

## PSYCHOTHERAPY AND SELF REVELATION

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Within the complexity of human life lives simplicity.  
Hidden by all of our ideas and explanations is truth.  
Behind our posturing breathes innocence.  
All of our struggles camouflage ease.  
Our fortifications protect us from love.

### My Evolution

For the past thirty-five years, I have been a psychotherapist. For twenty of those years I have also studied and taught yoga and meditation and for the past ten years, I have been exploring a process that I call Self Revelation. During my first years as a psychotherapist, I realized that my mentors, my associates, and I were as lost and distressed in our personal lives, as some of our clients. We fortified ourselves with a professional persona, which suggested that we knew what life is about. But there was not much depth to our knowing. We were struggling in a sea of confusion.

Eastern approaches to Self Realization promised that one could reach a state of consciousness free from the bondage of worldly struggles. So I began a serious exploration of these teachings. I dedicated myself to my spiritual practice of meditation and yoga, studied in India during several stays, and was initiated as a swami in a tradition that traced its lineage back more than a thousand years.

I eventually discovered that there was a huge chasm between the ideals of these teachings and their embodiment in the world. I saw that self-aggrandizement could hide especially well under the cover of spirituality. Paradoxically, renunciation, rather than cultivating humility, can lead to a feeling of being special. I encountered spiritual teachers and institutions that spoke of self-sacrifice, non-attachment and service to others but insidiously cultivated a sense of privilege and entitlement. I began to wonder whether there was anything fundamentally different from family life in this seemingly alternative lifestyle. The relationships I discovered were just like a family; having renounced the world, seekers formed another family structure. A dysfunctional family in the guise of an ashram or church, or synagogue is still a dysfunctional family.

My position as a swami and a psychotherapist, my practice of yoga and meditation, and the value given to aloofness, isolated me from outer distresses and helped me to maintain a calm demeanor. But this did not reach into the depths of my being. I was recognized as an authority, but my position made it difficult for me to expose the truth of my uncertainty. So I began to disengage from these positions. I renounced renunciation. I made a decision to only teach what I had experienced myself. In turning away from what was promised by these practices and toward the truth of my own experience, a new way opened up.

I was led to a process of exploring deeply into my experiences in the moment, free of judgment, and without trying to control them. I began to discover a way of being that had been obscured by my striving to reach an ideal. This way shines forth when I am not busy maintaining my sense of myself. It is clear and always present beneath my struggles. It is what is left when all striving ceases. I have found that this experience cannot be arrived at by anything I do. It is an experience of being, that only non-doing can enter. Yet I can recognize what I am doing to obscure this awakening, how I am standing in my way. This requires no effort. This presence shines forth when I am non-judgmentally aware of how it is for me in each moment. It is the truth that is revealed through unconditional acceptance. The less I presuppose, the more I am open to the unfolding truth.

This unfolding is the fulfillment of all that the soul longs for when it leads one to begin psychotherapy or spiritual practices. The seeker on a spiritual path or in psychotherapy would like to transcend the suffering he experiences in his life. His seeking keeps him from recognizing himself as he is and what that offers. Eventually he will discover that he is and has always been complete, at home. All of his ritualized thought processes, emotional patterns and behaviors obscure what is self-evident. The psychotherapist or teacher can either encourage him to meander in the fields of apparent self-improvement, or reveal the way of at-home-ness with oneself.

I am interested in exploring what is extraneous or counter-productive and what is minimally essential for healing and wholeness. I would like to share what I have discovered thus far, not so that it will be taken as a truth to be held onto, but to encourage each person to put dogma aside and enter more openly into the process of discovering for himself.

### Self Inquiry

Of all the spiritual ways I encountered, I felt most drawn to the process of Self Inquiry. It was only as I gave up trying to attain a more ideal state that I began to understand this way. The process of Self Revelation that I am presenting here, has evolved as a synthesis of Self Inquiry and contemporary approaches to self-discovery. While meditation is well known in the West today, and is being integrated into our current therapies, Self Inquiry is just being discovered.

Traditionally, Self Inquiry is considered to be the way that opens up when one finally recognizes the limitations of all spiritual paths. It is also known as the 'direct path,' for it avoids the detours, distractions, and allurements of other spiritual paths. Actually, it is not a path at all, for it leads nowhere other than right here. It is revealed when one comes to a standstill. One might say it requires nothing, or that it requires only non-judgmental awareness. It is simply inquiring into and honoring one's experiences in the moment. As awareness meets the moment-by-moment patterns that arise in the mind, they dissolve and in dissolving, cease to interrupt the flow of being.

