

**THE TRANSFORMATIONAL QUEST OF AWAKENING TO DAILY LIFE: A
PHENOMENOLOGICAL-HERMENEUTIC APPROACH**

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Abstract

In this thesis a phenomenological-hermeneutic method of inquiry, coupled with an embracement of ecological and transpersonal principles, was employed to delve into the paradoxical nature of the transformational quest to awaken to non-dual living. In particular there is a specific focus on the difficulty of embracing and living out a traditionally Eastern spiritual tradition for Western individuals. Analysis of interview transcripts with three participants, as well as, the author's own journals, found four major "stages" in the journey to daily living in a non-dual state, with 13 sub-themes. These interpretive themes delineate the chronological path followed by the three co-researchers on their journeys into embracing non-dual living. The first major theme – heeding the call: honouring what is – outlines childhood experiences and answering a call to walk the path. The second theme– the unfolding process: pulling back the veil – illuminates the depth at which consciousness development can impact one's lived experience. The third major theme – the wonderful land of oz: pointing to the answer within – explores the individuals' experience with various teachers on the path of consciousness development. The fourth, and final, major theme – finding a lotus in the muddy waters of life – reveals the need for beings on the path to return to the particular moment to face unresolved attachments and demons. These findings suggest the significance of an integrative approach to therapeutic/counselling experience, an approach that includes Eastern practices and philosophies in the repertoire of counselling tools, to ensure the deepest possible understanding between, and connection within, the partners in the therapeutic alliance.

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CHAPTER ONE: THE DREAM FOR WHICH ONE IS AWAKE

Introduction

Once upon a time, I, Chuang Tzu, dreamt that I was a butterfly, flitting around and enjoying myself. I had no idea I was Chuang Tzu. Then I suddenly awoke and was Chuang Tzu again. But I could not tell, had I been Chuang Tzu dreaming I was a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming I was Chuang Tzu?

(Palmer, 1996, p. 20)

From a Western perspective, the question of reality in Chuang Tzu's dream may appear as a far removed philosophical question, selectively allowing a mere faith or belief in linear thinking to provide an answer while excluding the experience itself, as a possible answer. Yet, if one is to look hard enough, the answer to this question can be found in going beyond the egoic-self and into an awakening of the essential consciousness that embodies all life (Almaas, 2001, 2004; Kornfield, 2000; Welwood, 2002).

Ego-transcendence and awakening to consciousness has been a life long struggle for numerous seekers. This struggle entails finding meaning in life, as well as, ending suffering and fulfilling what Prince Siddhartha Gautama – the Buddha – is said to have found under the bodhi tree over 2500 years ago in India, *awakening*. Unfortunately, there is no guarantee that an individual will stumble upon awakening or find a solution to end suffering but there may be signposts to guide the seeker if the choice is made to follow one's intuitive self or sense of being, which I will refer to as *beingness*.

This process of discovering these signposts may become a lengthy and complex journey, one that may bestow hardships and difficulties along the way. The actual process of establishing a sense of *beingness* requires a breaking away, or separation from the conventional values of life, allowing a “coming to consciousness” for the individual (Almaas, 2001, 2004; Welwood, 2002). In the Western world, conventional values are generally placed on external and tangible things, such as work, money, cars, and housing. To awaken, a deconstruction of these external, cultural and societal values must occur, birthing the commencement of an internal inquiry (Kapleau, 2000; Welwood, 2002).

As someone who has trudged the *path*¹ of *transformation*², having begun my own quest/journey some time ago, I have had various insights into the awakening process by turning inward to find truth. I first came to see some of these things at a young age when I felt as though I never fit in with my surroundings. I experienced intense feelings of sadness, yet I paradoxically possessed a passionate connection with other beings (animals, nature and people) and existence in general. I was able to be present with this sadness, from which an innate beauty emerged from within myself, until the beauty, nevertheless, began to fade. I was left with raw sadness which then turned inward and transformed into a feeling of grey melancholic, despair. I began to judge the sadness resulting in a burial of the heartfelt beauty that is held within it. The judgements bore so much weight. Welwood (2002) speaks eloquently on the transformative aspects masked within sadness, “in sadness there is a fullness of heart, a fullness of feeling in response to being touched by the sweet, transitory, ungraspable quality of human existence. This emptiness is one of the most significant of human experiences” (p. 177). I felt this “emptiness” and found myself asking many questions about human existence. I

questioned life deeply. These feelings seemed to set me apart from friends and acquaintances who did not appear to share a deep passion for existence, existential matters of the heart, and connection to being.

I felt an existential despair and was fearful of many things. I wanted to remain naive to the rest of the world's *shadow* (Zweig & Abrams, 1991). I experienced what Yalom (1980) coined as *existential isolation* and thought I would never be a part of, or feel a connection to, anything in life. I could never get intimate enough with anyone to abolish this preconceived notion from my mind and reclaim my being. Though I was to be blessed with many different meaningful experiences growing up – like merging with the environment – I found that, in addition to the intensive feelings of connection to this ‘something greater,’ none of these experiences helped me overcome the fear that I lived with and in.

I recall walking out of my home when I was somewhere between seven and nine years of age, during a beautiful autumn day. The leaves were blowing lightly in the wind and caressing me in an aura of love. The sun provided me with a warm embrace, through its gift of heat, giving me the opportunity to also be touched by the wind and the leaves. I became lost in the vastness of all the leaves blowing around me and on the ground. The trees also provided a sense of solid friendship and care, which would ignite this wonderful energy within bringing me to the verge of tears as I walked. I was no longer thinking, I was just being.

My self seemed to merge with the environment. I was the wind, the leaves and the sun. I was the ground I walked on. There was a sense of purpose and connection to everything and a sense of being inseparable between all that I was in the midst of. A huge

rush of energy came through my body and pierced my 'human' exterior. I felt a sense of oneness. No boundary existed between me and the rest of the environment. It was a surreal experience, yet everything still felt a degree of normality, as if I was home, just the way it was.

During that fall, I skipped and walked slowly letting the sun, the trees, the wind, and the leaves accompany me as I traveled the 25 minute trek to school. Yet, the feeling would not last when other people would be around and I would lose my sense of *okayness* (Almaas, 2001). I always felt anxious around other kids, especially at school. I liked to be alone sometimes to revel in the feeling of connection with the environment, yet the fear began to take over my entire life and I had difficulty connecting with anything outside of this.

As Rousseau (cited in Kenton, 2000) states, "man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains" (p. 1). I gave up my freedom, began to focus on 'fitting in' and started to create my own chains by judging my sadness and these other feelings as bad, wrong or weird. I was relayed the message 'boys are supposed to be tough' and hence, assumed the stereo-typical male image. According to this value, I began to judge the sadness as something that I was not *supposed* to feel and this new awareness of needing to be tough only served to push me further from embracing the beauty the sadness held. I then began to fight and lash out in other ways in order to 'run away from my sadness.' I started to steal and I started to look for external things, i.e., power, material possessions, high grades, achievements to dissipate the sadness in order to feel part of the social scene. My connection with existence began to fade from a feeling of being a part of the web of

connected energy, i.e., people, animals, trees, flowers, to a more lonely and disconnected state of being. I seemed destined to search for a ‘quick fix’ to feel better.

A couple of months after my 12th birthday, I attempted to end my own life. I simply couldn’t cope with the intense feelings of fear, pain and misery. I had no idea how to relate to others and was constantly running from everything. I wanted to die. I felt that I had no other options but to die. I was in so much pain that death was the only thing that actually made sense, having no other way out, knowing no other solace or break from all this pain. This was not a cry for help but a plea to leave my own painful existence on earth so that the painful feelings that enveloped my being would cease. There would be some finality to it all. It would all end. I would no longer be bound by my painful breath.

I was trying to snap my neck with a cord tied to a hook above the downstairs bar, when my mother came into the basement to stop me. I was destined to lead myself on a “counterfeit quest towards wholeness”³ (Grof, 1993; Solowoniuk, 2005) in which I began to embrace the addictive pathways of sex, drugs and alcohol in order to cope and live on a day-to-day basis. Embodying the *shadow* energy and embracing the darkness of human nature through crime, drugs, sex, booze, hate and rage was a very powerful tool I adopted to fight off the feelings of separateness and fear (Bly, 1988; Zweig & Abrams, 1990; Zweig & Wolfe, 1997). Darkness seemed to be my newfound succour and drinking, my daily meditation.

The darkness and insanity of these experiences seemed to paint a colourfully *black & blood red* life that was full of intrigue and lunacy. Switching from an intoxicating paranoia which resembled insanity, to the power of living in the darkness was never boring; however, I was unable nor willing to get away from the thick,

demonic, black and sometimes pure evil cloak that I wore. The luring influence of the dark side of human nature contained too much power for me to reject it. Thus, I basked in its alluring hate and rage, drunk on the darkness that provided me a solace from my unstable life. The never-ending power of the dark sea journey seemed to draw me into this lifestyle even more and fed on my hateful rage. I began to fear myself, and ran even further from my *wounds* (Goldstein, 2003; Grof, 1993; Leonard, 1989), being able to muster up enough *false courage* to only commit crimes and buy substances to fuel the fire that was charring my compassion for life and my will to live.

I began to wake up in a constant state of madness and desperation, with suicidal fantasies muttering in my mind that would slowly recede as the drugs or alcohol began to cloud my mind. Yet, as with most addictions, the substances and sex ceased to work for me anymore. I again began to embody fear and was out of control, no longer able to stop doing crime or the substances I was so attached to using for my psychological survival.

Near the end of my addiction, I had a poignant experience of “the watcher/witness” (Washburn, 1988; Wilber, 1986). I had been getting high or drunk pretty much everyday, all day and was unable to return to school. On this particular night, I was turning 15 years old and was doing mushrooms and smoking a lot of pot. I had lost my friends, and was aimlessly walking up a long road in Calgary when I was suddenly able to see through the witnesses’ eyes and view my entire life through another perspective, a greater cosmic angle. My life was going nowhere and I could clearly see it was the drugs and the alcohol that were the problem. I saw how my relationships had fallen apart and the impact of my actions on the world around me. I saw the emptiness in the substances and the crime and how my whole life was a grand illusion that I had

created to survive. I phoned my mother and confessed where my life was and what I had realized. Five days later I was assessed as an alcoholic and a drug addict and admitted to a treatment centre.

Although my life was intense at the time and this event sparked a turning point in my life, I was still not able to have my heart in the process of exiting my quest for wholeness through an addictive means. I could not surrender to the process and would fight the suggestions of others every chance I had. Feeling trapped and abandoned, I would eventually realize the extent of what I had lost and the darkness that I had embodied in order to survive the counterfeit quest.

One day in treatment, an evocative memory struck me like a bolt of lightning. It was a beautiful spring day and I was with my best friend. Very ordinary, just hanging out and looking at the beautiful river that was half frozen from the small amount of spring heat that had cut through the cold of winter. Our bikes nearby, as drops of water slowly fell into the easy-going stream of the river, I felt at peace. I felt love. Not only for my friend but for all of the spectacle that lay before me. There was no separation between the elements of nature that I could feel in my own heart, between the feeling of childlike innocence, and an embracement of all that is, and ever was, within me. I experienced a true connection with my friend whom I love/loved dearly. It was a moment that contained a lifetime of truth and beauty. It would be this memory that triggered my own recognition of what I had lost in my life. I was unable to continue down the path that I had chosen to walk, that path of evil and vile darkness that concealed this innocence and love, the path that took away my connection with existence and all that I had once held dear.

After seeing the counterfeit quest for what it really was, I spent countless years trying to regain the *okayness* I had once felt as a child through a rich tapestry of activities such as self-exploration, meditation, prayer, relationships, sex, ego-validation, poetry, art and many other things. I was to have many different experiences of intense meaning, sorrow, joy, and love that would forever shape my life and the path that I chose to go down.

These attempts went on for many years. I had many insights that would come and go until one day I had an experience of *seeing through my eyes for the first time* during a class break in college, when I wrote, “what if I chose to be in this body?” This was another break in my consciousness and a witnessing state of reality in which I truly felt the *walking corpse*⁴. It was as if the universe had been born within my body and I was able, at that moment, to see what is real for the first time. This experience shattered my thoughts of what life really was and how a formless reality is just as valid as the manifest. This, in turn, demonstrated that my body, self and mind *was* in fact, impermanent and that my being and experience could only be lived in the present moment. There exists no future and no past. Thus, my addictions were just a symptom of running away from reality and life as it is lived. This was however, not the first transcendent moment I had ever experienced, but it was the first transcendent moment that I was able to open into and come to some resolve about and gain deep insight from. Although this experience did not *cure* me of all of my maladies, I was able to move beyond many different issues that were part of my attachment to my own insanity and neurosis.

The unfolding of that moment was the beginning of a new understanding of reality. It unlocked a vast field of energy I could now access. I felt this to be a *coming to*

consciousness, a glimpse into the true nature and universality of *Atman*⁵ and *Brahman*⁶, a look inwards revealing *Buddha nature*, a gift to be cherished and a guide to what may lie ahead. I began to witness and feel a beautiful *white lightening* or white energy pulsate through my being and I began to open up into the whole of existence, “the light inside the dark” (Tarrant, 1998). I had always been referred to as a having lots of energy or an *energy phenomenon* but I was now able to harness this energy, from a place of wholeness and *beingness*. I was able to gain more of an understanding of the impact this moment would have on my existence within my mind and body. At this point in time, I was eventually guided to the addictions counselling program at the University of Lethbridge, where I was given the opportunity to learn more ways to harness and embrace this energy as well as the psychological theory underpinning the transformational process.

During my studies, I began to gravitate towards the more transformational and depth psychological theories of existentialism, Jungian, gestalt, transpersonal, Buddhist psychology, and non-duality which would ultimately be some of the driving force behind this thesis project. I was enthralled by the idea that other psychologists and individuals had discussed some of these states of consciousness and that I could begin to integrate them into my own counselling approach. It was also at this time that I was provided with the opportunity to discuss some of the experiences I had lived, and I began making more connections within myself. I went on to have even more intense experiences and to struggle with the integration of my realizations/awakenings into my daily living. Ultimately, I came to understand that there can be no final awakening; that it exists as a moment-to-moment process with no beginning and no end.

Having struggled with integration of various states of consciousness and awakening moments into my own everyday life, I feel that this is an important area to study in the understanding of consciousness, igniting my own interest in doing research in this area. Beginning to understand the different themes or experiences that occur throughout an individual's life through fundamentally similar experiences, may enable health practitioners (counsellors, psychologists and psychiatrists) as well as *seekers* to understand what parts of the awakening process are like. In addition, this study drives my passion towards the existential/transpersonal perspective and towards understanding the phenomenon of awakening within a daily life setting and how this may fuel it, as well as, unfold during the counselling process.

With this in mind, I chose a phenomenological-hermeneutic lens to interpret the texts, surfacing from the three participants in this study (two males and one female). All three co-researchers are Caucasian, North Americans who were born and raised in Canada. This research does not serve to generalize; conversely, it is engineered to illuminate the lived experience of these three individuals and the unfolding of his/her awakening process.

The Purpose of This Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate three individuals' experiences with the death of the egoic self, the end of seeking external sources for meaning, and the integration of this newfound awareness into daily life. This study will explore the experience leading up to and after the awakening experience, defined as *ego transcendence*. The research question is as follows: "What is the experience of awakening to *non-dual* living in everyday life?" Thus, this study will look at the impact upon a man or woman experiencing *non-dual* living and how that individual comes to integrate this newfound state of being into day-to-day life.

I am implicated in this research as a co-researcher because I have been a part of such a quest and, thus, have an intimate connection with the topic under study. My own interests lie in the transformation of consciousness and the beauty of present moment awareness, lying beyond time and space, that can follow from integration of these insights into daily living. These different states of consciousness intrigue me and have been of the utmost importance on my own journey. Although the addictive pathway can be a catalyst for such a journey, I also recognize that these awakening experiences are open to anyone, right here and right now. Thus, they are always available for all. With this awareness, I did not feel that it would be of any benefit to limit this study to individuals who have come through an addictive pathway. This is a study of the experience of three seekers for the truth or awakening, who have come out on the other side into present moment awareness.

In addition, as a phenomenological-hermeneutic researcher, I do not claim objectivity during the research process. I cannot withhold my "being in the world," nor

can I prevent this from colouring my research findings (Heidegger, 1962). Therefore, by speaking to my biases and being forthright with respect to my journey of seeking, my co-researcher's life text will engender part of the horizon of understanding, one that is interpreted and understood through the *hermeneutical circle* of inquiry (Gadamer, 1975, 1977; Heidegger, 1962).

In coming to understand the phenomenon of awakening, the next chapter outlines different theories such as: the process and meaning of awakening; enlightenment; transformation; the quest for wholeness; a psychological spectrum of consciousness development; an example of two *paths* that assist the individual in coming to awakening; and finally, a brief overview of individual authors and theorists who focus on the psychological within the spiritual path. Following is an outline of the phenomenological-hermeneutic inquiry which was used in order to interpret the texts from the interviews. This is followed by the interpretive themes that were derived from the texts and begin to create a map in which the journey towards daily awakening is illuminated. And in summary chapter five provides an outline of possible implications that this analysis and interpretation point towards.

CHAPTER TWO: DEVELOPMENTAL AWAKENING

Introduction

A professor came to a Zen master to inquire about life and Zen. The Zen master served tea, handed the professor a cup and began to pour the tea into his cup. The master poured and poured the tea, as it overflowed, he poured in more and more. The guest had held back as long as he could stand and blurted out, “No more will go in! It is full!”

“Exactly.” replied the Zen master. (Reps & Senzaki, 1994)

The above story is one of the most frequently quoted from the Zen tradition, and it is told in many different forms; the story itself not only illuminates the human condition, but it is also rather descriptive of today’s society. As someone who works and functions as a ‘provider of knowledge,’ the professor is full of knowledge, but yet he/she may be unable to open into the moment or into a new way of understanding, beyond the logical (Anderson, 2003). Just as Suzuki (1984) suggests in *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind*, the true seeker of knowledge in Zen must approach everything as knowing nothing at all, and not come with the preconceived ideas and constructs that already plague the mind. For Buddhists, this belief in constructs is one of many causes of misery within the human condition, the root of all suffering (Trungpa, 2005a, 2005b).

When looking towards human development, and the process of *awakening*, one must use a model or models that take consciousness growth into account. Human evolution and history has outlined many different ‘paths’ that open into the vast spaciousness that is *awakening* (Almaas, 2001, 2004; Grof & Grof, 1989; Levine, 2002;

Walsh & Vaughan, 1993; Wilber, 2000). Tarrant (1998) points to the suffering that we all face in life as a driving force behind the quest to awaken:

The journey into a life of awareness begins for most of us in a moment of helplessness. When our lives are going well, we do not feel any need to change them, or ourselves. We are content to go on as we are....Our habits of mind are sufficient to sustain us through the days. We are unperturbed, and half asleep. (p. 27)

Thus, as with many other theorists and individuals within the wisdom traditions (Almaas, 2001, 2004; Trungpa, 2005a, 2005b; Wilber, 1995, 2000), Tarrant (1998) sees one's consciousness as being asleep, with a need to awaken to reality. But, this path is not easy, as Chogyam Trungpa (2005a) warns:

The spiritual path is not fun – better not begin it. If you must begin, then go all the way, because if you begin and quit, the unfinished business you have left behind begins to haunt you all the time. (p. 187)

Ultimately, the human experience can be characterized as unfulfilling if there is no growth that takes place in the individual over time (Almaas, 2001, 2004; Maslow, 1968, 1971).

Although some may conceptualize the journey as one with finality, there are also those who see every moment of every day as a living path of awakening (Kornfield, 1989, 1993, 2000; Levine, 2002; Murphy, 2006; Tolle, 1997, 2005). Kneen (2002) emphasizes this position: “there is no end to this journey. Over time your heart becomes strong enough to withstand a breeze, a storm, or even a typhoon” (p. 56). Thus, it is in

this fearlessness that one continues on the path, moment-to-moment trudging along the difficult road of spiritual growth (Boorstein, 2002; Kneen, 2002; Trungpa, 1988, 2005a).

Though, modern-day society splits spiritual and psychological growth into two separate entities, this thesis will be written with the assumption that they are very closely allied and forever linked (Almaas, 1986). Hence, I will outline some traditional, developmental and psychological perspectives of awakening and transpersonal growth in the following sections, so the reader may better understand the process of coming to be awake; this will begin with an overview of Wilber's (1986) developmental model.

Wilber's Developmental Model of Consciousness Development

Given the state of knowledge already available to us, it seems ungenerous to the human condition to present any models less comprehensive.

(Wilber, 1986, p. 159)

Wilber (1977, 1986, 1995, 2000) has created a model that tracks developmental levels of consciousness from pre-cognition to self-transcendence. This is one of the most complete models of the self and consciousness development currently available and its canon is derived from and reflects observations across divergent cultures (Nixon, 2001a, 2001b; Reynolds, 2004). Moreover, Wilber's model (1977, 1985, 1986, 1995, 2000) is composed of ten levels, characterized as "fulcrums" which contain three main stages within the 10 fulcrums (pre-personal, personal, and transpersonal). The first six fulcrums are based on the work of various theorists such as Loevinger (1976), Piaget (1977), and Kohlberg (1981), while the final four are derived from contemplative Eastern and Western spiritual traditions and psychologies (Aurobindo, 2001; Maslow, 1968, 1971). This gives the individual an opportunity to understand the development of the self as an

ever-evolving process within a spectrum of consciousness. Lastly, Wilber's model also takes into consideration an individual's past, present, and current social milieu and maps out areas of possible pathology on all different fulcrums (Nixon, 2001a, 2001b; Reynolds, 2004; Wilber, 1995, 2000).

PREPERSONAL		
Levels (Fulcrum)	Name	Brief Description
Fulcrum 1	Sensoriphysical	The realms of matter, sensation & perception.
Fulcrum 2	Phantasmic-emotional	Birth of the emotional self.
Fulcrum 3	Rep-mind	Birth of the conceptual self.
PERSONAL		
Levels (Fulcrum)	Name	Brief Description
Fulcrum 4	Rule/Role Mind	Development of rules and roles to belong (birth of the social self).
Fulcrum 5	Formal Reflexive	Development of the more independent ego (egocentrism).
Fulcrum 6	Vision-logic (Existential Level)	Integration of the "whole self" (Maslow's <i>self-actualization</i>).
TRANSPERSONAL		
Levels (Fulcrum)	Name	Brief Description
Fulcrum 7	Psychic	"Opening of the 3 rd eye," beginning of transpersonal realm.

Fulcrum 8	Subtle	Archetypal energy builds up and projects outside of the self; deity formations (experiencing God, intense spiritual experience).
Fulcrum 9	Casual	Witnessing the <i>Abyss</i> ; energy has moved within.
Fulcrum 10	Non-dual (Awakening)	Total integration of previous levels, becomes form moving into formlessness (no-self, ego-transcendence).

Table 1: Wilber's Spectrum of Consciousness

Prepersonal

The prepersonal stages begin with issues of integration of the emotional-self since until this point of development there exists only a physical self (in early infancy, the child is still psychologically fused with primary caregiver.) This level is characterized as “primitive” because only pharmacological or physiological interventions can provide any help or provide “insight” at this developmental point because the child or individual at this stage is searching for an emotional-self (Wilber, 1986, 2000).

This gives birth to the emotional-self and the concept of *the other* which, if not adequately developed, can cause wounds to the psyche. This creates a fissure whereby the self loses basic trust in existence or the concept of the other is distorted (Almaas, 1988, 2001). As a consequence, the individual becomes somewhat stuck at this development stage and has difficulty mediating emotions and maintaining meaningful reciprocal relationships (Almaas, 1988, 1998a, 2001).

Alternatively, if the environment in early childhood is ample, the infant or child gains the psychological insight that reveals an existence of both a self and an other in the world

(Wilber, 1986). At this stage, the individual seeks a way out of the fused concepts of self and other.

The third fulcrum is characterized by the emergence of the id, ego, and superego⁷. This emergence can provide the individual with the ability to repress emotion and start integrating the self as a separate being. An individual at this stage seeks the capacity to integrate new concepts of self and other into society and the ability to “free up” any repression that may have previously occurred. The idea is that the individual turns to a more intra-personal place as opposed to an inter-personal reflective state (Nixon, 2001a, 2001b; Reynolds, 2004; Wilber, 1986, 2000).

Personal

The fourth level is characterized as more cognitive. At this point, individuals may work through family and social issues⁸ such as the roles and identities they become fused with. At this level, the individual is attempting to establish a “social self” which is based on fitting into society and following rules, thus seeking validation while losing a sense of self. Individuals can break away from these rules and “social expectations” in order to come through to develop a healthy consciousness (Wilber, 1986, 1995, 2000).

During level five, Wilber proposes a stage which can be understood as an egocentric state of mind. In this stage, the individual tends to identify him or herself more with occupation and material possessions (external sources) than internal sources of energy or constructs. The individual at this stage still needs validation from others to survive and regularly seeks this out in order to keep the ego happy⁹.

Wilber now moves towards the existential level where the deconstruction of the self may be contemplated. This level characterizes what Yalom (1980) has coined “the

four ultimate concerns,” representing themselves as death, meaninglessness, freedom and isolation or Maslow’s (1968, 1971) “self actualization.” The self no longer sees society as a catalyst for change or meaning since this seeking turns towards an inner self. Looking for meaning, in this sense, assists in creating a more philosophically orientated, and “whole,” being. Thus, the individual makes a psychological shift toward seeking meaning within an internal life as there is a realization that there is no inherent meaning to life that remains external to the individual (Maslow, 1971; Wilber, 1986, 1995, 2000).

Transpersonal

Level seven is the beginning of the transpersonal realm, which is characterized by breaks in the ideas of ‘self’ and ‘other’ through shifts in consciousness (Almaas, 1986, 1988, 1998a, 2001, 2004; Wilber, 1986, 1995, 2000). This is what Maslow (1961, 1968, 1971) coined as “peak experiences” which are based on the sudden disappearance of the self. The individual seeks to realize that the mind and body are not permanent constructions and are ever-changing.

The *Subtle* fulcrum can be seen as more of an integration of the individual’s introspection. As the self becomes more contemplative and spends more time looking at these matters, a shift in consciousness (into Self¹⁰ or *Brahman*) begins to become a more sustained and intense experience (Almaas, 2001, 2004; Wilber, 1977, 1986, 2000). The archetypal forms from within begin to manifest outside of the individual as a deity or form of energy (e.g., *Christ consciousness* – see Fox, 1988; Bill Wilson’s *white light experience* – see Alcoholics Anonymous, 1976). Buddhist texts describe this, in great detail, as dancing lights and colours that are grasped through deep experience and insight into existence (Orofino, 1990; Wangyal, 1995).

The *Causal* level is understood as the witnessing of a total merging with existence. The seeker here is trying to “let go” or to witness and merge unconditionally with all of life. Thus, there is no more seeking outside of the individual as the seeker realizes that everything is contained within the self. Therefore, seeking to find the Self outside oneself ends (Wilber, 1986, 1995, 2000). However, life itself does not end but takes on a new way of being. Here an individual carries on the journey of living, but is forever changed, and thus must start to negotiate non-dual living.

Non-duality (level 10), as characterized by Wilber (1986, 2000), is understood as the end of, or death of, the self. Thus, the seeker merges with existence and lives in a state of moment-to-moment awareness, where form is moving into formlessness in every moment (Wilber, 1986, 1995, 2000).

Although Wilber’s model is very comprehensive and entails an array of resources, it gives rise to a controversy that spans across many different philosophies contained within the wisdom traditions. Questions emerge like, “is there a final moment in awakening?” Or, “does the process just continue on as a path for continually learning to be *more* awakened?” As Kornfield (2000) points out:

Enlightenment does exist. It is possible to awaken. Unbounded freedom and joy, oneness with the Divine, awakening into a state of timeless grace – these experiences are more common than you know, and not far away. There is one further truth, however: They don’t last. Our realizations and awakenings show us the reality of the world, and they bring transformation, but they pass...in the awakening of the heart there is no such thing as enlightened retirement. (p. xiii)

Many have alluded to this fact, yet there is still an idea of finality within the concept of *enlightenment* or *awakening*. Thus, I will outline other paths, to provide richer and more in-depth perspectives and descriptions of the awakening process, while providing a definition for some key words used in this thesis.

The Quest for Wholeness and Awakening

There is a Sufi story about a child who asks his mother who his father is. The mother takes him on a long journey to meet his father. They go through meadows, forests, in open clearings, up steep hills. They experience changes in the weather. A day and night pass. They experience the hot sunlight and cool moonlight. Finally they come over a hill to a house. It is the same house that they left, but the child doesn't know this. The boy is told, "inside you'll meet your father." They enter, and the child has an experience of wonder and gratitude at meeting his father. The mother later explains to the child that as each of us goes out into the world, we make a big journey to come back to ourselves.

(Kneen, 2002, p. 63)

Throughout time and contained within myth across cultures, men and women have undergone various searches and quests in order to find something that is missing within. These myths or tales are usually representational of our deeper human longing for wholeness and to be complete (Campbell, 1970; Jacoby, Kast & Riedel, 1992; Jung, 1971; Pearson, 1991). As human beings, we can never penetrate the veil of flesh and bone that locks us into our bodies, thus we long to be a part of something more, something whole (Maslow, 1968, 1971; Welwood, 2002). Jesus, the Buddha, Lao Tzu, and many more are said to have achieved this whole state of being and left their mark on history, philosophy and world religion (Harvey, 2000; Huxley, 1945; Sluyter, 2001). This

something whole may characterize the human desire to exist without suffering, to walk the earth devoid of all negative feelings (Chodron, 2003a, 2003b, 2005; Welwood, 2002).

