

Enlightenment and Enlightenment Sickness

This is an interview with a person who did a serious fast and who woke up to his true nature. It is a beautiful description of enlightenment and how the ego tries to co-opt it.

What did you mean earlier, when you said that the mind and the ego were trying to get in the way of writing the book and making a production out of it?

After the awakening, when these insights were digested and understood, right after the fast, the mind resurfaced like a phantom limb and it was as if it tried to interfere with the writing process. It wanted to make an exhibition out of it because that's the way it was used to operating; making everything into a show. However this was seen through as it was going on.

Another problem was that all the books that I had read on the subject of Taoism, Zen, Sufism and non-duality, Gnosticism kept coming to the forefront of the mind and "I" (residual ego) found myself at the time parroting, rephrasing, and regurgitating a lot of it. Some of it I left anyway. I could not find a clear voice to express myself, since the sense of the person was gone. It was very odd because there was only blankness; like an empty screen or looking at a blank canvas before you paint. I wanted to write, but no words were coming out. Yet a strong urge to communicate was going on. The problem what was seen was visuals not words; Visuals that cannot be described or put into words. To put it more accurately it's not even a visual. This sounds paradoxical but it's a non-visual visual. Imagine the cornea of your eyes trying to see its iris. It feels like this. It's right there, but you can't see it, but you know it's there.

What happens is all these books get indoctrinated in you. The information and the associations are hardwired into the brain. If you are not mindful, you will become a mindless parrot; a re-hasher of this information. All of this information literally has to be unlearned, bracketed, or forgotten. After you have done this, then you can look at it with fresh eyes and perhaps understand it for the very first time. At least see it much clearer than ever before and then the words will form themselves.

What happened after the first glimpse of awakening was that so much information surfaced. I wanted to get it all down so I just spit it all out no matter where it was coming from. I was trying to document the new experiences as clearly as possible so I wouldn't forget any of it.

Why does this knowledge have to be unlearned?

Because it is only book knowledge, not real self-knowledge. It is just words, theories and concepts. How can you see or know reality with words, theories and abstract concepts in your head? To truly know you have to go beyond all of this. I'm not talking about scripture like the Upanishads here but mostly modern books.

You are an artist and used to doing exhibitions, so can you clarify what this phantom voice was communicating to you?

The residual conditioned patterns of ego structure, the sense of a self, the mind that was trying to claim it and make it into a “Broadway extravaganza”, like a conceptual art exhibition. It wanted to embellish it, take poetic license at times and make it seem more extraordinary.

Also making judgments, giving opinions, trying to make a case by sounding wise and brilliant, when it was not, or when it was confounded. It was attempting to connect the dots and searching for layers of meaning where there weren’t any. Like I said earlier in quantum physics and so on looking at consciousness as an object.

While this was going on, “I” (meaning the awareness), just sat back and watched it like a comedy. That’s all it could do. The awareness can see and witness the mind but the mind cannot see or witness the awareness because awareness isn’t an object that appears in the mind. It’s the other way around. The awareness is like the metaphor of a movie and the mind is color; the color and light splashed upon it. All you have to remember is that you are the screen, not the projected colored light.

So you were always aware of the ego resurfacing during the process?

Yes, but not in a “you”, but there was an acute awareness of it happening while typing the book. The “witness”, this awareness, consciousness was watching it all the time. Observing it arise but there were also egoic blind spots that were only caught later on in what I had written. However most of it was caught in the thought stage. These egoic blind spots are what interested me. How they got by and how they were written down. Obviously there were still some deeply ingrained patterns that had not been totally erased. Subconscious patterns. “Samskaras” , vasanas that were still arising.

Then after about five months of watching this, it seemed as if the ego kind of collapsed and gave up. The conclusion it came to was literally to shut up because it was wasting its time trying like a fish caught in a net with a giant spot light on it at all times. It had no space to run hide or maneuver in. At this point it was if all or most of the samskaras, vasanas had been eliminated. Dissolved, the connections severed. The unconscious has to become one with the conscious. Then this has to become one with awareness.

