a San Francisco State professor who was all hip style, who taught a kind of psychedelic Buddhism basically. And it appealed to me a lot because there was a—what he preached was lifestyle.

Because segmenting things into church and secular life never made any sense to me whatsoever. It seemed hypocritical. It just didn't work. So he preached consistency, you know walk your talk, be honest, confrontation is okay and other

weird stuff like marriage polarity. It didn't work out for him very well. A psychedelic's a sacrament. That was a short phase; that kind of thing.

So as much as there was available, I studied everything. I'd go see everybody that I could. In San Francisco, when I first moved there I moved into a commune that had an east coast comedian who had some sort of revelatory experience and opened up an ashram commune in San Francisco.

His whole deal was, he was an old guy too, was silence. So a vow of silence and just silence; he wouldn't talk. The guy didn't talk for like three years. I'd see anybody I could to learn during those years being exposed to those kinds of people.

But it was when we—Steve Gaskin ended up taking a whole bunch of people off in buses to a place in Tennessee to start a farm, back to the land thing. That was kind of the deal back then. I couldn't go because the government wanted me.

So I had to find a place to do my two years of alternative service. I'd been into alternative food stuff in San Francisco as well.

I just through also personal revelation, I'd started growing my hair and decided one day as I was cutting up a chicken and I was about 18 years old that oh my God, this is a chicken I'm cutting up. Before, it wasn't an animal. And it was like that was it being a vegetarian. It was like just stopped.

And so all those things were in place. I was also very interested in Yoga in particular and there was very little information at that time. The Eastern Yogis had just come over and there wasn't even a whole lot of stuff written about Yoga.

So I found like in a Shambhala book store a Yoga book, which there wasn't very many. There was like a couple. I was trying this stuff on my own and it was painful and I couldn't make it work. It's like one of the books where the guy's swallowing clothes Netties.

So I had the interest and I knew it was good but there was no teacher. I found an add in Rolling Stone magazine and the first food co-op on the west coast which is in Eugene, Oregon. So I wrote him a letter saying look, I've got to do two years—that was the day of letters—I've got to do two years of alternative service. Can you use me?

And someone wrote back actually and said yeah, come on up. Why not? So we packed up our van. I've been with my wife since high school. We went to separate colleges but we ended up in San Francisco together and things like that. So we packed up our van and just moved up to Oregon then went to the food co-op.

The person that wrote me the letter there, they didn't even remember who it was. But they sent me over to, and this is kind of the nice little bit of continuity, to a free clinic in Eugene that was actually on the board of directors.

And a lot of the Merry Pranksters were involved in that free clinic. We got a chance—Chuck and Ken and Ken Dabbs and I got to be with those people during that time. And so I went to the free clinic and they said okay, we'll rip you off from the system. What do you want to do? You can work here. Free alternative service.

So the food element was still strong at that time. My wife and I took over a cooperative restaurant called The Giant Zucchini and brought the wages up to actually almost a dollar an hour for the crew that was working there. But it was food for us to eat. I started working at this free clinic.

But meanwhile, the whole interest in spirituality things really developed. We were in this big house where this one guy that I told you about who was from New Orleans and the uneducated guy who was the most educated person I ever ran into in this big house.

And we had some people come visit and said have you done Kundalini Yoga? I said what? What's this? He said come to our class. So in Eugene, Sat Kirpal Singh and Sat Kirpal Kaur were teaching; just had gotten there. They were teaching.

So I took a class. The very first class I said this is my thing. I just had such an experience that it was like another just major awakening. I said this is what I'm going to do the rest of my life and this is what I'm going to teach. After the very first class, I found my thing.

PK: Can you describe your relationship with your teacher early on your spiritual path?

NK: Two weeks later, Yogi Bhanan came to town. The very first visit he came to Eugene and it happened the Sat Kirpal's were living two doors away from us in Eugene and I didn't even know it. So I went over and talked to him and was very impressed.

I was a young man. This is when he was like 40 years old. He was very impressive. He was big. He was fiery. He was antithetical to like any other kind of spiritual person that you'd have a concept of.

I remember walking in the room the first time and people were—there was a whole bunch of people crying. I said what's this? Why is this? It was basically, you know that confront, elevate mode. He was basically taking people apart and then putting them back together with their habit patterns.

So I sit down with him and I asked him a couple of questions. He answered them so artfully. It put me so at ease. And his aura was so bright and beautiful. I just said okay. This is my teacher too. I liked the Yoga first, before I met him. I had the experience. And that's really where it started.

The studies just don't end. I'm a student. One of the reasons I can teach is because I'm a perpetual student. It doesn't mean that I haven't read anything from any other discipline or any other kind of thought or that kind of thing.

And everybody that comes into Eugene or any of the environments I would go see. Like I had great talks with Swami Sat Chit Ananda, Probupati, the Hare Krishna guy and you know, just whoever. And actually Yogi Bhajan encouraged that.

And I think it was from his early training from his grandfather from what I understand, because his grandfather was the head of the village and all the wandering Sadus and Yogis and stuff like that would come by.

They'd take care of him. Then there'd be this constant flow for people to talk to. So he encouraged to see other people.

PK: Did you get an idea what it was—just while you're figuring this out. You're saying that you met Yogi Bhajan and he wasn't like the kind of teacher that you would imagine and that when you found Yoga, you knew that was the way. Did you get an idea what this was going to look like? Did you end up with spiritual dreams and aspirations at this point?

NK: Yeah, in a certain sense. I've got good intuition but I'm not one of these totally psychic persons. I'm a pretty grounded person. You know what I mean? Yogi Bhajan kind of came, literally came into my neighborhood.

But before that, I'd been praying pretty hard, reading an autobiography of Yogi and it says if you pray the teacher will come. So that's what I was doing.

So I had an idea. First of all, he kind of represented a potential human. But from all my reading and things like that, I had a fantasy imagination about how that would manifest. You could do special things. You'd have special powers.

