

Consciousness Newsletter Anthology 2007 - 2014

2007

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Ed Pitt

Canterbury, England

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Peter,

I appreciate that you are busy but I hoped that you might have time to read this. I am writing to you as I respect your writings a great deal.

My concern in this email is a purely mental experience. I am interested in how the mind generates objects or more generally concepts. I would say that in generating an object mentally we also establish its relationship with the rest of our experience and our other concepts. This is not a complete, exhaustive or error-free process. To repeat in a more minimal fashion: when we create an object mentally, the act of creation is one which also generates the relation the object has with at least some other object. The objects thus created are defined by their relationship. The relationship between the objects is defined by the objects. Thus the objects and their relationship are born from the same act, the act of distinction.

I would stress that obviously there are a great many acts of distinction or object generation. This can lead to long chains of this phenomena. This allows for a great deal of hazing or cloudiness to occur, for error to be introduced and the original point to be lost. It is the multitude of conceptual thought that hides the simple basis behind conceptual thought. I would liken this act of distinction to the action that creates yin/yang from tai chi. More complicated analysis could be done easily, but I am interested in how solid the base analysis is.

Intellectually this has parallels with non duality. Items cannot be separate since they originally were not separate and their existence is linked, somewhere, and inextricably so with their inter-relationship being (perhaps complicatedly) a symptom and requirement of their genesis. Yet items that are separate, linked or otherwise, are definitely separate.

I write this as someone with a very poor background in ontology. Sadly I can intellectually know the answers to many ontological problems if this is at all possible. I understand that this is as useful as fish intellectually understanding that you can use bicycles to travel on roads. You seem to have the ability to discern pretty words from realistic ones written with clear intent. Any advice or comment would be gratefully received.

Ed Pitt

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Ed,

I don't really know how to respond. There is no question here. It sounds like an active intellectual imagination is at work. Yes, distinction is essential, and it may be so that there is ultimately no separation. But as you correctly point out, this is not very useful unless experienced for oneself in such a way that reality is actually perceived in that way. Then it does make a difference in the way you relate to things. Having the belief that something is true -- and any intellectual conclusion comes down to being a belief -- can never approach the power of experiencing true insight. Besides attending the ontology workshop at the center this spring -- and I think you would get a lot out of it, it may well change your life -- you might want to try the eCourse on Contemplation. This would help ground your investigations.

Peter

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Ronan Galloghly  
Belfast, Ireland

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Peter,

We discussed some consistencies between Cheng Hsin and Vipassana during a conversation at the Wales camp. I've found Vipassana great for my feeling attention of my own body, but got confused. The sensations I feel whilst practicing feeling-attention are not dissimilar to what I feel during Qi Gong, yet it seems a paradox that one is attempting to 'build chi' whilst the other is ridding oneself of the tension and becoming aware of what is already there. You mentioned energy work before. Is Cheng Hsin energy work similar to that of Qi Gong?

Best regards,
Ronan Galloghly

Ronan,

There is no paradox. You simply are looking at two different things. Vipassana and Ch'i Kung are not Cheng Hsin. Cheng Hsin is a very different pursuit, and the other two are also both different from each other and pursue very different ends.

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Cheng Hsin is based on the pursuit of the truth, and so adheres to certain principles aligned with this effort. Vipassana also claims to pursue the truth, but that method doesn't include questioning everything, such as: What is communication? What is thought, mind, emotion? What is interaction? What are the principles of effective interaction? and so on. Cheng Hsin includes becoming conscious of the true nature of anything. Vipassana pursues a consciousness of "being" -- as do we -- and the method they use is one of systematically putting feeling attention on their whole bodies for long periods of time. Feeling the whole body in detail is one aspect of Cheng Hsin work, but not the only aspect. And generally we don't do it as a vehicle toward becoming conscious of the nature of being, just to become conscious of the presence of the whole body.

Ch'i Kung is a method founded on believing in a system of "ch'i" and ch'i channels that exist throughout the body. Their focus is to concentrate on moving this ch'i around in the body to improve health or create some unknown form of power. Nothing wrong with this, since regardless whether any such system of "ch'i" exists in any way that people tend to think it does, concentrating on such things improves one's sensitivity and control of their feeling-attention.

Both of these methods, however, are restricted to a belief system and follow dogmatically this conceptual structure. In Cheng Hsin we don't limit ourselves to such beliefs, and as a matter of fact, we work to destroy dependency on having to believe anything, even "Cheng Hsin." Rather, we set out to experience for ourselves what's what. The purpose of each of these pursuits is different. Note the purpose and you will notice the difference. Don't try to make everything the same thing. Don't think that all practices lead to the same place, and are simply variations on the same effort. This is not true. All practices and systems were invented by humans, and they were invented to serve a purpose. What one person comes up with is not the same as what someone else may invent. You can contemplate the implications of this to fill out the rest of my response.

Peter

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Charles Welborn,  
Ft. Collins, Colorado  
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Peter,

I just figured out why I have so much tension at times. It is because one cannot be conscious and social at the same time. It is not possible. I wrote you a few years back that while it is possible to think while being conscious, it is not possible to be conscious while thinking. This is what I meant (without knowing it at the time). This is why not knowing is so foreign to our experience. Not knowing is consciousness while knowing is NOT consciousness and never will be. What I have been trying to do is be conscious while at the same time fulfilling a social role. Not possible. It is possible to have give and take, i.e. 20% conscious while 80% social but they cannot be/exist in the same space at the same time. Exactly like mixing oil and water. They will mix for a period of time but all the while they are together they are trying to move apart, creating tension until they are separated. And they are never ONE thing, oil or water. A conscious person is not a social person and this is why conscious people move away from the social world and live in as much isolation as they can find, and still maintain existence. I CAN be conscious and think while being conscious, i.e., be conscious of thinking, but there is no consciousness in the thinking itself. May you have camels and goats enough to meet the needs of your harem.

Charles

Charles,

It may seem that way, but it isn't that way. It is only a limitation in Consciousness that makes it seem the two are separate. Being social is a particular event; within that context, what is outside of that context is meaningless. But all of it is Consciousness. And there is nothing there. So there is no reason, difficult as it is because we are born and raised as social creatures, that you can't be Conscious while in a social setting. You just might not be very social -- not unpleasant, simply not playing the game unconsciously. But you don't become ignorant of limitation by becoming conscious of "freedom" (easy word to use).

Peter

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Stefan von Lessen  
Hamburg, Germany  
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Peter,

There was a question arising out of the CI - When I am looking at the work that you are doing in the Ontology Course, I know that you are speaking a lot about manipulation, survival (as the main drive of our existence), being at the effect, etc. When I look at the way human beings (including me) relate, I would agree, but it seems to me that the main drive of human beings seems to be something completely different. Why would people come at all to your workshops if there is not some kind of connection to their real core which seems to be something different than manipulation. When I hear you speak I very often have the impression that people in general have lost all kinds of contact to this source. You might know that I did some work with Lawrence Noyes as well. These guys are always emphasizing that the real core of a human being is in fact love, the truth, etc. Apart from the fact that I find the second version far more attractive, I would like to know what you have to say about that.

Thanks in advance
Stefan

Stefan,

It may be true that at the core humans are love and truth. But that doesn't mean much. First of all saying we are "truth" says nothing, since truth doesn't mean anything. It is not something that is, it is what is true, so saying we are truth is only saying we are what we are. This is true.

Saying we are love doesn't say much either, since then the question is: what is love? If we identify "love" as being the same as what we feel emotionally (which is what people do with that), then it says we are an emotion. Do you think that is true? In any case, these aren't true in your experience. When they are, that means you're directly experiencing it for yourself. Fantasies don't help the truth, and being love and truth is a fantasy. If you directly experience what you are then you could say you are a walnut and it would be true, but you'd know what you meant. Those listening to you, however, will likely think of walnuts as they know them, not whatever it is you are pointing to.

I don't mean to suggest that self-survival is all there is. I wouldn't bring it up otherwise. The whole point is that it is not all there is, but it completely

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dominates our experience. We are considering the notion of freedom from self. This may only be possible if we become fully conscious of what self is -- not just the absolute nature of being (which is the freedom part) but this very experience that persists as the self. What is that? Why isn't the truth or absolute nature obvious? What is really happening at the core of self that this experience arises and persists? Without addressing these questions how can we transcend what's going on?

Both fantasy and negativism are the death of truth. But to make my point clear, let me offer the words of a long dead Tibetan Lama when asked about teaching people:

"If you speak to them of profound Truths they yawn, and, if they dare, they leave you, but if you tell them absurd fables they are all eyes and ears. They wish the doctrines preached to them, whether religious, philosophic, or social, to be agreeable, to be consistent with their conceptions, to satisfy their inclinations, in fact that they find themselves in them, and that they feel themselves approved by them."

Hope this speaks to your concerns.
Peter

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Charlie Conklin  
London, England  
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Peter,

I've been thinking about emotions, investigating things like what are they, how do they arise, what is their utility and what constitutes a proper relationship with regards to them. My thinking on this is such that I can't yet ask a clear question on it at the moment. However, in thinking about these things, something did arise, concerning Lending Being, where I think I can formulate a clear question.

I'm not sure I really understand very well what "Lending Being" is, but nonetheless I've been using your hints about it to good effect in training. From a previous newsletter Q&A, you said:

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"In simple, Lending Being is providing "life" to something, giving it its existence and presence. Since, for us, what we identify as "being" is the same as what we identify as "self," our energies and commitment are devoted to being a self. But if we provide "life" or "beingness" to something not immediately recognized as self, or to something that's recognized as not-self, then we have "lent" beingness to this thing, or action, or principle."

Trying to apply this, I've found for instance that me "Lending Being" to yielding practice, or to a particular distinction in play (say Game B while following, leading, balanced vs. managing off-balance, etc.), makes it much more real to me. In particular, it makes the distinction real in the sense that it changes from being something "I should be practicing," to something which can be the most important thing, THE highest priority. This is in contrast to the situation I often find myself in, where I may be training yielding or another principle, but somehow "winning" (in some sense) seems to take over, and the principle is sacrificed. So if I give enough "life" to the principle, it seems to become the most important thing of the moment.

In investigating emotions, one of the things which has puzzled me is that they seem so compelling and powerful, and yet may be completely based in fantasy, very far away from the truth of the matter. And often a fantasy can seem to be very real. For myself at least, if I'm honest about it, I'd say that my life is mostly (perhaps entirely!) directed by fantasies of some sort, and emotional effects arising from those, which motivate me to act in certain ways and move my life in directions dictated by those effects.

It occurred to me, that in a strange way, this is somewhat as if I was Lending Being to my fantasies and emotional responses! For instance, if I take a compelling fantasy, or something with emotional "charge" to it, and I do what is necessary to "Complete" it, it essentially disappears, i.e. it is seen as just another thought or idea, nothing more. On the other hand, if I "give it life," it becomes real and compelling, emotive and effect producing.

So my initial question, is this a somewhat reasonable way of holding this, that we often "Lend Being", or give life to these things which are not real, and thus find ourselves powerfully at the effect of them?

Secondly, in your description of "Lending Being" (Newsletter), and "Giving Being" (Internal Dialogue Anthology), you talk about the importance of letting things be exactly as they are:

"I am not simply moving the sword with my own ego and self-mind, but allowing the sword to tell me what and how it needs to be moved, and so it seems like I must give it the power of movement but I must also "get out of the way," so to speak, so that the weapon can perform its function freely."

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"We begin "giving being" by fully experiencing others exactly the way they are, including their context and exactly what they're doing, and only what they're doing, in each moment."

Thinking about it this way, it seems that there is perhaps something very different between giving life to the sword, and giving life to a fantasy. Along the lines of how much or how little the "life" is aligned with the underlying truth of what is happening. So this leads to the next question. When I "Lend Being" or life to my practice of "walking on pylons", I often use imagery from the film "Golden Child", because the protagonist finds himself in a space where he must walk on top of tall wooden poles (some of which move), where a misstep would be fatal. This helps my grounding a lot, thus it seems there is some alignment with the truth (in this case structural integrity through aligning with gravity). Yet it is very deeply a fantasy! An unreal imagining, which I am giving an artificial sense of reality.

How is it that we can take an untruth, a fantasy, yet which when given life, helps to align to some truth? And the deeper question, if this is possible (which obviously it is), what factors or distinctions account for the difference in a fantasy or imagining which aligns us with some truth, as opposed to those which take us away from truth?

Thanks,
Charlie

Charlie,

A well thought out and clearly presented consideration. As I said before, I am not inclined to go down the road of further distinctions in Lending Being. What you've worked out for yourself sounds just fine.

Your final question, however, is provocative. One thing we want to do right off is be clear that something can be true and yet not "factual," just as something can be truly "experienced" that isn't objective. When you have a fantasy, you say that it is a fantasy because you are conscious that it isn't true. It isn't something that is actually happening, it's something you imagine is happening. Your body-mind reacts to whatever is perceived. If you perceive a fantasy that you like, it might put a smile on your face, in other words, change your state. Yet you also perceive it as a fantasy and so the smile is fleeting and that state is countered with whatever you consider to be the real condition.

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On the other hand, when you "perceive" a principle taking place, which is to say if your body-mind is aligned with the principle or acting in concert with the principle and so manifesting the principle -- or if you like, Lending Being to the principle it is not a fantasy. This is something actually being created and experienced. When we use imagery to steer our conceptual-perceptive senses toward aligning to some principle, it will have an effect on the body-mind. But only insofar as you can convince yourself that it is real. If you hold that you are merely fantasizing about the pylons, then your nervous system will not align convincingly with the principle of grounding. Yet if you convince your brain stem your more autonomic brain functions that you are really standing on pylons, then it will take the matter seriously and make subtle physical and psychic adjustments to deeply align with the principle.

The imagery is only a tool to get to a real experience. Knowing this helps you convince your brain of the reality of the image, since you know you aren't really standing on pylons or whatever, but you are trying to alter your physical and perceptive state to thoroughly align with a principle that really does exist.

So the difference here is that on the one hand you may fantasize to entertain yourself and produce various effects that you like or dislike, but this is simply altering your state of mind by being at the effect of mental images. On the other hand, when training yourself to experience and align with a principle, you are transforming your body-mind and so how you experience and interact with reality.

As the ancient Tibetan monks used to say "you become what you meditate," so watch what it is you apply yourself to, and meditate the truth.

Peter

2008

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Oliver Thorne  
Lancashire, England

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Peter,

In the newsletter you said that Inquiry and Contemplation were not the same thing, so what is the difference between them and what do you consider to be Inquiry and what is Contemplation?

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A second question then, Is what is meditation?

Thank you for your time and attention

Oliver

Oliver,

Contemplation is a form of inquiry. In the paragraph you are referring to, however, there was no contrast between inquiry and contemplation. The use of the words contemplation, meditation, inquiry, or questioning could be the same thing if one held them that way.

I consider inquiry to be the whole matter of investigation, study, learning, experimentation, pondering, and so on. It would include contemplation. Contemplation, however, is direct questioning for the purpose of having an insight. It is focusing on a subject for the purpose of becoming directly conscious of its nature. Meditation, on the other hand, I hold to be all the work done to change one's state of mind, or improve some internal function, learn to control the mind or "energy" in a particular way, develop inner peace, quiet the mind, and so on. Look at the word meditation and suppose it has the same root as the word medical, then you more readily see the distinction I'm making. Meditation is healing, improving, empowering. Contemplation increases consciousness, produces insight, grasps the true nature of something. See the difference? Hope this answers your question.

Peter

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John J. Patton

West Virginia

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Hello again Mr. Ralston,

My internal path started over ten years ago while reading your book the Principles of Effortless Power. I have since then studied a lot of Alan Watts, Eckhart Tolle, Huang Po, Adyashanti, etc... and most recently some books that came out in the late fifties and early sixties under the pen name Wei Wu Wei. These are wonderful books. You have probably already heard of them but if you haven't please check them out. They are a rare find. To get to my point.....I read Reflections several times over the years and have always loved it. I picked it up

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to read it recently and discovered that all the things I have been learning and experiencing are right there. I didn't realize it before but it was there. How amazing. You don't use some of the familiar terms of Zen and other practices but the teaching is the same. So.... I have two questions.

1. Why did you not use the typical terms in your explanations such as the void, non duality, ego....etc? Don't get me wrong, you explain them well, I'm just curious. And

2. You had such a deep understanding of things all the way back then, and a clear way of explaining them. Why didn't you write more along those lines? Is your next book going to be anything like that? Thanks for taking the time.

John J. Patton

John,

1. I deliberately avoid using such terms. There are many such terms in "spiritual" pursuits, and in internal martial pursuits, or even philosophic pursuits of various kinds. It serves little to gather them up and parrot them as if it means understanding. A term may refer to something worth pursuing, but when people start using particular phrases too much they tend to fall into dogma, something merely believed. Then the communication loses power. It even becomes detrimental in that the user may think they understand far more than they really do simply because they have a special vocabulary, assuming this makes them special, or refers to personal experience and understanding when it does not.

It is the experience, the consciousness, the insight that we pursue. The pursuit is about what it true, not what it's called. Far too often people use words without having had the experience that sparked the creation of the word in the first place. Repeating a profound saying by no means makes someone profound. I try to avoid this and work toward the experience itself. Sometimes people have accused me of trying to reinvent the wheel. As in this case, why not use words already established? I have no problem standing on the shoulders of others and benefiting from their efforts, but like I said only a direct experience of what's true will suffice. Hearing about it is only a very first step. When we "reinvent" something, we know it from the ground up. When this is the case, it is often true that we see more than what the first inventors saw, or at least more than what managed to get passed down or packaged for popular consumption.

2. Yes, my next book will be about this work. It has taken several years to write and re-write this text. I believe it will prove to be a powerful and ground-breaking contribution to anyone committed to experiencing the truth of his or

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her own self, existence, and reality. It goes much farther than Reflections and Ancient Wisdom, and is far deeper and more open than most other books. The book works hard to clarify the whole domain of human existence far more than has ever been done before. It's not out yet, but we're working on it.

Peter

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David Spivak  
Eugene, Oregon

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Peter,

I had a question recently that perhaps you wouldn't mind answering. I expect you to be fully open and honest with me, so I don't fear that I'm asking too much of you by sending you this question: if you don't feel like answering it I believe you won't hesitate to tell me that. And please excuse the fact that I include reasoning like this in my email; I'm trying to flesh out the bounds of my interaction with you, and certain types of fears creep in to my mind. I include them so you'll know where I'm coming from.

The question in which I am interested requires the following background discussion. In the preface of Principles, you say that you realized that "there is no such thing as a fight, there never was and there never will be." I am interested in the principle behind this mysterious and beautiful claim. I am interested in how this principle interacts with ideas such as "In combat, use their reactive force," a claim also found in Principles.

Here is the question:

Q: What is combat? Is it important?

You went to the world championship matches so that you could end one phase of your life and also so that you could get credibility for the next phase. Presumably, you wanted credibility because you wanted more power to take on people's ignorance of the principles of Cheng Hsin. To me, it appears that you wanted to change the world for the better. WHY? Why did you engage in combat with ignorance? What is combat? Is it important?

Yours truly,

David

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David,

The phrase: "there is no such thing as a fight, there never was and there never will be" is about the fact that a "fight" is something invented in one's mind. If you do not create it, it doesn't exist. In other words, if you don't interpret what you are doing in an interaction as a fight, you are not fighting. You may be interacting, but you are not fighting. This is a very different experience of relationship than what occurs when you are "fighting."

When you hold a relationship of combat then there is combat. It is simply another aspect of a self surviving in some way, and in this case, in opposition to some thing or some one. It could be seen as a game, like in recreation, or it could be seen as real and important because the stakes are higher in the survival realm – but it is still a game. I guess you could even see it like "combating ignorance." In this way, at least no one gets hurt and only good comes of it.

Why take it on? It's my job, what else should I do? It serves me and others at the same time, creating a more conscious world in which to live. It's not ultimately important, but in the lives of people who engage in this kind of "combat" it makes a huge difference. We are better able to fully live the life that is occurring, rather than simply follow a blind program of suffering, pretending to be or know all sorts of things that aren't genuine. In this way we move toward becoming free of what isn't true, and can join with life before we die. Becoming conscious is really the only thing to do in life. I know that isn't much of an answer, it's just the one I have to give.

Peter

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Charlie Conklin  
London, England  
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Hi Peter,

I've been re-reading bits of the newsletter Q&A, and I've been pondering this one:

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Q: *"It seems, at least on the surface, that thought gets a bad rap. For example, in "Discourse...." from the "Principles" book, comes the following short quote: "If one's self is free from thoughts, then the form offers no point of attack." I find this way of talking confusing. Do "thoughts" mean any activity that pre-determines what is occurring instead of what is actually occurring? Or is it the talking to oneself? I feel some serious ontological work into what "thought" is coming on."*

Your Response:

"Don't confuse thoughts with awareness or even intelligence. You can be immensely intelligent and totally aware without having any thoughts at all. But this realization is virtually non-existent in most people. Thoughts are always "about" something, they are not the thing itself, nor are they a reflection of the thing, and rarely are they an accurate representation of the thing. Thought is a very large domain and we can make many distinctions in what people call thinking, from talking to yourself to recognizing an object or having an idea. It is indispensable for tasks requiring thought -- making a plan, thinking something through, creating a rationale. But it is inadequate for tasks outside the domain of thought, contemplation, immediate response, reflective awareness. Yes, I think some serious work on thought is appropriate."

Could you expand a bit more on thoughts, and the domain of thought? I'm confused, in particular by "You can be immensely intelligent and totally aware without having any thoughts at all." It seems to me that the intelligence and awareness required for say, appropriate action in a particular situation, needs at least purpose (to know what is appropriate), and some set of distinctions appropriate to the task (for example: getting out of the way of a moving object will require making the distinctions necessary to recognize the existence of the object and its motion). I personally seem to hold the making of distinctions as thinking. The same with having a purpose.

That said, I'm somewhat unclear on what thinking and thoughts are. I'd appreciate any guidance toward better clarity with this.

Cheers,
Charlie

Charlie,

Don't confuse taking action with the plan from which it springs. An interaction (which is apparently what we are speaking about) will engage thought and concept on many levels, but that isn't the only thing that should be going on. And what most people think of as thinking – activities such as internal dialogue

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– is much too slow a process for effectively interacting in any kind of freeplay format.

Also, don't confuse making a distinction with having a thought. Distinctions occur as a fundamental aspect of conscious perception, or experience. The intelligence that is needed to take responsive action in relation to these distinctions, even in relation to a plan or strategy for action, does not need to think things through in order to act. The moment of relationship has already been "thought through," so to speak, simply by instantly contrasting the feeling-perception of the circumstance with the strategic disposition that exists as a background sense, or "knowingness" of what to do, which is determined by the purpose of the interaction. These are conceptual activities but don't require much process to enact them since such things have already been decided (the parameters for action given particular circumstance has been pretty much worked out), and any thought processes that are occurring should be kept independent of the activity that is taking place, which should be "reflective" and spontaneous. In the minds of humans this really doesn't look like thinking and so any attempt to engage what is an obvious and cumbersome thought should be let go.

I suspect that is all hard to follow, and doesn't really answer your question. I suspect we need a more grounded and in-person dialogue to work it out. But maybe it gives you some things to play with until we meet again.

Peter

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Kevin Kulik  
Arlington, VA

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Hi Peter,

I've been practicing the Cheng Man Ching short form for a while, and have been wondering about how the back foot adjusts from the heel when the weight is shifted to the front foot. I know in boxing and in some tai chi forms they move the back foot when punching with the ball of the foot. I was wondering what the differences were and if the Cheng Man Ching one on the heel is more to teach something rather than out of direct practicality for fighting?

Thanks.

Kevin

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Kevin,

As far as I can tell, turning in the back toe serves to teach a few things, but I'm not sure if that was the purpose for doing it that way. You'd have to ask the inventor of the set, which would be long before Cheng. Turning the back toe along with the pelvic rotation suggests unifying the body and moving everything in the same direction. But I can't really say why this particular method is important. Unifying the body is very important, but that can be done with the heel pivoting around in the same direction with the back foot on the ball of the foot, just like it can with the toe turning with the back foot on the heel. In a practical sense, turning the back toe isn't all that useful. There may be an occasion when it might work just fine, but it isn't necessary and it is unusual in a fighting context. Still, turning in the back toe does force the student to work out several things about hip rotation and weight distribution and such, and this is useful for training more clarity in body function.

Peter

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Kevin Kulik  
Arlington, VA

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Hi Peter,

I've been wondering about the three enlightenment experiences you've mentioned, the one where you experienced yourself as nothing, then realized all are nothing and so connected, and then the part where you went above yourself and experienced the "void" when doing an exercise with a partner. I know you've mentioned sometimes it's good to describe things in strange terms like feel your energy because it might put someone in a different mindset or something like that and you've also mentioned a Tibetan quote I think about people not listening when you speak the truth but when you give it in fantastical terms they are captivated. I was wondering if you felt and had ideas about these things in more modern scientific ways-like chemical reaction and a retraining of bodily functions, unlike what others seem to describe like mystical experiences that Ueshiba described about god giving a message and golden aura enveloping him, or if you shared this belief. I don't mean something about fantasy or supernatural, because I guess that's just a linguistic logic-mess implying

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something that can't be. I guess I wanted to know your thoughts on your experience and these other peoples experiences -- also maybe an explanation of how and why this happens.

Thanks.

Kevin

Kevin,

There is no way or usefulness in explaining such direct consciousness. Nor is a scientific explanation going to cut it, or serve in any way. Don't confuse direct consciousness, as in an enlightenment experience, with all of the perceptive or phenomenal possibilities people come up with. They are different in nature. First of all, direct consciousness isn't something "perceived," perception is indirect. And all such things like being enveloped in a golden aura, seeing a blue pearl, having an out of body experience, or feeling some kind of energy, or whatever, are simply various perceptive experiences no matter how fantastic they are. This is not true consciousness. But they can be fun!

Peter

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Charles Welborn  
Fort Collins, CO

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Peter,

I am in the habit of thinking. I want to develop the habit of not thinking, i.e. only use thinking as needed, like my arm or hand. Am I correct in believing this is a discipline, an exercise in consciousness?

Charles,

I think so, it would require a very fundamental and contextual shift in how your brain works and has been trained to work, so there's a conscious discipline right there.

Peter

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Welborn Continued:

Peter,

I did not communicate exactly in my last email. I wrote that I want to control my thinking, which is not correct. I was referring to the noise in my head as thinking. What I want to control is the use of that area where the chatter takes place. This does not seem unreasonable. A few years ago I wrote that I want to be fully conscious while speaking and you replied that most people don't want to do that and it would require an enormous amount of concentration and discipline. It seems to me the first step, maybe the only step, to being conscious while speaking is being conscious in that area where consciousness takes place (I don't mean to imply this is a simple thing to accomplish).

In the introduction to *The Principles of Effortless Power*, you refer to moving before someone threw a punch or a kick, moving and not knowing why until seeing a fist go by, etc. My question is, did you ever reach a point where you are conscious of the reason for the movement and conscious of doing the movement before the fist goes by? Have you been able to be conscious at the beginning/root of consciousness? This would be the same as what I refer to above, be conscious throughout the entire process of consciousness, not just at the end of the process.

Thanks
Charles

Charles,

About new your inquiry, I would respond the same way as before, and when you speak of the place of consciousness in this case you are actually speaking about the place in the brain where speech takes place, and those two are different. Don't jump to the conclusion that where you cognize speaking to yourself is the same as the consciousness that cognizes this brain activity. But to answer your question (and I suspect you aren't asking only about internal dialogue), I'd recommend actually trying to locate where you speak to yourself. Then perhaps you will find that it is still not the consciousness that you seek.

Being conscious of the whole process of consciousness is not what you imagine. Really you are saying cognizing the process of cognition. Consciousness is both prior to and throughout cognition, but isn't the same as cognition. Cognition is the result of a mental-perceptive process. Consciousness is not a process. The beginning of cognition -- or consciousness before recognition -- is not thought or

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perceived in any conventional way. So there isn't much to say about it. But I encourage you to sort this out for yourself.

Peter

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Jon Boutelle  
Salt Lake City, Utah

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Hi Peter,

I have a couple of questions that I was not able to ask you in person while I was there and I'm wondering if you can give me some feedback:

1) Lately, there has been this trend towards something called "The Law of Attraction." I've had several friends tell me about a video and a book called The Secret that is making the rounds right now and there has been some talk about it on various television programs. Well, I understand "The Law of Attraction" to just be the law of cause and effect but just put another way. This "Law of Attraction" supposedly says anyone can attract anything they want into their life, by getting their positive thoughts together and blah, blah, blah. Peter what are your thoughts on this?

2) Also, I was wondering if you could help me to understand "Ideals" again. I know I asked you about it, but I'm still not grasping something there. If you could just run over the jist of that again.

I look forward to working with you again, Peter.

Have a great day.

Jon Boutelle

Jon,

About your first question:

I don't know about this specific version but it sounds like the positive thinking arena of beliefs, which has been around in many forms for a long time. It couldn't hurt, and what you tell the brain is very important as an influencing factor on what it is that you perceive and how you think about the world around you. This can make a difference in outcomes and relationships. Yet people usually like to settle for something simplistic rather than soberly consider the matter more deeply. A handy quick solution to all woes is much preferred.

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We should balance the "thinking your way to success" idea with the old saying: "if wishes were horses, beggars would ride." Obviously action is also needed, and effective action at that. This requires more than merely "hoping" something will come about. Commitment isn't just about creating positive thoughts about what you desire. It is getting clear on what it takes to accomplish something and then taking action, making correction, paying attention, and being intelligent about what you do, until you accomplish your goal.

The mysterious aspect to this might be found in the fact that things tend to become available when you commit yourself to attaining something that didn't appear to you beforehand. This could be due to several factors, but the end result is that things happen when you really commit yourself. Sometimes these opportunities seem to arise without direct action to produce them, but chances are that they won't occur unless the commitment to take action is real. They could happen because of some action taken that indirectly generates it, or some passionate communication that reaches the right ears, or for some other reason unknown or perhaps unseen. But I will bet that it only happens because you are committed, and place your "being" fully behind some particular accomplishment or condition coming to pass.

Creating a clear and positive possibility in which to commit your life and energies is different from having a programmed ideal that sits as something that you "should" be, do, or accomplish. These ideals are fantasies or programs -- both positive and desired, or negative and feared -- that dominate your perception of yourself and of life. Having a perfection ideal in mind is constant recognition of an unmet and, for reasons too challenging to go into now, unattainable program from your past. Looked at critically an ideal can be seen as a particularly subtle form of enslavement -- suffering about something that is not now true. It's best to free yourself from ideals rather than be dominated by them. This is quite different from consciously creating a possibility for your life to which you can commit yourself and your energies.

Hope this helps,
Peter

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Jochen Vaquex  
Washington, D.C.

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Hello Peter

I have been wondering about two experiences you mention in Principles of Effortless power. You mention your first enlightenment had to do with experiencing self and knowing that the self was nothing. But another experience, the more profound one, was experiencing the absolute nature of reality which is what Zen people call the void. You go on to say it's all nothing and doesn't exist so I was wondering several things. Can one have the more profound experience without experiencing the self and if you did have the more profound one does that automatically have to include enlightenment on self since that is included in absolute reality. The other question is what is the difference between the two since both are nothing, is it that one was more focused on you and the other had a greater view like the same but more spread out and more intense-hence more profound-like a deeper understanding of the same thing applied to everything instead of just you?

Jochen

Jochen,

These things are always misunderstood so I will take a stab at trying to clarify them. First, I wouldn't say that the enlightenment regarding self is less profound than any other. It is central and necessary. You can't grasp the true nature of anything "not-you" if you can't grasp the true nature of yourself. Also, I shy away from pegging these direct conscious "experiences" in Zen terminology. Not because the Zen phrases are inaccurate, but they are overused and people have too many ideas about what they mean.

As far as "nothing" goes, you can't imagine what the "nothing" is that I am referring to without being conscious of this nature. The word nothing is not the point, the point is what's true. So you are not an idea of nothing, you are *you*. What's said about that after such consciousness is a statement easily misunderstood. I simply chose the best word I could.

Your questions come from the mind, and the mind is not capable of grasping these matters, or imagining these matters, and so will of necessity misunderstand, thinking of such consciousness in terms that can be objectively and conceptually identified. A direct consciousness cannot be objectively

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perceived through any of the senses or imagined in any way by the mind. I know this is frustrating to that same mind, but so be it. It doesn't matter, only directly experiencing the truth makes a difference in this. Answers and ideas won't make any difference no matter what they are or how pleasing or disturbing they are (except the disturbing ones might draw you to contemplate the matter further).

Peter

~~~~~  
David Spivak  
Eugene, Oregon  
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Dear Peter,

Thanks again for the wonderful [ENB] workshop. And thanks for answering my question "why choose to act?" in the last newsletter. It makes more sense to me now: you have to be SOME WAY in order to be, but that way can be any way. So, yes, you (Peter) chose to fight and to hold a workshop and to write books, because you have to do something in order to even be. What you do is governed by the operational principles of the self that you are: it seems to me that you survive by consciousness surviving. You thrive by consciousness thriving.

I have a question I'm still really interested in. It has to do with time. Here is how I conceptualize time:

1. The time is always now.
2. The past and future are concepts which exist now. They do not have their own reality.
3. The past and future are part of the context for what is occurring now. As I type, the words I type now are held in the context of what I have typed "before" and what I am about to type. As you read, in the moment, your eyes are on a certain word, and the word is conceptualized in a moment, and that concept is held relative to the context given by the words you "previously" read.
4. A statement like "the context (of past and future) is changing in time" makes no sense because there is no time within which the context can change.
5. The IDEA that "the context (of past and future) is changing in time" DOES have some interesting content, it's just that I can't figure out what that content is. I have not experienced what it is.

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Ok, that's all abstract. Let me tell you a story that brings my question to the fore.

One day during the workshop, we were talking about time. That evening, Brendan told us "you might want to use your second sleeping bag tonight; it's going to get cold." So I did just that: I recall that during a certain moment before going to sleep, I put on my second sleeping bag because I held the idea that the future would include "cold."

Lo and behold, that night, I woke up and it was quite cold out. The situation had become what it was expected to be. My memory of Brendan's warning lined up with my current experience of cold. Heeding the warning had led to a situation of comfort. I was glad that I had "done that." I was also quite confused about the nature of that warning, that heeding, that comfort, that gladness of having heeded. I had been "in the moment" when I put it on (and I had wondered why I was doing it), and I was in the moment now, and yet time seemed to have taken place in between!

So let me ask a series of questions which try to hit on the question behind the words. In all of this, I want to recognize that time is a concept and that we are always existing now. The most flagrant time words are put in quotes.

1. What is warning? Why does heeding a warning work?
2. What is process? Why does it appear that an event unfolds over time, and that the events "before" are necessary to allow for events now?
3. Why is it that choices NOW seem to lead to experiences (in the "next") NOW?
4. What is discipline or practice? Why does "repeating" something lead to skill? What is commitment? How does one who is fully experiencing NOW envision entering into the contract of repeating a certain act IN THE FUTURE?
5. Why does the time concept "work"? If time is just a concept, what is the TRUTH behind the concept that leads to the success of the concept? To say it in a way that's possible to answer, at what starting points might one be best able to experience the truth behind the concept of time and process?

Thank you,
David

David,

The root of all of your questions is the question of Now. I can't answer each one (too many, and some deserve their own specific response). But since the real confusion is about now let's see if we can make some headway in understanding the nature of Now.

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Process and Now aren't mutually exclusive, as a matter of fact process is always now. When we look at time within the context of Now -- which is where it occurs -- it unfolds through memory and extrapolation as process, but it is still now and never leaves now. When you try to separate them into two exclusive domains you run into insurmountable contradictions. Remember, distinction doesn't mean separation; and what you are speaking of as Now is an absolute, and absolute isn't separate from anything, nor is it any thing. It is "context," if you like, and so "holds" or creates the space for time and process. But like any context it isn't found in the content -- which can't refer to its own source since it's like a subset -- and content is not of the same nature as that which creates the possibility in which the content exists. At the same time it isn't separate since that would make it elsewhere. I know all of that is rather abstract and difficult to understand, so let's see what else I can say.

If it were warm the night you speak of, you would have said Brendan's advice was wrong, and this way you'd see it was simply a concept, an idea of what might happen. But right or wrong doesn't matter, it is still conceptual. The "prediction" is based on accurately grasping the processes that are extrapolated to possibly occur, which are based on past observations of processes. Neither the past or future processes are ever known other than conceptually. But through concept (memory) we collect piles of process that have "come to pass" and from these we draw conclusions about how similar processes will unfold. This doesn't mean we can predict with certainty but only that we can guess well -- that is, if we've paid attention and our relation between concept and fact is valid.

Concept represents. If it represents accurately there will be power in such representation even though it will never be the thing itself. As it turns out we often represent "what is" sloppily or inaccurately and so our ability to relate effectively with objective reality is reduced. Nevertheless if we represent well, in other words, conceive of what's perceived accurately, then we can relate to what's there accurately.

Of course all of this is done now, and now doesn't go anywhere. We see that process cannot exist without time, and the nature of time is obviously an issue you are struggling with. Consider that the real question is how can space exist? We generally accept space or assume space more readily than time. Yet space is the foundation for time. Since if space can exist, then objects can exist, and if objects and space exist then movement and so change can exist. Simply viewing the same condition from a different perspective implies one and then another, and so a change has occurred. If objective change can exist, then this is what we

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call time. We are only left with creating the ability to conceive of one change over another – recalling a condition that has passed and comparing it to what is perceived now, or imagining a change that might arise that isn't what is perceived now -- and we have created the notion of time. So perhaps you should look into what is space. If you can grasp that time is an aspect of space then you will see it differently. And of course we see that space is always and only now. Problem solved?

In the world of process – within which we live just as much (and with much more attention) than the world of now – conceptualizing (imagining) a possible event and then committing action to realizing this event can bring something about that is similar to the event. It won't be exactly as conceptualized, but that isn't a problem, it never is, yet something in that domain can be created.

The truth is that Now is never seen for itself as itself. It can't be perceived in that way. It can only be directly grasped as an aspect of absolute consciousness. Even when we speak of the experience of now we're not really talking about absolute Now, we are referring to a moment of what we perceive -- what we can "hold" as a perceptive process over a short period of time and grasp as a moment of circumstance. The only reason this is called the moment of now is because it is conceptually compared to other objective possibilities of space that aren't perceived, and so are called "past," or "future," or non-existent (imaginary).

You ask what is the truth behind the concept? There is no truth behind the concept. The concept is itself created, it is an activity of mind. It may refer to something else, as in a representation -- and then successful interaction with what's represented depends on the accuracy of the representation -- or it may simply generate something to be perceived conceptually. In either case, it is what it is, but it is not the consciousness that generates it nor perceives it. "Now" is an absolute, and so is Consciousness.

If that didn't help at least it might have given you more food for thought.

Peter

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Lukasz Glowacki  
Namyslow, Poland  
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Hello Peter!

Recently I've been looking over the book you wrote, *The Art of Effortless Power*. I read it front to back some time ago and only last time did I pay more attention to what you wrote on one of the last pages of the book.

"For a moment consider what you truly believe about reality and yourself. What do you take for granted as true? What is simply so for you? Now challenge these very beliefs. Realize that they are not true, they are beliefs! The truth in the matter is actually unknown to you. Knowing this, or confronting it, immediately brings to the forefront wonderment, and the question: What is the truth? Do you experience the power of a shift such as this? Do you experience the freedom and excitement of stepping beyond belief – any belief? Remember this."

I wondered, for example, how I can challenge my belief of my faith in God. I know of God, as do millions of other people, only from what I've been told about Him. We know God from the Scriptures, from our priests and from many other people who testify about Him. I have never had a direct experience of God nor have many others who believe in Him. So, how in such a case one can challenge his beliefs about God. The faith in God is based on belief. Of course there were some exceptions, some people who had an occasion to experience God directly. They didn't have to read any books to know Him, they didn't have to listen to other people talking about Him, they went beyond a simple belief and experienced Him, but such people were, and maybe are, few and far between; they are those who were chosen, so to speak.

So, how can I challenge my belief in God? The only thing I can do is to take it for granted and believe this is true. I see no other way. You either believe or you do not, you're either a believer or a nonbeliever. How to go beyond one's belief in God? What will I find; probably only words of other people because nobody will tell me, or show me God saying "Look this is Him."

How to challenge my faith?

Regards,

Lukasz Glowacki

Lukasz,

It's easy, and recommended. Challenge your faith. Blind belief is binding and limiting. It is a mistake. If you think God exists, then prove it for yourself by directly experiencing the truth! If God exists you will experience God, if not, you

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will experience whatever the truth is. And more importantly, you will experience what God actually is, or isn't, and this will NOT be what you believe. A direct experience of the truth of this matter is beyond what you can possibly imagine. It is not possible to conjure up a picture or image, or to conceptualize the matter, since by definition, it is prior to any object or image or mind and so any conceptualization. Such activities can't contain an Absolute.

It may not be easy, but why give up your responsibility in the matter? Don't be lazy and just believe what others tell you. Contemplate for yourself. And drop the "chosen" bullshit. Chosen by what, by whom? This just takes you off the hook once again. You are going to die. What else is there to do but grasp what life is, what you are, and what Absolute Reality is before you die? Are you just going to "believe" you will go to heaven? Don't be silly. It's time to get past a childish relationship to this matter, and become responsible for grasping it first hand and for yourself. If you want some assistance come over and participate in the Contemplation Intensive. You may not have a direct experience of God (and then again, you might) but it is a powerful beginning.

Good luck with that.

Peter

2009

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Lukasz Glowacki  
Namyslow, Poland  
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Hello Peter,

Thanks for the fast reply regarding my previous question. I'm looking forward to the newsletter. I have another question, however. I was reading the Books and Archive section on your website.

Someone asked you a question:

I guess that means that someone of your level of mastery must have such an easy time with things that you are to be looked up to. If you don't mind, perhaps you could share what aspects of your life you find difficult, and which people that you see as "having it easy."

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And you responded:

I don't imagine that anyone "has it easy." Life is always full of challenges, and any individual is a conglomerate of specific traits. These "traits" will always bump into difficulties since we are stuck being a particular individual. Some people seem to be more easy going, and others embrace great strife and suffering as a character trait. Yet everyone has ups and downs, and no one finds everything easy. In fact, "effortlessness" most often shows up only after a great deal of work. — Someone who has recently awakened -- having had a powerful enlightenment experience -- will not be suffering much at all for a period of time, since the whole "self notion" will abate. Yet even then, given time, the self-mind will reestablish itself as he continues to cling to self-survival. Some of his past difficulties may have dissipated all together, since some of the self attachments will have ended, but many will remain and these will always cause struggle.

I would like to ask you about the second paragraph. You wrote that if someone had a powerful enlightenment experience such a person will not be suffering for a period of time. I thought before that those who had such great enlightenment experiences would be changed forever, not only for a short time. I decided to ask someone else about it who deals with ZEN and he told me: "What you describe here is not true awakening but an experience of awakening. A true awakening does not and cannot fade because you are completely transformed like a caterpillar to a butterfly, it does not go back." Do you agree with these words? Were you writing only about an EXPERIENCE of enlightenment or a TRUE awakening that may transform you forever?

You also wrote that the self-mind will reestablish itself as one continues to cling to self-survival. I wondered what this might mean? Does it mean that all our habitual reactions will again have an influence on us just because we have different problems in life and we have to face them and then we often forget what we were taught or what we sought for? Is it what you meant by Self Survival?

Thank you
Lukasz Glowacki

Lukasz,

This is not a subject you or anyone is going to understand through reading or hearing about it. But I will see what I can clarify. First of all the "Zen" guy is likely speaking from an intellectual belief system and so the response is not very helpful. I mean him no disrespect, but unless he has himself "truly awakened" and so transformed completely, then he can't speak with authority on that subject, can he? It is just something that he has been told or has extrapolated out

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from his own experiences or breakthroughs. It is a belief of Zen but not an experience of Zen – meaning, generally Zen people don't actually have true awakening, they have satoris or conscious breakthroughs, and only believe in the possibility of true awakening. It's time for them to tell the truth about that. I'm a great proponent of Zen, but believing in dogma happens there as it does everywhere else.

Most people think that an enlightenment experience is an ending and so means that something is finished, or that everything changes. Nothing changes, how could it? It is only experienced for what it *is*. Also, everything changes, since it is no longer seen in the same way. Does it mean that someone is changed forever? Of course it does. If someone has a deep enlightenment, their life is changed, a little or a lot depending on how much the root and consciousness of their mind has been altered. But complete or true awakening where there is no mind left, is strictly hearsay. I'm not saying it's not possible, but what people are referring to when they speak of such things is only hearsay and belief, since none of them have experienced such a thing. Therefore it is more of an ideal goal than a known experience; only a possibility yet to be realized.

That being said, when someone has a direct consciousness of the truth, or the true nature of something, they indeed are conscious of what's true but they aren't necessarily conscious of all that's true. It is the truth, it simply isn't complete consciousness of the true nature of everything. This isn't really possible to explain or understand. Like I said above, some changes occur. Depending on the depth of the consciousness, some aspects of self, some illusions about the world, some ways of seeing things, will just fall away for good. They are "transformed" so to speak, and do not return. We could say it's a little like once you learn there is no tooth-fairy, or that the moon isn't made out of green cheese, you no longer see these as real anymore. And yet if you still believe in Santa Claus, this continues to dominate your reality as it did before.

Now why would you see through some things and not others? There is no way to tell really, it just happens that way. Direct Consciousness, or enlightenment, is not subject to process or logic. It is not even subject to intellectual understanding. It is only subject to the truth -- and so it can, and does, embrace paradox. This is why it's silly to speak of the matter with too much seriousness or to try for detailed clarity. It's just not going to happen. The mind cannot grasp this matter. But let's say that complete enlightenment or true awakening would mean that the self-mind is no longer active at all, only consciousness exists and consciousness is nothing. Or to say it another way, self and mind are grasped

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completely for what they are, as is all of reality and the nature of existence itself. This is a tall order, and not what people imagine when they imagine such awakening -- no mind, no self? Being without belief, emotion, or thought? In this case, this is the same as saying that all of this activity is seen for what it is, and it has no more power upon you than the tooth fairy has. It is a figment, something made up and unreal. Now, is that what people are looking for?

A direct consciousness can be shallow or deep. Why? Once again, unknown. Is the shallow one less true? Not at all, it is absolutely true, it simply doesn't encompass the depth or scope of a more profound enlightenment. But even with a profound enlightenment, unless there is no self left, no "person" existing anymore, then some self remains, isn't that so? Ask your Zen friend, I bet he experiences a solid and well defined self -- no matter how conscious or spiritual he is. Whatever remains continues to survive or persist. What does not persist, disappears. Consciousness itself neither comes nor goes, it is just what's true. If you are conscious of the absolute truth, then to that degree you could say you are "enlightened" but it's silly to speak about such things.

The thing to notice is that you aren't conscious of everything, you aren't free in every circumstance or in relation to your own drives and reactions, your own mind. There is work to be done. The rest is hearsay. Your job is to become free, to awaken. Only then will you grasp the truth of the matter -- and then all this hearsay will no longer interest you.

Peter

~~~~~  
James Post  
Geneseo, NY  
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Master Ralston,

I just wanted to write to thank you for the workshop this past weekend. To say that it was revelatory would be an understatement.

