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Every evening comes the moon: Awakening to freedom in the darker pockets of human existence

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Abstract

This article describes the necessity of the decent into no-self as being critical in awakening to one's true nature. The decent into no-self is not always a seamless one and often fraught with encountering darker pockets of our personal and cosmic states of consciousness including the need to deal with the end of one's world, unconscious pain and desires, and non-ordinary states. The author shares a small segment of his own decent in pointing to the possibility of realizing the already awakened freedom of awareness found in the moment and within such states and that by resting in the absence of self, dying to the clinging mind, an incredible sense of freedom can be found. The moon of awakening points to making one's home in the emptiness of no-self and riding the full deck of human consciousness. A nondual psychotherapy approach is used in two case studies of client's describing small segments of their own working process in the decent into no-self.

Whoever goes into the night will be eaten up, consumed in an instant, incinerated in a second. The night does not love you, does not do good things for you, does not have mercy on you, and does not make your life easy. The only thing the night can do is incinerate you. This is its only effect: absolute annihilation. This sounds scary, but when you see the falsehood of your entityhood and recognize the pure consciousness, you will be consumed with the passion to annihilate what is false. The longing for cessation is the ultimate desire that we have. It is the ultimate death wish, not the usual physical death wish. To die in total and complete annihilation means not knowing that you ever were or that you will ever be. It is absolute darkness, absolute peace. (Almaas, 2011, p. 171)

Awakening is not revealed in a nice, neat little package. It is a journey into oblivion where ones entire sense of self and conceptual world is completely exposed and burnt up. With no effort at all, a thundering abyss can open up in the centre of our being and magnetically drawn us similar to a black hole opening up in space swallowing everything we have ever identified with. Everything we held dear to ourselves. It is not surprising that the mind can conjure up many clever strategies in avoiding the full brunt of such a cosmic napalm. But a vast freedom can be found in this endless blackness of existence; a luminous freedom can reveal itself in the midst of our own apparent fear, confusion and obsession. This luminosity can emerge through a deep acceptance and surrender to the incinerating abyss and is the clarity and light of who and what we are as human beings. It illuminates everything in existence, from our own lack of clarity and unconscious obsessions to the darker pockets of existence; and even non-ordinary states of existence. It is an endless fall into a black hole where all of our conscious and unconscious attachments become intensely magnified. Not only do the gritty and shadowy aspects of our own consciousness scream to the surface of awareness demanding our attention and recognition but so to does the cosmic realm; opening one up to the energies at a cosmic level. The demons and idols we have loved and feared

all come out to play. Rather than grasp at survival-hood, the invitation is to go all the way, to let go and take the plunge with no expectations and be with whatever arises.

Buddha's own decent is an intense invitation for us all to find the luminous freedom in the darkness of existence. He realized there was no way around this abyss and had to descend into the depths of the unknown with no life preservers; he stacked his whole life for the mystery of existence to reveal itself. Sitting under the Bodhi tree he saw through the desire for material existence followed by the ultimate desire of achieving Enlightenment. He pierced through the whole seeking and awakening game which allowed for a full on embrace of the emptiness of existence. His commitment was so total that he willingly laid his head on the cosmic gelatin and died to all of his personal attachments. He let go and fell freely into the abyss. Fear and desire were burned up in the fire of awareness. Falling further he was enticed by the Gods with cosmic hard-bodies and repelled with ferocious demons. His awareness did not flicker and suddenly everything became radiantly clear and obvious to him. There is no such thing as a separate self. The horror of existence is in believing that one exists in separation. Here, it can feel like one is being hit with an atomic insight that tares the fabric of self-identification instantly illuminating the paradoxical nature of who and what we are. The ineffable presence of who we are. Here, we die living. The feel and taste of this experience is so shockingly familiar because it is what we have always been but have forgotten. It is as if we have dined on the bland buffet of separateness for so long, for so many lives, that we have lost our palate for Eternity and only now realized it. We have lost the flavor of sharing the gift of infiniteness in everyday life. It becomes abundantly clear that we can not return to the world of lies and deceit buying into the

world of separation and otherness. No more can we stomach the lies of identification and separateness, seeing through illusion and fixation moment to moment, dying to the death of me and my life and resting in the fathomless black unknown, our true home in the cosmos.