Do you think this is what caused the mind to shut down and cease seeking and spinning?

There was no clear-cut discernable cause, but thought was literally cut off at its root. It could have been many other things because it felt exposed. Given the third degree, since “I”... meaning this awareness...was brutal and did not allow anything to get by. Every word, action and thought was being observed, investigated, interrogated and questioned for months on end; all day long.

Also, not being able to grasp it. The word “ineffable” just didn’t make sense to the mind. It grappled with, “Why can’t I describe this or see this?” “This should be easy.” “I’m going to show up all those others, who could not describe it though science.” That sort of thing. These were the thoughts that were arising. This did not make it into conversation, or in written words. It did not understand or know that awareness is not something that can be seen with the mind. It is not an object. The mind is an object since it is composed of endless thoughts, a finite thing; like the glass around the light bulb. The awareness is the infinite and eternal light. You can’t fit the infinite in a finite and time bound space.

Can you describe what it feels like when the awakening glimpse/shift occurs?

Like I said it's not really a shift, but more like having something at the tip of your tongue; seeing a picture yet being unable to express it. It was that feeling all the time. Or when you're trying to remember something and you almost remember it, but then you lose it and it just won't appear. The mind wanted to understand it, but it couldn't. Then at one point, it simply collapsed. It really collapsed. Maybe out of sheer exhaustion from failed attempts for five months. Maybe it just ran out of steam from not being identified with it anymore. Nothing was feeding it.

What happened when the mind's attempts failed?

The book was put away, mostly because of not knowing what to write and what to say about it. The whole idea at that point became pretty futile and really didn't make any sense at all, to the mind that is.

Then what happened?

About six months later, one year after the awakening the typing began again. It was sparked by a series of questions. This time it was very different. It was simply the keys typing with no self or ego looming around. Finally, the book began to flow.

What do you think happened the second time around to facilitate the ease with writing?

Both the grasper and the grasping were removed from the equation. One was not grasping any longer at writing a book. It was more like it was simply breathed into existence by answering questions. The words were literally forming out of the mystery of the abyss. This is how it seemed.

How were the intentions different when you began writing again?

This time there were no intentions at all, other than to answer people's questions and that was not an intention either; it's just the way it happened. No agenda, no goal or ambitions for writing the book or even showing it to anyone. It did not matter if anyone saw it anymore. It was simply a description of what occurred, without meaning or interpretation, but with some insight into what was seen along the process. I really did not care anymore. There were no expectations either. I was very content with a book or without a book. I did not have a need or desire to tell people about what I had seen or about my experiences. Or to keep it to myself. It made no difference.

Did you find that there was a difference between writing and typing?

What I mean by this is that deliberation in writing involves analysis, opinion, a view, a perspective, a value judgment, interpretation and meaning. Whereas typing is not so contrived or crafted; it is just immediate typing. It feels as if it is coming from another place altogether without the mind's involvement. It is so fast that it is literally punching one key after another. That's it. It is devoid of all personal opinion and is purely impersonal. It's basic descriptions,

documenting and reporting of reality and facts. It just happens, devoid of the self. It is literally coming from the void. Like automatic writing.

What happened to the previous incarnation of this manuscript?

Most of it was put aside or deleted or chucked out. Only a few parts of it were salvaged because after the second shift everything changed.

What did you do differently when you re-wrote the manuscript?

I began by showing parts of the first manuscript to a few people who then became interested in what had occurred and began asking questions. The second book began to grow organically out of the question and answer process. It was becoming more like a long joint interview than a book. It wasn't done so much with an end product in mind. It was more for the sake of it and how I got to the self-realization. As well as shedding some light on the matter.

During the writing process, were there any conflicts for you as you were answering the questions?