One thing that I was particularly struck by was your discussion of your "search" for effortless power and that you spent a year not using the things you had learned in your previous practices -- that you would get in the ring with boxers or "lesser" martial artists and get beat but you stuck with relaxing, etc., because you knew there was something there to find. I wonder, after hearing you

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Speak of this, if there was an aha! moment? Or was it a gradual process? If it was an aha moment, did you then have to figure out what that "aha" was? Was it a surprise you had to go back and analyze?

Did you try to grasp onto it when you had it? Did it drift away?

The reason I ask is because about two years ago I had what I would call that an Aha moment after about two weeks of deep immersive meditation, reading, and contemplation. Essentially I had to let my self die. It was a terrifying thing at the time. I had to be willing to die and to embrace that death. I had to overcome that fear.

That Aha stuck for a couple of weeks. After a couple of weeks I felt it start to drift away. Desperation set in then I realized that that Aha-ness wasn't what I was looking for but my response to that Aha held the key to an abiding in Enlightenment or Oneness, or as I sort of like to think of it, Aliveness. I was looking for something more immediately relevant to my physical person. How does this Aliveness tie into that sense of the non-physical. When and where does the ground of being meet with a stubbed toe?

I realized when reading *Principles of Effortless Power* that it is not a how-to manual and at the same time it isn't a magical, vague thing. It only seems that way depending on the perspective you are reading it from, much like any work of art or mystical tract. It is what you bring to it. It's very Zen-like in its rendering. So terribly simple as to be utterly confounding.

In any case I very much enjoyed the workshop. I am completely overwhelmed by "Principles of Effortless Power" and am pleased on a very deep level to know that people like you walk the earth. To some people that may sound touchy-feely but I trust you understand my sentiment.

Thanks much,
James Post

James,

You are mixing apples and oranges . . . and bananas. Referring to my discovery of intrinsic strength is not at all like an enlightenment in consciousness, and an "Aha" is an insight, and can be about almost anything. Discovering effortless power was a long process. An "enlightenment" or direct consciousness is sudden and always about the true nature of something -- not how it's defined, not skill, not details, not the form of something, not an explanation, not an understanding, not how it works, not what it means -- only what it "IS." However, an Aha or insight can be about any of those things. (For more on *Insight*, see Chapter Five, and it might help to look again at the Chapter Nine section: *More than you needed to Know about Consciousness*, in *Zen Body-Being*.)

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When I discovered the nature Judo, or experienced the fundamental principle that allowed it to work well, that was an Aha, or insight (even though I've referred to it as a "Judo enlightenment" as a way of speaking). It was an experiential insight since I could then "do" it, or take it to action right away. It transformed my skill overnight and improved my Judo in a very short time. If it were an intellectual insight, I may have had an idea about how to proceed, but it wouldn't have changed my physical skill much. Such insights only show us where to look for improvement. None of these insights should not be confused with "enlightenment" (although we do use the word enlightenment in various contexts, this one included). In truth, with Aha's, insights, or understandings, we are not talking about the same thing as real enlightenment -- which is a sudden direct consciousness of the true nature of existence.

Regarding effortless power, for me it was not brought about through an insight. Small breakthroughs occurred here and there, but really it was just a painstaking matter of experimentation and trial and error, with emphasis on the "error" part. After I'd stumble on an effortless result now and then, I began to "sense" directions in which to go. An insight or an Aha could have happened in this case I suppose, but it didn't. Insight isn't always necessary but almost always helpful, and sometimes essential.

I sympathize with your dilemma of "Being meeting stubbed toe." This is a good area of experience in which to look. The stubbed toe keeps you grounded in your actual reality -- the one you live. Your "ground of being" minus the stubbed toe tends to put you mostly in intellect and fantasy, but if your intent is honest and real, it can also provide a possibility. Within this possibility you can then look at the stubbed toe and ask: "What is it? What's really going on here?" Like what is the nature of the reaction I'm having to this stubbed toe, and why does it exist? Getting to the truth of this, experientially and consciously, opens a huge door in relation to the nature of self and experience.

Peter

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James Beale  
Bristol, England

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Peter,

I'd like to revisit the subject of context. I remember whenever we talked about context in the ontology workshops and also when we tried to rewrite the material during the apprenticeship that I was never entirely sure what we were talking about. I understood intellectually that everything is dependent on the context in which it is held, but I know I was missing the point.

Once or twice, I have had an experience where I would wake up in the morning, and not really know who I was. I wasn't confused or worried, and it wasn't a self-analytical thing; I wasn't questioning who I was, I just wasn't awake enough to think about it. Then 'reality' would kick in, all of a sudden I had a past and that gave me a present and aspirations for a future and I knew which people were important to me and all the things I was supposed to do that day. It was only looking back at the state before that I could say that I didn't know who I was because, as I say, when I didn't know I didn't wonder.

My best interpretation of this is that it was a small glimpse of life outside of the context of 'me'. Unfortunately it is now just a memory and whilst it may have altered the way that I think of reality in that I can see that this context is a mental construct and not a fixed parameter, I don't experience it as such.

We worked a lot on honesty of course, and in the apprenticeship we tried to interact out of a context of honesty. I think the closest I ever got was more of a sub-context, since I was still 'me' just 'me' being (more) honest.

This may not be the right topic for the newsletter, it's just what I have been thinking about lately. I know one answer is to come and do the ENB again.

James

James,

Context is not easy to grasp, because we aren't talking about an intellectual achievement. But we usually start there since we need to ballpark and then understand what it is we are talking about so that we can begin to put our attention on it, and contemplate what it is. What you describe is a good start. It ballparks us.

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This subject is too challenging to do justice in a newsletter, but I leave your question and my response mostly to assist others in considering this possibility for themselves. It may open some doors.

First let's start with definition of context as it appears in some dictionaries:

Context:

1. the circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement, or idea, and in terms of which it can be fully understood and assessed.
2. the circumstances or events that form the environment within which something exists or takes place.

Dwelling on these gives us a starting point. But we want to go much further than any conventional understanding of this point.

For one thing, we can consider that one's state of mind influences what is perceived and how it is perceived, and the mind – with all its associations, history, bias, knowledge, references, etc. – clearly provides the “setting” or “environment” in which anything perceived is recognized and understood. But even this point is hard to fully fathom. For one reason, as a culture of humanity, we don't have a context in which to fully grasp this fact. We do have a context in which to consider it, however, since we have created the context of “mind” and “psychology” and whatnot, and so can make a leap to the possibility that all this content provides a setting or environment (as described in the definitions) within which anything is understood or assessed. What we have a difficulty getting is that they could not possibly be understood or assessed, or even exist, as they do without this setting.

Of course, then we begin to view context as a bunch of content that somehow surrounds and influences whatever we are talking about and so provides a particular perception of what we are talking about. Yet this isn't what context really is. There is nothing there that is context. It isn't a bunch of stuff forming an environment; and yet it is not elsewhere or separate from the formation of the environment. Now, we begin to run into problems, because it seems I contradicted myself. Although really we just don't grasp this domain of experience. So, you are invited to look past your understanding of the matter and consider further. What could we be talking about?

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Not many people get it. If we use your example of not knowing who you are, and then knowing, we can see that even the dictionary definitions can be applied. The context of self existed when you woke up, since you experienced being a "self," an entity, and likely with a perception and interpretation of your surroundings. But you awoke without any history or the characteristic qualities you would normally associate as "who you are." Without these attributes you had no way of generating your normal and familiar experience of who you are as a particular self. So we might say you didn't have the context of a "self-identity." Yet when you "created" this context, then self-identity stepped forward (likely with the recognition that it was missing, which could only happen after you had created the possibility that it existed -- and so the context in which it can exist). So almost instantaneously you went from creating the context of self-identity, realized your particular identity was missing, and then a rush of content such as history, memory, placement in history and time and location and life, etc., all entered your experience, providing the "environment" in which a particular self can be identified. So it seems like this matches up with our definition in this way. But we shouldn't pass over my assertion that the context is created before the "environment" or content can be known or perceived. Since you can't know, or miss, or should be, something without it already existing as a possibility. The creation of that possibility only occurs as the context for this possibility's existence, which also allows for the creation of any of the content (which forms the "environment") to enter your experience.

It is a strange thing to consider that something really can't exist or be known outside of the context in which it is that something. Certainly I could discuss this in much more detail and at greater length, but that is best done as a live dialogue, because it stretches out beyond the domain of language and mind. So, yes, doing the ENB again is a valid place for this discussion. But thanks for the question, and I hope I've provided a springboard for your further contemplation. Good luck with that.

Peter

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James Post  
Geneseo, NY

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Master Ralston,

I've mentioned in past correspondence with you that I've had several, what you term, enlightenment experiences. I hesitate to say that "I've" had them or that they are "experiences" in the typical sense but to discuss them, as you know, you have to try to use a language that is impossible to describe such a "state."

One of the things that I've been wondering is how to discuss these "experiences" with other people. When did you feel it was time to begin talking about it? How does a person go from sitting at a desk all day to reaching out to others to talk about this? I feel like I have something to share but I've found that when you discuss this with people, they either look at you like you've gone batty and put up all sorts of protective walls, or they nod and smile and say they understand, as if it's some objective topic or task they could grasp, like changing their car's oil. The other thing, and this is reflective of a personal consideration I need to work out, is, it seems almost hubristic to try to teach them about enlightenment or oneness (as I prefer to call it). It seems not only hubristic but almost laughable. How can you talk to a fish about water? Was this something you had to overcome?

Highest Regards and Thanks Again,
J. Post

James,

About your "enlightenment" experiences, talk as much as you want about whatever happened. You are likely to get tangled up and you will find yourself misrepresenting it in many ways. I'm sure you already have. Yes, it is hubris, and you might want to think instead about your real motives for wanting to do it. Once you discover this motive, put it aside and then ask yourself what would be useful and helpful for the other person.

It's better for you to continue the work of asking questions and trying to have much deeper insights and breakthroughs than you've already had. I suspect you may be "resting on your laurels" a bit. Your active questioning and opening up will not only humble you (and repeatedly frustrate you), it will become what is inviting to others, an opening, not an answer. Once you've established this genuine questioning for yourself (but not to impress others in some subtle way),

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then you are better able to look into matters regarding others and perhaps ask them appropriate questions that are consistent and useful for their current state of mind — invite them to wonder about something by wondering about something yourself. To further your efforts and skills in this endeavor, I strongly suggest you come to the Contemplation Intensive this fall.

Good luck with that.

Peter

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Jesse Passenier  
Warnsveld, Holland  
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Hi Peter,

Being a musician I contemplate the nature of music and what drives me to create music. What gets in the way for me, from time to time, is that I run into the ego serving factor within music — I'm looking for (and finding) appreciation. This is a part of the reason I want to be a composer. What is creating something beautiful about? Why do I want to do it? Is chasing a dream a good thing? It sure feels good! But still it confuses me, because of the strong relation to the self; chasing a dream feeds self. And then there's the funny thing about being "in a flow." It all seems to fall into place, its all happening, I feel I'm moving somewhere that makes sense.

There are also motivations in me that I don't feel so confused about. Like learning and understanding. A big chunk of what I find in learning to play music and increasing my musical understanding is just that. Learning and understanding, summarized: growing. And creating music. Also for just that: creating. In my understanding, these are the biggies of life. Some of the few things that make sense.

My question is: can you help me in some direction, that could get me to deal with the confusion that I described above.

Thanks,
Jesse

Jesse,

It doesn't sound like you are really confused. It sounds like you've put into your mind a belief that it's wrong to do anything for yourself. But isn't that just a self trying to be better by clinging to some ideal of a transcendent existence as a not-

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self? What would that be? If you became “free of self” then you’d likely simply be a self that is no-self.

Don’t get into a fight with the self. You’ll lose. It isn’t a matter of overcoming the self to become something better, that is still simply trying to be a better self. And so no matter which way you turn or what you do, it will still be about yourself. Remember, our objective is to become conscious of what all this is — what a self is and what a not-self is — not to try for some unreal ideal. That would only separate you from what is so. Realizing what’s true puts you in a position to relate to and from the truth. As long as you live and experience being a self, it isn’t true that you experience being not a self. It is then just a belief and perhaps becomes an ideal, but is not an experience of the truth.

If you directly experience whatever the truth is about self then it will be what’s so, not what’s believed. As long as you are in fact a self, be the best and most honest self you can be. This is closer to a reasonable and functional ideal or possibility, and consistent with your experience of what’s real. From the position of being honest and joining your real experience, you are in a much more powerful position to ask the question: what is absolutely true?

As you say, your motivation suggests what you are actually up to. If you do music for appreciation, then getting appreciated is your purpose and music is only a tool. If you do music for music, then it is simply music, and you can ask what is that? Chances are, there is more than one level of motive occurring. When you let things be themselves, confusion often subsides. There’s nothing wrong with the self. There is also nothing right about it. It is simply the distinction and perception that you “are.” What you are is up for grabs.

In my upcoming book: *The Book of Not Knowing*, these things are all addressed in a uniquely complete way. I’m sure you will find a great deal of value from this work as there is a great deal of powerful and here-to-fore unaddressed dynamics communicated about the nature of existence. It’s a great read, although not necessarily an easy one. It will be printed later this year, but you can and should pre-order it on Amazon.com. (Many of you have been waiting a long time for this book, I know, and it's worth the wait. I want everyone who plans to order it to do so this fall rather than later because there's a good chance that the publisher will print a greater quantity if you do.) You'll find much to guide you in your questioning.

Peter

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Will Sime  
Hereford, England

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Peter,

Recently I have been looking into "detachment," or "objective" observation. It seems as though I try to take myself away from the subject in order to be detached. But this could be a mistake. Through displacing myself from the activity I am avoiding it in some way, no longer a part of it, and so cannot truly be detached because there is an ignored fear, or activity of separation. It is hard to describe. If I were actually detached, then should I not be able to stand in the center of the object and observe it, for I am not affected by it?

To provide an analogy, commonly with emotion there seems to be a notion that to be detached means to be cold, distant, or shut off from life and feeling somehow. I think perhaps this idea is a fallacy, that detachment from emotion could mean to be absorbed by emotion completely, and yet not reacting or being moved by it. And the sense of coldness that could come is not in any way related to genuine detachment or openness. Does that make sense?

I seem to have a problem here that if I desire detachment for some particular result — or desire at all, then the process becomes distorted, and I have trouble thinking clearly. Because desire is not detachment?

Is this what Shissai means when he says: "To surrender to life while alive and to death at dying is not to divide the Heart."

Thanks
Will Sime

William,

Dispassionate observation, as my friend Emmett used to call it back in the 70s, is, as you suggest, not a pulling away or ignorance of what's present. Such a move isn't useful since you then disassociate yourself from what's there and so from whatever is true. To be effective it must be inclusive, not exclusive.

If you read my communication about being calm in the Principles book, you hear me speak about not pushing anything away, or trying to control or eliminate what arises in the mind, but more like "floating" freely within circumstances, remaining "unattached" to anything that arises. This is inclusive but not stuck.

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Some of this stands on the principle of grasping the true nature of whatever it is you are observing. This doesn't mean intellectually understanding it, but becoming directly conscious of the nature of the thing encountered. This itself changes your relationship to it. You are no longer reacting since in this position you aren't relating it to you and your needs or fears. This allows it to be itself, and you to simply grasp it for itself. In such a case, you can't be anything but calm, or a "dispassionate" observer.

In your example you need to indicate if this is a martial or social concern. If martial, then being "cold" or "warm" is not a concern, since such social concerns are irrelevant to being effective. Yet even in a martial context, being shut off or lacking feeling sensitivity is unacceptable. These capacities are needed in order to engage effectively. Yet, as you surmise, there is nothing in being dispassionate and calm that necessitates insensitivity. Warmth may well be a desirable attribute for effective social interaction, yet once again, this doesn't mean you can't be dispassionate. Nevertheless, being detached and observing — even without pulling yourself away from what's being observed — can sometimes unbalance people in a social context. You will not be reacting to things as is customary and expected, which may create some misunderstandings and perhaps challenges for others, but this can be overcome via communication.

I think it might be simplistic to say that this matter is what Shissai was speaking about. What you are concerned with is a psychological issue or at least a mental one — which we must transcend in order to grasp such statements about life and death. Such as this one from Shissai: "It is easy to give up life and die, yet it is difficult not to perceive life and death as a duality." This isn't merely a state of mind he's referring to, and most people might not find it so easy to give up life and die, so we sense that what he is speaking about is far more than a having a belief or adopting a disposition.

It is true that desiring detachment is not being detached. Desire isn't detached; one needs to be detached to be detached. Falling into desire puts you back into clinging to something and so focusing on some outcome or result. Once again, this is not freedom. It is like trying to manipulate someone by not being affected by them. The only reason you manipulate is that you are affected already, and so it is a false notion and is itself a manipulation.

Hope this helps.
Peter

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Chris Haskins  
Boston, MA

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Hello Mr. Ralston,

Thanks in advance for taking my questions. I'm a bit shocked I hadn't learned of your offerings earlier. I recently found out about your work about a month ago from my T'ai Chi teacher. I've purchased 3 of your books:

Zen Body Being

The Principles of Effortless Power

The Art of Effortless Power (Cheng Hsin T'ui Shou)

I'm half-way through Zen Body Being, and just started Principles of Effortless Power. Please forgive me if any of the questions are inappropriate for this medium.

1. Enlightenment, Liberation, Success Questions:

In several of your biographies, you mention that you had "enlightenment experiences" which greatly helped you to increase your performance in various areas of your life, and specifically in martial arts.

Would you consider yourself (from the traditional Zen Buddhist perceptive perhaps?) to be fully Enlightened, someone who is fully liberated (sometimes referred to as someone who is liberated from the cycles of rebirth - if you believe in such things).

I'm still in the early chapters of the books listed above - in the books do you give daily exercises for having "enlightenment" experiences. I'd like to make this the primary focus of my martial arts practice (using the excitement, fun, and performance of martial arts to assist me in experiencing my "Essential Being").

Is it possible to apply these "knowings" gained from enlightenment experiences to ones career success and/or business? (I ask because it would be wonderful if I could use Cheng Hsin to generate enough money for me to attend the Apprentice Retreat).

Thanks!

Chris from Boston

Chris,

It sounds like you have a lot to learn, but also an enthusiasm and openness to learning. Keep the openness and proceed. It also sounds like your head is filled with all sorts of fantasy and stories that build up a picture in your mind of what these "alternative" realities are all about. None of it is true. Of course you need to

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start somewhere, and where you are starting is just fine. The thing to grasp is that you must move on, you can't stay with a fantasy. It must transform as you progress, otherwise your commitment won't be to experience what's true.

The truth isn't found in what you believe or whatever you have heard. My responses to your questions may not be a direct answer to what's asked — that will be true whenever having an answer would simply feed into the validity of the position and beliefs from which the question comes.

Let's start with your first question: am I fully enlightened? In brief: yes and no. But what is the question about? Since you have no idea what you are really asking, the question and answer is really useless to you, and to everyone else. The question only comes from stories and ideas that arise from the Buddhist tradition. In any case, you should ask yourself what does this question and my answer do for you? Really nothing, isn't that true? You don't have a better understanding of the matter in any way, you just have an answer to something that was outside your experience and consciousness in the first place. Now consider, what question would really forward your consciousness in this matter? Dwell on that and see if you can find such a question. This alone will move things along for you.

To respond to your next questions, my new book: *The Book of Not Knowing* will answer most of that. But don't confuse martial arts with a pursuit of truth or consciousness. It is not. They are not the same and shouldn't be painted with the same brush. It is up to you to bring to your practice whatever consciousness or searching that you want it to serve. You won't find it in the practice itself and certainly not in any of the traditions. That's not what they were designed for. The purpose for one is not the same as the other. If you want to combine them, and you want to use martial training to further your consciousness work, seriously, you should get yourself to Cheng Hsin workshops and camps! Become a serious student of Cheng Hsin. No other art will actually accomplish what you seek. Cheng Hsin is open enough to be included with any other practice.

And no, the matter of consciousness and the truth shouldn't be used to make money or promote business. Once again those are differing impulses, you shouldn't try to make the truth serve selfish ends (no matter how noble the ends are). It will only muddy the waters and you'll end up lying about the truth to bend it to your will. You certainly can use Cheng Hsin martial principles in business, since martial endeavors are consistent with business or any other competitive endeavor. Enlightenment is not, so don't confuse the two.

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Hope I've been useful and have helped you progress down the road of learning and discerning for yourself what is true.

Peter

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Tzachi Lavy  
Jerusalem, Israel

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Dear Sensei,

I have more questions to ask you. I know that I asked it in the past, but now I feel more ripe to absorb and operate. As you know, I haven't spare time to practice a lot (I mean physical practice), but I do my best to find time (even little) to practice on the spiritual side. In the past I asked Miles about contemplation and he told me that it reminds him of peeling an onion. You have to ask yourself the question: "Who am I ?" For example, in the beginning ask: "Who am I"? and then say Tzachi, and then ask, Who am I? and then say Tzachi Lavy, and then, Tzachi Lavy and I do aikido (and I can continue with it for long time). But, what is the aim, what do I get from it, how does it work, and what are the questions that I have to ask?

Sorry if I bother you with my questions, but I don't see any other instructor that is able to answer those questions (even though I think that this time you would think that I went too far with my questions or like the idiom says: "The curiosity can kill the cat" ;-))

Tzachi

Tzachi,

Sorry, I disagree with Miles. Or perhaps I should say, I disagree with your understanding of what Miles said. Yes, ask: who am I? This means to set out to become directly conscious of who you really are. Now, you may go through a bunch of intellectual identifications, like the stuff you listed above; but quickly you should move past that, since I doubt you really think that you are your name or what you do or what you are interested in. By all means if you do think this, then put your attention on those things and ask yourself: what are they, and are they "YOU?" Then you can ask: who would you be, and would you exist, if you

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had no name or a different name, and you had no job or interests, possessions, or anything else? You might discover that these things are not actually you.

Then your job is to put your attention on you, the real you, the sense or awareness of you "existing" in this moment — independent of any attachments or history or identity or image, etc. — and ask: who am I? Contemplate this "you" and try to become directly conscious of the nature of the real you.

But you have to contemplate; not just think about it! (My new book is due to be out soon. (The Book of Not Knowing) By all means, read the whole thing, but there is also an entire chapter about contemplation and how to do it.)

Good luck,
Peter

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Genevieve Ceraban  
Sonora, California  
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Peter,

Once during my apprenticeship (in 1993) you were talking with five of us apprentices and we were, well, pretty much staring blankly at you. You asked if anyone had a question, and no one responded. I recall that you then told a short story about how one of your teachers only allowed one question per student per training session — indicating the internal work of getting clear to ask a question, and the opportunity and privilege of asking it. So, I have a question for you:

Over the past years, I have become increasingly aware of the on-going chatter in my brain. It does feel like a troupe of raucous monkeys in there, jumping from branch to branch sometimes being like hooligans, often like rascals, once in a while napping. The Buddhist notion of "monkey brain" seems to suggest, in order to be peaceful and present, that those monkeys need to be quieted.

Instead of trying to silence the monkeys, I have been exploring what it is like to try joining with the monkey chatter. I have experienced the effectiveness of joining in T'ui Shou and San Shou, T'ai Chi and boxing, in conversation and disagreement, in relaxed play and in defense.... I figure that since I seem to be stuck with my monkey brain, I might as well let it do what it really wants to do,

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which is a constantly running, often uninvited commentary---and I actively listen. I thank the monkeys for sharing and I consider what I heard.

What is this internal chatter, this monkey brain activity?

Genevieve

Genevieve,

First, we have to let go of the metaphor. To point us in a direction, a picturesque metaphor might be useful, but taking it too seriously undermines its usefulness. We need to transcend a metaphor as quickly as possible, otherwise, it becomes a separate activity from what is really going on and pulls attention away from the issue that needs to be addressed. Your thoughts and emotions — and I take it you are referring mostly to your internal dialogue — are not monkeys. They are what they are, and that's what we want to get to, we need to ask: What are they, and what are they doing?

I think your direction of joining and listening is sound. Fighting your own mind is a battle you will lose. But you can't stop there. What really needs to happen is to understand — experientially — what drives this chatter. Why does it exist? What are you up to? If you hold it as an activity that is separate from you and something that you just put up with, you may be hard pressed to discover what is really going on. On the other hand, if you hold that you are the one doing the chatter — a reasonable assumption — then you have to admit that you don't experience complete control over the matter. So, if it's true that you are doing it but don't seem to be able to stop it, then it's clear you aren't in touch with the "one" or the "place" that is doing it.

The first order of business is to grasp, to consciously experience, the one or place that is responsible for this activity. That alone may resolve the matter. If not, you can then ask: what is being done and what is it accomplishing, what purpose does it serve? Once you grasp this, the issue will clarify and also change. One place to look, of course, is to see if it has something to do with your "self" and keeping that self-story going. This whole "self" business is more complicated and insidious than we know. Our consciousness generally sits on the surface of our own self-mind, so dig in a bit and see what's actually taking place. Why won't this chatter shut up? It seems benign and under our control. Most people think that they are simply "commenting" on the world, keeping themselves company or some such. But we need to look again at the matter.

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One thing I recommend is to sit for one or two minutes (set a timer) and work on not thinking at all, have no internal chatter the whole time. You will fail at this, of course, but it will help you get in touch with the power and location of this activity. And if you work at it, you can get better at it, and perhaps even learn where you need to "go" or what shift you need to make, in order to stop the chatter. This will tell you a great deal about what the activity is and is up to.

Good luck with that.

Peter

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James Post  
Geneseo, New York

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Master Ralston,

At the risk of being laborious, how does one discuss without the intellect or seeming intellect? Without intellectualizing or seemingly intellectualizing? The "I" can sit in the deep silence, even discuss, describe in silence, realize silence but past that when does any interpersonal communication happen without what could be perceived as some intellectualization even if that communication is "seen" to arise from that silence? It seems that's a problem with communication and modes of communication; to say anything is intellectualizing something beyond the intellect.

Take care,

James

James,

Like most people, you are confusing communication with words, and confusing speaking with intellectualizing. Also, when you say that you can discuss or describe in the silence in which you sit, think again. Discussion and description, even used metaphorically, are functions of language! I think you are confusing true "silence" or "emptiness" with a state of mind that seems consistent with this idea and experience. Language contributes far more to the experience of self, mind, and reality than most people know. I don't mean any particular language, but the existence of language as a context for experience. In any case, I think you are missing something here. This is why I suggested you are intellectualizing the matter.

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Speech doesn't mean that the intellect is the source of the speech. Yet, whether or not intellect is used, a communication can be communicating an experience that is independent of the intellect. I "hear" that this is not the case for you. Sorry, I know you don't want to hear that, and it's difficult to convey what "faculty" I use to detect such things. The long and the short of it is: if your communication comes from intellectualizing the matter — figuring it out, creating a schematic, understanding things via the intellect — then it will carry the "stink" of that process with it. If it comes from true consciousness, direct experience, it won't.

We have dialogued several times in the past, and so I presume to know you will be challenged by my response. I also suspect that your respect for me will prevent you from disregarding it outright, and you will consider the matter. I also know that you believe you have had and are in touch with a direct experience of some sort. I am not challenging this or in any way suggesting that it isn't true. I am, however, suggesting that it doesn't go as far as you want to believe. And it's not going to unless you get knocked off your position and are freed to move on. I'm trying to help you in this way.

To respond to your first Q: First, stop intellectualizing. In order to do that, you need to grasp what that is, and what I'm talking about. Most people misunderstand the quote-fragment from Ludwig Wittgenstein: "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must remain silent." It doesn't refer to not knowing what you are talking about, or having no authority in the matter. He is saying at the depth of consciousness where there is no speech, you are already not speaking! Almost no one understands what this means, even having said what I just said. Where there is no mind, you are not thinking. And believe it or not, no mind and no language are close to the same thing.

I'm in no way suggesting we hide behind: "I just can't put it into words." Of course you can. You can put any experience into words. That's what words are for. They are never the thing itself, they are representations, and are used to symbolize or point to the experience of which you speak. (Language both represents and creates, but that's another matter that is too much to tackle right now.) Getting an experience across does not end with saying some words. That's a matter of communication, and saying words or hearing words doesn't mean communication has taken place. Grasping the experience that is being presented, that's communication!

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In any case, where one comes from is visible to some degree in what they say. You'll see all this more clearly when you come to the ENB. So I look forward to working with you this Spring.

All the best,

Peter

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Mark Grzic  
Sydney, Australia

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Peter,

I have been working with a lot of what I got out of the C&R (Communication and Relationship Workshop). I am finding it easier to access my bottom line stuff (uncognized core beliefs), and it is also getting much easier to recognize this domain. At the moment I am struggling with trying to let it go. I find that I store a lot of it in my body and I seem to be able to physically feel it. Specifically across my back and in my solar plexus region. I keep trying to work with the idea that I generate the feelings myself, but I am struggling with how to let them go. Any suggestions in that direction would be helpful.

Also, in trying to remove labels and such when I look at things, to observe them as they are, I tried to do it on the ocean the other day and I felt overwhelmed at the size of the ocean. I felt like I couldn't get there because I perceived it as something so big. I think I probably need to work on dropping the size label but I was wondering if you had a similar sort of experience.

Finally, I have been working with the "Who am I" question and am struggling a bit with getting down to what is beyond the emotions. I am trying to experience the answer rather than intellectualize it but I always seem to get to roughly the same spot and then I plateau.

Anyway, it was good to have you in Oz. I hope you can give me some suggestions.

Mark Grzic

Mark,

Was great to work with you all in "Oz" (Australia). Working with the aspects of mind that are foundational but remain uncognized can be a challenge. The more you work with this kind of contemplation, the better you get at it. Some personal

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and deep core beliefs or assumptions can be challenging to access since it's a bit like trying to find your glasses when they are on your face. Once you become conscious of something very basic that has been running you, letting it go can be even more challenging. But remember, letting it go isn't even possible until you consciously realize that you are holding on to it. Any bottom line assumption that you've held onto for a life time will be welded to your sense of self. This can make it challenging to give up.

If something is affecting your body, in the way that you describe, this means your primary brain functions are affected by its presence. In other words, the very belief is sending a signal to the nervous system that you or reality is such and such a way, and the body is reacting to this signal. One avenue is to focus on the negative body sensations that seem to be related to your bottom line, and contemplate what is behind this contraction. You may have to stay with it for quite some time. Its very familiarity will be an obstacle to illuminating the source of it. Try to trace it back to whatever is generating the "need" or impulse to tighten up. Do this experientially. You can't just consider that you generate this bottom line and the resultant body effect, you have to become conscious that you indeed are generating them. Then you can let them go.

In the case of body tension, work on letting it go physically, relaxing it as best you can; then watch (feel) as the tension comes back and contemplate what brings it back. Do this repeatedly until you grasp the root of the impulse.

As far as seeing things for-themselves, have fun. It doesn't matter what other things you encounter, it is freeing just to perceive something newly and freshly and grasp it as a presence rather than an idea. The other stuff will work itself out.

Regarding contemplating Who you are: if your intent is true and you stay open, then hitting a wall is common and appropriate. Stay there. This is where you need to be. It's called contemplating. Keep intending to experience who you are regardless of any "progress" that seems to occur. Just stare into yourself and keep staring. Nothing needs to happen (except get who you are).

Good luck.

Peter

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Robert Daufenbach  
Pittsburgh, PA  
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Greetings Peter,

I am interested in some type of further exploration of your statement:

"When you imagine something is occurring in your body, and set out to feel it is really so, your brain and nervous system will adjust to this stimulus, and the body will rearrange itself to accommodate these perceptions."

Sounds like one of the essential principles of internal martial arts. The body has already "arranged" itself to other perceptions like , "I'm unstable" or "I'm fast" etc....

Since my field, clinical psychology, is now informed by advances in neuroscience, and we know the brain is much more "plastic" than ever imagined, how does thinking change the body? Imagining stretching exercises does not make one more flexible.

How do you, for instance, envision working on "ball and chain" altering one's experience of being grounded? I have experienced this through Cheng Hsin work, however, I am very curious about the "mechanism" involved.

Regards,
Robert Daufenbach, PhD.

Robert,

One challenge here is that an explanation doesn't get the job done. It only explains it. The approach to changing something in the mind, especially in the physical domain, is in a very different domain from explaining or describing or even understanding how the change might be brought about. I have noticed that detailed explanations about what I've discovered as to how or why something works usually leaves the student out in the cold. They have an explanation but aren't able to translate that explanation into action or experience. This is an important distinction to make, since often people will confuse an intellectual learning of a belief system, or a description of a cosmology, or explanation as to how something works, with an experience.

This distinction is all the more difficult to make since something often does take place in their experience, it just isn't what they think. Since they have will something in mind, especially if they take in on seriously, their perceptive experience will be modified to some degree to match what they now believe.

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These beliefs will be added to the process of interpretation so that whatever seems related to that domain of beliefs will be influenced by the beliefs and apparently “perceived.” It is as if circumstance, both internal and objective, is seen through the “filter” of the beliefs, creating a mental expectation of what “is” or should be there. But this “perception” has a lot of projections piled on top of what’s there. If the intellectual ideation is slight then the influence will be slight. If the concepts are strongly believed or the attachment to them is strong then the influence will be greater. All of this is not an experience of what’s true in the matter, nor is it even an experience of what is being explained or believed. This is a point that is frequently missed, and even having explained it just now, is still probably misunderstood or not understood, and likely not experienced.

But back to the issue at hand. When it comes to your example of imagining stretching, it actually doesn’t hurt. Since when you imagine stretching, if you imagine it as if real — in other words you feel like you are actually stretching as opposed to just seeing an image of someone stretching — then it will have some effect on your body. This would be useful as a warm-up to stretching, sort of orienting or awakening the nervous system and muscles to start the process of stretching. I suspect that if one trained long enough and correctly enough, he could actually accomplish some stretching of the tissue, or at least loosening of the tissue from this exercise alone. But that’s a lot of work to go through, since it’s easier to just stretch.

When it comes to something like the Ball and Chain, the nervous system changes in relation to the incoming stimuli. Like when you see a heavy object coming at you, you’ll likely brace up automatically or prepare to leap out of the way, even though nothing has happened yet since the object is just a visual image at this point. Still, via this perception, your brain and nervous system are set in motion and the muscles and body structure are called into action, preparing for this encounter. Just so, if we could somehow tie a real ball and chain to you and you had to spend hours and years carrying it around, we know many changes would occur in your body. You’d develop stronger muscles in some places, alignment in body structure would change, for better or for worse, you’d become far more conscious of and attentive to your relation to the ground, and so on. Even if we took this off, these changes would remain for quite some time and perhaps for your lifetime.

What we’re going for with such an imagination exercise is more than what’s listed above, but uses this relation between perception and mind-body effect. We are trying to develop a stronger sense of grounding. By concentrating on

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something like the Ball and Chain until we can perceive it as if it is real, we stimulate the brain to send signals to the whole body to accommodate this situation. Very small changes in alignment and physiological-anatomical engineering will be made of which we have no intellectual grasp. A transformation can take place in a domain of mind-body relations that we don't even know exists. This is why it must be done experientially, thinking about it won't do any good. This is also why it must be done repeatedly for a long time, since you are trying to alter how your body-mind works, developing a new ability, or "power" if you like, and this takes time. Just like stretching can't be done in a day or by wishing it to happen, such grounding also takes time and work. The knowledge of such a thing does nothing, except perhaps provide the possibility of taking it on.