Suffering is generally what fuels the drive to awaken. Trungpa (2004) states, “we must begin by seeing the experience of life as it is. We must see the truth of suffering, the reality of dissatisfaction. We cannot ignore it and attempt to examine only the glorious, pleasurable aspects of life” (p. 3). This reality, as stated by Buddhists, is not the dark and dreary reality that so many in the West perceive it to be (Katie, 2002, 2007; Tarrant, 1998; Trungpa, 1988, 2005a; Warner, 2003). It is a reality of what *is*. It is an acceptance of what occurs in the world. Yet, it can provide an individual with the means to begin to “rise above” suffering and see that pain is interdependent with life itself. Ikkyu, a Zen poet from the fifteenth century, provides an illuminating and thought-provoking poem which gives a rich description of this truth:

Pain and bliss, love and hate, are like a body and its shadow;

Cold and warm, joy and anger, you and your condition,

Delight in singing verse is a road to hell,

But at Hell’s gate – peach blossoms, plum blossoms.

(Ikkyu, cited in Cohen, 2002, p. iii)

In the West, many individuals are continually trying to come to a deeper understanding of what can be done to overcome pain and suffering, to be a better person, to cultivate compassion, to feel good, and to find love (Greenspan, 2003; Kornfield, 1993; Ladner, 2004; Levine, 2002; Tarrant, 1998; Tolle, 1997, 2005). This is the beginning of the quest, the journey towards coming to awakened consciousness. This is the human condition that Gautama Buddha talked about, the inability to be happy with

what we have and the constant need to strive for more; the incapacity to be okay with what is and see situations as they are (Guenther, 1972; Hahn, 1997, 2002; Kapleau, 2001; Katie, 2002, 2007; Rudloe, 2002). Levine (2002) sees the quest as more of a drive towards the mystery of life: “we have a will toward mystery, a yearning, greater even than our will to live. And luckily, too, because our will to live, our grasping at life, is killing us” (p. 10). The central theme is that we, as human beings, are “split” between the ego and our essence; it is a long, hard battle that embodies the quest to awaken (Almaas, 2001, 2004; Epstein, 1995; Levine, 1989; Pearls, 1972).

Yet, the path of awakening is paradoxical since the harder people look the more they can see the truth of the need to let go of attachment and longing to be more (Kornfield, 1989). As Chogyam Trungpa (1988) points out, “our life is an endless journey; it is like a broad highway that extends indefinitely into the distance” (p. 37). Thus, the process of awakening never ends and the challenge becomes a day-to-day or moment-to-moment integration of the experience into the here and now (Helminski, 1992; Kornfield, 1993, 2000; Welwood, 2002). When looking towards levels of consciousness, there are many different names for the ‘perceived end result,’ thus I feel that it is important to understand the difference between the two major words that are used to describe this process. This will be undertaken in the next section.

The “Unreachable Enlightenment” Versus Awakening

Enlightenment has no definite form or nature by which it can manifest itself; so in enlightenment itself, there is nothing to be enlightened. Enlightenment exists solely because of delusion and ignorance; if they disappear, so will Enlightenment.

(From the *Lankavatara Sutra*, cited in Kornfield, 1996, p. 160)

The word *enlightenment* has been understood in many different ways, through so many cultures, that the meaning has surely been diluted and is no longer understood in the traditional Eastern sense (Hahn, 2007). In the West, the understanding of enlightenment implies a mystical, out-of-reach state of mind, containing pure bliss and joy (Kornfield, 1993, 2000; Warner, 2003). Warner (2003) speaks about the common misconception amongst spiritual seekers:

Some people think that enlightenment is some kind of superspecial state without questions or doubts, some kind of absolute faith in your beliefs and the rightness of your perceptions. That's not enlightenment. In fact, that's the very worst kind of delusion....And yet, there is *something*, and even though this experience doesn't change anything at all, it changes everything. (p. 3)

Thus, the paradox of the awakening process cannot be grasped from an intellectual place; it must be experienced (Almaas, 2001, 2004; Das, 1998, 2003; Dogen, 2004; Osho, 2003).

The word *awake* as defined by Webster's New Encyclopedic Dictionary (Merriam-Webster, 2002) is "to cease sleeping...to become conscious or aware of something...to arouse from a sleeplike state" (p. 124). These definitions imply that human beings are not necessarily 'fully conscious' to all that is present in reality, as individuals may only see what their ego perceives and not the whole picture (Almaas, 2001, 2004; Aurobindo, 2001; Maharaj, 1996; Trungpa, 1973, 2004). Tarrant (1998) also speaks to this idea of becoming conscious:

Much of the journey is about the ways we work with our attention, because attention gives us more life. It expands the register, bringing us to notice more of

the vividness and consolation of our dark lives, so that we can exist in our true range, and not go around missing things, as if we knew countries from their airports and hotels. (p. 6)

For Tarrant, then, the idea of awakening begins with attention, waking up to see the little things that are missed, due to an incessant preoccupation with ‘things.’ As Cleary (2002b) points out:

Zen writings commonly refer to satori as realization of the ‘original mind’ as it is in itself, the universal ground of consciousness, concealed beneath the temporal conditioning that forces people to experience life through outlooks arbitrarily limited by their cultural, social, and personal histories. (p. ix)

Yet, more importantly, “Satori is not the end of Zen; it is more properly the true beginning” (Cleary, 2002b, p. x). Thus, the experience of awakening, or realization, is about coming to consciousness and beginning anew in the world.

Ultimately, if one is to understand the awakening process in these terms, one must look into traditions which are able to take the individual seeker into the heart of truth while still participating in the world, or as they say in Zen, “return to the marketplace” (Kapleau, 1989).

For the reader to understand the different paths of awakening and ego-transcendence, I will outline a brief section on the *perennial philosophy*, expanding on pathways that illuminate this journey towards awakening in the East and West, all of these pathways have played a pivotal role in my own transformational journey and provide a further framework for the inquiry being undertaken in this thesis.

Transformational Pathways to Awakening

We are hardly aware of the extreme peculiarity of our own position, and find it difficult to realize the plain fact that there has otherwise been a single philosophical consensus of universal extent. It has been held by [men and women] who report the same insights and teach the same doctrine whether living today or six thousand years ago, whether from New Mexico in the Far West or from Japan in the Far East.

(Watts, cited in Wilber, 2001b, p. 34)

In the contemplative traditions there exist many paths to an awakened or enlightened state of being; there are also various names for this “coming to consciousness” throughout these various traditions. Although they all have many understandings within the traditions themselves, a perennial philosophy exists, one which strives to bring about a cohesive awareness of the commonalities and parallels between these various traditions (Almaas, 1988; Huxley, 1945).

Perennial philosophy points to a divine reality that exists in all things, animate and inanimate, that comprises the entire universe (Huxley, 1945; Smith, 1982; Wilber, 1986, 1995, 2000, 2001b). Huxley (1945) provides a simple definition: “the perennial philosophy is primarily concerned with one, divine Reality substantial to the manifold world of things and lives and minds. But the nature of this one Reality is such that it cannot be directly and immediately apprehended” (p. viii). One must go beyond intellectual ability to see this divine reality and truly experience it, not ‘know’ it (Huxley, 1945; Hahn, 2007; Murphy, 2006).

Originally coined as *philosophia perennis* – a Latin term meaning perennial philosophy – this term (perennial philosophy) was popularized by Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716), a German mathematician and philosopher, who used it to describe the energy

that runs through the fabric of all objects and beings (Huxley, 1945; Smith, 1982). This energy was also used to describe the commonalities in the religious philosophies and more specifically, the mystical waves within them (Smith, 1982). As Goleman (1988) explains: “experience is the forerunner of all spiritual teachings, but the same experience can be expressed differently. In any given tradition, the map of meditative states set down is to some degree arbitrary” (pg. 39). He goes on to speak of how each “map” is describing the same phenomenon (across Eastern and Western wisdom traditions) and yet the maps themselves appear to be so radically different (Goleman, 1988).

Quantum physics also suggests there appears to be a single driving force, or energy (Divine Reality), behind all things that comprise the universe (Bohm & Hiley, 1993; Capra, 2000; Khan, 1999; Nichol, 2002; Simpkins & Simpkins, 2002). According to Huxley (1945), the perennial philosophy is derived of:

...the metaphysic that recognizes a divine Reality substantial to the world of things and lives and minds; the psychology that finds in the soul something similar to, or even identical with, divine Reality; the ethic that places man’s final end in the knowledge of the immanent and transcendent Ground of all being.
(p. vii)

Almaas (2002) also explains this ontological philosophy:

The spiritual ground, which is the ultimate nature of reality, is unconditionally loving and compassionate in revealing its treasures of wisdom to whoever is willing to open it. We simply need to recognize the truth about our present experience and learn the attitudes and skills that will invite the true nature of reality to reveal itself. (p. xii)

Thus, the great mystery of who we are is always already available to us (Almaas, 2001, 2002, 2004; Khan, 1999; Kornfield, 1993, 2000). This philosophy was one of the roots of transpersonal psychology and has begun to bring to light the various forms that consciousness can take (Boorstein, 2000).

My own quest has taken me to many different places and has shown me many different paths to follow; one such path is Zen. I will outline Zen in the next section to illuminate further progress after the awakening experience has occurred; and I will also outline Advaita Vedanta in order to bring in a tradition which is pivotal to understanding the non-dual way of being. Although I realize that the paths I included in this thesis may not encompass all the pathways that people walk to come to awakening, it can provide a framework from which to view the process of awakening.

“Tao can be talked about, but not the Eternal Tao. Names can be named, but not the Eternal Name” (Tzu, 1989). Similar to Taoist underpinnings, Zen posits that “a finger pointing to the moon, is not the moon itself;” thus, I am aware of the paradoxical nature of expounding such a philosophy; yet there is a lot to be learned from this – sometimes elusive – teaching. By its very nature Zen assists the practitioner in a constant re-visitation to the moment of truth in everyday life (Beck, 1989; Hoover, 1978; Watts, 1965). As Marchaj (2002) points out:

Zen is essentially a matter of our lives – not an esoteric meditative technique of self-transformation, not an ancient tradition that has woven its way throughout the East, not a code of ethical conduct, not a psychology of wellbeing, not a certainty of any kind. There is no one to follow, no one to emulate, no one who watches, no

one who cares. The practice of Zen is our response to the questions that come forth from the depths of our beings. (p. xv)

The Pathless Path of Zen

The enlightenment for which Zen aims, for which Zen exists, comes of itself. As consciousness, one moment it does not exist, the next it does. But physically we walk in the element of time even as we walk in mud, dragging our feet and our true nature.

(Bercholz & Kohn, 1993, p. 211)

The word *Zen* derives from the Sanskrit word *dhyana*, which translates into English as meditation (Goleman, 1988). In Japan – the birthplace of Zen – Zen is a derivative of Chinese Ch’an Buddhism that combines Buddhist and Taoist thought. Zen literally means meditation; with *zazen* being the most readily practiced form of meditation within the tradition (Oxtoby, 1996; Simpkins & Simpkins, 2003). Thus, it is a tradition of meditation and contemplation, relying on the Zen meditation practices of *zazen* and *koans* (or *gongan* in Chinese) – questions that assist the practitioner to understand that concepts, or constructs, cannot assist in coming to a practical answer, and therefore have no place in Zen – that allow the student to contemplate the essence of reality (Cleary, 2002a; Sekida, 2005; Senzaki, 2000). “These vignettes [Koans]...are intended to foster specific perceptions and insights whose absorption in experience enable the mind to work in a more coherent and comprehensive manner than conventional education can produce” (Cleary, 2002a, p. x). As Dahui (cited in Cleary, 2000) points out:

Buddhahood is the realm of the sacred knowledge found within oneself. You do not need paraphernalia practices, or realizations to attain it. What you do need is to clean out the influences of psychological afflictions connected with the external world that have been accumulating in your psyche since beginningless time. (pp. xv-xvi)

Therefore, Zen, as some know it, may not be a straightforward endeavour and is difficult to be defined as a religion or as a philosophy (Loori, 2002; Watts, 1965). As Cleary (2000) points out (referring to the Zen canon), “they are not religion or philosophy but a practical psychology of liberation [*awakening*]” (p. xvii).

The great master Dogen Zenji, 1200 -1253 C.E., (Dogen, 2004; Zenji, 1993), who founded the *Soto* sect – which relies more heavily on meditation or *zazen* than the *Rinzai* sect which relies more on the solving of koans – in Japan around 1200 C.E., states that there is essentially no difference between *zazen* and awakening, and provides us with his contemplation with these paradoxical words:

The essential way flows everywhere; how could it require practice or enlightenment? The essential teaching is fully available; how could effort be necessary? Furthermore, the entire mirror is free of dust; why take steps to polish?

Nothing is separate from this very place; why journey away? (Dogen, 2004, p. 3)

Therefore, to Dogen, there is essentially nothing to do and nowhere to go; yet, he holds *zazen* in the highest regard, as it assists the practitioner in being in the moment (Bercholz & Kohn, 1993; Dogen, 2004; Schuhmacher & Woerner, 1994; Zenji, 1993). To Dogen (2004), we are already awake and must only do *zazen* to come to understand this, thus the two are inseparable. Warner (2007) expands on this: “when you get right down to it, just

sitting is the reality of the situation. No bells and whistles, no mystical trances, no enlightenment or daft attempts at ‘self-improvement.’ Zazen is just sitting there” (p. 46). Looi (2002) also expands on the importance of zazen in Zen practice: “basically, zazen is the study of the self...but it is important to understand that, actually, zazen is not just meditation. It’s not contemplation, introspection, or the quieting and focusing of the mind. Zazen is sitting Zen.” (p. 27)

Yet in the *rinzai* tradition there is a very similar sentiment regarding the use of koans. The koans themselves can be used by a novice practitioner and/or a seasoned practitioner looking to refine his/her understanding on the path. As well as a historical individual, Zen masters described in the koans are representative of an aspect of Zen (Cleary, 2001b). “Koan-based Zen,” Cleary (2001b) points out, “follows the order of spiritual practice taught by Jesus, ‘seek the kingdom of God first: then all things will be added’” (p. 231).

A koan is said to provide the practitioner with a finger that points indirectly to reality, although the koan itself can not provide the student direct reality of what is. Senzaki (2000) points out:

Reality is not to be captured in a thought, or a phrase, or an explanation. Reality is the direct *seeing* of the world as it is, not as our intellects map it, describe it, or conceive it. It’s not that human intellect is bad or that we must get rid of it; but we must bring ourselves back to the fact that the intellect can only construct models of Reality, never Reality itself. The fact is that Reality cannot be constructed, nor does it need to be. It’s already *here* – and we’re inseparable from it. (p. viii)

He goes on to speak of the koans' role in helping the practitioner to come to a place of understanding and to *experience* reality, not see it through the mind. This is the main focus of Zen, and Buddhism in general, to experience reality, as experience cannot be handed to you or obtained from an external source (Senzaki, 2000). Maezumi (2002) points out:

There are as many different paths to realization as there are people. But we can say there are two basic ways. One way is to push ourselves to realize that our life is the buddhas' life. Another way is to simply let our life be the buddhas' life and just live it. In a way, this is the difference between koan practice and shikantaza¹¹. But whichever practice you do, the point is the same. Do not create a gap between your life and the buddhas' life (p. 26).

Finding Your Original Face

When the Buddha raised a flower and blinked his eyes, Kasyapa broke out in a smile.

(Keizan, cited in Cleary, 2002b, p. 4).

One of the most well known Zen symbols is the ox herding pictures that foster the use of an ox as a metaphor for one's quest to discover essential nature (Kapleau, 1989; Looi, 2002; Sekida, 2005). The ox herding pictures lay out a series of 10 frames in which they provide a title and commentary of various levels which symbolize the realization that occurs within the individual on the Zen path (Reps & Senzaki, 1994). The stages are as follows:

- 1) The search for the bull, 2) Discovering the footprints, 3) Perceiving the bull, 4) Catching the bull, 5) Taming the bull, 6) Riding the bull home, 7) The bull

transcended, 8) Both bull and self transcended, 9) Reaching the source, 10) In the world. (Reps & Senzaki, 1994).

The paradox of “the pathless path” is to lay out a path for the seeker to find the infinite nature of the true self (Ch’an Master Sheng-yen, 1999; Cleary, 2000, 2002a, 2002b; Glassman, 2002).

In the 12th century Zen master Kakuan (1100 -1200 C.E.) drew these pictures and provided commentary based on the earlier Taoist bulls/oxen (Bercholz & Kohn, 1993; Kakuan, 1993; Loori, 2002). His version extended the framework, by adding the last two oxen, 9) reaching the source, 10) in the world. As Kapleau (1989) points out, “it is probably because of the sacred nature of the ox in ancient India that this animal came to be used to symbolize man’s primal nature or Buddha-mind” (p. 313). These pictures, along with the commentary that is provided, depict the states of being that a Zen practitioner may experience throughout his/her training (Loori, 2002; Reps & Senzaki, 1994).

The bulls are seen as one of the expressions of the path of awakening and underlying their metaphors are psychological processes that are unique to each of the 10 illustrations (Sekida, 2005). Osho (1973) points out, “the Ten Bulls of Zen have tried in a single effort to express the inexpressible” (p. 4). And yet this depiction that expresses something so inexpressible, is not held to be mystical in nature. On the contrary, while seemingly abstract, “living Zen is nothing special...Zen is life itself, nothing added” (Smith, 1993, p. ix). Although the pictures illustrate what may appear to be a linear and straightforward path, they actually delineate different stages and provide a broad psychological map of what a practitioner experiences during and after awakening. While

some practitioners may excel in one area, they may be stubborn in another; yet what the ox of Zen truly provides is an avenue for practitioners to discuss what they are experiencing internally while also offering insight into the mind's attachments (Loori, 2002).

1) Seeking the Ox

In the pasture of this world, I endlessly push aside the tall grasses in search of the bull. Following unnamed rivers, lost upon interpenetrating paths of distant mountains,

My strength failing and my vitality exhausted, I cannot find the bull.

I only hear the locusts chirring through the forest at night.

(Reps & Senzaki, 1994, p. 242).

The search for the ox can be characterized by a journey that is lead by the senses and the mind (as is known in Western psychology, i.e., ego based rational thinking); good and bad, this and that, here our preferences and judgements cloud our true self while also being an obstacle to the pursuit of authentic meaning. As Epstein (1995) points out:

We are constantly murmuring, muttering, scheming, or wondering to ourselves under our breath: comforting ourselves, in a perverse fashion, with our own silent voices. Much of our interior life is characterized by this kind of primary process, almost infantile, way of thinking: 'I like this. I don't like that. She hurt me. How can I get that? More of this, no more of that.' (p. 109)

This is the individual's distraction to the real self – the ego; and yet as Kakuan states, "the bull has never been lost" (cited in Reps & Senzaki, 1994, p. 242). Thus, it is the incessant bickering and 'cross-talk' in one's head that presents the first barrier to awakening; although this can also be experienced in later stages as well. This search (for

the oxen) is the beginning of looking outside of the individual for happiness and/or satisfaction in life, possibly meaning. The practitioner is looking to answer the age old question, “who am I?”

Frankl (1984, 1988) and his therapeutic technique of *logotherapy* also outlines a search for meaning, as offering a Western philosophical and psychological existential framework. In the East, Buddhist or Eastern existential thought would attribute this search to the incessant craving (*trishna*) that humans have for more stuff or materials (anything external of the individual). We are in search of meaning and must have a meaning in life (Frankl, 1984); or the human being is in search of satisfying the craving (*Duhkha*) and therefore must accept his or her fate and/or come to an understanding of this malady (Bercholz & Kohn, 1993; Das, 1998; Hahn, 1997; Trungpa, 2005a, 2005b). Frankl’s (1984) philosophy of searching for meaning imbues the practitioner to look for something to fulfill his/her life, but that is only the beginning of the story when we look for similar sentiments within Buddhist psychological thought. As the Western existential tradition looks to make meaning out of the lives that we live, the problem – according to Eastern existentialism – does not lie in the world that we create, but in the creation of the egoic self, in turn creating a reality of suffering (Trungpa, 2005b; Welwood, 2002).

Buddhist philosophy and psychology deepens the inquiry of meaning and repeatedly asks that the practitioner be present and aware of whatever arises, to let go of thoughts and emotions, and simply allow the mind to unfold naturally; with the intention of having the practitioner begin to experience for him/herself that all phenomena are empty of any real substance and that there exists no permanence in the world (Brazier, 1995; Epstein, 1995, 1999, 2001). Such an approach can help the individual to avoid

creating a false sense of security and relying on the mind's incessant pursuit to construct meaning (Chodron, 2003b, 2005; Trungpa, 1973, 1988, 2005a, 2005b) which is the goal that clients are led to within the logo-therapeutic environment (Frankl, 1984).

2) *Discovering the Footprints*

Along the riverbank under the trees, I discover the footprints! Even under the fragrant grass I see his prints. Deep in the remote mountains they are found. These traces no more can be hidden than one's nose, looking heavenward.

(Reps & Senzaki, 1994, p. 244)

The second ox is hearing of the silence of truth, and/or the dharma of the Buddha, a cognitive understanding of the teaching. There still exists questioning and discernments here, as the individual continues to question his or her experience and wants to know the whole truth, thus not fully integrating or trusting his or her true nature. The individual ultimately must, "relinquish attachments to body and mind. If one is not yet free from body and mind, it is not the way" (Dogen, cited in Cleary, 2002b, pp. 201). Loori (2002) identifies the implication of this second painting being that the individual begins to understand that what he or she is searching for is not outside, it has always been within. There is now an inkling that once the individual has calmed his mind, oneness/awakening will unfold (Kit, 2002). Trungpa (1973) describes this realization: "He begins to realize that the world was never outside of himself, that it was his own dualistic attitude, the separation of 'I' and 'other,' that created the problem" (pp. 147). One must find his/her own authentic way to follow the bull, then one can start on the large maps – but there can be no definitive map towards truth (Trungpa, 2004; Osho, 1973).

3) *Perceiving the Bull*

I hear the song of the nightingale. The sun is warm, the wind is mild, willows are green along the shore, Here no bull can hide! What artist can draw that massive head, those majestic horns? (Reps & Senzaki, 1994, p. 246)

The third ox is the first experience in seeing one's true nature. Hahn (2002) provides his own insight into this ordinary experience: "being and non-being cannot apply to reality. By looking deeply, you realize that reality is not subject to birth and death, to being and non-being" (p. 89). This experience may occur in a brief moment of deep *samadhi*¹², in which the six senses – eyes, ears, nose, mouth, tongue, body, and mind – have to merge together, to forget the self (Loori, 2002). Some practitioners, however, see the six senses as no different from the source (Kapleau, 1989). It is said that many practitioners grasp at this experience, creating concepts and maps of what has just occurred in an attempt to try and understand what is happening to them (Loori, 2002; Sekida, 2005). Select Zen masters will not recognize this experience until the practitioner reaches the fourth stage; others may prescribe one hundred koans in order to assist in clarifying what has been seen (Loori, 2002). "After the first glimpse, people very quickly latch onto it, make an idea out of it, grasp it and strangle it. That's not it. That misses it" (Loori, 2002, p. 55). Maslow (1971) gives a description of what he perceives this state to be:

They [transcenders] can be more ecstatic, more rapturous, and experience greater heights of 'happiness' ...than the happy and healthy ones. But I get the impression that they are *as* prone and maybe more prone to a kind of cosmic-sadness or B-sadness over the stupidity of people, their self-defeat, their blindness, their cruelty to each other, their shortsightedness. (p. 279)

Thus, the practitioner is likely to have acquired psychic powers and can be tempted to abuse such powers which can be yet another obstacle to truth on the path (Kit, 2002).

4) *Catching the Bull*

I seize him with a terrific struggle. His great will and power are inexhaustible. He charges to the high plateau far above the cloud-mists, Or in an impenetrable ravine he stands. (Reps & Senzaki, 1994, p. 248)

In the fourth stage, the practitioner has experienced *kensho*¹³ and although there has been a realization of his/her true nature, there is an inability to control the mind and the practitioner must hold on tight to this realization (Kit, 2002; Loori, 2002; Sekida, 2005). The practitioner is now able to see the inseparability of his/her egoic self from the rest of the objective world, and yet struggles to embody the realization. Stephen Levine (2002) outlines this realization from his own perspective: “In every fibre of my being I understood that love was the only rational act of a lifetime. And with some dismay I perceived how everything else, how anything else, was just a lot of nonsense and folderol” (p. 213). Although the individual has come to this realization, he/she may also struggle with feelings of intense anger, or jealousy towards others (Kit, 2002). Wanting to behave one way, the practitioner may behave in the total opposite way. This experience of *kensho* has brought with it a whole new set of afflictions and obstacles and is the beginning of a need to refine the realization and expand the conscious awareness (Loori, 2002; Sekida, 2005). Loori (2002) points out, “this is the start of the actualization of your insights. And it continues forever. Realization followed by actualization, insight becoming action” (p. 59). The practitioner, despite the best intentions, may even become bitter, and nihilistic, and with this new understanding must begin to “tame the bull” by

transcending more attachments in one's self construction (Sekida, 2005). For example, a Zen practitioner that Kornfield spoke with concerning the awakening process had a great satori experience that lasted for six months, but then life changed:

Some months after all this ecstasy came a depression...I had continuing trouble with my children and family...I could give inspired lectures, but if you talk to my wife, she'll tell you that as the time passed I became grouchy and impatient as ever...To be honest, my mind and personality were pretty much the same, and my neuroses too. Perhaps it's worse, because now I see them more clearly. Here were these cosmic revelations and I still needed therapy just to sort through day-to-day mistakes and lessons of living a human life. (Kornfield, 2000, p. xvi)

Thus, the practitioner must work in order to be one with what is.

5) Taming the Bull

*The whip and rope are necessary, Else he might stray off down some dusty road.
Being well trained he becomes naturally gentle. Then, unfettered, he obeys his master.*

(Reps & Senzaki, 1994, p. 250)

The bull begins – at this point – to be tamed and manageable for the practitioner as he/she spends time in training (Sekida, 2005). Practitioners must continue on the path of cultivation as the ego is still strong and individuals can be pulled in and overcome with the delusions of the past that have previously clouded the mind (Kit, 2002). Although the practice is becoming less of a struggle for the practitioner, there must still be rigorous training and openness in order to continue to move awakened knowledge into the engaged aspects of daily life (Loori, 2002). Even with the understanding of the awakened state and true nature, it is fleeting and the practitioner may not be able to rest in samadhi,

but must succumb to the mind's way of waxing and waning (Sekida, 2005). Loori (2002) gives a description of this stage:

Training has advanced to a point where you are pretty clear on the natural order of things, how you fit into the total scheme, how your mind works, how your habit patterns affect your life, what the trigger points are that bring up anger or fear. You see clearly, but you still remain relatively powerless to do anything about your conditioned automatic responses. (p. 62)

As individuals begin to work with this, and cultivate a deeper realization, they begin to slow down and stop these habituated responses to situations that are based in habit and conditioning (Loori, 2002; Kit, 2002). Human delusions and conditioning arise from the mind, not from true-nature, thus one must continue to work with the mind (Kapleau, 1989). Thus, training is not the goal; it is only a means to develop awareness and discipline, which are not inherent and natural to humans (Osho, 1973). As Maezumi (2002) points out:

We do not see that our life right here, right now, is nirvana. Maybe we think that nirvana is a place where there are no problems, no more delusions. Maybe we think nirvana is something very beautiful, something unattainable. We always think that nirvana is something different from our own life. But we must really understand that nirvana is right here, right now. (p. 4)

Thus, the importance of working with attention becomes apparent when there is a willingness and embracement of the path; as how can one tune to the now, and realize that it is all here and now, without attention?

6) Riding the Bull Home

Mounting the bull, slowly I return homeward. The voice of my flute intones through the evening. Measuring with hand-beats the pulsating harmony, I direct the endless rhythm.

Whoever hears this melody will join me. (Reps & Senzaki, 1994, p. 252)

Riding the bull back home, the individual is in a serene state in which an understanding of what the body and heart are essentially for has been realized (Kit, 2002). The body, at this stage, may be going through chemical changes in which there is a physiological process that unfolds in the brain of the practitioner which creates more calm and peace within (Sekida, 2005). Students have matured in their realization and are able to enjoy the freedom of mind and body (Sekida, 2005). No longer tempted by the mind's chatter, the individual is carefree and rests in this serenity (Kapleau, 1989).

Occurring with ease now, the struggle is almost over, wisdom is beginning to manifest in the practitioner's life. The darker emotions – anger, greed, ignorance – are beginning to transform into healing emotions, such as compassion, wisdom, and enlightenment. This can be seen as a stage in which most students do not turn back and are usually dedicated to the process for the duration of the incarnate body (Loori, 2002). It is sometimes said that one practices to “reach the other shore.” Although there may be some debate as to what the other shore is; Maezumi (2002) points out, “until you realize that this shore is where you stand, this life that you are living, and the other shore, the life of the buddhas, are the same shore, you cannot appreciate your life to the fullest” (p. 26). And thus, practice continues.

