TRUTH AND TRANSFORMATION
IN PSYCHOLOGICAL AND
SPIRITUAL PATHS

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**Daniel Goleman:** We are here in New York City to take up the topic of "Truth and Transformation." But consider this: any number of other kinds of events might have brought us together. In each case you could have a different set of ground rules that you would bring with you regarding what you think is going to happen at the event. And there would also be things you think will not happen, and things that you don't think about at all, in any of these situations. For example, perhaps you expect just to sit in your chair and hear us talk about "truth and transformation." You are probably not going to get up in the middle of the discussion and do a Sufi dance. In fact, there are all kinds of things that you are not going to do now, that you might possibly do in this room, or have done here, under other circumstances.

We have constructed a reality here, a little bubble of reality. We do it all the time, through our whole day, and in all our lives. These constructions are scripts that we bring to situations, and

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they tell us what to do. Those scripts are the building blocks of our social reality, although we don't think about the scripts at all.

The script includes all the things you don't do, things that you never have to think about because of the automatic nature of the process. So, there is a level of things that goon that we do not talk about. This scripting of what is and is not in awareness is part of how we build a consensual reality. The script includes what we bring to a situation and what we expect to go on in it. The way we build a reality also necessarily determines much about what happens in our spiritual life and psychological fact, it is nearly the whole of it at the personal level of reality.

There is, of course, a vast amount of information in the mind that never comes into conscious awareness, and we don't know what's unconscious until it comes into awareness. That means there is incredible room for self-deception. That is to say, your mind knows more than it lets you know, at a given moment. For example, the Mahabharata has a wonderful line, "What is the greatest wonder of the world?" The greatest wonder of the world is that "No one, though he sees others dying all around him, truly believes that he himself will die." This may be the ultimate self-deception. It's so hard to face the thought of one's own death. The mind just doesn't want to let it in. This leads us to an illusion of invulnerability. If you ask people, what are the odds that they'll get this or that disease, almost everybody says the odds are much lower than they actually are. An interesting corollary is that they will say that other people, however, are more likely to get those diseases than they themselves are. This is a little bubble of reality based on the assumption, "It can't happen to me."

I think self-deception is so incredibly powerful in the human mind because it serves us very well. Consider this: there is a universal self-deception, which is that we all think we are a little better than we are—a little kinder, a little brighter, a little more skilled—because it is useful so do so. For example, if you go out into the world to do well, it is essential that you believe in yourself. You don't want to think about all the times you've screwed up. You want to think about how you can do it. If you are a salesman making a sales call, and you missed sales on ten of eleven calls, you want to be a little bit like Willy Loman in the play, Death of a Salesman, saying, "I'm the greatest salesman in the world. I'm gonna get in there and make a call." In fact, when people start to become depressed, one of the first things that goes is that illusory glow. People become more realistic, not less realistic, as they become depressed. They start
remembering all the times they've messed up, and think, "I may as well not try: I'm really a failure, etc." Then in a severe depression, they get very negative and see only the negative side. But mild depression is more like too much reality.

Now, why should the mind make self-deception so easy, so much a part of our mental life? Consider some additional interesting facts: If you are going into surgery, it turns out that you are better off totally tuning out of what is going to happen. One study, of people surveyed the night before going into an operation, showed that some had tuned out—they couldn't care less about the details of the operation. They would say things like, "It's sort of like being on vacation." Then there were others who wanted to know absolutely everything about what was going to happen. They wanted to know the kind of sutures to be used, what the anesthetic would be, the odds of something going wrong, and what the surgeon's history with the operation was. They were gathering all kinds of information, loading themselves with it. It turned out that, after the operation, the people who had tuned out had fewer medical complications, and left the hospital sooner. Why is this the case? Well, if you are going into surgery, there is nothing you can do. You may as well manage your own anxiety. If you can be relaxed in that situation, then your body has a better chance to martial its healing resources. So there is a situation where tuning out—denial—really pays. Denial soothes. I suspect there have been many similar situations like that in our biological evolution, and in life now. It may be one reason the mechanism developed so early in evolution.

Self-deception requires that the mind notice what not to notice. A study which showed how this occurs used special equipment that tracks exactly where the eyeball is looking when subjects view various pictures. Some of the pictures were very sexual in content, and some very hostile. People who were more anxious about sexuality or about anger did an amazing thing. For example, one man who was very prudish about sexuality, and very anxious, was shown pictures, one of which was of a man reading a newspaper. In the foreground is the outline of a woman's breast. What was phenomenal was that, when they tracked his eye looking at that picture, it never went near the breast. The mind knew what not to look at; it knew where not to go before the eye could move. Now consider what that means for what we perceive throughout our lives. It means that we can tune out, before we ever know we have tuned out.

Freud, of course, talked about much of this as defense mechanisms, and I think that he was quite right in his understanding of how the mind works. But what I would like to
explore is how the model of the mind I have just described allows us to make some fundamental errors in understanding spiritual life, from the viewpoint of Western psychology. This would also apply, in reverse, to how the failure to understand psychological truths can massacre one's spiritual life. Consider how each of us has a particular map of reality, and how well we synchronize our different maps. Nearly everyone who grows up in a family learns how to do this according to three fundamental understandings: one is what to notice; the second is what we call what we notice; the third is what not to notice. These are attentional rules, and you never have to be told these rules explicitly. They are learned without being spoken, because people do not really know they are doing them. To illustrate, if you grow up in the family of an alcoholic mother who is drunk by mid-day, it may be that you say, "Mom is in a bad mood, and she had a nip and she is taking a nap." What you can see from another point of view is that she is absolutely not functioning as a mother, and there are serious problems, but no one is facing it, noticing it, naming it, or doing anything about it.

The price of membership in any group is to adopt such rules. You can see, for example, how this would work in a relationship. In a marriage, one of the almost universally unstated rules is that you do not tell your spouse absolutely everything you have thought of the in-laws. You don't ever tell your spouse that this rule is operative in the marriage, but it's one that is almost universally respected. There are many others, as well. It's understood that a well-functioning couple has zones of things never thought of, spoken of, said, etc., in order to preserve the marriage. One sees the fact of this revealed vividly in divorces. Why are divorces so ugly? It's because "the deal is off," The former partners say, "Now you are going to hear everything that I never said for all those years!"

BLIND SPOTS IN WESTERN PSYCHOLOGICAL WORLD VIEWS

Now, consider the implication of this for how psychology, or the West, for the most part, views spiritual life. Huston Smith's book, Forgotten Truth, makes the case very elegantly that science is really blind to the spiritual dimension. But we live in a culture which worships the scientific world view. Now, psychology, in attempting to be a science, has bought into that world view—with much benefit, but also at great cost. To become a psychologist, you are socialized into a set of schemas which usually have a very negative attitude toward spiritual evolution.
Consider Freud, in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, who says (paraphrased), "I got a letter from a man who says he is my friend." A footnote says it was Romain Rolland, the Nobel-winning French poet who was at that time studying with Vivekananda and Ramakrishna, and had been with them in India. Rolland writes (paraphrased), "Sometimes I experience this extraordinary state when I feel absolutely merged with the world." Freud recounts the passage and says, "I have looked everywhere within myself, and I fail to find anything similar to what my friend is describing. I think we are better off putting it in a psychoanalytical framework." He then goes on to talk about all religious experience as regression to the womb. This is the man who is stating the first modern psychological world view, dismissing world religion.

There is also some difficulty with Jung, who was rather sympathetic when it comes to religion. Here is Jung, on spiritual practice: "People will do anything, no matter how absurd, to avoid facing their own souls. They will practice Yoga and all its exercises, observe a strict regimen of diet, learn Theosophy by heart, or mechanically repeat mystic texts from the literature of the whole world, all because they cannot get on with themselves and have not the slightest faith that anything useful could ever come out of their own soul." Now there is considerable truth in what he is saying, but there is also a bias. The truth, I think, is that you can use religious practice, or anything else, as a means to escape from your problems. I think Jung's call to look into the soul should be heard, but at the same time, even he is dismissing spiritual practice.