Hope this gives you something to work with.
Peter

~~~~~  
Kriben Pillay  
Durban, South Africa  
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Dear Peter Ralston

I teach an academic module on Consciousness and Leadership, and am looking for responses from writers such as yourself about the current notion in the cognitive sciences that awareness is a material epiphenomenon of the brain. I have just received *The Book of Not Knowing*, but note from the Contents that this specific question is not addressed, although I may be mistaken.

I look forward to your response.

Regards.

Kriben Pillay Associate Professor and Acting Director
The Leadership Centre
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Durban, South Africa

Kriben,

I would disagree with this assessment of awareness. As you read on in the book, you will find that I don't hold consciousness as simply awareness or cognition,

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but as prior to those functions and the source of them. The Consciousness I am speaking about is even prior to the brain and so can't be a function of it.

Hope you enjoy the book.

Peter

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Maria Hansen  
Aarhus, Denmark

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Peter,

I would like to share some stuff with you, so that I can become more clear.

I am reading the new book (a real page-turner, thank you!) and at the moment I am contemplating "existing" and "being", because I find that they are somehow different. The first is dependent on relationship and the other is not.

When something exist, it exist as something in particular. It exist in relationship to what it's not, it is defined by what it's not. Take away the relationship and it will cease to exist. Being however is being, it is, and goes before and beyond dependency, value, knowledge, judging, categorizing, recognizing, etc.. So for something to exist it must be, but being doesn't have to exist in order to be.

Please share with me if my understanding of this is far away from reality, thanks.

Maria

Maria,

The most important thing is what you are conscious of. It can be interesting, and sometimes useful, to work something out philosophically, since that can help point you in a direction in which to look. But if you don't personally grasp the truth of the matter then it really doesn't matter what I say or what we work out. If you do grasp it, then there is really no reason to ask me. Still, I understand the desire to share or get validation.

About the distinction you are making regarding existence and being: one thing we need to consider is the differences between objective existence, and the existence of something not an object, as well as the nature of being. It sounds like you are defining existence as the existence of some "thing," which is fine, and clarifies the distinction you are making. This existence can be applied to both

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object and non-object, since if it exists in some perceivable form, some knowable form, then it is some “thing” and so what you say is true. Anything distinguished from other things depends on this distinction for it to be perceived as existing as that thing.

Being on the other hand is “what is,” but as an absolute, this isn’t restricted to anything that is or isn’t — which sounds funny, I know. Yet your list of what being is “before and beyond” suggests a subjective relation — value, judgment, recognition — and so I suspect there is more to clarify in our discussion. But I’m stopped here since I’m just playing around with what I can glean from your letter, and if I go on I could be way off track, so I’ll wait until we can converse more fluidly.

I’m glad you like the book and are putting it to good use.
Peter

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Markus Herberholt  
Cologne, Germany  
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Peter,

Can you please say something about Attention, Awareness, and Consciousness? What it is for you, how you make a distinction for yourself. Not necessarily as teacher/student relation, just what it is for you. Thank you.

Markus

Markus,

I really can’t respond in any other way but the distinctions I make for myself, which will be the same for “teacher” and “myself.” Just to be clear, I’m not implying that “myself” is the same function as the “teacher” that I produce; there are many differences since they are different jobs. But when it comes to speaking about what’s true, there is no difference.

Since you ask me to say something, yet ask no specific question, I will say something. Attention is the capacity to move awareness from one subject to another, to focus one’s awareness somewhere and bring it into cognition. Awareness is what we are aware of, which has a lot to do with where we put out

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attention. And yet, awareness includes all that comes into our “cognition” whether we have put any specific attention on it or not, or even if we ignore it. Since I introduced ‘cognition’ I should clarify that cognition is what we grasp as experience, what is perceived and known, all that is recognized and identified in any way.

Consciousness on the other hand has no such restrictions. It is the source for all of it, and includes all of it — attention, awareness, and cognition — and more. Consciousness manifests for us as awareness and the rest, which are all functions of mind. Consciousness is the source of mind but is also “what is” on any level including the Absolute. Understood in this way Consciousness is “Being” and this is everything in every form.

So awareness is the capacity for experience to be known via cognition, and attention is the ability to focus this capacity on some aspect of experience. Consciousness is the source of all of it, from what is held as “being conscious” of something — what I call cognition — to the nature of existence.

Does that provide some clarity?

Peter

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Gene Kaufman  
Burbank, CA  
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Hi Peter,

I just finished reading your amazing book, The Book of Not-Knowing and found just about every page to be helpful and insightful. I'm working on removing the false beliefs I have accumulated over the past 60 years.

The question I have for you is how does the Buddhist "Theory of Emptiness" relate to your views regarding the illusion of a self. Is there any correlation to your views?

I have been contemplating that Emptiness is the main criteria that explains the limitations of all beliefs and all thoughts. It is still a confusing mess to me at times and other times some clarity.

Thanks again for a great book,
Gene Kaufman

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Gene,

First we have to imagine that it isn't just a theory. As a theory it would be simply an idea that may or may not be true. When you hear about such things as Emptiness what you interpret it to be could be called a theory, but really we should just call whatever you think Emptiness is: "wrong." There is no way to grasp this consciousness without directly grasping this consciousness. Any idea that we have is necessarily "wrong" — not Emptiness — and is in such a different aspect of consciousness (mind) as to be rather irrelevant.

The only thing that makes a difference is becoming directly conscious of the true nature of existence, mind, and/or self. What you call it is unimportant. Without this, it is just pondering an idea. Perhaps not a bad thing to do, but what you want to go for is consciousness of the absolute truth in this moment, and not to just figure out a theory. Even calling it "absolute" truth tends to put you to searching "elsewhere" and I don't mean to do that. Just grasp what is right now.

You can find this emptiness in the Book. Just stop looking for the name and work on grasping the communication — ergo the truth of your own existence.

Good luck,

Peter

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Jed Michael  
Philadelphia, PA

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Peter,

Hello there. I have written you before and was surprised by your accessibility. You requested that I clarify my questions. I think my real issue is in the following.

I find that 'my' enlightenment experience is not attained, but simply what is left after everything else has been abandoned. The more hopeless I become the more free I feel since hope is always bound to outcome or desire. The physical/mental/spiritual work is fun and good to have to check back in with, but the state of being behind 'correct' action clearly mandates proper technique once control has been surrendered to it, and all this is in flat contradiction to my socialization and society at large.

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I don't care about that too much, but how is it that you can maintain personal relationships? As one, I am fully willing to accept the consequences of being myself, having discovered that my happy place is living out of a backpack, or van down by the river, enjoying freedom in my body and soul.

As one in relationship, I take on some responsibility toward others who may not share my enthusiastic commitment to truth over consistency — luckily, this hasn't yet been complicated by children.

It seems though, that this is an either or situation — much as Jesus is rumored to have said that one must turn away from their family to enter the kingdom. It seems that this is what he was talking about.

You are married, right? How do you do it? How is it that you can maintain a practice of connection with the great "IS" and also maintain a connection with one or more humans being? I just don't get it.

So, here I am in my life looking at a profound fork in the road; settle in for the primate routine of responsibility and ontological pursuits, or go free? I have faced death under both circumstances, and am pretty clear that as a free-roaming being, I didn't even care. It was neat and I had never been more alive. As a someone, I felt challenged, insulted and slighted — to some degree, I am answering my own question, but I guess I am asking because I still want to believe there is a middle way.

Holy shit, did I just ask you about women and commitment???? hahaha

At any rate, I would be grateful for your observations.

Kind regards

Jed Michael

Jed,

You sound young, and that could make a difference in your struggle with committing to a primary relationship. You simply may not be ready for such a thing. But let's look at your perspective that relationship and consciousness are mutually exclusive. There are several assumptions that you are standing on which provide such a view. One, you are holding consciousness as a solo event, and so exclude it in some way from relating with others. What are others? What is relationship? Are these separate from Consciousness itself? You need to ask these questions. If "self" is best done alone, then self still rules, doesn't it? Transcending self (given that is one of your a goals) is likely not done by "catering" to self or doing what is easiest and offers little intimate feedback.

Since you bring up Jesus let's consider from that point of view. If we consider that he was enlightened — although we must postulate that much of what

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surrounds his teaching is myth — we have an example of possible relationships in such a case. We note that he maintained relationships with many people, and likely quite intimate relationships with at least 12 people, and in all probability a close intimate relationship with at least one woman (not counting his mother). You referenced his statement about family, and seem to view that as advice to run away from those people. But consider that he could well have meant you must transcend or become free from the deep programming that always accompanies any human being when growing up, and so toss off the assumptions, beliefs, and conclusions that make up your self and your relationship to others and life. Most of this is generated in relation to the “first” people you encounter, which is family. This is far easier said than done. He likely did not mean to suggest you engage in no relationships, since that seems to be most of what he did in many forms. (Personally, I like to think that Jesus was a Buddhist, that he went to India during those “lost 18 years” and studied Buddhism, becoming powerfully enlightened. There is decent evidence that this is possible, and it just makes sense. But who knows.)

Also, as I’ve said many times: Consciousness doesn’t make you stupid. In other words, you don’t suddenly lose memory about how social relationships work or what’s expected of you. You may decide to let some things go, or behave differently, but you don’t lose the ability to do what you’ve done before, although you may lose the will to do so.

Any challenges that arise for me in relationship to my wife are for me to transcend, not to dodge. If you want a crucible for personal transformation, marriage usually offers the intense heat to do so — it kicks ass. But you’d need to rise to the occasion. Remaining solo is also remaining safe, and it becomes easier to avoid one’s own limitations and flaws. Without feedback there is no feedback, and the programmed mind can’t be trusted to tell the truth about itself. Transcending one’s family programming is probably best done within the confrontation of intimate relating, since the challenges or limitations that are revealed within such demanding relations bring these programs to the fore.

There is an argument for a monk life-style, and yet this life perspective often doesn’t go far enough. Can you become conscious of all the dynamics of life while living outside of the social and more intimate aspects of it? If you can, then living with others within a social context should not be a challenge or distraction since you’d know what it’s all about. It’s rather like how people insist on a quiet and peaceful setting to do contemplation. In the beginning this might be best, just as living as a monk might be best for some time since it helps you

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separate from the habits and demands that normally distract you. Yet if you're contemplating what's true, how is what's true less true in a noisy hectic place? We need to grasp the truth, not the fantasy.

When I was younger and spent almost all of my time in either contemplation or training, at one point I realized that in certain ways I was trying to "transcend" social life without having really lived or mastered that domain. You can't transcend something you haven't fully experienced or mastered. Some food for thought.

Peter

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Margo Maier  
Grand Rapids, MI  
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Hi Peter,

Not sure if you will take the time to answer this email but want to at least try. Am baffled about something. Amazon.com sent me a link to your book Not-knowing the other day and that is how I came to your website.

"My" sense of being an "I" was eradicated during a four year process and am left clueless as to how life is done now. See that what "I" had called "my" "I" or Margot was a character/puppet/mask without any substance or solidity to it. It ran totally on its own with no actual "I" in charge of it. See through this Margot character and people as all being made up via mind, concepts, ideas, programs and there is absolutely no impulse to take part in the world again as everything seems fake, useless and meaningless. Plus, there is no longer an "I" that could choose or want or decide or go after anything. There is just void, emptiness, nothingness, vastness, presence experienced -- but this space is not experienced as being "me" or "my" true identity. It is experienced as what is left now since the supposed personal "I" is gone.

So, two things are happening: there is one, the Margot character still running on automatic as before, doing its programmed thinking and feeling while emptiness is experienced holding it all as it is happening -- like water holds fish swimming in it. The confusing thing is that there is no "I" any more that can act on anything the mind says, nor is anything believed in anymore. How is life done without the acting agent which the "I" used to be while still looking through the eyes that were of the "I"?

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The other thing that is happening is that there is no link to the body as being "mine" anymore either. What is felt again is presence holding the body within its field of nothingness and it is this field somehow that moves the body or gives impulses as to what is to do as a "next" in life. The mind does not understand what is happening and is going round and round with thoughts and feelings of confusion, stuckness and powerlessness.

Can you please help in any way?

Thank you so much in advance if you will take the time to answer me.

Warm regards,

Margo

Margo,

Eyes are still eyes, they function and you are aware of the view. No you? Perhaps, and perhaps there is no I, but there is vision, and sensation, and hearing. Why? You are not found as your body, but still all of your perceptions arrive via your body; why? You must be linked to your body since it is creating your experience and your mind, so perhaps it is useful to connect more thoroughly with your body, feel it more, become more conscious of what it is and what it is for. In addition to increasing your consciousness of what grounds your perceptive experience it also helps ground you in the "place" of your experience.

It is fine not to have a body as "mine," or a personal character, or confuse consciousness as an I. Still, you are walking and talking, you are baffled and confused. Why? If there is Nothing, there is no confusion, no striving, no meaning or the search for meaning. Where there is emptiness there is no language, no thought, no worry, and no dilemma. So it seems your challenge is not grasping what to "be" or what to "do." As Absolute Consciousness there is nothing to be or do, so that isn't a problem. Only as a "life" (ergo a self) is it seen as a problem. If "you" and "character" and "mind" are creations, then what seems needed is to become directly conscious of creating them, generating them. As it is, you aren't conscious of this. Also, if the body is created, what creates it? Why? What does it serve? What is it doing? These are questions you can contemplate. Since clearly you are still engaged in life, what is life? What is going on? Seems to me if you answer these questions you won't be troubled anymore.

Have you read The Book of Not Knowing? If not, then I recommend it (unless you have a history of mental instability, then pass on it). I also recommend Zen Body-Being since I suspect it would be very useful for you to become more

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grounded and conscious of this domain of your experience, which is the root of every perception and action you take.

Consider that Gautama Buddha, the most widely accepted person claiming complete enlightenment and freedom, said to "life:" 'you have me no more;" and yet still remained grounded in his body and his work until he died.

A quote from Chozan Shissai, 17th century Japan, might offer something to consider:

"In life one fulfills the Way of life and in death one fulfills the Way of death. Mind is not stirred in the slightest and the thoughts are motionless. Therefore, one is free in life and free in death. In contrast, that other person [Zen monk] sees nothing but illusion and deception in the creation; nothing but dream and pretense in the world of man. And thus he believes that to fulfill the Way of life means to cling to life and to suffocate in its activities. To surrender to life while alive and to death at dying is not to divide the Heart."

Hope this helps in some way. Let me know how it goes.

Peter

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Margo's Response:

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Peter,

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Your email did the trick. For some reason, awareness, which was experienced pretty much all the time, was not linked up as being that which was seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, laughing, eating, walking, etc. All these things happened as before but now they were no longer "Margot" doing these things, they were just happening on their own -- so it seemed anyway -- with awareness being there in the background. There was this gap experienced between awareness and the physical which just got linked up. I feel so grateful to you! Thank you once again.

Margo

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Łukasz Głowacki  
Namyslow, Poland

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Hello Peter!

I've noticed that you always or almost always write about contemplation and never or very rarely about meditation. Why is that so? Do you value contemplation more than meditation? Or maybe you have experience only in contemplation work and not much in meditation?

Thanks

Lukasz

Lukasz,

There is a reason I use the word contemplation more than meditation. Although we could, and often do, speak of these as pretty much the same thing, I make a distinction. Contemplation is the serious effort of focusing on a subject for the purpose of directly discovering the nature of it. The most central example of which is keeping all of your attention on yourself and setting out to become directly conscious of who and what you really are. But it can also be used to investigate anything really, from an interactive principle to the source of unconscious mind patterns. Contemplation produces insights and leaps in consciousness where sudden understanding reveals the truth of reality in some respect.

Meditation on the other hand does not necessarily have that goal. Meditation is using the mind and attention to focus your efforts on developing something rather than discovering something. This could be something like becoming calmer or more centered, or developing an inner sense of peace or state of joy. It could be used to help heal the body by focusing energy and attention toward that end, or to increase personal power or self confidence. Any such developments can be undertaken, and they could all be very useful accomplishments. They are not, however, insights, nor do they increase consciousness. Developing something, no matter how amazing it is, doesn't provide a deeper consciousness about the nature of anything. It is founded on a particular world view and a system of beliefs about how things work, since these are needed in order to pursue such a goal in the first place. Beyond the mere fact that the purpose and goal is different, this dependence on belief tends to exclude insight.

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In contemplation you need to create a great deal of openness, allowing yourself to “not-know” what is true. You can see that in meditation this isn’t the pursuit. There is nothing wrong with meditation, and this distinction is perhaps not widely shared, but this is why most of the time I speak of contemplation. Since primarily I’m concerned with discovery and consciousness.

Peter

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John Patton  
Hurricane, West Virginia

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Mr. Ralston,

I would like to ask you a question that I don't feel anyone has addressed all that well, at least not in my experience. I loved The Book of Not Knowing. It filled in so many blanks for me, and more importantly created new ones that I could be comfortable with.

I don't know if you have children, but my question is in regards to being a parent. I have many times found freedom from "my story" and my ever "self surviving mind." Beginning when I was eighteen years old and reading Principles of Effortless Power and Reflections of Being. My experiences have changed and deepened since then, but becoming a parent has presented itself as an obstacle. If for no other reason that it isn't my story any more but the story of my four year old son, and the role that I play in it.

I know that the most I can give him is direction for his own freedom, but I find it difficult to "detach" from my story, when another so close to me is so tightly intertwined. Becoming a parent seems to change the whole dynamic, and so call for additional insight. The investment in the whole game seems to be so much greater with a child involved. It is more difficult to find the freedom I found before for this reason. Regardless if I see through things, through my own convoluted story, if it all seems real to him, then it is real. It is real until he realizes it isn't, and this troubles me for some reason. This isn't about shirking my responsibilities, I am a single father and take good care of my son. It's more about feeling that our identities are tied together.

Lastly, I leave you with my two line philosophy: “Synthesize and Summarize - or, boil it down and sum it up.” And “Assimilate and Integrate - or, put it together and put it to work.”

Thank you
John J. Patton

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John,

Raising a child is personal and complex, and I hesitate to offer any real advice on that subject. But since you are concerned with the growth of your son I will offer a couple of points. The two most important things I could think of is to love him and be honest; and then make sure you are loving him and make sure you are really being honest. Children need structure since they are creating a world in which to live, therefore they will relate to what is really there in and as you. I suspect that your philosophy isn't the only thing that is there, and that the reality doesn't always match the philosophy. Be honest about it. Don't try to pretend that you are something that you are not or are conscious of something that you are not. Kids tend to see through that.

An Indian student once confided to me long ago that as a child the adults told the children to be compassionate and generous, but it was obvious to him that in reality there was a hidden message to lie and be selfish. It isn't what you "say" as much as how you "are."

Certainly in being honest there will be times of disappointment for the child, but in the long run a deeper trust and a real model are created. To be clear, I'm not saying share everything with him. He is a child and should be related to as such. Your internal nonsense isn't useful even to you, and certainly not him. But you can still be straight without confessing every quirk of your mind, some things are not relevant to a child. Be honest in the context of communicating to another's mind at whatever level they can understand and make use of such a communication. This is true of everyone.

Also, don't confuse an opinion or belief with reality. This might be the most fundamentally damaging action that a parent takes in relation to a child. Parents want their children to believe in the same things they do, and so stress that these beliefs are fact. You can have a belief and even share a belief, but it is far more empowering to clearly communicate that it is a belief and not the truth. It can be said that the truth remains to be discovered, and pursuing such a course is an obvious example that you indeed make a distinction between beliefs, stories, and so on, and what's real or true. Furthermore, courage can be shown by confronting your own challenges and limitations, this goes much farther in teaching than telling him to be courageous. And so on.

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Love and be honest. What else is there? He will create his own reality, but with such a model he will also create love and honesty and the rest will unfold.

Good luck,

Peter

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Alan Geller  
Manalapan, NJ

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Peter,

I just finished reading The Book of Not Knowing and as per your suggestion in the book, I'm going to dive in for a second read. My question is about contemplation: Must time be a major factor of enlightenment? I ask as I'm equating the contemplation work that you're recommending with a substantial investment in time.

Regards,
Alan Geller

Alan,

Time is really not an aspect of enlightenment. Yet there is a tricky side to it. You could become deeply conscious in the first instant of contemplation. This is actually the goal of contemplation. We don't contemplate to spend time, or to enter a process that eventually leads to enlightenment. Those are future and process related, and enlightenment is neither in the future or even in time, and is not a process or the result of a process. The goal is simply to become directly conscious of the truth now. This, however, doesn't always happen in the first instant. So a second instant is undertaken. And so on.

If you are worried about how much time is spent though, this will cloud the mind and stand in the way. The idea is to be free of how much time goes by, and to focus on the job of becoming conscious. What's also true is even after having had an enlightenment it's rarely as deep as is possible, and so contemplation remains an ongoing activity. The goal is to increase consciousness. This remains the goal even when deep consciousness has occurred, since rarely does anyone grasp everything all at once. As a matter of fact, usually real contemplation only begins after an enlightenment.

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The other side of the matter is that personal transformation inevitably does take time. Changing a person from long-held programs, assumptions, and beliefs to a very different state of mind open to the truth, can't be done unless you recognize these programs and beliefs as not-your-self. Stretching the body or training the nervous system take time to accomplish since changes in objective reality do require process. So it is with transformation which involves freeing yourself from the deeply worn grooves of a self-identity. Don't confuse enlightenment with transformation. They do tend to go together, but they are actually distinct. One occurs outside of time and process, the other is a process and takes time.

Because of all this, contemplation usually does take time. Most often it is a life-time companion — even for, or especially for, those deeply enlightened. The thing is to transcend the time component, and focus instead of the job of becoming conscious. And until you are fully conscious, and so completely free and happy, there is more work to be done.

Good luck.

Peter

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Magdalene Kuruk  
Birmingham, AL  
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Hi,

My name is Magdalene and I have been a seeker of truth for about 7 years now and feel as though my progress on the path has slowed down or even stopped. But once I started reading your book "The Book of Not Knowing" I feel as though something is happening to me spiritually again. However, I do have a lot of questions concerning contemplation and how to do it 'right'.

In your book you stress getting a real authentic experience or insight of what is being spoken of in the book. I have gotten some insights or direct experience while reading — like, I'll totally grasp what is being said — but lately that hasn't been happening. It's like I don't know how to "do it" or experience the concepts any more, maybe I'm just trying too hard, or being analytical or something. I am not finished with the book yet, in fact I had read up to a certain point and am now going back to the very beginning to make sure I really grasp every thing being said not just intellectually, however, but have a real experience of what is being pointed to.

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I have also jumped ahead in the book to the part in chapter 21 where you give the guidelines on how to contemplate. Maybe this is supposed to come with practice, but I am finding it hard to incorporate all the components of contemplation while I contemplate. It's like I have to remember to.

Another thing I struggle with is "keeping" an insight I get. For instance, I'll get an insight into the nature of something but then lose it by either forgetting it, or conceptualizing it and then it's like I never even had the insight. I don't know how to incorporate it into my life.

My last question is probably the most important one and relates to experiencing the material of the book. How do I read mindfully? I think this might help me experience what you are saying in the book.

Thanks,
Maggie

Maggie,

It sounds like you are doing fine. This is how it usually goes. That's why we study and continue to work on such things. You seem to have the right attitude and approach, which is to attempt to grasp what's said in your own experience and see it in operation in your own life. It's not something that can be done overnight. An insight or even an enlightenment experience can happen suddenly, but to grasp the human condition and transform your own mind takes time and continued effort.

We had a saying back at the old school: "get it, lose it, get it back." This referred to the phenomenon you're experiencing. Often when you grasp something the next thing that will happen is that you lose sight of it. This happens because sometimes it is just an intellectual understanding and so, although impressive, it can't remain as anything but a memory or belief, and fades away since it isn't operational within your daily experience. Yet even an experiential insight will tend to slip away.

The self-mind as it's been formed can't retain the insight since there is no real place for it. This is one of the reasons transformation takes time. You need to "build a place" for such an understanding by changing the foundation of thinking and cognition that normally occurs for you to one that is consistent with the insight. This is why we'd say "get it back." Through repeated hammering away at the truth of something — staying attentive and noticing when it's there and when it's not, when it's real and when it's only a belief, and repeatedly "re-

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experiencing” it when it slips away — eventually begins to “re-form” your mind and experience.

One thing, however, about “re-experiencing.” Don’t hold it as re-experiencing since it isn’t. I’m just using that phrase for convenience. It is experiencing the truth of the matter now, which you may have experienced before. It is not remembering something and trying to recreate that memory as an experience. The memory will always be off, since it is not really the insight, it’s a concept of it. So the “getting it back” part isn’t really getting the memory back, but setting out to experience the truth newly, whatever it is.

About the contemplation components, you may struggle with them in the beginning, but not to worry. It takes time. Get the idea of what to do as a whole and don’t worry too much about the components. Simply want to know and focus on doing so. Over time the components will become more real to you naturally and you may have some insights about their role. They are there to help, but it’s not a paint-by-the-numbers kind of thing.

As you read the book, almost each sentence is something to contemplate. It’s not practical to contemplate each sentence, however, and you’d likely lose the thread of the communication if you tried. Still, this is one reason you need to study the book many times — each time you’ll recognize something missed previously. Also, once you get something, say for example self-survival and you can see it in operation in your life and it makes sense, don’t stop there. This is a valid and useful understanding. Yet it is likely just a first level to grasping what survival is all about. After you become more familiar with this depth of understanding about self-survival if you continue to look into it, not taking what you’ve gotten so far at face value or as all of it, you can then have a much deeper insight and realize that this principle dominates everything you are aware of, and you will go to a whole new level and maturity relative to the matter. And so on. The deeper you go and more real you get, the more you can transform.

So reading the book needs to become a practice, a study, a life-endavor. I recommend coming to the Contemplation Intensive to put some serious time into contemplating as well as to receive feedback and practice in doing so. Also doing the Experiencing the Nature of Being workshop will put a whole new perspective on your work with the book. We are here doing the work, come join us if and when you can.

Good luck.

Peter

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Klaus-Heinrich Peters  
Hamburg, Germany  
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Klaus asks four questions. I will respond to them one at a time:

Peter,

1) For myself I experienced the process of looking behind patterns of behavior and emotions and finding a "bottom line" as a liberating one. I also found it to be a good process to find solutions to problems in a relationship, simply because it helps to address the problems on a more honest level, and communicating the real stuff can actually make a difference.

But what do I do when my partner in the relationship refuses to take on the same process? What, if my partner experiences her patterns and feelings as fixed facts, as the way she is, without any possibility or responsibility in the matter?

Often I end up by simply adapting myself to weird and eccentric character traits, but that doesn't feel right after a while. I have the feeling that I miss something here, but I don't quite get what it is.

Klaus

Klaus,

You can't change anyone else. You can communicate and invite and request, you can even demand, but in the end if your partner doesn't agree, you are left with what you get. If you can't live with it then you will have to leave. If you go this route because she can't or won't make a change in her agreements about being in relationship, then you can't be with that person. If this isn't the way you want to go, and still no communication or request works, then you need to work on yourself to fully allow her to be the way that she is, and learn to live with it. You can relate to it how ever you wish — you can let it be and not engage with it at all, learn to enjoy it, ignore it, study it, use it towards some end, or choose some other form of relating. But in your heart you need to get that her actions and behavior are not yours nor your responsibility. You can't change it, only she can. So learn to let it be or move on.

2) More and more I notice a pretty deep pattern in my life: I have a hard time making decisions. Especially "big" decisions like where to live, what to do in life in general, etc. One part is, that I fear making a decision because of all the

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other things I could do but can't do anymore if I decide to do the one. It's the fear that I could waste my life and I could lose the opportunity to be whole and happy and meaningful. I get on an intellectual level that it's actually the other way round and that doing one thing for real is much more fulfilling than doing everything only in my imagination (or the future), but that understanding doesn't drain into my feelings.

Also I noticed that, balancing reasons, I move my position to the middle until every possibility seems to be as bad as the other. I can trace it down to the statement: "I want somebody else to decide it for me. I want somebody taking my hand and leading me through life. I'll wait until somebody saves me from this situation." Contemplating this I can find something like it's unfair from the start to drop me here alone in this life. I'm offended by being born and by all the demands of life.

Here again, I feel something is missing in the picture. It doesn't really open a possibility to change this position to life. Do you see more there than I do?

Klaus

Klaus,

You know this is an unworkable position, but cheer up. You want someone or something to make the decision for you, and it will. You will die. No matter what you do or don't do, what you decide or fail to decide, your life will be taken from you, and sooner than when you were younger — maybe any day now. So putting off deciding what to commit yourself to in life, will be replaced by 'you didn't do what you wanted to do and then you died.' You figure it out. Life never said it was fair. It is what you do to survive in whatever way you do it. There is no "destiny" and there is no divine purpose that will show up and tell you what you should do or make your life happy and meaningful. Your life will only be happy if you are happy with whatever you experience and with whatever you do — no matter what it is.

I suggest you sit down and decide what it is you want out of life, what you would feel good about devoting your life to. Make it as ambitious and as far reaching as you want, just make sure it is what you want. When you've gotten that, no matter what it is, then ask yourself how you can make it a reality. Being satisfied in life requires only having worthwhile goals and moving towards them intelligently. You must create it, no one else can. Being happy in life requires being happy with whatever you've got. Period.

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Perhaps you should do the Consciousness Apprenticeship Program. It won't do it for you either but it will kick ass, you will confront more than you want to, and in the end should be able to put your foot down about the rest of your life.

3) Also, I noticed that I attend your workshops with the background idea of "this will do it for me." Although I've heard you saying a few hundred times that this is not going to happen, there is still this attitude. I want something or somebody to do it for me. I want to say "at least I'm trying." There seems to be a lack of seriousness and wholeheartedness, but I have no idea how to become more serious if I'm not really serious with it from the beginning. Feels like a circle I'm in.

Klaus,

See above. If you don't break free of the circle, you will be pretty dizzy before you die.

Also, look into your heart, the seriousness you seek is already there. It's simply a matter of committing yourself to finding the truth or to creating something. Neither will ultimately get you anything, but it is a place to "put your self" (or create for yourself) while alive. I suspect there is some deep fear lying underneath all this that is still not acknowledged. Find it. And while you're looking, contemplate the fact that you will die, and sooner than you think, until you can make this real for yourself. Use this to help you decide what to do, knowing it will all end and disappear no matter what you do, or don't do.

4) While the question "who am I" always needs some effort to hold, there is a kind of wondering that comes to me frequently and naturally, forming it into a question it would go like: "how come there is anything at all and not nothing?" Would it be a good idea to use this question in "formal" contemplation instead of "who am I", since it is easier to hold and seemingly more natural for me?

Thanks for your patience, and thanks for the opportunity to write.

Klaus

Klaus,

You can take on any question. Contemplation isn't restricted to any particular question. You simply shouldn't jump around from question to question since then your mind will use this as an out whenever you are bored or run into something challenging.

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Yet you'll need to clarify what it is you really want to know. Asking "how come there is anything?" you are asking "why is there something?" This is really "for what reason does anything exist?" You need to be open to the possibility that there may not be any reason for anything to exist. So really this isn't the starting point. The starting point is: What is it? What is existence? What is this? Without knowing what "this" is how can you possibly ask why it is or why it isn't? Since you don't know what you're really referring to as the "it" you first need to find out and clarify your question.

Still, there is no reason not to ask more than one question. It is the truth you want to get to. How you get there isn't so important.

Peter

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Jesse Brumm  
Gladstone, OR  
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Hello Peter,

If one can never know the truth - because knowing implies "of the self" - but one can directly experience the truth, how can one ever know if he or she is directly experiencing the truth?

Regards,

Jesse Brumm

Jesse,

There is no way to tell you about this, it's just something you need to grasp for yourself.

Don't start with the assumption that you can never know the truth. Who said you can't? If you're worried about the "you" not "being" the truth or capable of knowing the truth, the first thing you need to do is become conscious of what you are, the truth of you. Without that, you're just guessing, aren't you?

Direct consciousness is the thing itself. There is no "intermediary" and so no doubt nor proof needed or relevant. You are there. And there is no reason you

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won't know it, since it is a matter of consciousness — not mind, or perception, or intellect, which is where you can have this problem of not knowing if something is true or not. I know this doesn't help much, but I told you it wouldn't.

Good luck,

Peter

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Arthur Rowel  
Hattiesburg, MS

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Hi Peter,

I'm still working through The Book of Not Knowing, and a question about becoming enlightened has come to mind. You might even say it's a fear about becoming enlightened. If you no longer operate from the self-mind, do you still enjoy the same things as before enlightenment? I mean, if you like vacationing in Destin, or watching sitcoms, or drinking beer, or whatever, would you suddenly find yourself no longer desiring those things? The part for me that becomes scary is how that would effect other relationships. What if you suddenly found yourself having nothing in common with your family, friends, or even your spouse? Maybe this is silly, but I do detect the presence of this fear. I feel certain this is something I need to deal with, or it might stand in the way of having a direct experience.

I appreciate your guidance in this matter.

Warm regards,

Arthur

Arthur,

I understand your concerns. First let me say they are unfounded and inappropriate. But I know when you're afraid that doesn't help much. Yet what you are doing is imagining an outcome long before grasping the truth. The truth needs to be the important thing, since you don't know what may or may not turn out to be the case. You need to be open and committed to grasping the truth regardless of anything it does or doesn't do for you. This is the only attitude to approach such work.

Worrying about what you might lose before even knowing what is true is ridiculous. You're putting the cart before the horse. It is difficult for me to

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convince you of how silly it is since I know that when it comes up it seems very real. This is why you need to have courage and be committed beyond any outcome. I will say that what you imagine enlightenment to be is wrong and what you imagine it will change in you is also wrong. It must be, since you're not enlightened and so can't possibly know what you are talking about, can you?

I can also point out (and this can't be overstated) that whatever the truth is, it is already so now! It is already true for you and reality. It's the TRUTH. Not some fantasy or change of state or achievement. It is so now. Therefore whatever activities you now undertake are done with this being the case presently. See what I'm saying? So obviously if you can do it now, grasping the truth isn't going to change that. Like I say, "Consciousness doesn't make you stupid." What that means, among other things, is that you don't forget or become ignorant of anything you know now. It may occur that your perspective on something changes, or you may see some drive or mind impulse as unreal and inappropriate and so let it go. But this is not something that is thrust upon you against your will, it is something you see and choose because of your level of consciousness. See how this works? If you don't want to do something, you don't have to do it. If you do, you can. Enlightenment doesn't change that. It might change what you choose to devote your life and being to, but that's your choice. It's what you actually are drawn to do at that time. So it can't really be a problem, can it?

The idea is primarily freedom, not enslavement. You worry that you will lose the desire for things you desire or have right now. You aren't grasping the fact that if you lose the desire for something you really don't want it anymore and this isn't a problem. The more notable shift is becoming free of burdens and limitations, assumptions and beliefs, and so various forms of struggle and suffering. This occurs for the same reason you might not maintain your current desires. You become conscious of what these really are, and it is clear they are not only unnecessary they are false and cause suffering. From this perspective wouldn't you naturally drop them, in other words, stop creating such activities? Of course, and once again, it is something you choose to do.

The other side of this is it's highly unlikely that upon having an enlightenment experience you will become so deeply conscious that your whole life and experience changes overnight. If it did, it still wouldn't be a problem since that would be your consciousness at the time and it would be based on what's true, not on any fantasy. What is far more likely, however, is that you will have a direct experience that opens your consciousness to grasp the truth of your self to some

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degree, but not all that profoundly, and much will be unanswered and unchanged. Then you must continue and have another and another and go more and more deeply into the truth. This is how it usually works. You may experience the truth, and it is true, but it is not all of it and not as deep as is possible. The self-mind is incredibly tenacious, and will persist even through many enlightenment experiences. Getting completely free of this activity is rare. It is more feasible for you to transform the self-activity itself — into something more commensurate with a deeper consciousness of the truth — than it is to end it.

In general, the matter of becoming conscious is important for the job of transformation. Yet even if they do go hand in hand, they aren't really the same thing. Becoming more conscious of what's true to some degree doesn't necessarily transform anything about you. Transformation takes time, consciousness does not. This is all difficult to speak about in any rational way, so I will just leave it at that. Hope that helps.

Peter

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Sam Rutherford  
Canberra, Australia  
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Peter,

1. When I try to do the exercise on p 270 of NK (The Way You Are in Particular) I get stuck. I can't think of much. I mean I can observe how I feel and think in the moment I'm doing the exercise, but everything in the past, yesterday, or five years ago, seems kind of unreachable. I have memories of how I think I was, but when you ask whether I experienced myself being exactly the way I 'always be', I have to say 'no' because I feel like I don't really know. You say I can't give that 'unformed entity' 'the way it's not or alter it in any way' but how do I even know if I'm doing that? I know I reform memories at times to make them how I'd like them to be, I've caught myself doing it. How do I know how often I've done that and not caught myself? Can you help me with that?

Despite this, the exercise must have had some effect because when I looked in the mirror afterwards I had an experience. For a moment (just for a moment) I had the shock of seeing a stranger, or at least someone 'not me'. Just a feeling like I was looking at someone else, albeit someone known to me somehow.

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2. You say on p 579 of NK that "What has been shown to be possible by one of us means that it is possible for all of us." How do you know that? It seems to me that you've been an unusual person all your life. I live with a six-year-old and I certainly haven't noticed him wondering about the nature of 'now' and 'the future'. He's too busy playing Xbox and superheroes (he's a very likeable kid all the same). I was wondering on a related note about the fact that there are so few women, as far as I can tell, practicing Cheng Hsin or any other path to enlightenment. I know of few (if any?) in history who are reputed to have been enlightened. I'm particularly curious about this because since I've been on testosterone treatment I've noticed a significant change in my approach to life; particularly a tendency to 'do more and think less'. Before I used to sit and brood about things. I don't do that so much any more. Maybe women are at a hormonal disadvantage when it comes to learning to live in the present? (I know I would be on very thin ice in some people's books here!). Say I was mentally disadvantaged as well — maybe there's no way I could ever get it? Maybe the capacity for consciousness varies in degrees between people?

3. What is commitment? I mean, I have a dictionary definition ('the state of being emotionally or intellectually bound to a course of action or person'), but what is it really? How does it come about? So often people speak of it as being tied to belief. You're committed to something because you believe that it's possible or whatever. Where does the motivation to commit come from without belief? I may commit to practicing Cheng Hsin because I believe it is possible for me to achieve enlightenment (see Q 2!). Then I will do one of the exercises on letting go of beliefs and I have to let go of that, because I don't really know if it's possible. I don't know if I've ever really been committed to anything. Even the 'big' things I've done in my life (like leaving the Jehovah's Witnesses organization and changing gender) seem to have just happened to me. Yes, there was fear and difficulty but they just happened all the same. As if every step I took a wall went up behind me and I no longer had a choice to go back. I still feel as though I might commit to something, and then wake up tomorrow and no longer be interested, or forget, or want to do something else. How do I learn how to commit?

Thanks,
Sam

Sam,

About Q1:

You are trying to search for the truth as it really is, beyond subjectivity. That's not the exercise. This exercise is to grasp the truth of your own subjectivity, which

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means simply to observe how you unfold and have unfolded throughout your life. It's hard to miss. Everything and anything that occurs for you is relevant. How you are thinking and what attitude(s) you have right now. The various ways you react to differing circumstances. Your emotional patterns. The fact that you do misremember your past, and how you do this, and why you do this. Get it? It's what you are doing. Not something else. Just observe what you do. When you lie, get that you are lying. If you try to cover that up in some way, get you are doing that and tend to do that. And so on.

About Q2:

You are mistaking possibility for probability. I didn't say that everyone will do what others have done, I just said it is possible. How do I know? Because it has been done! Therefore it is possible, isn't it? You are considering if someone has the same capacities as another and therefore may be ill-equipped to take on the same accomplishments. This may be the case. And yet if all that is required is to be human, then it is possible for any human, since a human has already demonstrated that it is. It might be the case that someone has to work much harder or go through much more than someone else, and it may be assessed that it's not worth the effort or commitment. But it's still possible, just not reasonable or easy or likely.

As far as enlightenment goes, however, there is no accomplishment and it's about what's already true, so nothing is needed except Consciousness (not to be confused with cognizance or perception or intellect). As far as women go, in the old school — which was a neighborhood school and accessible all year to a community — we always had about half women to men, and occasionally more women than men. There was no gender difference between those that progressed or got enlightened. When it comes to history you have to remember that for most of it only men were considered significant to mention or had status. I'm sure there've been many enlightened females, just mostly unknown, and likely their expression and communication of it would differ and so may not be recognized as such. But I know of many women who pursue this course as much as any male does. You are confusing circumstance with ability. No matter what your condition, as a self you will have lots of obstacles to overcome. This is just because you are a self. There will always be something to deal with, even if you are a smart person or stupid, an emotional one or an intellectual one, a crazy person or a sober and committed one. All of these will have their own challenges. The truth, however, is just the truth, and already so now. Circumstance isn't the defining issue.

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About Q3:

Your dictionary definition of commitment isn't bad, but we don't need the qualifiers. We could just say: "the state of being bound to a course of action." Emotion and intellect are irrelevant and unnecessary. What you feel or think will always be secondary to the commitment. And "to a person" is redundant, since you are only committed to a person via action anyway. If you are committed in imagination only, in what way is that commitment, and to what are you committed? Or if one is saying they are committed to someone in their heart, aren't they just saying they are bound to them emotionally and will act accordingly?

Commitment is a function of intent. It's like making a decision, which most people see as having the pros and cons push you into a direction, but is actually a creative act. It is "making" a decision. You really don't need belief to do it, and yet you will assess many things to be true, or false, and likely calculate an outcome. You can also "make" believe, or simply create the possibility that something is possible. Is it possible? It is if you say it is, or even if you say it isn't, since if you are speaking about it, it is already a possibility. It may not be likely or practical or even attainable, but it is possible. Something may be a possibility and yet from our perspective be seen as impossible.

But I digress a bit. To commit to something you just commit to it. Decide what to give yourself to, what to give "life" to, what to create or make sure happens — or whatever your commitment is about — then do it. Put your ass on the line and remain there. Like I said, commitment and intent have a lot in common. Perhaps it's easiest if I just give you these distinctions as they're given to the apprentices:

INTENTION: Intention is consciousness "giving being" to the creation of something, standing for or providing the "space" in which something will appear. It is creating the possibility — right now in present time — that some action or event will occur, and providing the "life force" or giving one's own "beingness" to that occurrence. This is done without reservation, cross-purpose (counter purposes or actions), with no holding back, inconsistency, incongruency, or confusion. It is simply giving birth within your being to the existence of something "taking its place" in the world. To attend to some purpose or occasion. To care for the birth of a conception into reality. No particular emotions or thoughts are necessary for intention to arise (since intention exists prior to the form) but they may accompany it. It's not the motions, emotions, or thoughts that determine intent. It is the intent.

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COMMITMENT: Is a "creative act." It is the generation of power and effectiveness. Taking to action what is intended and declared. Standing for what has been declared to come about. Putting your "ass on the line" and making sure something is done, or will be done, without fail. Binding one's self and action to do whatever is necessary to realize an objective as promised by one's word. Holding no possibility other than that this something will come to pass.

Any obstacle that arises is met with intelligence and action that overcomes the obstacle. One can only break down or fail to do something once they have declared (to others or themselves) their commitment to do it. Breakdowns or negative thoughts and feelings regarding actions toward a committed goal are not inconsistent with commitment. In fact, they are likely to arise in contrast to the reality of committed action. What is inconsistent with commitment is remaining with these breakdowns — ineffective behavior, despair, resistance, upset, fear, incapacity, etc. — not whether they come up or not. They would not arise without one taking a stand in the first place. Commitment is what moves us through them, rather than have them stop us.

Good luck with all that.

Peter

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Nick Bishop  
London, England

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Dear Peter,

I have read many of your books in the past and have found them a great help and an inspiration. Please could you answer my question. Commercial Computer Programming is an intense intellectual activity requiring the ability to communicate clearly and precisely whilst working under pressure. I have worked as a commercial computer programmer for many years. Typically when I am programming I lose self awareness and become too involved with the task at hand.

My question is how can I maintain direct awareness whilst doing an intense intellectual activity such as computer programming?

I would say that direct awareness is "The Witness." I can describe the typical feelings and emotions of intense intellect activity and describe the desired

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states and impulses. The typical feelings are of ones of anxiety, inadequacy, and fear and continual looking for a solution to a problem by my awareness being located in my head. The desired state is that of alert, calm relaxation where the awareness is located in the dantien. I have tried to answer without beliefs and ideas.

Kind Regards and Thank You,
Nick

Nick,

You have a lot of work to do in the area of beliefs and assumptions. From our past dialogues I can see that this is obviously not clear to you. I mention this because I hear your desire to move forward and I think that this point can be tremendously transforming for you if you indeed grasp it.

You start with the use of the term "direct awareness" which would seem to be clear enough, especially since I use the phrase "direct experience" so much. But since I can't really respond to your request of a "how to" without knowing what you are really asking or what you mean by these terms, I needed clarity. Do you see that suggesting direct awareness is the "Witness" doesn't clarify anything, since if I don't know what in your experience or mind you are referring to as direct awareness, why would a different and even more abstract term clarify that?

Using "the witness" as clarification could only work if you and I shared an agreed-upon distinction or experience that we referred to as such. But since we haven't worked together we can't be sure of that, so it would be better to describe your experience in plain terms as accurately as possible to help me get a sense of what you are really asking. Just to push the point, even though you tried to respond without beliefs and ideas, you proceeded to use the term dantien, and this once again is based on a belief system that we'd need to share in order for it to make sense to me. Of course, you can assume that since I have grown up in the world of internal martial arts that I would know what this term means, and you are right. But I don't know what you think it means. Do you see how that makes a huge difference?

In a previous newsletter I made a distinction between contemplation and meditation. You are asking for something akin to a meditative practice, or a mental or physical practice that can accomplish your desired results. As I said, one restriction inherent in meditation is that it is based on a belief system. (I

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recommend you review that response in the last newsletter to add to your clarity in this matter.) I want you to consider how many beliefs and assumptions you can find in your emails to me. It would be a good practice. You can't let go of a belief, however, if you don't recognize that it is a belief or assumption in the first place. Beliefs and assumptions abound within people's experience, standing in the place of what might otherwise be an open investigation of the truth. These beliefs seem like they're true but they're not, or as if you're just observing some aspect of reality but you're not.

The first thing to do is notice everything that is simply a function of your mind, like an opinion or something you think is true. There are plenty of these. Easy ones to recognize right off are those you picked up from others — stuff like being a witness, or Tan Tien, or chi, or any of an infinite amount of hearsay, fantasies, or belief systems. These shouldn't be too difficult to uncover. Simply ask yourself whether it is something you experienced for yourself or something someone else said. Much of what you believe is accumulated from what others have said. Most of this remains merely believed and not in any way experienced. Some of this you've gone ahead and experienced on your own, or at least you've experienced something commensurate with the idea you have of what was said. Often the concept that you have of what's been asserted will strongly influence your experience, and so it becomes difficult to separate what is true in your experience from the influence of the belief. But once you understand this distinction you can begin to separate the two.

Now that this important stuff has been addressed, let's look at your question. Believe it or not, simply understanding the domain I've already addressed could make quite a shift in your experience while working on computer programming. It might even make you better at it. As far as shifting your experience in the way that you desire, you need to practice, both while you are working and independently. Learning to relax and finding your physical center is a practice you can undertake. With enough training you can access this state easily and with very little attention. When that's the case, you could work on computer programming and maintain such a state as well.

But consider that "losing yourself" in your work may not be a bad thing. Why do you need your "self" hanging around all the time anyway? You could create a practice of remaining present and relaxed but at the same time losing yourself in your work. Anxiety, inadequacy, and fear are all conceptual activities that you add onto your work. Drop them. They aren't needed nor do they serve. If you can create such negative activities and get the job done, then you could create the

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positive activities you desire and still get the job done, probably even better, but certainly with less stress.

Hope this in some way helps you find what you are looking for.

Peter

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Mark Ty-Wharton  
London, England

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Hi Peter,

I wrote the best part of a book before Christmas and talked about it in great deal to my life coach and mentor, Emily. On Christmas day, she handed me a copy of your book. I have started reading and I am of the opinion, your book is possibly the clearest thing I have read on the subject of not knowing.

Where the book I have been writing asks questions about the nature of reality, yours appears to answer them, in a brief, concise and understandable way.

It's annoying :-)

What intrigues me, is that your teachings and methodology closely echo the teachings of Werner Erhard's EST, but without the rambling and psychological bear traps. You appear to use a lot of the same terminology. For me, Werner Erhard seems to have bastardized Alan Watts and Zen. Could it just be, I have happened upon a purer Western source of Zen with similar terminology?

More interesting perhaps, he appears to steal chunks of Watts' stand up routine, so I guess on face value as a listener one could make the mistake that they were both up to the same thing. Watts was cynically British, whilst Werner was optimistically American. Perhaps that was the real difference?

My personal belief (sic) is all paths lead to the same realization. The name matters not, transformation, epiphany, enlightenment, eureka, the zone? All much the same. As far as I can tell, there appears to be one underlying energy to form. It is the meanings added that create the distinct philosophies and religions perhaps? I was discussing Jesus with my partner earlier. Probably just another sage? The followers adding belief and doctrine to the message?

Am I right in saying Werner used enlightenment as the context for transformation in EST? When you give up that you are not enlightened, then you are enlightened. Easier said than undone.

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I await your instruction with bated breath :-)
Kind regards
Mark

Mark,

This kind of work can be confusing and judging others doing it difficult. It is hard to separate the “fakes” or “believers” from the genuine article. It seems to me that both Werner and Alan were genuinely trying to get to the truth and help people.

Enlightenment was not Erhart's goal. Personal transformation was. And those two are actually quite different. Watts and Werner were not up to the same thing, so you are comparing apples and oranges. I'm not saying Werner didn't have any enlightenment experiences — as a matter of fact he participated in an Intensive with me in 1973, and he did have enlightenment experiences. But this was not really what his work was about, he worked hard to change people's minds and so selves. He really wasn't trying to have them have enlightenment, but supported that possibility. Although Alan was about Zen and so enlightenment, he did seem to chat a lot about life issues.

I also have to disagree with your belief about “paths.” Many people think that they are all the same, that all paths lead to the same place. Really they are rarely the same. I think you have approached this work with too much intellect. Understanding such work needs to be grounded in direct experience, and not thought about or figured out. It makes a big difference. I understand the fun of grasping things intellectually, and it can feel quite significant, but it remains trapped within the domain of mind.

Of course I have listened to others and studied with a few. I value their contributions. There are some great minds that have contributed a great deal. Unfortunately, there are far more charlatans and those who really just believe in something of which they've had no real experience. It can be challenging to know which is which. If you listen with an ear for honesty and genuine personal experience you can often make out who has had direct consciousness and who just believes or has intellectually made conclusions about the matter. But this skill demands that you listen beyond personal beliefs, and not be fooled by things that just sound good, or seem to validate your ideal vision of reality. My work has been built from the ground up, based solely on what I've experienced myself.

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You said you took up this stuff because of mental challenges, and it has helped you. That's great. If you feel up for it, however, try considering that all of your conclusions are wrong. Just sit and hold this possibility until you can get it as a reality. When you have what seems like a pretty solid handle on it, then let all of these conclusions go and ask what is true, without filling in the blanks with your mind. See where that leads you.

Although you are invited to come over here to the ENB in the spring or CTC and CI in the fall; I recommend that you do the eCourse called Transcending Self. It will help ground you and also deals a great deal with mind. I think you would like it.

Good luck with that.

Peter

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Líggjas Olsen  
Tarshavn, Denmark  
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Hey Peter!

I have bought and read your book "The Book Of Not Knowing" and I've just finished reading it! I might read it again right away ;) I have enjoyed reading it and feel that what you say and teach is true.

I have a question about contemplation. When I contemplate am I suppose to use my mind a lot, as in thinking? Or is it more a way of feeling and intuiting? I get that you have to intend, be open, honest and come in a state of not knowing, but still I wonder how much I am suppose to reflect and ponder with my mind/ thoughts about the question, like "Who am I ?"

How would you describe it as a total experience?

Sincerely,

Líggjas Olsen

Líggjas,

Contemplation is really becoming conscious of the true nature of your subject, in this case, you. Yet the reason we take up contemplation is that our mind and perceptions are doing something else and not conscious of what's essentially

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true. So in the process of contemplation, you will likely go through many “stages” before you have a direct experience.

One of the first stages involves thinking, putting your attention on the subject and wondering intellectually what is so. You will naturally try to figure it out, use logic and history, beliefs and assumptions, hearsay and personal experience to try and conclude or discover what is true. You’ll think about it. But this won’t work since thinking can’t provide you with a direct experience. I’m not saying don’t do it; you need to do it in order to get it out of the way and so that you can be convinced that it leads to a dead end. But you can’t be certain of this unless you go to the dead end yourself.

Then you may go through various emotions, try to use intuition or feeling, or attempt any number of methods, and pass through various other stages in your contemplation. This is fine and to be expected and accepted, but nothing will work except a direct experience. So go through everything you can, stay on purpose, and when you reach “the wall” — where you don’t seem to be getting anywhere and have exhausted every avenue — then stay there. Don’t try to bypass anything, but at the same time go for the truth directly and as best you can. Good luck with your contemplation.

Peter

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Monique Rana  
Titirangi, New Zealand  
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Hi there,

I trust all is well with you. I have a question...does practicing Cheng Hsin interfere with my spiritual beliefs with Jesus/Christianity?

Regards,
Monique

Monique,

Certainly practicing any of the physical Arts of Cheng Hsin is independent from your religious beliefs, but I assume you are speaking of our consciousness work as found in The Book of Not Knowing. Certainly my perspective is to seek out the truth, directly and personally. So it depends on how you hold your beliefs.

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If you find that your beliefs and view of reality empower you, others, and your relationship to life, then they seem to have a valid place in your life. If they help create a positive psychological perspective in which to conceive and perceive things, then I don't see a conflict. If, on the other hand, you simply hold these beliefs mindlessly, and are unwilling to personally question what you are told, then that isn't consistent with the spirit of Cheng Hsin.

In Cheng Hsin you'd pursue a direct experience of the Absolute, not just believe in something you conceive of from stories told to you. Allowing for genuine not-knowing also demands that you be open to the possibilities that your ideas and conceptions might be false, and be willing to discover whatever is true. This may be inconsistent with some religious ideas, yet such ideas are always man-made and so subject to error.

Our approach is to pursue the truth directly, not through beliefs. This means we need to create the possibility that we can do so — that somehow we can personally become conscious of the true nature of self and reality — since without that we must rely on belief, speculation, and what can be indirectly proven through science. This of course leaves out any direct consciousness.

Yet if we consider that Jesus himself had a direct consciousness of the truth, and don't assume this was inevitable or a function of his being "forced" to be that way through the mere fact that God willed to be so, then this very belief represents the possibility of direct personal consciousness. Like I've mentioned before, there is some evidence and a theory that Jesus actually went to India during his "lost years in the desert" and studied Buddhism — which is based on the possibility of direct consciousness in these matters. I hear tell, there was and still is a church created for that man, who they say became deeply enlightened and then left to teach back home. An interesting possibility, but the truth is unknown.

So, it depends on how you hold what you believe. Cheng Hsin might only interfere with your beliefs if you aren't willing to question and be responsible for pursuing your own direct conscious experience in these matters. Other than that it doesn't matter what you believe. What makes a difference is what you do, and being conscious of who you are.

Hope this answers your question, and that you can find value in your relationship with Cheng Hsin.

Peter

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Matt Biggerstaff  
Goldendale, WA  
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Hi Peter,

The consequences of the 'newly opened door' seem to make just about everything clear, easy, and pure fun. However, this doesn't seem to necessarily translate to more effective communication with my parents. They're persistently pissed and worthlessly worried because I'm not precisely what I used to think I was...Thoughts?

Matt Biggerstaff

Matt,

Many issues still come up once you've had some significant direct experience of yourself. We often think that once an enlightenment has occurred that everything will change and that all will be known. But this just isn't true at all. Just because you've had a breakthrough doesn't mean that everything is known, and certainly not all aspects of self have been transformed.

The mind is not destroyed by such insight. It may fade into the background for a while, and certainly isn't a feature of the increased consciousness, but unless there is a "complete" enlightenment and a total end to self — which almost never happens — the self-mind remains. Such conscious leaps influence the mind, and some things change, but this depends on the individual self and can't be generalized. So don't assume that having had a direct experience means that all things clear up, especially with parents. Your self-mind may well provide knee-jerk programmed reactions when you engage in established dynamics and familiar stimuli.

There is an important difference between consciousness and transformation. The first is only about grasping the truth, the second is about changing or improving the self. These are not the same. Although they do tend to occur together, the degree one or the other is emphasized can vary widely, and one doesn't demand the other. One's psychology is an aspect of the self-mind, not a matter of Absolute Consciousness. Regarding parents, the family unit is the very source of the most deeply ingrained psychological aspects of self, and not easily transformed.

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I suspect your question was referring to your parents' failure to accept the changes they perceive in you resulting from your breakthrough — but I wanted to address you first. As for your parents, you can't change them, but you can probably communicate in such a way that helps them understand to a greater degree what you have gone through. Beyond that, you must transcend your family dynamics so that you can be clear and relate freely and calmly. This doesn't mean you make them wrong, but let them be. They perceive a particular world that may not be the same as yours, and as a family member you probably have a good idea what that is.