And it kind of dovetailed in with—no doubt trained to be codependent and didn't have a strong psychological base. And so that kind of idea of having something different from society and being separate and being powerful is very appealing. You know it fit in with imagination and fantasy that I had about what that really would mean.

But the more you get into the practice, the more that becomes completely irrelevant. The idea is you just become more you; you become kinder, you don't show off. Whatever you have, you become more like a person.

So my goals changed over a period of time along with my walking into wholeness. So who I thought I was going to be when I started is definitely not who I am and I discarded that idea along the way in a self healing process.

PK: All right. Did you run into any notable difficulties along this journey? I know it's still going. Did you run into any struggles?

NK: Yeah, I think it's always a struggle and I think I still am. I mean there's no—there has to be a constant self examination and self correction and some of the stuff is pretty dramatic.

I think probably pretty early on, I think when you really do commit to things then you end up testing your own self with physical—I didn't have any major physical problems but some physical problems, mental problems, the emotional things; conflicts with other egos.

You were talking about spiritual community, just trying to find your place in spiritual community which is very tricky stuff. Probably any community, when you've left your culture—this is interesting. I was just in Malaysia and these people, we were teaching with Shanti and we're teaching Sikhs for like third and fourth generation Sikhs.

But most of them have never been to India. They're Malaysians. Some of the cultural underpinnings are gone but some are still there. They're not as heavily into certain aspects of Indian culture because they're removed from it.

And that's true with me. I'm fifth generation American of Irish, Scottish, English roots. And I have no relationship to that whatsoever; food, culture, language, any of that. The whole American thing is like it's all disappeared.

So I didn't have a place. So you have to find a place. Then you have to establish yourself in another culture. And we've got the music, the food, the lifestyle; the whole thing. This is probably what prompted me looking for a place to land and a place to belong, having a longing for that.

So there's difficulties finding your place in that especially as a young man. There's people that have more authority than you do or striving for access to the teacher, trying to fit into a certain way that was acceptable and thinking that that is actually kind of buying into the idea that this is the way you have to be in order to be spiritual.

And then finding that that's not true, you know and just working through that. It's like a process. It takes time. And then also having a lot of very close friends that you develop friendships which are probably from this life and past life or whatever it is, people that you get along with, that go through crisis of faith and then don't end up staying on the path with you.

And then maintaining friendships with them and finding that kind of equilibrium and balance. You know aging; marriage is constant challenge, raising children and finding the balance of lifestyle for them in a materialistic society is hugely challenging.

PK: When Yogi Bhanan was alive or maybe if the teachings are still relevant today, was his influence really helpful with all of this what you're talking about with the community and your spiritual buddies and these difficulties?

NK: I don't think there was—he provided a lot of security. He's a very steady, constant guy. Quite honestly, I didn't have a lot of questions with him about my doubts or didn't take very much direction from him at all because I didn't feel the need to because I figured that I could figure it out myself.

Part of it has to do with personality and training. But I do remember very early on in an early class, I really wanted to find out everything as fast as I could. I'm a questioning person. It's not like I accept everything on face value right off. I like to examine it. I actually like to flip it over myself so I can find my own equilibrium.

And so I asked him a lot of questions. I was sitting in the front of the class. He stopped and he was like lecturing or something and he stopped. I had asked him one more question. He looked at me and said, what do you want, my blood? I thought to myself okay; different strategy.

So I decided at that moment in time that if I needed to know something, he would tell me. I would ask questions about Yoga and definition of technical things like that. But about personal things, about what I should do and what I shouldn't—what direction I should go on and where I should take, I stopped asking.

I figured if he wanted me to know something, he'd tell me. If I had a question in my mind of my own thing, I could use him and his presence and his reflective nature to find the answer in myself. So in that case he was enormously helpful because I used him to balance my own self off him.

It was partly he gave me a clue early on. He's got that Tracatum picture, that meditation picture that you stare at him as a young guy, intense dark eyes and that kind of thing. And so I was looking at it and there was a lot of very significant meditation that I did early on with that particular picture.

So I had the opportunity to ask him about it. I said I was staring at your picture but it seemed like I was only talking to myself. He says that's what it's about. He says that's what it is.

You know, for these other people it was like messages from him or messages from beyond, that kind of thing. So I said I'm on the right track here in terms of being self correcting and self motivating.

PK: You led us to the teacher, the inner teacher.

NK: That's right.

PK: Was it just Yoga and meditation that was, and is your spiritual practice and do you still do that today? Have you found that you don't need it so much?

NK: I'm more effective in what I do. I think that's it. I really taught so much. Maybe I taught like 15,000 classes when I was in Alaska. So a lot of what I would do is like experimentation. I couldn't believe Yoga's so vast. It was like okay, let's try this out. Let's try this out. Let's try this out.

It was partly to see what it was about from my own point of view. Because, in order to really teach something, it really helps to integrate it because then it becomes real to the students because it comes from your experience and not necessarily you're reading out of a book or something like that.

I mean that still works. It still works. But I think it probably works a little bit better if you know what you're talking about and you can put it in a language so that you can reach the other person at their level of understanding.

So yeah, sure, I still practice a lot. I don't relate to it in terms of time though. I've done thousand days Sadanas, tons of 40 day sadanas. I did the early morning whole sadana thing two and a half hours for 10 years straight without missing a day.

PK: Really?

NK: I know all that discipline and I do that discipline but that discipline really doesn't matter to me. If I could actually get in that one place and utter Wha Hey Guru once in that place, I would be fine if I could do that. But the thing is I have to work my own mind out in order so that I don't self sabotage myself.

I know my tendencies and there's new things about my own self and my inner self that are being revealed to me over a period of time. I think there's some scars that come up with certain age and certain experience and maybe if you want to subscribe to the past life theory, that you're experiencing certain lives that you have to clear in terms of the same scars.