Another example is Franz Alexander, a famous psychoanalyst who was in the U.S.A. for many years. He wrote an article in 1931, "Buddhist Training as an Artificial Catatonia." Now here is an analyst, a German emigre, whose German compatriots were the very best Sanskritists in the world and for a century had been translating Pali and Sanskrit texts. Alexander read one of these texts, which is a version of a book called *Visuddhimagga*, a fifth-century manual which tells exactly what will happen at different stages of meditation. It's quite a remarkable book in terms of transformation of consciousness. But Alexander read it and concluded, "From our present psychoanalytic knowledge it is clear that Buddhistic self-absorption is a libidinal, narcissistic turning of the urge for knowing inward, a sort of artificial schizophrenia with complete withdrawal of libidinal interest from the outside world."

William James, however, was one Western psychologist who did not dismiss the spiritual life. He saw what was happening in...
psychology and called it "medical materialism." In Varieties of Religious Experience, he observes "we are surely familiar in a general way with the method of discrediting states of mind for which we have an antipathy." This indicates a politics of consciousness. Western psychologists hear of these remarkable states of consciousness, and changes in consciousness, which they then dismiss because it doesn't fit their world view. James said, "Medical materialism seems indeed a good appellation for the too simple-minded system of thought which we are considering. Medical materialism finishes up St. Paul by calling his vision on the road to Damascus a discharging lesion of the occipital cortex, he being an epileptic. It snuffs out St. Theresa as a hysteric; St. Francis of Assisi as a hereditary degenerate; George Fox as discontent with the sham of his age, and his pining for spiritual veracity it treats as symptoms of a disordered colon."

Now the upshot of this is that, as a culture, one of the great taboo topics, one of the things that does not enter our collective consciousness very easily, and so remains in the zone that is denied, is religious experience. There was a random sample "quality of life" survey of Americans done about ten years ago. One of the questions was, "Have you ever had the feeling of being very close to a powerful spiritual force that seemed to lift you out of yourself?" In other words, have you ever had a transcendental experience? Forty percent of Americans said, "Yes, that's happened to me at least once." Twenty percent said, it's happened several times, and five percent said it happened often. The pollers went back and talked to some of these people who said it had happened to them, and they found that almost none of them had ever spoken to anyone else about the experience, most particularly not to a therapist, and not to a minister, priest or rabbi. What was the reason? "They would think I was crazy." In short, these experiences do not fit with the Western world view, or even much of the Western religious world view, let alone the psychological world view. I think that the result of being a nation of "closet mystics" essentially is that as a whole our theories of human possibility are very limited. We have an incredible blind spot.

There is a description in classical Asian literature, the same literature that Franz Alexander was reading, of what is caned an "Arhat." An Arhat is a Buddhist saint, someone who has gone through a very specific set of rigorous practices, meditated very, very deeply, experienced altered states of consciousness through meditation, and finally arrived at an ultimate state which is called nirvana in the Buddhist literature, and afterwards has been transformed as a human being. "Nirvana"
is a technical term for a particular transformation of consciousness, not for some misty heaven world.

These transformations include the absence of certain conditions that never arise in the Arhat's mind. The Buddhist literature is very explicit that they not only do not come from the aware part of the mind, but are not even to be found anywhere in the hidden unconscious of the person.

These include the total absence of greed for sense desires; the absence of anxiety, resentments, fears of any sort, dogmatism -such as the belief that this or that is "the truth;" the absence of aversion to loss, disgrace, pain, or blame; the absence of lust, anger, or the experience of suffering, or the need for approval, for pleasure or praise; and the absence of desire for anything for oneself other than what one needs as essential. When the mind is cleared that way, what happens is that one becomes full of loving kindness, of impartiality towards others, or a calm delight in absolutely everything happening around one, no matter how seemingly boring. These individuals also exhibit quick and accurate perception, composure-skillful means, in other words.

I have read that list to Western psychologists, and they typically say, "That is absolutely absurd. It could not happen." If, however, you read it to anyone who's familiar with any of the great world religions, they will say, "Oh yes, that is a saint. I recognize it as the prototype of a saint." Every great religious tradition describes a similar transformation of being. Yet nowhere in Western psychology is it even plausible. It is seen as just too good to be true. Western psychology's view of reality does not fit the religious world view.

BLIND SPOTS IN SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

The examples I have used reveal some of the major blind spots of our scientific psychological world view in regard to transformation and truth. I would like to look at the other side now, and consider the blind spots one finds in spiritual practice. The difficulties of various spiritual communes, such as the Rajneesh commune in Oregon and some others in the U.S. and elsewhere in the world, provide good examples.

In the case of Rajneeshpuram, the Oregon commune, the spiritual teacher Rajneesh, had come to the U.S., attracting many followers and much wealth, and allowed his followers to create an entire small town and rather indulgent lifestyle-with
his blessing. Then he went into silence for several years and, in effect, turned over the control of the commune to some of his, as it turned out, more aggressive followers. There are now criminal charges by Rajneesh himself, and others, claiming that the top leaders absconded with millions of dollars and attempted to poison people, destroy another city's public building, and threaten various kinds of violence.

Now the obvious question is, how can this go on in a spiritual group? I would propose that part of the problem is "group think" in the ashram. It's a problem that is quite widespread because there is a discrepancy between the psychological world view and the spiritual world view. Western psychology is quite elegantly fine-tuned to a level of reality which seems to be missing in many religious traditions, at least as they have been transported to the West and evolved here. People who enter spiritual paths are sometimes extremely naive or blind to the psychological dimensions of the situation—which I think is as important as is the spiritual dimension to a full confrontation with truth and transformation. One has to face all the truths, all the levels of truth, or at least be willing to do so, in order to transcend.

There is a long history in America of problems with spiritual teachers and groups—sexual abuses, financial scandals, political meddling, and other problems. In many of these troubled spiritual groups there seems to be a zone which is off limits, a group-awareness which is repressed. It is typically the part that deals with the pull toward money, sex and power—nothing new to a therapist.

What is the nature of this group-think? First, there are meta-rules. One of them is, "Our group is a very special elect, and our teacher is perfect, and nothing nasty could be going on among us." This is the game of "happy family," in which the players believe, "we're a happy family, and nothing unhappy could be happening here. Even if something were making us unhappy, we wouldn't have to face it because it would not be happening. Besides, we don't have to think about it because we're a happy family." One of the psychological reasons for this thinking is that spiritual groups are prone to idealization, positive transference, seeing the teacher as perfect, regardless of evidence to the contrary. If the teacher takes various disciples into his back room and seduces them, "... well, he was doing no wrong, he's beyond karma, and it's part of their spiritual experience," or whatever line may be used to discount its significance. Another sign of this kind of group-think is questions that can't be asked, e.g., "Where does the money go?"
And another sign is answers that can't be given, e.g., "Swiss bank accounts." These are some of the meta-rules which keep one from admitting problems into one's consciousness singly, and certainly not speaking out to them into the collective consciousness.

Now, the counterpart of the idealization of the teacher and the positive transference for the teacher, is what's called, psychoanalytically, the "counter-transference." The teacher believes, "I'm perfect, I can do no wrong. Therefore, if! exercise all my impulses towards money, sex and power, I'm doing it in a perfect way, and no one is harmed by it because it's part of this teaching," etc. That is to say, teachers too can buy into that reality which excludes them from ordinary rules of decency, ethics, and the criminal code.

What is the antidote for these difficulties? One of them is what the Buddhists call "insight," seeing things just as they are. In fact, in Buddhist psychology that is the fundamental basis for all mental health-being willing to face things without blinders, without the need to deny in order to soothe or play along with the game of idealization. It aims just to see what's happening, to acknowledge it, and not to have to hide from it.

I don't want to paint a negative picture of spiritual life. It is something known for millennia, which this culture and many people are grasping for. It's a dearly needed antidote to the dreary state of reality that we collectively find ourselves in. It seems to be true of all versions of the spiritual transformation of being that they involve realizations that are ineffable, that are beyond our normal reality-altered states of consciousness if you will, or moments of divine understanding, or however you wish to characterize them. From that point of view it seems that, to go through such a transformation, you have to reach a stage where you're beyond words. That is one reason it's so hard to talk about spiritual realities, because to a large extent they exist in a domain beyond language, beyond schema, beyond common understanding.