As you free yourself from the programming and view you've been raised in, you will more clearly recognize your parents' perspective and be better able to more compassionately and effectively relate to it without necessarily trying to change them. If you are caught in rebelling against them this suggests you aren't free of it. If you get free you won't have to accept or reject anything. This lets you stand on your own feet and remain balanced. But parents are a primal part of your mind, so this can be challenging.

Good luck.

Peter

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Coby Miller

Helena, MT

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Hi Peter,

May I ask a couple questions?

During the first CI I attended in '04 (I think), I felt like I was just burning the question down into my psyche, focused to a point, and that felt like what I should do.

Now at the CI last year, it felt like I didn't have the concentration to burn the question into my self, on the one hand, it worries me that I don't have the concentration to do that. But I get the feeling like that much concentration isn't required anyway. What I feel is I am being drawn to letting go, the path of non-resistance, with respect to contemplation. While I endeavor to be one pointed, it doesn't have the same quality as the first CI, where I experienced holding the question intensely. I wonder how to approach this, where I don't feel so driven

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to own the "question" and go GET the answer. Now it feels like I am waiting patiently and being open for the experience.

I have some concern I am losing my power of concentration, but my sense is that maybe opening up is called for here. So could you comment on this, please?

A couple times a day, I will stop and put my attention on my self and notice where my attention is, then I will hold the attention on self, and notice when my attention shifts to thoughts. So far I haven't noticed directly when my attention is shifting as it happens, usually I notice a few moments after my attention has shifted and I realize I am being distracted with some thoughts. Then I repeat the process. But I did have a new awareness/experience which is: I am a "You". I can't say it was ass-clenching, more like an Ah ha.

Thank You,
Coby

Coby,

You need to do both. You need the openness, as if waiting, but doing it in earnest and with the intent to become more conscious. It can be a challenge, focusing hard and trying to get it, then grasping it isn't something you can "muscle" or produce with your mind or will, and so giving up in a sense and trying to just be open, to let it happen, or as you say, wait. But either can be a trap. So make sure you are really intending and also stay open. As I said some time ago: "Wait and don't wait — neither force nor avoid, do it now, but don't "do" anything or go anywhere."

Good luck,
Peter

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Josh Schachterle  
Denver, CO  
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Hello,

I've been practicing contemplation for a while now, and have experienced and continue to experience insights that at the time seem powerful. However, just a few hours later, in the busy-ness of the day, I feel like I've lost the insight or managed to keep only the concept and not the experience. I've realized that my doing seems to have no effect on my being, but does increased consciousness of

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the nature of being have an effect on my doing? Is there some kind of cumulative effect of these insights? Do these insights have an effect on the "outside" of my life?

Thanks,
Josh Schachterle

Josh,

This is going to happen, but it also suggests that your insights were not deep enough or experiential enough. It is possible to have conceptual insights that seem for all the world like a genuine experience since most of our experience is dominated by concept anyway. So although you may realize something true or valid, it still isn't a deep experience of what's true, but rather simply an "idea" of what's true, and the two are different.

As you've noticed, your self-mind will continually reassert itself as the prime force in your experience and get on with the job of self survival. Any effects noticed will of course be noticed in your life — where else could they be noticed? If you've noticed no shifts in your daily consciousness or perspective, then the insights you're having are abstractions and not experiential. If they are experiential — meaning they are real insights into the nature of you and reality (self, mind, life, interaction, consciousness, etc.) — then they will have some effect on you and your life, and they will be cumulative. The deeper the insight the more profound the shift.

But all this is a rather complicated matter, and without working with you or knowing what is really true for you, I can't really add much. I hope this helps in some way.

Peter Ralston

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Lukasz Glowacki  
Namyslow, Poland  
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Hello Peter.

I've been thinking about Enlightenment Intensives lately. I'm curious how far these Intensives can take one? How deep they really are? I assume that different people react differently to this method of contemplation and some

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people attain a deep awakening and some just a shallow one. I'm wondering whether the E.I. is complete, i.e. whether it can make that someone reaches such a deep awakening that he/she doesn't need to look for anything else any more because he/she already got everything thanks to this method. Or maybe the "awakening" attained during the E.I. is just the first step on the path to true awakening, true enlightenment, and one has to keep practicing, contemplating because it's not IT yet.

Some time ago I read an article written by one guy who claimed that he tried many different methods, many different approaches and none of them were "complete" including E.I. He said something that the "right" mind or "correct" mind (I'm translating, so I'm not sure which term is correct here) is effortless, so how can you get to this "right" / "correct" mind by such a great effort like during the E.I. which require from you a big effort, a lot of practice?

Thanks

Lukasz

Lukasz,

There is no easy answer, but here is an important response. You are looking for an overly simplistic solution to a problem that is ill-defined. Neither the implied assertions or criticisms you forward of these Intensives are well founded. An Intensive is just that, an intense period of work focused on one goal.

The enlightenment intensive was not created to be the end all. It is an invaluable method to assist people in having breakthroughs they are not likely to have otherwise. How deep you go is up to you; there is no difference in enlightenment in or out of any format. Enlightenment is about what's true. For most people who do such intensives, the enlightenment may be true but not all that deep. The more they work on it usually the deeper they can go, and there is no limit. It is possible one could have no enlightenment during an intensive, and it is also possible that they could become totally and completely enlightened (just not likely). An enlightenment is not the end but the beginning, and it is not grasping all that is, only whatever you become directly conscious of in that moment.

Such Intensives are not complete if what you are talking about is undergoing a personal transformation. That is not their goal or purpose. The objective is to have an "enlightenment" experience — to become directly conscious of your true nature. This is all that it is. Pivotal as such consciousness is to transformation — and essential as it is to grasping the absolute truth — by itself it doesn't change anything, nor is it likely to be the deepest consciousness possible, and so much

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will remain unknown. This is an ongoing endeavor, deepening one's consciousness and understanding through repeated and deepening enlightenments, as well as doing other consciousness work and transformation work. This is neither simplistic nor easy.

The point that it isn't complete is not valid since it was never supposed to be complete. The alternative you mention of finding a "complete" system that answers all your questions and is effortless in producing a right or correct mind is a pipe dream. Only you can become conscious or transform. This is not very likely to be done all by yourself and without help, but it still must be done by you no matter what systems, methods, or assistance you use. An EI or Contemplation Intensive is a very good place to start. Those running them can vary in what they are doing and how well or clearly they do it. I recommend our *Contemplation Intensive*, but generally they are the same — that is, if you can find someone who knows what they are doing and keeps it clean and absent of their personal belief system and every other belief system.

Good luck with that. It is best to genuinely undertake such things before forming any real conclusions, and even then be careful and remain open, this whole matter does not fit into some simple answer or "remedy."

Peter

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Roman Timpl  
Prague, Czech Republic  
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Hello Peter,

I hope you are doing well.

You asked me to get back after second round of reading *The Book of Not-Knowing*. It had taken me a couple of months but I finished the book in January. Since then I do contemplation quite regularly, not every day but about 4 times a week about 15-20 minutes a day.

My biggest trouble is to keep the mind focused on the question (who am I?). It gets distracted all the time. I don't think there is any shortcut, just "keep doing". Do you think it will improve in time? How much distraction is "healthy"? Could it be stopped at all?

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However, I had a few periods when I got easily into very calm state with considerably less thoughts. I was in calm state even throughout my normal day (I mean more calm than usually). After some time the period was over and I experience more distraction during the contemplation, I am less able to get into that more quiet state with difficulty or not at all and in real life I seem to be more prone to get angry, mostly for unimportant details. Could it be a reaction of mind that resists this kind of exercise?

Regarding questioning, now I keep the awareness on who is experiencing whatever there is (thoughts, perception, feelings) in this moment on this place. But I seem to be stuck here. Yes, I get very calm here for a few minutes before the mind gets back to its usual job (or usual speed and amount of job) but that's all. Later, when I think about it I can imagine there must be something in plain view, some fundamental "frame" that keeps me on the same track because I don't recognize it as a mere frame. I am not sure and I don't want to think about it too much. What do you think about it?

Kind regards,
Roman Timpl

Roman,

Asking who you are can take some time, it can also go quickly but then the next question can take time. Of course just keep contemplating. It is good to do short regular contemplations, but this is not a lot in the scheme of things, so be patient. One thing you might want to do to supplement your contemplations is to spend some real time (hours) either with someone as a non-responsive listener, or by yourself, just speaking out everything you consider to be yourself, no matter what it is — how embarrassing, far fetched, obvious, silly, buried, etc. Just everything that you think or feel is or may be true of you. Speaking out loud gives it a different status then thinking it silently, and you'll hear it differently. Try to find every thought, assumption, belief (even those that are buried or unconscious), feeling, fear, hope, hearsay, program, etc., that you have about yourself. Then when you go back to your contemplation you may be able to relate to it better. But then just do the contemplation.

The best thing, of course, is to spend a week at a Contemplation Intensive. This provides some real time of contemplating all day without break! Like holding your breath, if you only do it for a short time, it is easy and doesn't get very far; but the longer you do it the stronger the pressure mounts and the more intense it becomes. It is hard to do such intensity solo, however, that is why an intensive is

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valuable. Yet, even if all you can do is contemplate from time to time for longer periods to empower your shorter contemplations, and perhaps also from time to time do diads with a listening partner to see what comes up and clear out more space for your contemplations, this will help.

Distractions will lessen over time as you learn to control your mind and stay focused on your contemplation. Really want to know who you are and put your attention on that. About the anger, it could be all sorts of things, just pay attention. Anger is based on hurt so if you can get what you are feeling hurt about — frustration, old trauma coming up, self loathing, etc., etc. — this could allow you to drop the anger reaction.

It is useful to ask who is experiencing whatever you experience (i.e. “Who is angry? Who is walking? Who is thinking?). Keep doing that and stay on track. Sure there is something in plain sight, so to speak, it's you! Get who you are.

Hope this helps.

Peter

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Paul Hinton  
Windsor, England

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Hi Peter,

As a complete newcomer to Cheng Hsin I have a very basic questions for you.

For the last 8 or so years I've been trying to take a mind, body & spirit approach to life and my own development, but I've found spiritual development the most difficult as I haven't found a satisfactory definition of it and as a result have never really known what direction to head in or whether I'm on the right path. In your work you obviously talk a lot about mind and body, but I haven't yet found any reference to spirit, despite the fact that you refer to Cheng Hsin as a religious organization. Can you explain why this is the case?

Any guidance that you can give me would be very much appreciated.

Best regards.

Paul

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Paul,

Mind, body, and spirit are all simply distinctions made within your experience. The experience in which you are making these distinctions is referred to as "being" or being a person. If you didn't make these distinctions you would not and could not experience them, or even think about them. You experience and observe a body as an object, and similarly you experience and so "perceive" a mind. You assume this distinction of mind exists in others and so you see it occurring in their actions. You also apparently make a distinction you call "spirit" but, since this isn't universally shared in our culture the way body and mind are, I can't say what that distinction is for you. But let me say something in a direction that may be useful.

Cheng Hsin as a religious organization, relative to our culture, is really more of a legal distinction than a practical one. As a religion we would be considered considerably outside the box of what passes as religion in most cases. Our goal is to directly experience what's true and what's absolutely true, rather than to adopt beliefs about anything. Although this is applicable to a religious context, it's unusual within in our culture. The inventions that are generally created as religious organizations are almost always based on beliefs, such as believing in certain claims about the universe. Cheng Hsin, on the other hand, is founded on the principle of not taking things on faith, and not relying on hearsay or beliefs. We work to go beyond believing and instead discover for ourselves what is actually true.

So what is spirit? Our first goal here would be to work out what you're actually talking about. Since I can't dialogue with you about it right now I'll just have to make something up. For example, it might be that there is no such thing as "spirit." If that's true, what would you do now? It would then be recognized as merely an idea or concept or some such, and so you'd have to experience that that is what it is. Or maybe it's a concept of something that exists but is hard to grasp. If that turns out to be the case your goal would be to grasp whatever that is. This will lead to some insights or breakthroughs about the nature of this matter, and that in turn would change your relationship to and your concepts about it. And on it would go. Everything is based on what is discovered as true, and each discovery or insight arrives as a conscious experience.

When I use the word spirit, it most often describes a disposition or attitude: "a spirit of honesty," or "a spirit of open inquiry," both of which are necessary for

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gaining real insight. In the way it sounds like you use it — as a distinction within the self, or an aspect of one's self — the term spirit is much too ambiguous to be useful. Instead, I speak of Consciousness. I capitalized the word consciousness to indicate that what I'm referring to isn't found in the commonly shared ways we use that word, and yet is still somehow connected to what we call and experience as consciousness.

In Cheng Hsin, consciously experiencing what's true is the goal, and beliefs are, more often than not, barriers to this goal. My "direct experiences" about the nature of Consciousness — which in themselves are impossible to convey — provide a very different relationship to the human condition, as well as the nature of reality. Yet, although I try to communicate about this matter, and invite others to consider beyond their given assumptions, I don't ask anyone to believe anything I say about it. I invite them to discover for themselves whatever is true.

What else is true is that no matter what I assert in this domain, it will be misunderstood because it can only be "understood" through one's own direct conscious experience. So asking someone to believe in something I say about it would be ridiculous, since they'd be believing in something that is not "it." It would be like asking someone to believe in god, and yet, shy of becoming directly conscious of god, what would they believe in? It would be some idea that is made up to fill the space of not knowing what god is or is really about. What does that have to do with the reality or lack of reality of the matter referred to as god? See how this works?

In any case, this gives you an idea of what Cheng Hsin is about. Sorry to be so abstract and speaking in such a way that can be hard to follow. You opened the door for such speaking, however, since you were admittedly vague about your subject matter. I hope this provides at least a beginning to a direction in which to proceed. If you continue with your exposure to and study of this work it will unfold rather rapidly, and one insight will lead to another. Consider participating in the consciousness workshops, which offer a far more grounded and interactive encounter of the work.

Peter

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Sam Rutherford  
Canberra, Australia  
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Peter,

Along the same lines as my question about commitment, can you please give me an idea of what you mean by 'integrity'? I have this: (admittedly [dictionary](#) definition but I don't have an Oxford or Macquarie dictionary to hand):

In·teg·ri·ty:

1. adherence to moral and ethical principles;
soundness of moral character; honesty.
2. the state of being whole, entire, or
undiminished: to preserve the integrity
of the empire.
a sound, unimpaired, or perfect condition:
the integrity of a ship's hull.

The 'adherence to moral or ethical principles' bit doesn't mean much to me. Is it essentially about keeping one's word? There doesn't seem to be a verb for 'integrity'... how do I 'do' it? Is it the same as 'authenticity'?

Sam,

First, about integrity. The dictionary's contributions are just fine. Numbers 2 and 3 provide the foundation. It means to be without break or discrepancy, to be whole and unified; and as stated, this means the object or organization is sound and bound together in a unified or homogeneous way. What this provides is a stronger substance or union, and this adds clarity and power to the thing. Something with integrity is what it appears to be; it works as it was intended to work.

When a ship's hull or a porcelain vase is cracked or broken, even if repaired, it never has the same strength and is more easily broken apart. It lacks integrity. The sword that is melted down, folded, and pounded out repeatedly, is a much stronger sword since the molecules of the metals used become homogeneous and evenly bound and so suffer no breaks or flaws. The sword becomes very hard to break and also more flexible. This is integrity. You can see that if a chunk of wood fell into the mix, the sword would easily break at that place since it would be broken up and inconsistent within its own structure, and so lack integrity.

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When we apply this principle to a person's word or behavior it is the same. If one's word — which is a "speech act" and so is action charged to represent intent and commitment, commonly called a promise — is broken, meaning the promised action is not taken, there is a lack of integrity. This lack is the same, metaphorically, as the sword, and the consequences are the same. When your actions don't match your word, there is a crack or separation in your "self" manifestation, you will lack cohesiveness in your relationship with others and in your relationship to yourself. You can't be trusted, much like a ship with a cracked hull can't be trusted to perform as was intended or promised. This discrepancy between your words and actions will become known as an aspect of your character — what becomes perceived as 'true' of a person through repeated behavior patterns — and so people (including yourself) will relate to you in a manner consistent with this condition. As a consequence you will lack clarity and personal power.

One thing to pay close attention to is that this consequence won't just be in your relation to others. You will experience this as an aspect of your self. You will identify yourself as someone who can't be trusted and whose word is worthless. Since your word doesn't show up in your actions, what you say obviously doesn't represent your internal state or intent. This will create a "fragmented" experience within your self-sense, as well as your relation to others.

On the other hand, the more you keep your word, to others and to yourself, the more you can trust in what you create as your word and the more power you'll have. Instead of fragmentation, you have integrity. You can see how this relates to honesty and an adherence to moral and ethical principles. What those principles might be is up for grabs, but that you have integrity in relationship to them is not.

Peter

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Sam Rutherford  
Canberra, Australia  
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Peter,

I just tried one of the contemplations that you talk about in NK, about getting to the source of a particular emotion or behaviour. The behaviour in question is a chronic level of procrastination, especially over university work but also other odd things like paying bills and doing other tasks that are simple but

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have pretty serious negative consequences if they're not done. It went something like this:

I have this huge resistance to studying for my International Law exam (that's just the immediate example). I just want to go and get drunk and smoke, or even do the dishes, anything except sitting down and studying. Why?

I felt like I had a brick sitting in my chest — this concrete block of 'don't want to.' After I'd sat with that for a while I got that I procrastinated over doing things because I wanted, actually wanted, something bad to happen. Odd. Why do I want something bad to happen? I realized that I didn't want to appear competent and capable. Why would that be? I didn't want to appear competent and capable because if I did, people wouldn't care about me any more, or be interested in me. Why would I believe that? Then it came to me that if I was competent and capable, there would be nothing wrong with me. And, here's the crunch, if there is nothing wrong with me I'm not real, not human. On some level I believe that I am only real if there's something wrong with me. But I got stuck there — I'm having trouble letting go of that. Why would I believe that I'm only real if I'm defective somehow? Because if there's nothing wrong with me then there's no reason to BE, nothing to struggle with and angst over. I'm still sitting with that. I guess having a fundamentalist Christian upbringing it's not so surprising that it would be a deeply ingrained assumption.

What worries me is my lack of trust about some of these things. They seemed real, and arose naturally, and have had an impact on my behaviour already, but there's still some bit of me going 'how do you know it's real?' Does that mean it's not? Is insight always unquestionable?

Sam,

You are doing what we call a "bottom line" contemplation. And it sounds like you are doing just fine. You haven't reached the root bottom yet, but you've made good progress. As you indicate, regardless of what you discover as true, when you unearth some aspect of your un-recognized experience, it doesn't have to sound logical or reasonable, nor does it have to adhere to cultural norms. It is the foundation for your feelings and behavior in some matter, and that's just what's there, what is programmed in. It is not what "should" be there, or what you logically think will be there. So it's best not to contemplate from that point of view.

You've uncovered quite a bit, especially if this is all experienced rather than just thought. And you've noticed some assumptions that are the foundation for your perceptive-experience and interpretation of things. One of the hardest things to

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grasp is that the bottom of this matter — the foundation program or conviction that operates as a “principle” for your reactive behavior in relation to certain stimuli — is always and only about YOU. It is what you think is really true of you and of you in relation to others and life. I think you’re close, but something hasn’t fully clicked yet.

An area to look further might be in your relationship to “real.” You bring it up twice. First, you confront a sense that somehow you may not be real if you’re not defective, but then you draw conclusions about it, which takes you down another road. These conclusions may or may not be correct. You need to go back to the place in you that drives you, and continue to open up to it: what is it really? Try not to jump ahead with conclusions. Instead, find out what’s true experientially. The other time you bring up reality is in not trusting your discoveries and conclusions. One reason you may not trust them is that, like I said, you’ve confused some conclusions with what you experienced. In any case, it seems you have some issue with “real.” It is worth more contemplation.

Questioning serves to lead us to the truth. It is always appropriate. The truth is what is. Directly experiencing this, no question needs to be asked. If there is a question then something is still unknown, isn’t it? And there is always something still unknown. The goal is to be conscious of what’s true; the goal isn’t to be certain about some conclusion or other.

Peter

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Sam Rutherford  
Canberra, Australia  
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Peter,

Is there value in practicing self-denial even if I'm not clear about the base-level motivation for why I'm doing whatever it is that I want to not be doing? I'm saying this mindful of your comments in NK about beginning something like a “noble war against the self” which can only lead to a loss/win for the self, rather than any other kind of increase in consciousness. For example, I smoke cigarettes and wish I didn't. I'm obviously not clear about exactly what it is that causes me to do it because I find it very difficult to stop. Is there value in doing it the hard way and beating myself into quitting — which has (historically) led to multiple failures but not to say it couldn't work at some time... I'm just using this as an example, I could find plenty more! Can forcing yourself into acting in a

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particular way (with the self kicking and screaming the whole way) lead to a breakthrough? Is it worth the effort?

My apologies this message is much longer than I intended - let me know if it's too long and I'll try and crop more in future.

Regards,
Sam

Sam,

Yes — to all these questions. If you want to stop smoking, stop smoking. Period. You smoke because you are addicted and because you are neurotic in some way and the drug and smoking action seems to help pacify your inner turmoil. Thus the motivation to smoke. The action is the action. Stop it. Once you stop the action, the force of the drive to do it will increase and this helps you become clearer on what it is and how powerful it is. Yet even if you stop the action, you will still have the motivation. If you don't want to be driven by this motivation, don't be. If you want the impulse that drive you to stop, then get to the bottom of it and give it up. Giving up the action is a very good first step, since then the impulse isn't mollified with some drug or behavior which manipulates your experience so that you aren't driven so much for a time. Refusing to yield to the temptation to act on something pushes your face — if you are courageous enough to look — right into the uncognized internal condition that presses you into that reaction, and this is the best way to contemplate it, get what it really is, and transcend it.

Peter

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Tommaso Rossi  
Mosta, Malta  
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Peter,

Basically I was wondering about motivation — in the context of my pursuit for more discipline and also regarding reaching objectives in life. It is clear that one of the problems that I have in reaching objectives is the lack of commitment. I face the hard part of the trip, and I stop. By the way, is commitment a synonym of discipline, even though discipline seems composed of more than commitment?

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The problem seems to be motivation — the motivation to embark on the trip, or simply motivation to put more awareness in what I do, motivation to decide to live in a more disciplined way. First of all: am I right to consider that motivation must be at the beginning of a (spiritual) journey? That it is necessary to have a motivation in order to commit to something?

Often I discard my motivations because I consider them too stupid or too egocentric. For example, my motivation to do push-ups every morning would be to become stronger and have a better body, and all the narcissism that comes with it, like be more attractive with girls, etc.. Or also: my motivation to meditate every day would be to reach some kind of idealization (to become "enlightened"). Are there "good motivations" and "bad motivations"? Are there motivations that are better than others?

Also, when I decide to make a commitment or embark on a journey (and can you embark on a journey without some amount of commitment?) it would be better if I was clear about my motivations to do so, right..?

You see, sometimes it seems like I'm just pursuing some illusion or idealization... the idea of getting better, etc. Then the best discipline must be to be present in the moment ... as long as I don't idealize that too.

Thank you,
Tommaso

Tommaso,

Of course my response to Sam above relates to your question. But let's air out a few things. Discipline is taking on something that doesn't naturally befall you. In other words, any time you want something to occur that doesn't arise from what you're already motivated to do through your programming — be it losing weight, contemplating, pursuing some path or taking up some practice — then you need discipline. Discipline then is simply taking on something different from what's habitually created by your programmed whims and fears, distractions and impulses, reactions and desires. As we've heard, those motivating impulses occur to serve what is already identified as one's self, so those activities seem to come naturally. For something to occur that does not arise from what's already running the show requires discipline. Taking it on or making it happen is commitment.

Commitment is simply giving your self over to pursue some action or result or process, period. There is a relationship between promising to do something and commitment. This is true whether you give your word to another or to yourself.

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Once you've promised some action then you are bound to the action that you promised. That's what a promise is!

People often don't want to be bound by their word because it means they must forego any behavior that is inconsistent with what they've promised. This includes behavior that may arise from one's self agenda. Those whims, desires, or fears that continually push you or tempt you toward inconsistent behavior cannot be acted upon. You don't get everything you want, and you may have to confront some things you don't want. Such situations can easily arise when you give your word. Yet this is what being committed is all about, including being committed to keeping your word. Commitment is devoting your life energies, your beingness, to making something happen.

Given that's the case, you often have to choose one act over another, because some acts are inconsistent with what it is you're trying to bring about. But, remember, you don't have to give your word, nor do you have to commit to something. You should know what it is and what it requires, and give your word accordingly. If you do, then keep it. Otherwise, don't give it. It's that simple.

If you don't give your word, then, in this context, you don't get those things that only discipline or commitment can provide. What you do get is to answer to all the minor whims you may desire. Whether these whims provide what you want or not is up for grabs. Yet, even if they do, it is always temporary. Committing to something "larger" than yourself, however, actually tends to dissolve most of your life problems and dissatisfaction. It makes your life about something greater than pursuing all the little ups and downs of a self agenda.

In your own case, you can witness that your failure to commit creates massive dissatisfaction. You obviously can't take a stand, and when you do, you fail to keep at it. You do get to do what you want when you want, but you are endlessly bound to the force of a self-agenda and its limitations and whims, without really knowing what that is all about. So your commitment is solely to your self. Note that it's not actually a commitment to your being—which remains unknown to you—but to something adopted to serve survival. Living life in relation to excuses, second guessing, and confusion is not a recipe for satisfaction. Committing to something that you consider worthwhile and then sticking to it, even if you change your mind later on or you find it difficult, will create far more satisfaction in your life, regardless what it is you commit to.

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Do you need motivation to commit? No, actually you don't. Most people think they do, however, since they can't imagine committing to something unless they strongly desire to get something from doing so. This makes sense. But you don't actually need motivation, you simply have to do it. You could just commit to something without any internal impulse to motivate you. The internal impulse — such as desire, fear, greed, guilt, shame, lust, and so forth — that motivates you toward some end, is something that relates to your self identity and self image. That's why it motivates you. But you can create something just to create something without any such motivation. You could commit to wearing a green shirt every day for a week. Or you can commit to something just because you think it is worthy, independent of what it might do for you personally.

Because motivations related to a self agenda rely on identity and programming, the question of better or worse is irrelevant. Your program already classifies and evaluates what is good and bad and so what is better or worse for you. If you try to create something outside of your set agenda, then you will probably come up with some idea of a better way to go, something to accomplish. And this is likely to be an ideal and so a concept, and this concept will relate to your programmed interpretations of reality. But what else can you do? Either you work to create something that's not already given or adopted, or you follow your impulses.

When you try to create a new direction for yourself, you are likely to go through many challenges and to proceed in stages. Your first attempts, although well-meaning, will be limited to what you already know and can envision. This is all right since you have to start somewhere. As you grow and progress towards this goal, you will need to become increasingly conscious of what stands in your way so that you can get past it and proceed. In turn, getting free of the programs and assumptions that stand in your way will allow you new insights and you will realize that your goal isn't actually what you want or need. When this happens you will need to change your "idealization" — how you picture or imagine what your goal should look like — to something more accurate and aligned with what's true, as best you can ascertain what that is at the time. This will go on as you continue to grow and become more conscious, until at some point you can give up your ideal completely and replace it with new goals that are consistent with your real and created commitment — for example, real personal transformation.

This process needs commitment and discipline. And you can't let doubts or second guessing stand in your way. You have to clarify for yourself what you

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want to really be up to and undertake it soberly. In simple, I'd say, do the best you can, and as you grow do better.

Hope this helps in some way.

Peter

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Robert Ludden  
Chatsworth, CA

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Dear Mr. Ralston,

I'm going through your book on the power of Unknowing, for the second time. I am particularly interested in the chapter on pain management. I think I have made it work A BIT, but before I go further, I am wondering about a couple of things. I seem to be only scratching the surface. Since I am now an older man, I do have different pains cropping up from time-to-time but I need further guidance.

1. Have you been able to apply it in other pain situations beyond visits to the dentist?

2. Why does it seem to "work" at one moment, and fail the next?

3. When testing it, is it possible to "turn it off for a moment" and then return to a painless state again the next?

If you could comment on these for me, and perhaps include some further advice beyond "refusing to manufacture pain" when it is experienced, I would certainly appreciate it. I am enjoying and appreciating your thoughts so very much, and will certainly read more.

Thank you, sir!

Yours in peace,

R. Dean Ludden

Robert,

Of course it is applicable to other situations besides the dentist — it is applicable to every situation. Pain is always available and in many, many different forms. It is at the heart of all suffering.

You are looking in the wrong place, caught in the understandable desire and so loop to eliminate pain. But this is the very activity that creates pain to begin with.

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When you think of it as a “technique” to avoid pain and feel better, it is a minor accomplishment and simply a part of the same pursuit you are already in with self survival, just with an added piece of knowledge or a new skill.

As such, any skill has to be applied. It doesn't arise on its own since it springs from the domain of knowledge and will. Pain though seems to arise on its own since it is simply answering to the dynamics already set in motion through the fundamentals of self survival. If you still “need” pain, meaning if the self still needs to be a self and attached to all that you identify with, then you will continue to create pain. This is why it seems like pain simply arises, as does every other reaction and interpretation.

Why do you need to know a flower is a flower, or that the light switch turns on a light? You certainly don't want to do away with these interpretations — it wouldn't even occur to you to do so, would it? Because you need such interpretations to manage life and know what's around you so that you can relate to it properly. Just so with pain. Reactions such as pain and pleasure are “doing” something with what's interpreted. Just as you want to know, you also want to manage what you know so that you relate and act consistent with your self needs. This is the function of pain and pleasure.

I know this is all hard to grasp experientially. Try not to relate to pain via a technique to eliminate it. Work hard to understand the nature of pain and why it exists. When you become deeply and experientially conscious of what pain is, then you'll have a better idea of how to relate to it. As long as you identify with a self — and undoubtedly you will continue to create that reality — you will experience pain and suffering, just as you experience pleasure and joy. They go together. Yet you can change your relationship to all of this, and you can eliminate a lot of pain which is just a confusion and unnecessary. But I go into this a bunch in my book, and you'll likely hear it better in your next read.

So, beyond becoming more conscious about what's what, I'm afraid my advice is the same: either refuse to manufacture it, or enjoy it.

Peter

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NOTE TO READERS:

I understand that my responses to the questions up until now may have been challenging to understand, especially if you have no deep background in this work. The following questions and responses, however, are even harder to grasp. Without certain understandings they can be almost impossible. Metaphorically, it is like trying to understand quantum physics without any background in physics. Even with a physics background it is hard enough, but without it, it will sound like gibberish. I don't mean to be heard as gibberish. I strive to make my responses as understandable as possible, but rarely not without consideration and contemplation. Yet when these questions are asked I need to respond to the question as best I can.

If you would like to understand these things better I recommend doing or reviewing the ENB workshop (Experiencing the Nature of Being) to get a stronger foothold, and increase your depth of consciousness on the nature of yourself, experience, perception, reality, and Being.

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Sarah Budde  
Port Orchard, WA  
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Hi,

My name is Sarah Budde. I've been reading your books and they have been helping me on my journey. I started out only interested in the effortless power books to help me with my T'ai Chi studies. But then my teacher recommended your Not Knowing book and you talk a lot about mind work in the other books, so I started reading it too. I'm just about through it for the first time. I'm sure I'll have to read it several times to get even a fraction of it.

I just finished reading about distinctions. I thought we would further go into this subject but now the book has moved on to something else and I am left wondering what you meant by freedom. I feel I understand the first part of the phrase, power and ability come from distinctions, but I fail to understand what you mean by freedom comes from ridding myself of distinctions. I got a little excited with the first part about distinctions and power and ability because it helped me to see why sometimes my form is pretty good and sometimes not so good yet I think I'm doing it the same way. I fail to make those small distinctions in position, balance, breath... and I could see where being really good at making fine/subtle distinctions could really help a person not only with the physical

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world but with the social world as well. But the freedom part is throwing me for a loop. I'm not clear on what kind of freedom you are talking about.

I have pondered the ignorance is bliss kind of freedom...but I fail to see how that would necessarily be a good thing. My teacher and I talked a little on it last night but I'm not sure we were on the same page. His take was that once I learned the principles and could abide by them, then I could transcend the form and be free to do what I wanted. We were talking in terms of T'ai Chi but I'm thinking the Not Knowing book is talking of something more, more about life in general. I'm curious to know the definition of freedom or context you are using in regards to distinctions.

Do you have any plans to visit the Pacific Northwest (Seattle area) anytime soon?

Sincerely,
Sarah

Sarah,

Ignorance is ignorance. If you don't know of something that might be disturbing to you, then of course you aren't disturbed by it. But this isn't freedom at all. You are just as bound as when you know of it, you're simply not affected by it.

You're right, the attempted interpretations your teacher came up with may be useful in terms of that limited scope, but are shy of the mark in this case. Here we are talking about the nature of what you experience, and so the nature of what you perceive as reality. Without making a distinction within your perceptive-experience you cannot perceive or "know" anything, since what you experience is that distinction.

What I just said won't clear up anything because you have to grasp the nature of distinction in order to understand the sentence. The problem is that you are trying to grasp this within the framework of reality that is the context for your experience at present. In other words, you think reality is what you think it is. This doesn't allow you to grasp what I'm talking about, since what I'm talking about can't be found within that framework. You need to have some "nothing from which to come." You need to be able to see beyond any assumptions that you and our culture have about the nature of reality and experience. Only then could you consider distinction in a whole new way.

But let's consider your concern about freedom. Freedom doesn't mean the absence of what you don't want — which is often an ill use of that word. In

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simple, freedom means that you can have “it” or not have “it” in any moment. “It” can be anything you experience — a feeling, a thought, an object, a situation, a condition, or what have you. This means that whatever it is — and “it” will be a distinction no matter what it is — you are free in relation to it. It both exists and doesn’t exist. It is not necessary or meaningful except in the context in which you hold that it is.

When you can destroy distinctions, you don’t have to hold “reality” in any way at all, and so you are free of any influence that anything might have on you. At the same time, you can create it as easily as not create it. This is freedom.

Power, reality, experience, existence, ability, etc., lie (or come to exist) through making distinctions. Freedom exists in knowing what “existence” really is, and so knowing what distinctions really are, and therefore being able to not create (or “un-create”) any and all distinctions. Destroying a distinction means letting it be and letting it go, or realizing its true nature and so experiencing that it really doesn’t exist already. Destroying a distinction means realizing that in essence you are already free. But when you are bound to what amounts to an illusion, you are not free.

I don’t know if this clarifies anything for you at all, but it might contribute to your contemplation. Remember, it’s not useful to believe anything I’ve said. It is only useful to experientially understand it. These matters are very challenging to understand because you can only experience them directly. It can’t be figured out through logic or found within any knowledge. Sorry about that.

Peter

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Richard Allan  
Southampton, England  
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Hey Peter,

Hope this finds you well. I have been working through the Book of Not Knowing pretty damn slow. I’m still only halfway through it! 3:28 to 3:47 alone took about 2 or so months to get through effectively, and when I say get through, I mean get familiar with.

Most of what I’m finding recently is that my experience of my body is limited by my thinking. For example, that the central nervous system and

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cardiovascular systems are just that: separate systems, rather than one interacting system where the system that creates the beating, is the beating, feels the beating and then analyses and classifies the beating as systems, are just part of a wider unit. As I noticed these ideas frame-working my experience, I increased my ability to feel my heartbeat. Nothing profound, more an example of how the lines I have drawn between "this" and "that" which are totally arbitrary, and when removed, have led to a deeper experience.

The only questions I have, in the light of this, are:

These seemingly arbitrary lines between "feeler, feeling and felt", are there any actual lines at all? (I mean, I know if I run at a wall, I'll find a pretty definite one, but in outreaching, the fewer lines, the better the result seems. So how to extend this but not over-reach or possibly lose the center in the process?)

How to get to the actuality of this experience, when all I seem to do by removing these preconceived ideas is move to another slightly more subtle perspective which later becomes irrelevant itself? I know the mind likes "cooling the lava to rock" as you say, but can one ever get to the "core"?

How to know that what I have found/uncovered is the Truth of the matter? For example with a mind on interaction, how can one know that they have found the most effective way of interacting with this truth, and not just a *more* effective way?

I'm likely missing obvious points, and will look back at these questions myself after some more investigation and have a "face-to-palm moment." In fact I'm doing that already as I read back, but as much as anything, I thought I should get in contact with you, and it seemed foolish not to ask some current questions as I did.

Once again, hope all is good with you

Richard

Richard,

Good to hear from you. It can be challenging to avoid what could be called "second-guessing" everything while working to create openness. It is important to question all assumptions, and stare into the open face of the truth regardless whether it fits into any reasonableness or familiarity. One way some people go about this, however, is to ask "doubting" questions, using extrapolation a their method of consideration. This gets them into trouble. Although it's fine to do this now and again just to see where it takes you, you need to grasp that an extrapolation isn't an experience. It is a thought that goes something like: 'Well, if I keep going in this direction where will I end up?' This might be a thought to have, but it's not an experience of the truth.

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In the old days, during the Pleiades — a two week ontology workshop — I had a few “rules” in the form of repeated sayings. One was: “No extrapolation,” which points to the fact that you can’t base experiential consciousness on concept, and extrapolation is always conceptual. If you have an insight about something and then say, “If this is true then such and such must be true . . .” or “If this is true and I follow it out logically, I reach such and such a conclusion . . .” then you are not experiencing what’s true, you are imagining what might be true.

For example, you said you removed some arbitrarily created “lines” and you had a new experience; from this you considered that there may not be any lines at all, and wondered what that might be like. You could have also come up with: “If I removed all lines, I would experience a universal absolute.” But you see, these are both extrapolations, although one is a question and the other a conclusion. As you proceeded, you seemed bent on continuing in this vein. You’re asking questions about things you haven’t experienced but imagine you might, and worrying about problems you might run into given that things unfold in the way you suspect they might.

In the end this is a fruitless activity, since you don’t know. There is no use drawing a conclusion or worrying about an imagined possibility, since the truth of the matter may well be different than whatever you can imagine at present. Like I used to say in the Pleiades: “Don’t extrapolate. If you think something is true, then go there and experience the truth for yourself. Otherwise it is merely an intellectual exercise and doesn’t count. Don’t imagine what’s true, experience what’s true.” Do you see how this applies to your questions?

About the lines. The question you should be asking is: “What are the lines?” There is no need to ask: “Do the lines exist?” Since, once you know what they are, you will know if they exist and how they exist. We’re really talking about distinctions here, and this is a wide open field, since everything is a distinction. And the framework or context in which you are making those distinctions — in this case, the distinction of “lines” — determines what that distinction is, and so how you will experience it. Once you get this, you see that changing your “view” on the matter will then change what you experience. This changes what you will ask and how you ask it.

Once again, don’t know if I’ve helped much, but perhaps some food for thought.
Good luck.

Peter

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Charles Welborn  
Ft. Collins, CO

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Hi Peter,

Are complete awareness and complete consciousness the same thing?

Thanks,
Charles

Charles,

No, not at all. People confuse awareness — which is dependent on “experience” or perception — with consciousness, because very few of us grasp the nature of consciousness. They also use cognize, which is dependent on mind, interchangeably with “becoming conscious,” and therefore confuse the word consciousness with cognition. This is to be expected since in our culture we don’t make fine distinctions between these words. What’s more, we completely misunderstand the true nature of Consciousness.

When we are aware, we are “conscious” of something in our experience, even if it is abstract or completely non-objective. We’re aware of, say, an idea of being thrifty in much the same way as we’re aware of the boss walking into the room. This is simply being or becoming aware of something. It is similar to recognizing and interpreting something within our experience which I call “cognition.” Being conscious of these things means we “know” of them, identify them, and know them as something. This is really cognition or awareness — both of which exist within Consciousness.

Consciousness, on the other hand, is what’s there, and at the same time doesn’t exist in what’s there. It is the foundation, space, and possibility for both awareness and cognition to occur. It is the “mother” of mind, intellect, intuition, perception, knowing. Consciousness both doesn’t exist, and is existence. So do you see where I’m going with this, and the direction or distinction I’m making? Really grasping it can only be done directly, to be “one” with Consciousness, so to speak. And that’s not common.

So to answer your question: no.

Peter

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Lukasz Glowacki  
Namyslow, Poland  
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Hello Peter,

A few days ago I opened your book (*The Book of Not Knowing*) to a random page and read "If we could free ourselves from self-survival, we would free ourselves from suffering."

Does by "freeing ourselves from self-survival" you mean only freeing ourselves from a "self" or shall I understand this phrase in a broader context? For example, going to work and making money is also a form of survival. People make money because they need to survive, pay the bills, buy food, etc. So does the term "self-survival" relate only to the survival of our "selves" or to survival in general?

Thank you,
Lukasz

Lukasz,

It is difficult to say easily since there is so much confusion. For example, you confuse "you" with your self. And likely you confuse your self with your mind. Now, how can you understand those statements?

Don't confuse existence with survival. Existence "is," survival is a process. Also, don't confuse process, even intelligent process, or maintenance itself, with self survival. Self survival is a particular process and its purpose is the generation-persistence-promotion of the self.

Self doesn't actually exist. But you'd need to understand what a self is, and what you really are — your true nature — in order for that to be understood as a reality at all. Like I said, your self will be confused with — as in "mistaken for" — mind. You don't just think you with *have* a mind, but that you *are* a mind. Mind is an activity, and when self is confused with this activity then survival becomes about maintaining and protecting the mind. That includes beliefs, opinions, perspective, self-image, and so on. Do you start to see the thing unfolding here? It's not easy, so I'd say read the book again. It's a challenging story to tell, that's why the book is so long (and there's more to grasp).

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I will say some more, yet the only way you can make use of it is to contemplate and become conscious of what is true in this matter. Yes, if you are free from self there is no suffering. Remember, physical survival isn't so complex. Or rather, the complexity of it is out of your hands anyway — physiology, micro-biology, perceptive distinctions necessary for life interactions, etc. — these all go along simply as a function of your existence, or have been learned by you in the course of forming your life abilities. To the degree that you are attached to even the simple process of physical persistence, you will suffer any difficulties you may encounter, and also suffer the failure or loss associated with your inability to maintain any aspect of this process adequately. Death is always an option, and will occur. You will die, and then all of the activities that are this "general" survival as you call it, will fail. Will you suffer, or just die? Do you see the difference?

But let's be clear, most of your suffering doesn't come from paying bills, eating, breathing, or even having trouble with any of these. It comes from trying to do something your way, or accomplish all those things you think you need. Merely persisting as a human isn't the source of most of your suffering. Your mind is, and your self is, and your self-mind is. Do you see the difference?

Really you need to get what self is in order to understand any of this. One place you can look is the fact that I've said all this and more in the book and yet you can't hear it. This is normal. Everyone hears things in relation to the mind and perspective they are attached to, and so whatever is outside of that is rarely heard. Instead, it is twisted to fit into the perspective that is hearing it. This is incredibly hard to understand, since it's operating right now as you try to grasp what's being said. Hearing this, however, gives you the opportunity to look into this phenomenon and contemplate what this is all about. Consider that much of what you've read in *The Book of Not Knowing* has been missed. That means it's still there waiting to be discovered. That's why I say you must read the book many times, study it, contemplate it, and do this until everything said is directly experienced. Tall order. But then, in the end you will just die. Might as well grasp what this is all about before then.

Good luck.

Peter

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Charles Welborn  
Ft. Collins, Colorado  
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Peter,

The Book of Not Knowing, 26:8, talks of Gautama wandering "into the mountains to finish out his life." Why would he do that? What is the significance of his statement "Why [teach]? No one will get it." To me this is perplexing.

Also, is it direct consciousness or direct Consciousness? Is it direct experience or direct Experience? Also, are direct (E)xperience and direct (C)onsciousness the same thing?

Charles

Charles,

To respond to your first question: why not? Should he commit suicide? Why would he do that? He is living as a human, this has its natural process. He'll die when he dies.

But more to the point, the Truth is already the Truth, during life and despite it. Nothing changes with absolute enlightenment — except now one is Absolutely Conscious. What is true *before* grasping what is true was true even when it was unknown. Ignorant of this fact, the human condition still marches on and the human process unfolds. So why would that change through being conscious of it? What's true is true now.

About wandering off, I doubt he considered a thing. Really. I know this is hard to understand. Since we live within a survival-mind that is constantly spewing forth strategic interpretations and impulses, we can't even imagine a state of mind where such thoughts just don't come up. He sat under a tree with the vow that he wouldn't move until he became completely enlightened (at least that's the story). Since he "accomplished" his goal, he didn't need to sit under the tree any longer. So the natural thing is to go on living until death. Where? Wherever. Why not where he came from? When confronted by someone asking him to teach, he responded. Prior to that I suspect it wasn't even a thought.

I would guess his statement about no one grasping this depth of Consciousness — and remember all of this is hearsay, who knows what really happened or what was really said — had nothing to do with going into the mountains. He was likely just going to finish out his life, or allow his life to finish out. He came from the mountains so why not go there? I'm sure he could have sat where he was —

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like Ramana Maharshi, or wandered to the ocean. It wouldn't matter, which was demonstrated by the fact that, instead of doing any of these he devoted his whole life to teaching just because someone *might* get it.

Why say no one will get it? Because chances are no one will! I suspect it was just an honest response to the request. Such depth of Consciousness isn't common nor is it easily accessible since it is beyond belief and beyond logic. There is no way to get there from here, meaning there are no steps. There is no way or method that walks one to direct consciousness. Contemplation is the best, perhaps the only, practice to put you in the most propitious place to "awaken." But even contemplation doesn't "do" it for you, nor are there steps or stages. When people enter into some sort of process they might believe this process provides stages and a method to direct consciousness. But it doesn't. That's why it's called *direct*! There are no steps, means, or vias. It *IS* the truth, ergo the use of the word "direct." Even the word direct is too much.

The moment we put the word "direct" in front of the words *experience* or *consciousness*, there is no difference between the terms. Direct means there is nothing more to say. We can call it *consciousness* or *experience* because it is really neither. That's often why we capitalize them, to show that it isn't what we normally think — it is not the distinction we usually make when we use those words.

I do make a distinction, however, just to create space for people involved in contemplation, between a "direct experience" — which is really more of an insight — and an actual enlightenment. This kind of direct experience may be genuine and "direct" (meaning it's true and you're conscious of it, you're "there" so to speak) but it is still an experience. It is something "experienced," it is not enlightenment — for which I more frequently use the term *direct consciousness*. But for this there are no words or descriptions that are accurate or possible.

My intent in telling the story about Gautama was to assist people in breaking free of assumptions and beliefs, and from trying to fit this matter into a logical context. Compassion is often attributed to Buddha and yet his first response to teach or "help others" appears to lack compassion. How are we to understand this inconsistency? The challenge here is trying to understand such things in the context of our human social perspective, and this perspective doesn't allow for paradox. Paradox isn't graspable by the mind and yet it is the foundation nature of the Absolute. You can tell by all I've said so far that in a normal human mind much of what I've communicated must sound nonsensical. This is to be expected.

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The only way to make sense of it all is to become directly conscious, which is what I recommend and support.

No matter what you experience that seems true, or how much you think you are conscious, I recommend still being open. With complete consciousness comes complete freedom. Are you still attached to anything? Then something is still *un*-conscious. With such freedom (and so detachment from self and self survival), your relationship to others will change radically. You'd be freed from the drive to fear them, the need to judge them or resent them, to need them, react to them, and all of the other relational experiences that arise from self-survival. So compassion in some sense is likely, although this is not the "drama" of emotion that we *call* compassion but something else.

So when Buddhists say Gautama had great compassion, I doubt it was what we normally relate to as compassion. Likely the reference was really to the fact that he stayed and taught. And this was seen as a compassionate thing to do since it served others and not himself. But his "self" wasn't an issue anymore so we'd have think of this differently. The draw to serve others in becoming more conscious is understood by us as compassion, and it is, yet the matter is quite different than what we usually experience as that impulse. Like I said, the matter is outside of our comprehension until such time as we ourselves become deeply conscious.

I hope this gives you some things to consider.

Peter

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Bob Daufenbach  
Pittsburgh, PA  
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Peter,

I hope you are well. I simply wanted to say that the Cheng Hsin newsletters are profound experience to engage with each time they arrive. Especially regarding the last 2, I would say, among many things, you are also a phenomenologist.

Regards,

Bob Daufenbach

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Bob,

I'm glad you enjoy the NL. But I'm not really a phenomenologist. I can see by how it's defined that it sounds like I am. For example, looking at a definition of phenomenology as:

- “the science of phenomena as distinct from that of the nature of being.”
- “an approach that concentrates on the study of consciousness and the objects of direct experience.”

We can see that the first statement is inconsistent with what I do, since I'm absolutely focused on the nature of being and not willing to stop at what's perceived as phenomena. Yet the second statement uses the same words I often use, but they are using them completely differently.

What they are calling *consciousness* I would call *cognition*, and likely an intellectual grasping of what's perceived; and what they call *direct experience* means to personally perceive something. But what I call *direct experience* is becoming conscious (not as a perception or cognition) of the true nature of being. So you see the rub. We're using the same words but talking about the opposite things. Interesting, isn't it? This really helps point out in a stark way why there is so much misunderstanding about what I'm communicating, and also how challenging this is to get. Especially given that in no way am I denying phenomena or perceptive experience. I am simply pressing us to grasp what it really is. There is a paradox here that is impossible for the mind to deal with, and so the mind always wants to simplify the matter by choosing a side.

Thanks for the feedback. I appreciate it.

Peter

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Shelly Chan  
Sydney, Australia

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Good Morning Peter,

My name is Shelley and I'm currently reading *The Book of Not Knowing*. I was introduced to the book by Mark Grzic, who attended your Texas workshop in April 2010. He suggested I write to you as I'm struggling and am not sure how to proceed.

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The thing I struggle with most is how do I translate insights and understandings into actions? That is, now that I'm aware of the beliefs, habits and patterns that are unhelpful, destructive and makes me miserable, how do I "stop"?

The habit I most wish to stop is bulimia. I have been trying to stop for the last 15 years. My intuitive healer talks to me about the concept of "choice" and how I can choose to behave differently. But since I'm still bingeing and throwing up, on some level I am choosing to continue with this behavior, even though it makes me miserable. It is wrecking my health and makes me gain weight. I am terrified of being fat, because for me fat = unattractive = rejection = no one will love me = all alone. (Which I am right now since I isolate myself when I'm struggling with bulimia). Yet I actively participate in an activity that results in weight gain (I put on 2 kgs in 4 days).

Yesterday I asked myself the question "do you enjoy being miserable, do you get something out of it?" And I think I must because why else would I continue with a habit that makes me so unhappy? Yet despite much self-questioning, I was not able to figure out what purpose feeling miserable serves for me.

I was reading passage 11:17 last night. I love the rock analogy. I can so totally relate to the rock, dancing her heart out thinking she "should be" that and is suffering because deep down she know she isn't. So how does this rock drop the "should be" and start accepting what is and stop pining for what isn't?

Thanks Peter. I am really enjoying reading *The Book of Not Knowing*, but I must say, my brain hurts afterwards (and they say there's no pain sensors in the brain - ha!).

Regards,
Shelley

Shelly,

You present a very straightforward and grounded question, and yet the response must be multi-leveled — even though the answer is pretty simple: if you want to stop it, then stop it. The key is obviously in the "want" or impulse that drives you, and so this must be addressed.

If you haven't finished the book (at least twice) then likely the answers you seek are there — in particular, in Part V, which speaks to the more "pragmatic" side of the work. I sympathize with your brain pain, especially since, without loads of work on this stuff, it can really be a challenge to grasp. This is one of the reasons I say you need to read the book several times. The first time, your brain is just

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trying to make sense of what's said, to understand what the words mean, and try to bring them into your experience. In many ways this will be inaccurate, however, since it's virtually impossible to read from a personal set of beliefs and programs and hear things that can't be found within that perspective. But some of it will be understood, and hopefully breakthroughs and insights will occur, and this will serve as a platform from which to begin deeper study.

In order to change your impulse to act a certain way — in this case not eat — you have to get to the bottom of your drive to eat. Since this drive will be based on your survival in some way, it will have a real force to it. You need to disassociate eating from your fear of death. This fear could take many forms, but I don't want to speculate on what's true for you specifically. Suffice to say that it will feel like a real need and a strong drive. You need to let go of your emotional attachment to eating. Likely the act of eating seems to lessen a great pain in your heart, but also likely is that it only does so *while* you do it, and so you are driven to over-do it. The only way I can see to let go of the impulse (aka: drive, fear, pain, desire, need) is to get to the bottom of it, which means to experience the cause of the drive in your own self-mind.

As you will read in the book later on, we call this a “bottom line” contemplation, which is a primary tool used in transforming your experience (just as contemplation is the main tool used to get at the nature of being). Bottom line work focuses on the unrecognized aspect of your mind and experience. This suggests that your current experience, and thus your drives, are sourced by aspects of your mind that you do not recognize. You aren't conscious of the very beliefs and assumptions that you have about yourself and reality which drive you to eat. Get conscious of these and detach yourself from them, then you won't be driven to eat.

Many habits of mind and living (and so eating) will still have to be tackled with discipline. Since you have built up patterns of behavior, automatic ways of thinking and acting will need to be deliberately dismantled. This will take honesty and diligent questioning. And as you work to get free from the particular ideas about yourself that drive you, you will probably have to hit them again and again, to remember and reinforce that these are just concepts and the feelings that arise from them are not real. But they'll feel real, that's why you have to face them head on until they stop feeling real. Remember, it is just a feeling, it isn't a fact nor is it necessary, and it doesn't mean you must act on it.

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Turn into the feeling, deeply feel it and get to the bottom of it. This takes contemplation. Once you've gotten to the heart of this emotional drive, you will need to hit it again and again, each time the emotion or drive comes up, until it stops coming up.

There is much more to say about this in order to understand it completely, but this should start you in a direction. When you've studied the book more, perhaps we can have a more detailed dialogue about this issue.

Good luck with your challenge.

Peter

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Markus Herberholt

Koln, Germany

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Peter,

What is the difference in your understanding when you speak of making an extrapolation and creating a possibility?

How do you call something which may arise as extrapolated but afterwards being experienced, in the sense that one went there to experience it? Where is the difference in creating a possibility (as in the contemplation components) and extrapolating, consciously or unconsciously? I am trying to figure out whether I am making the same distinction as you.

An extrapolation can be a valid possibility, but even when really experienced, how can I trust the experience as it can be merely mind-made (as you said: "you can't base experiential consciousness on concept")? What I am really wondering is, how can I trust experience? It seems it is always made up, at least when "I" am in it.

Thank you.

Markus

Markus,

Hmmm. A loopy question. Let's start with extrapolation and possibility. Extrapolation isn't the same thing as creating a possibility. It only seems the same

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because both are imagined to occur in the future. Extrapolation is based on interpreting past patterns and imagining them continuing into the future and occurring in the same pattern for some time, and so reaching an outcome that is only imagined from this extrapolation. This can be useful in kicking around ideas and imagining where things might go. But it is not “true,” it is only imagined.

Creating a possibility, on the other hand, is creating or realizing that something is possible, and it is possible right now. It doesn't take any imagination or extrapolation of patterns for it to be possible. It *is* possible. Usually we relate to the word *possibility* as simply an idea about something that *could* happen or come to pass. Yet this isn't actually creating a possibility, it is just imagining what could be or become. Creating possibility exists in an experiential domain: if it is to be real and grounded, it must be experienced as so right now. The manifestation of the possibility may or may not occur in the moment, but the possibility exists now.

I wanted to make that distinction so that you understand the difference. Yet I think you are asking about something else, maybe a few things. If you experience something that you had previously extrapolated and imagined could be true, then you experienced it. That's not just imagined. If, however, you are having some emotional or perceptive-phenomena occur in relation to a conclusion you've come to, you may simply be creating or reaffirming your conclusion in a form that is essentially conceptual but manifests as if it's experiential. I know this is likely not what you wanted to hear, and it can further confuse things. But there you have it.

In contemplation, creating the possibility that you can become conscious isn't an extrapolation at all. First of all, it can't be based on past patterns since in this case there are none. You haven't had a direct experience and so there are no patterns of doing so. What you do have are patterns of processes that lead to insights or understanding, and this is likely what you would base any extrapolation upon. This is not creating possibility. In contemplation you need to experientially create that it is possible to become conscious of who you are, or whatever it is you are contemplating. Failing that, you must adopt the conviction that it is possible and base your contemplation on the conclusion that you really can become conscious. When you create the possibility like an experience, you are *with* this possibility as a presence that is here and now. It's a bit like you can “feel” it or “taste” it (metaphorically speaking). This is not an extrapolation. Even the conclusion isn't an extrapolation. And neither a conclusion or an experience of possibility exist as

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a process that can only be realized in the future. Possibility exists now, and can only be realized now.

As far as trusting experience, your experience will be based on "you" just as your concepts will be. Your mind will generate or make up both. This doesn't make them necessarily invalid, just relational, and they are related to your self-existence. Experience and concept are distinctions in your interpreted-perceptive field, in your "mind" so to speak. This doesn't mean they aren't real, it just means that this reality isn't set in stone or what we normally consider "objective."

I'm probably not making this any clearer, am I? In any case, if you make a grounded distinction of a real and objective experience, independent from your self agenda and based on the intent to know the truth, I see no reason to distrust it. In the way we're using the word (in this context), this is what an experience "is."

Peter

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Lolita Higbie  
Bolder, Colorado  
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Hi Peter,

I feel like my life is a mess right now, 'cause the truth and my separate self are at war/odds with each other. I'm practicing the meditations at the end of Chapter 16 [in *The Book of Not Knowing*] daily, and getting an ugly picture of how I am at effect in my life. It's appearing in my dog being a neurotic mess and shaking and whining all night long, then being fine during the day. Roger, my partner, says the dog's fine when I'm not here. I also see how sensitive the dog is to me and acts as a good mirror. He's a nervous wreck as soon as he senses I'm engaged in my Hysterical agenda. I'm frustrated with others and myself.