That'd be an explanation of it. It's nice to put a philosophical base on your own process if it helps you to understand it, but it doesn't actually matter to me, past lives or karmas or anything like that. It's like what I am right now is the most important. I know if I'm off a little bit. I take feedback from my environment if I am that way.

I have to find something else in the technology whether it's Sikh technology; you know Bhanis or anything else. Physical exercise—that's all part of the thing too, Yoga, meditation, those kinds of things. And all that is kind of fun. It's a lot easier to get into bliss states these days than it certainly was at the beginning.

But that is not totally attractive to me anymore either. That's fine. I know what that is. It's more to me that do I feel in a state of balance and clear? And sometimes I have to work a little bit more intensely to get there than others.

PK: Now from your current point of view, how would you describe where you are on the spiritual path today. Have your original expectations been met, exceeded or changed?

NK: I would say that I'm really relieved that it got to this place. Because if I had become what I thought I would have become, I'd have been a danger to myself and my process. So I'm actually really grateful that I didn't actually get what I wanted.

And so I have a lot of compassion for myself at different stages and ages of development because I was an idiot. I mean really. I'm a product of my own environment and my own self and process and that kind of thing.

But man, whatever has been protecting me from my own self has been wonderful. No disillusionment at all whatsoever. I'm not disappointed in anything and anybody. Nobody's let me down.

NK: It's the idea of like if reality and juxtaposition of the development of self. It has more to do with actually finding what's real and being what's real over a period of maturity that you were talking about. Do I have regrets about things I do? I probably do.

Like I said, that's where the compassionate line comes in. there's things that I've not so much done but attitudes that I've had and the way I pursued my life and what I like really found myself being engaged with and to, basically buying into that I have a lot of compassion for my own self in that regard.

PK: Okay.

NK: And so it was wrong thinking basically. And it wasn't serving myself or my environment. So it's not a matter of disillusionment of the change in the self. It's more a conversation with myself about who I was and what I have been. From the seeking point of view, it's always made sense to me is that you know, "it's not the life that matters it's the courage you bring to it" that kind of thing.

More or less, you're really preparing for your death in every moment of your life. If I do that preparation for that ultimate time when I'm going to leave, then I'll have done more of the work than I need to do when it's time to go instead of leaving it for the end. I've seen people leave it for the end. I've been with people who have died and it's not easy. It's not a good—it's better to take care of it as you go along.

And so it's a good lesson in continual self forgiveness over a period of time for who I thought I was and what I thought I was doing.

PK: You seem to be very aware of this developmental aspect. You said that your teaching has evolved. You started out just experimenting with it and with lots and lots of classes. So what is it that you do with students now? What changes are you attempting to accomplish?

NK: It's an interesting change in this last year since I've been doing this work down here. I haven't had a regular class to play with or a bunch of regular classes. I was teaching 10 to 15 classes a week for like 32 years. So it's different now.

But I found that it's much, I'm very, very relaxed. I have a lot of confidence in being able to deliver what I need to deliver. I think that's probably it. It's partly the teachings and a lot of it is my understanding. But without having—I don't have anything to prove to anybody at this point in time. I don't want to be perceived as the best teacher or the worst teacher.

As a matter of fact, I would rather come off as maybe as a little bit dull so that people are allowed to have their own experience and my personality is not going to get in the way of it. So a lot of times people say that I just don't speak very much, that I'm very quiet. But you can tell I can talk as much as I want.

It's all very calculated. It's like how much can I say to be effective that won't get in the way of their experience so that they can integrate and uplift their own selves.

PK: Wow.

NK: So that's kind of where I'm at right now. What a lot of people say is gosh, I had a great experience, but it was like really easy and it's good he really didn't say very much. But other times, I talk like crazy. It depends on who's there and the situation at the time.

PK: Oh wow. So it really matters on—how do you calculate the students and what they need? Does it matter if they are very new to Kundalini Yoga as opposed to someone who's coming in who's had years of experience?

NK: Doesn't really matter too much to me. I mean there's a lot—when you get new people you can tell. You're reading body language. You're picking up on an energetic field or whatever else. Also, you're engaged in reading their thoughts in a certain way and how they're processing what they're going through.

So a lot of new people need a lot more explanation, a lot more assurance, a lot more because they're unsure about what they're experiencing. And so you have to basically let people know whatever they're going through is okay. And so that sometimes takes a lot more of your verbal cues and assurances and things like that.

More advanced people, you could work like kind of on a different level. Actually, the way I think right now is that I kind of teach from only a little bit from the physical body. I like to teach from another, more expanded place for people that are more advanced.

And working that area, and not so much this area through this physical part. And that's just a, it's partly imaginative and it's partly an experience of what is happening in the class at the time.

PK: Yeah. Very different from your teacher. This is a very different style.

NK: Yeah. You know I never tried to copy him.

PK: Oh okay.

NK: And still you see a lot of teachers out here who really emulate his style exactly. But I knew I could never be him. So I had to develop my own way of doing it.

PK: You mentioned this you're finding your place in the spiritual community as one of the challenges. I was thinking, now that you are a very experienced teacher yourself, How has that affected how you fit in the community?

NK: Yeah, in this community in particular or communities in general, I mean just the larger spiritual community?

PK: Well I guess whichever community is valuable to you.

NK: Sure. Well they're valuable to me to support because I feel like I have an obligation out of gratitude for what I learned from Yogi BhaJan. And also I have

an obligation to—my children and specifically and to all my children's friends to create a real environment.

And so to me, whatever role I end up playing is fine. I really do have a lot of different skill sets. So if I'm needed to do one thing, I can do it. And I can do it in a balanced way where I don't feel like I'm not being true to myself because I have an intention that I just basically stated that is a driver for me. So whether I teach or not, it doesn't matter to me. It actually really doesn't.

It's fun to teach because I learn more about my own self by teaching and that's always been the thing. But in terms of wanting students or needing to do any other reason, there's no other reason. But on the other hand, a lot of teaching opportunities come. In terms of fitting in now, it's actually not an issue because I do fit in. I'm very confident that I fit.