7) The Bull Transcended

Astride the bull, I reach home. I am serene. The bull too can rest. The dawn has come. In blissful repose, within my thatched dwelling I have abandoned the whip and rope.

(Reps & Senzaki, 1994, p. 254)

The seventh stage is called reaching home, with the practice getting easier and more effortless for the individual (Loori, 2002). All is forgotten, kensho, Zen, awakening, satori, there is only a state of being; and yet as soon as the practitioner becomes concerned with this state – whatever it may be – it begins to weigh him/her down. *Samadhi* has now become under the individual's control, no longer separate from the practitioner. Thus, the bull is gone; self in *samadhi* remains (Sekida, 2005). As the ego begins to dissolve, compassion flows through the individual effortlessly (Loori, 2002). Loori (2002) outlines this:

What has evolved and deepened over the course of training is the ability of the student to see the absolute basis of reality, to clarify that perspective, to see how that absolute basis of reality functions in the world of phenomenon, and to make clear how that functioning occurs. (p. 67)

Murphy (2006) illuminates this in a different light, bringing with her the power of awareness and mindfulness:

The *Tao Te Ching* tells us that the softest thing on Earth overcomes the hardest thing on Earth. So coming back again and again to mindfulness, to agreeing to be here with what really is, overcomes the stubbornness of the human heart. The heart must break completely open so that everything may be here, fully itself, at last. (p. 88)

8) *Both Bull and Self Transcended*

Whip, rope, person, and bull – all merge No-thing. This heaven is so vast no message can stain it. How may a snowflake exist in a raging fire? Here are the footprints of the

patriarchs. (Reps & Senzaki, 1994, p. 256)

*Sunyata*¹⁴ has dawned and the practitioner is at one with the cosmos! Sekida (2005) provides an illuminating verse;

Last night, two clay bulls fought each other,
 Disappearing in the sea in the fighting,
 And nothing is heard of them this morning (p. 229).

Like bamboo, clay figures are (generally) hollow; thus the clay bulls are representative of the state of *sunyata*. These two empty figures then vanish into the ocean of energy to become one. There remains no-thing at this stage, no knowing, no seeker, and no one to be awakened or to experience sunyata (Kit, 2002). “Subjectivity and objectivity accompany each other,” (Sekida, 2005, p. 229) and self and object are completely forgotten. There are five levels of consciousness that have been revealed throughout this process (see Sekida, 2005, p. 229) and the individual has come to “no-mind” *samadhi*. There is a level of awareness that has reached a depth in which there is no action to accompany that awareness; he/she has become *Wu-wei*¹⁵ (Sekida, 2005).

9) *Reaching the Source*

Too many steps have been taken returning to the root and the source. Better to have been blind and deaf from the beginning! Dwelling in one’s true abode, unconcerned with that without – the river flows tranquilly on and the flowers are red.

(Reps & Senzaki, 1994, p. 258)

Coming out of absolute *samadhi*, the consciousness now becomes active. The no-thing becomes everything; one begins to see his/her reflection in all sentient beings. Everywhere one looks they see themselves (Sekida, 2005). Simply emerging from the

state of “no ox, no bull” gives way to a return to the source; Sekida (2005) poetically outlines this state:

Just a flip and you are in the warm spring sunshine, with flowers blooming, birds singing, and people picnicking on the grass. If you look carefully at the scene, you see the same old world you saw yesterday....But each of the flowers has its own face and talks to you. (pp. 229-230)

The precepts begin to transform into a natural instinct and are now a fundamental part of one’s existence (Loori, 2002). Mountains are still mountains, and trees are still trees, yet they are not the same as before this cultivation of consciousness (Kit, 2002). Things may be heard, seen and touched, but they no longer move the heart (mind). The practitioner is able to abide in the source as he/she truly is the source of all. The practitioner has spent countless amounts of energy to cultivate samadhi/awakening and now it is a permanent fixture of his/her being; the individual is awakening/samadhi (Sekida, 2005). Bayazid Bistami (cited in Fadiman & Frager, 1997) outlines this state from a Sufi perspective:

You will not be a mystic until you are like the earth – both the righteous and the sinner tread upon it – and until you are like the clouds – they shade all things – and until you are like the rain – it waters all things, whether it loves them or not. (p. 40).

10) In the World

Barefooted and naked abreast, I mingle with the people of the world. My clothes are ragged and dust-laden, and I am ever blissful. I use no magic to extend my life; Now, before me, the dead trees become alive. (Reps & Senzaki, 1994, p. 260)

Coming back into the world is an integral part of the entire Mahayana path as it is seen as a natural expression of awakening (Kit, 2002). Shantideva¹⁶ laid out an entire collection for entering the path of the *bodhisattva*¹⁷ in order to free all sentient beings; the impact of this is endless and is laden with awakened energy. It is reminiscent of the famous prayer of St. Francis which also contains a plea to be available to all:

May I be the doctor and the medicine

And may I be the nurse

For all sick beings in the world

Until everyone is healed. (cited in Thurman, 1997, p. 160)

The practitioner becomes a messenger for awakening: “his only thought is to bring joy to others” (Sekida, 2005, p. 230). The true *bodhisattva* assists others in their own realizations, ever immersed in positive *samadhi* (Sekida, 2005). As Looi (2002) explains, “that innocent mind – the naiveté, openness and receptivity of the beginner – is the quality developed fully in the process of coming down off the mountain’s lofty peak. No trace of enlightenment remains” (p. 77). The student now becomes the teacher, and continues on, Warner (2003) explains, “No one masters Zen. Ever. It’s a lifelong, never-ending continuously unfolding process” (p. 159).

Non-dual Reality, Advaita Vedanta

I am the boundless ocean.

This way and that,

The wind blowing where it will,

Drives the ship of the world.

But I am not shaken.

(Ashtavakra Gita)

(Byrom, 2001, p. 20).

“When ‘I’ appears, then the whole world is divided into pairs of opposites” (Sahn, 1997, p. 20). The boundless ocean that Advaita Vedanta (or Advaita) speaks of is, as Sahn (1997) points out, divided by the mind or by a false sense of knowledge concerning conceptual reality (Radhakrishnan & Moore, 1957/1989). Sometimes a difficult conceptualization for Westerners, the philosophy of non-dual reality is the cornerstone of the thought process behind Advaita (Hodgkinson, 2006). Descartes (1955) proclaimed, “I think, therefore I am; *cogito ergo sum*” (p. 29). Yet one cannot really experience reality until one gets beyond the conceptual mind and transcend thought. Sahn (2006) explains further, “but what if I am not thinking, then what? Before thinking there is no you or I, no form or emptiness, no right or wrong...all things are just as they are: form is form, emptiness is emptiness” (p. 76). This is what mystics and sages throughout the ages and across cultures have debated and is what Advaita subscribes to (Radhakrishnan & Moore, 1957/1989).

The truth lies beyond concepts, beyond mind, and everything is truth (Maharshi, 2002). Ultimately there is no division between soul/*atman* (refer to endnote 5) and ultimate reality/truth/*Brahman* (refer to endnote 6). It is all one in the same. It is merely a mirage of a material reality that prevents one from seeing this truth (Maharaj, 1996; Poonja, 2000). Gupta (2004) gives a brief definition of what Advaitan thought posits:

The most important philosophical thesis of Advaita Vedanta is that reality is one without a second (hence the name Advaita or non-dualism). This one reality,

called in the Upanisads texts *brahman-atman*, is not only the same as the inner self within each individual being (*jiva*) but also the stuff out of which all things are made. All differences in names and forms are mere appearances imposed upon one reality by a beginningless ignorance. (p. 121)

Balsekar (1989) also describes this philosophy and experience of awakening:

‘I’ am the subjective Reality, the dreamer of myself in the Cosmic dream in which I appear...it is never the object that awakens, only the dreamer who awakens from the identification with the dreamed object that is the cause of the illusion of bondage. ‘Awakening’ in effect, means vanishing as a dreamed object, the dissolving of appearance, the evaporation of the illusion or dream. Awakening therefore amounts to the discovery that the apparent entity has disappeared along with the total illusion or dream. (p. 24)

As Byrom (2001) states, “this is not a speculative philosophy. It is a kind of knowledge....We are all one Self. The Self is pure awareness. This Self, this flawless awareness is God. There is only God” (pp. xviii-xix). The concept of the self or *atman*, is paralleled with the concept of Self or *Brahman*; there is no separation between the two. To know the self, one knows the Self, or conversely, to know *atman* is to know *Brahman* as they are inseparable (Hodgkinson, 2006; Oxtoby, 1996). Thus, to ask “who am I?” following Maharshi’s line of inquiry, is to form a reminiscent query of many Zen koans to surface throughout the ages. However, to continue self-exploration along these lines, one may see the inseparability of themselves and all of reality.

Advaita is a major force in the Hindu wisdom tradition and is very well known. It began with a commentary on the *Mandukya Upanishad* which; was written by a sage

named Gaudapada (6th or 7th century), who was also the teacher of the renowned sage Shankara (Gupta, 2004). The oral tradition is said to date back to the *Upanishads* and is said to be older than the teachings of the Buddha, which are over 2500 years old. The scholarly/textual tradition began with this commentary by Gaudapada (Mahadevan, 1977). Shankara is known as one of the most eminent sages within the Advaitan movement, which began around the 8th or 9th century C.E (Hodgkinson, 2006; Radhakrishnan & Moore, 1957/1989). Modern or turn of the century sages who have been involved in the Advaita tradition include Ramana Maharshi, (2002; Mahadevan, 1977), Sri Nisargaddatta Maharaj (1996, 2001), Papaji (Godmen, 1993; Poonja, 2000), and Gangaji (1995, 2005). I will provide a brief description of these four practitioners including the line of teaching to which they adhere. As with many Buddhist lines of teaching, the Advaitan is one that relies on the guru heavily. Papaji claims to have been taught by Maharshi, and Gangaji is Papaji's successor (Gangaji, 1995, 2005; Godmen, 1993; Poonja, 2000). Nisargadatta is also said to have taught many different people along the way, Ramesh Balsekar being one of the individuals, though he did not have a direct successor.

Ramana Maharshi: Who Am I?

Self-inquiry is to focus the entire mind at its source. It is not, therefore, a case of one 'I' searching for another 'I'

(Maharshi, 1988, p. 76).

Born in Tamil Nadu, India on December 30, 1879, Maharshi is one of India's most celebrated and renowned sages of modern times. At age 12, Venkataraman (abbreviated as Ramana) lost his father and moved with his mother to be in the care of his

paternal uncle. It is said that a curse was placed on the family long ago, that at least one of the family members would become an ascetic from every generation. Though Ramana showed no signs of this at an early age (Mahadevan, 1977), suddenly and seemingly out of nowhere at 17 years of age, Maharshi experienced a radical shift in consciousness while sitting on his uncle's porch. A sudden fear of death overtook him. Feeling as if he would die, he held his breath and laid down. While stiffening his body, he began to resemble a corpse and asked himself, "now what would happen?" (Mahadevan, 1977).

Maharshi (cited in Mahadevan, 1977) recounts his thoughts that followed this experience:

Well, this body is now dead. It will be carried to the funeral pyre and there reduced to ashes. But do I die with the death of this body? Is the body I? It is silent and inert; but I feel the full force of my personality and even the voice of the 'I' within me, apart from it. So I am the Spirit transcending the body. The body dies but the Spirit that transcends it cannot be touched by death. That means that I am the deathless Spirit. (p. 17)

Following this experience, Maharshi left his home with a note to tell his family he had gone to solidify his experience of non-duality. He journeyed to Tiruvannamalai or conversely Arunacala, a place that he is said to have been familiar with since birth.

Becoming an ascetic and renouncing all his worldly possessions with his realization of the body being impermanent, he went on to embrace a new life in seclusion for several years (Mahadevan, 1977).

It was not long until various spiritual seekers had heard about this great sage and sought him out for spiritual guidance. Since he did not profess any saint hood; he would also not validate others' experiences; nor did he name a specific successor or create a

lineage to carry on his teachings (although as mentioned earlier, individuals see Maharshi as their guru). Maharshi was also known for his use of silence and sparse use of language; at times responding only with silence. Individuals were simply invited to ask themselves the question, “who am I?” and to embrace a similar process that Ramana himself undertook for his own alchemy of self (Mahadevan, 1977; Schumacher & Woerner, 1994).

Although it seemed simple to Maharshi, many have questioned the teachings wondering, “if all reality is non-dual/Brahman, then why are we oblivious to it?”

Maharshi (2002) responds:

In one’s own Self, which is not other than Brahman, there is a mysterious power known as *avidya* (ignorance) which is beginningless and not separate from the Self....Just as pictures in cinema, though not visible either in sunlight or in darkness, become visible in a spot of light in the midst of darkness, so in the darkness of ignorance there appears the reflected light of the Self, illusory and scattered taking the form of thought. (pp. 91-92)

Thus, Maharshi’s teachings are similar to that of Buddhist doctrine in which it is stated that the material world is much like a dream that we must wake up from in order to see the truth (Murphy, 2006).

It is through these tireless investigations using “who am I?” to inquire, that one begins to break through the mind’s eye and move into the *Self*. Maharshi truly believed that this was the best method of meditation and that it provided plenty of space in which to transcend the mind (Mahadevan, 1977). Maharshi speaks to this method of self-inquiry:

Self-inquiry, Who am I?, is a different technique from the meditation ‘I am Siva,’ or ‘I am He.’ I rather emphasize Self-Knowledge, for you are first concerned with yourself before you proceed to know the world or its Lord...from the moment you get into the quest for the Self and begin to go deeper, the real Self is waiting there to receive you, and then whatever is to be done is done by something else and you, as an individual, have no hand in it. (cited in Mahadevan, 1977, p. 152)

The impact Maharshi’s teaching has made on the spiritual community is immense, containing an approach that transcends religious dogma and promotes peace. His line of self-inquiry is one that illuminates the Advaita tradition and has the potential to deconstruct our views of what reality is. Ramana Maharshi lived to be 70 years of age, leaving his mind/body on April 17, 1950. After his death, ashrams all over the world devoted to his teachings have been established. One such individual who began to teach, claiming Maharshi’s line, was Sri H. W. L. Poonja, or Papaji.

Papaji: The Lion of Lucknow

Nothing has ever come into existence; nothing has ever happened; the unchanging, formless Self alone exists.

(Papaji, cited in Godmen, 1993, p. 61)

Hariwansh Lal Poonja was born in Gujrunwala in western Punjab, India (now Pakistan); known as *Papaji* or *Lion of Lucknow*. Interestingly, his maternal uncle was the renowned Indian saint Swami Rama Tirtha (1873-1906), a famous saint in India. Reminiscent of Ramana Maharshi and many others who follow the spiritual path, Papaji had a deep spiritual experience when he was eight years old (Godmen, 1993, 1998). He describes his first experience of deep *Samadhi* (cited in Godmen, 1993):

I had just been consumed and engulfed by an experience that made me so peaceful and happy...my mother and other women present were both astonished and alarmed by my sudden inactivity...by this time my eyes were closed. Though I was unable to respond to their queries, I could hear the discussion going on around me, and I was fully aware of all their attempts to bring me back to my normal state...the experience was so overwhelming it had effectively paralyzed my ability to respond to any external stimuli. (pp. 3-4)

This state went on for two days and Papaji stated feeling just as ignorant as his family about the experience, not knowing what really had unfolded for him. He expressed a longing to have the experience again and became a devotee of Krishna at the advice of his mother. He spent many years after this experience performing devotion to God in many forms and was also an astute meditator (Godmen, 1993, 1998; Ingram, 1992).

Papaji would go on to join the army, marry and have children, but his lust to find God never left him. He met Ramana Maharshi in 1944 and was able to realize his true Self, upon which he returned to Lucknow and maintained his existence by providing for his family and raising his children. In 1966, he retired and began to teach others (Godmen, 1993, 1998; Ingram, 1992).

Papaji maintained the perspective that there was no effort necessary in finding awakening and that all forms of seeking only remove individuals further from the truth (Godmen, 1998). Papaji illuminates this teaching:

The secret to Bliss is to *stop* the search, *stop* thinking, *stop* not-thinking, and keep Quiet.

The best practice is to Know “Who am I.”

You are Brahman, know this.

If you want to do anything, just

Always adore Self. (Poonja, 2000, p. 20)

He also held that there is essentially no teaching, that things just are as they are:

The essence of my teaching is this: I teach about that which cannot be attained by any teaching. My teaching cannot be taught. I have no teaching for the Essence from where all teachings arise. This Essence doesn't need any teaching or non-teaching for it is beyond everything. It is where all words arise. (Poonja, 2000, p. 23)

Papaji was known for his unpredictable teaching style in which he embodied the moment and would mirror back to the individual what was needed in that particular moment. His *satsangs*¹⁸ became known as a place where anything could happen and thus received his name, "Lion of Lucknow." Although he could be relentless in the way he worked with mind, he was also known for his radiance of love and tender kindness. He lived in the present moment and was truly the embodiment of his teachings (Godmen, 1993, 1998; Papaji, 1993). He died on September 7, 1997.

Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj: "I am That"

Between the banks of pain and pleasure the river of life flows. It is only when the mind refuses to flow with life, and gets stuck at the banks, that it becomes a problem.

(Maharaj, 1996, p. 6)

Relatives of Maruti Kampli (his given name) Nisargadatta have said that Nisargadatta was born on a full moon day in March 1897. This was also Hanuman Jayanti¹⁹, a festival for Hanuman, also known as Maruti – Nisargadatta's namesake – the

famed monkey god from the *Ramayana*²⁰ (Maharaj, 1996; Schumacher & Woerner, 1994). Therefore, the date of his birth is quite auspicious. When asked about his birth Nisargadatta would reply, “I was never born.” Never seeing the point in biography and personal life, not much is known about him (Maharaj, 1996). What is known about him is that he grew up poor and his father died when he was 18. With not enough money to feed all the children, he eventually left and went to Bombay. He started a shop in which he sold cigarettes, children’s clothes, and other small goods. Finding some financial security, he was able to get married, having three daughters and a son (Maharaj, 1996).

A friend of his was a devotee of Sri Siddharmeshwar Maharaj and one night, Maruti decided to join him to see the guru. This proved to be the turning point for him as he began to have intense experiences in meditation and eventually realized his true Self. With these experiences, he became Sri Nisargadatta and left ‘Maruti the shopkeeper’ behind as he undertook a pilgrimage to the Himalayan Mountains to further his realization. He eventually came back to take on the shop again and taught out of his home in the slums of Bombay until his death at 84 years of age, in 1981 (Maharaj, 1996).

Nisargadatta taught many individuals at his small flat in the slums of Bombay over the years. Some of these individuals are Steven Wolinsky, Ramesh Balsekar, Wayne Dyer, and Maurice Frydman. His legacy has been upheld in the *satsangs* that were transcribed, which are translated into many different languages. Besides the few individuals listed above, Jack Kornfield also met Nisargadatta. He describes his presence when working with him, “Nisargadatta had an emptiness more extraordinary than anyone I had ever been with. There was an extraordinary sense of spaciousness, while at the

same time he was very intense” (Kornfield, 2006, p. 6). He goes on to describe the essence of Nisargadatta’s teaching:

The essential point of his teaching is that we already are absolutely free and that there is nothing that we have to do or make or become or change ourselves into; we simply have to see the truth of life which is that we are not this body nor this mind, but they are plays of the elements as your will and that, when one understands this, there comes an extraordinary happiness and freedom.

(Kornfield, 2006, p. 6)

Tat Tvam Asi (“That thou art”) proclaimed the Hindu teachers who wanted to teach Western pilgrims the knowledge of Vedanta (Schumacher & Woerner, 1994). This simple Vedic statement was also the basis for the teachings of Nisargadatta. Conducting his teachings in a question and answer format, he never claimed to really teach anything and claimed to only know ‘original essence’ (Maharaj, 1996; Schumacher & Woerner, 1994).

This timeless being is the source of both life and consciousness...it loves, and has endless fun, shaping and re-shaping the universe. Every man has it, every man *is* it, but not all know themselves as they are, and therefore identify themselves with the name and shape of their bodies and the contents of their consciousness...to rectify this misunderstanding of one’s reality, the only way is to take full cognizance of the ways of one’s mind and to turn it into an instrument of self-discovery. (Maharaj, 1996, p. 536)

Nisargadatta explains that humans have evolved biologically in order to survive in the world. This evolution has also created the arts of thinking, communication and language.

Though he recognized the importance of this evolutionary change for human survival, Nisargadatta believed this creation now replaces and illustrates reality as a cloud of concepts, abstractions and symbols. Thus, it is by going beyond the mind that human beings can begin to recognize the futility of the constructed self and see things for what they truly are (Maharaj, 1996, 2001). Maharaj (1996) expands on this:

To know what you are, you must first investigate and know what you are not. Discover all that you are not – body, feelings, thoughts, time, space, this or that – nothing, concrete or abstract, which you perceive can be you. The very act of perceiving shows that you are not what you perceive. The clearer you understand that on the level of mind you can be described in negative terms only, the quicker will you come to the end of your search and realize that you are the limitless being. (p. xxii)

Gangaji: Stop and Experience

Self-inquiry is not a path that leads you somewhere. It is the path that stops you in your tracks so that you can discover directly, for yourself, who you are.

(Gangaji, 2005, p. 73)

The Southern United States never felt like home to Antoinette Roberson Varner, or Gangaji, who was born in Texas in 1942 and grew up in Mississippi. Growing up in an alcoholic family, she endured shame and as a result, was not a very happy child. She explains in her own words:

I was brought up in a small town in Mississippi with all the freedom and privilege of a white child of the middle class, yet I was secretly tortured by my family dynamic and shamed by my parents' alcoholism. I had the sense that I was involved in a huge mistake, that some force of darkness was surrounding me on all sides. (Gangaji, 2005, p. 1)

She took refuge in her grandmother's love for her and in the love of Christ for a brief time, but nothing seemed to 'take it all away' and make her feel whole, blueprinting her life as a long search for truth.

In 1964 she graduated from the University of Mississippi, went on to get married and bore a daughter (Marvelly, 2002). Still not finding what she was looking for in life, she began to search and moved to the San Francisco Bay area in 1972.

Deciding to pursue a spiritual path, she dabbled with psychedelics and eventually decided to take the Bodhisattva vows, subsequently practicing Zen and vipassana meditation. Assisting others in the Bay area to manage a Tibetan Buddhist meditation center, her experiences with psychedelics soon taught her something about total acceptance and surrender. She would eventually travel to England to study acupuncture and start a successful practice back in the United States. She was married to Eli Jaxon-Bear and eventually left California for Hawaii. Still feeling the unrest and suffering that describes the "human condition," she recognized she needed a teacher and prayed to find one (Gangaji, 2005; Marvelly, 2002).

It would not be until six months after her prayer to find a teacher, in 1990, that Jaxon-Bear met Papaji in India. Gangaji traveled to join them both in India, meeting Papaji on the banks of the Ganges River, which ironically, is reflective of her spiritual

name. Seeking freedom and absolute truth, Gangaji (2005) recalls some of the words spoken by Papaji:

Do nothing. Your whole problem is that you continue doing. Stop all your doing. Stop all your beliefs, all your searching, all your excuses, and see for yourself what is already and always here. Don't move. Don't move toward anything, and don't move away from anything. In this instant be still. (p. 5)

Upon hearing this, she had a shift in consciousness and was able to stop. With this she spent more time with Papaji and continued to be tested and tried by him. She would eventually be asked to go back West in order to teach (Gangaji, 2005; Marvally, 2002).

The power of stopping is explained further in Gangaji's (2005) own words:

To 'stop' is to stop searching for yourself in thoughts, emotions, circumstances, or bodily images. It is that simple. The search is over when you realize that the true and lasting fulfillment you have been searching for is found to be nowhere other than right where you are. It is here...it is everywhere. (pp. 9-10)

This is Gangaji's (2005) main framework for teaching, "calling off the search." She currently lives in Ashland, Oregon and teaches all over the world. Retrospectively, as we look towards an understanding of 'calling off the search,' we find a commonality amongst various wisdom traditions. The idea is that we have nowhere to go and that we must end our seeking if we are to come to a place of truth.

End of Seeking

The thing we tell of can never be found by seeking, yet only seekers find it.

(Bistami, cited in Fadiman & Frager, 1998, p. 37)

The above quote seems to be a huge paradox. How can something exist that cannot be found when seeking, and yet only be found by seekers? The answer is something that seems to be a point that is difficult to describe. Although Gangaji, Papaji and many other Advaitans deny the need to seek and search, the inquiry of “who am I?” is still a form of seeking. To merely sit back and hope that something happens with no effort whatsoever, does nothing for anyone or the unveiling of truth. Thus, how can one make sense of this paradox?

Bodhidharma (1992) states, “when you seek nothing, you’re on the path” (p. 7). Accordingly, we have the same issue within the Zen tradition. Only with effort can one begin to dissolve this effort and thus, “call off the search” or “seek nothing.” Yet it seems to be a difficult thing to understand; however, Bistami (cited in Fadiman & Frager, 1998) seems to describe it perfectly. All may not agree that effort is needed before the process of ending the search begins, though both the Advaitan and Zen traditions do agree that an end to the search is needed (Balsekar, 1989; Bodhidharma, 1992; Gangaji, 2005; Murphy, 2006; Poonja, 2000; Sahn, 1997; 2006).

With the dissolution of the path at hand, individuals come to a state of being when they can clearly see what was sought for has always been present, no longer being a need to look for anything (Tolle, 1997, 2003, 2005). As Ingram (2003), a Buddhist practitioner of 20 years and later, a student of Papaji states:

We have nowhere we need to go because all is in its place as is, ourselves included. We have nothing we need do to belong here because we feel no separation from existence...we realize that what we really wanted was not something that comes from seeking but that which comes from being found. (p. 9)

Once the seeking has ended there is a deep realization that there is ‘nowhere to go’ and essentially nothing that can be done to ‘get somewhere.’ Tolle (2003) expands on the truth of this, “this one moment – Now – is the only thing you can never escape from, the one constant factor in your life” (p. 39). Thus, to end seeking, one must rest in the present and remain open to whatever may arise. This ends the suffering caused by the preference of states and by being a slave to the mind’s grasping nature. In doing so, the individual embracing the path of the warrior-bodhisattva walks into all things with an open and vulnerable heart (Chodron, 2003b, 2005; Tolle, 2003).

The deep awareness of all that is permeates the mind and creates an inner resting place. Tolle (1997) states, “realize that the present moment is all you ever have. Make the now your primary focus of life” (p. 28). If the practitioner can make the shift into being present, he/she has come to the true end of seeking. And as Almaas (2001) brings forth, “Self realization fulfills the meaning of our lives. The true significance of all experience is the essential presence” (p. 227).

If one is to focus primarily on self-realization, both spiritual and psychological attachments/issues within the psyche must be explored. There have been a few individuals who have begun to bring these two realities of working with the mind with a spiritual sense into light for the Western psychologies. The next section will chart some of the issues and attachments that hold the egoic self stable, while also introducing psychotherapists who deal with these issues in practice and theory. All of these individuals have been influential in the psycho-spiritual field, as well as in this thesis.

Psycho-spiritual Meld

When we are able to become completely one with irritations or feel the abstract quality of the irritation as it is, then irritation has no one to irritate. It becomes a sort of judo practice. (Trungpa cited in Welwood, 2002, p. 188)

Although the quest for wholeness can sometimes be seen more in terms of a spiritual quest – as opposed to a psychological one – there have been many who have pointed to the need for the integration of the two (Brazier, 1995; Epstein, 1995; Khan, 1984; Kornfield, 2000; Maslow, 1971; Trungpa, 2005a, 2005b; Washburn, 1988; Welwood, 2002; Wilber, 1995). Following James (1902/1985), Maslow (1961, 1968, 1971) was one of the first psychologists to bring the transcendental into the realm of psychological thought and theory and for this he has been coined, “the father of transpersonal psychology” (Wilber, 1996).

A. H. Almaas (1986, 1988, 1995, 1997, 1998a, 1998b, 2001, 2002, 2004) has also been a major spokesperson for the integration of the psycho-spiritual. Almaas (1986) recognized “a need for the spiritually informed psychology, or conversely, for a psychologically grounded spirituality. This perspective does not separate psychological and spiritual experience, and hence sees no dichotomy between depth psychology and spiritual work” (p. i).

Jack Kornfield (1986, 1989, 1993, 2000) and John Welwood (1990, 1992, 1997, 2002, 2003) also advocate an integrated spiritual-psychology. They realistically stress that psychological health should not just solely contain a cure for basic human distress, but encompass a path towards wholeness and awakening. Considering the voices of these practitioners, the need for integration from both ends of the psycho-spiritual spectrum is fundamental. It is true that, not all individuals who seek therapy appear to look for a

transcendental-self, a true-self, a sense of being or assistance to achieve awakening, nor do all desire a basic understanding of it. Nonetheless, it is an invaluable therapeutic movement to go beyond mundane and familiar issues within the individual. The gifts of self-realization from embracing a holistic approach may assist a client to live life in a more meaningful way (Hillman, 1992, 1996).