Then I remember to connect with experience simply being "for itself" and this calms me down for a second or two. I keep feeling like I want to go away and hide for a few weeks and at the same time feel like that would be irresponsible. ARGH!

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Is any of this to be expected en route to a direct experience of the truth? I am open to skipping the challenges and having that direct experience here and now! Any pointers?

For now I'm going to go to a yoga class and move my body!

Thanks,

Lola

Lola,

Yes, going to yoga sounds like a good thing to do. Physical involvement is almost always a good way to get grounded, to help you get out of your mental chatter and so calm the mind.

Direct experience may help, but chances are slim that it will transform your psychology overnight. The form of your mind — what you've developed and have attached to (think of as your self) since birth — will likely survive pretty much intact after an enlightenment experience, or even two or three. Changing your psychology demands that you change your psychology. This endeavor is different (much narrower and more "personal") from the pursuit of enlightenment.

I doubt you are really ready for such work as found in Chapter 16. For now, it may be useful just to create some space and open the possibility of letting go of what seems to be the immutable truth of "you" or your experience of yourself. But as a real contemplation, it's too early for you. Perhaps you'd find more use in Chapter 22, since this focuses on the work of getting at the foundation that has generated your psychology.

Transformation is different from enlightenment. (I'll communicate this more fully in my next book, but I know you don't want to wait until that's done.) The real work of this kind is found in the Consciousness Apprentice Program. Yet that might be too much for you.

One thing to remember is not to create a war between your self and the truth. You *are* the truth; you simply don't know it yet. It's a matter of consciousness. But it sounds like your challenge is really mental-emotional neurosis, and this is something you have to come to grips with yourself. I can't help at a distance, except to say: love yourself. Stop the damaging "parent" voice, or whatever it is that keeps you fretting and holding yourself negatively. Breathe. Then be happy with what you have. Since your mind will resist this and take it on only

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superficially, such a "positive" thought process will break down pretty quickly unless you can make it real for yourself. Only you can do that, but you *can* do it.

Good luck,

Peter

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Maurice Gillis

Ibaraki, Japan

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Hello Peter,

I hope this finds you well. It has been a long time since I last had contact with you but having just read the last newsletter (thanks so much for the effort involved in making it happen), and also having just finished Chapter 1 of *The Book* (or should I say bible?) of *Not Knowing*, I was wanting to know your thoughts on something.

It is in regards to young children. What you talked about in 1:9 and 1:10 touches on something I have thought about for many years. It seems that in the very early years, children in general are closer to "being", and much more open and that that openness is lost, especially when they enter the so-called "education system."

So here comes the question. What sort of program could schools incorporate into the system that would be of benefit to students? There is talk of a need for a revolution in the education system and it seems to me that this must begin at the very base, which is to engage each child in a process that may allow them to have a conscious experience. Young children seem to operate much more in the now and with way more creativity than older people. It seems these abilities are not only not valued but actually frowned upon by society as a whole.

As I said this is only Chapter One, perhaps the answer is further along in the book but any scrap of insight you might throw my way would be greatly appreciated.

Best Regards,

Maurice

Maurice,

I share your desire for a good education for young people, but the first thing I must say is I do not teach children and so I don't have any expertise on the subject. That being said, the matter is more complex than we want to admit. No matter what you do or don't do, children will form into a self and create an

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identity. This will be based upon what is absorbed-created by them, given their interpretations of the reality around them.

There is so much more in *The Book of Not Knowing* that you've yet to encounter; you've only touched on the introduction! Truly changing a person by changing the process of their growing up would primarily require changing the entire thinking and perspective of the whole community and culture in which he or she develops. Any educational method and educational content is only a reflection of this whole view. Changing education so that the student is encourage to think for himself, to be creative, and to learn how to learn, in my view, would be an exceptionally good thing to do. But this won't happen unless such principles are truly valued by the community.

The main place children learn is from their parents and the people around them; not simply what they are formally or consciously taught, but what they learn by example. If you are the adult that influences them the most, what molds them the most is how *you* are — what you think and feel, how you handle emotions and challenges, how you view and relate to others, learning, being creative, and so on. In other words, changing ourselves is the best way to change what develops in our children.

Good luck with that. I whole-heartedly support transforming humanity!
Peter

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Charles Welborn  
Ft. Collins, Colorado  
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Hi Peter,

1. Can the question "What is true?" have distinctions? Example: I think, "that is a pretty, red rose". Experiencing that "pretty", "red" and "rose" are *not* what is true, I try to experience the "rose" directly, what is true about it.

2. For the purpose of increased Consciousness, should I only be asking the question "What is True?" in the non-distinct way of a question such as "What is life"?

Charles

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Charles,

1. Yes, of course you can make distinctions in any question. And it's very useful to become clear about what you are asking, specifically what you want to know. *True* is a distinction that can refer to all sorts of domains, or content, especially when you put a "what is?" in front of it. It depends on what you're using the term "true" for.

2. You should ask such questions in all ways. What is emotion? What is honesty? What is true about what you saying or thinking? What is a fact and what isn't? What is mind? etc., etc. And not just "what is the true nature of existence?" I recommend doing this until the smallest and most relative questions about self or perception or mind, are finally undifferentiated from the absolute nature of reality.

Peter

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Charles Welborn  
Ft. Collins, Colorado

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Hi Peter,

I have been asking a lot of questions. It may seem that I am trying to know something but I am only trying to clean up a lot of contradictions that have been piling up for a long time.

Are Enlightenment and Consciousness the same thing? Are the words interchangeable?

A monk is hanging over a cliff from a tree root with a tiger above him and another tiger below and two mice are gnawing at the root. The monk sees a plump strawberry growing within reach and fully experiences the eating of it.

A Zen abbot visits another abbot. Upon being greeted, the abbot he is visiting asks him on which side of his sandals he placed his umbrella. He cannot answer certainly and spends the next six years with the abbot he was visiting.

In a previous e-mail I asked if complete awareness and complete Consciousness are the same thing to which you answered: no. It is because of Zen readings like the ones above that I developed the belief they are the same. In these two examples, the intent seems to me to be to indicate or at least imply

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that Consciousness and awareness are the same thing or that a goal of Consciousness is awareness or at least that there is a necessary connection.

In an e-mail to me on 12/27/11 you wrote "You will likely not understand many of the Zen dialogues (stories) since the point is often obscure, and without a reference to what they are talking about they can't be understood." Would you please comment on the above examples as to their purpose?

Thanks,
Charles

Charles,

I don't use these words in that way. *Enlightenment* refers to a particular direct Consciousness. Consciousness ultimately can't be spoken of since it encompasses everything, Nothing, and infinite form, including no form. So all one can do is get cute and say something like what I just said. We can't "think" the matter, in rather the same way that we can't think the matter of God. Consider what Buddha said in response to the truth of God: "I don't believe in God. I don't believe in not-God."

These parables you cite do seem to point to awareness rather than Consciousness — unless there is something we are missing, which is also likely. What people wrote or said over time, and what listeners liked well enough to repeat, is wide and varied. The parables are not always about direct consciousness, even in Zen stories. The focus on awareness could easily be about Zen discipline, not an attempt to communicate about Consciousness (regarding which little can be said that makes any difference).

There is more to life and living than direct Consciousness, so enjoy the strawberry; it's what's there and will pass soon. In this world the alternative is to not enjoy it, and fret about what's to come. The monk may also be demonstrating the freedom he had concerning matters of life and death; there's no need to forgo enjoyment of the strawberry even though death is coming and can't be stopped. The message might be: don't be attached to life or to death either way. This aspect is not about awareness but freedom, and you're likely to miss that.

It is also possible that it isn't so important that the visiting monk remember on which side of the his sandals the umbrella was left, but because he doesn't remember indicates that his mind was elsewhere, perhaps on the meeting coming up, or other matters. This suggests that he wasn't free of this mind and so

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just setting down his umbrella when he was setting down his umbrella. You see the additional possibility here?

So there can be more to such stories than a reader understands without having had a direct consciousness from which to come, or knowing the particular background that the teller may be assuming. Also, there may be less to the stories, and the reader makes them more than they are.

In any case, the paradox of the Absolute makes understanding difficult and contradictions likely.

Hang in there.

Peter

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Tommaso Rossi

Mosta, Malta

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Peter,

I am in a relationship with a girl, very interesting, very beautiful some times, very painful other times. After the beautiful emotions and dreams of the beginning, we are now in the disillusionment phase. I notice how much it is a war between two egos; a series of expectations that we have (that if met release positive emotions, otherwise negative ones). I am OK with it (well sometimes I don't like to suffer, but in general I accept that this is our lot and the only solution is inside myself).

On the contrary she doesn't seem to understand that ultimately she is the only person responsible for her emotions. She is always seeing the problem in me, and her mind is nearly completely locked to any sort of self-honesty that would make her wrong. It is very, very difficult for her to accept a truth that makes her wrong, and she immediately starts inventing incredible explanations of the facts (excuses).

Somehow I believe that another way of relating is possible. For example, two persons in a relationship could still be taken into this "ego war" but at the same time could realize that it is in fact only one aspect of their interaction, and could let go of some of the unnecessary emotional babbling, and instead, communicate more.

Any reflection on this is appreciated.

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Also a question:

It seems that she doesn't respect me. Probably she feels that she can break any of the rules and I won't be able to do anything about it. She also uses her emotions in a very manipulative way and threatens me in subtle ways making leverage on my emotions and fears/desires. (Well, OK to be honest I do the same, and I don't like to be conscious of it when I do it, but she is really over the top with it!) Someone advised me "don't let her threaten you that way, put some limits," and I try to do it. The problem is that she reacts with an attitude of challenge, to see if I react or if I have the balls. But balls to do what? I cannot beat her up, right..?

For example, I asked her not to smoke in our room, since I don't smoke, and because she was upset with me she lights up a cigarette in front of me saying "no, I will smoke, you cannot give me orders" and looking at me to see how I react. I tried to grab the cigarette from her hand and I finally managed, and I throw the cigarette from the window. Then the story repeats and we arrived at a physical "fight" at the end of which I pushed her out of the room and I locked myself inside. Since she continues in her attitudes, obviously she is treating me as her doormat. What can I do to regain respect?

How do I express the limits of what I accept and what I don't accept in a way that she respects them and she doesn't feel like I'm imposing some rule on her just because I'm bossy or something? When you, Peter Ralston, tell the limits of what you don't accept, few people have the courage—or craziness—to challenge them. What is the source of this power? How can I get it more?

Please help me to understand what I am doing wrong.

Thank you very much,

Tommaso

Tommaso,

I feel for your dilemma. Of course, there are always two sides to any relationship story; but this doesn't mean that both sides are equal or culpable in the outcomes. It sounds like you are dealing with an emotionally and perhaps mentally unstable person, locked into childish behavior. You yourself are likely also locking into some childish drives and limitations, otherwise you wouldn't persist in this dynamic. Besides growing up mentally and emotionally yourself, the only thing you can do is communicate clearly what you want and what you are unwilling to put up with. If this is unacceptable to her, then stop seeing her. If she won't behave like an adult in the relationship, let her know that you cannot continue to relate to her in any intimate way. If she can't deal with this, then it is

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probably better to give up the relationship than to keep trying to get your needs met and putting up with damaging and unhealthy behavior, on both your parts.

On the other hand, if she could possibly get to a place where she is at least willing to consider growing, then you could both do the “Transforming Your Experience of Relationship” eCourse. But first, you’d have to have her communicate some willingness to look into her own self. This invitation shouldn’t be attempted with some particular result in mind on your part. Just invite her to a place where she’s willing to consider looking into her mind, emotions, and relating. If she can get this far then you could propose that you two do the course together. That way it isn’t about you telling her your demands, but me working with both of you. It sounds like she may not be open to such a thing, but it doesn’t hurt to ask. First, work on the willingness, however. If there is no openness or willingness, then no proposal will work.

As for the source of my power, the Apprentice Program (especially the Consciousness AP) is the doorway to that. But you know this. Become more conscious, work to grow up, be willing to let go, as well as keep your commitments, and take actions that are healthy and, as Immanuel Kant said: “*Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.*”

When these are accomplished you will have a much more powerful and grounded presence and place from which to come and relate and communicate. It’s a tall order, but a worthy pursuit.

Good luck with that, and let me know if you and your girlfriend want to tackle the TER. But remember, you must first establish that she is *willing*. Not willing to do something specific or change in some particular way, but willing to consider something new, even about herself, and let her know you are willing to do the same about yourself.

Peter

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Tommaso Rossi  
Mosta, Malta  
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Peter,

Listening to the *Experience the Nature of Being* trailer titled "Transformation," you are talking about personal transformation and you say: "... I'm not inviting you to change a thing, I'm inviting you to become conscious of what's true."

This struck me. It is the first time that I hear you saying it this way. I've heard you many times inviting us to become more conscious...but it's the first time that I hear you saying that you don't invite us to change a thing.

I always had the impression that you were pushing me hard to change... for example the advice of "keeping your word" or "be honest"... to me those require quite a change, quite a disciplined effort. And when I take on these disciplines I am not necessarily conscious of the powers that are running me internally. So it looks like what you speak of as "when we try to change something superficially, by adopting some kind of belief or little behavior it doesn't change anything fundamentally."

And in the martial study the pressure to change was even more evident. But maybe in the martial field the reasoning is different for some reason?

The advice "don't try to change, be more conscious instead" is – for what I understand — central in tantric yoga tradition. For example I've heard that a student asked: 'How can I stop this and that behavior that I have, this and that thing that I do?' And the master replied: 'If you want to do something do it, but be there (in the sense be conscious) when you do it.' Is this what you are also saying Peter?

I'm asking because sometimes I see how I'm totally fucked up, full of nonsensical behaviors, psychological problems, etc... and trying to address them one by one I don't think is the right thing because they are just too many and on top of each other and I can never be sure if what I am doing to address the problem or to "become better" is really going to solve the problem or is just going to create another facet to my personality, or another fixation, or another ideal. I have the feeling it would be better to drop my self all together and be happy.

After all, isn't NOW the only place that there is? So what is the sense of trying to achieve any progressive change? This is a bit of a paradox for me... because yes, I might see that the only "real" thing is NOW, but surviving still requires that I think about the future and make plans.

Tommaso

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Tommaso,

We most often don't hear something until we are ready, or can. You might guess that I've made this point many times, but this is the first time you heard it. Still, it seems you are trying to turn the real point into something overly simplistic, and I fear you may be using it to justify or excuse your failures to undergo transformation, and bend it to fit what it is you want to believe.

Let me clarify that, however, since what I just said will likely evoke a reaction. You don't have to transform or change at all. You are fine just the way you are. But that is about transformation, or in this case, the lack of it. It is not about the truth. The truth doesn't get you anything but the truth. The truth isn't about what good it does you, how you can benefit from it, or even how it may or may not agree with you or your belief systems. It has nothing to do with your agenda or goals — that's *your* job. The truth is just what's true. It is already true, nothing has to change for it to be true! Our job in this pursuit is to become conscious of what that is. Although our goal is to grasp the Absolute Truth, along the way we also work to become conscious of what is true on any level — what is true about self, mind, perception, and so on.

Transformation, on the other hand, demands change. It is "changing the form" of something — in this case, you. Usually we hold this to be making you significantly better. But don't confuse transformation with the truth. The truth is already the truth, so nothing needs to transform. Yet if you want to change something, then that's a matter of transformation. If you want to become more effective, or more open, or free yourself from particular reactions, or whatever, then this is a matter of changing the "form" that you are attached to, what you consider to be yourself. To be conscious of what any of that is, however, doesn't demand that anything change. Do you see the difference here?

Most people confuse enlightenment with transformation. These aren't the same thing. Enlightenment is about becoming directly conscious of the nature of the absolute truth. Nothing needs to change. Transformation is about you becoming better. Change is necessary. These are completely different goals.

When it comes to martial skill for example, if you are not as skillful as you want to be, then something needs to change, doesn't it? It turns out that any increase in consciousness, or grasping the nature or truth of something, does tend to change your view of it and so changes your actions in relation to it. This isn't a

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requirement, it's a side effect. It also turns out that enlightenment does significantly increase the "space" in which you can transform, and the grounded reality in which transformation can occur. Even just experientially grasping the nature of a principle, having insight into how things work, or getting what something is that you are working with, tends to increase your effectiveness and ability to work with it. Can you see how this might be the case?

Yet you need to see that nothing changes by becoming conscious of what it is. Perhaps you are more conscious, and may "perceive" differently, but the thing itself didn't change. What also tends to be true is that when you let something be what it is, such as letting you and your self-mind be how they are, you are much more likely to recognize the truth of this condition. This is a better place to play with transforming it. But it seems you are looking for a simplistic phrase or motto that can help you, or some easy answer or belief that seems to approve of you the way you are. Consider what this is really about. There is no need to disapprove of yourself. If you want to have approval, then know I approve and love you, just the way you are. That doesn't mean I don't think you'd be better off learning to keep your word, becoming even more honest, and freeing yourself from your limitations or ineffective behavior. But c'est la vie; you're just fine as a human being. How you live your life and what you pursue depends on what you want your life to be about.

Hopes this clarifies the matter some.

Peter

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Sam Rutherford  
Canberra, Australia

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Peter,

I've been reading some of the teachings of Ramesh Balsekar (and Wei Wu Wei). As you're probably aware, he teaches that there is no free will (of individuals), and that individual lives are simply like roles in a movie which has already been completed. The sense of a personal doer is an illusion. At one time I would have found the notion unacceptable (but oddly enough, at the same time being able to accept intellectually that the self is an illusion!), until a day happened unexpectedly where 'my doer' seemed to just disappear, or take a remote back seat for a bit. 'I' didn't sit at home in a trance or anything, 'I' went

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out, talked to people, did the usual things I would have done, no apparent change except a tremendous sense of calm and curiosity and astonishment that it all just happened anyway, whether there was a sense that 'I' was doing it or not. I emailed you briefly at the time and I confess I was feeling very pleased with myself, and thought I'd got it, while I guess it should have been obvious that if I thought 'I'd' got it, I almost certainly hadn't. The shift in perspective faded and I subsequently disregarded it.

There is a question here, or at least a request for feedback. As I said in my last email I've been feeling pretty bad lately. A part of the reason for that I realize is the almost-constant feeling that I should be doing something other than what I'm doing at any given time. And when I'm sitting in a corner getting drunk it seems like a pretty justified feeling. You talk quite a bit about discipline, and commitment, and personal responsibility, and 'just doing it' (whatever 'it' happens to be), and most of the time I have to admit those concepts just terrify me. I don't have those qualities, have never had them, and it seems like there's just a massive brick wall there. If I do something 'good', or that matches what I think I should be doing at the time, it feels lucky, and if I don't, I beat myself up about it, but the beating up doesn't seem to make the slightest difference to what happens!

Balsekar says: Any given moment can't be different than it is. Now what's concerned me is reconciling the apparent value of this practice with the emphasis in Cheng Hsin on the above-mentioned qualities of discipline and responsibility, etc. Surprisingly, even the practice of discipline which I'd always understood as requiring volition or doership, can seemingly just happen. Unless I've missed it, you don't talk much about free will or volition in NK.

Balsekar says that because there is no free will, everyone's actions and behaviour are a result of DNA and conditioning (input from any external source). Even a sage will continue to act basically according to his or her conditioning, with the only major difference being that there will be no attachment to the actions (maybe this explains the surprising behaviour of some reputed sages — Trungpa Rinpoche, Alan Watts, the drunken Taoist...!) Correct me if I'm wrong, but it seems his concept of conditioning refers to the same phenomenon as self-survival in NK. Except that he teaches there is no escape from conditioning, whereas you seem to suggest that it is possible to step outside of self-survival entirely. Am I right? Are the two perspectives compatible? Is it a difference in depth of insight? Does it matter?

Regards,
Sam

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Sam,

As with most attempts to make a statement about the absolute truth, the phrase 'there is no free will,' bogs down quickly in contradiction and confusion. Trying to frame up a simplistic slogan or stance runs us into problems. Self survival may construct and dominate our entire experience, but that doesn't mean it is all there is. It may be that we as a self are dominated by what constitutes being a self, and can't "see" outside of this context; and within this domain actions taken in relation to programming and beliefs, assumptions and biological demands, can be said to exhibit no free will. Yet we already make a distinction of free will, therefore it exists within that distinction. If it is a fact that we really have none, this hasn't stopped us from acting as if we do. And this changes the actions we take. So, within the context of a self surviving, having free will does create different perspectives which demand different actions than not having free will.

In the end it doesn't really matter if we have the idea that our actions are not determined by our will, since what can you do with such an idea? You will still make a decision to do one thing or another, to be depressed or take some positive action toward not being depressed. This is how we take action and will continue to take action — no matter what decisions you make based on a new idea or even insight — so the point is rather moot.

Being able to "think for yourself" doesn't mean what people often think it does, which is to have and assert one's own opinions or beliefs. It is being able to have a thought that you currently don't have. This means NOT basing your thinking on what you believe or what you want or are programmed to think. This suggests and demands another possibility: creating thought from nothing, which then means creating thought. If you can think outside of what you are currently drawn to think, what you believe, and how you perceive things presently, then perhaps you can think for yourself. The possibility Balsekar asserts suggests that your thoughts and actions are stuck in stone to your conditioning and DNA. And even if they are, there are still many possibilities existing within that domain that are not what you'd consider stuck or "destined" to be that way. So how does a theory or observation about no free will contribute?

It may be that grasping something about this aspect is like grasping the power and all pervasive nature of self-survival. Such a deep experience helps change one's consciousness about the very nature of your experience, and this serves to create the possibility of becoming free of this dominating domain. This may not be easy or even likely, but it is possible.

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Beating yourself up doesn't free you from anything since it's just more of the same — it is a self-survival manipulation. It's what one does to feel better about failing themselves or others in some way — frequently this is not keeping your word to yourself or another. If you have a value or operate out of the principle that you are basically an honest or good person, and so shouldn't break your promises or hurt yourself or others, then when you violate this value you contradict your own self image and self concept — how you want to view yourself. In order to manage this violation you will manipulate your experience, trying to balance out this inconsistency. Since your values are consistent with being a good person, a "good" person must feel guilty about lying. Therefore, you go through the motions of "beating yourself up." This is to "punish" yourself so that you can then feel better about your violation and being a liar. Once you've done this enough to feel like you've paid for your violation you stop beating yourself up. In this way you feel better about yourself, telling yourself that because you beat yourself up you are still a good person and consistent with your self image. This lets you off the hook, and that's why you just do it again, since you know you can go through the motions to let yourself off the hook rather than be responsible to change your behavior. See the cycle [here](#)?

Of course you can just change your behavior, and this appears as "an act of will." Yet if your "will," ergo "you," are not up to the task — or even if you are, over time the continuing push to behave ineffectively will probably eventually drive you back into the same behavior — then you must change what drives you. Whatever drives you to behave in some way must be understood and eliminated if you want to more naturally act in a different way. This is essentially what we call transformation.

You are responsible for your actions, not your DNA. Don't excuse yourself and your behavior with such nonsense. If you are driven, get to the pain that drives you and look into it. DNA doesn't do that. Those people of whom you speak may have been trying to make a valid point, but it sounds like you end up using it as an excuse. If consciousness is a function of the biological and conditional programming then indeed nothing can change. On the other hand, if biology and conditions are a function of Consciousness then through increasing your own level of consciousness these can be changed. You can stop identifying yourself with these functions or at least identify with a Consciousness that is not any of those things and not bound to them. In this way, you have the possibility and "space" to let go of impulses and drives that don't serve you.

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This is not to say you should merely resist or suppress these forces. Allowing yourself to join with your own drives, and impulses, and forgoing the temptation to judge yourself, helps you be “one” with your own experience and this is the best place to change it. First, you have to let it be the way it is and tell the truth about it. Allowing these drives to “be,” however, doesn’t mean you need to *be them!* Once free of *being* these things, you can then create the possibility of changing what’s there. You can’t change your fundamental experience, however, with a superficial concept. On the other hand, if you can deeply change your perspective and how you perceive yourself and reality, then you have immediately changed your fundamental experience.

As you know, this is all a long and involved story. The truth is actually remarkably simple, but the explanation and communication to the self-mind becomes quite complicated. Hang in there and have courage, we can work through this together and over time, but you have to do your part.

Peter

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Sam Rutherford  
Canberra, Australia  
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Peter,

I’m puzzled about your use of the word “possible” — you seem to suggest that anything conceivable is possible, yes? And somewhere you used it in contrast to “attainable.” Sorry if this is a dumb question but I can imagine I can fly to the moon by flapping my arms — is that possible merely because I can think it? Possible but not attainable? In which case what meaning does “possible” have left in it?

Sam

Sam,

As far as possible goes, yes, you could say if you can conceive of it it is possible. Yet you can't conceive of flapping your arms to get you to the moon. This you see as impossible, and so you would have to put it down as not possible. The "possibility" of it lives in the “impossible” as far as actualizing it. On the other hand, you could conceive the possibility of going to the moon and not have any "method" conceived of as to how to get there. This is possibility. The possibility

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comes first, the method of realizing it is second. Once a method is invented to actualize a possibility it then becomes attainable.

Yet what is also true is that a possibility most often becomes restricted or limited to the invention or method created to actualize it. It is good to remember that the method is created to serve realizing the possibility, and not the other way around. In this way, you can remain open to other methods and inventions that can also realize that possibility and so aren't stuck within the limitations of the one.

Peter

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Justin Sharp  
Essen, Germany  
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Hello Peter,

I just had a small realization. At first it was an intellectual realization, but then upon focusing on it, I then had a small feeling of relief.

Situation: I found myself reacting to what was written in an email. I reacted negatively to what I read. Then, I realized that my reaction to that email was simply my interpretation of the situation. My reaction was not reality. Only my interpreted belief. It was my version (only) of what was true. Not what IS true. I then began to see how much I interpret everything around me, and how it differs from "what is". I then felt inside some form of peace within myself, after having come to that realization. I could then let go of interpreting everything around me physically and mentally.

QUESTION: I don't think this was a moment of enlightenment. Like you said on Friday at the Dharma Talk in Hamburg, "There are no steps." But is 'releasing' the need to react to/interpret a situation, an element to consider? What would you say?

Sincerely,
Justin

Justin,

Of course it's not enlightenment, it's not trying to be. It is, as you say, a realization — noticing something about reality that you've missed, getting past the assumption that your interpretations are the same as what's true. It is a very

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important insight, but won't serve much unless it becomes a more common place occurrence in your experience. This is your next step — make it a more constant experience. Enlightenment isn't the only thing to pursue. A study of mind and experience is also necessary to get free.

Good luck with that.

Peter

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Markus Herberholt  
Köln, Germany

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Peter,

I did ask you within the month-long "Is purpose always created?" To me it seemed you hesitated to answer the question and said something like it would be too complicated. I see in the "domain of power" it is being created, in the domain of consciousness I am not certain if there is a purpose. I wonder, if there is, how come one can loose touch with it. So I ask again: Is purpose always being created? Maybe you can elaborate on what you had in mind at the month long?

Thank you.

Markus

Markus,

Since it is ourselves that interpret the purpose of or for something, it is always created. If we're talking about creating a purpose for our reactions or taking action in relation to something, it is also always created, but it may have been created unconsciously within our self-agenda and so doesn't show up as deliberately created or "consciously" created. If we look deeply into it, however, I suspect we can find the way in which we did create it by getting in touch with the mind activity and forces that were at hand in which we first generated such a determined course of action, reaction, or goal.

Peter

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Luke Glowacki  
Namyslow, Poland

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Hello Peter

I have one question to you. A few days ago, as I was skimming through your newsletter from winter 2012 I came across such a sentence about you: "He is like a cross between a Zen master and a cognitive scientist, with a deep understanding of psychology and philosophy, recognizing both the value and limitations of each field." Can you tell me what these "limitations" are? In what way these fields are limited?

Luke

Luke,

Strange question. To start, inherent in the statement of being a cross between disciplines suggests that there is something beyond common understanding going on, doesn't it? We often think that any given discipline covers a larger scope within its field than it really does. Each has a particular focus and views a certain aspect of the human condition. They also view events from a particular model based on a given set of assumptions and conclusions. Regardless of the value these disciplines may provide, they limit the view and focus.

Zen is concerned with enlightenment. This is a great goal, ultimately the greatest. But it does not address the experience that is occurring prior to such a breakthrough, and post such a breakthrough. It may be that absolute enlightenment will lead to grasping every aspect of reality and the human condition. Yet this is not something remotely achievable by most people, and is also only speculation that such all-encompassing enlightenment will result in complete understanding. In the meantime — and all time *is* the meantime — we fall short of grasping what and why a self really is, what mind, perception, and experience are, why they exist, what are they are doing, and so on. This is a limitation if you want to grasp what the human condition is really all about. Zen practitioners tend to fall into the trap of the "fantasy" of Zen, and a particular form of pursuit. They also tend to limit their investigations to an ideal they seek called "enlightenment." The value and contributions of Zen are unmatched in many ways and aspects. The practice, however, is limited, and the participants often fall short of actually and honestly seeking out the truth rather than the ideal.

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Cognitive science is a study only of objective results using a scientific model and so is limited to the theories and assumptions that found the study. It also presupposes that science can lead to understanding what cognition is all about. This study may be well grounded, but it is limited to the domains of “experience” and biology, and to the presumption of a physical and objective reality.

Psychology primarily relates to mental-emotional problems and their causes. Over time, as a field or study, it has expanded beyond illness, but still remains stuck in the assumption of an unconscious mind and the presumption that the brain and past experience is the only domain in which to look to understand the human condition. Psychoanalysis often bogs down in an endless investigation into one’s past and yet rarely frees the subject from this past influence and formulation. Again, since it is scientifically based, it is restricted to the presumptions of objective reality.

Philosophy tends to end up being all too abstract in it’s application, and is often only a game of mental gymnastics practiced by academia. It’s true that someone like Kant contributed greatly to human thought and transformed the limitations and mistakes of the then current philosophical presumptions. Personally, I believe that he had an enlightenment experience that created the possibility for him to recognize the mind’s domination of perception and so recreate philosophical thought. Such thinking allows us to go way beyond the norm and step outside of social dogma to consider reality in a new and expansive way. Yet philosophy tends to remain mere ideas and as such is limited to the domain of abstraction, failing to be anything that can be taken into action or fundamentally recreate our experience or consciousness.

Each of these pursuits contributes something important and valuable. But as is true with every pursuit it is only an invention and quickly falls into the limitations that are created in the same moment as the invention. Beyond this, their practice also tends to degrade as practitioners fall into the mistake of assuming the invention is “true” and reflects reality. It is not and cannot. But that’s another story for another time.

Hope this helps clarify the matter.

Peter

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Anne Cointrell  
Limoges, France

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Dear Peter,

I was happy to meet you in Aubeterre but frustrated not to finish listening and talking with you about mind matters! I did not attend any of your teaching on the mats since I was cooking in the kitchen during the workshop, but listening to you during dinner time has totally puzzled me!

As I could so quickly tell you, I have followed dharma teachings and practices for nearly 15 years, but I left my community about 7 years ago. Actually, during these years among Tibetan Buddhists, I encountered two bright and joyful experiences. The first one was during laktong meditation (looking directly for the origin of phenomena). Not so easy to explain, moreover in English, but ok, let's try: I suddenly felt free from what I had always thought I was and felt joyful of what just was. I could perfectly understand what was wrong in each of the people around me and did not feel separated from them. The second experience was in the temple, during a 2 weeks practice (puja) including times of fasting.

But the fact is that I could hardly talk about this with the people of my community, since it was obvious to everyone around that none of those kinds of experiences could happen to anyone of us in this life. Since then, day after day, I felt as if my teachers were manipulating me, and overall, I had the impression that they were hiding something very important since it was the very thing I had come there to seek. I had the feeling that staying there longer would not bring me to the truth. And the meaning of religion, spiritual paths, and ideas were all falling apart in my mind. The will to "stop grasping" which I had been hearing during all these years had no power anymore: I thought that the first thing I had to stop grasping was this very will. I left, and was in a blank state for a few months.

Then, and until now, I went on keeping my life commitments (I committed for life on ethic vows and I also committed for life to daily do the short practice of Dordjee Phurba which has been transmitted to me from a dzogchen master when I worked in India). I kept on meditating each day since it is the very place where I have learned with accuracy about my way of acting, behaving, and my conditioned habits and emotions. Thus, since my quest was not finished, I've tried again and again to go back to listen to dharma teachings, but each time I feel bored and I do not understand why after so many years of practice, people still have such a bad self-esteem while admiring from afar "high masters" that are nearly impossible to really meet.

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Now after you came to France I am feeling both puzzled and inspired (again). You do not look like other masters I used to encounter. You are just here, authentic, sitting around the dinner table and talking about things with which I can agree or disagree. I've been thinking since you came that maybe sometimes we prefer admiring people from afar — and thus somehow be sure that we would not find the Truth —rather than accepting that Truth is just here, very close, and that we can be inspired to search for it thanks to a neighbor sitting around the table! And since I have not given up my life quest, it looks to me that it may be worth following your teachings now.

But I have some questions I would like to ask you. Why do you never talk about “spirituality,” or “spiritual life?” I would also know what does “blessing” mean to you, or if you give it any place in your life story? Now I wonder whether “blessing” could have been created — or just used — to subdue people under a spiritual school. But this thing that made me feel connected to an enlightened person and receiving a deep teaching or opening without any intellectual means: does this have anything to do with “blessing?”

I hope you've enjoyed your European Tour.

Thank you for coming,

Anne

Anne,

Quite a story. It sounds like you had a direct experience or two, yet since I am unclear as to what you became conscious of — and you may also be unclear — it's hard to tell if it was an enlightenment or not and of what. This is not very important, however, since the impact was apparent in your life and so even if you were clear as to the nature of the consciousness that unfolded it wouldn't have changed much. It also sounds like you've answered your own questions.

As you can see through your own breakthroughs that the form and beliefs of the practice are not necessary nor are they in themselves true. At best they help focus your attention and point you in a good direction for making breakthroughs. But as you seem to suggest even the people of that community really didn't believe they or others could manage it, and that such “enlightenment” is reserved for special people. Nonsense!

You are likely correct in your assessment that your teachers were manipulating you to serve a belief system that they follow, or perhaps to serve some other ends. And you are probably correct that the idea of being given a “blessing” from some spiritual teacher is a tool used to either control and bind students to the

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teacher or practice, or used as an invitation or excuse for the student to become more conscious in the guise of being given something by an outside authority — something like a placebo effect. It may also be true that something can be grasped or “transmitted” simply by being in the presence of someone who’s more deeply conscious. This isn’t necessarily a function of that person willfully “transmitting” anything, as much as it is that the presence of this consciousness is picked up by you without knowing directly what it is. Such an occasion isn’t about mind or perception and so it can seem mysterious. I think that’s just because people aren’t conscious of any other domain of consciousness than that of the self-mind.

I have talked of spirituality, but not much. It is only a word and since it can readily be misunderstood as to exactly what one is referring to I avoid such terms. Instead, I try to stay with more basic language (although I know many don’t find my use of language all that basic) and work toward the truth, not fantasies or beliefs. This is an important distinction. And as you experienced sitting with me at dinner, conversation with good people is it’s own reward, what we talk about must only be interesting to those conversing. You also could see that when anyone asked me about consciousness or the truth, it takes no time to speak in this way, and with enthusiasm and care, since that is a different conversation serving a particular purpose. There is no need to separate teacher from student, or “normal” life from “spiritual” life. It’s the truth we’re after, and that exists at the table talking about wine as much as it does in the temple meditating. The challenge is that our attention at the table is likely not to be focused on grasping the truth, so if that’s our goal then a contemplative practice may be more appropriate, just no more true.

There is no need to put on airs, since the truth is already the truth and needs no pedestal or protection. My informality with people does sometimes confuse, and sometimes people get the wrong impression about what is a useful relationship to have with me. In the end it doesn’t really matter though, since those who are going to sense there’s something to learn, some greater depth of consciousness available, will sense it best without the “robes and pedestal” which too often just lead to fantasy. (When I wear a robe I do it to keep warm.)

You may also want to read my response to Paul Hinton in the Winter 2012 newsletter, which relates somewhat to your last questions.

I look forward to a deepening relationship and hope I can be of service.

Peter

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Jesse Brumm  
West Linn, Oregon

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Hello Peter,

In re-reading *The Book of Not Knowing*, and in watching the clips of the *Experiencing The Nature of Being* Workshop home study on the Cheng Hsin website, I am understanding your explanation of "Grounded Openness" to mean being open to experiencing something that I am currently unaware of but that's based in reality, that's real and not imagination nor fantasy. In other words, I'm understanding "grounded" to mean that something actually exists that is true, and "openness" to mean allowing myself the freedom to explore the possibility that maybe there is something I'm missing. I'm wondering if I'm headed in the right direction.

One thought I had was "What if I didn't know what something was? Then I wouldn't know if it was alive or dead or anything" and that right there scared me. I was looking at my sock on the floor and I thought "What if I didn't know what it was?" and for a very quick moment I was scared because I didn't know if it was alive or not, because it could be anything. It was as if for an instantaneous moment I had lost my ability to defend myself through knowing-ness. Here, too, I'm wondering if I'm headed in the right direction.

All the best,
Jesse Brumm

Jesse,

Yes, you are headed in the right direction. About not knowing what something (everything) is, another step to take is to grasp why it scares you. As you likely know this is answered in the book, but to get it first hand and to get it experientially is by far the best thing to do. It changes the whole dialogue to something real and something experienced.

Good luck with that.

Peter

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2013

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Darren Kurtzer  
Adelaide, South Australia  
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Hi Peter

I hope this email finds you well. I look forward to seeing you in Sydney in early 2013. What I am interested in is being able to use your fantastic work in *The Book of Not Knowing* to educate people about the true nature of self, consciousness and reality. I do not see the need to reinvent something that is so complete — your book is a masterpiece that carefully unravels the social conditioning of the mind. Its language is clear, direct, and, as you say, truthful.

Through my own experience I have come to know that awareness is simply that — you can be aware you are seeing or you are not aware you are seeing. There is no degree of awareness. Consciousness is like awareness — there are no degrees. Consciousness can only be experienced in the moment of now. Any activity where the mind is replaced with *being* rather than *doing* is an experience of consciousness, like for example, when one loses self and time in creating a masterpiece on canvas or the like.

From my experience anyone can experience awareness and consciousness. Consciousness being freedom from self or mind. Awareness being a state of being aware. I know you speak of awareness in this way but, with consciousness you speak of degrees or levels. For me, I only see people operating from within different states of self-imposed or socially-conditioned imprisonment, maximum security being in the centre (core, cultural, social beliefs, assumptions) and minimum security (surface beliefs, easier to change) on the outer perimeter. It is a rare treat to meet someone who really seeks to discover the prison is an illusion and doesn't keep you safe. Can you say if what I am speaking of is truthful and have I read and understood you correctly? For me your work is a necessary evolution of humankind and the time for it is now.

Finally, Enlightenment for me means knowing the truth of self, consciousness and reality and being free of the illusion of the ego at all times. This is a state of being I can be in at any moment — it is knowing I am all powerful and creative — a divine force. Of course, I am not always in this place, I still wander back to prison as I guess it provides the comfort I know while still getting used to my newfound freedom which excites me yet also terrifies me.

Do you propose having people qualify as teachers in Consciousness work as you have done with the Arts? Is this something that is manifesting now?

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The truth stands alone and it needs no saviours.

Thank you for your great work — it takes courage to speak the truth in a world where it is so rare and often unwelcome.

Zidaz (Darren Kurtzer)

Darren,

It sounds like you are following the book but it's hard to say how much, since the same thoughts and sentences can be referring to radically different realities or experiences. This is why working with me in person is so fruitful. It is much easier to more accurately discern what one is experiencing and what reality they are looking at through live dialogue and intensive work.

There are some aspects, however, that you do not grasp yet. Granted, these are hard to grasp since they don't lie in the domain of perceptive-experience. As you mention, I make distinctions in consciousness that you do not. First of all, consciousness isn't the same as awareness. Awareness is a function of perceiving and recognizing, ergo "being aware of" what is perceived or experienced. When I speak of perceptive-experience I also include being aware of thought, emotion, or any other activity within our internal state. The reason I use the hyphenated word is to try to bypass confusion about my use of the word experience, so that it is clearer I'm speaking of experience as the domain in which everything is known or perceived by us. This is how we know or "experience" what we call reality. It includes objective conditions as well as all conceptual activity and internal states — *everything* we are aware of. This is the domain of awareness, and that's why I speak of consciousness differently.

Although the nature of Consciousness is absolute, and so Consciousness itself is always what it *is as itself*, the degree of consciousness one might have can vary wildly. Being conscious of some aspect of what's true doesn't mean that you are conscious of all of what's true, and having some level of consciousness about self, mind, being, or reality, doesn't mean there isn't a greater depth to be had and so an increased depth of consciousness. This is why I speak of "degrees" of consciousness. Of course, this stands on the present possibility that one can become conscious of absolute reality, or even just conscious of the truth about something of which one might be aware but of which the essence or nature or purpose or whatnot is unknown. Standing on this possibility creates "degrees" of consciousness.

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As you can see I use a capitalized “Consciousness” to indicate the “thing-itself” — which in this case is beyond objectification but not separate from it, and so is paradoxical — and is not an activity. I use the term “consciousness” to indicate the activity or “act” of grasping the truth of something. Although in our common language the use of this word is synonymous with awareness, I’m using it in a different way and in a precise way. If we look at the Latin origins of the word, we see the root *conscire* meaning “be privy to,” we can grasp this as our “consciousness” or “self” being privy to the truth of some aspect of reality.

Consciousness itself isn’t awareness, although awareness is a form of Consciousness, as is cognition, perception, and interpretation. But none of these activities of mind provide insight into the nature of Consciousness, and Consciousness is not at all limited to those forms or functions. Consciousness is the beginning and the end. It is the source of everything and yet not anything nor separate from anything.

From statements like that — which clearly don’t make sense — you can see that what I’m speaking about isn’t a form of experience of which you can be aware. This whole matter isn’t available until one grasps the nature of Consciousness itself, or the true nature of Being. *That* is enlightenment. Although you have a definition of enlightenment that sounds like it works for you, it isn’t actually enlightenment. It is something you made up to describe changes in state and experience.

The mind will always do this, since that’s its job. Grasping reality beyond mind is immensely tricky, and even though much growth and progress can be made within the domain of mind and awareness, and an increasing degree of freedom attained, these can still fall short of real enlightenment. Even several enlightenment experiences, or kenshos, are often not enough to grasp what I’m referring to now. This is why I won’t talk about direct Consciousness in my Dharma Talks in any detail, since it must be misunderstood and so will degrade into a fruitless dialogue. In order to really get it, it seems a great deal of work and personal commitment has to be undertaken, as well as facilitated interaction with someone like me over a significant period time.

I have no plans to create the same type of degree system for consciousness work as I did for the Art. We’ve always had opportunities for people to learn more and more about the consciousness work. It is far more organic though, since it must relate to the depth of consciousness and understanding of the individual. The core program for someone wanting to facilitate the consciousness work is the Consciousness Apprentice Program (next possibility is 2015). Involvement needs

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to be continuous and for quite some time, progressing in understanding and breakthroughs as you go, and also learning about facilitation. This is the path that is available and works. But it takes serious commitment, not just doing a course or a workshop as if to obtain some quick knowledge or tools, but devoting one's life and self to the work.

This year there is also an opportunity to do a Three Month Consciousness Program, which is a very powerful step in the right direction.

Peter

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Romina Naito  
Swansea, Wales

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Hello Mr Ralston;

I am Romina and I came to see you in Kopenhagen this summer. (I am the British Japanese girl that salutes like a Thai person.) Thank you very much for the training week and it is a shame we did not touch hands for some sticky hands, but I hope we can meet again for a session. I apologize I have been meaning to write to you for a while but somehow I have let things slip a bit.

However, I have the perfect reason now. I would like to take a few minutes of your time to ask your opinion about something that happened to me last week and I would like to hear your thoughts about it -- if you don't mind.

It was after an afternoon of training taiji outdoors, and doing the form several times, on my last days of my period, and because I forgot to take my bottle of water with me I was probably a bit dehydrated. When doing standing qigong a huge gigantic blue dragon fly landed on me and stayed on my left thigh for quite a while. Sorry if this sounds random.

After the training session and a bit of a swim, I had a strong feeling on my 3rd eye, like if it was opening up, that lasted the rest of the day and next day. I could always feel my 3rd eye by thinking about it, but this was there all the time and quite strongly. I think I had a slight headache too or the 3rd eye was the headache. There was no realization as such in the mind.

Not knowing me but having met me, what would you say that was and how could I take the training forwards? I hope you don't mind me asking. So the way perhaps to learn from this for next time....is to stay with the feeling in the body and through awareness feel if it is related to me or not? If there is an insight or a change of state that is implied to me?

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The mind can apply meaning to everything. If we let it. But what is the truth if not just our interpretation? At the end of the day don't we create everything including our feelings based on what we choose consciously and subconsciously to believe? Don't we just live our thinking? And if so, how can we raise above that and connect to our consciousness to align to the source? All this flapping in the water just makes me tired and takes me nowhere...

I could write a lot more but I will keep it short and simple for your sake. Please let me know if you want to know anything else and please know I appreciate very much the time you are taking to read this email and your dedication to the arts.

Looking forwards to hearing from you soon.

Kind regards,

Romina Naito

Romina,

Yes, I do remember you. Let me ask you: Did you become conscious of something? The sensation located in one area of your body – what you call the 3rd eye and so a spot in the forehead between your eyes – may or may not relate to anything in the realm of consciousness. You say there was no insight that accompanied this sensation. The question to ask when such things happen is: what am I conscious of, what have I realized, or perhaps, what do I know now that I didn't before? Or what has changed in my perception or perspective of reality or myself that is permanent? If you don't know anything more than you did before, if you aren't conscious in your experience of something true that changes your perspective a little or a lot, then really what difference does it make?

It is only some sensation in the body, and you don't even know what it really is. Sometimes these are interesting or unusual, and they may be fun. They are often a result of focus and concentrated work, and aren't a bad thing. But they shouldn't be clung to, nor rejected. Whatever it is is exactly what it is. That's it. It's a sensation in your forehead.

On the other hand, if it changes something in you, then that might make a difference, even if you still don't know what it is. Such a shift in experience or consciousness occurs naturally and isn't something you'd have to figure out or interpret.

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You seem to suggest that the only avenue we have to reality is via our own beliefs and interpretations, that we are then stuck with having to believe or interpret what everything is. But this isn't the case. You can have insights outside of and independent of whatever you believe. You can also experience something directly that doesn't require interpretation. Certainly, once experienced or made conscious, your mind will interpret it, but this occurs after the fact and, given you're honest with yourself, you have no choice but to interpret it consistent with the insight. You can also become conscious of something directly and this too is prior to anything you do with your mind.

People most often don't access these domains of experience or consciousness, and so it seems like the only possibilities for understanding reality lie within their own beliefs and current experience. So when new sensations or experiences occur which are unusual, we immediately think they must mean something special. Especially when they fit into some belief system or something we've heard — such as the third eye — and so imagine that some significant event may have occurred. But like I said, what occurs is whatever has occurred, you felt a sensation and had some thoughts about it. If you don't have an insight or become conscious of something, then it really isn't any more than that. You can experience all sorts of things with your body and mind, some are quite beneficial, most are just stuff. The proof is in the pudding so to speak.

Keep working on becoming more sensitive and conscious of your body and movement, continue to question, consider, and study. If you don't understand something then you don't understand it. No outside answers or predictions will make a difference, except to make it into something it isn't. You need to experience what's true for yourself, no one else can do that for you. I'm here to help, but validating unusual experiences or claiming that it means something it doesn't, isn't helpful.

Keep up the good work.
Peter

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Tommaso Rossi  
Malta, Malta  
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Peter,

I would like to share with you an experience that I have had for quite some time, but I still don't understand the meaning of it.

In general I tend to have big (bigger than average people, I think) fluctuations of moods, emotions, and of the way I perceive myself. One day I might go to work finding myself in a certain mind state, and go through all the difficulties quite well. Another day I might wake up in a different mind state and the same difficulties throw me out of balance completely.

My fluctuations do not seem to depend on something that really happens in the "objective" reality. At first it seemed that these fluctuations of mood were coming for no reason at all, then paying close attention to the feeling-sensations in my body I noticed that in reality there are some specific bodily sensations that elicit my moods (at least in some cases. I can't say that it's always like this).

One example is a sensation that I feel in my liver area, and when that sensation is present, there are some specific, unpleasant moods associated with it, like anger, or "need to hide myself," or sense of fragility... fear, agitation. Sometimes at the beginning I am not conscious of the bodily sensation, but just of the mood. But sure enough, when I have those specific moods and I start listening to the sensations I find this unpleasant sensation in the liver area. And it feels that my mood in reality is all about that sensation, not about the external situations.

Let's say that we are driven by various programs. The root one is "I must survive", and the others are like ramifications of it. And with the years we become so full of these programs that we start missing something in our life, or we become inefficient, or trapped in crazy patterns, etc.

Now, practices you suggest, like "keep your word," "be honest," "look for what's true," when they are taken on by a person become programs as well, right? Is the only real motivation that a person can have to take them on still the "I must survive?" I guess maybe I'm coming from an idealization a bit that one should be "without programs," and yet I do appreciate and see for myself that these practices make one's life much better.

I wondered if you have some view about this in general and about how this mechanism works, why it is there, and if it's a common mechanism for everybody.

Thanks a lot,
Tommaso

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Tommaso,

Practices such as honesty, keeping your word, and grasping the truth are not programs, they are principles. If they were simply beliefs or dogma held for a long time, then they could become a program, but as principles and practices they are not. They fly in the face of programs and kick ass in relation to beliefs and assumptions, and this is why they are used to get past your agenda and beliefs and programs.

It may be so that one's motivation to take them on is related in some way to self survival, but these principles do real destruction to the false-self, and even to many other levels of self survival, so they can serve in this way. This tendency is also why they are often scary and difficult.

What you describe about your internal state could have various sources. One possibility is physiological, you could have some hormonal imbalance, or you could have some mental dysfunction or suppressed psychological associations, etc. Discerning what is the case takes consciousness on your part. And one of the best ways to diagnose such patterns of mood swings is to work to free yourself from them. If you can simply drop them and stabilize yourself this suggests that they originate from some activity you are doing conceptually, and you should be able to discover what that is. If you run into difficulty in freeing yourself, this should assist in drawing your attention to the source of the difficulty and so better isolate the cause. As you struggle to get free, you should be able to clarify what's really going on and address it properly.

Peter

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Adriaan van Hoogmoed  
Zutphen, Holland  
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Hello Peter,

For far too many years my bottom lines (uncognized core beliefs) have had a big impact on my relationships. I struggle sometimes the same way as I did 10 years ago. When I investigate my bottom lines it seems that in growing up I developed a negative self image with bottom lines such as:

I am not capable to survive as myself.

I need to be accepted by others.

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Although I probably don't know everything that is going on, perhaps some bottom lines are still hidden in my subconscious.

I grew up alone with my mother. My father was an alcoholic. As a kid I was ashamed of both of my parents. I didn't want other children to know they were my parents. I adopted the belief that my parents were weird and couldn't take care of themselves, and so were not capable to raise me. Perhaps I was ashamed of myself and my situation. I felt doomed because with parents like that, I would not be able to survive in the real world. In my early 20's I can remember telling myself, I didn't want to get old. Just enjoy life when I am still young. I just didn't feel I could have a serious life in this fucked up world. I believed this world was not a good place for me. I tried alcohol and drugs but that didn't work for me, it just made me even feel worse.

I am not negative about my life and my parents anymore. I am grateful with being alive. And if negative feelings arise I set out to not feed them. I try to use your work to gradually transform my experience of relationship. Doing this course I feel both it is possible to make a change and that I probably need a long breath because making a big step in transforming my experience of relationship takes a lot of work. And is not easy.

I really wish and feel it is time to let go of my bottom lines. And I know my bottom lines are not about the truth. But they still have a big impact on me relating. They occur automatically. My question is: How can I make a big step to really let them go and so free myself from them?

Greetings,
Adriaan

Adriaan,

The way to make the next step is to step. Just let these core beliefs go. Whenever they come up, drop them immediately and take the time to re-tell your brain they are not true, and experience being free of them. It may take some time before the automatic or unconscious part of your brain stops reflexively dominating your experience when stimulated by particular relational circumstances. Since you're self-mind has used this manipulation for so long it has likely become hard wired. But if you work to repeatedly cast them off and be free now, over time they will come up less frequently and eventually stop. You have to really experience these bottom lines as unnecessary and not what you want to "be" or be doing anymore. When you can do this, letting them go will stick.

Good luck,
Peter

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Tommaso Rossi  
Malta, Malta  
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Peter,

I would like to tell you about a dynamic that I am observing, maybe you can help me to understand better. I will try to explain this dynamic with an example (it is a simplification, because the real thing might be much more complex and multidimensional). I had bulimia for a few years (and the root of it is still in me) it all started because I wanted to control my eating (at the time I wanted to become pure and get free of all addictions, I was seeing some eating habits as addictions too. Also, having just stopped taking drugs, my addictive tendencies had started shifting on food), I grew more and more obsessed with eating "healthy" and perfect. To the point that even a minor failure to "control myself" would upset me greatly.

At one point I was like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, striving all day to be perfect, and then being caught by this huge waves of emotions and impulses that would force me to binge on unhealthy foods until my body was sick.

When I was in "bingeing mode" I had the sensation of "being out of control" like it wasn't me doing those actions. Looking back, it was like I had separated myself from the part of me that wanted to eat some chocolate, as if only the "good" impulses were "me" and the "bad" impulses were "not me, but something that is happening *to* me".

Anyway, here is something that I notice: the more I try to resist the impulse of eating some chocolate, the stronger it grows until eventually it explodes, overpowering me... and it ends up with big consequences (e.g.: a huge binge). Also during this process there is the sensation that I don't want to be present to what is happening, and in fact it's all a blurred and unconscious rush.

On the other side, if (like I see most "normal" people doing) I just accept "mmm, I want some chocolate", I go for it, I enjoy it, then it usually ends there... OK, I ate a bar of chocolate, but I didn't binge myself sick!

So to me this example is a huge question about EFFORT, CONTROL, and DISCIPLINE. From the example it seems that I was putting quite a big effort on controlling and trying to discipline my eating (actually it became the most important thing for me at that time) but still, for a reason that I don't fully understand, I continuously failed. Not only failed, but caused a living hell for myself. And actually destroyed that same health that I wanted to protect!!

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And not only in this example, I have noticed this dynamic in many other situations in which I try to "change" and "discipline" myself or the impulses inside of me. For example, trying to go to Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu classes regularly, or trying to behave perfectly in a relationship... all things that do not come naturally to me.

Obviously I am doing something wrong in the way I put my effort to discipline myself... And at this point I'm thinking that it's because I'm trying to impose the change superficially, while there is stuff deep down of which I'm not all that conscious which is more powerful. (And this is just a thought, still far from experiencing it).

Any reflection that you would like to share with me?

Thank you,

Wishing you a good day and life.

Tommaso

Tommaso,

Sounds like you have a good idea of the problem, but not the way to deal with it, or enough depth of experiential consciousness where you can manage your own mind and impulses. I suspect you already know what I'll say: become conscious of the source of the motivations and impulses that drive you into this behavior. As I've mentioned before, there are at least two possible avenues to get in touch with this source.

The hardest and perhaps the most effective approach begins with not acting on the impulse when it comes up, but instead contemplate it. If you have to lock yourself in a room and bounce off the walls, crying and screaming, then do it, but stay fixated on the feeling that drives you until you get to the bottom of it. What is it doing and why is it there?

You may have to do this more than once. But each time, after you've spent enough time and attention suffering, and are perhaps finally worn down into a wet rag of spilled emotion and mind, even if you haven't yet uncovered the source you will likely be past the domination of the impulse at that time. Since if you are feeling the suffering directly, there is no need for the impulse to arise, it is short circuited. The manipulation — arising as the drive to avoid the suffering by adopting particular behavior which will produce some experience or change of state that promises to subdue or push aside the suffering — is no longer viable. If you are committed to feeling the suffering that the impulse is trying to avoid, the drive loses its power — it has no purpose. So you win in either case. Either you

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become conscious of the source of the drive, and can begin freeing yourself from it, or you are at least freed temporarily from the drive.

In this way, you should eventually be able to get to the bottom of your self-mind and discover what it is that drives this suffering. The source will be conceptual in nature — although it will feel experiential and real — and by being conscious of this conceptual nature you can stop believing it and free yourself of the source and so the drive. This is the only permanent solution, barring an iron willed ability to maintain discipline.

The other avenue begins with working out the dynamics of your mind as you're trying to manage your relationship with these matters, and instead of getting trapped within an ideal that is not going to work, you can create a more realistic relationship to the issue. Make your approach more organic by rethinking how you look at the matter — be it eating, relating, studying, etc. — so that you aren't simply imagining a "perfect" behavior, born solely from your intellect, but a more "healthy" behavior created from a new perspective on what you want — one that allows for ups and downs, unknowns and challenges, pressures as well as benefits. And work out ways of dealing with these drives in a more healthy or acceptable way, instead of trying to make it all or nothing. Within this effort you'll still have to work to become conscious of what drives you, or at least what thinking keeps you ineffectively relating to these issues.

That's a bunch to work with. The first thing would be to study what I've just said a few times and try to get past any misunderstandings and impressions to instead experience what it is I'm talking about experientially and for yourself.

Good luck,
Peter