No, there were no conflicts, but with the last shift, what resulted was a complete revision of what I had previously written as much of it did not seem relevant anymore. What happened after the first glimpse of awakening was that so much information surfaced. I wanted to get it all down, so I jotted it quickly and spat it all out no matter where it was coming from. I was trying to document the new experiences as clearly as possible so I wouldn't forget any of it. So I still had all this written down and used some of it later on.

Would you say that the writing made more sense to you the second time around?

The writing did make sense to the mind, but what occurred with the awakening shift was baffling. By answering emails or questions from people, the writing was so much easier, it felt more natural, less contrived or affected in any way. The problem I had previously with writing the book was that it felt that I was "trying" to write a book. I became self-conscious of doing so. Trying to be a writer, which I'm not. Writing did not feel natural for me at all; it felt like work until this occurred. Answering a question is different.

Just after the awakening there was an excitement, an urge to communicate what I had seen. A strong urge to write about it, but after about five months of pure bliss, this decreased. As I was writing I could see that without a question, when there is no limited sense of self, there isn't as much of a stimulus, impulse, reason or motivation to say anything. The questions seemed to naturally help drive the writing; to keep it going without any effort at all.

What happens is that it begins to negate itself because it sees that whatever is said is leading away from what it is. The process also seems to be endless; when one layer is revealed there are infinite layers underneath. In other words, the more you see and “think” you know the more you realize that you know absolutely nothing at all. It literally silences you into not even wanting to open up your mouth. I now understand why someone would become a “muni”, completely silent on this matter. It’s like when you go around in a circle; you end up exactly where you started. Each time this happens, all you can do is laugh because it feels kind of nonsensical and really funny.

So you think it’s all a joke?

Yes, in a way it is a divine comedy, but sometimes a very serious comedy., but there is a lot more to this than humor.

What do you think the ego process; the struggle with writing the book was about? I recently came across some writing by an Indian named Sri Aurobindo, who talks about this stage. He says:

“...These things, when they pour down or come in, present themselves with a great force, a vivid sense of inspiration or illumination, much sensation of light and joy, an impression of widening and power.Very easily he is carried away by the splendour and the rush, and thinks that he has realized more than he has truly done, something final or at least something sovereignly true.....

He may not realize at once that he is still in the cosmic Ignorance, not in the cosmic Truth, much less in the Transcendental Truth, and that whatever formative or dynamic idea-truths may have come down into him are partial only and yet further diminished by their presentation to him by a still mixed consciousness.”

Yes this is what he refers to as the “intermediate zone”. What this means is that the experience carries the person away; the impression created is that one is enlightened. It’s a subtle and very clever sort of co-opting mind trick that if one is not careful, one can end up believing they have intellectually negated the ego but still being there to be enlightened in the sense of a person. This is an example of being unaware that the ego is still there; a mental blind spot.

This is a subtle form of self-denial, suppression as well as an affirmation. It is trying to convince oneself by repeating it over and over like a mantra that there is no ego there, which can have the adverse effect of actually sustaining it in the process. This is what I was referring to earlier on during those 6 months after the awakening and the ego wanting to make a production out of it. Wanting to form a new spiritual ego. Take on a spiritual sounding Indian name and so on. Or to start wearing colored beads and walking about in a loincloth.

However there is also another dimension to this, the sub-conscious mind. You can't get rid of your id, or the *samskaras* (mental dispositions and deep psychic imprints in the body), *vasanas* (karmic residues, unconscious propensities, disposition, habit energy, habit formation, habit thought) or *vrittis* (thoughts and feelings that trigger the glands associated with that particular propensity to secrete corresponding hormones).

You can't get rid of your shadow self by suppressing or denying it. And, you can't get rid of your super-ego with your ego since in time it will pop back up in a new enlightened persona.

Is there a temptation at this point from the ego?