The next section describes a small segment of my own plunge into the abyss.

The Newspaper Incident

Through many years of spiritual seeking and self-striving for the golden prize of enlightenment, a sudden shift in identity occurred in the most ordinary of events. Several years ago, while traveling through Europe on vacation with my wife we were staying in Lucerne, Switzerland and while reading a newspaper in the hotel room, the sense of “me-ness” suddenly dropped. The suddenness was striking. I felt like I had lost all control and personal functioning and was spinning backward into a spiraling black hole. Something completely impersonal had taken over. I sat on the bed in what appeared to be a frozen state but my body could still move yet what was clear and noticeable was that “I” did not feel located inside of it. I continued to feel as though I was receding further and further into the background. There was an incredible blackness and silence in the midst of all the traffic noise outside on the street. All the noise became background and this awesome black abyss enveloped me totally becoming foreground. Something had cracked in my consciousness and I was falling deeper and deeper into the unknown. There was fear and it racing throughout my entire being.

My wife had returned from her walk and she saw that something was wrong, I weakly reassured her that all was well, but I did not get into the specifics of what was happening to me as I did not fully understand it myself. I simply asked if we could sit in

silence for a while. I tried to relax that evening but all I could sense was this continual decent in each and every moment with no end in sight. The following morning I started to journal about my experiences as a means of grounding and possibly shedding some light on it. Humbly, it dawned on me that although there were many shifts in my consciousness and awareness over the last several years there was subsequently a great deal of accumulated knowledge and concepts that I had collected. I saw at times, how I had parroted a lot of what other spiritual teachers had reported instead of coming from my own direct experience. This was not merely conceptual thinking. It felt like an energetic insight and realization had rippled throughout my body. It felt true. I felt some embarrassment and a sense of fakeness but then it seemed like something in my being had fallen away revealing more and more aspects of my consciousness and existence. It felt like something was chipping away at my being without my involvement.

For many evenings during the remainder of our trip, I had a flurry of disturbing dreams; dreams of being tortured and/or participating in the torture of others, mixed with desires of many sorts manifesting themselves. The fear continued and my wife was finding my company distant and unpleasant. As we entered Germany, the experiences started to ramp up a little more. I felt like I was energetically sensitive to different parts of the country, which were not uncommon for most people visiting Germany given the violent history, but I was plagued by more and more disturbing dreams and witnessing atrocities that seemed vividly real. At times, while staying the night in different villages I had this peculiar sense of being followed by something threatening and unseen.

I felt desperate. It wasn't until we were in Bruges that I wrote in my journal, "You just have to go with it, stop running, whatever is happening, remember, just go with it".

Soon, I felt like I could relax a little more and be more open to my situation. A sense of freedom swept over me even while in the midst of my decent. My whole world was caving in, losing its solidity, but I did not feel like I was resisting or fearing it as much anymore. Upon returning home to Winnipeg, I continued to feel a sense of freedom in the midst of the unknown and saw with some clarity, that existence had opened up tremendously for me revealing a vast terrain of uncharted consciousness and energies. I was slowly starting to see now how the beauty and dangers of existence can be met and experienced from a place of freedom and surrender rather from a place of terror and contraction.

A Gut-wrenching Decent

In one moment you are simply going about your ordinary daily existence and then suddenly you find yourself falling endlessly into a cavernous abyss. Beyond logic or reason:

A void appears here that nothing in the world can fill; a gaping abyss opens up at the very ground on which one stands. In the face of this abyss, not one of all the things that had made up the stuff of life until then is of any use. In fact, that abyss is always just underfoot (Nishatani, 1982, p. 3).