~~~~~  
Stefan Von Leesen  
Hamburg, Germany  
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Peter,

I remember during the apprenticeship going through a hard phase of depression. I asked you what to do about it. Your answer was surprising: "I hope you enjoy it." Apart from the fact that it gave me a good laugh it left me with some question marks.

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In daily life it seems like this state is sometimes coming in a more or less intense state. If I refer to your response in 2004, I think that you were pointing to the fact that I am creating this state myself. Here is the difficulty: if this is true I can't see it and I also can't see why someone would do it, what purpose would it serve? It seems rather stupid to do so. Right now I feel like it is coming and going without a lot of my participation — I think I am overlooking something.

Thanks for your help

Stefan

Stefan,

If you can't consciously experience that you are indeed creating your depression, and that you are doing it on purpose, then you are likely to suffer quite bit and for awhile. I'm sorry this has to be so for you — or anyone.

If you can't stop it, possibly you can grasp that on some level you want to be depressed (since you are *being* depressed) and shift to enjoying it. By enjoying the depression — or misery, sadness, suffering, or whathaveyou — you will radically change your disposition on the matter to a positive one, without having to change anything else about the depression. Since the purpose of these negative dynamics is to motivate you negatively, by enjoying it (an emotionally positive disposition) you interrupt this activity. It loses it's impetus and so dissipates of its own accord. I know this sounds strange because we hold that such negative experiences must be treated negatively, they must be suffered and resisted. But think about it, who said that this has to be so? Especially in relation to those activities you clearly create yourself, you should be able to either choose to suffer them or to enjoy them.