Although not a transpersonal psychologist, Jungian James Hillman (1992, 1996) talks about restoring the *soul*, which he sees from a more ecological sense, i.e., the interconnectedness that exists within our world, back into psychology and the ability for the individual to come to a greater understanding of the role he or she play in life. As Epstein (1999) points out:

The traditional view of therapy as building up the self simply does not do justice to what we actually seek from the therapeutic process. We are looking for a way to feel more real, but we do not realize that to feel more real we have to push ourselves further into the unknown. (p. xix)

Thus, in Epstein's eyes, as individuals, we are looking for something to feel 'more real' and therefore may need this integration of the unknown in our everyday lives, since nothing in life can be known for certain. As Sell (2003) points out, "the root of suffering is resisting the certainty that no matter what the circumstance, uncertainty is all we truly have" (p. xvii). The teachings of the renowned Shambhala Buddhist nun, Pema Chodron, illuminate this truth and provide practitioners with the understanding that the true warrior of the heart will walk into uncertainty and accept all that arises, embracing what is. This advice is very pertinent on this quest (Chodron, 2003a, 2003b, 2005; Sell, 2003).

In their everyday lives, people generally take solidity for granted and are only guided by their senses, thus missing the elemental energy that connects us all to the same source. As Maharaj (1996) points out, “I am that” and thus, you, too, are that. “That,” which is the underlying energy that fuels all and is not only the source of life, but is life itself (Huxley, 1945; Maharaj, 1996). And this “that” is what has been a difficult gap to close between the Eastern and Western teachings of philosophy and psychology. With the emergence of transpersonal psychologies in the 1960s however, a bridge was formed across these cultural barriers to deconstruct some of these differences.

Integrative Practices

The call to link our psychologies with other psychologies, to understand our minds, is not simply of academic interest: our culture is in the midst of a crisis that may be resolved by nuclear annihilation, mass starvation, and the partial or total collapse of civilization.

(Tart, 1977, p. 3)

In looking toward the psycho-spiritual union of the West and the integration of Eastern philosophy and psychology into psychotherapeutic process, one must bring to light practitioners that bring their wisdom to work within the field of psychology and transformation. Three main figures who have had a major influence on this re-structuring work and also within the transpersonal field are Jack Kornfield (1989, 1993, 2000), John Welwood (1990, 1992, 1997, 2002, 2003) and A. H. Almaas (1986, 1988, 1995, 1997, 1998a, 1998b, 2001, 2002, 2004). Both Kornfield and Welwood have strong backgrounds in Buddhist practice and have been teaching and practicing transpersonal and Buddhist psychotherapy for many years. Almaas has a strong Sufi background in which he continued on to flower his own path for working specifically with narcissism on the path

of self-realization. Although I will be drawing mainly on the works of Welwood, Kornfield and Almas I will also be bringing other transpersonal and Buddhist psychotherapists into this section as there is a need to emphasize in this thesis, the importance of the integration of Eastern wisdom into the West, through the means of psychology.

Jack Kornfield

Even the most exalted states and the most exceptional spiritual accomplishments are unimportant if we cannot be happy in the most basic and ordinary ways, if we cannot touch one another and the life we have been given with our hearts.

(Kornfield, 1993, p. 11)

Hailing from the great forest tradition²¹ of such teachers as Ajahn Chah, Jack Kornfield holds a degree in East Asian studies, as well as a Ph.D. in clinical psychology, spending many years in monastic Buddhist training in various East Asian countries (Grof & Grof, 1989; Kornfield, 1993). Having spent an abundance of time in retreat and meditation in the monastic community, Kornfield felt he was destined to come back to North America and begin the tedious process of integrating what he had learned into his daily life (Kornfield, 1993). Upon entering back into North American society, disrobing and entering into a new relationship and graduate school, he found the difficulties of beginning to ‘enter the marketplace.’ He speaks further:

I had arrived back from the monastery clear, spacious, and high, in short order, I discovered, through my relationship, in the communal household where I lived, and in my graduate work, that my meditation had helped me very little with my relationships. I was still emotionally immature, acting out the same painful

patterns of blame and fear, acceptance and rejection that I had before my Buddhist training; only the horror now was that I was beginning to see these patterns more clearly. (pp. 6-7)

Kornfield explains that it had been his journey to come from the mind and work his way down the chakra system in order to descend back into the world of the heart. This long and arduous journey consisted of his attendance in group and individual therapy, doing heart-centered practices to foster more emotional awareness, to encourage awareness of patterns, relationships, and transpersonal psychological practices. He goes on;

Gradually I have come to understand this work of the heart as a fully integrated part of my spiritual practice...I learned that if I am to live a spiritual life, I must be able to embody it in every action: in the way I stand and walk, in the way I breathe, in the care with which I eat. All my activities must be included. (pp. 7-8)

Thus, to Kornfield (1993, 1995) it is of the utmost importance to constantly revisit the mind and all its workings that affect the awakening process. Having slighted his emotions and body during his years of training in Asia, he now speaks of the importance of Westerners integrating psychotherapy and meditation. The process here in the West is now seen as a very different process than that of working with the mind in the East, which was mostly in a monastic context (Brazier, 2001; Kornfield, 1993; Nairn, 2001; Welwood, 2002). The majority of Buddhist and depth-orientated practices were never intended for use within our shame-based culture. Therefore, a predominantly Buddhist practice has turned into its own entity here in the West (Kornfield, 1993). As Nairn (2001) points out:

We mediators project all our unresolved psychology into our meditation and mix it up with our conditioning. So our goals, hopes, longings, expectations, and assumptions about life snag and flow into any unconscious material that arises during meditation, and cause derailment of our practice. (p. xv)

So as the West's shame-entrenched collective psyche reaches toward the teachings of the East for newfound wisdom, there is an obvious paradox in which one can see the need to cultivate not only the awakened wisdom from the East, but also a need to resolve our collective and personal hang-ups on the illusion of a self or the existence of an "I" (which, interestingly enough, has been stated by psychoanalytic and object-relations theorists and practitioners in the West for over a century) (Almaas, 1988).

There is a spiritual pathology that is created by Westerners practicing these traditions (Preece, 2006). Kornfield (1993, 2000) outlines some of these pitfalls and struggles on the path, including various issues that may evolve at a psychic level of being, and how one can use both psychotherapy and meditation on the path to no-self, drawing on teachings of the East and his own experience.

John Welwood

We are born with this incredible instrument called a mind, which can tune in heaven and hell and everything in between, but no one ever gives us operating instructions on how to use it or what to do with it. (Welwood, 2002, p. xiv)

Also taking the view of Kornfield and Preece, Welwood (2002) speaks to struggles within a psychological context that may arise for practitioners and vice versa. Outlining the point that in Asian cultures, the spiritual systems were designed for people who were, "too earthbound, too involved in family roles and social obligations" (p. 206)

is also pertinent. Consequently, some Eastern teachers simply do not understand the self-hatred, overwhelming isolation, guilt, and general lack of confidence that often marks the Western practitioner (Welwood, 2002). With this identification, Welwood (2002) has used his own experience in working within a psychotherapeutic context alongside Buddhist practitioners, to outline issues he has witnessed these individuals struggle with over the years.

Building on Trungpa's (1973) conceptualization of *Spiritual Materialism*, Welwood (2002) has paralleled and expanded this foundation with the term *spiritual bypass*. Spiritual bypass is described as the "tendency [of spiritual practitioners] to avoid or prematurely transcend basic human needs, feelings, and developmental tasks" (p. 12). According to Welwood, people may begin to transcend 'too early' and the path becomes another escape from 'what is,' leaving behind what individuals need to ultimately deal with on their quests such as fundamental issues, i.e., addictions, core wounds, trauma, abuse, and neglect. This can sometimes be apparent if the shadow of the practitioner unfolds and begins to cause harm to others, due to a lack of awareness or avoidance by the individual (Zweig & Abrams, 1991). This has been a notion that has struck teachers from both the East and the West (Falk, 2005; Fields, 1992; Wilson, 2000). There can be a very essential and vital piece here, pertaining to openness and the willingness to continually look at the interactions of the individual with the 'other,' especially when there are hundreds and thousands of followers devoted to that individual (Wilson, 2000).

Welwood (1990, 1992, 1997, 2002, 2003) has also taken a more specific focus when looking at the path of realization and transpersonal psychology, entwining the

concepts of spiritual bypass with relationships on the path. He outlines many ways in which to work with relationship in his seminal works (1990, 1997, 2002).

A. H. Almaas

Until we directly experience spiritual transformation, we do not truly understand that this transformation involves such radical changes in our experience of ourselves and our world that it is not a matter of becoming a transformed individual; we recognize, rather, that the reality that is realized is something that cannot be limited by such notions as 'individual' and 'world.'

(Almaas, 1998a, p. ix)

While the diamond is the hardest naturally forming substance known to exist on earth and is also the focal point of the *Diamond Sutra* in the Buddhist tradition, it is also what A. Hameed Ali chose to name his psycho-spiritual approach in order to speak to the deconstructive nature of the diamond approach (Almaas, 2001; Price & Wong, 1990).

In the Buddhist tradition, *vajra* is usually translated as “diamond,” which is symbolic for the indestructible, spotless and untarnished nature of all beings (Price & Wong, 1990; Schumacher & Woerner, 1994). Characterized by its clarity and nature, diamonds are clear and appear to be empty. The diamond purveys the inherent nature of emptiness within an individual, which is a cornerstone of Buddhist thought (Hahn, 1997). The diamond brings with it a plethora of symbolism when speaking about spiritual paths.

Though he is not a professed Buddhist, Almaas, the pen name for A. Hameed Ali, actually means diamonds in Arabic and in other languages as well (Olson, 2003). The

diamond approach created by Almaas is a deconstructive pathway (of sorts) that works with the mind and provides a way out of narcissistic tendencies along the path (i.e., spiritual materialism/bypass) (Almaas, 1996, 2004). The approach is characterized by 18 stages of ego narcissistic deconstruction which he outlines for “essential identity realization” (Almaas, 2001). Rooted in depth psychology, ego psychology, and object relation theory, this deconstructive pathway uses many facets of the wisdom traditions as well as psychological theory, extending to the metaphysical realms of the psyche in the development of consciousness (Almaas, 1986, 2001). These stages are outlined in great depth, therefore I will not focus upon each stage but provide a broad overview of the ideas presented.

This transformative method will take the individual through a progressive letting-go of narcissistic and ego-driven ways of living, in which one will experience a vast array of feelings and expansiveness in consciousness awareness while stepping toward a true understanding of the essential self. In Almaas’s approach, one can see the (sometimes) subtle elements of narcissism throughout the different stages and how this ego-centric feeling can alienate the practitioner from deeper dimensions (i.e., our inherent nature).

The ‘beginning of the path’ is characterized by an increasing identification with an empty shell of existence. This unfolds a multitude of emotions and the individual begins to see that his or her whole life is based on a fake existence as opposed to what he or she once thought was real in the world (Almaas, 2001).

These feelings eventually progress to what Almaas (2001) calls feeling the “great betrayal,” which he characterizes as not only the support of others in this false existence, but also the self. He outlines such feelings as self-hate, regret, shame and guilt as the

individual starts to see this more clearly. Almaas (2001) writes of this experience, “so we learned to pretend, to be like them, to join them in their world, the world of lies, the world of the shell, the conventional world” (p. 319). This “lie” eventually leads the individual to the point of rage, and more specifically, narcissistic rage.

“Narcissistic rage is a universal reaction to feeling unseen or misunderstood” (Almaas, 2001, p. 323). Thus, the individual not only feels very hurt, but he or she also feels rage with the betrayal that has occurred. The individual can appear to be angry all the time, specifically when his ‘specialness’ is not mirrored back by his surrounding existence. Thus, the absence of the need to be seen begins to become apparent if the individual can turn his awareness inward and watch the mind’s attempts to solidify the ego. The invitation at this point for the seeker is to witness how this rage is a reaction to the absence of mirroring, as a response to an ‘ego blow’ (Almaas, 2001).

After the individual has worked through these different feelings, a great wound emerges from the anger and rage. This pain becomes the catalyst for the individual to experience a luminous emptiness. This is regarded as a difficult process to undertake, but necessary to undergo in order to transcend (Almaas, 2001, 2004; Tarrant, 1998; Tolle, 1997, 2005).

In order to grasp what this author is saying, I will present some rich descriptions that Almaas provides as maps of these states. Almaas (2001) describes the state of luminous emptiness:

We experience ourselves then as a luminous night sky, transparent and pure, light and happy, cool and virginal, deep and peaceful....It is a nothingness, but it is nothingness that is rich, that is satisfying preciously because of its emptiness. It is

a direct sense of endless stillness, of pure peacefulness, of an infinity of blackness that is so black that it is luminous. It is a transparent blackness that is radiant because of its purity. This is not the experience of a self, an observer beholding the endlessness of space; rather, it is the experience of the self experiencing itself *as* the infinity of peaceful space. (p. 338)

These are the beginnings of the self-transcendent path. The ego (self) then begins to intensify its efforts to survive within the mind and body unit (Almaas, 2001). There is also a point where the individual realizes that their efforts have been useless and the end of seeking begins. Almaas (2001) also illuminates this beautifully:

As he sees the struggle and the suffering of his ego-self, deep compassion flows out of the purity of being towards him. There is no malice now, no hatred, no blame, no judgment, and no rejection. There is only an understanding, love and compassion. He can now understand very clearly what really concerned his ego-self, what motivated his thinking and feeling. He has only wanted to be accepted and loved, just wanted to be allowed to be, without hassle, without demands, without expectations. He has tried to live up to external ideas, to gain acceptance. He tried to be pure, complete, good, and strong, but none of it really worked.

None of it could give him back his original purity and simplicity. (p. 347)

This state marks the point where the individual stops the search outside for external validation and begins to bring total awareness to the present moment, in which there is an ability to also continue to work with the mind. There is no longer a past or future; there exists only the present. This is the place of no-seeking, of no-self (Almaas, 2001, 2004). This is not, however, the final stage for the individual as Almaas (2004) voices: “At some

point, the soul realizes that she cannot simply remain at the transcendent summit of reality; her unfoldment naturally takes her on another journey, the journey of decent” (p. 413). Therefore, he outlines the soul’s decent into the rest of existence, in order for the seeker to make the transition back to everyday life:

The absolute moves from being absolute transcendence, beyond and above all dimensions and forms, to being the inner nature and ground of all. Yet, the absolute does not leave its condition of transcendence; its transcendent mystery simply appears as inseparable and nondual with all forms and dimensions. (p. 415)

As the individual begins to come back to daily life, there is no final destination here. Like Buddhist psychology, there is no finality to the workings of the practitioner with the mind. Though there is non-dual awareness, each moment is a new visitation to the ever present moment and provides a new opportunity to continually work with mind and the narcissistic tendencies of existence in a human mind and body (Almaas, 2001, 2004).

Summary

In summation, the latter sections of this chapter elucidated some of the paths (i.e., the quest for wholeness, Zen, Advaita) and theorists (Wilber, Almaas, Kornfield, and Welwood amongst others) of the awakening process and the trials and tribulations of entering into non-dual living. However, the process and the integration of everyday life from a non-dual state of being has not yet been clearly delineated in the literature. As such, and as already stated in the research question, this thesis will begin to fill this gap by bringing to light the process by which three individuals go about integrating the newfound awareness of awakening into their daily living. Hence, the next section will

outline the framework used for gathering the co-researchers' lived experience with the phenomenon of awakening and integrating this phenomenon into everyday life.

CHAPTER THREE: INTERPRETIVE RESEARCH

Introduction

The phenomenological vision which does the apprehending must indeed direct itself toward a being, but it has to do so in such a way that the being of this being is thereby brought out so that it may be possible to thematize it.

(Heidegger, 1982, p. 21)

In this thesis I used a phenomenological-hermeneutic approach coupled with narrative aspects, and an emphasis on ecological principles, to elucidate the co-researchers lived experiences. It was hoped that in this way, the (sometimes) elusive topic of awakening would be illuminated with depth and breadth.

Specialized Qualitative Method

Researchers in the human sciences view the standard quantitative and qualitative research methods as insufficient for describing the individual's subjective experience of "being-in-the-world" (Heidegger, 1962; Maslow, 1968; Osborne, 1990; Rogers, 1980; Wilber, 2001a). These individuals maintain there is a need to go beyond traditional methods of research to understand the depth of human experience, thus creating an alternative to the popular scientific, empirically-based quantitative research. As Wilber (2001a) points out "the empiric-scientific method is virtually incapable of dealing with *quality*" (p. 24). He argues that:

The problem with numbers is that, whereas one quality can be better than another, one number cannot...once you have translated the world into empiric measurement and numbers, you have a world without quality, guaranteed. Which is to say, without *value* or *meaning*. (p. 24)

To follow the suggestions of these theorists and researchers – and to assist in conducting research that has meaning in the realm of human experience – I used a specialized qualitative method of phenomenological-hermeneutics for this inquiry. Thus, I provide a way to illuminate the lived experiences of the co-researchers and to allow for humanness in the interviews and the research by embracing this “meaning centered” approach that has been laid forth (Wilber, 2001a).

Going beyond the traditional methods of scientific and quantitative research gives a researcher the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the individual’s lived experience and to better theorize this experience. As Gadamer (1975) points out:

The experience of the sociohistorical world cannot be raised to a science by the inductive procedure of the natural sciences. Whatever ‘sciences’ may mean here, and even if all historical knowledge includes the application of experiential universals to the particular object of investigation, historical research does not endeavour to grasp the concrete phenomenon as an instance of universal rule.

(p. 4)

A Return to Things Themselves

We have received an inestimable gift. To be alive in this beautiful, self-organizing universe – to participate in the dance of life with senses to perceive it, lungs that breathe it, organs that draw nourishment from it – it is a wonder beyond words.

(Macy, 2007, p. 48)

Phenomenology has been defined as “the attempt to describe our experiences directly, independently of the causal explanations that historians, sociologists, or psychologists might give” (Mautner, 1996, p. 421). Husserl (1970) brought forth the

phenomenological approach to explain the role of consciousness and intentionality in human experience. Considering consciousness to be the window of the world, Husserl (1970) felt that in order to understand humans, one needed to understand the totality of consciousness. It was understood that intentionality was the mirror for consciousness, in the sense that we are always conscious of something (Osborne, 1990). This point takes away issues of dualism within the subject-object framework that is created by the detailed observer who is removed from the world (Barrett, 1958; May, Angel & Ellenberger, 1958). May et al. (1958) believed that the psychological being itself needs to be understood, for it is the “being of the living man that is doing the experiencing” (p. 15). The result of negating the dualistic conceptualization is an understanding of the individual’s “lived experience” (Runes, 2001).

Merleau-Ponty (1962) provides a description of the phenomenon of phenomenology, defining it as:

[T]he study of essences...the essence of perception, or the essence of consciousness, for example. But phenomenology is also a philosophy which puts essences back into existence, and does not expect to arrive at an understanding of man and the world from any starting point other than that of their ‘facticity.’ It is a transcendental philosophy which places in abeyance the assertions arising out of the natural attitude, the better to understand them; but it is also a philosophy for which the world is always ‘already there’ before reflection begins – as an inalienable presence; and all its efforts are concentrated upon re-achieving a direct and primitive contact with the world, and endowing that contact with a philosophical status. (p. vii)

Phenomenology furthermore provides a way to study lived experience within the world, prior to personal reflection. To study the phenomenon of awakening, the prior experience of ‘walking along that path’ can be an essential part of capturing the co-researchers’ lived experiences. This provides a space to plunge within the co-researchers’ individual and collective experience and explore the similarities of what meaning and value can come from the experience.

A Turn to Hermeneutics

Even from its historical beginnings, the problem of hermeneutics goes beyond the limits of the concept of method as set by modern science. The understanding and the interpretation of texts is not merely a concern of science, but obviously belongs to human experience of the world in general. (Gadamer, 2004, p. xx)

Sass (1988) points out that Husserl’s reductionist phenomenology attempts to ‘bracket’ personal biases and take them out of the equation. This would require the researcher to be totally self-transparent and become simply a witness to the phenomenon in question. However, as stated earlier, Heidegger (1962) suggests we are already “being-in-the-world” and consequently can never fully bracket all of our prejudices. This paradox creates a problem for phenomenological interpretation.

I interpreted the phenomenon by uncovering the meaning behind my co-researchers’ expression of thoughts that arose from their lived experience during the interviews. Furthermore, I denote my *thereness* in the research process and findings. I also agree with Gadamer (1975/2004) with respect to the problem of unconditioned knowledge being a misdirected goal and not a possibility when looking towards an unbiased, objective framework in research. Consequently, Gadamer (1975/2004) believed

that no method could capture untainted knowledge. In the same vein, Heidegger (1962) asserted that hermeneutics was at the core of being itself; he held that meaning arose out of the *Dasein*. Gadamer (1975/2004) showed how through the art of language and interpretation, the essence of one's existence or "being-in-the-world" could then become shared horizons in the *hermeneutic circle*. The hermeneutic circle is interpreted by Solowoniuk (2005):

In a simplistic description, the hermeneutical circle is a referential operation; thus, Schleiermacher held that we understand something by comparing something new to something we already know. Then in a comparative way, what we understand forms itself into systematic units, or circles made up of parts; the circle as a whole defines the individual part and the parts together form the circle. (p. 105)

Thus, the hermeneutic circle allows for the space in which there no longer exists a summative conclusion within the research findings (van Manen, 1990). This can also give power to the researcher by opening up into the subjective experience of co-researchers.

Linge (1977) explains:

The task of philosophical hermeneutics...is ontological rather than methodological. It seeks to throw light on the fundamental conditions that underlie the phenomenon of understanding in all its modes, scientific and non-scientific alike, and that constitute understanding as an event over which the interpreting subject does not ultimately preside. (p. xi)

Although the task of hermeneutics is clearly not a method for Gadamer (1975/2004, 1977), to provide rigor for research, a method is necessary (van Manen, 1990).

Hermeneutics, based in conversation and dialog, can assist the researcher to create a more refined interpretation and understanding of the phenomenon by giving a partially complete account of the interpretation of interaction between two “beings-in-the-world” (Nixon, 1992). Being a long-standing tradition in textual interpretation, beginning with biblical texts, hermeneutics allows the interaction of writer and reader to unfold in the hermeneutic circle (Solowoniuk, 2005).

Bleicher (1980) offers a general ‘working definition’ of hermeneutics: “hermeneutics can loosely be defined as the theory or philosophy of the interpretation of meaning” (p. 1). Smith (1988) stated that an important aspect of hermeneutic philosophy is for the individual to understand that humans base their knowledge or understandings on past experience and judgments. Therefore, the individual researcher embraces this fact, rather than pretends it does not exist. Hence, he or she create a space for the individual to go forward, being more likely to be upfront with biases.

Gadamer (1975, 2004) stressed the need in conversation and the conversants – both speaker and listener – to be open to experience and that an authentic meeting cannot be held by one individual:

Ultimately this openness does not exist only for the person who speaks; rather, anyone who listens is fundamentally open. Without such openness to one another there is no genuine human bond. Belonging together always also means being able to listen to one another. (Gadamer, 2004, p. 355)

Along with this openness, I was aware of the impact of experience as it arose out of both the co-researchers’ and my own experience of being in the world. As Schleiermacher (1997) states:

Complete knowledge always involves an apparent circle, that each part can be understood only out of the whole to which it belongs, and vice versa. All knowledge which is scientific must be understood in this way...to put oneself in the position of an author means to follow through with this relationship between the whole and the parts. (p. 113)

Thus, it was imperative that I remained open to the experience of the interview, my interactions with my co-researchers, and the meaning of the interview while embracing “life as it is lived” (Bayda, 2003; Jardine, 1989, 1994). As Bayda (2003) writes:

May we exist like a lotus.

At home in the muddy water.

Thus we bow to life as it is. (p. xii)

In other words, be in the moment, embrace all life, and realize this interconnected web that exists between all beings (Bayda, 2003; Chodron, 2003a, 2003b, 2005; Kabat-Zinn, 2005; Macy, 1989, 1991). We need not sever the connection with each other and with the earth to come to see an individual’s lived experience or connection with a phenomenon.

When focusing on a topic such as non-dual experience and awakening, there is a need to point out this connection because within the many paths and experiences of awakening is a deeply embedded union with all of existence (Chodron, 2003a, 2003b; Macy, 1989). As an individual begins to awaken to this truth, all that remains is the non-dual and there exists nothing outside of the individual because it is all encompassing (Almaas, 2001, 2004; Grof & Grof, 1990; Grof, 1993; Maharaj, 1996; Welwood, 2002). Zen master, Keizan questions and comments on this experience, “those who manage to see the real self no longer keep the subjective self, so how can anything block their eyes?”

Perception and cognition are ultimately not differentiated; there is one thing, one reality, which is undivided” (cited in Cleary, 2002b, p. 68). Almaas (2004) eloquently adds:

The absolute moves from being absolute transcendence, beyond and above all dimensions and forms, to being the inner nature and ground of all. Yet, the absolute does not leave its condition of transcendence; its transcendent mystery simply appears as inseparable and non-dual with all forms and dimensions. (p. 415)

Thus, to understand the phenomenon, the individual undertakes to embrace the interconnectedness of life and to allow the necessary space for the phenomenon to unfold as it may.

With this awareness, there exists a capacity for deeper engagement and openness during the interview process for me, as well with the process of interpretation. An intimate connection with all aspects of the environment around me gave me the opportunity of intuitively knowing how both the co-researchers and myself are intimately connected to the rest of existence during the entire thesis process. As Sosan (2002) states:

Meet doubt directly
with the words “not two”
and know that nothing can be separate
and all is one...

There is nothing that is not included:

This is an eternal truth.

The very small and the very large are equal,
boundaries and limits do not exist.

Absolute reality is beyond time and space,
being and non-being both exist. (pp. 71-72)

An ecological philosophy heavily and positively influenced my interactions with the co-researchers in that I was able to understand on a deeper level the ideas put forth by practitioners such as Sosan (2002) and embrace the non-dual reality that is always present and timeless. This endorsement also enabled me to practice action (i.e., ask questions) and non-action (i.e., listen with an open heart) based on the interconnected web that spans throughout existence while enriching and creating a non-dual state of being during the research process. As Jardine (1994) points out:

Ecology...presents us with an image of our lives and the life of the Earth as involving a vast, vibrant, generative, ambiguous, multivocal, interweaving network of living interconnections. We are living *in* this web of interrelations and these interrelations are always already at work *before* the task of writing *about* those relations has begun. (p. v)

If, according to Jardine, we must be aware of this interconnectedness when writing, the importance of embracing this relationship during the entire research process would be imperative. Thus, the next section will expand on the ecological philosophy and its importance during the research process.

Loss of Ecology

Understanding is the essence of love. If you cannot understand, you cannot love properly.

(Hahn, 2006, p. 2)

Modern social science attempts to quantify the human experience and conclude erroneous causalities of various degrees. There are some that feel this push towards

causality has begun to injure our connection with the others and the earth. As Macy (1991) points out, “since the rise of modern science, determinacy has become identified with efficient causation, one thing shaping or pushing another thing. This made mainstream Western causality susceptible to materialism and useful as a defender of it” (p. 33). Along with Macy (1991), Jardine (1989) sees the act of empiricism and the work of Descartes as a longing to re-connect and understand things as they are.

“Mathematization is, again, a sign of the deep desire to get re-connected with things, to understand them, but this desire takes its shape from the severance from which it was originally born” (p. 41). Thus, Jardine calls for a turn toward the ecological within phenomenology in order to begin “restoring life to its original difficulty” (Caputo, 1987, p. 1). As Nishitani (1982) points out, “even the very tiniest thing, to the extent that it ‘is,’ displays in its act of being the whole web of circuminsessional interpretation that links all things together” (p. 149).

Jardine (1989) feels this type of inquiry is a chance to enhance the sometimes ambiguous nature of life, “It’s a manner of speaking therefore not ‘informative,’ standing outside of the ambiguity as a voyeur demanding a good show, demanding presentability. It is, rather, provocative, a ‘calling forth,’ a voice crying out from within the midst of things” (p. 119). This refinement allows for the researcher to come to a “greater understanding” of the phenomenon under inquiry. Jardine (1989, 1994) says that we need to reconnect with nature as well, since it is Mother Nature herself who provides the earth on which animals walk, and the oceans in which animals swim. Yet, human beings are continually trying to control or leave nature behind, preferring the ‘urban sprawl.’ Thus, there is a call to come back to nature by many (Bly, 1990; Forstater, 2003; Macy, 1989,

1991; Plant, 1989; Simpkins & Simpkins, 2003; Suzuki & Dressel, 2004; Suzuki & McConnell, 2002; Watts, 1973, 1997, 2002; Zimmerman, 1994). Even within the Zen Tradition there is poetry written about the power of connection held within nature:

Every day, priests minutely examine the Dharma
and endlessly chant complicated sutras.

Before doing that, though, they should learn

How to read the love letters sent by the wind and rain,

the snow and moon. (Ikkyu, cited in Levering & Stryk, 2000, p. 40).

As we try to control nature and meld it into massive, concrete infrastructures to make our lives easier, it has only alienated us from nature even more and accelerated the entire planet's (including the human species') demise (Suzuki & Dressel, 2004; Suzuki & McConnell, 1997). Simpkins and Simpkins (2003) speak further:

Trying to control nature sets us apart from it. The more we strive to control, the further away we find ourselves, alienated from our own environment. Only human beings interfere with what is naturally there...as you reunite with nature, you draw strength from it, rediscovering your harmony with the universe. There is no conflict and nothing to control...you are not so different: you are nature itself.