The energetic charge of separation is so incredibly strong that it often takes a tremendous shock to the body-mind system in order to pierce through all the accumulated conditionings; to see through the illusionary nature of self-existence and embrace the true stateless state of the absolute. Having the floor ripped out from underneath is sudden and striking and can quickly reveal how much of our energy is involved in maintaining the illusion of separateness. The hold of separation is felt

throughout the entire body-mind system, like an intense contraction refusing to relax and let go. What appears necessary here, when existence spontaneously reveals itself to itself in conditioned form, is to cooperate and ease into the process; to give up the “I am a separate self” drama and allow oneself and world to be totally consumed. Not just our concepts, ideas, hopes and dreams but the body itself. The love for bodily existence can be incredibly intense and the fear of losing it excruciating. As Segal (1996) experienced in her meditation practice and conversations with her spiritual teacher:

Whenever I have clear experiences of transcending, I’m attacked by an overwhelming fear that makes me feel like I’m going to die right there if I don’t stop meditating.” Maharishi broke into pearls of laughter, a response I had not anticipated. “Don’t worry about the fear,” he said, still laughing, “it’s just the body holding on to the world. You must let go of the world to transcend, but the body becomes afraid because it thinks the world is all there is. You must not listen to the fear of the body---just let go” (p. 32).

The body is compacted consciousness and energetically loaded with conditionings so it is entirely normal for there to be an abundance of fear; in fact it would be the body’s biological nature to experience fear, but the invitation to relax beyond fear is essential in abiding as one’s real condition. Osho (1981) observed the descent into no-selfhood is marked by an incredible sense of loss and death where he likened the descent as to being “on the road of sighs” where everything that once applied to a sense of self and its conceptual world crumbled to pieces. None of it can be related to in the same way. Almaas (1995) encountered this in his own descent into the abyss with the existential realities of death and finitude:

This loss has implications I have never fully come to terms with. Death is no longer living this particular present life. It is my particular, present life that I will leave, and not only life in general. This is not a philosophical question; it is a completely personal concern. The sadness is the grief about recognizing that I cannot remain with what I love. When physical death arrives, I will lose contact with all that I have come to love in this world. Death will be the end of contact with family, friends, students, places, things, activities, work; everything and everyone I love and cherish (p. 127).

The love for existence is so deeply ingrained in human conditioning that a flood of tears can emerge in this realization. A deep guttural sadness at the loss of everything which constituted one's entire life. The attachments, hopes and ideals are all burned up in this seeing. The shift in perception from a separate bound entity to the vast endless mystery calls for such a death. The shift from the peripheries of life to the endless depths of existence is so strikingly clear that one can not hold back. Perhaps this is what is being meant in "crossing to the other shore". The energetic charge of separation begins to lessen and the pull to realize one's true nature becomes even stronger. Adyashanti (2008) experienced this while attending a friends wedding reception:

At that moment, it suddenly hit me that I would never again see life as most human beings see it. It was as if at that moment I felt like something within me was completely leaving the human condition. Viewing things from conventional perspective was over for me; it was finished. This knowing was accompanied by a bit of nostalgia...But in that moment I saw that the way most human beings

view the world was no longer the way I viewed it. And I knew I'd never view it that way again. Whatever had happened, there was no going back (p. 176).

Falling further into the abyss one typically has to encounter and work through all the nasty unconscious material buried deeply in the recesses of their being. The next section points to elements of this experience.

Beggar's and Hangers on: Working Through Unconscious Material

As we begin to let go of the peripheries of existence and dive into the depths of no-self and wake up from the mud of conditioned existence we have to encounter all of our unconscious baggage we have hidden from awareness. This can be excruciating painful because such baggage keeps the belief of separation in place. As we descend further into the abyss, it can feel like a Dante's inferno has erupted deep within the recesses of our being bringing forth all of our deeply held unconscious complaints about life, hidden desires and attachments to the surface, especially with the attachment to the body. Although a profound shift in awareness may have taken place, we may still be harboring complaints about existence about not yet being found out or recognized as the next nondual awakened teacher, feeling like a fraud, chasing desire, hiding out in a space of "nondual immunity" where we lack the ability to be vulnerable and touched deeply by life, hiding out in nondual concepts, or mimicking a partial surrender where the deep seated fear of no-self is far too great to embrace. This is where the nondual rubber really hits the road.