Let's go a little deeper into this and take a closer look at the dynamics that found depression. The foundation view that I have on this matter is that it's a function of one's outlook about the future. Since your self, your often unrecognized self-agenda, and your background ideals of "destiny" are all created in relationship to the future, your perspective on the future is central to your sense of well being and your assessment of your success or failure in life at any given time.

Let's probe this a little more since most people don't get it, overlooking the inherently important role that concepts of the future play in their present experience. In your experience of yourself and life, you have what you assess as your "current" experience — what's going on, how things are working out in your life, how you are doing, what you perceive and experience presently. When you look more closely, you find that this sense is relating to what has just

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happened and how that fits with what is going to happen. This isn't now, it's past and future, and so is also completely conceptual, but it very much dominates what you consider as your current experience.

For example, if I just lost my job and my cat died and my wife left me, and I'm sitting alone at home, I might feel depressed. Why? Well certainly we'd say because of the loss. But that's not really it. Because of the loss I might feel sad, but not depressed. When I look into the future — which happens automatically by the way, and so seems like it is an experience of the current situation — I see I have no prospect of a job and have no idea how I'm going to stay alive and fear I'll lose a lot more, I imagine my life is going to take a turn that doesn't fit my idea of how I wanted it to turn out. I also see I'm alone and I have no one to relate to since I lost my wife and cat, and fear being lonely for the rest of my days — and once again this doesn't fit with my future image of my “life-in-order-to-be-happy.”

So the loss isn't as much about the past but the future. If I lost my job, but had a better job waiting for me, and I lost my cat, but I had a new cute kitten to play with, and I lost my wife, but I had another woman I was in love with who wanted to be with me, but couldn't heretofore because of my marriage commitments, do you think I would be depressed? Not likely. I may suffer some sadness at losing my cat, wife, and the people I worked with, given I liked them and was attached to them in some way. But my future would look bright and so I wouldn't be depressed.

This is an “ontological” dynamic, not just a psychological one. What that means is the dynamic of depression exists within this interplay of self, agenda, ideals, and future-perspective. The simplest way to say it is: if you are depressed it is because you are mentally viewing a negative future. Create in your mind a positive future for yourself and you won't be depressed.

Since all this obviously goes on in your mind, it is clearly something you are creating. But most people don't have a very good sense of what goes on within their own minds, or why, and so are just at the effect of whatever seems to arise as a condition. This is why it seems like what arises, such as depression, is *imposed* upon you rather than *created* by you. This is not true, and one of the first things you need to do is become conscious of what is true in this case. Granted it can be hard to completely know and control your mind. The self-mind is so much more automatic and stronger than the “you” that you identify with as a willful entity. This is a problem of consciousness and identification, but that's

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another story and I won't go into it now. Suffice it to say that with work you can recognize what's true within your own experience.

I want to give some space for the possibility that one can have physiological chemical or mental challenges that make depression far more likely. I don't think this is your case, but I do want to acknowledge this possibility. Yet it also begs the question: what is stimulating the production of these chemicals, or the warping of the mind? We might find unconscious self-mind activities are at the source of these physiological activities, and so, once again, if we change what we're doing deep in our minds we'll change the outcome. If there is something simply "broken" in the physiology or physical systems of the body, then that may need to be addressed physiologically. Yet for the vast majority of us this is not the case, and no more than creating a positive future will lift any depression.

You may have some trouble clarifying exactly what in your "experience" is relating to a negative future, but if you look into it you should be able to find it. Perhaps you can begin by asking what positive future do you see for yourself in the immediate and long term? If you don't recognize it right away, then perhaps there is something negative there. It may be as clear as a story you tell yourself, or a scenario you imagine being acted out in your life; or it may be more obscure and seem more like a blankness, or vague darkness, or perhaps even an absence that you see before you. Look into it and clarify what it is you imagine as the future. Once you get clear on what you're doing that generates a negative outlook, you can change it.

Answering the question of why someone would do this starts with what has already been said. It is fixed within the dynamic of self-survival — as is everything we experience and do. How this is so I'll let you work out for yourself, or re-read *The Book of Not Knowing* more closely with this question in mind, and you should be able to discern the answer.

Good luck, and cheer up.
Peter

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Paul Breer  
Carbondale, Colorado  
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[Quick Bio: Ph.D. from Harvard, conducted research at the University of Wisconsin, Cornell, and Dartmouth Medical School. Private psychotherapy practice in Hanover and Boston.]

Hello Peter Ralston,

I'm stuck and need your help. I've read *The Book of Not Knowing* twice . . . and parts of it five to ten times. In my 82 years I've probably read at least 1000 books on Buddhism, Zen, And Eastern philosophy . . . but yours is by far the most useful I have come across. I say this as someone who has studied Zen with considerable devotion, including a five-year stint studying with Roshi Kapleau. Despite the energy invested at that time ... I have failed to attain the big enchilada.

Twenty five years ago I published a book, *The Spontaneous Self*, in which I spelled out the psychological implications of giving up the illusion that we cause our own behavior. While the book says little about enlightenment, it represents steps in that direction. Your own book goes beyond the homunculus idea to discuss in detail the meaning of self-as-a-person, its origins and structure, in particular the mistake we make in identifying ourselves with what is only a concept. What I did not consider in my own book but what I now see, thanks to *The Book of Not Knowing*, is that identifying with the conceptual self stands in the way of identifying with the Being that is our true nature. It is in fact the major obstacle to discovering the truth.

Fifteen years ago I got a whiff of Pure Consciousness as I was lying in bed . . . suddenly it all gave way to what I later described to friends as "empty, unbounded space." But the big enchilada . . . nada.

So Peter . . . can you say anything to nudge me over the top? At this point, awakening to my own True Nature and using that discovery to help others is the only thing that really matters to me. For years, enlightenment has been a distant goal for me . . . but I have enjoyed doing other things too much, mainly writing music and books, to give myself over to the kind of effort needed to reach that goal. Now getting there is all that matters.

Thank you. I would be grateful for any response at all.

Paul Breer

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Paul,

You have to get past this addiction to wrapped Mexican food! But seriously, there is nothing that can be said that would do the trick. It does sound like you had some kind of direct experience with the emptiness thing, but there are tons of direct experiences one can have, and many enlightenment experiences. The real missing ingredient with your experience is that you either didn't become conscious of anything, or more likely, don't know what you became conscious of — which sort of defeats the purpose.

The purpose of enlightenment is solely to become conscious of the truth. It is NOT to have an "experience" of some kind, even a special or unusual one. If you don't know what it is that you encountered then it can't be an enlightenment. I've watched people have powerful direct experiences, blowing their minds and presenting to them a very different perceptive-experience. But they did not become *conscious* of anything — they did not now "know" what they are, or what another is, or what life is, or what reality is. So it wasn't an enlightenment experience, and didn't give them much, except a great story to tell their friends.

Don't put having an enlightenment, especially about your own true nature, on a pedestal. As is always the case, the problem is looking in the wrong place. There is no way for your mind (and by extension your experience and perceptions) to grasp what the "right place" is – that's the bitch of it. But the good news is it isn't elsewhere and *is* you! It is NOT an experience of you, or a perception, or even an enchilada. It is so close to you that *close* is too far. (To paraphrase Groucho Marx, "If it were any closer, it would be *behind* you.") Don't look elsewhere. Simply get you — without preconception, fantasy, perception, or any other via or method, or anything else. Everything else is NOT you. Only *you* are you.

I know this doesn't clarify much and I don't mean to be a pain (that simply can't be helped). But don't think of enlightenment as special or unattainable. There is a lot more work to be done after your first few kenshos, so I recommend having several right away. Having heard all the Zen stories and "answers" just doesn't serve, they only get in the way. I recommend truly tossing them out, since whatever your mind imagines is true of those things, I guarantee that you are wrong — that's simply going to be the case, there's no way around it. Nothing you've been told or can imagine or conclude will serve as anything but obstacles. I suggest a real healthy dose of not knowing is appropriate. Deeply don't know what you are, without imagining anything or trying to fill in the blanks. Just

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don't know, and keep doing it until you get that you don't know as a real presence. This may supply the space needed to openly contemplate.

Also you should know that enlightenment won't transform your Self as you probably think. So if you are pursuing it to be different or better or even free, a few enlightenments won't do that. They certainly won't hurt, and can provide a springboard in consciousness that allows you to de-identify with mind and experience, and this allows you to more effectively pursue a transformation of yourself. But it won't do it for you. Only you can do that. Such a change occurs in the world of process, mind, and the human you choose to be. Enlightenment does not occur *as* or *in* process. Therefore you can begin, and probably have, the process of change without any enlightenment. Don't wait for one to do the other.

Hope that helps in some small way.

Peter

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Tzachi Lavy  
Jerusalem, Israel  
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Dear Sensei,

I am reading *The Book of Not Knowing*, I met the phrase For-Itself versus As-Itself many times (for example in page 308) and I can't understand the difference between For-Itself to As-Itself. Please help me to understand.

I watched on the DVD Introduction to Contemplation and I saw that you explain there about a pencil. Now, let's see if I understand. The pencil is As-Itself and what we perceive from it (like the reflection of the light and the feeling when we touch it) is For-Itself. Am I right?

And if so, how can you apply it to the mind? Actually, you say that there is a memory or a thought for example (that you see As itself) that one can interpret differently than it really is. If so, how can we change this perception through contemplation?

Sincerely,
Tzachi

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Tzachi,

I'm afraid it doesn't sound like you fully understand. This is why coming to a workshop is so valuable. Even having read the book, where it is laid out quite clearly, and watching a DVD talking a bit about this matter, still, like so many, an experience of the reality of the matter escapes you. In a workshop such as the ENB this can be cleared up through dialogue and exercises. So much is misunderstood when trying to get any of the things I teach only through "virtual" means. I bring this up since I've been meeting so many people who've read and watched from a distance but who really don't get what I'm communicating, and yet have no idea that this is so since people always think that what they get is what there is to get. You are doing much better, however, since you question whether you get it or not and are asking questions trying to understand.

First, don't confuse consciousness with perception; read 16:47 again more carefully getting that perception is completely different from direct consciousness — if you still don't get it, I can't say it much more clearly. So read each sentence until you get what it's saying, don't assume, read what's there.

I can't do a whole workshop in a newsletter response and that's what it would take, unless you can get it on your own through contemplation. Do you understand that people don't in any way grasp anything "As-Itself?" Without that, you are missing something fundamental in these distinctions. As-Itself may be the "pencil" itself — its true nature — but you don't know what that is, or even *IF* it is. There may be no pencil, since its nature might be nothing at all. So, "as-itself" means what is really and absolutely true, and you don't know what that is.

For-Itself is what you might consider the perception of the object without any reference to you — without any thought of what it is, its function or value, what it means, or what it reminds you of — what you might consider its mere existence before you interpret it for yourself or make sense of it in any way. But you need to grasp that *every perception* that you have of everything is always in relation to your self. This is automatic and inherent in your perceptions — that's what perceptions are *for*. And they're not the same as what's there; they are interpretations that give meaning which is necessary for you to survive — physically, socially, and as the self you call Tzachi. If you eliminate all of these interpretations so that there is no good or bad (which relates it to you), no use or function (also seen in relation to you), no meaning or charge (again these only

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exist in relation to you), then you can, with training, perceive something “for itself.”

This is still a perception but it is not at all normal and nobody does it unless they have been trained to do so. In this kind of perception you perceive something existing, like an object, but it is completely meaningless and useless to you. Because it is useless, your mind won't remain in such a perception, and your first glimpse will likely be brief.

In your mind example, you need to get that you don't know what it is “as-itself,” even if you're talking about a thought or feeling. So there is no changing of perception, since there is no perception to change! Getting something “for-itself” changes how you relate to what's there already. If it is perceived for-itself it has no function or meaning so your relationship to that thought or feeling must be totally different since function and meaning only exist “for-you.” I know English isn't your first language and I'm making precise distinctions that even native speakers don't make. But what I'm referring to, the conscious experience of the matter, is whatever it is and not limited to names or labels, but you need understand that I'm using all of these terms precisely as you try to grasp the experience that I'm talking about.

In order to approach the matter of for-itself or as-itself you need to get what really dominates your whole experience which is perceiving everything “for-me” — this subject constitutes most of the previous chapters in the book. Without having an experience of that, these other distinctions can't be made, since you can't see anything outside of how it relates to you. Remember, this isn't an arrogance on your part it is automatic and programmed into everyone's perceptions. Continue to read the book and contemplate some more, it should become clear with more work!

You should have been able to get this, but it seems to have slipped by you, as so much of the book has slipped by most who read it. This is why I say read it again, and again, and contemplate it. Otherwise it can't be grasped at all. Unless you can actually create a conscious experience of everything I'm communicating in the book, you really can't understand it at all — such increase in consciousness will be new, and you will have new distinctions and experiences that you've never had before (otherwise it will only be how you experience things now, but simply with intellectual add ons). Better yet, come spend seven months with me in the 2015 Consciousness Apprentice Program and we can make real headway.

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I know this is not in the cards for you, which is why I put so much into the reply. I'm just pointing out what it takes to get this stuff. It is not an exercise in intellectual musings, and part-time attention to abstract ideas is not enough to get it. Good luck with your study. I will continue to help as best I can from a distance.

Peter

~~~~~  
Charles Welborn  
Fort Collins, Colorado  
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Hi Peter,

I hope you are doing well.

At one point I came to the conclusion that I do not exist and your response was something like "Oh, there is existence." In *The Book of Not Knowing* in the part titled What is Being? p180-185 it is stated through the use of definitions that Being and Existing are the same thing. But are they really? If the definitions are accepted then the answer is yes because they show the two words to be synonymous, but it seems to me they are not the same. I certainly agree that a rock is being in the sense that it exists but is the rock also being in the same way we are being? Is there not an alternate meaning of the word being where existence is not a synonym? For example we say an idea or belief exists but we do not say they are or have being. In 1:30 of BNK you state "your real being exists prior to concept" but does it really exist at all? I think we can all agree that our bodies exist and are being in the sense of existing but what about the non-body part of each of us? Does that really exist? Or does it only exist in the same way an idea exists. What exactly are you trying to communicate with the words real being? Isn't real being not being at all? Not existing? In the same way consciousness is consciousness but does not exist as consciousness?

Thanks,
Charles

Charles,

This is difficult to understand. The mind can't do it. You are stuck in mind — which is where everyone is stuck so don't feel bad. Having the thought that you or "Being" does not exist is valid. Having a kensho (enlightenment experience) or two and so becoming conscious of this directly, shows it to be true. Yet it is still not enough for what you are asking.

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What I'm about to say isn't very useful because it won't really make sense; and moreover since you are asking about absolutes it flies in the face of my newly adopted policy of not trying to communicate accurately about that domain because it is not only impossible to communicate or understand, it degrades into silly fantasies or ridiculous conclusions on the part of the listener, and so doesn't empower our dialogue. That said, I will try to point out where your consciousness is falling short.

The first thing to notice is that you've divided "is" into two domains, the objective and the non-objective. This is natural since we all do that. It is part of our culture and experience. Yet you are asking about the non-existence of Being. The challenge here is that ultimately non-existence can't be separate from existence since then it exists as the "non." See, that sounds stupid, doesn't it? You are working within an objective mind framework (distinctions being made as if separate objects) so that you create a distinction of Being, or real You, as elsewhere, as not the body, and is in this "other place" that is non-existent. But this separates one thing from another.

The separation you are operating from is based on our already occurring distinction of mind and body. This is why you use the idea that concept is somehow non-existent like Being is; but really what you are saying is that it is immaterial, it is not an object. This is not the same as non-existent. It exists as "immaterial" which is the substance of its existence. All concepts exist as something in particular with specific aspects that are not any other thing, object or concept. The fact that its nature is different from the physical doesn't make your case. You get that mind or concept don't really exist, as in there's nothing there. This is true, but what you're getting is they don't exist *like an object* and have no substance, location, etc., even though it may seem like they do. It is an important "get" but it is not in any way an enlightenment. The sad thing is most people haven't really noticed that the conceptual domain, or mind, is of a different nature than what we perceive as objective reality. It looks like a case of non-existence because it doesn't occur as an object or in space in any way. That being the case, my contribution here is easily lost.

If you are following me so far, consider first that when you consider the "non-existence" of a concept it is not the same as becoming *conscious* of non-existence itself. When you are directly conscious of Being, the nature of non-existence is not immaterial, instead it simply doesn't exist — no thought, feeling, perception, sense, or anything else can occur in relation to what I'm talking about. Even after

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having a direct experience of this, unfortunately it can easily be missed that there is no separation in absolute existence. When you think Being is non-existent and that this is not “existence” — meaning objective reality — you have placed it somewhere. You place it as *not* objective existence. Do you see the problem yet?

You are probably influenced by our cultural-religious background where we hold such notions as the “soul” is our real selves, or we are really a “higher self,” or we are a mind within a body, some other distinction, which places us as an immaterial self as opposed to a physical self. These kinds of distinctions are built into the fabric of our thinking and so determine our basic experience. When you say non-existence, you don’t really mean absolute Nothing. With absolute Nothing, there is really nothing there and is not separate from anything. This can’t be understood with an object-relativity constructed mind — which is how the human mind is constructed. In the mind “nothing” is only the absence of a thing, but real Nothing isn’t the absence of anything. There’s the rub. Do you see it?

Being, or “IS,” isn’t separate from anything. How could it be? It *is* everything. Existence and non-existence are not different. The true nature of existence is the same as the true nature of non-existence. Nothing and Objective Reality are not two, or different. It is impossible to see it this way. But that’s the absolute truth, and that’s why I don’t try to explain it. It’s impossible to get, shy of incredibly deep enlightenment or Consciousness.

So, if you can decipher what I’ve said, there you go. I’m not sure it will serve all that much, but you have some new ideas to toy with and toss into the mix.

Good luck with that, sorry it can’t be easier.

Peter

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Richard Alan  
Southampton, England

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Peter,

What I’m trying to get insight on: Both the experience I got at the Contemplation Intensive at the end of the apprenticeship, and another experience I’ve had since: Both involved the falling away of thought and an expansive “whiteness” overlaying and concurrent to my sense information

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(during the contemplation), and the second the sense information also "fell apart" and there was no ongoing sense of self, just my awareness of this whiteness with the feeling of expansiveness.

Now I know this is something my mind was doing or creating (especially since the during the second experience I was on a psychedelic) and not the actual experience of me, as I am that who was experiencing these things.

However, I couldn't say I was separate from it either. I took great care not to "explain" or solidify the experiences. They were what they were, while they lasted, and while my general way of being was shifted by both events, quite extensively, they are not something that is permanently accessible in my unaltered state.

However, when I do consider these experiences, I wonder if this whiteness is, for lack of a better term, the screen on which my senses, perception and mind are projected when stripped, or if it is a cultural thing: I am "having a profound experience", therefore my mind produces an experience of expansive light because "That's what happens, right?"

Both are interesting conjectures, but conjecture leads nowhere but itself. I haven't boxed it in one extreme of "experience of truth" or "thing my mind is creating" as it's likely something different and/or inclusive of both. At my current understanding, who I am is just the one who experiences these things.

Hence me not mentioning all this before when I asked the question. I didn't want you thinking I was coming from some batshit mental "I've seen god" thing. It was what it was, and both times I felt more clear, aware, and less entangled in thoughts and meanings than before.

So my purpose: To see if you have ever experienced anything similar, and to gain some further insight into the matter.

My Goal: To see if it has functional significance later on in the Art.

What I can say is when engaged in push hands recently, when I access the expansive feeling of who I am, I relax more, get out of my own way, feel the other person far more — like I can feel their occurrence within the expansive space of what I am aware of and generally go with things and be more effective. Others have commented on how I do things is very different since concentrating more on this.

Your input would be greatly appreciated.

Richard

Richard,

As always with this subject there are various possibilities. It is easier to speak of what it isn't. It isn't enlightenment, and it isn't necessary. But what is true can be

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a bit of a muddle. Since we are dealing with a subjective experience, at least in part and perhaps in whole, interpretation is an issue. The reason I say it isn't an enlightenment is simple, you are left trying to interpret what it is you experienced, and you are focused on the perception or experience and so are not conscious of an absolute truth.

The whiteness is unimportant, it is simply a visual phenomenon. Such perceptive phenomena aren't bad, and they tend to indicate a depth of concentration and focus allowing you to be more present and not as stuck in the normal distracting mind chatter and organizing. Yet you can reproduce such perceptive-experiences, like brightening, expansiveness, spatial awareness, increased sensitivity, distortions in visual objects, colored auras, strong sense of presence or now, stillness, a sense of oneness with surroundings, and many more, simply by contemplating and concentrating your attention and mind in certain ways for some time. They don't lead to anything but improved concentration, presence, and focus. They are simply an altered state in your perceptive field.

Of course, as a result of intense mental focus you can also experience such things as mental breakdowns, hallucinations, and the like; and these are a function of the instability of your own mind and not something to pursue. Some people have such cracks in their mental and perceptive-experience and think they've achieved some sort of consciousness. This isn't the case at all. Sometimes even those charged with being a facilitator or guru or guide or some such don't know the difference and acknowledge mental breakdowns as "enlightenment" or progress. This is a big mistake.

The reason both of these shifts of state are confused with attaining some kind of increased consciousness is that they are rare and unusual, and often more exciting than the dreary and mundane experiences that we've engaged most of our lives. They are also usually attained only after intense contemplation or focus and so seem as if the result of that work. As you mentioned, hallucinogenics will also provide some similar shifts on one's perceptive field; yet these also have nothing to do with enlightenment.

The tricky part is that sometimes an increase in consciousness can occur at the same time as such phenomena. It is possible to become directly conscious regardless of what's occurring in the perceptive field. Unfortunately, most people think that enlightenment is going to be found in their perceptive-experience and search for it there. But it is in no way a perceptive experience, and this is impossible for the mind to understand. Having been an apprentice and having

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participated firsthand in intense contemplation with me around, you have more information and feedback about the ins and outs of such work than most people. Your experience of who you are, and that your experience of being has shifted as a result, suggest there is some conscious component at work. It is also evident that you don't really know what that conscious component is and are left trying to interpret phenomena, and as such are looking in the wrong place. So clearly more work and increased consciousness is needed.

It's strange how frequently people have some weird or unusual experience and wonder if it "means" anything. What could it possibly "mean" if you don't know what it means? What good is it anyway? So no, it doesn't mean anything, it's not a breakthrough in consciousness. It is what it is, just a weird or unusual experience.

On the other hand, you find your martial interactions improved when you make a certain shift. There are any number of possibilities here. One is that merely concentrating to make the shift in your awareness puts you in a more present place, less likely to be involved in normal reactions and so your play is improved. This would be more of a function of the fact you aren't doing what you usually do that screws you up. That's where I'd put my money at first glance. Consciousness and effective martial skills are two different things. Whereas altering your state of awareness has nothing to do with enlightenment, it can have a lot to do with your skill level. Remember, martial activity (and everything else) *IS* a function of your perceptive-experience and awareness, so changing this will change your play — for better or worse depending on the change.

People make the mistake of thinking that every practice and philosophy, every breakthrough or insight, every attainment in human growth, are all doing the same thing, all leading to the same place. Nonsense. People are ignorant, and simplistic easy answers to what they don't know (self, life, reality, skill) are embraced to fill the gap of this ignorance. The idea that it's all "one" is misunderstood. Because someone has skill or mastery in some area doesn't mean he or she knows anything but that, and it doesn't mean they are enlightened at all. Martial mastery, even internal martial mastery requires NO enlightenment whatsoever. And enlightenment doesn't make you skillful. Don't confuse one with the other. I am writing a new book to try to clear up some of these fundamental misunderstandings, but it will be a couple years before it's out.

So keep up the work. Hope this provides some sort of useful feedback.
Peter

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Anne Cointrel  
Saint Auvent, France  
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Dear Peter,

I finally find enough time to share with you my deepest gratitude and my last questions about Truth and life.

I attended the last Contemplation Intensive with Kevin Magee in DeGlind (Holland) and the brightness of my experience completely changed my daily life. I directly experienced things which I had gotten a few weeks ago with the support of the Transcending Self eCourse. I could see the impermanency of phenomena, I could feel that I could be anyone, have the thoughts or beliefs of anybody and that it would change nothing to the Truth. I could feel love towards all beings for the very first time.

Since I've been back, everything seems to easily push me towards my life duty. Without asking for anything but offering my life to this Truth quest, my professional activity bounced up. I welcomed one hundred persons at my first lecture on conscious education, I was asked to go on local TV, and overall I've had clarity on what I will now do in this life. My relationship to communication has totally opened up, I can also see unnecessary suffering that opens me to compassion.

Having spent many years living in an Indian community of Buddhist teachings, it is obvious now that there is nowhere else but Cheng Hsin that I could have touched the essence of Truth. Therefore, I wonder why it is said that Buddha is the founder of Buddhism. It seems to me that if Buddha existed, he might have been a guy like you and created a Cheng Hsin school, where it is possible for anyone to personally begin the path, but not a school where it is necessary to believe in anything.

So my first question arises. During the CI, I deeply felt in despair of finding who I am, and struggling to find another way to look at the question. I had taken the habit to "connect" to any enlightened deity or master in these situations. But I had committed in the CI rules not to use any other meditating habits. So I wondered whether I could connect myself to the Cheng Hsin founder, and decided to "connect" myself to you — to your realised Truth. And I had a deep breakthrough. It was the last contemplating walk of the last evening and I met who I was.

What is connection about? Is it just something I create because I have heard that it could be done? What is a "connection" made of? Is it linked to this opening you can get in a CI when it creates a kind of space where you just know

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nothing, judge nothing and finally get into communion? But then why have all these deities been created? Or do you also think that they have really existed? Were they, just at the beginning, a kind of “guide” created by Buddha to help one person in particular to get to the Truth? Or have they been created after Buddha in order to keep power on people? And so why would it be possible that when we open to them, connect to their enlightened dimension, we could receive a “break through”? And is this what is linked to the word “faith” in spirituality? Has faith also been created by humans to give birth to a kind of magic way that requires submitting oneself to anyone or anything? Or is faith linked to a very concrete reality such as being in communion with enlightened people?

Nearly one month after the CI, I can see that Truth changes nothing to what has always been there and what I have been. I’m sometimes trapped back with my self habits, sometimes feeling free from what arises from situations. But I always keep a background feeling of ease, joy, and love. Are you completely free from being trapped with your habits and sufferings, and do deeper steps of enlightenment exist, in which you can live always in the state you reach when you discover what Truth is about?

Then I think I have a last question (for now!). I have learned from Buddhism that the law of “karma” is guiding our lives. That a cause creates a consequence and for instance, if you get into anger, you create suffering consequences for you later. But today, when I see myself or anyone else getting into anger, I just see nothing, nowhere it comes from and no place it goes to, and I wonder how or where this “karma” could really be created? How do you experience it? Is it something that requires a deeper opening to understand?

Peter, at least may you receive my deepest gratitude, that you taught so many people, that you taught Kevin who perfectly guided me and all the Holland CI participants.

Thank you!

Anne

Anne,

I am happy that you had such breakthroughs and that they are present in your life. Remember, however, this is only the beginning. There is much more to become conscious of and since you’ve had some conscious experiences you can appreciate more fully the “value” of such a pursuit, as well as the fact that this is only a beginning. The good news is nothing stands in the way of deeper consciousness except the lack of will to pursue it.

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Sounds like your questions are a lot like they were the last time you asked. Since you ask basically about the same thing, I will share with you my thoughts on the matter, but I want you to know that I'm only speaking from my own experience, not from any ultimate "knowledge" on these matters.

When people try to become directly conscious, they always seek out some way to do it. As a matter of fact, there is no "way." There are no methods that can create or lead you to a direct experience. That's why we call it "direct." But this is another discussion. The point here is that your mind will try to find some method to perform, since that's what a mind does. The only "way" is to become directly conscious.

When you "connect" in your mind with some enlightened person, you are really adopting an idea of this person and then directing your mind to surrender to something or someone regarding grasping the truth of which you are ignorant. This may seem to create an opening since the alternative is to search your mind but when you search your mind you can't find an answer. As long as you keep searching your mind this will always be the case. That doesn't mean you shouldn't search. You must, since you won't get to a place where you "hit the wall" in your deep experience unless you do. What I mean by that is found in the example of you entering despair at not being able to get who you are. This suggests your mind finally admitting it can't get this job done and that you really don't know.

Genuine and deep not-knowing is important here, since it is what allows for genuine openness. When you "connect" to me, what I imagine you are really doing is admitting that you don't know, but want to, and this surrender to what seems to be an "outside" knowingness — one that is not you or your mind, or within your experience — allows you to open up with the intent to know. The crucial element here is the not-knowing. Getting to a place where you really don't know allows you to truly question and contemplate. I suspect that the "connection" aspect is really just not-knowing and openness dressed up to look differently, and in a way your mind can relate to. In itself it's unimportant. Just a way the mind can proceed. It needs to be genuine though otherwise it wouldn't work. That doesn't mean there is any guarantee or that it is a method to pursue; I'm just providing an explanation for what might be the case in such matters.

About the deities, my guess is that they were created after Buddha; just like all the various deities and saints and everything else that people create in religions. Religion represents a failure to grasp the truth directly. Since people can't

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understand absolute consciousness — it's not possible within mind and experience — they invent religions to relate to something they don't understand. This degrades into beliefs and rituals. These may assist people in feeling better about themselves or be comforted by the idea that reality is known in this way and that they are partaking in deeper aspects of it, and are perhaps cared for by some "father" or protector idea of god or deities or what have you. None of this is true, and it is often damaging when taken seriously. But since people are generally ignorant, this is what they can handle.

About your question of a steady state of enlightenment and transcending the self condition. Yes, it is possible. But that being said, consider, if Buddha wanted to jump over a creek, he'd still have to jump; if he tripped he'd fall down and get wet. Does that help take some of the mystery out of it? Buddha still walked and talked and ate . . . and died. How he lived may have changed from before complete enlightenment, but *that* he lived was the same as everyone else. The real difference wasn't in his body or his process of life, it was in his Consciousness. This is impossible to grasp shy of deep enlightenment and even then it usually takes deeper and deeper enlightenment to begin to understand.

I will have more to say on this in my next book, which I can see is wanted and needed. I intend to speak to people who've had an enlightenment or two, as well as to those who have not. There is much confusion on these matters, and one myth is that an enlightenment experience will just clear everything up, but it won't. So I will try to help. The main thing is to keep studying both self and mind and continue to pursue deeper enlightenments until there is nothing left of which you are ignorant (then we call it "complete").

About Karma: karma isn't guiding your life, *you* are. If you are ignorant of what you really are then you are ignorant, but you are still doing it. So you might as well call karma "you." Of course in the world of process, there are consequences — this is the way life works, it's not all that mysterious. If you jump in a river, you'll get wet. See? Karma! You don't need to wait to grasp the consequences, the fact is you are creating the suffering right now! Why focus on later?

Yes, Kevin has worked long and hard studying many aspects of Cheng Hsin. I'm glad you are benefiting from his work. I'm also happy you are on board, there is much you can learn from this work, and I'm sure that's far more exciting to you than simply believing in something.

Peter

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Paul Breer  
Carbondale, Colorado  
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Peter,

Is it possible to shed one's self-identity PRIOR to discovering one's True Nature? Or, as Zen and other Eastern traditions would have it, should we expect the self to drop away only AFTER satori is attained? Satori would certainly make letting go of identification with the separate self easier...but does it have to come first? Perhaps there is a different way of looking at the relationship between self and enlightenment (hinted at in your book). Would it make better sense if we saw the self as representing an obstacle in the way of opening up to one's true identity...an obstacle that if eliminated or minimized would make access to one's True Nature much easier? Is the self like a stone that sits across the path to enlightenment?

In Zen, little is said about that stone other than that it doesn't really exist. That leaves all the work to zazen which must carry the burden to doing an end run around the self rather than attacking it directly. That means years and years of intense meditation...something very few people are ready for. Your book suggests that working on the self, picking it apart, revealing its illusory character, could shorten the path to enlightenment greatly. So back to the question: How far can one go with this process....is it possible to expose the self-identity as an illusion and experience the "incredible lightness of being" that comes with that act without first experiencing a new identity as Undifferentiated Consciousness?

Paul Breer

Paul,

The challenge here is putting the horse before the cart. Trying to imagine or logically figure out what's what in this case is really impossible. The thing to do is to become conscious of what is really going on, what "is" the self, really? What is the absolute truth? Satori is an idea and should be tossed like everything else in favor of whatever is really true. Consider such notions as conventions, and the fantasy that enlightenment will produce instant transformation as a misunderstanding. (I intend to clarify much of this in my new book, but that may take years.)

This being said, having a few enlightenment experiences (kenshos) will not end the self process. The self will continue with or without such consciousness —

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although it will by tendency change and be viewed differently, but not like people think. It is not a case of simply removing the self and then enlightenment (consciousness of the absolute nature of you or reality) will spring up. Nor is it the reverse the case. In Zen, as you mention, the focus is on enlightenment, simply relegating everything else (which is everything) to "illusion." The big mistake here is ignoring the question, *What is this everything else?*

Another way to consider this is: if this experience isn't the absolute truth, what is it and why does it arise or seem to exist? This questioning isn't addressed in the Zen tradition. I think although this was likely not the original intent, it seems to have become an assumption that turned into an unnoticed ignoring of the whole, and that is a mistake (ergo: why I looked into the matter so thoroughly). Enlightenment does help, and ultimately will be necessary for any kind of complete transformation. Yet enlightenment can't be accomplished through a linear or planned process — although life (self survival) is done that way, and so we can't help but approach enlightenment in that way.

Much progress can be made by becoming more and more aware of and then letting go of each aspect of the self identity. Doing this tends to increase consciousness and open up possibilities that can't otherwise be realized. There is no "paint by the numbers" answer or a response that can even be thought, much less communicated. The matter does not lend itself to simplistic solutions. That's not because it is so mystical or unattainable, but because it does not fit within the mechanics necessary to create thought or perception, and that's all we have available within our awareness. I recommend going at the matter from both ends: having recurring and deepening enlightenments, as well as continuing to study and de-identify from the self experience.

Peter

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Robert James Coons  
Toronto, Canada

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Hello Peter,

I have more or less come to the conclusion recently that emotions, or more importantly how we think about emotions, are not important beyond the significance our thinking gives them. Another way to say this is that people often tend to place too much emphasis on the emotional events of their lives.

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A good example of this would be people who purposefully do not feel emotions in order to avoid pain. Another example is people who attempt to feel emotions too strongly in order to confront them (so that they may solve problems associated with fear, anger, pain and the like).

Recently, my observation is that emotions, at least in a practical and non ephemeral sense, tend to be related to the domain of thinking and life skills management. I find that if I am properly hydrated, have consistently good nutrition, sleep well, and approach life as if it were a practice instead of a series of events happening to me, my overall emotional state tends to balance itself. When negative feelings come up, they tend to go away naturally with the knowledge that their basis in reality is related to events which have very little to do with myself directly, but tend to have more to do with external events.

There is much more to this idea, but I want to avoid getting too wordy and get around to the question:

In Cheng Hsin practice, when we put emphasis on feeling states, how do we navigate the rise and fall of emotions? What is the mental function associated with feeling emotions properly, but not letting them become overpowering?

What is the Cheng Hsin take on the importance of emotions and their role in our lives and our practice?

Thank you very much,
Best wishes,
Robert James Coons

James,

There is a lot of confusion regarding emotions. Humans are primarily emotionally driven, just as we are primarily visually oriented as well as social animals. This doesn't mean there aren't other aspects to us, but that the emotional domain is the main way in which we relate and experience everything. What makes something important or insignificant is how we "feel" about it. Although people generally think of emotions as the more dramatic culturally acknowledged feeling-states such as fear, anger, love, and so on, there are an infinite number of feeling-states that are emotionally oriented but aren't talked about as such. The domain of emotional orientation is the whole negatively or positively charged field of judged relationship with everything experienced. Another way to say that is: it is how we "feel" about everything, from petting the cat to the particular color of the sky.

This kind of emotional feeling isn't just sensation, it is a mix of created ingredients that are combined to form a sensation-type reaction to conceptual

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judgments and assessments in relation to yourself and how you should relate to whatever you encounter. This includes emotionally relating to everything you have going on in your own mind as well as to physical circumstance. Emotions act to orient you to whatever is encountered and to motivate you to adopt particular dispositions or behavior. That's their job. This is part of your survival, or managing life.

So the first thing to do is understand emotions better. If you haven't already read *The Book of Not Knowing*, and if you have, reread more carefully Chapter Twenty-three: *The Nature of Emotion*. Then read *Zen Body-Being*, page 54: *The Two Domains of Feeling*. Relative to your questions, these will be useful.

You'll see that we make a distinction between feeling that is a physiological sensation, and emotion which is a charged psychological reaction appearing as a sensation only because the net result is a motivating feeling-impulse. So, to answer your questions, emotions are primarily a social function and relate to social survival. In the martial domain such social concerns and emotional reactions are inappropriate. It is difficult for most people to make this distinction and to eliminate the social aspects within a martial interaction. First, it requires making this distinction within your experience, not just your intellect. Then, it requires being able to interact with another human without reacting emotionally. Few have ever really experienced this domain of mind, since few are ever called to or disciplined enough to do so.

Some people think this means to be "unfeeling" or somehow negative. That is neither true nor appropriate. In Cheng Hsin we use feeling a great deal, it is essential. But this doesn't mean it has anything to do with emotion. These are two different domains and shouldn't be confused.

So to respond to your first question, you shouldn't have to navigate the rise and fall of emotions since they shouldn't rise and fall. But if they do, you have to address what's going on for you with these emotions and that's a job for the Consciousness work. Once again, take a look at *The B of NK* and "bottom line" contemplations in Chapter Twenty-two. But you'll also have to understand the foundation of why people react emotionally and what emotions serve, so you'll need to delve into much more of the book.

Understanding what emotions really are is useful to create a healthy relationship with them. They are mostly an automatic reaction and so lack the intelligence that a consciously created feeling state or response can have. Healthy human

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social interaction will involve emotional responses. This is built into the human condition. Without being conscious of who you are and without experiencing and transcending your self agenda, or at least lightening up on your self identity and not taking it so seriously, I don't think emotions can be much more than reflexive reactions to perceived circumstance. It is possible to create a domain of emotion not bound by programmed and childish self agendas. This takes work and consciousness. A very good beginning to such work is *The Book of Not Knowing*. Participating in interactive Consciousness workshops would help make this material real.

Hope this answers your questions in some way that is helpful.

Peter

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Sam Rutherford  
Canberra, Australia

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Peter,

I have a question: I've been wondering about "doubt".

In the bull series in *Zen Flesh Zen Bones*, on p 176 it says "Delusion is not caused by objectivity; it is the result of subjectivity. Hold the nose-ring tight and do not allow even a doubt." And in the Shissai translation it talks about teaching people how to acquire "forthright convictions," which I understand as something like not doubting.

Yet it seems there can be no questioning without doubt, and there's a quote in NK about there being no freedom of thought without doubt.

I'm inclined to doubt a lot of things, and I've found that it can be (for me, often is) paralyzing. Can you tell me what is the place for doubt? How is it possible to have "convictions" and "not allow even a doubt" and still question?

Sam

Sam,

I think the problem occurs from speaking of doubt in different ways, and so making different distinctions. If one isn't another then we aren't saying the same thing, even though we're using the same word. The context of the communication indicates what distinction is being referred to. One difficulty is that the Asian quotes are translations. Whatever was intended can be easily

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changed by the translator, who has to find some English word equivalent to the communication, and often there is none that really fits the bill. I'm not saying that is the case here, since what is being referred to requires a stretch beyond the norm regardless of language, and has to be read that way. I suspect you can understand what these teachers were trying to convey and who their audience might have been. In that vein, you probably get the spirit of what they recommend. If not, think about it.

Don't confuse not knowing with the disabling activity you call "doubt." They aren't the same. (See *The Book of Not Knowing*) When you say you "doubt yourself" you are probably referring to a mental state of confusion and uncertainty. You may also be referring to a mental activity akin to a neurosis, like being obsessive or insecure or paranoid. These are not something to embrace and they don't free you, they entrap and debilitate.

Not knowing, on the other hand, is either a fact or a principle or a state of mind that acknowledges the lack of consciousness in some matter. It is a fundamental requirement—for a state of openness, and openness is required for learning and questioning. The word "doubt" can be used in this way, but isn't usually. Even the phrase "not knowing" is often seen as a malady or lack. There are simply no affirmative English terms for the open state of wonder that occurs before every new understanding.

So you need to clarify what it is you're really talking about. Not knowing is powerful; self doubt is a limitation and a falsehood.

Peter

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Markus Herberholt  
Köln, Germany

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Peter,

When you say the Greeks invented mind, what do you mean?

Do you speak about mind in that case as something that had not been there even just as an unconscious part, not even as a function of Being? Or do you mean it was a new distinction within their experience?

Thank you.

Markus

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Markus,

If it's not a new distinction, what else is it? What is mind? Does one exist? Were do you find it outside of the context and distinctions of mind? If you don't know what the word and distinction "mind" is referring to, it's difficult to say what might have existed prior to inventing the idea and creating the distinction we call mind. We live within an assumption that everything we experience was an aspect of being human from the beginning of being human, and people before us were just ignorant of these things. But this isn't true at all.

Consider that at some point humans had no language. Without language, there are not only activities that can't be done — such as speaking, symbolizing, writing, recording, counting, and so on — there are perceptions, understandings, beliefs, assumptions, interpretations, distinctions, and so experiences that just cannot take place.

We think of language as simply giving words to known phenomena or observable things. But where is the known or observed phenomena that is "melodious," or "lying", or "philosophy," or "betrayal," or "tardiness," or "accountability," or "clarity," or "art," or "metaphor," or "internal dialogue" (so often confused with "thinking" itself), and so on, without the context and so content of language? These and more cannot be observed without language since they don't exist without language. They weren't an aspect of reality waiting to be labeled; they simply weren't an aspect of reality. This is hard to understand, especially since people make huge assumptions that create their current experience of the world, and so have a hard time experiencing or even thinking about anything outside of or prior to those assumptions.

Even what you might consider the pre-language observable phenomena as existing without language, still it is heavily influenced and altered as an experience by language. Certainly the influence or alteration that has occurred in language did not exist before language and so that experience didn't exist. If this is true of language, why not mind?

Perhaps it will help you to look at a relatively new set of distinctions. Consider all the Freudian concepts we unthinkingly banter about in Western culture. Whether or not one embraces his ideas, after barely a century, it's nearly impossible to think "pre-Freud." To paraphrase the poet W. H. Auden (from as early as 1939!): *To us Freud is no longer a person, but a whole climate of opinion under*

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which we conduct our different lives. Did "unconscious mind" exist for most people before the term was popularized by Freud?

Have you ever seen a mind? It is not something observable and exists only if the distinction of "mind" is made. In other words, you might argue that body exists as something observable and inherent to being human. Yet why say there is mind? Without language, for example, there would be no internal dialogue, no abstract references, no symbolism, no inference, no abstract "thinking," and so on. How much of that is known as content of the mind? Well, all of it. So what is left as knowable and observable activities or objects that is there in this case?

Imagine if you lived in a world where there was no distinction or thought called "mind." You may see people all around, and perhaps even talk to them and interact with them. But where would you see or observe a mind at work? You wouldn't. Without the distinction, there would simply be no experience of mind. So you ask, "but doesn't mind just exist even if we don't make such a distinction?" Okay, *where*? You are postulating that mind is some thing that exists somewhere and awaits our discovery. But that assumption only arises out of the experience in which mind is already an aspect of being human. The distinction of mind has already been made and so you'll unwittingly divide your experience into two distinct categories: objects and mind content. Without the distinction "mind," you wouldn't — you *couldn't* — do that, and nowhere in your experience could you find anything you call mind.

What's more is that this distinction can't be made until a new context is created. This context could itself be called "Mind," yet we need to consider that the context or possibility that it is created isn't what we think of as mind. It is the "space" in which to create the idea and assumption of mind that we know today. It is the possibility, created by humans, that there is something going on in our "being" other than the body (object) and its activities. Consider that, prior to the context of mind, something like perception would be considered a bodily function, such as the eye "seeing" or the ear "hearing;" there is no need for mind here. If a thought arose, it wouldn't be a thought, it would be the body knowing or reacting, and would not only be different from what we might think, but would also go unnoticed, rather like breathing or a burp. Are you starting to get a picture here?

If you're formulating a picture of what I'm talking about, this will be held as a function of mind, without which how could you do it? But that doesn't mean prior to the human invention of the context of mind, this picture could exist, or if

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it could that it would be held as a mind activity. Do you see that you can't say "just making a distinction within their experience" as if it's a mediocre activity, or that there is such a thing as the fact of experience that we only "just" decide to divide up into new distinctions? This core principle of reality and the human condition is very difficult to understand because we have such a hard time grasping anything outside our own fabricated "reality" which has been built, by the way, upon millennia of humankind's conceptual inventions. I doubt, however, that saying more will add much clarity, so I'll leave it at this.

Thanks for asking.
Peter

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Sandra Weidner  
Grand Rapids, MI  
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Dear Mr. Ralston,

I am re-reading *The Book of Not Knowing* (3rd time almost). I let it go for a while so I could see it afresh.

On page 321 there are the guided meditations for letting go of self. This time I will spend some time on them. My present confusion comes with the popular media representation of people who are suffering from partial or total amnesia. I presume these states "freer" from self than people normally experience. But such individuals are not represented as free from anything. They are portrayed as unfortunate and crippled in their behavior.

So, what came up for me on pondering the possibility of not being me or not having any history or relationships was "but then I won't be able to negotiate the world." Me is how I negotiate the world.

I won't know what to do. (!) So I have imagined myself crippled just like the individuals with amnesia. Is there some difference between amnesiacs and what I might experience if I could for a moment really be free of my self?

Sincerely,
Sandra Weidner

Sandra,

There is no relationship between having amnesia and what I'm talking about regarding getting free of the self. When someone has amnesia, as I understand it,

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they have lost nothing really but memory about their lives. Their brain is still programmed and reacts and perceives just as before, and this formation was created from their history, they simply can't remember the history. They may still have many of the skills and understanding that they had before, and you can see these were developed historically and remain, but the pictures of the past are gone. Many recover their memory. But all of this is a function of brain damage or repression, so it's a bit like having your saxophone keys damaged so that you can't play certain notes. It doesn't really change the "instrument" of "you," it changes what you can express, or in this case, what you can recall.

But consider, the "person" and their self identity is still pretty much the same. What is that? *Why* is that? I'm not asking why it's that way in amnesia, but why is it that way at all? I can imagine that the amnesiac might have some shift in disposition if something that has been motivating his actions is not longer remembered. Sort of like encountering what appears as an angry horse, but then finding and removing a bur under his saddle, the horse becomes mellow. The irritation invited the behavior. So depending on what motivates the behavior or reactions, they may be altered when the irritating memory — the bur — is absent.

But really you are putting the cart before the horse. You seem to miss the aspect of the book that negotiating the world and knowing what to do are aspects of self survival. They aren't what's *true*. The thing you need to do is grasp what is true. Who and what are you really? That you can't lose. So if you are worried about losing your "self," contemplate what that self is and see if it's really you or not. If not, no worries — and it turns out that everything you experience and every attachment you have are not you.

Good luck,
Peter

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Tommy Carr  
Cardiff, Wales  
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Hi Peter,

It's been a while since I contacted you. I do Cheng Hsin in Cardiff with Kevin though in truth have been sporadic in my commitment due in part to sciatica and knee pain.

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I wanted to ask for your perspective, or to direct me to some of your work on honesty. I'm having some difficulty in my life with being too honest. I'm very honest with my emotions and let people know how I'm feeling all the time. If I'm in a bad mood people around me know about it. I struggle to just get on with people and freak them out by answering "how are you?" with an honest answer instead of the "fine" that social convention expects.

I'm also honest with my questions and I ideas. I question everything and have a need to understand the reasons and principles behind things. I'm not good at just accepting things as they are and accepting the 'emperor's new clothes' like everyone else. I think that people who don't know me struggle with how my mind works just as I struggle with how theirs work! I'm told recently that I am too rigid in my thinking and wonder if I'm on the autistic spectrum but I'm not sure.

I struggle socially to engage with others and find that what I do is the opposite to what your Art encourages - I resist, I become mentally tense, I fail to engage and commit to the interaction.

So the question is, am I being too honest? Is there something to be said for the kind of manipulation of social interaction that might be seen in T'ui Shou? Should I be leading, joining, blending with others more? I wonder if you have any recommendations for honesty that isn't just a brick wall to others? I wonder if you will say that I am misinterpreting honesty and that the way I am is dishonest in resisting others or that a certain amount of manipulation in social context is not dishonest but vital?

I also wanted to add that I have been doing a course in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and find that everything is mirrored in Cheng Hsin from accepting the knife as you detail in the discovery interview to what you say in TBoNK about fear. It's interesting to me as it feels like everything I need has been in Cheng Hsin all along, though it had been obscured from view. I know that you have little time for Mindfulness or many therapies but I feel it is a shame that more mainstream approaches are unaware of you.

Best regards,

Tommy Carr

Tommy,

Nice to hear from you again.

I'd say that you aren't honest enough, but the one you need to get most honest with is yourself. Simply sharing what emotions and opinions pop into your experience isn't much honesty, since it is a manipulation itself, just not a graceful one. You don't get upset with others "just because," but rather your mind does it

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as a manipulation. Sharing that doesn't make you very honest since this is all quite superficial. If you want to be really honest, you need to get more and more in touch with what's true. You don't really know why you get upset, or what's so about you deep down that is challenged or threatened. Sharing the vulnerability that produces such emotions would be far more honest and in a much deeper way. Perhaps begin examining your tendency to over-inform or manipulate by calling it something less noble than what's implied by the word "honesty."

Getting to the source of what is going on with you deep down allows you to be much more honest, otherwise you are just reacting and sharing the reaction, or believing and sharing the belief. If you are upset with their beliefs or their social manipulations, this suggests that you aren't free and able to stand on your own feet, so to speak. Isn't it more effective to invite people to wonder along with you, or allow yourself to not know and question along with them? Think about that.

The only way to become more honest about yourself is to contemplate what is really true in your experience. Not just what appears in your experience, but why is it there, what purpose does it serve, what is behind it that doesn't at first meet your eye? When you know why you feel the way you do, act the way you do, react the way you do, then you can be honest about it. And let me give you a clue: it is always about *you*, never about them. It is a manipulation of them and in reaction to them, trying to establish something for your self agenda — much of which is unconscious. If you are manipulating, claiming this is just how you feel or what you think, it is still dishonest since it isn't presented for what it is: a manipulation for a purpose. Ignorance shouldn't be used as an excuse.

So in order to become truly honest, you've got work to do. Find out what is behind or beneath your reactions and experiences so that you can represent them with candor. Discover the nature of these activities so you can create a disposition that is true to their nature rather than just being at the effect of what stimulates your reactions.

Being misunderstood is a rather common human event. Get used to it — I am. This doesn't mean you should despise the people who misunderstand. Communication is your responsibility, if it doesn't work, try again. Ask yourself whether you are doing your best to empower them as well as yourself. If not, what can you contribute that would?

Good luck,

Peter

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David Zucker  
Northampton, Mass  
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Hi Peter,

I have a question about contemplation.

I am assuming that it is possible to treat an activity as a subject for contemplation. For example, if it were washing dishes, would the question that one would hold be what is washing dishes? Or, would it be more accurate to simply ask, what is this? I mean, an activity is an activity and takes place in the present moment no matter what that activity is. If I am washing dishes, doing tai chi, making the bed, or sweeping the floor — in the moment it's taking place, it is just "this." So instead of naming the activity in my holding the question can I just told a question "What is this?" As a matter of fact, doesn't everything boil down to, "What is this," even if I am contemplating a chair, a seashell, Who-am-I, or What-is-existence? Why is it useful to name the activity or the object of contemplation?

Do you have any advice on this aspect of contemplation? Or is it too complicated to contemplate an activity instead of a thing?

Thanks,
David

David,

There are many ways to ask a question. You can “contemplate” anything, asking what it is. But we should make a distinction between contemplation as a function of seeking the absolute truth of something, the real nature or essence of it, and contemplation just to find out what is true as in “occurring,” as well as what is “factual” about something. This may sound confusing at first, but the difference is between becoming directly conscious of the true nature of something versus discovering how an activity actually works, or the principles behind a phenomenon, or the elements or components that compose some experience, or the purpose for the existence of a pursuit or a reaction or an activity. The latter questions are not contemplating what is ultimately true but what is relatively occurring.

This second form of contemplation also applies to the immense amount of important work to discover what is “true” about you as a person, the emotional

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makeup and unconscious nature, the unconscious framework that creates the personal experience you identify as you. All these aspects are wed to and “lived” as if they are so, as if they are occurring, but not ultimately or absolutely true. In other words, they don’t exist on their own and they aren’t the very nature of what does exist. This is not something to be believed, it must be grasped personally. Hearing about it isn’t enough. I’m just indicating the difference.

The point is that contemplation can be used for everything, but the effort doesn’t always have the same goal. Yet the goal is always in the direction of the truth, whether only a stepping stone or the absolute.

As for asking “What is this?” I wouldn’t recommend such a question until you are asking it of all existence, since this is a general and open question. Although the question may be the same, when asking about a specific, you should use the specific name to keep your focus on that subject. Otherwise, the door is left open for the mind to wander and enter areas of distraction and fruitless tangents.

Of course, when it comes to a question such as “What is washing dishes?” it is likely that you don’t really care, and that isn’t your real question. In many cases you need to ask what your question really is — what exactly is it that you want to know? After this work of clarifying the question — finding what it is you are actually asking, not just the words or thoughts that might have come to mind when first considering it — then you can contemplate it. Best to keep it specific, and to understand whether your goal is to grasp the absolute nature, or merely a relative “truth.”

Good luck,
Peter

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Stewart Breslin  
Pacifica, California  
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Hello Peter,

I have been working with Chapter 24 of BNK for a while now and I can’t find a way to understand two statements you made in paragraphs 24:28 and 24:29.

In 24:28 you say “The mere “is-ness” of anything makes it a distinction.”
In 24:29 you say “The nature of distinction, and so the foundation of our

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experience, becomes even more mysterious when we realize that distinction is something we create." Taking these two statements together you seem to be saying that we create the "is-ness" of things. If the is-ness of a thing makes it a distinction and we create distinction then, logically, we create the is-ness of the thing. I understand "is-ness" to mean being-ness, that a thing is or has being. Working with these statements my body has is-ness and so is a distinction, and since distinction is something I create then, by extension, by creating the distinction "body" I have created its being. It is very difficult for me to see how this could be so.

That a thing "is" makes it a distinction, I get. The distinction of the thing and its being are the same thing. However, I have no access to any experience, sense, or intuition of having created my body by creating the distinction "my body", which seems to be what's being suggested by these two statements. I get that I created all the distinctions that constitute what the experience of my body is for me but not that I created the distinction that is my body for and as itself.

If I consider an object like a mountain I can see that I have created many distinctions that make the mountain that particular mountain in my experience. But did I create the mountain's being in any real way except for how it appears in my experience? Although there is no way I can prove it I'm pretty sure the mountain was there before it entered my awareness. And although each distinction is of an aspect or feature of the mountain that IS, no distinction, or even all possible mountain distinctions I make are or can be the mountain for itself. The mountain isn't its shape, its mass, its geographic location, the snow on it, the color of its rocks, its spatial relationship to other mountains, or any other distinction that can be created. It is itself. How did my creation of these distinctions about this mountain, or even all mountains, create the is-ness, the beingness, of the mountain?

I'm sure I'm missing something here. I hope you can help me find it.

Thank you for your help and best wishes,

Stewart

Stewart,

This will be a bit difficult, since the only way you can understand what I'm about to say requires making some new distinctions, as well as becoming directly conscious of the true nature of you and reality. I think I can say a few things that might help point you in a direction, but the subject matter is not going to be useful to most people and could only be seen as "philosophy" or some such. Also, I have to lay things out one at a time, but they don't make sense until grasped altogether.

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That being said, let's start with your body. You said you can grasp that everything you experience of your body is a distinction that you make. This is correct, even though we're likely to only get that intellectually rather than as real. But you also don't experience creating the body itself, the is-ness of or existence of the body. First, however, let's acknowledge that you just did. You have made a distinction of the body-for-itself, or the body-independent-of-your-mind/experience. That is the distinction you are referring to when you say you don't create your body. Isn't it? Who made that distinction?

Still, you'll have the conviction that your body existed before you did, or before you realized any ability to perceive or "make distinctions." So how could "you" make the distinction of the is-ness of the body? There is a bigger problem here which stems from the limitations inherent in the distinction you call "you," but we'll get to that in a bit. Before that, consider where does this "is-ness" of anything exist? Only in your experience. No matter how much you may insist that it is outside of your experience, that very insistence and your experience that objective reality exists independent from your experience is something that exists only in your experience.

Now I can imagine that many will be hearing this as abstract metaphysics or just plain silly; and their concern is valid. But I'm not talking about what they think I'm talking about. The need for the context and distinction of an objective reality, something you can't fool with, is very real and needed by self and life. It's the foundation in which you get to exist. So you certainly don't want to monkey with it. In other words, you don't want it to be in your hands or a function of your mind since you know you're ignorant and have no idea how to "create reality." But before we go on to the next point, can you see that this is still a distinction you make? It may be etched in stone, but it *is* you that makes the distinction. The is-ness of which you speak is *in your experience* (ta da!) It's not elsewhere for you, even the idea that there is an elsewhere. The whole domain of "not-you" is a distinction you make, even the distinction that it is independent of you.

You say that "as-itself" isn't something you create. But let me ask you, what experience do you have of as-itself? That's right. Absolutely nothing! You don't have any experience of as-itself except as an idea that there is such a thing and you don't know what it is — but in the back of your mind, or forefront, you'll "live" that the as-itself is really the same as the for-me or for-itself experience that you have. Correct? Perhaps for you it seems as if somehow the experience of as-

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itself is just behind the experience you can have of for-itself, like a foundation of what you experience or perceive.

This is incorrect. What you actually have is nothing, you have no experience of as-itself. So why insist that as-self, or simply the absolute truth, is of the same nature as your experience of its is-ness? The distinction you make of is-ness is the distinction you make. Get it?

I know this is hard to tackle. True nevertheless.

Now regarding my earlier point: There are a lot of problems tackling this kind of thing, mainly generated by the fact that you identify "you" in a certain way. In other words, when you talk about "you creating this" and "you creating that," there's a *problem of identity*. What you call you — primarily your identified self and cognized mind — is NOT the creator of all this. It is itself a distinction. So, if you don't know what *you* are, or what the absolute truth is in this matter, you need to give some space when talking about what "you" create. Whatever is True, does create or *is* everything you speak about. Not being in touch with that reduces the conversation to only our minds, and this is not what I'm saying here or was saying in NK. Yet as we can see here, it works out no matter which way you slice it.

I know this will be a challenge, but absolutes always are. Hope this helps.
Peter

2014