So, I'll conclude here by first acknowledging the wisdom of the Tao Te Ching, "He who speaks does not know, he who knows does not speak." But before I stop speaking, I'll illustrate what I have been discussing with a brief story. God and Satan are walking down the street, and God bends down and picks up something. While he is holding it in his hand and looking at it, Satan says, "What is that that shines and is luminous?" And God says to Satan, "This is the Truth." And Satan says, "Oh, let me have it, I'll organize it for you."
Huston Smith: As I looked towards this workshop a memory returned to me. The year was 1977 and my wife, Kendra, and I were taking a group of college students around the world for an academic year, studying on location. We had passed through Morocco, Israel, Iran, India, and were then in Japan, our last stop. We were there to study Buddhism for seven weeks, and I gave the students an option. They could go the academic route and learn some facts about Buddhism, or if they wished they could go the experiential route and spend the weeks in practice. Twelve of the 30 opted for practice, so I went to the abode of my former Roshi (Zen master). I knew that he had died, but I met his successor, and asked if he would take on twelve innocent, short-term American students. I was not surprised when he said he would like to have a look at them. Guiding Zen students is demanding for a Roshi, and he reasonably wanted a sense of whether the "raw material" was worth spending time on.

It was arranged that I was to bring these twelve students the next morning. We arrived, a young Zen student ushered us into a small room, and we seated ourselves on the floor around a long table. As I sat there it came to me that twenty years before to the month I had been sitting in that same room being reviewed myself for Zen candidacy. Now I was back in the role of a teacher. In Japan, as the periodic rebuilding of the Grand Shrine at Ise symbolizes, twenty years is archetypal for the passing of a generation.

Truth as a Goal

To continue my story, the Roshi came in, smiled, sat down, and through an interpreter asked a question, "I understand that you are interested in Zen practice," he said, "Why are you so interested?" A pall fell over our group. The students were nervous to begin with, and straight off the Roshi asks them a question. One could feel the anxiety level rising, to the point where someone absolutely had to speak, and as there was one graduate student in the group, the obligation devolved on him. "For several years," he said, "I've been deeply interested in Buddhist teachings, but I hear on every side that there is a dimension of those teachings that elude the rational mind. They seem to call for another dimension of one's being, one that meditation is designed to develop. It is to fulfill this pre-requisite for understanding the Buddha's teachings that I would like to spend my time in Zazen."

The Roshi said, "That is not a good reason for doing Zazen!" The sword of Manjusri, flashing uncompromisingly, comes slicing down! Actually, I had felt rather proud of my student's
answer. I thought he had done rather well. "The object of Zazen," the Roshi continued, "is not to understand anybody's teaching, not even the Buddha's. The purpose of Zazen is to come to see things exactly as they are. Normally, we don't so see. A young man falls in love with a maid. Is it her he loves? Oh no. He's in love with the beautiful picture of her that he has painted on the mirror of his mind. The picture itself is beautiful, no question about that. But it's not the woman, and therein lies all manner of sorrow. It happens every day right here in Japan, just as it does in the United States. We decorate the mirrors of our minds with fantastic drawings. As art, some of them are quite good, but they're not reality. The object of Zazen is to erase from the mirror of our mind the pictures we unwittingly painted on them, to make them into clear, bright mirrors that will reflect exactly what's before them. If any of you want that, you may return at 5 a.m. tomorrow."

For me, those words point toward the goal we seek in this workshop: truth as the capacity to see things exactly as they are. In our Western idiom we have it on good authority that truth shall make us free, and to the extent that we are able to see things as they are, we are indeed free. That's the goal, and I don't know how to say it any better, or half as well, as that Roshi put it.

WHY THE TRUTH IS DIFFICULT TO SEE

But why don't we see things as they are? Dan's book (Goleman, 1985) of course, tackles this question head on, and magnificently. He's summarized some of its contents for us already, but let me add my supplement to his answers as follows. Having started with Buddhism, I'll continue with another leaf from that tradition. The Buddhist diagnosis for why we don't see things as they are is that our own lives are riddled with "the three poisons." We can get at their point graphically through an image—the image of a lens. A lens has a bulge that refracts the light that passes through it. The three poisons are craving, aversion, and illusion, and in our image they create the lens' bulge. We can think of craving as the surface that bulges, our demandingness toward life—"Give me, give me, give me!" The underside of that same surface might represent aversion, the second poison; it is a pushing away of life's offerings. "No thank you, not that, not that."

It is avoidance, a distancing of oneself. Then central to all this and forming the mass for the lens' bulge, is ignorance. Why this image pulls the Buddhist point together is that the fatter the lens' bulge, the more it is inflated with craving, aversion, and
ignorance, the greater the arc of distortion. Conversely, to the extent that these three poisons are reduced, the bulge flattens and the arc of distortion diminishes. The logical terminus is obvious. If we could rid ourselves of these three poisons completely, our gaze would be unrefracted and Roshi's goal would be attained. We would see things just as they are.

TRUTH AS A MEANS TOWARD THE GOAL

Now, how do we proceed towards this goal? With this question we turn from the truth as goal, to truth as the path that leads towards it. Truth can be a means as well as an end. In that role, though, it can be complicated, and I was glad that your book, Dan, did not gloss over that point. You allude for example to workshops in which couples are instructed to tell each other things they have never before revealed. Like you, I take a dim view towards this kind of assaultive approach. For one thing, it takes two people to tell the truth: One to tell it, and one to hear it; there are some truths that one hearer can make constructive use of, but another can't handle. The place from which truths are spoken are important too. St. Paul has this wonderful counsel, "...to speak the truth in love." That's splendid, for it's probably true that if our love were sufficient we probably could say everything that needs to be said. Lacking this all-embracing love, though, it's important to proceed cautiously, with all the wisdom we can muster, for if truth can free, it can also be wielded as a weapon of assault.

The Buddhist manuals are very sensitive on this point. As we know, the third step on The Eightfold Path is right speech, but the instructions don't approach that point simplistically. They don't say, "Okay, you've said you're going to walk the path. From now on speak the truth only." Not only would that be impossible; it would be disastrous. They enter a wise preliminary. Instead of promising never to deviate from the truth, begin by noticing when you find it necessary to deviate from it. For note well, the deviation is always for the sake of protecting something in you that is flabby and ill-formed. Yet that stuff is there, and as we cannot abandon all our defenses instantaneously, we have to work with it-e-reduce it, yes, but not pretend through some kind of romantic gesture that it isn't there. Noticing how many times during the day we find it necessary to hedge a bit provides clues as to what it is within us, and needs changing. Once we are onto that, we can proceed incrementally to the change itself.

I've made three points; let me close by recapitulating them. On truth as the goal I used the Roshi's formulation: Our goal is to
see things just as they are. On what blocks us from this goal I used the Buddhist notion of the three poisons: craving, aversion, and ignorance. For expunging those poisons I cited the recommendation that we begin by noticing where we have to deviate from the truth for the clue this provides as to what, within us, needs changing.

Ram Dass: Huston has said elsewhere that I represent a bridge, but actually, all three of us represent roughly the same bridge, although we may play different parts because we are all trained intellectuals, and we are also people of spiritual practice and intuition. And we're just dancing this dance, playing our different parts. We all could play different parts than we're playing today, as you, I think, understand.

I would like to make this presentation very personal, to discuss with you the ways in which I explore truth, or approximate truth, or move towards it for myself and in my own life. Perhaps there will be some value to you, through empathy or through generalization, in extrapolation, because I find truth to be deliciously elusive. I can just move towards it with the process of approximation, and I think I'm standing on truth, and then a moment later I see the lie that is holding me up. This also relates to my sadhana, or spiritual practice.