Several years ago while participating in a nondual group, I remember feeling like a fraud when it was pointed out to me that I was merely parroting nondual concepts as my own experience. They were right. I felt exposed and vulnerable and a great

trembling in my being was taking place. I saw what I called a partial surrender where I was willing to give certain things up but still projecting images of being the “Mr. awakened guy. What I did not see at the time was that surrender is a non-doing.

Nisagardatta Maharj (1999) explains it best:

Self-surrender is the surrender of all self-concern. It cannot be done, it happens when you realize your true nature. Verbal self-surrender, even when accompanied by feeling, is of little value and breaks down under stress. At the best it shows an aspiration, not an actual fact (p. 478).

All my nondual chatter was merely a defense against the underlying fear of no-self. I was invited to own it and not run or defend against the experience and dissolve into the fear. “Fear will be there - in spite of it, go into the unknown. Let the fear be there - still go into the unknown. Only by going into the unknown will the fear disappear, because you will come to know there is nothing to fear” (Osho, n. d., p. 37). I soon saw that the freedom is found in allowing it all to come screaming to the surface and met with an open accepting heart. The slightest judgment or condemnation towards the experience keeps one scrambling for an eternity. We are all frauds, liars, tricksters, afraid, pretenders at times, who cares, we don’t have to make any of it into some healing project. We have to come out of hiding and expose our dirty little secrets. If we open up to it in the moment with an open heart, that which is eternal, can shine through uncluttered.

By descending deeper into our beings and addressing our unconscious seeds and not indulging in them we are subsequently not bound by them and released into a more expanded sense of freedom. And with this new found freedom from the self comes

the possibility of opening up to realms of trans-personal consciousness where non-ordinary states can emerge.

Dealing with Non-Ordinary States

Not only do we have to contend with our own personal consciousness but at times, existence has a way of tossing us a cosmic curve ball just to shake up our beingness by way of dealing with the cosmic realm or non-ordinary states of consciousness. As we descend into the mysterious depths of existence there can be a cosmic opening up to uncharted levels and dimensions of consciousness where some of the difficult or darker pockets of existence present themselves (Wilber, 1999; Grof, 1985; Modi, 1997; Nixon, 2001; Rich, 2012). Returning to the story of Buddha's own awakening, Mara, an apparent demon God, emerged in Buddha's awareness tempting him with beautiful women to give up the awakening process. The women represented craving, desire and boredom and when this was ineffective, Mara attempted to repel Buddha with ferocious images and visions of demons and ghosts hoping he would contract back into separateness out of fear and return to a conditioned life. Buddha did not give any energetic fuel to fear and desire and amazingly, while remaining completely still, he saw through the illusion of the separate self and Mara himself. Existence revealed itself to itself in a cosmic flash. It was all mind created. As there is no self, there is no other. Mara never really existed and so there was no need to fight him, it was all a dancing illusion taking place within awareness. There was no effort needed in this realization, it was a spontaneous understanding happening to no one (Kramer, 1988). Who could possibly surrender? There was no one there. It was all a clear seeing and impersonal understanding.

This can be a frightening experience but Buddha's story points to how the transformational process of awakening does not follow a predictable tract and that everything is put into question. Whether it is in the energetic form of disembodied spirits (Modi, 1997), spontaneous visitations (Moody, 1976) or unresolved traumatic past life scenarios (Adyashanti, 2008) for some people, the need to see through the clutching that has taken place at a cosmic level is critical to relaxing into the endless mystery.