The mind mistakes Self Inquiry to be a mental process, a philosophical inquiry into the question, "Who am I?" But the only function the mind has in

entering this way of being, is to recognize its own limits. Self-Inquiry is a non-mental opening to who I am taking myself to be in this moment. As this is explored experientially, without prejudice, that identification is revealed and released. As the exploration continues afresh, moment by moment, each of our identifications and patterns deconstruct, and we are left increasingly free of these limitations. In this way, our true self is uncovered by recognizing what it is not. This way exists beneath rituals and practices as the heart of many spiritual traditions. It is the essence of Advaita Vedanta, and Taoism, and can be found in Zen, Sufism, Tibetan Buddhism, Judaism and Christianity. It is the source of all healing, hidden behind all of the rituals of psychotherapy. It is not a practice, but the absence of practices. There is no technique involved; it exposes all techniques through existing free of technique. While it may seem unfamiliar or mysterious to the mind, there is nothing mystical about it; it reveals the realest of the real, the most substantial. It is grounded in the reality of what is.

Psychotherapy and spiritual traditions share a common purpose along with science, art and philosophy: to lead us to a true experience of ourselves and the context in which we live. They help us to explore beneath the surface appearance of life to discover the underlying patterns of manifest life and, still deeper, to the source of these patterns. They also complement one another in our exploration of who we are. Spiritual traditions are interested in what transcends the complexities of the person. They have little patience for teasing apart the intricate knots that make up each person's psyche. As a result, they produce people who may achieve mastery in certain realms, yet are at the mercy of unresolved psychic conflicts, which preoccupy them and corrupt their human relationships. Psychotherapy, on the other hand, can become so caught up in investigating the complexities of mind and emotions that it misses the forest for the trees. It does not recognize the whole within which these complexities exist. As a result, it is not able to guide us to an experience of that which transcends our troublesome lives. The process of Self Revelation that we are exploring here integrates the best of these two ways of exploring who we are.

### Revelation

Before there were religions or schools of psychotherapy, there were remarkable individuals who ventured forth into the unknown and brought back treasure troves of wisdom. Each of these great innovators emancipated us from the confinement of previously held dogma and thereby advanced the scope of consciousness, opening to a new way of being. Each breakthrough emerged out of a confining structure, and permitted a more comprehensive appreciation of ourselves and our existence. But each breakthrough almost immediately began to form its own limiting structure. It led to a new set of beliefs that confined our thinking, behavior, and experience. Rather than honoring the process of discovery, we worshipped what was revealed and who revealed it. We thereby cut ourselves off from experiencing the process of revelation. The creative breakthroughs in different schools of psychotherapy and in different spiritual traditions became the basis of new dogmas. Religion and authority inevitably

followed revelation. After the revelationaries, came administrators of the dogma and their adherents. The innovator disrupted the norms of the time; the administrators have always been interested in adherence to the currently accepted order.

Psychotherapy and spirituality heal us when they free us from the meanings we have made, but they imprison us anew when they make meanings of their own. The progenitors of psychiatry, psychology and social work were revelationaries. They were not merely interested in a person fitting into the norms of society, but in exploring the depths of the human psyche and human relationships. However, as psychiatry, psychology and social work have grown into professional organizations, these organizations have become preoccupied with the security of their practitioners. Consequently, the mainstream practice of psychotherapy has increasingly been interested in the client's adaptation to the concerns and expectations of society rather than self awakening. Similarly, as the insights of spiritual awakening have become institutionalized, the guardians of these institutions have become preoccupied with their security and with upholding their dogmas rather than opening the way to further revelation.

This interplay also takes place intrapsychically. Each person has the opportunity to go beyond the security of what is familiar and open himself to what is newly revealed in each moment. But there is a tendency to become bogged down in the process. Every time a pattern that has confined us dissolves, we experience a breakthrough that releases bound-up energy and is exhilarating. As a result, we become attached, attracted to, and fixated on the circumstances that surround the freeing experience. The ideas, situations, behavioral patterns, substances, words, postures and individuals associated with the release take on a value of their own and we pursue and defend the associated circumstances. These become the new patterns to which we are bound in the form of beliefs, rituals, superstitions, relationships and organizations. These make up the fabric of our lives. These fixations regulate our lives and we wage war with anything that threatens these structures. All of our melodramas individually and collectively arise out of these formations. We are bound to each pattern until we see through it. Our bondage continues as long as we cling to what has been revealed rather than remaining in the process of revelation. Opening to this ongoing process of revelation is the basis of healing. All else is superfluous.