Now, wearing two hats, the fact that I'm trained as a psychologist, and the fact that I'm also a child of God and seeker of God, is not often always a comfortable position, because, as Dan pointed out, it's very easy to get into very deep illusions within the spiritual tradition, and that part of me that's a psychologist finds that abhorrent. There's a part of me that is fighting with myself, because I would like to be conned spiritually, but psychologically I can't handle it, and I'm constantly in this inner dialogue with myself about this.

I was just recently in Burma, where I was for two months at a Buddhist meditation center, sitting, practicing Vipassana, or Theravadin Buddhist meditation practice. Now, it's a very rigorous practice. To give you a little feeling of it, you awake at three in the morning. From three in the morning till eleven at night you only meditate. You either sit, or do walking meditation. Plus you eat two meals, one at five in the morning and one at 11:00 in the morning. That's it, you go to the bathroom, you can take a quick shower, but roughly, all your waking hours, or twenty hours a day, you are sitting or walking in meditation. And you're in a meditation center where there are 800 other people, and they're all doing the same thing, so it's no big deal. That's important in terms of the cultural context, that gives you support for doing this kind of work. In this
particular tradition, as opposed to other traditions a few miles down the road in Burma, you are following the rising and the falling of the muscle in the abdomen that is connected to your breath. You are doing that roughly 10-12 hours a day. The rest of the time you're doing walking meditation, which means that you are following your foot as it lifts, as it moves forward, and is placed down on the ground.

Now, I went into the meditation center armed with two one-pound bags of M & M's and a strong will to succeed. I had much opportunity to reflect as to what I was doing there. Why had I come halfway around the world to sit and watch my breath all day? I realized that it was because of this pull of truth, and that I was so disquieted by the guile of my own mind, the kind of slithery nature of my mind, that I was making one last desperate grandstand play (I don't know that it's the last, but I'm not rushing back there, I'll tell you). It was one last grandstand play to confront my mind. It was showbiz, there's no doubt about it.

Now, an interesting thing happened about two weeks into the meditation. I woke up at three in the morning and, usually, as you wake up, you wake up directly into the breath. At first it may take you a few minutes when you're remembering your dreams, but as the weeks go on you get so good that as you're waking up you go right into it, whether you're on a rising or a falling when you woke up. Was it on a rising breath or a falling breath? And at that point you're aware of other things, like your bladder may be full, you're aware of the heat or the rain, it was the rainy season, the rain's meditation.

What I was aware of were some sounds out in the universe which are the ground animals that are around and some traffic noises in the distance. But they all conspired somehow to become a chant, and the chant that I heard was "Om shri ram, jai ram, jaijai ram om, shri ram, fat ram, jaija! ram om." Now, you've got to understand my predicament. Here I am, a Jewish Hindu, I'm in a Buddhist monastery, practicing a Buddhist meditation, and what arises in my mind is a Hindu chant! Now at any other time it would be delightful that a Hindu chant would arise in my mind, but it's not appropriate for this particular situation. So I, in effect, doubled my efforts to follow the rising and the falling. Rising, falling, om shri ram, jai ram, . . . I'm not saying it, it's just lurking around in the back, so every time that my mind doesn't stay right on my breath, there it is. It's lurking, I know it's there. Well, I have to report that that chant went on all my waking hours for almost two weeks, and it wouldn't go away. It would only go away when I stayed at my practice, which drove me deeper and deeper into my
practice. But it still wouldn't quite leave. So I went to my teacher, and said "I have a problem, in that there is a chant going through my mind, and it keeps distracting me." I told him the chant, and he laughed when he heard that I was in India and that I had been following this other method. All I was for him was another mind that he was busy helping toward liberation. The content of my life, the history, my own drama, was of no relevance to him at all. He pegged me totally in terms of the way my mind operated. So he said, "Well, I'll tell you what you can do." He said, "Take refuge in the triple gem, i.e., the Buddha, the dharma and the sangha. Take refuge in the Buddha, and that will free you from the chant." So I went back to my room mindfully, and I thought, how bizarre! I am about to use Buddha to get rid of Ram.

Now, where does the truth lie in all of this? Here I was in a Buddhist monastery, but I had the picture of my guru next to my bed. Prior to 1967 my primary sadhana was psychedelics. After 1967 my primary sadhana was spiritual practice of what is called gurukripa, or the grace of the guru. Since 1967, every day, I had been eating only prasad, for example. Prasad means consecrated food, which means you offer the food to the guru and then you take what's left over. For all those years I had been connected with the Hanuman Temple and with Ram, and been singing "Shri Ram Jai Ram" over and over again, and I found it abhorrent to think or using Buddha to get rid of Ram. But then I said to myself, "Do you want truth? All these methods lead to truth. If I'm experiencing a conflict it must be in the limits of the way I am conceiving of these two ideas, of Ram and Buddha. Shouldn't I be able to follow anyone of these methods, and won't they lead me to truth?" So, I put away the picture of Maharaji, and instead of offering food to Maharaji (before I'd eat I'd say, "May this food strengthen me so that I can know truth"), instead, for the first time in eighteen years I did not. Then, I felt this incredible loss and at the same moment I felt something new happening. First of all, the chant stopped within a day. And something happened to my heart; it wasn't as mushy as the day before. I had also snuck in one other thing to the monastery, a book of Kabir's poetry. That was my devotional fix, if you will, that allowed me to get through this ascetic practice. So I put that away too, everything except the M & M's, that was just for protein.

At that moment I looked back and I saw, in myself, what we have been talking about this morning. I saw spiritual practice in the service of psychological mechanisms. In my psychedelic days when I took LSD, I experienced that I took a pill that altered my consciousness, and as the chemistry wore off, my consciousness returned more or less back to a certain place.
Habits reasserted themselves in my mind. I could still remember what had just happened in the psychedelic experience, but it became a memory, and I experienced myself as waiting for the next opportunity to take LSD after the refractory period went by. And what I built inside was a feeling "the pill does it to me." It is a certain feeling of impotence, if you will. I need the pill to do it. Now, I used to say in the psychedelic days, "Well, this is all temporary. Each time I take a psychedelic it's changing my habit patterns and perceptions, and pretty soon I won't need it. But after six years of taking it as often as I could, I still needed it. I still couldn't create or enter that state of freedom, of "truth waits for eyes unclouded by longing." I couldn't extricate myself from my own personality, my clinging—my ignorance, aversions and cravings. Now then, when I Shifted ground so that I gave up psychedelics as my primary upaya, or method, and moved to gurukripa, "I take the dust from the lotus feet of my guru to cleanse the mirror of my mind"—that is the frame I worked in. The idea is you love your guru, your guru represents truth incarnate, you love him, honor him, and open to him, or her, until finally you merge with that being and then you are truth. It's that a guru is like a doorway, it's not a teacher who's pointing the way, it's a being who is the way. It's a very alien concept to Western minds, extremely alien, because we don't trust another human being that much. As Dan has pointed out, we probably shouldn't.

But you see, when I transferred to the guru I did the same thing all over again. He was the one who had all the power, he was the one whose grace was going to do it for me. I was again ineffective and impotent and unable to do anything. So it was "Do it for me, oh great guru." And always I would think, "Oh Maharaji, do this, do that, do this for me, do that for me,"

But here in Burma I was practicing a tradition which is a real warrior tradition, this Theravadin Buddhism, where you do it for yourself. But rather than becoming a warrior, I had kept the picture of Maharaji to which I was saying, "If it be your grace, let me get on with this method." See, I'm still holding on to my old psychological mechanisms. When I put all the props away, and I just started to do this method, I started to feel this power in myself. That's scary to me, because that's what I've been avoiding, that feeling of that power.

Now in the meditation center in Rangoon there are the basic requirements of taking the precepts—non-killing, non-stealing, non-sexual misconduct, non-intoxicants, etc. There are eight or ten of them. Everybody you're meeting in your consciousness every day for months is under these precepts.
What I experienced was that my practice could move ahead very, very rapidly because of the support for those precepts. That I couldn't do by myself, but with that support system I could do it. I mean, as the grossest way of saying it, I can only say that for two months I didn't have an erection once, and I'm old, but I'm not that old. It just wasn't a sexy environment. Then I realized something that I've often wondered about. In the drug days I kept saying the issue isn't how to get high, the issue is what brings you down. With Maharaji, when I was around him, it would all turn into light. But I'd walk away from Maharaji and get caught back in my mind again. I kept thinking, "What is it that's bringing me down?" I used to say, "I'm not pure enough," and it sounded so righteous. But I now see that I was not willing to confront the places in me of craving and aversion sufficiently strongly to create a space in my mind that allowed my consciousness to stay pristine clear, if you will.