Yes, Bernadette Roberts talks about this in an interview, (http://www.spiritualteachers.org/b_roberts_interview.htm)

"The major temptation to be overcome in this period is the temptation to fall for one of the subtle but powerful archetypes of the collective consciousness. As I see it, in the transforming process we only come to terms with the archetypes of the personal unconscious; the archetypes of the collective consciousness are reserved for individuals in the state of oneness, because those archetypes are powers or energies of that state. Jung felt that these archetypes were unlimited; but in fact, there is only one true archetype, and that archetype is self. What is unlimited are the various masks or roles self is tempted to play in the state of oneness - savior, prophet, healer, martyr, Mother Earth, you name it. They are all temptations to seize power for ourselves, to think ourselves to be whatever the mask or role may be. In the state of oneness, both Christ and Buddha were tempted in this manner, but they held to the "ground" that they knew to be devoid of all such energies"

So what can you do if the shadow jumps right back in?

If you have the awareness to even see it, just observe it, investigate it, and witness it. Meditate on it. Don't identify with it and know it's not who you are; see it for what it is. Test it and see for yourself. Don't worry about it if it pops up, since it isn't you. Doing that will only drag you back into the story. Don't try to force it, suppress it, stop it, or bully it away. Be gentle on it. Doing this is quite effortless. It just takes shifting your awareness. That's really all it is. To remember whom you are and stay with this at all times if you can. See that you are this infinite and boundless awareness, not the body or the mind.

How does it feel to be devoid of all these things; no personal identity, no sense of a "person" being there?

It's not a question of feeling, it's more direct being. It's direct living, being present. There is no effort at all. Simply being natural. The Taoists have a term for this "*wu wu*" effortless effort. Non doing. In a way it's like doing *tai chi* at all times. I've done *tai chi* and *qi gung* for many years now. This is exactly how it feels when practicing *tai chi*. You disappear into the flow of the movements.

As an artist, if there is no self, then “who” is making your artwork?

The same exact source that makes it in every other organism. One has to understand the illusion of the artist. Artists are just vehicles, or instruments for this awareness, consciousness to reveal itself through. Art is an extension of nature like the fruit on a tree. It's quite funny because people believe they are being creative when they are not. Without awareness none of this could happen.

Do you have ambitions, aspirations, hopes and dreams?

Those things are unnecessary, as everything is already perfect the way it is. Awareness, love, truth, being, bliss and life, has no need for ambitions, aspirations, hopes or dreams. What is it going to do with any of it?

So why bother even writing this book if that is the case? Isn't that your aspiration, goal, or dream to get published?

It is no bother at all and there is no aspiration or expectation of getting published or any one reading it either. There are already countless books out there on this subject. One more isn't going to make a difference since they are all coming from the same source anyway.

Do you ever have doubts?

No because if there is no doubter, there is no doubt. Just 100 percent certainty that I am pure consciousness.

Did you feel a great loss for your old sense of self?

No, because the only thing which was lost was an illusion of a self. When this was clearly seen and understood, it was more of a relief, not a loss. It was seen as the impediment and hindrance. It was not an asset at all because it was seen that it was a case of mis-identification all along. As if seeing things back to front or upside down and then suddenly seeing things the right way. Like having your vision corrected and realigned with one's true nature.

Do you think there is a way to get rid of this ego?

There is absolutely no way to get rid of it other than to know what it is and simply observe it. Investigate it, test it, look into it and find out for yourself that it does not exist. For example, look at the River Thames in London, what is it exactly; it is a river with a label on it. It is a concept just like you.

You can't fight the ego, repress it or force it to disappear. None of these tactics will work. The only thing that works is light. Knowing that what you are is this awareness and not the ego.

One's ego is the subtlest and cleverest things in the universe, although paradoxically it doesn't even exist. Again what the ego is, is a mistaken case of identity. This is the problem and also the solution. Knowing and seeing that one is not one's ego is sometimes enough to sever its roots. Another method is to cease watering it, feeding it or giving it sunlight by being in your natural state of awareness; the here and now. This will work because the ego cannot be in this place.