~~~~~  
Glen Smith  
Auckland, New Zealand  
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Hi Peter,

For a few years I have periodically wondered whether when you fought you fought from a place of self-mind or Consciousness. Or, to be more accurate I have always assumed that part of Cheng Hsin martial was to learn to act from not-self, to learn to surrender to what arises in each moment, to be conscious of and integral with what life demands in each moment. If this was the case there

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would be no expectation of winning. Winning might happen or it might not, or you might sit down and have a cup of tea if that was the most appropriate action.

Over the past couple of years I have noticed an increasing aversion to trump anyone. I find no glory or sense of achievement in succeeding in a conflict or confrontation. To me if I am a winner and someone else feels like they have lost then there is no winner. I am not talking about a competition such as shooting pool, but rather when there are conflicting values or desires between me and another. Unless there is a mutually agreeable outcome I feel like it is not an outcome of any substance. If there is a victor then there is no harmony.

So, could you talk a little about your disposition towards the task of fighting in those moments please. How did you relate to the opponent and the task? Were you seeking to triumph? It must have been tricky to fight enlightened while knowing that desiring to win would be self-mind. Or maybe your purpose was not winning but for harmony, surrender, Oneness, Love, and winning was simply concomitant. Perhaps you sought to win but refrained from, or felt angst at, hurting another.

I am interested in what you have to say about this seeming paradox.

Regards,
Glenn

Glen,

There are many assumptions and some confusion in your questions, so it will take a bit of unfolding. First, you're asking about more than one thing. This is common. People try to imagine that the "world" works in a simplistic manner that fits into their desired belief system or philosophical sound bite. This isn't the case.

When you make a distinction between self-mind and Consciousness you need to know you're doing that, and that ultimately it will be a false distinction. I know that's a weird thing to say. But what I mean is, lacking direct consciousness in the matter (and even then it is often still misunderstood) when you simplistically hold that these two are as if two separate "objects" or two different states of mind you aren't talking about either self or Consciousness. You're mostly referring to ideals about what you want these things to be about, and this will be something you can think and adopt in some fashion.

Consciousness, as an absolute, cannot be thought or adopted. It already "is" and yet remains unknown for what it is. Everything you're speaking about is self-mind.

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You've simply made a distinction in the world of mind of two different states. One state is restricted to a self agenda, focused primarily on immediate self interests and concerns. The other has a different focus. Your alternative mind state seems to postulate that there is a "true" state that embraces oneness, love, and selfless qualities, and this of course is "good." There may be such a state, but it isn't the Truth and it isn't outside of self survival.

You would likely take on such an uncommon shift for a different set of self interests, usually more long term and more universally inclusive. In order to do that you need to operate out of principles that aren't related solely to your self agenda, and sometimes run counter to your immediate self interests or concerns. Such principles as honesty, or universal love, or any others that demand inclusive concerns — rather than merely self centered concerns — orient your experience toward serving a different "master" than your exclusive self sense.

But we already have such notions. They live within our cultural ideals, or the ideals of various belief systems. These are not what you think they are. They are not a transcendence of self, but a different, and perhaps rare, version of self that puts self into a more inclusive or more "selfless" domain and state. This may be rare as a real occurrence but does exist within the mind as ideals or fantasies.

One thing to look at that may have contributed to and influenced your scenario is the idea of the master "warrior." We hear of valiant knights or "Zen" warriors of the past that learned to make unusual shifts of mind and so perform better in life and death situations than others. This discipline or shift of perspective moves away from self survival in very significant ways, but not how you think.

One of the primary shifts made to accomplish this state involved getting over social self survival and eliminating it from the mind and process during battle. Another shift, of course, was removing fear regarding physical death. This is indeed very different and appears as if transcending self survival but it did not. It transcends what the vast majority of people are caught in and persisting as, and so would have changed how these warriors thought of themselves and their relation to others. Yet they still had the goal of persisting, if at all possible, and of accomplishing a particular outcome, or *winning*. And they likely had no concern for love or compassion or other social feel-good (or bad) elements. They killed people.

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This shift of state, as well as a permanent change in how they related to “life” and self, was essential and significant. Others would see them as an extremely disciplined person that seems not to be motivated by self comfort, nor has concern for the avoidance of danger or death, and so has apparently transcended self survival. Yet this seems so extraordinary only because others aren’t willing to sacrifice those aspects they’ve become attached to and confused with, such as these warriors did.

We need to take care not to paint self survival with the very thin brush almost everyone who hears about it does. It isn’t thin at all. It is the broadest of brushes. Although a very unusual form of survival these warriors still lived within this principle. They simply and dramatically changed “what” they were surviving and how they were doing it. There may not have been much of the “petty” concerns that dominate most people’s attention and efforts, or the same needs being acted out in a social setting, and certainly there wasn’t an attachment to life and death. This does suggest a transcendence from a great deal of the self attachments and confusions that the vast majority of people assume to be “themselves.” But hard as it may be to fathom, it isn’t a transcendence of self survival altogether.

The reason people paint this issue with a thin brush is to easily side step the depths of what I’m talking about. This is done by dividing the self experience into a superficial or “selfish,” perhaps ego-centric, self idea, often attributing to it ineffective behavior and less than desirable traits, from a “you” that is the one you want to be. In this way you get to keep you pretty much as you are, but adopt a disposition that there’s a “self” separate from you that is somehow bad and to be shunned or transcended. The problem here is the “you” that you consider to be more real or “Being,” isn’t. It is actually self! Self includes all of it, everything that you identify with as you. See how that works? It isn’t the “good” you versus the “bad” you.

I suspect like most, after hearing about this subject, you’ve divided your experience into *self* and *real you*, and perhaps call the distinction of real you “consciousness” that is free from self, or some such. Understandable, but wrong. These are both you. And everything you speak about is self. As I’ve said there are a vast array of possibilities within the domain of self survival. As a matter of fact everything you think, see, feel, imagine, or perceive in any way is all in the domain of self-survival. It is the domain of “life” and the “world” in which you live. Do you want to get out of that? Probably not.

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This is all very difficult for people to grasp, that's why I'm taking the opportunity to go into it a bit. People want to make self and self survival a simplistic matter, and it isn't. You might say it is the most complex matter there is. Simple, but infinitely complex. There is a vast difference between what you think of as your self, and being free from any self. For example, unlike the "warriors" your concerns are totally social in nature; your shift isn't away from self or survival but from an exclusive self to a more community self. You desire your social relationships to have a different outcome, one that produces harmony or partnership.

You are playing with alternatives to your self survival. Not a bad thing to do. It really helps get some space from particular self attachments, and to become more conscious about what you're doing as a self. But there's a huge gap when it comes to understanding what the self principle is really all about. The chances are high that you really have no interest in being free from self — most people who think they do, actually don't — what you want is a *better* self, a more ideal self, perhaps a self without so much struggle and pain. But you don't want to get rid of "you!"

Asking me about my experience in something like fighting is trying to get information that your mind can use to confirm or alter your concepts about how you think all this should work. Doesn't work that way. There is no way to productively communicate what I experience in such matters since there's too large a gap between what's so for me and what's so for you. This isn't a put down, it's just the challenge that faces us. Your mind would relate to anything I said within a context and perspective that would make it something it's not.

To master fighting of course it is essential to be in the moment, and without concern for winning and losing (the way most people think of it), and free from social survival. In other words, interacting without concern for being humiliated, lose, embarrassment, ambition, greed, glory, fear, worry, internal dialogue, self image, esteem, and everything else that normally plague people's interactions. Those and more are all born from social concerns. In fighting such concerns are irrelevant and very much get in the way.

So one must learn to be "empty" in a sense, completely attentive, acting faster than one can think, and so on. But this is not free of self or survival. It is, as I've said, a shift in state, into a more powerful interactive mode necessary for mastering an immediate psycho-physical interaction such as is fighting. There are also principles to such effective interaction that seem paradoxical to the

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nature of conflict, such as joining or following, non-judgmental acceptance, and so on. But these have to do with being effective, not seeking a social outcome such as harmony or love. Beyond this we have no common ground in which to communicate successfully.

But an area of confusion we *can* tackle is the fact that all games are competitive. It's the nature of games. To interact within a game — in which I include fighting, war, business, as well as monopoly and chess — means there is competition. How you compete may be up for grabs, but that you relate to winning in some form is not. If you're goal is not to win, in whatever form that takes, then you won't be playing the game. Winning here simply means pursuing an outcome consistent with your purpose for interacting. For all games you must do this otherwise there is no game. You don't have to do it the way most people do, but it is that way nevertheless.

Your concern for “trumping” others isn't about competition, it is about relationship. You confuse competition with all relating in some way, as do most people without knowing it. Given self interests and fears, we end up “competing” with others on all sorts of levels, even when it goes unnoticed. This is a natural tendency of self survival and specifically social self survival. Yet there are other possibilities.

One possibility that we can and do engage is partnership, and what you're speaking about is likely in that domain of relating. In such relating it is inappropriate to trump someone or to win at their expense, since it's not about “sides” or merely self interest but the collective interest of all involved. This doesn't mean there won't be different views and goals but that these are dealt with collectively to find a way that works for everyone. Without some outcome that works for all involved it isn't a partnership, or perhaps the envelope of “partner-self” has altered to exclude someone or some view, but then they are excluded from the community, group, or partnership.

Including others within your self concern is a function of grasping that isolating yourself and limiting your agenda to strictly selfish concerns isn't healthy or ultimately effective. Especially when it comes to living in a world that is empowering, enlivening, connected, and satisfying. This open inclusion, however, is also often misunderstood and some confuse it with neediness, or worrying about other's views, or trying to “please” everyone, etc., which are just concerns found within one's own self image and self agenda.

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Yet even if it isn't made into something it's not, inclusion is still in one's self interest and an aspect of survival. It's just more intelligent and effective for community life than limiting yourself to separate self concerns. This direction could be called becoming more mature. If you grasp that the world in which you live isn't only internal or merely about your personal desires but includes the world around you, then it becomes more obvious that having concern for the world around you is in your self interest.

Anyway, I've gone on way too long so will stop here. Thank you for the question. I hope I've added to your consideration.

Peter

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Stewart Breslin  
Pacifica, CA  
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Hi Peter,

Many thanks for your response to my last question. It really helped me clear up a lot of things but, as is usually the case, the contemplation of distinction has created more questions.

I want to express both my admiration and gratitude for what you have achieved in this area. I profoundly appreciate the depth of your understanding and the extreme rarity of it the more deeply I go into it myself. Without the guidance your work provides it is unlikely that any real breakthrough in consciousness would be possible for me and for that I am grateful.

The first question is regarding something you said in your response. You said relative to the experience of "as-itself" that I would "live that the as-itself is really the same as the for-me or for-itself experience..." and that would be "like a foundation to what you experience or perceive." Then you go on to say that this would be incorrect. In BNK 24:32 you say relative to "nothing" as the nature of distinction that it cannot be grasped because, "Grasping would be making a distinction, which is not the same as distinction itself."

If my interpretation is correct that would indicate to me that the object for-itself is a distinction that is underlying the distinctions for-me and for-itself. I also interpret the statement in 24:28 that the "mere is-ness of anything makes it a distinction" in this same way – that the underlying being that is, is objects for-themselves, and without that ground no distinctions of for-itself or for-me would be possible.

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So, I'm sure that I am still not understanding this correctly and I'm guessing that this is still because of a belief in an underlying "objective reality" but I still can't see it as you have expressed it. The nub of the problem for me comes down to this, if nothing exists outside of my experience of it then nothing exists at all, nothing is at all. It's a complete dream and fabrication with no reality. However, I can accept that for me what is, is what I experience and in that sense it is a dream and a fabrication, but that it is based on an unknown and unknowable fundamental reality that is appearing as me and my experience. I hope you can help me make sense of this.

The second question has to do with the nature of awareness. In BNK 11:4 you say "We might begin with the recognition that what we are aware of is not the same as the awareness itself." From one perspective I don't have a problem with that statement. But what has come up inescapably for me is that what is also true is that awareness itself cannot be distinguished from what is appearing in awareness. Awareness is experience, experience is awareness.

Without awareness there is no experience and without objects there is no awareness. This is evident in the experience of being awakened from dreamless sleep by some sensory input like a noise. Before the arising of that experience there was no distinction of awareness, or even of being or a self. The awareness of the noise and the experience of the noise are the same thing. I can agree that what we are aware of is not the same as awareness itself because what is appearing in awareness is not itself aware. But I can also see that awareness is a single, undivided event, that awareness is the experience, because it is who I am, it is what is appearing as me. So the question is, are both things true?

Thanks again for your invaluable assistance,
Stewart

Stewart,

We run the risk of going into too much abstraction and so turning the dialogue into an intellectual or philosophical exercise that won't hit home as intended. I know this isn't your goal, but the weird sounding references that we engage to speak about this matter lend themselves too easily to such an outcome. So care needs to be taken.

You are probably right in the first case that your confusion stems from an insistence on a context of objective reality. But the real problem comes from holding your experience and objective reality as two separate activities. This is understandable since our world culture assumes this to be so, and for good reason.

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When you consider your personal experience it is often “internal state” activities or “mind” that you identify as your “experience.” The other possibility is awareness relating to objects, but here too the awareness itself is related to or assigned to yourself as if located internally. Objective reality is not assigned to your internal state or your “experience,” even though it is only found in your experience.

Once again we revisit my assertion that there is a problem of identity. Some tricky and difficult to understand aspects found our confusion about exactly what it is we *are*. You speak of awareness as the founding “evidence” of you and existence. Yet awareness is not Consciousness. I know that is hard to grasp because culturally we consider these to be about the same thing. I make an important distinction by saying they are not. If we then turn this distinction into two separate things we will also misunderstand, but at least we have some room to consider a nature to Consciousness that is not restricted to awareness or experience. Since you identify with awareness or experience you fall into the trap of “identity” once again. Especially since you assume that you are somehow an “object” at the source of this awareness. If it turns out that you’re not, what does this suggest?

Of course, if you don’t identify yourself as the source of awareness — or as some other identified “object,” whether having form and substance, or not — you would be at a loss to “locate” yourself within your experience, or relate to anything found in reference to your experience, and this is the rub. Your mind won’t consider this possibility, and perhaps more importantly *can’t* conceive of it. That’s what I meant by being open to the possibility that the nature of “as-itself” may be different than everything *experienced*.

Unfortunately, I don’t think going into this more deeply is useful right now, since the obvious implication of what I said is that these two — objective reality and Consciousness — are not necessarily different. The paradox involved won’t allow us to grasp this, however, and so any further conversation will probably degrade into sophistry.

On the other hand, what I think you missed about distinction, and perhaps awareness, is that the thrust needs to be to become conscious of their true nature. This isn’t something that allows for much discussion because whatever that nature is must be grasped directly. If it isn’t what you think it is, perhaps it is neither experience nor object, awareness nor what you are aware of. This is why I

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use the word Consciousness, but this doesn't provide much without a direct consciousness of what that is. So I'm afraid anything more I could add won't really help.

Good luck.

Peter

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Mark Russell

Paradise, CA

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Peter,

May I summarize: "being is instantaneous, immediate & out of nothing" without error as you see it? My current problem then is the continuity of being, but you say continuity is a self problem, eh?

Thanks for *The Book of Not Knowing* and all the courses I took in our past.

Namaste,

Love,

Mark Russell

Mark,

When you say "instantaneous, immediate, and out of nothing" you are still holding Being as an action, not as "is." So, no it is fundamentally an error. You're confusing "being," like an action or process, with "Being" or what is — ultimate existence. Your view on continuity also is a confusion, since you see Being as a function of time, and not the absolute.

But thanks for playing!

Peter

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Paul Hinton

Windsor, England

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Hi Peter,

Thanks very much for your help at the UK camp in July. I really enjoyed it, even more than last year, and that's quite an achievement.

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I've just been reading the summer newsletter – in particular the letter from Anne Cointrel, and your response. It reminded me of a question that I was going to ask at the second satsang in Malvern, but we ran out of time. It's easy to get the impression from a superficial appreciation of Buddhism, that there is a linkage between enlightenment and compassion, such that the more enlightened one becomes, the more compassionate one becomes. Is this correct or is it myth. Are all enlightenment experiences compassionate in nature?

If at all, I've had one very minor enlightenment experience in my life, after a 30 minute chi gung session, followed by a 30 minute standing meditation, and it did have a compassionate component. I'm curious because compassion isn't a word that people would normally use when describing me, but do I have the potential to be a much more compassionate individual than I am currently?

I'd be interested in your thoughts.

Best regards.

Paul

Paul,

Well, let's look at the word first.

Com·pas·sion·ate:

Showing feelings of sympathy for the suffering of others, often with a desire to help.

(The etymology of "compassion" in Latin means "co-suffering.")

Although these feelings relate to the pain of empathizing with human suffering and this is independent from enlightenment itself, having a human identity I don't see a way around it. But we should also consider that the kind of compassion involved may be of a different nature and motive from what people usually consider compassion.

The direction involved in becoming more conscious of the true nature of things, helps free one from an exclusive perspective based solely on self, and so a more inclusive identity can emerge. This tends to expand one's concerns to include others. Also, the desire to share may just be a human impulse. So assisting others in freeing themselves from unnecessary suffering may be a natural outcome.

But when considering such compassion I'd also like to remind us again of the fact that Gautama Buddha, after "complete" enlightenment, had no impulse to teach, since he considered it nearly impossible for people to understand. So where was the compassion? This does not sound like what we think when we

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consider this matter from an emotional disposition. Yet, he did spend his whole life, including during his time of dying, sharing and teaching, even though he knew the vast majority wouldn't get it. That could be called compassion.

Another way to consider the matter would be to view it in regard to action rather than emotion. Having some emotional feeling that you might call compassion is not *being* compassionate. Relating or interacting in such a way that serves others, regardless of how you "feel" or what it might do for you, could more viably be considered real compassion.

Still, it is wise to balance all of this talk with the fact that any such compassion, or lack of it, is not enlightenment or proof of enlightenment. If relating shows up that seems to have such a component, it is a side effect, not the thing itself. We see many of the great teachers showing little or no signs of kindness or compassion as we know it in our culture — Rinzai, Ramana Maharshi, etc. — and could actually seem rather brutal and unconcerned with people's feelings. But their actions and relating served to free and awaken people. So you decide.

Of course you can be a more compassionate person. That is a matter for transformation, or changing what you identify with. But let's not confuse this with what is often seen as compassion. When someone is showing signs of pain, physical or emotional, in our culture we are socially "required" to go through the motions of comforting them. Answering to a social obligation isn't compassion, it's maintaining a social image. Responding to another's expression of pain — which is most often a manipulation trying to accomplish any number of outcomes — may well be simply trying to maintain your self image, how you want to view yourself and how you want others to view you, and merely falling into the trap of manipulation. Seeing someone's expression of suffering as a manipulation lends itself to no response, or perhaps a desire to help free them from this self inflicted and unnecessary, often damaging, activity. This may not at all look like you're being compassionate as a soft and empathetic "caring" person. On the other hand, relating to their real suffering rather than their manipulations to manage such suffering, might more accurately be called compassion.

If you want to adopt such a quality then change how you view yourself, others, and life, and create an experience and perspective in which you develop a more automatic view that inherently has concern for alleviating suffering no matter where it pops up. If you saw other's suffering as your own, or as unnecessary and ineffective, or some such, you would respond with wanting to eliminate it.

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This would probably be seen as compassion. That shift would require deeply and experientially understanding your core self perspectives and assumptions, and changing them. If that's something you want, good luck with that.

Peter

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Richard Allan  
Southampton, England

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Hi Peter

Hope you are doing well.

Can one keep asking the question "Who am I?" without the question? Sometimes the language and the way of asking seems to get in way. Do I just rest in the experience of what is occurring, or find (without fabricating) the most "me-est" (clearest) feeling that I am, and reside there, more fully experiencing that?

Is it possible to move beyond language, or at least reduce it being such a major focus? If language is a conceptual framework latticed on top of more feeling based ways of interacting then how can these be accessed, beyond focusing more on moment to moment body/environmental awareness?

Language, mind, and personality structures seem so tied up together and it seems difficult to remove distinctions that are already made, although I have found that the boundaries of old distinctions are at least plastic, if not totally changeable. I guess what I'm asking for, is to say more on the point Markus brought up regarding mind, or to please suggest further avenues for investigation.

Second try: Are there pre or post language based modes of being that can be inhabited, beyond increasing grounding and body or environment focus, to just hold the question constantly? If so, how can they be accessed?

Of course enough language is required for interacting and buying things in shops, but the emphasis, as you say, seems primarily with just maintaining the flow of the story of self in relation to the environment. And yet it just keeps on babbling away. My assumption is that there was a way before language that people behaved and interacted, and that there may be another way of interacting not entirely dominated by language. To simplify the whole question: Can we get beyond a way of being dominated by language and concepts?

As always, Many Thanks

Richard

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Richard,

You can definitely contemplate who you are without asking the question in your internal dialogue. It's actually best that way. You can make use of verbalizing the matter for awhile so as to focus your attention; once you're locked on target, however, then simply set out to grasp who you really are. Language isn't necessary to focus. Focus is a function of putting and keeping your attention on a subject matter, this doesn't require either language or what we've come to know as concept.

I think you've also confused language with concept. This can be a natural confusion if you grasp the depth and domination of the context of language, since it appears as the form in which our conceptualizing occurs. Yet we shouldn't confuse the activity of conceptualizing with the conceptual domain that is language. The common way we hold concept, as an activity of mind in which we think in terms of relating words and pictures, is dominated by language. Yet the possibility which allows for concept occurs prior to language, even though we might not recognize it in that form. So best not to equate the two as the same thing or as all that we have going on or can access.

Although you may think that language is superimposed onto a basic feeling based experience that is prior to language, this could be inaccurate. Feeling is thought to be primal, but this isn't entirely true. Language and concept create feelings that don't exist without them, and influence not only the primal emotional reactions but also one's relationship to those emotions. Human emotions are intimately linked to both concept and language, since most are constructed via culture and self. But that's another subject. For now, just consider you may be jumping to conclusions that block an open investigation.

As to your central question, yes you can and should contemplate independent of language. The truth is the truth not what you say, believe, think, or assume about it. You *are* you. I don't see why this should even be a question when it comes to contemplation. Relative to your life and especially social interactions, then getting beyond language would be difficult to impossible, since most of these domains show up in and as language and are created and managed primarily through language. But as for contemplation the goal is the truth and ultimately the absolute truth — what "is" — so I don't see it as a problem.

Simply set out to become conscious of who you really are. You aren't invited to talk about that, or think about it, or imagine it, or *do* anything at all with it. Just

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get you, directly. End of story. If other activities arise, which they will, fine, but they aren't the contemplation, they are mind activities trying to participate. This will happen, just make a distinction between all that and your contemplation.

What Marcus was asking was about the creation of Mind, I answered that. Best to re-read that response. If you have a specific and clear question about it, let me know and I will respond — vague and rambling doesn't work. I think you're standing on too many assumptions. Check out and challenge the assumptions you might be making and see if you open some doors in that way. Let me finish with a little blurb that I wrote some years ago speaking about language and thinking as they relate to contemplation:

Our language and so our thinking -- that "from which" we come, "to where" we go, and "in which" we abide in thinking about and reflecting on this matter -- exists after or superficial to the matter itself. The conviction of being to which our considerations point, existed prior to language or reflection. Therefore, thinking will not in itself bring us to a realization of what Being is. It serves only to point us, to draw attention, to give fuel to openness and questioning, and to move us towards. It is important to make this distinction so that the work is not only going on in your thinking; but as an actual intention to experience what's there, who and what you really are.

Peter

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Bob Daufenbach  
Pittsburg, PA  
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Peter,

I have more of a comment than a question prompted by this sentence: "since we struggle to maintain ourselves, all of our relationships with others will also exist as struggle." So if I am manipulating, by definition I am in a struggle. In the Discovery Interview the questioner asks what you meant when you said "it should be easy" and you went on to describe how marital interactions are typically a struggle and you wanted to go beyond or get rid of that. I have been using that as a solo contemplation, as well as out in the world, and this has helped me notice that wanting to appear clever, or smart, or good etc., is a struggle and dropping that (struggling) is an entirely different experience.

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I do recall you suggested not to mix this work with other work, however this seems like one and the same, i.e. a fight, an argument or a simple conversation are all relationships where this stuff shows up. When this does occur (brief as it may be) who or what is witnessing this interaction?

Regards,

Dr. Bob Daufenbach

Bob,

One thing to get is that the struggle — even when you don't feel like you're struggling, such as when things are working out or going your way when relating — may feel good and as if it's easy and smooth, but still be a struggle. When it feels easy, however, is this because you're "winning," or your needs are being met, or life appears to be working out, or perhaps you may be feeling some relief and glee about things "being the way they should be," or lucking out? You may see that if in any way the "ease" is a temporary aspect of the circumstances or successful manipulation, the struggle is still an active principle, because manipulation is an active principle. Even if things are working out, in the background is always the possibility it can fail or breakdown at any time. This possibility has to be actively addressed even when things are going smoothly. See how this works?

You can see that when you drop attachment to being clever, smart, or whatever, you don't have to engage in any manipulations to bring about or maintain this impression, or engage any internal states that struggle to be consistent with those qualities. So the survival of that fraction (although personally important) aspect of yourself will engage no manipulation or struggle. But only because these attachments don't persist. They aren't aspects of yourself any more, or at least not at the time.

You can see from this example, that self survival demands manipulation in order to manage and maintain whatever is identified and attached to as oneself. This will always engender struggle, as well as suffering in some way. If there is no self there is no manipulation necessary to maintain this self.

Since that's not going to happen, in other words, since you aren't going to give up being a self, you can see that this principle also applies to any number of single aspects of yourself. Many of which you could give up. Just like you notice that without an attachment to or identification with being a clever and good person, you don't have to manipulate to make that so. You needn't try to give the

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impression you are that, nor do you have to defend those qualities if attacked, or maintain, promote, or even think of yourself in those terms. Obviously, this doesn't mean you are then the opposite of them, but that you are free of them. You exist independent of those qualities. Therefore there will be no impulse to persist *as* them and so no manipulation or struggle (and so no suffering) relative to them. See the principle at work?

It's true, best not to mix different methodologies or subjects. Fighting is nothing but manipulation. It may be possible to "experience" such manipulation or struggle with ease and mastery, but it doesn't change the principles involved in the activity -- it is changing the state and "reality" in which the activity is held. This may be a principle one can seek out, yet don't confuse it with the ongoing underlying dynamic that is self survival and manipulation.

It's important to focus on getting this self principle for what it is, and for-itself. This means recognizing it even in places it doesn't appear to be so. Observe that attempts to not identify with self at all, and so not manipulate and struggle, tend to fail. This further reveals the power and automatic nature of this self activity.

Peter