As I would meditate, what would come up would be not only momentary stimulations, like a pain in the knee, but waves and waves of self-pity, waves of loathing, waves of unlovingness, waves of agitation, nervousness, waves of fatigue. I noticed an interesting thing this summer, that there are certain states that arise in me that I treat as real. The rest of them I say, "Oh, there's my mind operating. I'll just bring myself back to my right breathing, and it'll go away."

For example, you start to make a plan for, "What will I do in the fall." And then you notice you're planning, and there's a category called "planning," and you say, "planning." And then you'd notice, "planning .... What am I doing planning? Did I come all the way to Burma to plan what I'm gonna do when I get home? Of course, I should be following my breath." And then you come back to your breath. That would be an easy one. But, you're going along and suddenly you feel fatigued, and you say, "Oh, god, I'm tired, my neck's stiff, I can't meditate any longer. I better lie down and take a nap for ten minutes." And that became real. That was a real one. I would go to the teacher and tell him that, and he says, "Fatigue is just another one. Just notice it and go back to your breath." You say, "Fatigue is just another creation of my mind?" Fatigue is not the truth, it's just something your mind is doing to avoid doing the work. Sickness was another one. I got sick in Burma. Everybody gets sick in Burma, I guess, except the Burmese. How real was the sickness going to be for me? Was it going to be the real thing? Oh my god, I've got a fever!-I mean, I've got my thermometer. I've got all the pills and I'm, you know, young Dr. Kildare. I'm going to treat myself, and I'm feeling my pulse, and there's no doubt I'm sick. The wrong things are coming out, the wrong things are happening. I'm sick.
I have a category for sick. Everything changes when you're sick. I went to the teacher, and reported, "I was meditating, but I felt feverish, so I lay down," and he looks rather curious. "Just note it, and return to your breath." Now, I thought, "Have I the strength to take something that I treated as real and true and treat it as another creation and not buy into it?" Health seems so real,

The last one I got hit with was I was supposed to be there for three months, and at the end of two months I received a telegram saying that there was a family medical emergency back in the U.S. So, I thought, I've got to go back there immediately to help. So I went to the teacher with the telegram in hand, and I showed him the telegram and I said, "I will have to stop the practice and leave tomorrow." He said, "If you were a Burmese now, I wouldn't let you go. But I don't feel I have any right to tell you not to go, you're from a different culture." But, he said, "I don't think you should go." I said, "Not go?" I mean, I'm needed there and I'm not going to go? You can understand that feeling, and yet you can hear what he's saying also. He's saying, "Look, if you really want to help suffering end, you better end your own suffering." And this is just another one of these old things of mine that is coming up at this point, and I say, "No, this is social responsibility." And he's saying, "No, it's just another one." I mean, what about all the millions of people I don't know and yet they are dying? What am I doing about them? And am I really out to alleviate suffering for all beings, or am I just out to look like I'm alleviating suffering for all beings? And when push comes to shove, where am I going to be? Push came to shove, and I got on the plane and came home.

I realized at that moment I just didn't have that desire for liberation that would allow me to just crunch everything else in its stead. And it's always been an interesting question to me, how much do you want God? In India, the sadhu has a funeral ceremony with his family in which he is seen as having died to the family, so that he can go on with his spiritual practice. And what I notice I have been doing is, I use one sadhana to kind of slide by from another, and then I use another one to slide by from another. Now I'm not attacking myself, I'm merely pointing out as a human being what I'm facing in my incarnation. Somebody said to my guru that they wanted God, and he said, "Well, if you want it bad enough, just tie rocks to your feet and jump in the lake." It's an interesting question how bad you want it.

I had another lesson in Burma. I've spent all these years as a Hindu practitioner, in which you understand that behind the forms lies the One, or the Formless, and it fit in with my Jewish
traditions of "Hear 0 Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One," that behind it all there was One. And I've always taken a certain solace in that. If I really experienced that, if I cleaned away all the ways that I was attached to my own separateness, I would still be separate, but I would acknowledge and know myself as part of that One. And I would in effect speak as that One. In Hinduism, this place where we know that One within ourselves is called the Arman. Now Buddhism's three major tenets are anicca, dukka, anaua. It says there's a lot of suffering, dukka, in the world. Well that I can see, that's pretty clear. It says anicca... it says everything is changing, all forms are changing, so as Christ said, "Lay not up your treasures where moth and rust doth corrupt," that's pretty clear to me too, I can handle that one. I can see that we're all growing old and dying and decaying, and that I'm part of a changing thing, that I'm not going to be able to stand anywhere, and I'm really quite comfortable with that. Then comes the third one, called anaua, which says that there is no self. Now, I can handle that psychologically. I can understand that the psychological self is a creation, as Dan was pointing out, of various schemas or models of who we are and how we work. But I could see that as I sat and meditated, I could see myself as this separate entity with a set of models of who I thought I was and how I thought it all worked. That all worked fine. But there is another line in the Buddhist doctrine... it's a technical matter but it's very relevant... that said, in asankata dharma-in the formless dharma-there is also anatta. In other words there's no One behind all of this. I couldn't handle that, because I had just spent the last twenty years resting in the idea of that One. I had always slipped by it, and said well, nirvana is really another name for it, and the void and the One are really the same. But the Buddhists say no, that isn't true, that's a cop-out. In fact, as you empty, as you empty, as you empty, there is nothing, there is nothing, there is nothing. Not the one behind the many, there's nothing. I thought, "Well I'm just being very naive about the concept of the void. Really, they must mean there's a One somewhere." I read the Abhidhamma, and I read the Visuddhimagga, and I kept studying the stuff, and they were uncompromising, and I was in this tradition in Burma that was uncompromising. They were not giving me any space.

I tried it with my teacher, and he just laughed. I saw they were saying there's nowhere to stand, really. I wasn't quite ready for that. Now I was facing something else about truth. I was realizing not that I was wrong, or they were right, or they were wrong and I was right, but that I was being allowed to confront a place in myself where I was not in harmony with the deepest truth from which all this would spring. That it was my idea of...
what one was, and what my idea of what void was, and what my reading of the sentence itself was that was leaving me caught.

Now I'm telling you this, I'm just struggling with this stuff continuously, to show you how sadhana becomes a method of approximating truth. It is not something where you get the truth right away and you say, "Oh, that's truth," and I'm all done. It doesn't work that way. In terms of your life, it's one of tuning, tuning, tuning, because not only is there the "truth" in the formless stuff that lies behind, but there is also the truth of an incarnation, there is the truth of what is your unique form. You can feel it inside yourself, you can intuitively feel, "I'm right on, that was absolutely right that I was in Burma." And you can feel yourself being guided if you want that, or moving through the universe. You can feel when you're in harmony with the lessons you need to learn, the way in which you're growing as an individual, just by the clarion call of truth, and then everything in my life follows from that, or how will I hear it? Why am I so uncomfortable here? How do I move into this space? The method is one of very slow approximation.

My guru said to me at one point, "Ram Dass, (I've written about this elsewhere [1979]) two swords cannot fit in the same sheath. If you give up money and sex, you will know God." My method is gurukripa, following the guru. What'll I do? I sayan one hand my method is gurukripa. All I know is, I still have money and I still have sex. Am I living a lie? Either the method is my method or it isn't my method. He made it clear. I'm from a family of lawyers, and I say, "What he really meant was.... He didn't mean give up money, he meant give up the attachment to money, that's much more reasonable. I'm not attached to money, so I can have as much as I want. But that isn't what he said. Well (I rationalize), what did he know? He's a simple Hindu, it was a bad translation, etc.