Adyashanti (2008) experienced this in his own awakening:

For the most part, what I saw was anything that was unresolved about the dream of "me" in a particular lifetime. There were certain confusions, fears, hesitations, and doubts that were unresolved in particular lifetimes. In certain lifetimes, what was unresolved was a feeling of confusion about what happened at the time of death. In one lifetime, I drowned and did not know what was happening, and there was tremendous terror and confusion as the body disappeared into the water. Seeing this lifetime and the confusion at the moment of death, I immediately knew what I had to do. I had to rectify the confusion and explain to the dream of me that I died, that I fell off a boat and drowned. When I did this, all of a sudden the confusion from that lifetime popped like a bubble, and there was a tremendous sense of freedom (p. 209).

Instantly the traumas were resolved. By relaxing in and as awareness itself, that which is prior to form and formlessness, heals the wounds of confusion, fear and separation. This is important transformational work because there can be a significant degree of energetic forces at play, which we are not even aware of, that can stunt the unfolding of awakening. By not adopting a particular preference towards a non-ordinary

experience awareness pierces through and thaws the frozen experience freeing up the accumulated energy and allowing for a full resolution to take place. Wolinsky (2002) saw how this is important in helping someone who has made their physical exit but who does not realize they are even dead and locked in a state of fear and shock.

When my dear friend, Christian, died, at first “my” mirage body-mind felt its grief response. Later that evening, however, within the EMPTINESS, while “I” was sitting in the living room of our apartment, there appeared the much less condensed consciousness called Christian. That consciousness was floating in EMPTINESS, and that consciousness did not know it had died, and hence was in shock. “I” spent some time with him (his consciousness, which was thinning out) letting him know what had occurred. Over the next 24-36 hours, “his” consciousness was around until it thinned out within the BIG EMPTINESS and was no more (pp. 145-146).

Seeing through his own dis-identifications and illusions of separateness, Wolinsky (1993) was able to help his friend surrender to the dissolution process and open up to the truth of who he is as emptiness. Everything is interconnected consciousness and as such everything that manifests can be embraced in a relaxed way; the typical “spiritual significance” given to such non-ordinary states dissolves and seen as ordinary phenomena. The next section describes an embodied realization of the truth of our being in all states and experiences of consciousness. Having been rinsed out of all personal attachments, unconscious seeds and non-ordinary states existence becomes an open field of free participation where nothing is excluded and can be met with the light of pure awareness.

The Moon of Awakening

Waking up out of the dream of self-identity requires a dramatic shift in awareness. Seeing through all aspects of personal and non-ordinary states of consciousness one relaxes and rests as a spacious luminosity. The illusion of a separate solid self is exposed and the truth of who and what they are is apparent moment to moment. The moonlight of awareness illuminates all aspects of consciousness and is a paradoxical realization; “In the process of decent, she learns that there is no leaving the absolute, but that the decent is simply the integration into the absolute of all dimensions of manifestation” (Almaas, 2011, p. 415). Everything is arising happening to no one and existence becomes a play ground of energies. The intensity is in this instance, seeing that at any moment, existence can snuff you out. The next instance is not guaranteed. Everything is left up to divine will where an incredible re-orientation of our being takes place. It becomes clear that in the dream state most people only live 1% of an authentic existence, and the rest is all just bullshit and deal making and fakeness. The question becomes where in my life have I really shown up? That is the question. And the realization is to live from the vast openness in each instance.

We are totally open and innocent, with no defensiveness and no strategizing.

There is no holding back, no hiding, no protection, no pretension. There is complete openness, presence, and genuineness. There is no self-control whatsoever. So the spontaneity is total. The absence of control is absolute. We simply experience ourselves as freedom, lightness, delight, openness, and

spontaneity. Without self-consciousness, action and expression are absolutely spontaneous, and hence totally free (Almaas, 2011, p. 387).

This is both exhilarating and dangerous all at the same time as there is no knowing of what the next moment may bring. Being so alertly aware it may become clear where we have made fraudulent deals with people over the years. One can have a fraudulent mirror in the world and it is up to them to spot who that is. A fraudulent mirror with whom one has given all of their energy to, giving away one's gift of awakening and completely dulling one's energy and ability to move freely and fluidly in life. A fraudulent mirror will typically support a sense of self-identity and it is up to each person to take them down and reclaim their energy. We may see how for years we have been taking on other peoples assumptions and insights about awakening without realizing it ourselves; trusting on blind faith.