Staying in the process requires continually surrendering the fruits of the revelatory process. Clinging to any truth, insight or form that is revealed, fixates us. Without form, nothing would be revealed, and without revelation, all would remain static and confined. There is a dynamic edge where form disintegrates and the inexplicable appears, out of which arises a new form and a new disintegration. Here is where consciousness becomes increasingly aware of itself.

## Self Mastery

The pervasive dogma in contemporary American society is that we can be fulfilled through achieving mastery over ourselves, our circumstances, and our environment. This belief is ingrained in our approach to life. We relate to life like the Army Corps of Engineers. We have achieved a great deal in the way of physical comfort, but we have also paid an enormous price because of our one-sided allegiance to mastery.

This approach to life presumes that we know what is good and what is harmful. Once we have differentiated these, we cultivate what is valued and get rid of what is unwanted. We also take this approach in relating to ourselves. We are preoccupied with eliminating inner experiences that are considered unpleasant or harmful and fostering those we think are pleasurable or positive. A vast array of therapies and empowerment programs dedicated to self-improvement and self-mastery, assist us in this endeavor. We have even adopted spiritual practices toward this end.

The person who comes to psychotherapy wants to gain mastery over himself and his circumstances. He believes that he can do this by cultivating qualities he values and by eliminating those feelings or behaviors that are plaguing him. He seeks an ally in the therapist who will offer insights and techniques to accomplish his goal. This attempt to eliminate what is uncomfortable leads to a schism between ourselves and our experience, between ourselves and our environment, and between ourselves and life. We separate ourselves out, as the observer or manipulator of our experiences. As a consequence, we feel separate and alone. This schism, is itself a primary cause of suffering in contemporary life. Since we believe that managing is the way out of suffering, the more alienated we feel, the more desperately we try to control the situation. We are caught in this vicious cycle. We would like to experience contentment. But as long as we are restlessly striving for contentment, we can never be content. The very approach and methods we are using are antithetical to the end-state we are seeking. If we experience an uneasy feeling inside, and try to get rid of it, the very attempt to get rid of it will cause more disturbance. We increase suffering in our attempt to eliminate it.

All techniques to arrive at a peace within, whether drawn from spiritual traditions or approaches to psychotherapy, merely make our distress more insidious, and more entrenched. We take false comfort in the belief that we are freeing ourselves from dis-ease when we have merely found a new arena in which to continue our striving. We have become so one-pointed in managing ourselves and our environment, that we have estranged ourselves from the very life we are trying to make better. We do not know how to disengage from the managing process and experience how life supports us. We have become separated from our capacity to feel nurtured, sustained, and embraced by life.

Other cultures have a different perspective. For example, the teaching of Taoism, the I-Ching and Akido in Chinese civilization emphasize living in harmony with what presents itself, rather than trying to control it. Following this approach one becomes interested in developing an accepting relationship with what has been experienced as bothersome. For example, if one feels fear, he

might allow himself to open to that experience and all that the fear is bringing to his awareness, instead of than trying to overcome it.

Those particular qualities or experiences that a person would like to remove from his life are actually his most valuable assets. They provide an entry into those fields of consciousness that have been closed to him. It is by honoring these strangers and uninvited guests instead of distancing from them, that revelation unfolds.

Psychotherapists do encourage exploration of the client's disturbing experiences. But these experiences are usually viewed as unwanted. They are explored in order to gather enough information so that they can be eliminated. The very way in which we use the term, 'symptom,' reveals our disrespect for these unwanted experiences. The focus in allopathic medicine and in much of psychotherapy is on eliminating symptoms rather than regarding them as allies and messengers. The unpleasant experiences that we want to eliminate are actually guides that can lead us to our essential self.