It's not because I have authority either. It has more to do with my internal process. It'd be more of an issue when you travel and go someplace and see if you fit. But now I found being a little bit older that I pretty much fit in anywhere, it doesn't matter where. So it doesn't matter here.

It can be like in any part of the world or with any other group of people intersecting with a group of people.

PK: Do your students go along this kind of a journey as well? Have you seen any of them progress? What do they struggle with. I guess, I know you're in a new community now.

NK: Sure.

PK: But did you see them ever progress along this kind of development you're talking about? And did you help them?

NK: I would say yeah. But there is no cookie cutter approach to this at all. That's one of the challenges along the path is that there ought to be. By nature, just from my personality, I am an observer. And then teaching so many classes, you become a professional observer.

There really isn't much that I miss. Everyone's got their own unique stages of development. I don't think anybody has developed in the way that I have in particular. And I'm almost so neutral that I can't even make a judgment about other people's development at this point in time.

When I see people, I just generally think they're doing great, as best they can for their environment. If someone needs my assistance then that will come up. Yogi Bhanjan's style was very confrontive. He was very Saturnian. I can be that way too.

But a lot of times I don't even have to be that way. Really my way is much more to work in silence and to work on—in a much more subtle way.

PK: Yeah.

NK: Not that he wasn't subtle but he worked in all levels. This is a guy who is completely masterful on all levels. That's why I never thought that I could be him or like him.

PK: Finally, do you have any vision of what is to come with all of this? I know that you mentioned along the way this journey is still going. Do you have a vision of where it goes? How do you deal with where it goes? What do you see from here?

NK: For me personally, I just see more refinement over a period of time.

PK: Refinement in your personal life?

NK: Yeah sure.

PK: What does this mean?

NK: Well the refinement is just self understanding, future self understanding and this expansion of self too. Let's see. What was someone talking about the other day? Oh I know.

Someone was saying—I was doing this library of teachings project and I preserve all the lectures of Yogi Bhanjan's tapes making them available to people. That's part of my job and to make searchable data bases so you have like a Google search of Yogi Bhanjan's teachings, the 8,000 lectures and things like that.

So people are going around the table and saying why are you here and why are you doing this? And the answer that came to me was well basically I'm doing it for myself. I thought it was better than the lapsing into a story about for future generations so people can be uplifted.

I mean all that is there, but it's my sense of self is like myself, for my own satisfaction is enough but my sense of self is pretty big. So that's the refinement is to maintain that very large sense of self.

PK: I see.

NK: That's the whole thing. I'm the acid test within my own self if I'm being true to that. If I step out of that and, like I'm saying, I'm doing it for this other reason, then what? If it doesn't resonate with me, it's not true. And where all this is going, it's like it has its own life and destiny.

I'm playing a role in it but it's up to you. God knows how much times I've got left. It might be six months. It might be 60 years. But it's going to be your deal. It's up to you where it goes because this is your community too and you've got more time. It's your turn now really to participate and to do with it whatever you want and how you're guided.

I'm not seeing myself—right now I'm having to work like crazy, a lot harder than almost I want to work to establish things in a way that I feel will serve myself the best which includes my future. But I have seen myself standing back much more into an advisory role. I'm not interested in holding on.

I'm not so interested in—like to be premiere in China you have to be like 85 years old to run the whole thing. I'm not interested in that. I can like stand back and advise. I have plenty of interests other than working 70 hour weeks.

PK: Well thank you so much for taking the time to contribute to this investigation

NK: Good, you are most welcome. I enjoyed this.

[End of audio]

Interview with Gurudass Khalsa

PK: I am going to ask you about your spiritual journey. Then I'm going to ask you about your teachers influence on this journey, and then your work as a teacher and finally how has the spiritual community as well as spiritual practice influenced this journey. I am interested in how you perceived these elements in the beginning and how you view them now and what changes may or may not have occurred over time that you might recall.

So, I guess if we can just get started. OK, so do you remember what you were doing when you first got on the spiritual path, like what life was like?

GK: Yeah, I was in college, I was just starting in college, I was 17, I was sort of in the middle of a depression, I was in the middle of a depression, and that state of pain that I was in motivated me to start seeking. Also the loss of my father, which had happened like a year and half before that and two years before that, which I sorta had shut down or blocked out and then that came back, that pain came to the surface and, you know, in the state of depression that I was and feeling sort of like impotent and alone then that longing got even stronger. So yeah, all this intense experience was happening at that time.

PK: Well, when you were in this state did you get a vision of what you were seeking and maybe what this spiritual journey was gonna look like?

GK: I would say at that moment I was seeking to come out of that state of destitute and intense pain. That's what I was really seeking in the beginning, you know, now that I look back. Then it's hard to say, I think the rest would be mental. You know what I mean, but I can go back to sorta how I felt and I just felt like shit. I felt really, really depressed, disappointed with life, disappointed with the ideals that I had gone after up to this point in my life.

PK: Well, so who was the first teacher that you met? What kind of relationship did you develop to a teacher?

GK: I actually met Swami Sat Chit Ananda and I actually spoke to him, and I also went to satsangs, and gatherings. I went to Guru Maharaji and I think I went to Muktananda, I think too, I'm not sure it's so long ago I was 17 then—yeah.

PK: OK, well, so do you remember what it was like when you found a spiritual teacher, someone you accepted as your teacher?

GK: Well, I had a dream experience in which I was in a, whatchamakalit, sort of a monastery kind of place way up the Andes or in the Himalayas, something like

that, and I—hell, I’m gonna go sit down. I’ll take a little time to talk to you because it’s hard to walk and talk and think. Yeah, and I was staying with someone and I was having spiritual doubts and I saw this man with long hair and a beard and a robe walk towards me and look at me in the eye and say, “Are you still doubting?” and I threw myself on the floor and I started to cry and then when I looked up he was standing there before me and the image started to fade and turn into light and I woke up and the room was just like filled with this light and that lasted for about an hour. I was just laying there awake with my eyes open in the room filled with this light, and then soon after I started practicing Kundalini Yoga, and then about, I would say about six months after that I saw Yogi Bhajan, met him for the first time, I’d never really seen him before, I never even seen a photo. When I saw him it was a gathering in California and he came down the hill and then I looked at him and I said, “There he is, the guy from the dream,” that was a clear sign to me and I interpreted it as he was my spiritual teacher.