The supports that once made up a sense of self, spiritual or otherwise are all now gone, incinerated completely. Here, one can feel themselves energetically pass through people, not out of anger or anything, just a natural cosmic moving through where no deals are made, no recoiling out of fear, no need for security, just love, all love. This is the embodied realization of our true nature, where the eternal side of our being makes its way into the relative world. The moment one can make the whole world their play ground then one can meet anything that arises in consciousness with love and awareness.

Nondual psychotherapy invites us to realize this inherent gift within each and everyones being.

Nondual Psychotherapy

The central task in nondual therapy is to facilitate “awakening an experience of the unconditioned mind for the therapist and client, and the ongoing cultivation of this experience” (Fenner, 2003, p. 28). Although a person may present in therapy with very real emotional pain and inner conflict, when one’s thoughts, feelings, sensations and inner conflicts, cosmic or relative, are seen from the stateless state of no-self one is multi-dimensionally aware and liberated from the fixation that life in the moment should or should not be the way it is (Wolinsky, 1993). This is depicted in what the mystics have called “the one-thousand-petalled lotus”, a full blooming of awakeness in both personal and impersonal aspects of consciousness. Here, the therapist is abiding within paradox; the realization that there is no crystallized separate self, and yet, in the same breath, there does *appear* to be one. The shift is in surrendering exclusive fixation this appearance in resting in nondual consciousness. It is the client’s fixation and belief in the reality of the apparent separate self that causes misery and endless suffering (Osho, 1983).

This is mirrored and facilitated when the therapist herself is anchored in nondual consciousness. The role of therapist and client are seen through, allowing for the possibility of a nondual resonance to take place within the therapeutic process. The boundary between client and therapist collapses bringing about a stillness and silence out of which a spontaneous encounter can emerge (Blackstone, 2006). Within this possibility of inter-subjective resonance, therapeutic techniques may be used and developmental theories considered but they are regarded as mere pointers towards nondual realization. Any fixation on a technique, role or particular therapy (even nondual therapy) limits access to the already free flowing nature of nondual consciousness

(Prendergast, 2003).

In many ways, the nondual therapist is acting out of an impersonal love. It is an impersonal love and acceptance of all things. One's responses are fresh, clear and spontaneous in nature. There isn't even the expectation or hope that a client realizes their true condition because doing so would be placing a demand on the moment and close down the aperture of awareness. It is similar to what the Taoists call "action through inaction" where one responds to the needs of the moment without losing sight of the already awakened condition of no-self (Wei Wu Wei, 2004). Almaas (1996 pp. 343-344) describes it as "a quality of boundless and gentle love, a delicate light experienced as the presence of softness, sweetness and generosity. It is not exactly a personal kind of love. It is love for everything and everyone---universal love". The nondual therapist makes his or her home in the clarity of no-self, moment to moment, not matter what emerges. This is the moon of awakening in all aspects of life and a gift to be shared with others caught in confusion and fear. In the next section are a couple of case studies describing small segments of clients decent into no-self hood when dealing with letting go of old ways of being, unconscious material and non-ordinary experiences.

Jack

Jack (a pseudonym) has been in recovery from drugs and alcohol for the last 6 years. He grew up in a family riddled with alcohol abuse and profound neglect and found support and connection in joining Alcoholics Anonymous. Having been a member for the last 5 years and a sponsor for 3 people he considered his home group family. He also found himself drawn to the teachings of Eckhart Tolle and had been practicing

mindfulness strategies and attending online Tolle classes for the last year and half. He had also recently completed a 12 week stage II recovery group with me. He scheduled a session with me to discuss an experience he had had at a recent AA meeting. He shared that while listening to the speaker share his story he suddenly felt himself “fall inwards”, where he felt acutely aware but frightened all at the same time. He shared feeling as though he could not move and that the room and people around him felt “paper-like” as if they were not real anymore. Although he was able to finish the meeting and ended up going home that evening he felt something had taken place for him that he did not quite understand. He sat in his apartment feeling as though his identity was being eroded.