### Naming, Story-Telling and Hoping

In psychotherapy, we barely touch on our experience in the moment. We almost immediately become distracted by looking for what is causing our experience, trying to understand it, or by relating it to similar experiences. We distance from our experience by objectifying it. We name it, evaluate it as desirable or undesirable, or plan to change it. We associate to the past and consider the future. All of these endeavors interfere with the process of inquiry into the immediate experience, and take us on an entirely different journey.

Contemporary society and schooling emphasizes the cognitive domain in our exploration of ourselves and the world. As a consequence, our inquiry into any situation is almost always a mental process. We delude ourselves, believing that thinking about our experience is actually exploring into the experience. It is more helpful to explore into our proprioceptive experience, or the "felt sense" in any given moment. If we were to remain in this exploration without labeling, thinking, judging, or trying to change it, we would be taken to an ever deeper, more subtle, profound and direct knowing of ourselves.

We are quick to label whatever arises from within. Certain sensations occur and we say "I'm anxious" or "I'm depressed." We have learned to interpret our sensations in a particular way. We have barely scratched the surface of our experience. Naming it, we stop our exploration. Instead, we experience what that label refers to. To name experience gives it an apparent substance; it fixes it as though it were an object, rather than recognizing it as numinous and unfolding. It is in naming, that both spirituality and psychotherapy go off-course. Calling it the devil, Satan, the id or a depression results in years or a lifetime of taking our own fabrications as real entities to be avoided or sought after. The truth can only come forth when therapist and client repeatedly disengage from frameworks for interpreting what is occurring in each moment.

With some encouragement, a client may discover several distinct experiences in what he was quick to call "depression": an ache in the upper

torso, a hollow feeling, irritability, fatigue, disinterest in taking action. Unless he is guided to do so he will not linger long enough to really explore more deeply into any of these experiences. We are like the tourists who rush through a national park in a day, pausing briefly at known landmarks, taking snapshots and believing that they have really participated in the glory of the park. As therapists, we have the opportunity to encourage our clients to pause in their rush past life, and really explore how it is right now. We might ask, can you feel further into that sensation of hollowness? What more shows up? Where do you feel it? What is it like? And now what is happening?"

As therapists, we have been trained to believe that we have expertise in dealing with the situations that clients bring to us. We fit the client's behaviors and experiences into a conceptual model. But what is most needed in therapy is innocence. By innocence, I mean the freedom from points of view, from expertise, from a readiness to interpret. In Zen, this is known as "beginner's mind." In this innocence, true listening into the client's experience is possible. This sort of listening takes the client ever deeper, so that his experiences can be fully revealed. It also models an openness-to-experience for the client and leads him to appreciate, rather than interpret or evaluate himself. The therapist's willingness to be okay with not-knowing will encourage the client to be less anxious about his own uncertainty. Instead of assuming we understand what the client is experiencing based on his labels, it would be more revealing to continually assume we do not know what he is experiencing, and to inquire further. We would thereby encourage him to delve more deeply into his experience. There is a taboo against admitting to not-knowing in our culture. We base our sense of worth on what we know. But willingness to live in not-knowing can lead to endless discovery.

Another detour from one's immediate experience leads through the client's story. So many therapeutic hours are taken up in recounting the client's distant or recent past. It is valuable to uncover connections between current experience and experiences from the past, especially when these connections are spontaneously revealed. But a focus on storytelling is another way of avoiding one's process in the moment.

Still another way we avoid facing the moment is through hope. While stories divert us into the constructed past, hope distracts us by focusing on an imagined future in which we escape from our "demons." We are seduced by the promise of what could be. Hope arises out of dissatisfaction with, and avoidance of, the here and now. As long as hope persists, dissatisfaction persists. Only through giving up hope, can we open into the truth of this moment. Here all struggle ceases.

### Opening

In thinking, naming, storytelling, and hoping, we spend our lives trying to protect ourselves with what is familiar. We wish to free ourselves from the suffering in our lives, but the freedom from what is known is so frightening that we settle for pretending that we are freeing ourselves. We avoid delving into our

immediate experience because we are terrified of being vulnerable, of being open without a plan, of having no means of defense or escape. We believe that if we open to our experience of pain, grief or hatred, it will overwhelm us and will never leave. We are afraid that we will be taken over by emotions, irrational impulses and fears; that we will go insane.