PK: Oh, yeah.

GK: But before that, the turning point for me was in that process of seeking I had a friend who taught Kundalini Yoga and I asked him to help me, it was when I was really, really depressed, and he taught in Puerto Rico. I went to Puerto Rico on a, like a college break, so I think it was fall break, Thanksgiving I think, and I did one class with him up in the mountains and after we finished, you know, I think it was about an hour and half later I felt like 90 something percent better than I had felt in a good six, eight months. It’s like all the anxiety, tension and a lot of that stuff just got released there, and there was like still a little bit of that inner anxiety, tension so I started going to yoga classes twice a day, every day, for about 10 days I was there in Puerto Rico, and by the end of that time it was gone. I felt more normal, I felt happy, I felt clearer and sort of like what ever this is, is gonna lead me to peace and happiness.

PK: Yeah, so that friend played a big role in—

GK: Absolutely—

PK: In—did the spiritual community of Kundalini Yoga or any other community helped shape your spiritual journey?

GK: Not at that time. I was in college in Boston and I started going to yoga classes once, twice a week and it was at Harvard, they had like this evening programs, different activities so that was the one place it was Kundalini. I started going there, but I didn’t really connect with the people there much, I just went to classes. I started taking—I made, you know, friends with other people in the Boston area who also were seekers of all different kinds of traditions and stuff and it wasn’t really until that summer, the next summer when I met Yogi Bhajan that somehow in my mind it was confirmed for me that this was the way for me to go and then I moved into an ashram and then community started to play a big part.

PK: OK, once you got into the Ashram, but until then spiritual practice had already been very useful for you?

GK: Yeah, but just on my own, and then I went to this gathering called summer solstice in California in '72, and that was my first community experience and that was very powerful too, and I did Tantric Yoga there for the first time and that was like the real, the real pusher—

PK: Is that when you met, maybe we could say your spiritual buddies or like some people—

GK: Yes, yeah, I would say so, yeah, that's when I started to connect with some people and then with some of those people I still have a relationship with until today.

PK: OK, well, let's move all the way forward 'til today, and talk about, what you might describe your path is like today?

GK: What my path is like today.

PK: And just have your original expectations about what it was gonna be like, do you think they've been met or exceeded or have they changed at all?

GK: Well, they definitely have—well, let's see, I would say most of them have not been met. Not that what has happened hasn't been or where I'm at now isn't fulfilling and incredibly positive, but you know if I look back and what I thought would happen and how life would be certainly wasn't that way, it would turn out that way.

GK: And my understanding of life and understanding of myself, and the spiritual path if there is such a thing 'cause I even questioned that term, so we can go into that if you want me to.

PK: Sure.

GK: But I would say that at the time what initially lead me into this path was the pain, but once the pain was gone, I sorta went back to the same thing that had motivated me before the pain when I was a hippie and an idealist and the way I would define it today was seeking an extraordinary life. Seeking an experience in life in which extraordinary things would happen to me. I would be rewarded for all my efforts and my practice, I would be rewarded with fame, with wealth, with recognition, also the expectation then, the part of that extraordinary thing, was there would come a point in life where I would not experience pain. I would live in this state of perpetual bliss, and none of that—well, I wouldn't say none of that was met, some of that was met, but it wasn't an absolute thing. I could say I have lived, you know, if I compared my life to many, I have lived an extraordinary life

in different aspects, but there really has not been any fulfillment, true fulfillment in that. There's been moments of pleasure, there's been moments of satisfaction, but it hasn't given me this perpetual state of fulfillment, you know, those kinds—those things that had happened along the way, and it also of course didn't spare me from the pain and suffering either.

PK: You said something about your concept of spiritual path has changed and perhaps you question that term even at this point. What is that about?

GK: I think that there is life and that everybody has an experience of life that is unique and exclusive to them and that is why each individual is here and some of those experiences are very painful, some of those experiences are pretty pleasurable, most of them are, you know, up and down in the experience of pleasure and pain, and I think that's what life is. I don't think that there is anything parallel to that that one could call the spiritual path. Now, I think that there is a seeking that awakens in one, which is—I think it happens at two levels. I think there's a deeper level, which is—I'll put it this way, I think it's God wanting to return to God. In other words, the soul or inner personal consciousness, individual consciousness, however one wants to call it, is being drawn again towards the state of one, of merging, or just returning. However, though that's all conceptual to whom ever explains it might use little different language, but there is that deep longing that every human being has. Whether then that human being is capable of articulating that, of understanding that, of defining it in some particular way, you know again that's very individual.

PK: From your current experienced point of view can you describe any changes in your awareness or perception?

GK: You know I think that seeking also manifests itself in many, many ways. I mean some people could call it spiritual seeking, but the seeking of wealth, the seeking of love, the seeking of recognition, and all of that is still the same seeking—but that's one level of it. The other level is then how the ego-self views that seeking, and it identifies itself as the seeker. "I" am seeking, so if you are seeking you're already going on the premise and also the sense of self-doership in the sense that I am seeking and I am doing all of these things in order to find whatever that is, rather than simply life happening. Because, you know, from my perspective whatever you seek, you know, or not, whatever is meant to happen is going to happen along the way, and then the ego will interpret it, "Oh, I have found a little bit of it," or "I haven't found anything." You know, but life goes on, so my view nowadays is that if one can be in a state of peace and contentment with an ordinary life, and what I mean by an ordinary life is a life as it is, you know, the one that has been dispensed to you, and instead of seeking, you know, these extraordinary experiences of, you know, both material or spiritual or emotional, however one, you know, sort of gets them in their mind and then goes after them. Because also my experience, personally, when I look back was that part of my experience on the so called spiritual path was tremendous disappointment 'cause those things

that I was seeking, you know, because many of them did not happen or I didn't get them in the way that I wanted, etc., then I felt disappointed and the way that I looked at myself and at life back then, it was a combination of I am not doing enough, I'm not doing the right thing, I'm not making a big enough effort, there is something wrong with me that I am not getting those things, and there was another part of me that felt I had been born and deserved those things why aren't they happening to me, you know, after all of this effort that I am putting into it, and—but all of that, to me, ultimately reduces itself to suffering, so for me, my approach to life now, to free myself or put it this way, for suffering to end is to not place any expectations.