When I asked him to share more about his experience he indicated that over the last several days and while attending AA meetings he could not bring himself to introduce himself as “Hi, I’m Jack and I’m an Alcoholic” anymore. It did not feel real anymore. I felt this was an important experience for Jack as the shell of his identity was beginning to crumble. In some ways, he appeared to be in the process of moving from mindfulness to no-mindedness. He had attended many mindfulness meditation retreats and experienced states of witnessing consciousness but nothing as sudden and striking as this. Mindfulness helped him relax in the moment and contend with the dramas of life but appeared to be used as a self-soothing strategy whereas the decent into no-mindedness is a whole other level altogether. I reminded Jack of Eckhart Tolle’s decent while sitting in his apartment and invited Jack to give up the identification game with being an addict, a sponsor or body and mind, and to continue falling inwards and notice the underlying emptiness within. “I feel like I am being pulled down,” he stammered. I

encouraged him to cooperate with it and not judge or manage the experience. It seemed like the darkness he was avoiding was confronting his wound of abandonment and neglect and allowing the spontaneous decent to unfold. After a few minutes of sitting in silence, Jack began to weep heavily sharing he felt like he was losing his family (referring to his AA group) and everything he knew. I only nodded not wanting to pull Jack away from this insight. He then shared feeling like he was being abandoned and feeling guilty. This was a delicate place for Jack as the unconscious wounds of abandonment were natural given his traumatic biographical history and so I asked Jack to feel into the wound of abandonment but not react from it, to see the freedom of awareness even in the midst of his pain; to simply to allow it to be there and to take the risk of not doing anything about it and to stop making abandonment and guilt into some type of problem. After a few minutes, he smirked and appeared to relax into his experience. I pointed out to Jack that the mind can use such emotional states as self-survival strategies in maintaining control and separation and the endless “recovery project”. “Maybe you have finally exhausted this whole ‘I am nothing but an addict identity’, I said. “Also, the concept of family can be limiting, perhaps it is all just based on connection”, I said. “I’m not sure if I can go back to my meetings and do the whole AA ritual”, Jack replied. I pointed out that whether he went back to AA meetings or not was not the point, “Who know’s”, I said. “But notice the freedom found here, when we just drop into the emptiness of no-self”.

Several months later, I received a phone call from Jack sharing that he did make the decision to leave his home group realizing he could not buy into the self-identifying AA scripts any longer seeing it as a barrier to the natural unfolding of his being.

Although he found it painful he saw it as necessary and finds solace in reading of other peoples accounts of descending into the mystery of existence.

Nancy

Nancy (a pseudonym) arrived for our initial session filled with fear and panic. She had been on a spiritual journey for a few years embracing Buddhist teachings and the work of nondual teacher Joan Tollifson. She tearfully described the death of her husband a month and a half ago; a tragic death where he violently took his own life. She shared feeling the grief, confusion and sadness with the way he died but felt like she was also going “crazy” these last few weeks stating she sees him almost every evening sitting in the living room looking confused and angry. “He even yells at me, telling me its all my fault. He would fade in and out. I just avoid going into the living room altogether now.” She looked at me anticipating my response, perhaps worried that she would be pathologized and judged. I responded that I was genuinely sorry for her loss and pointed out that the phenomena she was experiencing is actually quit common and ordinary. “It’s all consciousness happening”. She appeared a little relieved hearing this. I invited her to slow things down and simply sit with the energy of fear, sadness and confusion that was arising for a few minutes as there appeared to be a great deal of ego activity taking place.