(pp. 63-64)

So, the inherent connection between a human and nature is an innate and unavoidable aspect of life. Thus, we must honour that connection and continue to be open to whatever may arise during the process of life, whether that occurs during the research process, walking to the bus stop, or hiking in the mountains (Bayda, 2003; Chodron, 2003a, 2003b). This is also particularly relevant to the research process and the

phenomenological method as the more we try to control what occurs during the research process the further away from understanding the phenomenon we get. It is only through this adoption of seeing this interconnection that we are able to embrace this open and broken-hearted vulnerability that allows us to connect with other beings.

Although many human beings seem to feel as if they are ‘above it all’ and that all other beings are beneath us, there is still a connection between humans and all other creatures on earth. Various scholars have warned the human population that it is imperative that we, as a species, come to appreciate this connection and see it for what it really is. Mark Forstater (2003) states:

Unless we are able to see and feel the primal living connection between ourselves and the rest of creation, we will find ourselves increasingly cut off from organic existence, and will face the threat of turning into mindlessly driven machine operators in an increasingly oppressive machine dominated world, which will continue in the mistaken attempt to completely control the natural world. (p. 33)

With all of the above in mind, I followed Osborne’s (1990) suggestion to replace the term “subject” with “co-researcher” as the latter engenders a relationship that is based on a cooperative engagement. In doing so, I feel the ecological approach to research is also attended to and an Eastern sensibility is provided.

While phenomenological-hermeneutics helps researchers understand lived experience and ontology, it is still necessary to outline the procedure I abided by in order to bring the co-researchers’ text to life in the thesis. As van Manen (1990) points out:

While it is true that the method of phenomenology is that there is no method, yet there is tradition, a body of knowledge and insights, a history of lives of thinkers

and authors, which, taken as an example, constitutes both a source and a methodological ground for present human science research practices. (p. 30)

While I am working within a Western framework, it is the East, bearing the rich and timeless literature, that I have drawn from. Thus, below I point out some of the links between the Western transpersonal traditions and Eastern thought into this framework.

Transpersonal Aspects of Interaction and Experience

My point is simply that when it comes to the intelligibilia and transcendelia, empiric-analytic studies are of extremely limited and extremely secondary importance.

(Wilber, 2001a, p. 61)

When a student asked his master what the first principle in Zen was; his master replied, “if I told you it would be the second principle” (Cleary, 2002a). This defines one of the ultimate issues within the process of communication: language is the core barrier to understanding another’s authentic experience, while it is also one of the only ways to do so. Another issue in the research of the non-dual experience in daily life is the egocentric language that English provides us as a way of communication. Goldberg (1986) expands:

Our language is usually locked into a sentence syntax of subject/verb/direct-object... ‘I see the dog’ – with this sentence structure, ‘I’ is the centre of the universe. We forget that in our language structure that while ‘I’ looks at ‘the dog,’ ‘the dog’ is simultaneously looking at us...there is an exchange or interaction rather than a subject acting on an object. (p. 62)

And yet, there are examples of the written word that go beyond this and provide understanding at a certain level, i.e., 10 bulls of Zen. As Watts (cited in Wilber, 2001a) points out, “Zen does not attempt to be intelligible, that is to say, capable of being

understood by the intellect” (p. 65). Yogananda (cited in Wilber, 2001a) also comments on this issue: “reason is powerless to understand transcendental truth. Man’s highest faculty is not reason but intuition: apprehension of knowledge derived immediately and spontaneously from the soul, not from the fallible agency of the senses or of reason” (p. 65).

While Heidegger (1962) believed that “language is the house of being” we still, at times, are at a loss for words, trying to verify something that is not manifested easily into reality or can take form, especially when describing transpersonal phenomenon (Wilber, 2001a). Thus, we cannot use our intellect or reasoning to understand the transcendental phenomenon that is being studied in this thesis, we must use an alternative method to draw on from our own intuitive or transcendent selves. As Valle (1998) points out:

There are experiences or certain kinds of awareness, however, that do not seem to be captured or illuminated by phenomenological reflections on descriptions of our conceptually recognized experiences and/or our pre-reflective felt-sense of things. Often referred to as transpersonal, transcendental, sacred, or spiritual experience, these types of awareness are not really ‘experience’ in the way we normally use the word. (p. 275)

Ultimately, when an individual is looking into the phenomenon of awakening, he or she encounters some experiences that are unusual and have the power to illuminate a new awareness of intuitive energy.

The Three Levels of Research

Wilber (2001a) can assist in illuminating and understanding the beginning of the process by explaining some of these experiences within his three nodes or “3 eyes.” The

philosophy of the three eyes utilizes the concept of confirming different experiences through three basic strands of knowing. The first of which is the “eye of the flesh,” from which one can look toward concrete objects that can be perceived through the five senses. What Wilber (2001a) calls the “empirical eye” uses basic empirical and analytical skills to verify experiences. For example, when one wants to test the speed of objects falling, one would do a test of dropping and timing the objects that may fall from a specific starting point. Thus, sensory perception is used and thus deemed an appropriate way to ‘know’ that realm, basic physics (Wilber, 2001a).

The “eye of reason” is used in logic and philosophy, including phenomenology and hermeneutics in perspective and relation to things and objects that cannot be reduced to the eye of the flesh. As Wilber (2001a) points out:

It is important to remember that the mental eye [eye of reason] cannot be reduced to the fleshy eye. The mental field includes but transcends the sensory field.

While not excluding it, the mind’s eye rises far above the eye of flesh: in imagination it can picture sensory objects not immediately present, and thus transcends the flesh’s imprisonment in the simply present world. (p. 4)

Thus, it includes, yet transcends the form of sensory perception and should be used in accordance with the phenomenon that can be understood by the mind, as Schumacher (cited in Wilber, 2001a) states, “the truth of ideas cannot be seen by the senses” (p. 5).

Lastly, Wilber (2001a) brings to light the “eye of contemplation” which, in turn, transcends the eye of reason:

Where the eye of reason is transempirical, the eye of contemplation is transrational, translogical, and transmental...the quest of philosophers, therefore,

has nothing in common with that of contemplatives, since its basic principle of exhaustive verbal adequacy is opposed to any liberating finality, to any transcending of the sphere of words. (p. 6)

In other words, the mind cannot conjure the understanding of the apparent paradoxical nature of non-dual reality in everyday experience. How can a mind understand being, nothing, and everything, all at the same time? Or to see that there is no 'you' nor is there an 'other' but that there only exists consciousness? These are questions that are asked throughout many contemplative traditions.

Wilber (2001a) suggests these three eyes are used to confirm data validity, within their respective elements, which are as follows: a) instrumental injunction: stationed in the realm of form, with regards to instructions, i.e., if you want to understand rocks, read books on rocks and study them; b) intuitive apprehension: emerging from thought form (cognitive knowing) that is experienced in the immediate object domain or an aspect of that domain; c) communal confirmation: involving a verification, at a communal level, with others who have completed the other strands. Wilber (2001a) goes on to explain the importance of using this framework and going above and beyond traditional phenomenology for the study of transcendental phenomenon:

The referent of the transcendental perception, its very data, cannot be perceived with the mental or sensory eyes. Satori [sudden awakening] takes as its referent, not sensory objects out there and not mental subjects in here, but nondual spirit as such, a direct apprehension *of* spirit, *by* spirit, *as* spirit, an apprehension that unites the subject and object by disclosing that which is prior to both, and an

apprehension that therefore is quite beyond the capacities of objective-empirical or subjective-phenomenal cognition. (pp. 55-56)

Wilber uses Zen to provide an example of how these three strands can be used. He outlines the use of both communal confirmation, which is used when one comes to awakening, and the intensive discussions with one's Roshi. Although I did not have such a community at my own disposal, I used literature from the wisdom traditions to 'check with the community' when doing this research. Hence, while working with the phenomenon of awakening, I chose to consider the importance of the transcendental nature of the experience of awakening and was aware of the difficulties that it presents in the process of researching such a matter. Therefore, I have built into this study some of the transpersonal dimensions that Valle (1998) suggests to use when working within the transpersonal realm of lived-experience.

Valle (1998) mentions six characteristics that the transpersonal researcher should be aware of when researching transcendental phenomenon: the deep pervading essence that underlies all thought, emotion, and form; a deep connection that is ecologically present in us all, providing a deep sense of love and passionate presence for all that exists; experiences of 'no-self,' there is no longer a perceiver; going beyond the body, pervading energy no longer identifies with the body, i.e., the Zen experience of the body as a bag of flesh and bones; time slows down, and the experience is of the eternal now; insights that contain multitudes of wisdom, perceived in a flash, that are seemingly spawned out of nothingness. These experiences are difficult to begin to conceptualize in the mind since "they are beyond mind" (Cleary, 2002a). After experiencing some of these states of consciousness himself, Valle (1998) states, "I found myself re-conceptualizing

the existential-phenomenological concept of intentionality by acknowledging a field of awareness that appears to be inclusive of intentional nature of mind but, at the same time, not of it” (p. 277). He goes on to explain the implications of such a reality:

I soon [after] came to realize...that consciousness without an object is also consciousness without a subject, and that transintentional awareness represents a way of being in which the separateness of a perceiver and that which is perceived has dissolved, a reality not of (or in some way beyond) time, space, and causation as we normally know them. (p. 277)

Thus, he posits that there must be an enhanced awareness of reality when we are researching this type of phenomenon. Personally, I also came across some of these six characteristics when doing some of my interviews, which will be described in the next section.

Interview Processes

Of all the ways we communicate with one another, the story has established itself as the most comfortable, the most versatile – and perhaps also the most dangerous.

(Fulford, 1999, p. xi)

There were points in the interviews where “I” was no longer present and there existed just two beings merging in the moment. It seemed they were no longer there as two bodies, but existed as raw energy. There no longer existed a story of “me” or “them,” only a running dialog, equivalent almost to a fairy tale or myth in that moment, as if there was no one there to tell it, just a body that sat across from me who provided the narrative of what was spoken in that moment. “I” was lost in the wonder and mystery of how and why we identify with self and the ability of the body to exist while the consciousness

continues on in another plane of the un-manifest, half in and half out. At times I was also able to embrace the inherent nature and connection of the narrative that was being told, as there was an identification from my own past experience. I kept a journal during this time and recorded some of the more intensive experiences during the interviews:

There was a point in which I asked him something about how he coped on a daily basis with his “break.” He responded, “Sheer courage.” This cut through the very core of my being and I felt the terror, sadness, love, expansiveness, and vastness all in one moment which turned into an intensive connection in my own being and my own experiences that were similar to his own. My eyes began to tear and I was no longer there in the interview. I was just consciousness and then I split off and began to recall some of my own journey and meaning through which I also, could say that “sheer courage” kept me going and got me through some of my own lived experience. (Journal, January 21, 2007)

I will provide another written example from the journal that I kept. This was a point in which, I met one of the co-researchers, Scott and we sat in silence for approximately 10-15 minutes before starting the interview:

I was in a nice place and was able to also feel his own energy and the merging of the two at points. I would also open my eyes and he would no longer be there, there would be only a corpse that was breathing, and there was also no one to see it. Then my mind would kick up again and I would have to distance myself from it a little. After emerging from the silence, I was blown wide open, as was he, and there was a nice merging of energy into the non-dual awareness. At that point it

seemed stupid to even do the interview as there was nothing to say to anyone, and it was all there at that time. (Journal, February 23, 2007)

The above experiences are examples of many transpersonal dimensions that unfolded during the interview process for me.

I found that the conversations were esoteric, in the sense that these are not things that are widely accepted in our culture, or so I project. There was also a feeling of honour in sharing these narratives with my co-researchers. I felt a sacred underlying synchronistic aspect in these conversations, that this experience could not be measured up to 'just research' or 'my Master's thesis work.' It was well beyond the realm of form, and in the dimension of formlessness, it just was.

I also found that it assisted me in coming to a deeper understanding of my own connection with the phenomenon of my own 'quest to awaken to daily life,' providing me with a deeper perspective on some of the things I began to integrate into my lived experience.

The following section will outline the research procedures I used for this thesis.

Research Procedures

Selection of Co-researchers

Participants were selected from a purposeful sample so as to ensure that the co-researchers involved in the study would be able to articulate their experiences of the phenomenon in question. In selecting participants, the co-researchers were to meet two criteria: to have experienced the phenomenon in question and to be capable of articulating that phenomenon in such a way that it provided rich description of the

phenomenon in question (Colaizzi, 1978; Osborne, 1990). Therefore I took steps to ensure that both of these criteria were met.

I found the participants by contacting people I knew or were known through others who have had these experiences and met the criteria. I also attempted to contact people through the internet, by email, and was able to find one co-researcher that way.

One criterion also required that the individual was 18 years of age or older and had come to experience the state of *awakening* and had a moderate amount of time (at least one year) to begin to integrate this awareness into day-to-day living. A preliminary interview was done on the phone to ensure my personal satisfaction that the individual met that criterion. The participants were also advised of the nature of the study and steps that I would take to provide confidentiality. I also underscored the purpose of the research.

At this point, if the participant had met all criteria and with the researcher/participant's safety in mind, I conducted interviews in an environment that was best suited to the co-researcher, that is, where the individual would be most comfortable (Osborne, 1990). In accordance with other studies conducted in similar fashions (Osborne, 1990; Nixon, 1992; Solowoniuk, 2005), I clearly outlined the purpose of the study and exemplified the point that it is, in fact, the phenomenon that is being studied, not the individual. This approach was taken, following the co-researchers being asked to sign a consent form prior to the selection of his or her individual pseudonyms.

Interview Procedure

Similar to Solowoniuk (2005), I tried to draw out the co-researcher's lived-experience in hopes of acquiring a vivid picture of his or her story, the co-researcher's

“life text.” I used an open narrative approach to my interview style and was open to whatever emerged during the interview experience. In this part of my research, I utilized some basic counselling skills to create a space from where the co-researchers’ could ‘tell their story.’

In accordance with studying a specific phenomenon, a short list of specific questions was used as a guide during the interview. How these questions were used, depended on the descriptions the co-researcher was providing in that moment.

- When did you begin your quest for awakening?
- Why did you feel the need to pursue the “goal” of awakening?
- What was the moment of awakening like?
- Where has this quest taken you?
- How has your awakening changed your perception of daily living?

Because of the abstract nature of phenomenological-hermeneutic research, I kept a journal in order to elucidate my own experiences of the interviews and thesis writing process. This helped to capture the essence of the phenomenon. I anticipated that the interviews would last between 90-120 minutes, yet some lasted longer; the interview with John was done in four distinct sittings, each lasting between two and three hours.

Textual Interpretation of the Interviews

All interviews were transcribed and any identifying information of the co-researchers’ was deleted. The co-researchers were also informed that the recorded data would be destroyed after the completed analysis and would only be reviewed by my co-supervisors, myself, and possibly a hired transcriber.

I then began a thematic analysis of the interview manuscripts in order to provide thick, rich descriptions of the phenomenon being studied. Osborne (1990) explains: “[Now] the researcher’s focus is upon the deep structure of meaning rather than surface linguistic structure” (p. 85). Thus, it is the shared structures in “lived experience” that are essential to analysis of the text (Wolcott, 2001).

I examined the manuscripts looking for commonalities and themes beginning to arise within the text (von Eckartsberg, 1998). During this interpretation, I exercised the use of openness and letting things rise and fall as they may to allow space for these various themes or interpretations of the text to appear in the moment. In following this process, I felt impeded by my awareness of the literature I read and previously outlined in this thesis, while bringing the co-researchers’ text to life.

I used van Kaam’s (1966) six steps of explication as a procedure for interpretation. They are as follows: listing and preliminary grouping; reduction; elimination; hypothetical reduction; application and final identification (van Kaam, 1966). I first began listing and grouping the text into categories that began to unfold from my co-researchers’ manuscripts. I then used a reductionist method of shortening the narratives by looking at descriptive elements, signifying expressions of the co-researchers’ lived experience. This led me to the third step of elimination, in which I eliminated all of the text that was not relevant to the phenomenon of awakening and the nature of the research, i.e., “its cold outside,” “I’m tired.”

The fourth step, as laid out by van Kaam (1966), is when the researcher outlines the process of coming to understand the text at a deeper level, creating more in-depth pools that are complementary to the total textual interpretive means. I began to organize

individual cases into thematic elements that arose from the text, with a view toward a larger thematic grouping within all the manuscripts from the interview process.

The final process that I used as per van Kaam (1966), was checking and describing the groupings and individual themes that emerged, being mindful of the possible generation of an elucidated explanation of the phenomenon (van Kaam, 1966; von Eckartsberg, 1998).

Ethical Considerations

A primary concern was the confidentiality of the co-researchers. To ensure confidentiality was being met, the co-researchers signed a letter of consent prior to the beginning of the interview process and were provided with answers to questions that they had regarding the process. The consent form outlined the following:

- The purpose of the study
- The requirements and commitments required during the study
- The voluntary basis of the study
- The use of pseudonyms in the study

The use of pseudonyms and the omission of revealing information became a critical part of establishing confidentiality with the co-researchers.

Being interviewed can place participants in a vulnerable place of feeling very “open” and “exposed” during the process. The co-researchers were notified that they merely volunteered for this interview and could “opt out” at any time during the interview if they so desired as a response to this feeling; although this never occurred.

The conversations held were very interesting and poignant to the topic at hand and thus, I feel, didn't place the participants in an unethical or potentially harmful situation.

Summary

In summary, the former sections of this chapter brought to light the difficulty of conducting research with a paradoxical phenomenon, while also outlining the traditions of phenomenology, hermeneutics, ecology, and the emergence of transpersonal phenomenology in order to bring a more “meaning centered approach” into this process (Wilber, 2001a). Although phenomenological-hermeneutics is one way of expounding such a phenomenon, there was also an emphasis put on ecological principals in relation to the need for openness during, not only the interview process, but also in the interpretation of the text. This was done by using Van Kaam’s six steps of explication (1966), while also drawing from von Eckartsberg’s (1998) and Wilber’s (2001a) suggestions for conducting transpersonal research. With all these principals in mind it was hoped that in this way, I could remain open to interview process and be connected with my surroundings to a point in which I could experience some of these transpersonal dimensions in the conversations that took place. Thus, there was a brief summary of some of these experiences that transpired during two of the interviews – from my personal journals – and the importance of mindfulness, openness, and connection in the interpretation that was done after the conversations were transcribed. The following chapter will begin to delineate a map of what the awakening process looks like, and how it is crucial to be practiced in daily-life.

CHAPTER FOUR: TEXTUAL INTERPRETATIONS

Introduction

The interpretative situation is no longer that of a questioner and an object, with the questioner having to construct 'methods' to bring the object within his grasp; on the contrary, the questioner suddenly finds himself the being who is interrogated by the 'subject matter.'

(Palmer, 1969, p. 165)

Chapter four contains an in-depth thematic analysis and interpretation of narratives derived from interviews with my co-researchers as well as a presentation of text situated in the literature. This will be offered in a chronological framework for the reader, to provide a clear understanding of the quest for awakening and the process involved. This will be attempted through excerpts from verbatim transcriptions of the three participants in this study while drawing on personal writings and experiences of mine over the years on my own journey. Before undertaking this interpretive analysis, I provide the reader with snapshots, brief synopses of the three other co-researchers involved in this project.

Participant Profiles

John came into the world with a slim chance of survival, the last of nine children. He found himself having to fight to live at a very young age during a time marked by the receiving of three blood transfusions. Growing up in B.C. gave John an affiliation with the forest, in which he worked in for many years. Having had a variety of psychic energy experiences when he was younger; questions began to plague his mind, and an energetic inward turn began. Realizing certain truths of the world, he was able to process deep

philosophical things at a young age. He eventually injured his back quite severely while working in the forest, and subsequently developed an addiction to opiates for a few years. After having surgery and going through the painful withdrawals that come from an opiate addiction, John decided to go back to school.

He, his wife, and their three children moved to Alberta so he could pursue this goal. John entered the academic world eager to be seen for his brilliance, and put a lot of effort into his schooling for the first period of time in his academic career. He finished his undergraduate degree and went on to also do a Masters in psychology. During his undergraduate degree a spontaneous, ‘falling away of the self’ occurred while he was in an internship placement at a mental institution. He has spent the subsequent years integrating this experience into his daily life. He now works as an academic and has been married for 15 years.

Jaclyn grew up in eastern Canada and also had some psychic energy experiences at a fairly young age in which, going to bed at night she would feel the vast spaciousness of the world. When her parents got divorced, things changed and the experiences stopped, until she was in her mid-teens.

Always having a had connection with animals, she began to work with them, having intense experiences when she had to euthanize some of them. She then became involved in sexually addictive behaviour that would take her into her late twenties. She describes this time in her life as “being vacant,” in which she lost sense of her connection with the cosmos and was full of self-pity and shame. She then decided to go back to school and moved to Alberta to enter the counselling field.

During her time at school, she met people that would begin to tear away at her narcissism and who helped her understand some of her earlier experiences. Jaclyn began to work intently on herself and with her mind, having more cosmic experiences, which she began to integrate into daily life. She now works as a full-time therapist, dealing mostly with individuals who have experienced trauma. She is an avid long distance runner.

Scott spent the first three years of university in mechanical engineering, and then he took a philosophy course as an option. He became intrigued by this line of thought, foreign from the engineering courses that he was taking at the time. He felt a connection with his professor from the beginning of the class, who is still a friend and mentor to him today. Scott was able to begin to open up into exploring inner thoughts and truths. Reading William James during this time was a turning point in his life and he began to open up to the idea of a divine intelligence, refuting his earlier atheism. Then hearing a quote from Eckhart Tolle (1997) he felt a connection within and went to go and see the spiritual teacher speak. Upon hearing Tolle speak he had an intensive experience of being totally present in the moment and being blown wide open into the consciousness that surrounds us all. Scott went on to explore these experiences and to see different gurus and teachers throughout the next few years. He was asked to begin teaching satsangs at the request of Pamela Wilson in Alberta.

He was in his early thirties and engaged to be married at the time of the interview. His partner is also very focused on her own spiritual life. He presently works as an engineer and holds satsangs in the community.

This brief introduction to the co-researchers gives the reader an understanding of the basic context from which each participant emerged. It would be of benefit here to point out, again, that all three of the co-researchers are westerners, born and currently living in Canada. In light of this information, it seemed from analyzing the interviews there was a map of sorts, that began to emerge. This may be understood as a developmental process in which consciousness begins to unfold and intensify. It is my hope that in this thesis I have elucidated a map for the benefit of the reader and that it can be used as a general guide to answer the question posed from the beginning: What is the experience of awakening to non-dual living in everyday life? Although the 'map' may appear different for some, what follows is what was revealed to me through interpretation of the texts. I would like to state that I am not trying to create an exact map of the process. After writing this thesis, it is clear to me that there is no such map; but basic themes and experiences exist that seem to be prevalent in the experience of awakening.

In addition, I would like to point out that during the interview process, John was able to speak to the phenomenon at length and in-depth. The connection between us was very natural and intense, and what's more, a vulnerable space opened up in which we were able to meet during the interviews. With this in mind, it became apparent that his 'life story' is not only distinct and unique, but that he was able to provide more insight into his journey than the other two co-researchers. I feel this difference may have been due to a slight lack of trust and a laissez-faire attitude that I had going into the interviews with the other two co-researchers. I did not press the co-researchers for information or ask for much more than what was voluntarily presented during the interview process. Also, the lack of trust is what really seemed to come through in the transcripts. It became

clear to me while reviewing the transcripts that the level of trust was just not present for both Scott and Jaclyn. For example, at one point Jaclyn said, “Well you know what happened though, I should be honest.” Reading this comment more deeply I can see that the level of trust was quite low since she had to pull herself back in order to, “be honest.” Many things transpired in all of the interviews; however, the long transcripts generated from the various interviews with John seem/seemed the most open and profound.

This left me to interpret the text from John’s interviews and treat this text as an individual case of sorts. I linked my own, experience as well as, the other co-researchers’ within this framework. It is of my own understanding that John’s themes are ever present throughout the journey for most people who fit into the, “man/woman of the spirit” (Almaas, 1988, 2001, 2004). In contrast, an issue of trust, or difficulty linking experiences in the past with present life stands as an obstacle with the other co-researchers, which in essence is part of the never-ending process of awakening. John, again, seems to possess the clearest and most precise account of his own awakening process, creating a gateway for the depth of these interpretive themes to arise.

Over the years, I have reflected on many of my own experiences, written about them, painted them and tried to capture them in whatever way I could. This assisted me in coming to a deeper understanding in my own process and also provided me with some of the deep insights that John possesses into his own journey. Thus, I, have decided to weave in my own experiences where relevant. In many ways the process of researching and writing this thesis has deepened the understanding in my own process of deconstructing the egoic self and facilitated a significant amount of insight. I will now begin to outline some emerging themes that surfaced during the interviews.

Heeding the Call: Honouring What Is

As we recognize that the fragmentation in which we are subject is due to a disconnection with the source of our life, the immortal self, it follows that our path to wholeness must involve a 're-membering' of that self. (Metzner, cited in Kenton, 2000, p. 12)

To remember the *Self* and come back to a knowing which is beyond one's conceptual mind is to find, *awakening*. There are many ways to go about this quest and yet when the search is over or abandoned, one comes back to participate in the world again. It becomes a return to help others to achieve the same realization and ease the suffering of humanity. It can also be perceived that the more an individual does for others, i.e., random acts of kindness, selflessness, helping the elderly lady across the street, the more the individual begins to have realizations which cut through the psyche, creating distance from one's "grasping at self" (Salzberg, 2005). Revealed within all of these selfless experiences is a non-dual reality, by which the ego refrains from an executive role, and non-dual reality becomes the essence of all beings. This is sometimes seen after an individual has experienced this non-dual essence and is able to reflect back on earlier experiences.

For myself, it was not until after I had experienced my first few awakenings that I had the ability to trace a connection to my earlier life experiences and how they had inevitably shaped my life-path significantly, initiating a ripening process. Through writing this thesis and the presence of issues that surfaced during this process, I was also able to gain a more in-depth understanding of the unfolding process throughout my own life. It became clear that I expended a lot of energy into helping others in some way as a

youth until the darkness of addiction began to besiege my life, only to begin this practice again later in life, once I abandoned the addictive pathway.

The circle that is created within the love for all is apparent here (Chodron, 2003a, 2005; Salzberg, 2002, 2005). Barasch (2005) reminisces on his own life and his Buddhist teacher's words before his undertaking of the bodhisattva vow:

In his wily way, he had framed this vow – the bodhisattva's promise to live for others – as a case of enlightened self-interest. It was not, he told me, a matter of wearing a one-size-fits-all hair shirt. I was taking the vow for my own good. It would give me some leverage to pry loose, finger by finger, the claustrophobic monkey-grip of ego; give the heart a little breathing room. (p. 7)

In my mid-teens it became visible that I could achieve this state of mind; letting go of the ego and creating a space in which my heart could be a little more open. Although I did not have any knowledge of any Eastern philosophy or psychology at the time, I began to lose small pieces of myself without really knowing what the implications of this loss were. It becomes possible, at this point, to use others as a mirror, reflecting back one's personal and unique qualities. This may serve to accentuate one's developmental process along the path. Since the view of others provides the true reflection of the impact of one's individual life on the world; one can, in this way, see themselves in a new light.

It is within the basic trust in existence – created by this mirroring – that makes it possible for one to enter spaces and states which the cognitive mind warns against. For example, in working with clients, a individual may feel as if he or she cannot feel their pain as it will just be too much to bear. While this is a judgment, trust in existence would enable that client to *free fall* and totally give himself or herself to the emotion that he or

she is being faced with, or avoiding. As a result, one's basic trust in existence may be a vital, and deciding, factor in how the individual works through various states, and to the degree of openness to realities and insights that are presented.

The Mirror of Existence: Seeing the Self Through Others

Until we directly experience spiritual transformation, we do not truly understand that this transformation involves such radical changes in our experience of ourselves and our world that...the reality that is realized is something that cannot be limited by such notions as 'individual' and 'world.'

(Almaas, 1998, p. ix)

To connect with our ever-present being, the setting in which all life is lived, a basic trust in all of existence must be present. If the psyche develops pieces of basic trust, the individual is more explicitly drawn towards being and essence. In contrast, if the psyche does not accept this trust in existence, it will be more prone to an egoic driven state. This provides another way to make sense of consciousness development; how for some it can seemingly just unfold on its own, and for others represents a lifelong struggle (Almaas, 1988, 1998a).

When the ego signifies a mere crystallized version of one's own constructed reality, representing what he/she labels "I", the process of awakening can bring forth a lot of fear within one's mind when the threshold of awakening is crossed (Almaas, 1988, 1998a; Das, 1989; Kornfield, 1989, 1993, 2000). Almaas (1998a) stresses the importance of having a basic trust within this process; a free falling trust that one will return from any state or experience unscathed, no matter what. Going beyond one's normal sense of

the world, can be equated perhaps, with faith. Yet, it is more than that. It is a complete knowing of something that cannot be rationally and conventionally known.

It is within our grasp to achieve this state of awakening. However, if we do not believe in, and ultimately trust existence, it becomes very difficult to know what is beyond our egos. Having only a minimal trust in existence fuels the fire of a terrifying place that may exist when there is no familiar ground appearing before us, leaving us feeling as if there is nothing to fall back on. This terror can come from a feeling of having no solid ground to stand on, the feeling that not only do you not exist, but possibly that there is nothing else in existence either. This potential shift is so radically different from the material reality presented daily to our psyches, that it can be a massive shock to the system and conjure up this intense anxiety and fear, stemming from the conceptual mind (Almaas, 1998a; Kornfield, 1993). This may force an individual into facing the mind and its judgements at an intensified level. In the case when an individual does possess this trust, the intuitive knowing that surfaces from it may also provide an aid to objectively face the mind and curb some of this fear (Almaas, 1998a).