PK: Yes, that's a pretty big shift in perception from where you started out and then you know where you're currently at is very different. Would you say that these, I think what you called disappointments, were the biggest difficulties that you had on this—well, I want to say path because that's the term I've been using, but—

GK: OK, that's fine.

PK: I don't know what else to call it. Do you think that those disappointments were the biggest difficulties you've had or have you had other life struggles that have influenced this new perception?

GK: I think it's a combination of all of it. I don't think I could put more, what's the word, I don't think I could say that one or the other has played a bigger role. I think it's all, you know, it's all together.

PK: Oh, OK.

GK: I think that what I—how I view myself today, what I am today as human, as Gurudass Singh, as this ego, is the result of all of that all together. I couldn't be who I am today and understand what I understand, know what I know if all of those hadn't happened.

PK: Yeah.

GK: And I think they all play a role, I think there are moments when disappointment was a huge source of suffering, but then there were other types of experiences that also at different times caused a lot of suffering so—

PK: What—can you tell me about other kinds of experiences came along, like other than just your disappointment of achievement in the spiritual realm, what other kinds of things felt like difficulties to you that contributed to this?

GK: Loss, loss of people primarily.

PK: Oh, OK.

GK: And also loss of stature, that was a big cause of pain at one point.

PK: What kind of stature?

GK: Well, I think it's tied into that expectation of that extraordinary life, of being recognized and admired and seen as, well, as a great spiritual teacher. Those kinds of expectations and a bundle of expectations there, and then things, you know, incidents happened where then my image, my relationship with other people, my power diminished or was even lost to some extent, you know, and that was also very shattering.

PK: Oh, yeah.

GK: I'd say another very shattering—there were two very shattering things as well. One was when my teacher came off the pedestal.

PK: Oh, OK.

GK: And when the idealization I had of him and who he was and who he was supposed to be and how he was supposed to be and what he was supposed to do, what he was not supposed to do, that got shattered, and that was very painful, and then the other one that was a very big one was the expectations that I had put on my son, who also was born in this life style—should I answer personally or more impersonal?

PK: What ever you feel comfortable with.

GK: Well, you know, the expectations that I had towards my son, meaning all of the things that I was doing with again the expectation that they would lead him to be this extraordinary being within the model of the life style of, you know, Sikhism, Kundalini Yoga, you know, spiritual leader of the future, la la la la, all of the things that were part of the package that was part of the belief system that we collectively sort of partly bought into and created as a group we were co-participants in that, but that expectation that I had, when he became a teenager and then, you know, later a young adult, and he—his life took a different course and now I can look back and say that's how he was meant to live, but during the time that it looked like he was leaving the tradition for me that was a tremendous disappointment. I believed that he would end up on this path because I had the belief system that all of those things I had done and all of the sacrifices that I had made and all the things that I had, made him to do had not paid off in the way that I thought he should. So, that also began to shatter, you know, I would say there was a period of probably 20 years, I, you know—you saying again the possibility of spiritual path from when I started 'til now, it's been 36 years. I would say for those first 20 years, I unquestionably believed that doing all of those practices would lead me to the results that were a combination of my own projection and

also what sort of a collective projection was, and then when that thing happened both with Yogi Bhanan and with my son did not turn out as I had imagined, then my whole belief system there got greatly shattered. I wouldn't say all of it, but I would say a huge part of it, you know, and I would say before that I really looked at all of that from a very black and white perspective and that—as painful as that was it opened a window to me to start to realize that for me that model—not only the practice model, but the actual core belief system of that model didn't work anymore and that there were other options, you know, how to look at oneself and how to look at life. That was sorta like the beginning of a new seeking stage.

PK: Oh, OK, almost back to the beginning.

GK: Yeah, that's sorta like the new beginning. *[Laughter]*

PK: *[Laughter]* Yeah.

GK: You know, pain, I say—it seems like pain is sort of the, the big catalyst for the majority of people.

PK: Was the relationship with your teacher helpful for you in this process and the transformation that you've been on for the past 36 years?

GK: I would say it was helpful; it was very helpful especially at the beginning. I mean I was very young. Both his teachings and his persona played a significant role at that time in transforming my life. And, you know, I would say in this process, in this illusion of seeking, yes and for a long time, and I had a very intimate relationship with him, very close one, so he was definitely very important at different points in my life. Things that happened through either his immediate direction or indirectly, such as getting married, moving to Spain to take Kundalini Yoga there and of course my life took from that moment onward, my career, and even this new stage in my life he was also the catalyst that pushed me to go in this direction which was you know to teach and to dedicate myself fully to teaching and if he had not strongly encouraged me to do that—well, I know it wouldn't of happened because that was part of the combination of all the factors that lead to it happening, but as a persona he played a very significant role then, but the relationship definitely changed tremendously when I had that experience of him coming off the pedestal, and before it was a relationship in which I blindly did what he told me. I was obedient, I was clearly seeking his love and his approval and that was a huge motivator for me to be obedient, and then when that shift happened then my thinking became a lot more autonomous and it was definitely a teaching of love, but the power that I had turned over to him to a great extent was not there anymore—or—not there anymore, I had sorta taken it back, put it that way.