Nancy shared having many breakthroughs and insights into the nature of human consciousness, letting go of self and attachments and enjoying a sublime witnessing state but had never encountered this type of non-ordinary phenomena. She shared desperately wanting to help him as she sees him trapped in a hell realm of his own but felt too afraid. She appeared caught up in the drama of his own hell. I invited her into a

two phase intervention process by inviting her to sit in her own hellish pain first followed by sitting with her partner and giving him feedback. It was important for her to accept her own death and desperate need to survive. I pointed out that her ego activity was perhaps a buffer against the realization of her own demise and invited her to relax the need to save herself or anyone else; to dissolve together in the instance of this moment with nothing anchoring her into separateness. We sat in silence together for several minutes. Nancy reported feeling an “openness in my soul”. I encouraged her to allow the openness to spread throughout her being. From this place, I asked her to recall the last time she encountered him sitting in the living room and to see the whole scenario in her mind’s eye without trying to manage the experience or judge it in anyway; to simply see it as another expression of consciousness happening to no one. We sat with this for awhile as she felt a full spectrum of emotions emerge and fall. She also saw how she was taking on his pain and confusion causing her to shut her energy down and feel small and separate again. This was a significant insight for her. I asked her to see him struggling in his own confusion and anger but from a place of presence and being willing to sit in the fire of his own hell without flinching. “I don’t feel myself in such a panic right now but I have this fear in the background that i could get stuck in there with him”. I pointed out that this was the fear of the mind and that she did not have to participate with it. “The mind is fed by fear, you’re prior to that. Whatever shows up in awareness is just another experience”. I asked, “Can you simultaneously allow yourself to dissolve while sharing what it is you need to say to him and pointing out to him that he has passed on and needs to make his way and continue his journey?” “I think so”,

she said tearfully. Nancy was encouraged to come from this place the next time she sees his consciousness appear in the living room.

Nancy scheduled another session three weeks later. She arrived appearing calm and smiling. She described having “2 sit downs” with him sharing her love for him but also sharing she was letting him go and that he needed to move on. I said to him, “I love you with all my heart but I can’t do this anymore. You need to go. I would share the same thing each time I saw him until I felt him leave. I haven’t seen him for a week and half now.” She shared further, “It was strange, I felt my body twist and contort as if I was letting go of a life time of relationship attachments with him and my own demons of guilt and shame. I felt the emptiness within and I could see how much the mind wanted to fill it with something, anything, but I just sat with it like how we do here and I felt pretty relaxed.”

I acknowledged her work as being an important shift for her and an aspect of impersonal love towards her partner. Little was shared as we sat in silence for several minutes allowing the instance of the moment to unfold between us; not knowing what will emerge. There were rounds of sadness and grief but Nancy did not cling to her experiences and reported a deeper shift within her being; a surrender to the mystery of consciousness. By not making distinctions within consciousness she appeared better able to meet her experiences in a fresh and clear way; a mirroring gift for her partner to continue on his journey but also, a deeper realization for her in seeing that any situation is an opportunity to let go and that we have to be alert and ready to meet anything that emerges in our awareness.

Conclusion

The moon of awakening is waking up out of the dream of conditional existence and finding freedom in the essence of our most difficult and contracted states of being. It is a freedom of awareness which brings everything to light; illuminating the shadowy corners of existence and allowing the freedom to encounter all levels of human and cosmic consciousness. It is an awakening into no-self which is a total stripping away of the illusion of separation and person-hood where there is a complete relaxation with the need to identify with anything. Such freedom is found in the decent into no-self which is necessary in awakening to our true nature and where no matter what presents itself in our awareness, from dying to old habits and ways of being in the world, burning up any unconscious seeds and dealing with non-ordinary states of existence, every moment and every experience is seen to be a workable situation. The deeper the decent the more it becomes clear that each moment is an invitation for us to see that which is ever present, intimately aware and untouched by experience. Real freedom exists in being able to ride the full deck of consciousness, in all pockets of existence, both beautiful and dangerous. And for nondual therapists we can work with people stuck in such pockets by pointing to the reality of freedom here and now when one simply relaxes, lets go and dissolves.

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