Our unwillingness to be overwhelmed leads to lives of quiet desperation. We have a deep longing to free ourselves from our bondage to the known and our alienation from life, so we seek out the experience of being overwhelmed in contrived and controlled situations like amusement parks, casinos, and movie theaters. There we can live on the edge of feeling overwhelmed, yet safe. We also imagine that we would like to be overwhelmed in spiritual practices. We are intrigued with being taken by the Holy Ghost, or the awakening of the kundalini. But we hold back and cultivate the persona of devotion and surrender.

It is in exploring this edge between our familiar patterns and what lies beyond, that aliveness, healing, and spiritual unfolding takes place. On one side is the known world, with all its entanglements, pains and pleasures, our familiar sense of ourselves and management of our lives. Beyond is the unknown – will we fall off the edge of the world, be possessed, go insane, become enlightened, be liberated, or experience God? We can stay back where we feel safer. We can stand at the edge endlessly speculating about what is on the other side. But all of our routines and all of our speculating and all of the words and promises from those who claim to have traveled farther will never truly satisfy us. Without venturing forth to explore the unknown, we will never really discover ourselves.

All therapy and spiritual work is dancing across this edge. As we venture across our former boundaries, healing occurs. This is the place of miracles. Nothing is to be done here, for all doing comes from and takes us back to what is “safe” and familiar. Accepting-awareness allows the grace that is just beyond our knowing to meet our patterns and to relieve us of them. Anything else is merely a fence. It encloses us.

Surrender to the unknown usually occurs as a small step forward. Then we become concerned with securing our ground. We want to be sure that consciousness has not been annihilated or taken over by a foreign or destructive element. The evolving person moves back and forth across this edge through time, now securing what he has attained and at another time laying it down to open further. If, out of fear, he remains clinging to his fortified positions, life comes to a standstill, to an endless repetition of old patterns.

The person who consciously chooses to return to vulnerability, despite the suffering he may initially experience, gradually finds a greater support than the apparent protection of his mind and ego. Each time he becomes aware of a pattern, he may acutely experience the discomfort and pain that is an inherent part of the constriction of that pattern. But if he continues to explore the pattern with unconditional acceptance, it releases and the constricted energy that was experienced as suffering is now experienced as flow. Eventually, he finds that all life supports him and that even his suffering is a way to greater connection and communion. He recognizes that his pain serves to open him further, to deepen his awareness. Then he does not value pleasure or pain above one another, but



remains equally open to all experience. As he increasingly finds himself supported by life, the necessity for taking his stand in the ego-mind dissolves and he finds that he is not separate.

As long as we are avoiding what we fear, we do not see it clearly. It appears more threatening than it really is. We are so preoccupied with running from it, that we only see its shadow. But when we turn and face it, we will discover that what we were afraid of has not substance of its own. When we see the experience through, we see through it. Then we can distinguish between what we were projecting onto it and what it really is. We realize that it is not what it appeared to be. It no longer has a hold over us, so there is no basis for it to persist. This is equally true for attractions to which we are addicted. Whatever appears before us, when allowed to be, no longer has the power to possess us.

We gave it that power by attributing numinous, attractive or repulsive qualities to it. When we open to each occurrence, unfettered by our attractions and repulsions, the energy bound up in that possession is released and reveals itself as an essential or divine quality. If we have the courage and wisdom to face directly what we imagine would possess us, not surrendering to it, but surrendering to growing awareness, we will discover that it is our fear or attraction that gives it its apparent substance. If we relate to the fear or attraction with welcoming awareness, whenever it arises it is assimilated into awareness and we are left free to experience clearly and more directly what we were fleeing or seeking. Then we realize that, like the illusions rigged by the wizard of Oz, it has no substance of its own and cannot harm or possess the awareness that we are. It was only our own fear or attraction that possessed us.

The client who comes to therapy is in need of a friend who, instead of attempting to make his suffering go away, will show him that it is safe to fully experience his fear, despair, or panic, as these occur in the moment. Such a friend will discourage him from escaping into stories, explanations, or promises of change, and will not try to fix him. He will honor the client as he is in that very moment and will encourage him to explore ever more deeply into how it is right now.

Let us go beyond the limitations of spiritual programs and psychotherapeutic models to the simple opening to truth in a meeting between two people. One comes for assistance in escaping from or annihilating what is plaguing him. However, what is plaguing has never been seen clearly. It has only been seen vaguely, out of the corner of his eye as he is desperately fleeing from it. The therapist who has the courage to face the unknown without the armament of his profession, will allow the unnamed to reveal itself more and more completely. This is the underlying basis of healing and the rare skill of great facilitators.