I've had thousands of ways to kind of slither through my spiritual practice. Now I can sit around criticizing myself for doing that and say "You're being dishonest," or I can say, "Look, that's who you are, that's okay too. That's where you are in your incarnation. If you were who you think you ought to be, you wouldn't have been here in the first place. You incarnated because you had this work to do because you have these kinds of attachments, and the judgment against it, is just making them cling all the harder." It's a very fine line from there to the one Dan was talking about where if you're a spiritual teacher you say, "Well, I can do anything." I've played with that, believe me. It's scary, and it's a very interesting thing, when you are with somebody and you see where they're caught,
and you see that you could say something or do something or touch them in some way that would change them and, through your mind goes, "Yes, but do I want to do that? Am I going to trust my own motives?" The reason I stopped teaching a few years ago was because I didn't feel pure enough to teach. I just felt that there was too much of my game which was in the service of my subtle desires. In part, it is what drove me to Burma, to meditate, to see the way these processes go. To approximate the line, "The truth waits for eyes unclouded by longing."

**Audience:** Many of the situations you describe are concerned with "mind" questions. When you are with another person, what does your heart tell you?

**Ram Dass:** Well, it's only in order to talk about it that I bring in the "mind" aspect. In fact, I just watch what I do. For example, when I take care of my father each day, I notice in my own mind that some days I'm doing it out of long-sufferingness, and self-pity. Some days I'm being a little patronizing. I'll just give you the list of ways, because each day you go up, and you get him out of bed, take him to the toilet, put him on the toilet, change the pads, shower, dry him, etc., and you're talking, and you're hanging out with another being. Some days I'm distracted. I'm thinking about other things. Some days it's all very automatic, just mechanically going on. Some days I'm infantilizing him. Some days I'm busy "being kind." Some days I'm sharing the joy of a new day with him. Some days I am drawing him out: How'd you sleep? What'd you dream? How're you feeling? What's happening? Some days I am respecting him. Some days I'm listening to him. Some days I'm giving him space. Some days I'm guiding him. All those are different stances that I have toward that same act every day, the different parts of myself. Now, I just respond differently each day. What I do through the daily meditation is I notice these differences in myself-e-not judge them, but just notice them. Not try to stop them, but just notice them. These are all mind sets mediating my relationship with my father. As I quiet down and let go of these veils of mind, we just meet as is, act as is ... heart-to-heart. For a long time I mediated everything I would say to people by what intellectually I thought I should say in order to be a spiritually conscious being. You all understand that "sickness." But you transform slowly to the point where you trust that you have learned some of these lessons, and you are what you are, and you just say it as you say it, and let the chips fall where they may. Later, as you meditate, and reflect back over the day in contemplation, you...
see where you got Lost along the way. You begin to see the ways in which your mind grabbed and distorted things along the way, as in the distortion Lens.

When I was using drugs as my primary sadhana, I was saying a lot of things that now I know were not my deepest truths—things I saw at that moment. When I got involved with Maharaji and the method of the guru, I was doing practices which I thought were my deepest truth, and when I started to do this meditation practice in Burma and gave them up and felt this loss, I thought, "How could I feel loss if indeed these were my deepest truths?" What I now find is that I'm finished with that practice for the moment and I'm not back into the way I was with Maharaji before. It's not that kind of lush bhakti (devotion) that I'm used to, but it's a whole new way of being with Maharaji, in every way.

Goleman: I probably should clear up one point. In my opening discussion I did not mean to suggest that healthy relationships are built from hypocrisy. What I do mean to say is that there's an optimum balancing, as St. Paul said, to speak the truth in love. Let us take the example of a family; The reason people in families go along with the collusion not to notice certain things is that we are, as members of families, deeply frightened that we will destroy the family by speaking the truth, that we'll be isolated, alone, or abandoned. Now, in any group—for example, a corporation—the same dynamic of the family applies. If you are managing money at a major brokerage and you see the brokerage bilking the banks for a quarter of a billion dollars a day, you probably don't speak up, because if you do, you have violated the contract that keeps you a member of that family. I will contend, however, that those who do speak up are serving the highest notion of what a business is or what a family can be. That is, they're speaking the truth in order to save the unit that feels threatened. The price they pay, though, is that they're booted out. The whistle-blower typically gets fired. The messenger of bad news is seen as having betrayed what makes us a whole, what makes us a group, and the price they pay is that they've got to leave the group. So, people who do speak the truth in a group pay the price, but they do the group the greatest favor.

Audience: What makes seeing reality in its true clarity so sacred? What is so great about truth?

Smith: In Sanskrit the word sat means both truth and being. To be brief, what's so great about truth is that it gives a largeness to one's life, it gives a life more substance. One lives in a larger world, and to me, what could be more important than that?
One has the choice to go through life provincially in terms of one's little patch, or in terms of the cosmos. William Blake has this wonderful line: If the doors of perception could be cleansed, we would see things as they are-infinite. "Infinite" there is not just a quantitative term, it's a qualitative term. Behind Blake, as with the Indians, there is a notion that being is good-esse qua esse bonum est, "Being qua being is good," and more being is better.

**Audience:** It is also written that the world is maya, or illusion, therefore, how do we know what is presented as the truth is not also illusion?

**Smith:** Maya is not reality, or rather it's a qualified reality, a diminished reality. In regard to the second part of your question, if you ask me to prove to you that what I'm saying is truth, I cannot. In that sense, the right is on your side. But you're asking me whether I believe that what I'm telling you is truth, and I say it is. It's not private, because this is the ultimate verdict of all the great traditions. I'm saying that out of a lifetime of study, and therefore, I'm speaking for the human unanimity in its profoundest registers. That's still no proof, but it's the reason.

**Ram Dass:** My response to the question is, at some point I have an experience which feels more valid than anything I've had before. So, I experience it as more connected with the truth than anything that's happened before. That really shakes my perception of everything that's gone before in my mind, in my history. It also then affects the way in which I read and hear other people's proofs. When Huston says the great people agree-and even the less great people agree-there's a way in which you have a non-conceptual sense of something which you resonate back and forth against the universe around you. Out of that you create a sense of what your truth is. It is true that it changes as you go on through life and have other sets of experiences, and so we don't end up with an absolute truth. Again and again I have met people whose experience of truth resonated with mine, and for whom it is the deepest experience they ever had. What I build is a body of consensus that's the deepest truth we could get to at that moment. I notice as I read through books those things pop out at me as reinforcing that feeling in me. That's what my body of truth is. It has the power of such intuitive validity that it guides and colors the rest of my life. That's what's so great about it.

**Goleman:** I think there's another implication to the question, and that is, if truth is so great, why do we avoid it so feverishly and intensely?
*Ram Dass:* Well, it's certainly true that fear of something keeps you attached to it ... aversion to anything, pushing away, is an attachment just like grabbing it is an attachment. That will keep it coming up, in your consciousness, again and again. It is a clue to what you need to work with.

*Audience:* I can leave the city, feel very secure and powerful, and then come back to New York City and realize how little my concept of truth matches and blends with other people's. What about that problem?

*Goleman:* I'd like to speak to that, the notion of competing realities. Much of our discussion so far has been about truth—my truth, your truth, our truth. I'd like to remind us collectively that the title today is, "Truth and Transformation," and we haven't talked much about transformation and its relationship to truth. I would contend that the level at which we've been talking about truth is a hopeless morass. That is to say, relative truth is really no truth at all. It's actually points of view, partial perceptions of reality. The grand program laid out by the great spiritual traditions has to do with trying to understand another level of truth, which is really quite removed from, but related to, this relative truth. The transformation that they point to is one in consciousness, in the "organ" that perceives truth. Generally, there are many, many paths described, but they come down to intensely working on one's organ of perception in order to cleanse it, usually through meditation and variations of it. It's never an easy transformation, yet it also can happen out of the blue. But what it points to is another kind of knowing, which is really beyond words, beyond the schemas we have. My problem is I'm talking to you in words, and if it's consensual level of reality, it's all conjecture. The Buddhists said you've got to do it yourself, face it and find out. Therefore, I'd like to suggest that transformation has to do with changing the way one knows, and thereafter one knows differently, and in that sense one knows a different kind of truth. Now, when it comes to being in the world, having gone through that transformation, the Sufis have a saying, "in the world but not of it." That is to say, one plays the game, but one does it from a much different internal stance.