PK: Oh, I see. If we could just shift now to how it is that you work with your students, how has this whole experience that you've had that has shifted your awareness

over the past 36 years or so, how do you work with a beginning student that comes along, and what are you trying to accomplish with them?

GK: I don't know if I can say I want to accomplish anything. I could just say sort of what I do.

PK: OK.

GK: Because I don't think that I really have any power over what is going to happen to them. What is going to happen to them is going to happen to them and I am just playing the part that I have to play as a teacher in order for that to happen to them. My fundamental belief is that everybody deserves to seek happiness and peace in life, and that people, if it is their destiny—anything that will help and encourage them, open windows for them, bring opportunities for them, in order to achieve that and, you know, they are entitled to do that and my role is to encourage them to do that. I don't tell people what to do. If they ask me, the only thing that I will tell people to do specifically are certain practices by which will help facilitate an experience for them and help them quiet their mind, be able to be self observant, begin to know themselves, begin to identify their ego, not as themselves being in touch with what they feel and trust what they feel above what they think. To know that everything that happens is perfect, it happens as it should, whether it's pleasurable or painful because you can get, you know, out of experiencing both. That you are not responsible for what happens, you're just simply playing the role that you are given from the script that you are given and you are acting your part and you have really no power over that. Yet at the same time there's an experience of choice that one has, so one should then, at that moment, chose what everyone thinks that one should do, which ultimately is what one is meant to do anyway, but the trust that this is what I feel I should do, then let that be what makes the action become manifest. I'm not interested in form, I'm not interested in creed, I'm not interested in teaching too much extraordinary stuff at all. I don't believe in placing too many expectations on people other than the expectation that they can be happy and they can be at peace with themselves, regardless of what happens because over that you have no power, so sorta going back to the ordinary versus extraordinary is just to learn to be at peace with oneself and with life as it is rather than doing all or—imagining that you are choosing to do all of these things in order to achieve the extraordinary.

PK: Yeah, when you say that, that's the number one struggle that your students end up with as well or do you recognize anything that they continuously come in struggling with?

GK: Which one?

PK: Oh, the struggle with extraordinary or the ordinary—

- GK:* I think—I mean I would say not only my students—I would say all the people that I know struggle with that. They struggle with being at peace with what is and also struggle trying to get what ever it is that they think once they get it it's going to then, you know, solve it all, bring them peace, bring them happiness, bring them what ever it is that they are seeking.
- PK:* Yeah, Is there anyway that you try to assist your students to be more at ease with their process—I mean other than what you said was give them some form of practice, is there anything else that you recommend?
- GK:* Well, if you want to sorta talk about methodology I would say that the practice of meditation aimed at bringing the mind to the place of silence of quietude gives one the experience of what is or gives one the possibility of the experience of what is because in that moment of silence the ego self then is sort of removed to the side and, you know, in that place of no thought there's no ego present but there is a deep knowingness and experience that I am, I exist. That is consciousness, that is God, that is the self that is what ever you want to call it. The knowingness that I exist beyond all this other phenomenal stuff around me including what I call myself.
- PK:* Oh, I see.
- GK:* So meditation for me it's the key to helping people go into that place of silence so they can begin also to identify not only that true self, that beingness, that what ever we want to call it, but I am, and also be able to recognize the ego once it steps back onto the plate.
- PK:* I see—
- GK:* Because as you can begin to identify the ego stepping onto the plate, and especially that part of the ego that is loaded with all those concepts that feed into the whole marionette of expectations of one should be, what one shouldn't be, what one should do, what one shouldn't do, what should happen, what shouldn't happen, yeah, that is the ego that costs us, you know—or an ego loaded with that is an ego that is going to then suffer.
- PK:* Yes.
- GK:* So as you identify those patterns of the ego when they show up and you can begin to say, “Oh that is the ego, but that is not the self.” It begins to disempower that also.
- PK:* I see, so do you still have to meditate or have you adopted other spiritual practices at this point for—

GK: I wouldn't say I have to, I would say I do. I do because it happens and I enjoy it. Some times I have—the desire shows to say OK I'm gonna sit now and practice some meditation technique and other times the state of meditation sorta shows up by itself.

PK: So with this—what is your current relationship to a spiritual community?

GK: Well, I would say the spiritual community that I am more involved with right now is in south American where I am teaching, and it is a spiritual community that is linked through the tradition of Kundalini Yoga with a wide range of levels of commitment to that. There's the students to beginners to old timers, but some how the people that are gravitating towards me as a teacher and with whom just a connection happens both ways, 'cause it's reciprocal are people who are attracted to what I teach and concepts that I teach and the way that I share what my understanding is, and—but that is the nurturing, the sense of community is very nurturing, but I found that I—it's sort of happening that the type of community that I am more and more a part of is a community that is more connected from the heart and from the place of more acceptance and less judgment than a community that is dogmatic and very vertical in their approach to themselves in spirituality and in life and all that.

PK: So you're involved in the development of a new spiritual community?

GK: Yeah, absolutely.

PK: Now, how do you think that your status as a spiritual teacher has affected your relationship in this community? What's that like, to be a teacher as opposed to when you were a student?

GK: I would say teaching happens through me, but the way that I relate to myself is just me being me and sharing who I am and what I know and to the extent that that effects people is not in my power anyway so I honestly don't worry much about it or think much about it, but it does seem to have an impact and I—you know, like you're saying, this new community is sort of emerging, and I wouldn't say that it's emerging around me, I think it's just sorta emerging because like-minded people some how are being drawn together in what ever it is that I'm teaching.

PK: Well, that sounds awesome. Do you have a vision for where this is gonna go in the future at all? Are you—do you have any idea, what's going on?

[Laughter]

GK: *[Laughter]* Well, honestly I would say no because my experience is that I haven't met—you know, it's interesting, I can't shake it, I can't try to draw it or, you know, define it. I mean, I always knew that I was meant to teach and it has happened but

how—what's gonna happen in the future, where's this all gonna lead. I don't know. My experience is that it would be a waste of time to try and envision more than just a few months ahead. That's because I have a schedule.