Opening to the unknown seems dangerous; it requires trust. We give ourselves over in blind trust to those who claim to be authorities. We have learned to trust beliefs and the words of others, but not in our own experiences, and where they lead. We have even less trust in our alignment with that which truly supports and sustains us within and without. Is it possible for two people to

explore together with non-judgmental awareness, allowing the unfolding experience to guide their way?

### A Series of Five Meetings

The beginning of a session is unstructured, so the client usually begins as he would most psychotherapy sessions by sharing past experiences or difficulties. His way of approaching the session is characteristic of how he lives his life.

*I notice that John is speaking rapidly, rushing to cram as much as possible into the time we have. He seems driven. His shoulders are pulled up and forward to protect him. He has little awareness of himself in the moment as he describes the recent past. I find myself most interested in what is occurring in the present. Rather than responding to the content of what he is saying, I ask, "What are you experiencing right now?" He feels interrupted by my question and gives me a cursory answer, "I'm okay," then resumes his monologue.*

*John describes an occurrence that led him to feel anxious, so I ask, "Do you feel any of that now?" I encourage him to explore how he feels in his body. He reports that he doesn't feel much of anything, so I ask him to close his eyes and direct him to explore the sensations in his shoulders. He says, "my shoulders are always tense. I usually try to get rid of it by stretching them back." I ask him if he is doing that now. He takes a little time to check it out and he tells me that he is. I ask him to become aware of how it feels to try to relieve the discomfort. As he does so, his struggle to relieve the tension gradually subsides. Now, he is better able to explore how it feels to be tensing his shoulders. With my encouragement, he feels into this further, without trying to do anything about it. After a few minutes, the tension begins to release as well. The session continues with a non-judgmental exploration of tension in other parts of his body. Some of these areas begin to relax in response to John's acceptance.*

Focusing on the body helps the client to come into the moment and to discover ways he holds back and how uncomfortable that is. Clients are surprised to discover that tension and discomfort are released when fully accepted. The client also begins to discover how he is relating to himself: is he unaware of himself in the moment; is he critical of himself; does he busy himself in trying to control or change his experience; or is he accepting and supportive of himself? The focus of the session is on fostering an effortless recognition of his felt sense in each moment. During a session, I remain focused on my felt sense as I am also attending to the client's process. This seems to enable me to align with, and mirror the client's inner experience. There is often a mutually subjective sense that this resonant exploring together allows me to experience his inner process along with him. It has the effect of amplifying the felt sense and creates an environment of deepening connection.

*At our next meeting, John becomes aware of pressure in his chest and difficulty breathing. He tells me that in the past his inability to breathe had led to panic attacks. I remind him that accepting and exploring into these sensations rather than fleeing from them is just what is needed. I tell him that if he becomes*

*panicky, to let me know, and we will welcome that feeling as well. As he feels further into the pressure in his chest, he vividly remembers a traumatic experience from childhood in which he almost drowned. I ask him to continue staying with the felt sense in the moment, even as he is recalling what happened. Over the next minutes, the pressure becomes more intense. He says, "I feel that I hold everything in. It takes a lot of effort. It's painful!" I encourage him to feel further into how painful it really is, and to be there for himself in his pain much as he would be there for a friend who is in pain. After some time, as he welcomes the discomfort and pressure, they too subside. John feels relief from the efforting and tears come to his eyes. He feels tenderness toward himself, who has been straining for so many years, and appreciative for the ease he is feeling now. Soon, he becomes aware of a tingly feeling in his hands and feet. I ask him to let go into these sensations. This tingly sensation is a pleasant contrast to the former pressure. As he lets himself experience this more fully, he feels this pleasant sensation spread through his body.*

In this second session, John deepens into his felt sense and begins to discover the emotional and attitudinal concomitants of his body armoring. John's accepting awareness creates a welcoming atmosphere in which the pressure in his chest can reveal what it is about. John becomes aware of his strong initial reactions to his experiences and learns that these reactions can also be welcomed.

As one becomes aware of his patterns of constraint, pain and suffering may become more acute in a session or in one's personal life. The client discovers how he has been avoiding suffering and begins a process of letting go of the patterns of avoidance. He discovers that he can be present to his emotional pain and that this is healing. This willingness to bear and embrace his pain allows the knots of suffering to unravel and reveal the delightful energy from which they were formed.