Two of the three co-researchers did experience the terror and torment of the conceptual mind after a falling away of the ego. To expand on this concept, I will outline some of the co-researchers' experiences concerning the mirroring of essence, or lack thereof, from surrounding others that occurred throughout their respective childhoods. It must also be pointed out once more that there is no finality to this process; even though one may already have a great trust in the universe, this does not make it less painful. Possibly, this trust makes it less terrifying relative to the mind as the ego is gradually

obliterated, and a veil of reality is lifted to reveal reality as it is, without the filter of the supervising ego.

Within John's experience on the *path*, a clear reflection of essence was provided throughout his path, though it would seem John would later have to deepen and develop his trust in existence. This reflection gave way to little pieces of basic trust, which seemingly provided openings into his awakening process. Though two of the co-researchers did not specifically identify some of these moments in as much depth as John, I suspect there were various elements present throughout their lives as well since both Jaclyn and Scott are able to see the essence that is contained within all beings and have experienced various awakenings throughout their lives.

Almaas (1998a) provides a definition and a brief synopsis on why it is important to possess basic trust in the process of self-realization:

It is the confidence that reality is ultimately good; that nature, the universe, and all that exists are of their very nature good and trustworthy; that what happens is the best that can happen. Basic trust is a nonconceptual confidence in the goodness of the universe, an unquestioned implicit trust that there is something about the universe and human nature and life that is inherently and fundamentally good, loving, and wishing us the best. This innate and unformulated trust in life and reality manifests as a willingness to take that plunge into the abyss. (pp. 22-23)

Paralleling my own experience, John seems to have had various individuals enter and pass through his life with whom he was able to establish a meaningful connection. I feel that there is a lot to be learned and understood in the process of connecting, mentoring, and creating a mirror for one another. When one looks closely to what the

function of a teacher or therapist is, they are a mentor, a guide of sorts, assisting an individual in coming to a deeper understanding of how to perfect what is already perfect.

Providing this mirror for John helped him recall one of the first times he remembers that particular feeling, arising from when he was around one of his sister's husbands:

He was one of those people that even if you were five or six years old, he didn't make you feel like you were five or six years old around him. He made you feel really special...I look at that now and for whatever reason he mirrored back to me a real unique specialness and value. I don't think that was necessarily just him but what came through him, so a person really felt quite good around him. And you really wanted to be around him and you wanted to experience that.

Interestingly enough, and similar to my own experience, this sense of love and seeing into his own essence seemed to occur from outside his family dynamics. On the outside of his family, he was able to tap into the compassionate side of being human. Although he seemed to remember some of these times, John also seemed to experience difficulty being *okay* when he was not provided this mirroring, and developed into an 'angry kid':

I remember being a really angry child...I threw a lot of temper tantrums, had a lot of anger...that always seemed to be there...I think that I got into fights from grade 1 – 12. They were always people that I hated, or at least I thought that I hated. It was more or less fear of not knowing them and then in a lot of ways feeling less than them, or feeling I had to measure up.

Although this anger seemed to be a strong backdrop for John, during the interviews we both came to an agreement that there was always a feeling named, *being* which is the true

backdrop to all experience. This also fits with the literature claiming that we are all already awake, we just need to realize it (Dogen, 2004; Maharaj, 1996). Thus the mind can sometimes symbolize a thick veil, covering this *being* or *essence* from us, keeping us from awakening.

Upon reflecting on his own attempts at negotiating certain states of consciousness through his process of spiritual maturity, John saw basic trust playing a pivotal role. It became a continual process of surrender, of working with his own trust in existence, and with his own subjective experience:

I remember being in the library one time, we were doing this project and I knew I was right out there but I just didn't care anymore, it didn't even matter. If a person can't actually get...the sense that the basic trust is there. And so you know I read a piece on the holy ideas and the basic trust. And then I started to realize that, at some point in my life, I misplaced the basic trust but ultimately it's pervasive. And really, to me, a huge piece of this is really, some basic trust in the universe again; and that just completely grows. But it's like...there's no longer trying to find it, it just is. So you get back to that place of...even when you have those really bad times; you can talk about the hell realms. And I still lose chunks today of having to go to that place and realizing this is falling away and then I could come back into it and I say, okay, this is a time where I am allowing the universe to take care of me. And it's okay. And even when my mind wants to spin me on – oh he should be past this point, I realize that is just my mind trying to terrorize me.

This experience allowed John to begin deeply accepting what is, and to let things happen as they unfold. Surrender may have reared itself as a catalyst, birthing a depth of trust in the universal experience that was unfolding for him, while also enabling him to continue on and deepen his process of surrender. Though it can be seen as a very simple concept, basic trust is needed in order to have any surrender to the process. It is needed to wake up to the process and to understand how it has manifested in one's life, and basic trust seems to only be seen by one's own deep experiences of surrender in conjunction with prior knowledge of what basic trust is.

Scott did not speak much of his own childhood, only linking his belief in a Christian God growing up as having importance in his process. He eventually began to question the idea of God and became an atheist in his teens, questioning the roles that people played – i.e., skater, punk rocker, raver, etc. – and the cultural stigmas that were attached to being a youth at that time. For Scott, his opening into awakening did not seem to take flight until he enrolled in a philosophy class while finishing his engineering degree, enabling him to begin putting his questioning mind into a more solid form. In turn, this brought forth deeper inquiries into himself and the world around him.

Jaclyn, on the other hand, had a more difficult childhood, experiencing sexual trauma which took away pieces of her own trust in existence. Although she did not talk much about this experience during the interviews, I understandably felt a sense of the pain she attached to these experiences as she briefly mentioned them. Jaclyn also acknowledges this, as her early experiences with *being* seemed to stop around the time that this trauma began to occur in her life. Although some of her early experiences

stopped around the time that this trauma began, she was still able to have some intense experiences, later giving her inspiration on the path.

It is through these early experiences with mirroring that individuals may come to possess a greater basic trust in existence, creating a more flexible view of the world. These experiences allow for an increased willingness to face some harsh realities of the internal and external world. This mirroring can be seen in alternate ways, and is also one of the prime core beliefs in modern day humanistic psychological thought (Corey, 2001; Rogers, 1961, 1980). The process of having this trust can give the person a chance to reduce the experience of shock and terror when the ego happens to fall away (Almaas, 1998a).

Peering closely at the awakening quest, it seems there may exist a predictive component within some individual's lives, between childhood experiences of bumping up against the void and feeling of essence, as well as a return to these experiences, allowing for profundity in the process of expanding one's own consciousness. This has been the occurrence for two of the three co-researchers, in which the childhood experiences they describe could be a precursor to the falling away of ego, and to waking up to greater reality.

The Gift and the Curse: Precursors of Experience

You already have the precious mixture that will make you well. Use it.

(Rumi, cited in Kenton, 2000, p. 11)

Foreshadowing later awakening experiences, one of the interviews with John revealed that we were both able to see moments in our lives at a young age in which the opportunity to *wake up* was presented. If, in fact, the back drop to all life is essence, then

there may be many opportunities to get beyond one's egoic self in a lifetime. Going back through his life, John was able to see these 'opportunities for awakening' and to acknowledge what he was running from was the vastness concealed in the present moment. He described a time in which he was working with his father and hated him for being where he was, contrary to the fact that John was 19 at the time and partook of his own accord. John identifies what it was that he was actually running from:

I look back at that now and such a lesson right there that you could never – you couldn't grasp...and yet now it stands out so much and as I mentioned earlier about how I could piece it all together about how I created my own suffering or was escaping at every twist and turn. I could look back and I could take you through [grades] 8, 9, 10 perfect places, where I could look back and say here, there were signs for me back then to wake up; and to see what I was actually running from. It didn't really happen but in some ways they were still there.

Although John was 19 at the time of this experience, it is interesting that he often seemed very close to the void of existence; that he holds the ability to look back and piece together a large chunk of his own psychological process and his refusal to stay in the moment to face his own fears, projections, and judgements.

In terms of human development, the questions that surround the proposition of waking up at a young age are vast, i.e., how can it be possible to wake up if there is not enough development within the mind and body? Yet, through studying the literature, a few individuals have had intense experience with consciousness when they were young; myself and two of the co-researchers included (Godmen, 1993; Ingram, 2003).

There is something that pushes individuals like Ajahn Chah²² (2002) to go into a monastery at the age of nine of his own sincere accord, for Papaji (Godmen, 1998) to become paralyzed by an encounter with the void at a young age, or for Ramana Maharshi to realize the deathless self at the age of 17 (Mahadevan, 1977). Although these experiences are just *experiences*, and the individuals having them may not even possess the potential to understand them at their young age, these states or insights seem to indicate a precursive stage for some who follow the path of awakening. These experiences may come in various forms such as a dream, a vision, or a finely tuned psychic awareness.

As Ingram (2003), a modern spiritual master, points out, “Pure presence is our fundamental experience, even when we seem to be lost in the stories and activities of life” (p. xiv). She goes on to describe one of her own experiences at a young age and the recognition of this later on when she was to meet her teacher Poonjaji (Papaji) and have this experience again:

I remembered this feeling from my earliest days with my Italian grandmother... we would silently walk among the blue hydrangeas in her yard, everything inside and out appeared to be glowing and shimmering. It all seemed perfectly normal at the time. But, as I grew older, I somehow lost the sense of it...On meeting Poonjaji, the search fell away and in its place an appreciation for mystery and an awakened awareness emerged. (p. xv)

This may be what Jesus meant when he said “We are all God’s children;” we are all capable of becoming like a child in the light of God, a manifestation of ourselves hidden

by the sometimes thin veil of the “I.” It is only through pulling back the veil that one can feel this place of childlike beauty and wonder.

If the journey of a thousand miles begins with one step, what do we do if there is no *real* beginning and no end to the journey? Thus, we are forced to start where we are and be with that. In my own life, I intuit the deep sense of sadness and the beauty contained within that sadness (refer to chapter 1), which to me signifies an entwined connection to the world, and contained within that connection was a melding of my being to all things.

This was the backdrop for my early years, and was ‘re-gained’ later on in my life when I began to trudge along my quest for peace and happiness without drugs. Although this feeling provided so much beauty and love in my life, it was also my curse to bear. This feeling was a vulnerable, broken-hearted connection and love for all beings around me, which sounds very romantic but there are always two sides to a story. I later came to understand that this feeling became a catalyst for my travels through the addictive pathway. My misunderstanding of what this feeling pointed to created the struggle to let go of judgements I held, and to let my mind fall away, revealing the broken-hearted reality of the universe in which everything is in constant flux, the rising and falling in and out of existence.

I later created a painting (2005) entitled, *The reality of existence* (see Appendix B) which represents this feeling. Although the painting and this experience in itself may not be *it*, I feel it highlights something that provides a vehicle to connect to life on a deeper level, which for me is part of the awakening process – a continual reflection on what is, and one’s connection with all that is.

For Jaclyn, it was a matter of bumping up against the void before she went to bed at night at a young age; she states:

...it always happened in the night time. And I would have this experience of lying in bed, just lying in bed, and then I would close my eyes and I could see that the world was quite spacious. I didn't really know what was going on and so that would cause a little bit of anxiety. But at the same time it was like more nurturing than my own mother could be to me...I would go to bed and then these big – this overwhelming darkness, blackness, spaciousness, timelessness would just kind of zoom over me. And I remember one time of getting really anxious about it because it was almost like I had gone – I was gone so far that I couldn't ground myself in coming back...I didn't even feel attached to my body at the time.

This experience proved to be a precursor and paralleled future experiences of the self dissolving and seeing one's Self as the universe. Although these experiences are intense and can be terrifying, Jaclyn was able to feel the love of being entwined with the universe.

Similarly, John also had many precursors to his own shattering of egoic self later on in life. He had a long-recurring dream, in which he was encased in a spaceship, flying in deep black space. He remembered feeling as if he was about to crash into another spaceship, and yet somehow had the knowledge that it was to be the end of the human race, if not the universe. He explains this in his own words:

So when I look back at analyzing that dream I had when I was 3 or 4, I think that would be a precursor in any of my memories, I guess it was emblazoned with a lot of that fear...having the spacious dream and being on the one ship, and being out

in outer black space; and to my recollection, I hadn't watched any Star Trek...just knowing that I was going to die, but this is the end of the human race. These two ships are going to smash and there was a small window to look out. And watching it all happen and yet nothing can be done about it...It scared the hell out of me but never really talking about it with anyone. But just thinking back on it now, even in the dream it was scary as hell...but what really stands out for me is that there was an intuitive wisdom and power that was beyond me that was watching it all.

And part of me was terror stricken, but part of it was calmness to it all...

This fear symbolized a possible link to his combustion of egoic self, leaving him in utter terror and baffled, trying to pick up the pieces and understand what had happened to him for years to follow. John speaks about the similarities between the two experiences:

Looking back on [that] experience [of self dissolving] the terror would be the same, but there is no dream there. But I also remember, in the early times, I remember thinking this is a terrible nightmare that I am never going to wake up from; and slowly but surely a person just wakes up from the nightmare before realizing it.

John also seemed to have an innate insight into things, or a deep wisdom of what was happening around him, at a very young age. He explains how he was able to deconstruct the roles that human beings play at a young age, "for some reason I always was in the perspective of a fear-based kid. I knew everyone else was too, but it was really clear to me that everyone was playing games back then." Returning to this school later on and connecting with one of the girls there, he elucidates how his insights began to become ever more refined:

...coming back to that school in grade 12, basically 6 years later it was even more pronounced. That actually really enabled me to become really analytical about things. I remember going to school in grade 12 and meeting this girl...I remember getting to grade 8 with her and by the time she goes to grade 9 and 10, she used to be a brilliant student, her grades had completely slipped and we used to talk a little bit. On one level there was still innocence between us, like she was having a rough time in her life at that time, and I could say it's quite obvious to me why that is. And we levelled with each other...the accuracy about what was going on in her life was bang on. So that ability was always somewhat there...so for me there was always this capacity that I had to witness my life but at the same time not be able to really completely own things with myself...that's just the way it was.

Since John moved around a lot, the uprooting seemed to give him the opportunity to see things from more of a witnessing perspective. He was able to step back from situations and view the world from an objective place, enabling him to *see* some of what he was able to observe. This seems to have provided him with a unique perspective from which to view the world, and appears to have been one of his gifts from a young age.

Lines of Questioning: The Tried and True Method

Give up all questions except one: 'Who am I?' After all, the only fact you are sure of is that you are. The 'I am' is certain. The 'I am this' is not. Struggle to find out what you are in reality. (Maharaj, 1996, p. 70)

[Self] Inquiry begins from a not-knowing, from recognizing and observing something in your self that you do not understand. (Almaas, 2002, p. 17)

It is through deep questioning that one is able to come to terms with what is and never remain stagnant in his or her own personal growth. These questions provide us with the ability to become open and learn that the *real* answer that one is seeking lies beyond the intellect and not in the logical mind; this is the theory behind Self-inquiry (Almaas, 2002; Gangaji, 1995, 2005) and Zen koans (Kapleau, 2001; Senzaki, 2000). Murphy (2006) presents a very honest question that we must all ask ourselves if we are to come to know our true Self, “Who doesn’t recognize that disappointing moment when we find we have traded in our birthright once more for the ramified little defence case tirelessly presented by the ego?” (p. 93). It is through this ability and perseverance to continue our lines of questioning – even if that means for years – that we are able to deconstruct some of our preconceived knowledge and expand our consciousness.

For John, his acquired distaste for his father’s “rough and abrasive” ways at a young age seemed to fuel his ability to question everything from an early point in childhood, including his father’s role. A very integral part of the path is to possess the ability to deconstruct and question everything. This allows the individual to come to a personal understanding of truth and develop an aptitude to begin deconstructing, reaching a deeper wisdom where his/her own mysteries are embedded (Gangaji, 1995, 2005; Warner, 2003, 2007). The whole path of Advaita Vedanta (as has been mentioned in earlier chapters) is based on the premise of questioning through Self-inquiry that Ramana Maharshi and others following him underwent and passed on through the years. Thus, this is an integral part of the process of awakening as it is only when we begin to believe that all of our beliefs cannot be questioned that we see the darkness of humanity begin to surface in the form of hate and violence. Therefore, we can say that to actually expand

our consciousness and continue down the path of realization, fulfilling what Almaas (2001) calls *the point of existence*, we must continue to question not only the world around us, but the thought processes and beliefs that we hold dear. The Buddha also speaks of this path towards self-inquiry to Ananda, Buddha's closest disciple:

Ananda, be ye lamps unto yourselves, be ye a refuge to yourselves. Betake yourselves to no external refuge. Hold fast to the Truth as a lamp; hold fast to the Truth as a refuge. Look not for a refuge in anyone beside yourselves...it is they who shall reach the very topmost Height. (Kornfield, 1996, p. 122)

Warner (2003) explains his own take on what this passage means: "...if you really thoroughly question *everything*, if you pursue your questions long enough and honestly enough, there will come a time when truth will wallop you upside the head and you will *know*" (p. 9). Interestingly enough, this is exactly what happened to John later on in his life.

It seems from reflection on my own experience that something just clicked within me and I put everything I had into seeking for an answer or for something that I couldn't totally understand. It began to consume me, and a lot of my activities outside of regular social gatherings and class time consisted of me reading various spiritual and philosophical material of all sorts. I wrote:

...at the time I was consumed by them, I couldn't stop searching for an answer to what existence is all about. I can remember having glimpses of this feeling throughout my entire life. And by this feeling I mean, an intuitive knowledge that there is more to life than what we can see, hear, feel, touch, and taste. There is some sort of underlying presence that embodies us and brings us all together as

one. I may not have been able to name it, but even when I was in severe emotional pain and hurt about the whole idea of what was going on for me, there was always a deeper connection to the universal pain that is felt all over the world. (Personal Journal, June, 2007)

Looking at this time of my life is interesting, as I seemed to be taken over by this power I had to understand. I wasn't really sure what it was that I had to know and I didn't even know much about awakening at the time. I was just hooked on finding answers to some of the questions that seemed to be asked from a very deep source within my being. Thus, it was partly through the medium of text and reading that I began to come to understand some of the experiences that I had as a youth.

John also sees his early love and passion for reading as another way in which he began to explore and question the world from a young age. John speaks further on this experience:

...looking back at that stuff, it wasn't like a person had an affinity for all of this but I definitely questioned the nature of reality of existence and my place in it. And at the same time there was always this...veil of consciousness sort of where the world was always unfolding and I was always watching the world unfold and in some sense I wasn't completely participating in it or part of the world I didn't understand or didn't have access to. And that was really weird and I would reflect on it and wondered 'When am I actually going to be in the world and participate in the world?' ...a person had acquired a vast amount of knowledge but didn't really know what it was about.

This excerpt seems to allude to John's spontaneous falling away of egoic self, being forced into the fire, struggling to connect the dots.

It seems that many people may ask questions and question many different things in all walks of life, so why is it that they are no further along on the path to awakening? I feel that the big difference is in how they are prepared to answer some of these questions, the willingness to look into the reality of the situation. For example, I knew that while I was using drugs and into my addiction, my life was going nowhere, or rather, to a dark place at a rapid velocity. At the time, I did not have the willingness to *own* what was going on with me and begin to heal until I was somewhat forced into it. And yet, when I was able to connect to my own being again, I dug in and kept going. I was able to finally see on an impactful and brutally honest plane, the preciousness of what I had covered up. This was my ultimate tool for growth during that time, still having a lot of relevance today. Thus, if one is to begin to ask questions of reality and only use his/her logical mind and beliefs to answer them, one gets oneself deeper entrenched in that line of thought and further solidifies the automatic egoic response. This can be seen when we look at the process of using koans or much of the Zen literature that does not always make sense to the material/logical mind.

For example, Dogen (2004) states:

Practitioners of the way, I implore you, sit still and dispassionately contemplate the ephemeral nature of the body. The body, including hair and skin, is created by a drop from each of the parents. After the last breath is taken, the body is scattered over the mountains and fields and turns into dirt. So, why attach to the body? (p. 11)

When one reads this passage, it can be understood on two separate levels. One may see that yes, it is true that human beings are created by a drop of each parent and that the human body will either rot in a casket or be incinerated and turned to ash. But there is a deeper sense of knowing, intuitively within one's being, what this actually means. There may be a knot felt in the stomach from the fear of death that many possess, or there may be a falling away of one's attachment to the body that may unfold; this can take moments or years and may continually unravel and evolve over the practitioner's life in that body (Loori, 2002).

There are some that may begin to ask these questions but are so entrenched in their beliefs that they are not able to break through to the other side of truth. It seems that it is only through a process of insightful knowing and quantum shifts in one's being that it begins to unfold into an unravelling of the egoic-self. The next major theme outlines the co-researchers' lived-experience with the void – beautiful yet terrifying – and assists others in understanding what the experience of no-self may look like.

The Unfolding Process: Pulling Back the Veil

As the chatter of self-regard and fears dies away, the natural ground of the mind emerges as you. And so you just bathe in the presence of what is, letting yourself grow completely 'wet through' with it, with no thoughts, conditions, clingings, or preferences being held onto or affirmed or pushed away. (Murphy, 2006, p. 9)

A large part of North American culture has become entwined with materialism and is known all over the world for its vast riches and the potential to live a prosperous life. And yet, if we look at how much of North American life is tied to inward pursuits, one can see that there is a lack of initiations, rites of passage, and ways to find meaning

outside of material goods. It becomes about doing. There is a constant sense of doing in North American culture, it is difficult to come out of the hectic life in order to slow down and experience ourselves. The concept of inner reflection or just sitting (Zazen) seems so insane to some – I have made many attempts to have individuals sit in stillness over the years of working with students and clients – that it literally begins to fragment the “doers” as they no longer have anywhere to run; there is no longer a distraction from reality (Kornfield, 1993). There is a gaping hole that is constantly trying to be filled by *stuff* and achievements which pushes the individual further away from being than ever (Almaas, 2004). Whether the pull of karma comes into play here or not is a whole other debate, but what seems to be true is that some people are wired for this kind of work while others are not. And thus, when we can acknowledge that we are on some kind of path – whatever that may be – we can begin to come closer to this sometimes tenuous connection with reality.

Consciousness Reveals ItSelf: The Ground of All Being

Thought and dream are the same. Images float up from that same nowhere, dissolving one into the next. Images materialize from thin air. They seem to just think themselves, and disappear like rain into a river. (Levine, 2002, p. 167)

It is well known that the spiritual path has a variety of difficulties and pitfalls and that systemic spiritual practice can occasionally lead to serious psychological and even physical complications. Great prophets, sages, saints, and teachers of all religions had at important junctions of their spiritual development dramatic experiences that from a traditional point of view would be seen as psychotic. (Kornfield, 1989, p. 138)

As one begins to embrace his/her path, an initiation begins, a deepening of process within what is revealed. Form may begin to seem formless, the material world may unveil more than what our rational minds ever dreamed possible. Insights begin to become part of normal experience, Self-inquiry is deepened, and the path lays itself, introducing teachers and opportunities to open to reality appear around every corner.

The veil of our everyday egoic reality starts to fall away and crumble, revealing a wider view of the world, a world that is very mystical, yet paradoxically, very ordinary. This crumbling enables us to see a small piece of where our true home lies. Love, peace and compassion come into our lives with intensity and begin to calm the mind and promote connection with all that is around. There forms an opening, allowing us to perceive some of the patterns that fill our lives and block us from this peace.

For all of the co-researchers, there were points in their lives in which it was apparent that things were beginning to unfold for them, giving way to new perspectives on what reality is or is not. Scott's experience was one of learning all about the path in university and making his own connections with what it meant to him. Sitting in a philosophy class he began to question the nature of reality and what truth was. While listening to his professor read excerpts from various books, one caught his attention and presented a shift in his consciousness:

One day he [the Professor] read from a book called *The Power of Now* by Eckhart Tolle. And as he read it, I just had a feeling inside, whoa! This is it! This is the truth! I went up after class and I was kind of trying to find a paragraph he read, and it just totally resonated with me. And that was the first time there was recognition of truth, coming from someone deeply present with truth.

This seemed to give Scott the push he needed in order to sink into Self-inquiry of the non-dual, and begin to seek the stillness that Tolle (1997, 2003, 2005) talks about. Tolle's (1997) simplistic ways of describing the mind's attachments are obvious and have helped many break down some of their own barriers to presence. For example:

The mind always seeks to deny the Now and to escape from it. In other words, the more you are identified with your mind, the more you suffer, or you may put it like this: the more you are able to honour and accept the Now, the more you are free of pain, of suffering – and free of the egoic mind. (p. 27)

Thus, it was Tolle's emphasis on the Now that Scott began to resonate with, and which assisted him in learning how to ground himself in the present.

At this time, Scott had also started to do Hatha Yoga and was learning some of the benefits of getting more into his body and being in touch with his bodily form at a deeper level. After having deep insights from the readings that were arranged by his professor, and reading the book (Tolle, 1997), Scott began to become more grounded in stillness and presence. He then sought out Tolle, eager to hear a spiritual teacher share his wisdom; this would prove to be one of his most influential experiences on the path:

Eckhart Tolle came to Calgary, early January, and he did an afternoon talk at the Centre for Positive Living. So it was a three or four hour afternoon talk. And that was amazing. That was the first time I felt like I had really been with a spiritual teacher. And there was, there was just a very much being present and just absorbing it – being in the environment, being grounded, having him there was extremely grounding and that just allowed me to...there was a real grounding into my body at this point.

Within this time, Scott became really grounded and was able to connect with his being, getting beyond his mind for the first time:

So in that talk, it just – it was four hours of me being present, one hundred percent present. And in my totally grounded...I just remember feeling my legs and I was like, wow, I've got these legs! They are here. And just looking at them, I was at the back, and I could just see his form; it was kind of shifting. My conscious, my grip of consciousness on reality was shifting and loosening up and stuff.

It was in this presence that Scott was able to connect beyond the mind and unfold more of the Self, deconstructing the egoic self a little bit more in the process.

For Jaclyn it unfolded as an intense feeling of connection when she was living in Australia and traveling. This seemed to surface from out of nowhere and becomes a testament to dropping thought and embracing what is in the moment. She describes this in her own words:

...when I was 21 and I was living in Australia and I had gone out on a walk by myself...I had gone so far to have lost all touch with anything. Like everything. There were no buildings around, there was nothing. I was in the middle of the desert and there was one tree...I sat down at that one tree and it was like – now I could explain it [as] existence just hit me. Everything just hit me! And I just sat down at the one tree and although I was lost I was never so comfortable in my whole life; I was never so peaceful and serene, it was like something had just wrapped their arms around me and I was just like – ah, I'm home. Here I am. And yet – it was very overwhelming. I remember I cried quite a bit...I'm crying like this because it's such an intense [experience] – like no words can describe it. I

could say beautiful, but that's not accurate. I could say harmonious, but that's not a good enough word. Like, nothing could explain the energy and the intensity that just boom, shattered me...it was boundless.

Conversely, this became a big experience for her as she tried to re-create it, becoming intoxicated with its memory:

And then after that I remember wishing for that experience again and almost like – wanting it back and thinking that – oh it's going to happen again and oh let's go for a walk! Let's go for a walk! I'm going to go for a walk. And I called the dog, and I'd be like, come on doggie! And we'd go for walks and it didn't happen again and that started really bothering me. And that, I remember, almost that experience of wanting it again was like – that would almost lead me to insanity.

Jaclyn later met a Buddhist woman who explained this experience as one of no-self or a falling away of the egoic self. Jaclyn, however, was just not prepared at this time to hear such an explanation and began to drink a lot and engage in sexually addictive behaviour throughout her twenties. She did not feel she was able to have any more cosmic experiences during this time, as she was so caught up in her addiction. Jaclyn describes this period of her life as “vacant.”

In this way, many of us can have experiences that *rock us* and yet, if we cannot begin to embody these experiences in our daily lives, no change occurs in our psyches. Furthermore, we cannot arrive to the deeper knowing at which the experience is pointing. Either way, the experience is just that, an experience. Most unfortunately, some chase the experience, like Jaclyn who grasped onto it and used it in a similar way as a drug, for an escape.

For John it all fell away for him, seemingly out of nowhere. He had the ability to reflect upon his experience, and it became clear to him how it was destined to unfold. During the first few years of his undergraduate degree, he began to make some profound connections with object–relations theory and his life:

When we got into it, it was like a light bulb and it was like I understood all of this. I couldn't understand all of it, cause all of the concepts, but it was basic to me. It was like, yah, we created a false self and there is a true self. It was so obvious, that I am thinking; there is nothing else you need to know...I was writing stuff in the journal and questioning everything and then when I got into this stuff, I got into object relations at the level at that year...It's like, well, this basic to me, it's like a whole door way opened up that I had already been in, that I had already lived. But I understood to be, my whole life, what I was witness was that. That's what it was. There is a true self and I lived out the false self. It was so easily demarcated I couldn't believe it.

As John began to build these connections, he was seeking a practicum placement in a large mental institution. At this time, things began to come together for him, and the separation between himself and the clients that he was working with became increasingly slight:

So I started seeing similarities in me and other people, other clients, on a regular basis...and I started realizing how it was a universal thing...just the idea of being; just the idea that all these things that they supposedly had wrong with them...the idea that this person had this, that person had that ...