The problem, which arises, is that the ego of a person will do anything to sustain itself. It will disguise itself using false humility, piety, holiness, false enlightenment, flattery, ingenuity, sincerity, lies, jokes, humor, manipulation, intellect, self-delusion, and even honesty and truth; anything to not have to die.

When is the best time to do this?

Anytime. Just keep watching it at all times. Observe it and pay close attention to it when you interact with other people. When someone flatters you, how does this make you feel? How do you respond? Ask yourself who is it that is feeling and responding?

When someone reprimands you, how do you react, how does this make you feel? Do you feel wounded, hurt, ashamed, belittled, patronized? Ask yourself who is this "I" that is feeling these emotions?

When someone rejects you, do you feel pain and suffering? Ask yourself who is this "I" that is feeling these emotions?

When another validates you, approves you, do you feel good, uplifted, proud of yourself? Ask yourself who is this "I" that is feeling these emotions?

When someone laughs at you, ridicules you, can you sincerely laugh with him or her or do you feel hurt? Ask yourself who is this "I" that is feeling these emotions?

When someone confronts you, curses you, criticizes you, cheats you, steals from you, what do you feel? Who is it that is experiencing the hurt?

When someone loves you, who is feeling the love? Ask yourself who is this "I" that is feeling these emotions?

Watch yourself when you make a mistake, make a fool of yourself, when you achieve something, get something, or learn something. Do you get a warm glow or a feeling of being puffed up when you do something that feels like you have made an accomplishment? Do you get angry or defensive or sad when someone points out to you that you were making a mistake? Look to see if you try to defend your actions? Ask yourself who is this "I" that is feeling these emotions?

Are you competitive? Do you have a need to show off your skills? To show to others how wise, talented, sophisticated, cultured, cultivated, refined, learned, or educated you are? To play one up-man-ship, to be a teacher or to show people how learned you are?

How do you react if your wife, husband, lover leaves you? Do you fall apart? Ask yourself who is it that is falling apart?

What happens if you get fired? Do you feel wounded, angry, frustrated, thwarted, bitter, jaded, and cynical? Ask yourself who is it that is feeling all these emotions and sensations?

Do you get embarrassed or jealous? Ask yourself who is it that is getting jealous?

How do you feel if you get promoted, get a raise, make more money, get recognized and become famous? See your name in the newspaper? Who is it that is feeling these emotions?

These are perfect times and tests to find out where and what your ego is. You can use almost anything to gauge it during the day. Measure it and to see if you can trace yourself back to it.

Do you think it's even possible to totally become aware of all of these things?

Yes, you are this awareness if you like it or not. You just don't know it. It is the backdrop of everything. For this to come into the foreground permanently doesn't always happen overnight. Just being able to see this gives one leverage to observe it with a much brighter floodlight because now you see it for what it is.

What exactly do you see when this ego death occurs?

What you see is how it was formed in the first place. How you were led to believe that this is who you are. How you came to misidentify yourself with it and how this conditioning and hypnosis took place over time. How your parents shaped it from the time you were about two and a half years old. By the way they spoke to you, mirrored you, loved you, disciplined you and told you who you were. How your interactions with your siblings and early childhood friends also shaped it.

How school indoctrinated you. How society and peer pressures shaped you by approving of certain types of behaviors, beliefs and disapproving of others. Understanding and seeing that much of what you think about yourself was imposed on you externally and drummed into you like a false mantra. A form of societal voodoo through the power of persuasion and suggestion.

How what you think about yourself is also a self-delusion; a way to make yourself feel better and more confident, to have self esteem, self pride and self love. You realize that in essence you have been barking up the wrong tree. Watering the wrong plant. It's not too different from believing that you were Cleopatra or Napoleon Bonaparte in a past life. You are doing the same thing but with another character in the present.

You will begin to see that all of these things are there to nurture yourself; to stroke your ego. To keep it inflated and puffed up or to create walls and defenses around you. Barriers and obstacles to hear only what it wants to hear that will make it feel good. To block out anything that brings it down, threatens it, questions it, depresses it or deflates it.