PK: Yeah, so some how you're just seeing it unfold.

GK: Yeah.

PK: And you think if you create some grand vision of it then that would not be the way?

GK: Oh, I could create a grand vision of it. That doesn't mean it's gonna happen, so why bother with it. 'Cause again, I'm not seeking anything extraordinary I'm content being me sharing what I know, and if that helps people be at peace with their lives than that to me is a tremendous sense of fulfillment and what ever happens as a result of that, well, it's not in my hands anyway, so I—

PK: Some how what's happened to you is now striking me as, I forget the words you used, but it was like phenomenal or—no that's not it—it was like—

GK: Ordinary?

PK: Yeah, ordinary, or the other side of the spectrum was—it was tremendous or something. This—

GK: Extraordinary?

PK: Extraordinary, yeah. This is striking me as extraordinary. This new relationship that you're having to what is, the way it's affecting your life and your teachings, it's amazing.

GK: But I would say that there is certainly very wonderful and pleasurable things happening, I can't deny that and I enjoy them, and they are fulfilling, but along with it there are painful things happening at the same time, and I have no control over those either, so that's why I don't look at it as extraordinary because, you know, what I define as that extraordinary vision or projection is one that would be freeing of all of it, of all that other stuff.

PK: Oh, I see.

GK: And I don't think that anybody could be free from all that other stuff. Pleasure and pain will always be there present. There will be times when life is more pleasurable with small doses of pain. There's moments when life is more painful with small doses of pleasure. There's other times when their kinda both in there together, and over either one I don't seem to have any power to make it go away,

you know, any sooner because I want to or because there's anything I can do to make that happen.

PK: Yeah, so you're—

GK: So—

PK: You're not in a struggle between, you know, pleasure or pain anymore? Is that—?

GK: I would say no, you know. Doesn't mean that I don't feel the pain, I mean I feel the pain very strongly and some times that pain—you know, by what ever the grace of God because I assert myself and I see my ego self, you know, showing it's head and I can recognize it, but, you know, I would say, you know, some times it almost verges on suffering. Then I can, you know, for what ever reason, there is some degree of understanding in me that when it comes—before it reaches that point there's an acceptance of that pain that comes into play and then that sort of deflates—it deflates it a little bit and some how the ego thinking, judgmental mind then doesn't take over and that experience of suffering per say doesn't come into play, but it borders some times—

PK: Yeah.

GK: - At times touches on old patterns and, you know, things that I identified with before that I guess are still there, part of my memories.

PK: Yeah. Wow, that's the most real and authentic answer I've ever heard to that relationship to suffering. I hear some of the other people who have become realized and they say that there are no longer suffering—or they are no longer plagued by suffering because of their new relationship to what is, and I always think to myself well, that may be true in this moment, but then what happens when someone close to them dies, or you're pulled into an amazing relationship that tears you out of something else you got going on. I guess in your response just then I felt a humanness that sounds way more real than I am no longer plagued by suffering. That doesn't seem real.

GK: Yeah. The way that I look at it is me as Gurudas is as much a part of what is as everything else, and this, you know, body mind entity is as it is. It is emotional, it is impulsive, it has a tendency to, you know, small outbursts of anger, it's sentimental, it is sensitive, it is that way, so when things happen there is no way that this body mind entity is not gonna react in terms of what it feels, you know, out of that spectrum. You following me?

PK: Right, yeah.

GK: That's the way that I am, you know. What is God, consciousness identified within me as me, has made this body mind entity be this way, so something might

happen in another person who has a different kind of character will respond differently than how I would respond, but the way that I look at it is that one or the other is not more enlightened, more spiritual, wiser, clearer, what ever adjectives, than the other. They both are what is. When things happen and my body mind entity reacts in that way, I've come to the place where I can say, "Look, that's how I am, that's me, I can't react any other way," and then there is no guilt or shame that then comes along to then judge that and trigger suffer.

PK: Wow, you know—

GK: But the feelings are there.

PK: Right.

GK: You know, I think the suffering comes from this thinking mind comes into play. The suffering doesn't come from the feelings because feelings change. You know, you feel anger, it will go away. You feel pain, hurt, it will go away, you know, but when the thinking mind comes in judging it, blaming yourself, blaming someone else, feeling ashamed, feeling guilty, etc., then it takes that pain and it magnifies it into suffering, and it makes it also be, what's the word, remain there much longer. Because now you're identifying yourself with it, you know, blaming yourself for the—just the whole snowballing effect that it has on one, you know. Rather than saying well, the feeling arose, that's how I react, that's how this body mind entity reacts. I have no power over that because I didn't even make myself, so I mean just being at peace with that, and it's already happened anyway. There's nothing to be done to erase what's already happened.

PK: Yeah, I'm pretty much on board with you at this point. This has been an awesome hour for me Gurudas.

GK: Wow, great. I enjoyed doing this, so—

You know, and what I would—last thing I would say is that for me the important thing that, you know, my relationship with someone else is—it's rather than building expectations there that no one knows whether they'll be met or not. My feeling—my experience is that with people, when you approach them from the place where they can hear within themselves that it's OK who I am as I am, and that, you know, I can only do what I think I should do and beyond that, you know, it's not in my power what's going to happen. And you can help someone unload all these learned and self created concepts that just tie you back to the shoulda, woulda, coulda, you know, and all of the judgment that the ego immediately throws into every situation. People need to feel that it's OK to be themselves and just be at peace with what's happened; that is such a liberating feeling. You know, beyond what ever you believe, beyond whether you believe this or you're religious, you're not religious, you know, all of that is part of the, again, the

seeking of the extraordinary rather than just simply being happy, being me as I am, within what's happening. And just sort of that is my story in a nut shell.

PK: Awesome.

[End of audio]