As the clarity of these similarities allowed him to connect with clients on a deeper level, John had an intense conversation with a very bright gentleman who was struggling with a concurrent disorder (bi-polar disorder and alcoholism). This somehow began to help John connect with his own mind and see the division between his mind and his being:

I got in touch with...at that moment, I got in touch with my, never really identified before, my crazy monkey mind. My mind started to reveal to me how I had this capacity to have my mind run rampant. But I never really connected it...I mean I had always seen it as me just being me. And I guess it was but what I started to do was create a division between...I started to see myself as foreign. And that sort of scared me a little bit.

With the beginning of this fear starting to unravel, things were to intensify a lot more for John.

It was also at this time that a client came in who seemed to mirror back to him a feeling of being transparent, like he knew John on a deeper level somehow. While he was very “weirded out by the guy” there was still a piece of him curious as to what this connection meant. He spent some time with him talking and read some of his file, something John no longer did at that point, recognizing the limitations of a pre-conceived understanding of a client. This also helped him better understand how he reacted to clients. John was able to connect with this gentleman on a profound and reciprocal level:

I only talked to the guy for a short period of time so he was telling me that...you know, I haven't been able to talk to anybody before at that level, to share that stuff...he felt very comfortable with me... So that was the beginning of the end of how I knew myself to be.

Life became a little altered for John after this, as soon as he lost the ability to identify with himself as he thought he was:

And at that time I was already starting to get a bit shaky so everything started to...I was starting to figure this stuff out. I guess I look at it now in a different light; I was starting to really understand the human condition. So that practicum was a real eye opener, because you really got to see a lot of different things.

The combination of all these experiences provided an opening to John's spontaneous falling away of self.

As one can already see, it is not a finality, but a continual process of deepening the embodiment of how we live that defines awakening. One can have many experiences, but not until it is embodied does it really become anything beyond an experience.

Kornfield (2000) points out there are views held in literature, which claim that there is finality to this process:

In this vision, all greed, anger, fear, judgement, delusion, personal ego, and desire are uprooted forever, completely eliminated. What is left is an absolutely unwavering, radiant, pure human being who never experiences any difficulties, an illuminated sage who follows only the Tao or God's will and never his or her own...we also have to acknowledge that such beings are exceedingly rare or may not exist at this time on this earth. (p. 121)

Conversely, he also outlines how the other vision varies and is more true to life on the spiritual path:

The more circular vision of enlightenment presents freedom as a shift of identity.

In this vision, too, we awaken to our true nature, and rest in a timeless freedom of

spirit. We know that our true reality is beyond body and mind. And yet because we also live within this limited body and mind, the ordinary patterns of life may continue. (p. 121)

And thus, it is through this lens that I am viewing these experiences; ultimately these experiences can be seen as the beginning to something bigger that unfolds for the practitioner, but it is not a given that these will be integrated into one's life.

It is without a doubt that the states of consciousness, which become accessible is something that draws people in to the journey, but it can also keep people stuck and attached to these radically different states. When Kornfield (1993, 2000) would experience various states of consciousness discussed in the literature (i.e., the cosmos running through your body, dancing lights, intensive feelings of bliss and love, meeting the Buddha) and speak to his teacher, Ajahn Chah, about them, his reply was, "just one more thing to let go of." While studying the intensity of some of these states, we must keep in mind that an in-depth understanding must be habitually developed through the process of embodying an awakening. Furthermore, without a deep understanding of the process there is a danger in chasing these states. It merely keeps us at a stuck point in our personal growth or gives us another thing to grasp on to, only to let go of.

As Kornfield (1993) points out:

The value of transcendent states is the great inspiration and compelling vision that they can bring to our lives. They can provide a powerful vision of reality beyond our day-to-day consciousness and guide us to live from this highest truth. The experiences we have of them can, at times, be profoundly healing and transforming. But their dangers and misuses are equally great. (p. 121)

A state is only that, a fleeting state. Yet, when individuals are living in the way of the dharma, Tao, or path, it is at this point when we gradually see reality for what it is. In John's case, though, he was not on a path and had no prior knowledge of spiritual traditions to describe the experiences that unfolded for him. However, he was familiar with the psychoanalytic tradition, ego development, and object-relations theory. It is hard explain his capacity to experience a falling away, but his preceding life story highlights many insights, leading him toward the shedding of ego.

Spontaneous Combustion: Baptized by Fire

When you suddenly realize the source of mind, you open a box of jewels. Honourable on earth and in heavens, you are aloof even from the joy of meditation. The essence containing all flavours is the supreme delicacy, worth more than ten thousand ounces of pure gold.

(Zen Master Fenyang, cited in Cleary, 2000, p. 16)

Although it happens rarely, individuals can experience a spontaneous combustion or a falling away of ego without warning and with no prior seeking. Here is a brief dialog with Roshi Kapleau (2000) and a student regarding this idea of spontaneous awakening:

Questioner: Roshi, aren't there cases where enlightenment has come about suddenly and spontaneously?

Roshi: Strictly speaking, every kind of awakening is sudden in the sense that it occurs abruptly, like water coming to a boil; what is 'gradual' is the long training that usually precedes it. By 'spontaneous' you mean enlightenment that comes without spiritual training, is that right?

Questioner: Yes.

Roshi: The question is always, ‘How genuine are so-called spontaneous enlightenments?’ In the past twelve years I’ve tested dozens of persons who claimed to be enlightened and found only one who I felt had a genuine awakening without prior training. Without training, however, one’s life won’t be appreciably transformed, for one won’t be able to operate out of that enlightenment and in time it’ll become a cherished memory. (pp. 51-52)

From many of the traditions and paths already discussed, it is apparent that awakening is always available to us. It may only be a matter of priming an individual’s mind to open into the truth of being through meditation or self-inquiry (Almaas, 2002; Murphy, 2006; Poonja, 2000). Standing as a very rare occurrence (Kapleau, 2000), I will outline this experience from a literary standpoint, alongside findings from one of the co-researchers. With prior spiritual effort, one such individual recorded in literature as having a spontaneous falling away is Segal (1998).

Segal (1998) speaks of the experience of ego falling away, as she is waiting in line for a bus:

As I took my place in line, I suddenly felt my ears stop up like they do when the pressure changes inside an airplane as it makes its decent. I felt cut off from the scene before me, as if I were enclosed in a bubble, unable to act in any but the most mechanical manner. I lifted my right foot to step up into the bus and collided head-on with an invisible force that entered my awareness like a silently exploding sick of dynamite, blowing the door of my usual consciousness open and off its hinges, splitting me in two. In the gaping space that appeared, what I had previously called ‘me’ was forcefully pushed out of its usual location inside

me into a new location that was approximately a foot behind and to the left of my head. 'I' was now behind my body looking out at the world without using the body's eyes. From a non-localized position somewhere behind and to the left, I could see my body in front and very far away. All the body's signals seemed to take a long time to be picked up in the non-localized place, as if they were coming from a distant star. Terrified I looked around, wondering if anyone else had noticed something. (p. 49)

Although Segal (1998) states that she had a *Collision with the Infinite* (the title of her book) with no prior warning, she also practiced Transcendental Meditation® (TM) for close to ten years, beginning her meditation practice at 18 years old, though she claimed an absence from meditation for a significant amount of time prior to this experience.

Interestingly enough Maharishi,²³ the founder of TM and one of the leaders of the meditation retreats she participated in, never did address the issue of no-self or the falling away of egoic self (Segal, 1998). In comparison, the falling away experience for Segal was an out-of-the-blue occurrence which she was not able to understand. She was shocked and fearful of the experience as most individuals express about the first time the egoic self falls away for them. And still, she is able to track early childhood experiences that also caused a shift in her at a young age. For instance:

I used to meditate on my name. As a child of seven or eight, I would sit cross-legged, eyes closed, on the long white couch in my parent's living room and say my name over and over to myself. The name would reverberate in my mind with repetition, starting off solid and strong. My name, who I was. Then fainter, repeating, repeating, repeating, until a threshold was crossed and the identity as

the name broke, like a ship released suddenly from its mooring to float untethered on the ocean waves. Vastness appeared. The name became a word only, a collection of sounds pulsating in a vast emptiness. There was no person to whom that named referred, no identity as that name. No one. (Segal, 1998, p. 1)

Segal professes, “there is no linear causality at work here” (p. xv), referring to the events in her life that led up to her falling away of ego. However, there is a possible link between the two above experiences and the intensive meditation that was done prior. It is imperative to note that I am not attempting to underline a linear causality in Segal’s life, rather that there was a prior “collision with the infinite” and subtle no-self experiences in her youth, similar to two of the co-researchers’ experiences as well as my own. It would take Segal years to integrate this experience and to gain an understanding of what was actually going on for her. This is – as we are already beginning to see – where the real difficulty lies: in the integration of the experience and beginning to get to a place of no mind where the mind can no longer try to ‘make sense’ of the experience that can not be explained.

Although one may be able to experience a spontaneous falling away of ego, it can still be very jarring upon the inability of totally letting go under the control of the mind. That is, to independently fall into the experience without judgement from the mind. In my own experience, the cognitive mind and ego-centered psyche tries without avail to intellectually grasp the process and experience. It will clutch at anything to create a mental understanding of what has occurred. It is within this experience that thoughts dominate the aftermath and one may begin to understand the Self as far removed from the egoic structure created in the body (Almaas, 1988, 2001). Similar to the Zen koan, the

experience cannot be understood by a cognitive function, it is only through having no-mind that one can saturate the real wisdom of these experiences (Dogen, 2004; Sahn, 1997). It is beyond the mind and within a deep connection to all of existence where this truth is contained, not within the cognitive realms of living.

In this same light, John – although having no prior experience with meditation/spiritual seeking in a formal/informal sense – had a sudden falling away of self, which left him terrorized and attempting to make sense of the experience for the next few years. In this way, John’s experience is quite unique in the literature on others’ awakening experiences. And in John’s case, he began to seek answers subsequent to his falling away of self.

At this point in his life, John began to piece together ways in which there is no division between an individual and an other. This was attempted during his practicum at the mental institution and the veil of separation was thin, about to disappear. He explains in his own words:

I went back to my room, I think it was about six o’clock, and I was sitting on my bed, it was a small bed, I was just sitting there. And then – it’s hard to describe what happened – I don’t really perceive it, conceptualize it, and what it seemed like to me, it was like...an instant – my consciousness completely expanded. You could say it was an out-of-body experience, but I don’t think it really was; now that I think about it – but I describe it as such and I listen to it, that’s what it sounds like. So it felt like, to me, how I picture it, is that I witnessed it as it happened – it was just like I was ripped – the room just completely expanded and it was like there was a complete division between my ego or who I thought I was,

and this capacity to see what else was going on around me. But a huge rush of energy at the same time. It definitely scared the hell out of me, the first time.

This was to become John's backdrop for his everyday experience during the next few years, varying merely by the intensity and terror perceived by his mind. This experience was grossly misunderstood in his search for an answer as to why it was all happening.

This searching would only feed his terror. He goes on:

I remember getting that, rushing out of the room and open the door to see if anything else had happened in the building; just because, I don't know why. I remember going around the corner, walking into the nurse's room and knocking on the door. I had come across and they looked at me and they said, "Are you okay?" And I said, "Oh yeah, I'm okay." So I tried to settle things back down. I went back into the room and it was the same, intense...well, I tried to calm myself down, I tried to figure out what was going on...I kept on theorising about what happened. And my capacity to hear myself speak was...like I was speaking but I wasn't speaking...I was really shaky because I didn't think I could move. And pretty scared and stuff. Thinking this is completely not right.

Similar to Segal (1998), John's experience was not a 'typical' awakening experience outlined in various books and traditions. Generally the individual has a bit of an idea of what is going on and can recognize it for what it is, or at least 'check it out' with the community in which he or she is a part of; although 'typical' may not enter the picture when it comes to consciousness development. For example here is a recount of Micchaka's enlightenment (cited in Cleary, 2002b):

Dhrtaka said to Micchaka, ‘To practice sorcery, thus learning something minor, is like being dragged by a rope. You should know for yourself that if you give up the little stream and immediately return to the great ocean, you will realize the uncreated.’ On hearing this, Micchaka realized enlightenment. (p. 24)

Although we do not hear Micchaka’s lived account of this experience it seems as if it is a very nonchalant occurrence. In Zen, practitioners are primed to become open to *what is* throughout all of their training and in that training are attempting to create a space for whatever may unfold (Loori, 2002). Another Zen practitioner, Warner (2003), explains his awakening:

I really can’t recall anything unusual. I was just walking to work...I was walking along the road and just about to cross that bridge [a bridge he would cross on the way to work every day] when all my problems, all my complaints, all my confusions and misunderstandings just kind of untwisted themselves from each other and then *plop* on the ground....Every damned thing I’d ever read in the Buddhist sutras was confirmed in a single instant. The universe was me and I was it. I looked up at the sky and that experience was exactly like looking into a mirror. (p. 96)

He goes on to explain that he saw himself as everything around him: the trees, the concrete, everything. Paradoxically:

...there were no bells, no whistles, no gongs; no thunder, no earthquakes; no peals of laughter, no tears, no drama. And then I went to work and did my job. It was all very ordinary and normal. But in that very normality and ordinariness was

something more wonderful than anything special I could ever have imagined. (p. 98)

The paradox of awakening being the most wonderful thing in the world and yet the most ordinary thing ever is something that I also have experienced. It is quite a peculiar experience, as the mind cannot rationalize and/or understand it for what it really is.

In my experience it was a very sudden recognition of the Self in an instant. It happened in an encounter group that I had been going to for a while; I remember that I was fighting the idea of having a self/no-self. And one of the members, the leader, was challenging me on this. I suddenly felt the “I” fall away and was just energy floating around in the body that “I” once thought was “mine.” “I” became everything and nothing, all at once and I began to cry at the ordinariness and beauty of this realization. “I” was all that was around me, the people in the group, the chair, the carpet; “I” had no form. “I” had become pure consciousness, no longer associating with the body. Maybe a little more dramatic than Warner’s (2003) description, and yet it is in both the ordinariness and the extravagance in which these experiences are similar. I also wrote something later that night to try and convey the experience:

I try to fight the obvious and the reality,

My mind is confused.

Who is this person called Kyler?

They are not really here,

Only an object of the world.

Separate from the body/mind,

Moment to moment.

The big illusion.
But a body starts to tremble and shake,
A mind shuts off.
Is this me?
It can't be!
It is not!
Tears fall for no reason.
Rush of emotionless emotion.
Nothing.
Not a thing.
There is nothing.
I am nothing.
Vast emptiness.
Calm and peaceful.
The suchness of reality.
(2004)

Although “I” did think that this was *it*, fortunately it was not. The idea of a finality in the process seems to be easier to swallow for the mind, as my mind definitely came back to me and began to play tricks on me. I had a tough time coming into a state of embodiment after that experience and tended to be half-in and half-out of my body for what seemed like forever, three or four months. And thus, I began to learn, what Kornfield (1993, 2000) outlines as “no enlightenment retirement,” that there is no finality to the process and that mind has to begin to let go of the idea of that. This is similar to what the ox

herding pictures refer to as *catching the bull* (refer to literature review in chapter 2) (Loori, 2002).

For some on the path there seems to be a tie into what *complete* awakening is to them, but it is all just another conceptualization of the mind, not pure being or truth. The truth can not fit into a concept, it just is. Interestingly enough one of the first things that Scott told me before we started the interview was that he had not yet been able to see all as himself. And according to him, he felt that his realization was not complete or final, due to this inability to experience this awareness, although he did state that he still felt as though he was awake, or waking up. He states:

And any idea that I need to have this enlightened experience, like fireworks and ten thousand suns and blissed out and it never goes away – that’s also a concept that needs to be let go of. So that’s all. You’ll never, you – who is wanting to understand this – will never be satisfied with your own experience of truth because you just can’t recognize it. You can’t understand it. And that’s basically why in so many traditions the teacher basically has to tell you, yup, you got it. You’re awake. Because the mind will never say, I’m awake! It never knows.

For Scott his first awakening experience was during his encounter with Eckhart Tolle in the talk that he attended that day. He explains:

Leaving that auditorium, my senses had been amplified – just cranked. And I was hearing everything and I was seeing everything. It was just like my head was this huge hollow space and just open to everything. And totally present – every little thing; every little thought activity. And there was just a knowingness that this is very delicate and so I chose not to go home right after...I had a nice dinner and I

just remember every taste sensation was just – it was like the best meal I had ever eaten in my whole life. And looking around, I had a constant smile on my face – just joy. Just a fascination with what was happening around me...Everything was wide open and I knew that something had changed. It was never going to be the same again. If I could label it, when I quote ‘woke up,’ that was it. And for about four days after that, I was just walking around in a similar state of consciousness.

So it was in this presence that Scott was able to come to his own understanding of awakening and begin to embrace the path at a deeper level. He began to do more meditation – sitting in presence, a form of meditation that Tolle (2003) talks about – and to explore other spiritual traditions. This began to help him to integrate his experience and to broaden his own process.

Jaclyn’s experience was of a spontaneous nature as well. She encountered the darkness of existence and was forced to face the annihilation of her own egoic existence:

I had gone to yoga...during yoga I had this shift – and I’m like, that’s okay, it’s just your Kundalini energy opening up – I was driving home and I was really aware that I was driving home. And I was really aware I was passing the shadows of the trees. And everything was hyper-vigilant. Everything was just so apparent to me. And as this started happening and happening, I got really panicky...really panicky. I remember pulling up to my house and sitting in my car and seeing the blackness and the bleakness and having this huge energy – almost like a separate entity was closing in on me and keeping me and I was completely paralysed in my car. I couldn’t move. I’ll never forget that feeling...it was dark out but I kept

seeing a blackness that was coming over me. I remember reaching for the door and I was finally able to get into the house but I felt this big energy was going to get me. I thought this is it, like, this is it. I was scared of what it was going to do to me. I thought it was going to do something to me. But that's in your mind...I was just panicking.

In this state of panic, Jaclyn was going to an encounter group at the time and was able to surrender to the experience the next day with help from the group members:

I went to group the next day, and I was telling them all about it and I remember [the leader] had facilitated me to see the panic and the blackness and everything like that. But then this time, it was a complete surrender...initially it was panicky and fear...[and then] everything was just vanished. And I was just free-floating in this, in this abyss, darkness, blackness. Nothing was there and it was just so calm and so relaxing and then, it was like – this is me! And that was it! This is me! This is it. I just remember laughing and laughing because it was so ordinary.

So there appears to be many different 'types' and 'levels' of awakening. As Loori (2002) points out, "it seems to me that people train better when they are informed about and clear on what they are doing, especially when the maps are balanced with mysteries" (p. 41).

These experiences speak for themselves and can be seen as individual experiences of the cosmos and what our true Self is. Although John had other, deeper experiences of awakening and no-self, this became a process for him to deepen his understanding and to surrender to the terrifying experience that it was for him at times. The point here is that some of these states, when the experience is interpreted by a mind, can begin to look like

psychosis and insanity; however, they simply are not (Grof & Grof, 1989; Kornfield, 1989).

Welcome to Hell: The Terror of No-Self

Let me offer a warning...the truth won't be what you imagined. It won't even be close. And you may well wish you hadn't chased it so long. But once you find it you will never be able to run away from it again, and you will never be able to hide. You'll have no choice but to face it. (Warner, 2003, p. 9)

Although awakening is supposed to be this great affair which is celebrated and eternal happiness/bliss takes over, it can also be a traumatic process. The human "I" function is a structural part of us and has been for a very long time, and thus when one loses this it can cause a lot of panic and fear (Almaas, 2001; Kornfield, 1993). There can also be a sense of grief as one is literally losing themselves. Although the ego is a construction, there is still a great attachment to it and the mind can sometimes play games and spin out of control, creating the illusion that one doesn't exist at all, beginning to drive the mind to the brink of madness (Kornfield, 1989).

Epstein (1995) provides a great description of how we create the terror with our own minds and are unable to see it. He melds Buddhist and psychoanalytic traditions to explain:

They do not recognize that their torturers are products of their own mind, however. They believe themselves to be tortured by outside forces over which they have no control. At the same time that they are completely dominated by their rage or anxiety, they are cut off from those same emotions they do not see

that those unwanted forces are their own, and they are therefore imprisoned in a cell of their own making. (p. 22)

It is in this place that there is great opportunity for transformation, yet it remains a very terrifying state to have to face. Jaclyn describes this terror in her own words:

I would say consumed and I would say black. It's almost like...a separate entity like in Pac-Man? You know Pac-Man just kind of grabbed every kind of thing. It's like Pac-Man is going to grab and just take you. And take the next person. It's like swallow, like swallow, swallow you up...Well and I don't even know if you can illuminate it well...there's nothing that can describe it. It's just so huge. And there is a home there but there was also this panicky and anxiety and fear and will I ever come back...and after I surrendered – it's almost like – you know in those movies where you see people are like lost in space? And there's the blackness and tiny little people and they are lost in space? That's like how I always think of it. But then there's no person because you're the blackness. It's a terror. You think of even your worst possible feeling or terror around anything, it would be tenfold. It would just be so – you think that your body won't be able to handle it. You think that you'll be mashed down to a puddle of water, and nothing that will ever exist.

It is through this surrender that Jaclyn speaks about that the terror begins to diminish and transform the fear into a more peaceful experience.

Jaclyn was able to work through the experience later on, learning to surrender on a deeper level, coming to an understanding of how it is one's mind that creates this panic. When this foreign state is introduced to the psyche and one is overrun with thoughts

in/about this state that fear can begin to take over, as the state does not make any sense to the cognitive mind.

Part of my own deepening process was having a falling away similar to John, and having to face the fear and madness of that experience. It is a very different place to be as there is no way that you can ever look at the world in the same way, as you are the world, and yet you are still embodied in a human form; form and formlessness. You are out there, and yet, still here. The last line in the Heart Sutra personifies this well:

Gate, gate, paragate, parasamgate, bodhi svaha!

Gone, gone, have gone, altogether have gone.

(cited in Glassman, 2002, p. 66)

In my own experience I did a lot of writing in this state as I felt that it was pertinent to what I was trying to process. I also created a piece of artwork (2006) which remains to be unnamed (see Appendix C) in which, I feel, shows the madness that I was facing at the time. Following is an example of my writing that conveys this terrifying state:

The ground on which I stand is gone, I feel as if I am awake in a dream that will not end, the world in which this body walks. There is no connection with this body, only numbness and uncertainty. No matter how many times I see that people are walking and going about their business, I know that it is not real and that I am beyond all this and so are they. There is no world, there is only an illusion of being on this plane of reality. There is a vast reality that is open to us all right here right now, if we were only to see it. Understand that we are all beyond it all, and that our “self” is a construction of our reality in which we

reassure ourselves that we exist. There is nothing that exists except this...there is only this...and nothing more. (Personal Journal, October, 2006)

In speaking with John about these states, our experiences sound very similar. For John, it became a very intense feeling in which he would lose some of his functioning for periods of time, at times not knowing anyone around him. Right after his first falling away, he explains the panic and disorientation that he felt:

But I remember laying in bed thinking, fuck why won't this go away, blah, blah, blah, and all that. So eventually I somewhat fell asleep. I woke up at five thirty, still pretty messed up. I remember walking into the bathroom to shower and at that time I had lost the ability to move and walk very well. So I didn't know if I was going to make it out of the bathroom...well, that's what I thought anyway. So I thought, well I gotta get this together. I managed to be able to walk out of the bathroom, walked back to the room, dressed and stuff, tried to eat but I couldn't really concentrate very well, and I walked to the unit and I think...somehow I managed to get through the unit that day.

For John that was not the end, there was to follow from this experience years of fear and terror. Coming back that weekend to his house and seeing his wife was a very difficult thing for him to do; just when he thought that it would get easier, by coming home, it got a lot worse:

So I remember walking into the room and instantaneously I had a huge expansion again and just wanted to leave. I remember my youngest daughter being on the steps, she was on the stairs crawling down, and she was probably only...she could walk so she would have been seventeen months and I remember her toddling over

and my wife turning around on the couch and the kids saying, 'Hi.' What came to mind for me right away was, 'I don't know these people.' So that's pretty shocking. Who are they? Who am I? I don't really know you, but I do know you, but I don't really know you; so that was very hard, to not say anything. But they didn't know...And that was hard because I was always very close with my family and stuff so that was when things really started to unravel for me in the sense of...you know, we talk about the idea of existentialism and aloneness and death and meaninglessness and all that kind of stuff...and at that point I think things worsened in the sense of...for me there was no support anywhere because I wasn't going to tell anyone what was going on for me. Because at that time I was going to school, my wife was tired of me going to school and she had...because basically, the whole time she said that I had changed so much in six months that she didn't know me anymore.

Although taking pharmaceutical drugs may have helped slow down John's symptoms and fears, he never did go to the doctor; although, he stated on many points in the interviews that he was not far away from declaring himself insane and going to the doctor for help. As many teachers and psychologists interested in this phenomenon are finding, there are many different issues that can arise for people on the spiritual path, and although John was not on a traditional spiritual path his experiences were very similar (Almaas, 2001; Grof & Grof, 1989; Kornfield, 1993, 2002).

For John, he experienced a lot of angst and terror about what may be around the corner, not knowing his family, and not knowing himself. He explains in his own words:

I remember waking up in the middle of the night – and this is the whole witness capacity, because I remember rolling over in sheer fucking panic, waking up. Not knowing my name, rolling over and not remembering her name [his wife's]. At all. Interestingly enough though, it wasn't like I woke up and then I was panicked. It was like I was already there. So the thing is...everybody talks about panic attacks, but my heart wasn't beating, wasn't anything like that. So a piece of me kept me there. But I remember flying into the bathroom and looking in the mirror and not really knowing who was looking back at me...I went back into the room and I managed to get back to sleep. So if you analyse it from that perspective, somebody, something was still there. But that happened to me a few more times...So I stayed away from mirrors for a couple of years after that because when I looked in the mirror there were these eyes, a vacant-ness, and so I needed to work that through.

These experiences can create immense terror in an individual and make it very difficult to carry on day-to-day existence. I know that, in these states, I even thought of suicide, but realized how ridiculous that was. How can killing the body in which there exists no-self end any terror? There seems to be no way out, only a way through. John also spoke about this, reflecting on his ideas regarding terror:

But there was times, I remember, when I would get to the madness and – and the reason why I think a person might kill themselves is because you can't handle it all after that. And you can't get outside your mind as much so it gets to the point where it is so obliterated but then when you come out of it you can start to see it.

As when he began to ‘see it’ and unpack what was going on for him he started to see that maybe he was creating it and had to face it head on:

I hadn’t realised that nothing was really going on. I didn’t realise that I was making it all up...And, since I had read so many fantasy books when I was young, the idea that there was magic became, to me, in my mind at that time, would twist it and would say to itself, ‘Well, you’ve always wanted to find a world that was different than this one, now you have to deal with what you found.’ And the idea of the seeker and the idea of some of the reference around that to the narcissist at the time, before I figured out maybe that was part of it...the idea of the fearlessness, the idea of seeking a person who’s that, fearless, right? And so I knew that I had to defeat the fear or else I was pretty much going to be in a prison.

Coming from this state, John began to seek out an answer and try to find a solution for his new-found conscious reality of no-self and non-locality.

Struggling with learning to exist in this state, a seeker was born. This is the major difference between John’s experience and the majority of the literature out there; John experienced the spontaneous falling away of self and then began seeking to make sense of the experience. For the vast majority of individuals it happens in the reverse, and thus most have an idea of what is unfolding for them during this process. John had no idea of what it was that was going on, and he intended to find out. The next major theme begins to illuminate the role of teachers on the path and how they can help or hinder the individual.

The Wonderful Land of Oz: Pointing to the Answer Within

There is no perfect teacher...the point is to make a sincere effort to become a perfect student of an imperfect teacher. (Fujita, cited in Sluyter, 2001, p. 59)

In the classic tale of the *Wizard of Oz* (LeRoy, 2005) an interesting parallel to the spiritual path can be made. The tin man, Dorothy, the scarecrow, and the cowardly lion set out on a journey to find what they feel they are missing, trudging down the long path of “the yellow brick road.” It can be seen in the end of the classic tale, the wizard does not actually give the four individuals anything that they did not already have within themselves. Thus, within this framework, a teacher’s role is very similar to that of the wizard of Oz. It can be seen that the student is looking for something that is already within, hidden beneath the veil of egoic functioning. The teacher’s function is to point and direct one to this truth and assist the practitioner in peeling back these layers.

When further unpacking the role of a teacher on the spiritual path, we must revisit the reality that we are taking an Eastern tradition and bringing it to the West (in what this thesis is looking at). While in the majority of Eastern spiritual traditions the concept of the teacher/guru is a very important one – as we have already seen in the literature review – and can often be the clarification of whether the student is awake or not (Papaji, 1995; Wilber, 1986); it is not necessarily the same in the West (Brazier, 2001; Preece, 2006). As Preece (2006) states:

The position of the guru in Eastern religious traditions carries with it many factors that could be highly questionable when transported to the West.... We may need to consider the psychological consequence of a teacher brought up in a rarefied

prescriptive world, viewed as some kind of special being, moving to a culture that does not have the same social and ethical base. (p. 157)

Although this can be seen as more of an issue from the past, it still occurs and can cause some problems with teaching Western students, while in some communities there is no issue at all. There are many Western teachers now that have been trained in the East and come back to the West and therefore, have some understanding of the Western psyche and some of the unique issues that are found in the Western ego development (Welwood, 2002). And yet there are still issues (i.e., Osel Tenizin²⁴) and abuses in these traditions similar to the scandals that surface in politics or the Roman Catholic Church. This has forced American Buddhist teachers like Phillip Kapleau (2000, 2001) to write widely on ethics and morality within the tradition and Kornfield (1993) to outline a specific code of ethics for meditation teachers. Many others have commented on these issues as well (Falk, 2005; Fields, 1992; Warner, 2003; Wilson, 2000).