What you begin to see is that it is like an automatic thermostat that regulates itself, but also has built in defense mechanisms to hinder anyone from getting anywhere near it. Especially since getting too close to it could mean shutting it off, and this would mean death.

What else do you see about yourself by going through this process?

You see all the lies, the self-deception, the dishonest behavior, the falseness, the stupidity, and the sheer naked-ness of how unconscious you were; how absolutely vain you were. How manipulative and conniving and greedy and selfish you were.

You will see the falseness in your words and actions, the reasons and stimulus for your behavior. You will see the hidden motivations; the ulterior motives that you could not admit to yourself were even there. You will see the ugliness of this false person. You will see all the masks that you wear. You will see how you treat your boss or someone with money or fame differently from how you treat the garbage man or the postman. And how you are polite and respectful with one person and sharp and patronizing with another, no matter how subtle.

You will also see how you are filled with insatiable desires for sex, food, pleasure, comfort, stimulation, money, and mostly attention, recognition, approval, validation and acceptance. You will see how you want to be unconditionally loved like a baby. To be pampered, stroked, cuddled, adored, worshiped and idolized.

You will see an unsuitable desire and need for wanting to fit in with others. Wanting to be part of the pack, the club, the group or society. Wanting to belong to some clique or private organization. To be part of the "in crowd" The trendy elite.

This is what the ego craves and desires the most; to be recognized and to be acknowledged. The last thing it wants is to be ignored or be dismissed as if it didn't even exist. It wants to stand out in any way possible, negatively or positively. Any kind of attention will do because it will feed on all of it including conflict, arguments, disagreements and war because it's all fuel. It's anything that will get others to notice it, sustain it and keep it alive.

So when all this is stripped away, how does it feel?

It is simply seen for what it is, it feels blissful, liberating, more than can be put into words. You feel like you are nature itself, like a flower that neither spins nor toils; beautiful, wonderful, a miracle. All sense of shame, fear, anxiety and embarrassment is gone. Nothing can faze you. Nothing anyone says can get to you. Because what you are is free and you have found your true center or see that there is no center at all.

You will see that all your problems do not come from outside of you, but from your misidentification with your ego; the false belief that you are a separate person. Separate from oneness, consciousness, God. This is the crux of the matter; this mistaken identity. The real cause for all your suffering is coming from inside of this false you. The source of all your problems is the identification with this false plastic manufactured self.

Why can't you just drop it? Get rid of it?

Because there is no one there to drop it. Trying to drop something that doesn't exist is impossible and will have you spinning in circles chasing a phantom that doesn't exist; except in your mind.

The way to see this is to know that you are the awareness; the consciousness that witnesses the mind. There is really nothing you have to do because it is already doing what it does. There is no one to do anything. The way to clear a puddle of murky water is to not mess with it or to stir it up, but to leave it alone, step back, observe it and let it clear up by itself. It works the same way with the mind. The mind is like a wild beast; it is chaotic and uncontrollable and cannot be easily tamed.

Let it run its course and wear itself out, but do not engage it or ride it; otherwise you will be thrown off over and over again. Doing this is the insanity of it all; like going along for the roller coaster ride. Identifying with this roller coaster ride and believing this is you; the ups and downs, the disappointments, the satisfactions and the gains and losses. None of this is who you are because this can never be gained or lost, it was never Not there and it will always be there.

The self-identified mind is also cunning and subtle. It will even pretend to you that it has dropped itself. It will act as if it is now humble. It will put on another act; a false humility, which will reveal itself in self-deprecation. The way Hollywood actors do this when winning an Academy Award. All it's doing is hiding out; waiting for the first opportunity to rear its ugly head again. A way to test this is if you are aware of being humble, you know the ego is there. If you are aware of being charitable, you should know the ego is there. If one is aware of being holy, you should know the ego is there.