*Smith:* I do believe that there is an absolute truth. Another way to say it is, an absolute being, or the way things are. That saves me from relativism, which is unlivable. Second, I have such a tiny sliver of a hold on what that truth is, it therefore stands to reason any formulation is going to be radically fallible, and the corrections will have to be unending. Third, in all this coming into focus, then dissolving and discarding, there is some sense
of being pointed in the right direction. That stays in place, and helps along the way.

Much has been said about the painfulness of truth, and we need to never forget that. But the truth is, that pain is destroying our illusory ego, and it's the death of the finite ego, and death is painful.

Audience: How does one select a path to transformation, to truth?

Ram Dass: I always come back to an intuitive sense of what you need at the moment. For example, I might feel that my mind is very agitated, and I'm then drawn to things that will quiet my mind. Then, as my mind is quieter, I see things differently, and I become aware that my heart is closed down, for some psychological reason. That draws me into a therapeutic relationship, in which I start to open that. Then I become aware of feeling finite, and I realize that the place my heart is closed has to do with my relation to God. That then draws me to a devotional path.

Now, it may well be that each of us has a specific way, and perhaps you will find it intuitively. My suggestion is to start out in a very eclectic, intuitive way, and let yourself be drawn into the method that may be uniquely appropriate for you. All these methods work, for somebody. It may well be that the final coup de grace, the final transformation is going to come through sitting, or it may come through serving people. Now, I may go out and start to serve and then realize, just as I did two years ago, that my serving is too impure, and it'll drive me back, and I will keep going in a spiral of work on mind, heart, body, relationships. I may be drawn into a single method and I may not be.

My own change of practice was jarring which shows how much I was clinging in the first place. Ultimately I would like to be like Ramakrishna, where each method merely summates, without any losses; but even difficult changes can lead to a discovery of aversions, and where you are holding.

Audience: How do you bring about transformation?

Ram Dass: Once you understand where you're going, that it's possible to be transformed, to get out of your own shadow, to extricate yourself from the kind of ego stuff that's strangling you, or isolating you, then you can understand it as a marriage that you're not going to get out of easily. It's a marriage with
truth, and everything is grist for that mill of awakening. You may start out by saying, I'm going to meditate thirty minutes in the morning, and that's it. But very slowly you want more, because once you have tasted what it is like to be free, or feel that spaciousness, you won't settle for a relationship that is full of deception, or that's turned off. It's that pain you were talking about, the pain of falling out of the grace, of falling out of truth, which is excruciating pain. And it drives you on to start to use the stuff around you.

Now, for example, we're talking about how you take a simple service relationship and grow from it (Ram Dass & Gorman, 1985). This week I've spent five days visiting in an intensive care ward, and talking with the nurses about burnout. The ones that burn out are the ones that don't have a framework for seeing their experiences as a chance for their own growth. They are attached. As the Bhagavad Gita says, "Be not identified with being the actor," and they are identified with being the actor. That is, they think they are exclusively a nurse, helping people, while the next level is, I am a being who is being a nurse helping people in order to awaken and become a better being so I will be able to be a freer nurse to help people more, in order to, etc., etc. That approach doesn't burn out.

Goleman: If you take as the goal of the spiritual transformation the movement toward a state where one is compassionate-compassion being love without attachment-that is something that we don't hear much about in this culture. What it means is being with other people, with love, without necessarily being anything in it for yourself. If one were in that mode, it would be absolutely effortless and natural to help with anyone. To the degree that we're not in that mode, we feel angry, we feel our own needs getting in the way, and that it's hard to live with people. One gauge of that movement toward transformation is how deeply you get caught, how angry you get, and how quickly you recover, how soon you notice. If you can use the situations in life to grow, you can use living with other people to grow and to transform. One of the tools you have is your own reaction, your own going under and getting caught, and seeing your own attachments, e.g., "Oh, I did it again. I just blew up." Or realizing, "I tried to manipulate so and so," and then freeing yourself from it by letting go. The exercise of getting caught, losing yourself in attachment, and freeing yourself, in ordinary life, is really no different than in spiritual life, except for its place in the continuum. You can do that in a group, perhaps better in a group than you can alone "on the mountain."

There's a story about the sadhu up in a cave for thirty years. He comes down, feeling he's free at last, and gets to the village. It's a very busy bazaar, with a lot of people there. In the
middle of this, an important Maharaja comes through on an elephant. The crowd parts, and a little boy in front of the sadhu steps back on his foot. The sadhu raises his staff as if to hit the boy and sees in mid-stroke what he is doing. His upraised hand never leaves the air; he just turns around and goes back up to the mountain, because he's seen that it was all well and good up on the mountain, but going back into the village revealed all the real attachments. In fact, that is an argument for a whole spiritual sadhana, service being part of it, which is to stay in the world.

_Rom Doss_: Just to complete my answer to that question, two points. One, from a personal point of view, I feel my job is to work on myself, to become an environment in which other people can see their clearest truth. I don't feel I have to teach them in the sense of push them to find the truth, I merely have to create an environment where they can feel safe enough and open enough to explore that truth. I treat other people's attitudes as the work ... I don't focus on their predicament, I focus on my reactions to their attitudes.

Now, point two, about groups. Nineteen years ago we started a commune up in New Mexico, a commune called the Lama Foundation. And, unlike most spiritual communities, this one did not have a single unifying spiritual tradition. It has many traditions. Some of the people there are American Indians (peyote eaters), some are Hindus, some are Buddhists, some are Christians, etc. We work by consensus, and it's quite a stinker. For the first ten years it was hard to get anything done, because the workers wanted everybody to work, the players wanted everybody to play, the druggies wanted everybody to get stoned, the abstainers wanted everybody to be a renunciate. What we kept coming to, besides the fact we nearly destroyed ourselves many times, was an appreciation that we really all wanted truth more than we wanted to be right all the time. We found that we had to increase the amount of silence every day to be able to handle the words, because the words were so divisive. And so we kept instituting more and more hours of group meditation, just to keep ourselves afloat. It took years before the psychological struggles abated. We'd gone through them so many times, eventually we all got bored with them. We started to focus on honoring our differences rather than fighting out our differences. I can't honor enough the value of an experiment like that. If your journey is to freedom, you use everything. That means living in New York City with people whose opinions and attitudes are very different from yours, and watching yourself get furious and then, not how many times you get furious, but how quickly you let go each time. That's the measure.
Goleman: I just want to add, finally, you see it before it even arises. That's the transformation.

Audience: What about work and love as a way to truth and transformation?

Goleman: There are many paths to the truth, and one of the oldest ones is the way of the householder, where you do your spiritual work in the midst of the world. For this culture it's the most appropriate, frankly. I think Freud had it right, that the two signs of full maturity are the ability to work and to love. I would add that the ability to work and to love most fully comes if you can do it in truth. In order to do it with the fewest skews introduced by these psychological factors, one needs to do some other kind of inner work along with living a full life in the world. If you don't have that, you're not living life the most fully. Also, if you could fall in love, and then be in love, utterly, and in a way where you use the love to work through your attachments, to see the way these things are keeping you from loving, that's absolutely a spiritual path. If you could do it with work, that, too, would be a spiritual path. You don't have to go off to some ashram in Burma, in fact, it may not be the most effective way to do it.

Audience: This is to Huston Smith. In your books you refer to untruths the modern ethos perpetrates. Can you elaborate on that?

Smith: Many of the presuppositions and assumptions of our whole world view are, I am convinced, radically in error, yet we're programmed to believe them, for if our minds can be likened to computers, culture is the program.