*A few minutes into the next session, John becomes aware of how he is holding his body. As he sits before me, it feels to both of us, as though he is raising his chest and drawing in his chin. This posture was more of an inner felt sense than an observation. As we delve into this experience further, we discover that it expresses an attitude of superiority. I ask him if he feels this way at other times. He says, "I have never felt it so clearly. Now I see that I usually feel like this." As we continue to deepen into this experience, John discovers that it supports the feeling that he has the upper hand. It hides his vulnerability from himself and others. As he continues to open and accept what is being revealed, this inner posture relaxes and is replaced by a gentle feeling which spreads throughout his body. As we deepen into this quality further, a sense of strength emerges out of it. He begins to experience himself as this quality of gentle, all-pervasive strength. It is the essence of strength, yet it is surprisingly calm. It flows forth without an agenda. It has no enemies; it has nothing to prove. It contrasts markedly with John's earlier posture of strength and superiority, which arose as a compensation for a sense of inadequacy and insecurity.*

Sessions often highlight compensating patterns that mask vulnerability. As these patterns are recognized and accepted, the underlying sense of vulnerability is exposed. Allowing oneself to be vulnerable then provides an opening for the essential quality that was being obscured to shine forth. In this case, John discovers that giving up his attempt to protect himself allows genuine strength to emerge. In future sessions, other essential qualities that are caricatured by the personality will come forth. Through a succession of such experiences, John will find it increasingly safe to let go of his posturing and live from his essential self.

*The fourth session begins with John experiencing a band of tension around his head. I direct him to explore how he is relating to himself in the moment. He discovers that he is observing his body and thinking about what is occurring; he is not really being in his body. I encourage him to release himself into the feeling in his body rather than making it an object. Gradually, he begins experiencing from his body and the tension in his head melts away.*

*As John continues to explore the felt sense in his body, he discovers other areas of tension. But now, he is more able to rest in the welcoming-awareness rather than being preoccupied with the tensions themselves. Gradually, the tensions give way to undulating sensations in his torso. There is no physical movement. These are subtle wavelike expressions in his inner environment, as he remains still. Soon the undulation is gone. He says, "I find myself trying to feel into it, but trying leads me to break off from the experience." I ask him to accept himself who is trying, rather than trying not to try. As the trying is accepted, it ceases and the undulating sensation comes back even stronger.*

*After several minutes, he reports, "I'm coming up against a boundary. On the other side is openness, and on this side is me, who is pressing against a membrane. That membrane could just open if I weren't pressing against it. As he accepts himself who is pushing, this releases, along with the sense of a membrane and he finds himself in openness. He does not feel separate from his surroundings. For instance, the sounds coming through the open window, penetrate him through and through and he extends through the space in which the sounds occur.*

As the fourth session progresses, John becomes aware of more subtle straining and how it arises to interrupt the flow. As this subtler trying is released, he recognizes that he is not separate from the life force that flows through all things. He is able to rest in this experience of being, free from doing. This does not come about through the avoidance of the trying, but by embracing and including it.

*At the beginning of the fifth session, John moves more easily through the process of attending to the felt sense, as well as his attempts to control his experiences. Gradually his striving subsides. Then, he begins to feel a force moving through him. This force successively moves into different areas of his body. When it comes to a place that is taut, dense, or armored, its wavelike energy penetrates and dissolves the postural and psychological structures that have been maintained in that part of the body.*

*John realizes he is not in control of this process and that he is not maintaining his familiar sense of identity. He says, "I just became afraid of losing myself; this led me to pull back, and the force seemed to disappear." I encourage him to attend to and accept feeling afraid. This allows that part of him to feel safer. The fear, once accepted, recedes, and the process of deconstruction continues.*

*He now experiences a sense of letting go. He feels as though he is falling through space. This time he pulls back by observing and thinking about his experience. I ask him to sacrifice trying to know in an objective way and to let go into the experience even if it seems less defined. As he does so, over the next minutes, he discovers that he is distinct from his thinking. He becomes aware of thoughts arising in the mind, but he is not moved by those thoughts. He says, "I'm not agitated by my mind trying to chase something. The mind can have a thought or not; it doesn't matter."*

*John also realizes that he is "not trying to prevent anything from happening." He feels safe to let go of his usual vigilance, to be vulnerable. He says, "I feel like a frog laying on my back very exposed. Surprisingly, I'm okay with this." Eventually, he begins to experience himself as a very pleasant "liquid, shimmering light" expanding and spreading through space. This is accompanied by a pervasive sense of well being. He rests in this experience for several minutes and the session ends. For now, the patterns with which he has identified have dissolved. The sense of well being continues as he leaves the session.*

As we attend to the ways in which we constrain ourselves, these constraints begin to ease and we become aware of the flow of life within. At first the energy of life seems tentative and difficult to discern. As we continue our explorations and discover more and more subtle ways of holding ourselves together, these too are released. Then what began as a barely noticeable quality within, is experienced more and more vividly until it overwhelms with its pervasiveness. At first, this force may seem 'other' and our patterned self may feel threatened by it. Little by little, we discover that we are merely offering up what binds and constricts us, to experience ourselves as that unfolding flow of abundance. We realize that we are the fountain of life. All of our concerns, fears and insecurities are embraced and transformed by the flow of unconditional acceptance.

Over the next few days and weeks, John will be integrating this experience into his active life, learning to function from a greater sense of his innermost self. Unresolved issues will emerge to be integrated into this awareness. The old patterns have not been eliminated. They will take over at times. Gradually, with further sessions, the capacity of non-critical awareness to embrace these patterns, no matter how painful and aversive they may have been, will become pervasive in his life in the world. In this way, the identification with each and every pattern is dissolved, and one awakens into non-dual existence.

## Commentary on the Sessions

The process begins with recognizing our identification with, and absorption in, what is most gross, dense or material. This is accomplished by allowing consciousness to intimately interact with the identification that is foremost in the moment. Through the intimacy and recognition of that pattern, the identification unravels. Then, more subtle identifications emerge in consciousness so that they might also be released. This process proceeds through to the more and more subtle layers, until consciousness is freed from the limitations of identification with form.

The emergence into awareness of an identification brings emotional pain, for consciousness experiences itself as imprisoned by that identification. The constricting identification persists until it is released through being seen, embraced and integrated. Until then, split off, it haunts us. Each encounter with suffering is actually an opportunity, an avenue, for the release of a limiting identification.

Release from our entanglements occurs not by fleeing from the grossness, as many spiritual and religious teachings suggest, but in turning toward, accepting, and thereby releasing the energy confined as “grossness.” Then, the gross is revealed as embodied spirit. Embracing grossness is to be distinguished from identifying with the gross. Our worldly miseries arise out of being absorbed in the gross and by our struggles to flee from it. In either case, awareness is sacrificed.

In this process, awareness is recognized as preeminent. Only it has the power to release us. This awareness shines through all that comes before it and transmutes it into itself. In a session, awareness first turns to what is most noisy or demanding of attention: the preoccupations of the mind, the emotions and the physical body. The patterns that demand attention are the characterological patterns that have formed as a consequence of trauma. As the body-mind armoring dissolves in awareness, we experience ourselves as unprotected. We begin to experience release and delight but intense fear also arises and a renewed attempt to protect.

One client told me that she was always on the alert against being punched in the stomach. As we explored into that sensation of readiness and it disintegrated, she began to experience greater vulnerability. This was soon followed by the experience of being like a snarling beast ready to protect itself against threat. Like a gargoyle, it stood poised to protect what is most sacred.

At this point in the process, we recognize that our work centers on the apparent issue of protectiveness and vulnerability. Each time we open to greater vulnerability, we are challenged. When that which we fear, that which is demonized, comes before us, in the world outside or in our inner realms, will we use whatever weapons still remain to ward it off? Will we be taken over by fear or rage and do battle, flee or build a new fortress? Or will we allow space for non-judgmental awareness to move toward and through each of these tendencies? Will we also welcome what we consider to be the demon, so that we can meet it as it really is, rather than what it appears to be? In this way the

demon is released from the form we projected onto it. This is the challenge in each session. This is the challenge of our lives.

If we have the courage to explore through the shadow land and encounter what haunts us, we will discover that each time a demon is released, a newly freed energy spreads through us as abundance, clarity, mercy, grace or another divine quality. In this way, we are led from the material, through the underworld, to our essential self, opening, ever more completely, to the source of all.