I'll identify the mistake in three ways, beginning with an image that I got from E.F. Schumacher. He begins his Guide for the Perplexed by telling of sight-seeing in Leningrad and being lost. As he was studying his map, a guide approached him, offered to help, and pointed on the map to where they were. "But," Schumacher protested, "those huge churches on these corners. There are no churches here on our map." "Oh," said the guide, "We don't show churches on our maps." "But," Schumacher continued, "that fourth church over there on that corner. It's here on the map." "Oh, that," said the guide. "That used to be a church. Now it's a museum," Precisely, Schumacher goes on to say, with the map of reality his Oxford education gave him. Most of the things, that most of humanity have most believed in, did not show on that map. Or if they did-and with this his analogy locks tightly into place-they showed as museum pieces, which is to say, things that people...
used to believe in, back in the childhood of the human race, but which we don't believe in today.

Reality has been drastically reduced by the modern world view, and for my second way to bring this out let me quote a former colleague at Syracuse University, a sociobiologist (Smith, 1982): "It is by now a Sunday supplement commonplace that the socioeconomic and technological modernization of the world is accompanied by a spiritual malaise that has come to be called alienation."

At its most fundamental level the diagnosis of alienation is based on the view that modernization forces upon us a world that, although baptized as reality by science, is denuded of all humanly recognizable qualities; beauty and ugliness, love and hate, passion and fulfillment, salvation and damnation. It is not, of course, being claimed that such matters are not part of the existential realities of human life. It is rather that the scientific world view makes it illegitimate to speak of these qualities as being objectively part of the world, forcing us instead to define such evaluation and emotional experience as merely subjective. The world, once an "enchanted garden," to use Max Weber's memorable phrase, has now become disenchanted, deprived of purpose and direction, and in these senses, of life itself.

My third way of putting the point takes the form of an argument that runs like this. Science has become, as Alex Comfort puts it, our sacral way of knowing. That is to say, we look to science as the oracle of truth. Quite precisely, it now occupies the place the Middle Ages reserved for revelation; already in the nineteenth century more people in the West believed in the periodic table of chemical elements than they believed anything in the Bible.

To this first point, that science has become our sacral mode of knowing, we can add this second: science-modern science, that is-turns on the controlled experiment. The third point is that we can control only what is inferior to us. We are brought, therefore, to the conclusion: science can show us only what is inferior to us. If there is anything that is superior to us-greater that we humans are, not just in size or brute force but by every criterion of worth we know, including such things as intelligence and compassion-it will never turn up on science's viewfinder.

Converting this argument into an image: If we liken the scientific method to a flashlight, as long as it is tilted downward, to illumine the path we are walking on, its beam is steady, clear,
and bright. When we raise its beam, though, to shine it on things that are our equals—other human beings—something interesting and important happens. As long as science (now we are into the social sciences) keeps human subjects in the dark regarding its experimental designs—which is to say, keeps them in a tilt (inferior) relation to itself, the scientist-science continues to work. But if they are informed of the experimental design and the tilt relationship is removed, the experiment collapses and science is silenced. Human selves in the fullness of their intelligence and freedom cannot be fitted into controlled experiments. And if they won’t fit, how much less would things—i-angels, God, whatever—that exceed us in every respect; if such things exist, it is they who dance circles around us, not we them. To bring back our analogy, if we tilt the flashlight upwards, a loose connection develops and we get no light at all. This argument doesn’t prove that there are things greater than the human species, but it does (I think) provide a knock-down argument that, if there are, science cannot disclose them. Yet we look to science for truth, so are conditioned to live as if, other than ourselves, there are only things that are our inferiors. This, I believe, is the greatest untruth our ethos unwittingly imprints us with.

Goleman: Shall we try to come to some closure?

Smith: I’ll begin. We have dwelt a lot today on ways in which we hide the truth from ourselves. This is important to see, but I hope it hasn’t left us with a negative view of human nature. Not that the alternative is a positive view. Rather, we should get off the positive-negative self-assessment see-saw and get on with what we should do wherever we start from. I’ve given up completely on the self-assessment project because no reading will stay in place. One day I can see myself as a rather well-appointed human being, only to plummet the next to the realization that I’m the cosmic ass-hole. One problem is which self I’m looking at, for as someone has wisely said, “No woman is as good as his public best, or as bad as his private worst.” The deeper point, though, is the one I got from Frithjof Schuon: “Whether we are good or bad is indeterminable. It belongs to maya, and therefore is unimportant.”

Goleman: I’m very moved by something Huston said, and didn’t elaborate as much as he might have. That is the way our cultural ethos blinds us to spiritual life. The way individual awareness arises and is censured, and how group awareness arises and is censured, I think, expands out to a national and cultural reality too. Textbooks are a very good place to see blind spots of the society. If you look at the history books of Japan right now, they are being rewritten to make the Japanese
occupation of Manchuria less awful than it actually was. In Russia, it's very easy to see because encyclopedias used to be recalled every few years to have pages changed. In our own culture I think we can see it if we look for it. I grew up in California having been born just after the war, not knowing that all of my Japanese friends came from families that had been put in prison camps during the war. Nobody spoke of it. It was as though it hadn't happened. I never read of it in a textbook. It was one of those chapters in the collective consciousness that didn't happen. Another good example is that we never speak, at least at the textbook level, of the terrible facts of how we got this land from the American Indians. And in the same way I think there's an incredible cultural blind spot, which is the one Huston was speaking of. It is the fact that in this culture there is no place for spiritual life. There is a place for going to synagogue, or church. But in church and in synagogue there's no place for spiritual life. There's a place for religiosity, for the exoteric, but not the esoteric. I'm simply saying that something seems to be missing, and it may be missing in our individual lives, but it certainly is missing in our cultural life. It has to do with transformation, with the spirit, and I think one antidote is to call our attention to that fact. What your answer may be individually is up to you. In fact, another lesson for me from today is that there are many, many paths to the truth, and it may be marriage, meditation, psychotherapy, and it may be in any or all the individual paths we pursue. But I do hope that we all find the courage to seek it.

Ram Doss: I haven't been doing public lecturing for the past few years, but prior to that, my audiences from the 60's were very narrow in age range, and background. Over the course of the 70's and into the early 80's they have become more heterogeneous in age and background, and in ways of working on themselves. Today, I find that I use different metaphors, for saying roughly the same thing as in those earlier years. I find that people can find the same truths through a variety of metaphors. Also, when they talk about marriage and the family as the only way, or my Buddhist teacher talks about renunciates and following the precepts as the only way, or Christian fundamentalists talk about the only Way, I experience a compassion for them in the same way I experience compassion for a teenager that isn't yet an adult, or the way I feel towards politicians in Washington who feel their power, and don't have the perception yet to see how limited their power is. What I'm referring to is the way in which we live in the world of beings who have different evolutionary work than we have specifically, and a way to appreciate them, and give them space to do what they need to do, still doing what we have to do. I honor somebody who says their method is the only way. I
dishonor when they prevent me from doing my method. That's the question of freedom, as to what you'll fight for, and what you disagree with.

I'm less and less convinced that we in the West can find happiness in a renunciative path. The experience I have is that when I turn off part of the world in order to get high, I am still stuck. If I can't look wide-eyed at all the suffering, or the socio-political issues, because they aren't spiritual enough, somehow, I'm missing the mark. Part of the sophistication that we're evolving into is to recognize ourselves as political, sexual, social, spiritual, esthetic, and mystic beings, and realize it's not a "one or the other" game any longer. To believe that it is, is too cheap a way out. You can't just be a good husband and say, well, I did it. If you are ignoring persecution that's going on down the street, turning your eyes away to be happy, that is cutting off a part of one's being in which you are knowing the truth, or are being one with the truth of the universe. Part of the spiritual journey as I understand it is learning to have open eyes to what is, keeping your human heart open to it-which hurts like hell-s-and yet keeping the higher wisdom or the philosophical understanding of the lawful way of things. This includes the suffering, pain, fear, and your own death—of it.

These are the balancing acts that I think we are about. That we come to a workshop like this, reaching to understand this ephemeral thing, "transformation," pushing ourselves, working toward the leading edge of our growth, this is the way we do it. And you can't go away and say, well, that's that, now I understand. That will fall flat too, because there isn't anywhere to stand in this game. There's just nowhere to stand.

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