So one can ask: “What is the role of a guru in the realm of spiritual development?” Brazier (2001) comments on what he sees the fundamental function of a teacher, through the lens of Buddhism, “the common course of this relationship is that it is one in which all the trainee disciple’s habitual patterns of dependency – inadequacy, blaming, pride, stubbornness and so on – encounter the teacher’s unwillingness to cooperate with inauthenticity” (p. 179). Thus, the teacher serves more of a psychological function than anything, and Brazier also comments on the fact that a lot of ‘true teachers’ had very few trainees due to the challenging nature of looking very deeply into one’s self. Brazier goes on to touch on what he sees as part of the issue here in the West with the function of gurus/teachers:

Modern people have particular difficulties understanding this relationship. They easily swing to extremes. Either they dismiss the whole idea in the name of individualism – ‘everything I need to know is already inside me, therefore I need nobody.’ Or they fall into a slavish, irresponsible adulation – ‘My guru is everything and I am nothing.’ Neither of these attitudes is adult...Buddhist training is a matter of realising true autonomy. Put simply: it is a matter of growing up. (p. 179)

Although this looks into Buddhism specifically – which varies from sect to sect, i.e., the Tibetan tradition holds that the teacher is the path in many ways (Preece, 2006) – the importance of the guru/teacher is seen earlier (see Chapter 2) looking at the Advaitan tradition as well (Hodgkinson, 2006; Oxtoby, 1996). The teacher seems to hold a pivotal role for the practitioner in all traditions, even in Christianity, historically; the priest or minister is the individual who can provide you with God’s guidance (Freke & Gandy, 2001). Although the teacher does not have to be an individual, it can be anything or anybody. As Sluyter (2001) points out:

Not all teachers have formal status as coaches, professors, priests, rabbis, or Zen masters. They may be friends, enemies, lovers, animals, rocks, trees, jobs, situations, even characters in books...they can be the accidental teachers who teach by negative example – whose patterns of confusion show us what to avoid. We can be deeply grateful to such people for suffering so that we may be free. (pp. 61-62)

Thus, it is within the idea of openness, not stubbornness, that one must look towards teachers on the path for help in his/her own quest to awaken. There are many stories,

particularly in the Zen Buddhist tradition, that outline each and every moment as a teacher (Cleary, 2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2002b). And when one becomes mature enough and begins to embody non-dual living, every moment must become the teacher, as form moves into formlessness and the teachers are endless. Each and every interaction that occurs in one's life can provide individuals with a mirror into his/her own being for guidance. An inanimate object like a book can provide many different opportunities for such an opening. Allowing a dialog between reader and text to unfold in the hermeneutic circle (see Chapter 3), allowing the opportunity to dialog with such great masters as Dogen, Gautama Buddha, Chuang Tzu, and Nisargadatta.

For John, it became a fascination with different texts and authors on the path (Almaas, 1988, 2001; Kornfield, 1993; Levine, 1987; Tolle, 1997) that began to help him to negotiate some of the fear and intensity that he was feeling. This began to provide him with some answers in his quest, allowing for deep insights to unfold as he also began to practice some of the meditations and integrate some of this knowledge into his own life.

Textual Masters: Transformational Interpretations

Jesus said, 'Whoever drinks from my mouth will become like me; I myself shall become that person, and the hidden things will be revealed to that person.'

(Gospel of Thomas, cited in Sluyter, 2001, p. 73)

With the ability to question and look deeply within one's own psyche, individuals can actually dialog with some of the various gurus and masters whose words and writings have been recorded over the years. It is our own interpretation of how things relate back to our egoic structure that can create a window to go beyond the normal informative reading. And yet, it is only if they are totally honest with themselves as they dialog with

these books that individuals can begin to have an honest dialog with the text as well.

Texts that I have read over the years have provided me with a lot of insight into my own process and the process that I must face if I am to deepen my own conscious awareness.

Although it seemed that all co-researchers had had many insights arise from his/her reading (i.e. Jaclyn spoke generally about the impact of tantric teachings/readings on her life), John spoke specifically about how his reading had affected him intimately.

John's first experiences with a teacher, after his falling away, was with texts, books that seemed to point to a different reality than him just being crazy. A few days after his egoic fall, he went to the library to find some of Guntrip's (1969) work on schizoid personality states and instead came across a book written by S. Rinpoche (1994) entitled, *The Tibetan Book of the Living and Dying*. He recalls his experience with that book:

...if we were to go back there tomorrow I could locate that book for you just by where it was on the shelf. It was the beginning of the beginning of the turning point for me. At that time it wasn't enough to change my understanding, though. I remember getting that book and I remember coming home and I remember where I was reading it because I was sitting in the loveseat, the couch and I came across this passage in the book...and basically it was describing exactly what happened to me, and continuously experiencing here and everywhere. And I'm thinking to myself...how can that make any sense for me? And so in that moment, 20 percent of me thought maybe I'm not going mad.

Another book that seemed to ease John's mind a little was one he had received from a friend earlier and which he had previously never looked at. It was a book by Osho

(1999) – a controversial mystic from India, also known as Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh – to which he found simplistic and almost intrinsic to his way of being already. John explains in his own words:

...Osho was pretty basic. I thought all that stuff when I was six or seven years old. And here's this crazy mystic talking about freedom and I thought to myself, well, I could have wrote this. Easily. This is nothing new, this is stuff I've been talking about since I was really young...That changed things a little bit. It helped me a little bit to sort of think that maybe I was going to be able to continue my existence in the world without having to do something drastic or be put in the padded cell.

It was for him a way to be able to connect with this phenomenon without knowing any spiritual teachers or having done a formal or informal practice. It became a way for him to understand what it was, which began the unfolding of self, although it took a long time for him to be truly convinced that he was not crazy. In my own experience, I have had no formal teacher either and began to see the realities that were provided in some of the texts, for the first while – going back to my witnessing state that occurred in college – and I found the texts and traditions very helpful, if only to give some of these experiences a language and a way in which to speak about the experiences that I was having. Some of John's most significant experiences were those of coming to an intuitive knowledge of what is and beginning to integrate that into his daily life.

John was able to connect with an individual (Dennis) who began to show him that his experience was of having no-self, to which he would not accept in the beginning of their conversations. However, Dennis did possess a vast library of books on the subject

and John began to look more for an answer to his lived reality of the formless in those texts:

I started reading everything on his shelf, trying to get through this and that. So then I became really intent on trying to break free of my suffering. And I really started seeking, but it was to the point where it was driving me mad. I was exhausted but I couldn't stop trying to be okay; and still thinking that I was the answer, still coming up with these grand delusions for myself.

It was this seeking that fuelled the fire in John's belly to feel peace and be free of suffering. John wanted to find an answer and he was going to do it himself. Although, Dennis had begun to do some work with John around trying to help him merge some of his experiences, John still felt that he could find the answer on his own. He read a lot of books and took a lot from them, as they explained some of his experiences in graphic detail (Almaas, 2001). He even began to have experiences surface for him when he was reading some of the books:

I remember I read *The Heart Sutra* and I got through that really quickly but then I started to get into the formlessness stuff and I tried to piece some of that together. I remember having one experience one night reading that book where....It was like everything went sort of blank and I witnessed, sort of the entire globe and I witnessed, it was kind of like the globe was breathing through me and that was pretty neat. It was scary at first and then I got this warmth and I hadn't felt that kind of peace – this is the first time I have ever had any real peace or warmth come through. Before it was all loss of self and so for about three or four hours, it was just the first real blissful experience. And then I thought, well, this is it. I got

it all figured out; nothing to worry about anymore. But that helped in a sense because it was like, well there is some sense to this, it's all not going to be crazy and nuts.

John was able to get a lot out of the texts that he read and would practice some of Levine's meditations (1982, 1987, 1989). This allowed him to embody the experience more and to be more grounded; to reflect on Kornfield's *Path of the Heart* (1993) showing him the need for more loving-kindness; and bring in Almaas's working with narcissism (1988, 2001); giving him more of an idea of what was going on for him and connecting with the text on an intuitive level. Things would just begin to resonate deep within and come clean in his mind, a contemplative path, with the text being the teacher began to guide him.

Although none of the other co-researchers spoke too specifically about the authors and texts that had created turning points for them, they all identified some of the teachings that had resonated with them and the importance of these in his/her own life on the path. For example, Scott's experience with Tolle's book *The Power of Now* (1996). Scott also identified with listening to dharma talks or satsangs on tape as being a part of his spiritual practice. Scott also names different teachers and gurus which he identifies as having had, and continuing to have, an impact on his life. The next theme points to the possible need for contact with individuals who are deep in his/her own process, or gurus, on the path.

Intoxicated With the Guru

People project a great deal onto their teachers. A good image for understanding this is that of falling in love. We 'fall in love' with spiritual teachers. We seek a place for love,

perfect goodness, and perfect justice, and in longing for it so deeply, we project it onto another person.

(Kornfield, 1993, p. 260)

Scott spoke of Tolle being one of his major teachers, mainly through Tolle's books and talks that Scott would read/listen to at night. Scott has met many other teachers on the path and has dialogued with many of them. Meeting his first non-dual teacher – Pamela Wilson – he began to come to a greater understanding of what it was that was unfolding for him and how to connect with her on a deeper level. He describes this in his own words:

[I] walked in the front door and looked over at the couch and instantly knew that she was – that this woman on the couch was the teacher. That is her. That is this person I am here to see. And that's when I was first introduced to satsang...so it was like question and answer and she very much brought people back into their bodies. Like someone would go up and say, I'm feeling this tightness in my heart, this anger. And she would lead them inside and have this inner dialogue with the feeling, the contraction, welcoming it and having dialogue and allowing it to actually loosen up and reveal itself as another aspect of love and self; and in doing that, liberating it from its forms, its role, that was given to it by us...Like, oh my god, how many people you read a book, you actually get to meet them or talk to them or give them a huge hug? It was a recognition of this is someone who's deeply in touch with spirit – like basically ask spirit a question, right now, what would I ask? And just that license, that freedom to communicate directly with presence.

This text points to a divide between Scott and Pamela, which can be harmful and slow individuals on the path down by not allowing them to own his/her own energy (Almaas, 2001, 2004; Kopp, 1972; Warner, 2003, 2007; Welwood, 2002; Wilber, 1986). Although a guru may or may not be awake, there is also a semblance of owning what one can. One has to recognize that although a guru/teacher may bring an individual closer to the truth by his/her teachings, it is only through the seeker's own effort – or abandonment of effort – that he or she can come to know the truth. A guru can point to the truth, but he or she can not hand it to the individual. That is solely one's own responsibility. As Kopp (1972) states:

The truth does not make people free. Facts do not change attitudes. If the guru is dogmatic, all that he evokes in his pilgrim/disciples is their stubbornly resistant insistence on clinging to those unfortunate beliefs that at least provide the security of known misery, rather than openness to the risk of the unknown or the untried. (p. 13)

By giving one person all of your power it can free the egoic self from narcissism, but it can also create a reliance on another for everything, rendering the seeker unable to do much without his/her blessing. This is similar to Carl Jung's work on transference/counter-transference²⁵ (Jung, 1971; Mattoon, 1985; Singer, 1989). If these issues are not addressed it can become harmful to the student/individual. This is not to say that a community is not helpful, and nor to say that a teacher or guru is not helpful; I am just pointing to the fact that an individual must cross the abyss and experience the void of his/her own accord (Almaas, 1988, 2001, 2004; Kopp, 1972; Maharaj, 1996; Sahn, 1997, 2006; Welwood, 2002). There is no solace from suffering when one sees

another who is free and awake; it is one's own subjective experience that has to be touched by the same thing. Knowledge is not experience (Almaas, 1988, 2001, 2004; Maharaj, 1996; Sahn, 1997, 2006; Sosan, 2002).

Scott mentioned many different people whom he identified specifically as teachers/gurus/mentors; he, also, identified one of the individuals who teaches satsang with him as his *dharma brother*. Thus, for Scott, there is a strong spiritual community in which he is involved. But to surround yourself in only *spiritual* things/people/teachings can lead to materialism and can be a way to hide from the suffering that is a part of life (Almaas, 2001, 2004; Bayda, 2003; Carroll, 2004; Chodron, 2003a, 2003b; Welwood, 2002). It can be a façade and a way to create an illusion of everything being spiritual and good, as you may be able to create an environment in which you never really have to look deeper into the process and have people validate that process for you (Trungpa, 1973, 2004). There is a denial of life as it is (Bayda, 2003; Kornfield, 1993, 2000; Maharaj, 1996; Trungpa, 1973, 2004). As Kornfield (1993) states:

Since beginning to teach, I've seen how many other students misunderstand spiritual practice, how many have hoped to use it to escape from their lives, how many have used its ideals and language as a way to avoid the pains and difficulties of human existence as I tried to do, how many have entered temples, churches, and monasteries looking for the special effects. (p. 6)

Although Jaclyn did not specifically identify any struggles with idealized transference or with a teacher/guru, an individual (Jerry) became her teacher on the path. This opened her up to a deeper understanding of some of the solidified attachments within her psyche (Almaas, 1988, 2001), issues in *spiritual materialism/bypass* (Trungpa,

1973; Welwood, 2002), and enabled her to find the encounter group that she would attend for many years. Through her experience of coming to surrender in the encounter group, she identifies this individual as a pivotal part of the process for her, “I went to group the next day, and I was telling them all about it and I remember [the leader] had facilitated me to see the panic and the blackness.” Meeting an individual who lived in her building, Jaclyn began to have conversations with him, and later he introduced her to her new teacher:

I met Jerry and that was all right and everything like that and the person that kind of introduced all this for me was Bill. He and I lived in the same building as one another; he lived upstairs, I lived downstairs. He would always come down and talk to me about this and kind of like – but it was more like he started challenging me on my narcissistic games and all this kind of stuff.

After meeting Jerry, Jaclyn began to go and talk to him more and began to become more interested in the encounter groups that he was having with Bill and a few others:

I remember one day there was a non-dual group happening, right? And I wanted to become a part of it, so I kept asking and they kept, no. Not a direct no, but an indirect no. And then one day, myself and Jerry and Bill and [another individual] were in Jerry’s office and I’ll never forget this moment – he said, he said, yes, okay, you can come. And I just hit the floor in a second flat. And I was just like, because it was like, intense terror and fear just came right over me. And I just thought what have I done?

Jaclyn began to work through some of her issues with sexual addictive behaviours, being called on some of the games she played in the group. She recalls what the first group and subsequent groups were like for her:

What I remember is it was full of men. And so it was the perfect opportunity for me to use my sex gig. And I was the only female. And I'm the only female that was allowed into this group. So, for probably the first six to eight months, I was just like blah, blah. I had one group experience that was quite intense. But most of the energy shift happened to me outside of group.

The group seemed to have been transformational for her, and although she does not identify many experiences from the group, they still came outside of the group process.

These groups/satsangs/dharma talks seem to bring people together and depending on the ability of the members to challenge one another can be a very transformational way to process deep inner attachments and psycho-spiritual struggles in general. As John points out:

Basically when you are in a community – but I think when you are going through this, I think you could go through it a lot quicker if you had actually had a group of people that were supportive and it wasn't all about – I could have fried my brain going through it by myself...there were times when I was going completely mad that it didn't matter what I read. Because what would happen was my mind would terrorise that, too. And I don't know what kept me there, what kept me sane. But when I came back to it...I could never really be honest with Dennis because I just couldn't for some reason. Because I didn't know if he would make fun of me or he didn't really provide a holding enough environment for me. It

didn't quite work that way. So I hated him for that. But at the same time, there was some hate there that made some sense now. But to have that reassurance that you can fall apart and you are going to go to pieces but you're not.

Thus, although a teacher can play a pivotal role in one's developmental process, there must also be a transcendence of the student-teacher relationship, creating no divide and duality between the two, as each individual is ultimately alone on this journey and can only receive support in the form of a "finger pointing to the moon, not the moon itself."

Burning Through Idealized Transference

No teacher or outside authority can give us the truth or take it away. In the end we will find that our heart holds the simple wisdom and unshakable compassion that we have sought all along.

(Kornfield, 2000, p. 156)

The teacher/guru relationship, for some, can become a love/hate relationship, much like what can occur in psychotherapy and through assisting others in working with their own deep attachments. It has already been identified how teachers/gurus can be very challenging and embody what they feel the practitioner needs at the time, whether that is unconditional love, or a breaking away of ego (Kornfield, 1993). And for some in the Western world, it is just too much to put all their trust in one individual due to their own egoic tendencies. Kornfield explains:

...[students] who cannot accept that someone might actually know more than they do. They find it hard to let themselves be taught by anyone...often this attitude stems from unfinished problems with authority figures, and shows itself as the

inability to be at ease in different roles, at times the inability to learn as a student and at other times to be comfortable as a teacher. (p. 232)

For John this seemed to happen for him in his relationship with Dennis when he started to work through some of his struggles with him, not totally trusting his insights and his *reads* on some of John's attachments. John also attended an encounter group for a few years as well, but had very different struggles than Jaclyn. He explains further:

At this time I knew that this was the group, we were on a path of enlightenment, but you see I didn't really try to make friends or try to connect with people to support me because the way they talked and the way they talked about things – the way I perceived it was that they were all – I was never really a seeker – they were all on this path and they all talked about this and that, but to me it was completely fake. Because nobody could describe to me the experiences that I was having, not even close.

There was also part of John that was still very narcissistic and looking to prove something to the world; he also possessed a well developed intuitive sense and was able to read people quite well, seeing what some of their deep wounds/core issues were. When first meeting Dennis, he began to pick up on some of Dennis's unresolved childhood wounds as well; this may have created a barrier in which John was never able to trust Dennis fully. John recalls:

...the first time I encountered Dennis but didn't really make any connection with him that day. He was interesting. There was something about him that I was attracted to....So I wasn't quite sure of all of this and for some reason I could also pick up on Dennis's unresolved childhood issues. For some reason there was a

sense of...yeah, he knew something but I also knew something about him that he wasn't aware of. I made sure I drove that home over the next few years.

John's 'know it all' attitude seemed to be a big barrier for him to begin to see things in a deeper way and to surrender to the process. He would have problems with Dennis and also have issues with seeing things as they were and not placing huge judgements onto them; in turn creating more drama and fear for himself. For example, John talks a little about Dennis and the group:

...it was interesting because the meetings with Dennis, we had some huge battles. Because he sort of thought that he knew what was going on for me so it was basically...he would challenge me and stuff and so that was when I really started working on my object relation stuff with my dad, trying to get to that piece. And then so that continued...all these people [in group] they seem like they are pretty unhealthy to me. And I wasn't really allowing people to have their path and it was an all or nothing thing. And I had to learn that lesson on a regular basis that year.

Throughout these battles, John seemed to get to a greater place of understanding where he was able to begin to see a lot of his own issues and work through them. It would not be long before Dennis was to get energetically over-inflated – becoming very manic and high on energy in a deep merging with the void – which, in turn, created a break from reality in which he was hospitalized. John recalls going to see him in the hospital and beginning to work through his idealized transference with his teacher:

I was starting to wonder about the idea of the perfect teacher. So this is when I started to realise that the self, no self, didn't really matter anymore. And I wasn't trying to figure that out anymore and the whole idea of...the whole Zen thing

about the mountains and the whole shift and I started to understand all that. And then I started to see Dennis for who he was. And so then I could let go of him being the idealised teacher. And I could let go of needing him to be that; and hating him for not being that. And we had to work that through at the bar one night where we got into a big, big hoorah, with everybody around us – we had a forty-five minute argument, me and him. And then I just started to love him for who he was and then realising I didn't like seeing him in the psych ward all messed up and realising, well, you know everybody has their foibles...And so seeing that and trying to figure out what that all meant and realising, okay, this is just another person.

Through this experience, John began to see Dennis for what he was, just another individual on the path, and began to drop some of his judgements of who Dennis really was, in his own mind. This enabled him to become more open to the process and begin to work through more of his own object-relations and embrace the path on a deeper level. But there was still a lot of spiritual maturing and deepening of the process that needed to unfold for him. The next major theme delineates the lived-experience of various pitfalls, struggles, and spiritual maturation on the path; as well as outlining the difficulties and lessons that can be learned in a relationship on the path, moving toward the experience of embracing non-duality in day-to-day life.

Finding a Lotus in the Muddy Waters of Life

The human mind has absolute freedom as its true nature. There are thousands upon thousands of students who have practiced meditation and obtained this realization...if you can't find truth where you are, where else do you expect to find it?

(Dogen, cited in Kornfield, 2000, p. 61)

From a Buddhist perspective, to have an experience of awakening is just another way to open up into the process of becoming free from the cyclical births of suffering, *samsara*. As Levine (2002) points out, every moment becomes another way to develop our capacity for awakening:

To awaken is to become aware. To become aware is to put that awareness to work on the further awakenings that lead toward liberation. We are born with a mind that needs watching. They cannot be left unattended. It constantly wanders off, attracted by nearly any shiny object...the mind changes itself. (p. 81)

Thus, for the serious practitioner on the path, it becomes a re-visitation to *track* (keep in one's conscious awareness) patterns of neurosis, narcissism, and attachments. This is where the path becomes inseparable from day-to-day life. It is the place in which every moment of every day offers a chance to work through and embody the truth that has been understood through the experiences and insights that have previously unfolded. As Kornfield (1993) points out:

Letting go and moving through life from one change to another brings the maturing of our spiritual being. In the end we discover that to love and let go can be the same thing. Both ways do not seek to possess. Both allow us to touch each

moment of this changing life and allow us to be there fully for whatever arises next. (p. 15)

Beginning to embrace what life can provide as an opportunity for growth in each and every moment, one can become an embodiment of *bodhichitta*.²⁶ Embodiments of what the path 'is,' there is no longer exists a separation between the path and awakening; they are inseparable. The path is the goal.

Yet, this is a constant process, and one may be amazed at all the unfinished business that may arise, when they feel that they have it all worked out. I know this first hand, having to continually reflect on the same issues over and over again. The cunning ego seems to reconstruct and create the same issues monotonously, further solidifying one's narcissistic tendencies and the illusion of having an answer. As Bradbury (cited in Kornfield, 1993) states, "sometimes I think I understand everything. Then I regain consciousness" (p. 230). Many traditions ask the practitioner to come to a state of no-knowing, while embracing a childlike love for the world and all that is in it. Love and compassion naturally arise from embracing the reality of the interconnectedness. It is not very hard to come from a place of interconnectedness when there remains an ability to see this very clearly in one's life. Ingram (2003) explains:

We look into the eyes of another creature, human or not, and we see there the timeless quality of being. We notice the plant pushing up out of the sidewalk and immediately feel the same force of life that we ourselves embody. Even the cement through which the plant pushed reflects a dance of molecules, just as we reflect a dance of molecules moving in and out of our bodies. The people who are starving in poisoned deserts, the dying seabirds covered in oil from a spill, and the

loggers cutting down the last of the old growth trees out of fear for their own economic survival are not just some other creatures; they are us. (p. 73)

And yet, re-visiting to this reality over and over again, coming back to the present moment, may be required to learn this difficult lesson. For many this continual return to the moment – in a vulnerable, open state of mind – can assist them in working through deep issues that may arise in the mind and deepens this never-ending process. In this light, the path can be gruelling at times and present challenges that seem to dominate our awareness until it is worked through or we take whatever opportunity that we are being pointed to. The next theme outlines the realities of relationship on the path.

Living as One with Another: The Difficulty of Relationship

How can we hope to create a better world if we can't even relate to our partner when we come home at night? (Welwood, 2002, p. 291)

The path of relationships is a difficult one as an individual is essentially trying to connect with another and yet there remains a realization that everything, including one's own body, and one's partner are that other. The ego can begin to get enthralled by the idea of spiritual materialism and create a division in the relationship. This can lead to many problems within relationships and within one's lived experience. Ingram (2003) points out, "in awakened awareness it is understood that we are each, though unique expressions of one source, totally alone. It is the paradox of existence: no two alike, yet no two at all" (p. 90). The unique aspect of relationships on the path presents many different challenges, some which have already been identified in this writing.

One's relationships can open up many opportunities to see various areas in which a re-visitation to the process is needed. This is apparent in Welwood's (1990, 1997, 2002) work on relationships. He explains the struggle in his own words (Welwood, 2003):

The hard truth is that spiritual realizations often do not heal our deep wounding in the area of love, or translate readily into skilful communication or interpersonal understanding. As a result, many spiritual practitioners – teachers and students alike – either withdraw from engaging in personal, intimate relationships at all, or else wind up having the same relational difficulties that everyone else has. Even though they may have a loving, compassionate intention toward all beings, most modern spiritual practitioners nonetheless continue to act out unconscious relational patterns developed in childhood. (p. 17)

Therefore, Welwood makes a case for the spiritual path to involve an intimate relationship. Such relationships can make it impossible to live in one's own world of habitual patterns from childhood. They provide a mirror in which to view some of the work that one must contemplate. These challenges are unique to this relational-path outlined by Welwood (2002); he points out:

While it is important to respect our needs...we must also be able to let go of being too identified with them...While we must be able to meet another with engagement and commitment (form), we must also be able to let go of the relationship, drop all our agendas and ideas about it, and give the connection room to ebb and flow as it may (emptiness). (pp. 242-243)

One is given the unique task of balancing form with formless emptiness that also embodies one's form. It is a difficult task and is, understandably, an influential reason why many choose not to be in a relationship while engaging in such practice.

The *other* in the relationship can act as a mirror for awakened consciousness and bring to light one's own glaring issues, acting somewhat like a *sangha*²⁷ on a microcosmic level (Welwood, 1990, 1997, 2002). Unless an individual turns a blind eye to what his/her partner is mirroring back, one is forced to face the habitual patterns in order to deepen, not only an intimate connection within the relationship, but also the connection with 'true nature' or awakened being (Welwood, 2002). Welwood (1997) expands:

We often don't see that how we relate to another inevitably follows from how we relate to ourselves, that our outer relationships are but an extension of our inner life, that we can only be as open and present with another as we are with ourselves. (p. xi)

Thus, it is through the relationships in an individual's life that can mirror to many what it is that needs to be seen.

Although only two of the three co-researchers were in relationships at the time of the interviews, they all found that it had a significant impact on their lives and in their process. For Jaclyn, although she was not in a relationship at the time of the interview, she felt a lot of pressure from family-orientated people at work. She expands on this:

I work with a lot of females and males that are really family-oriented and really put their projections on me – that I'm a single female and I'm incomplete because I don't have a significant other. And well what do I do on the weekends, and they

project their own loneliness onto you. I know that that's something that can get me right out it – and I've got to watch that because I will start grabbing onto their projections and start owning them and I will do that – and then all of a sudden that message will come up as, 'is there something wrong with me?' How come – oh my god, there's something wrong with me. And then it will come, oh Jaclyn, it's because all this stuff you did as a kid and whatever, so that's what – karma is coming back to bite you in the butt. And it's like, wait a second! Slow down...oh here you are. You quite enjoy this.

Although there may be an enjoyment of being alone often, if one is to be vulnerable and embrace the humanity of an embodied life, one can see that there may be a split in many ways, similarly to Jaclyn. It is difficult to say whether what begins to be embraced is the truth being mirrored back, or something that would like to be avoided. This is in relation to each and every individual on the path as the psyche is very cunning and can be very convincing when uttering self professions of integrity (Almaas, 2001). And yet, is it that one is truly enjoying aloneness, when some of our fears are thrown back towards the psyche? Or that there is a false ego defence, building a wall to hold out the truth and just pretending to enjoy it, in order to not face the reality of being afraid of feeling the loneliness?

One of the *goals* of living in Western society is to get married, buy a house, and have 2 ½ children, which is the tale to have been told, so the myth goes, that it will be fulfilling (Schlosser, 2003). And although one may not accept this, there is still a deep conditioning that is engrained in, North Americans, and makes it difficult to make this distinction between what is being experienced and what the mind says (Wilber, 2001).

And when one is 'blown wide open' in consciousness, it can be hard to relate to another person, whoever that may be. In those times ego inflation may occur along with a feeling of being beyond humanness, and yet there can still be an attachment to form. This is a true difficulty and a big struggle for many along the path in today's Western world (Preece, 2006; Welwood, 2002).

In John's case he struggled with his relationship for many years after his falling away of self. He began to try to *convert* his wife to a path and help her to understand what was going on for him. Although this was something that I also could relate to and spoke with John in quite some depth about, it is obvious that an individual can only point in the direction of the path, he or she can not create it for another. There is no control in anything, this is part of the development of basic trust in the universe that Almaas (1998) speaks of.

The reasons why one may want his/her significant other to be on the path, although it may seem a worthy thing to do, may be rooted in selfishness. One may not feel as alone and isolated, no longer having to face some of the existential questions that may still crop up in one's mind if there is also a partner living the path as well. Our partners may begin to see more of what they need to own, in turn providing validation in a different way; creating a diversion from the reality of responsibility. But the stark truth is that there must be a continuation and a working through of attachments, the process coming through more clearly. One cannot rely on others to begin to change and provide these opportunities. Individuals must trudge on no matter what, if they are to live the path.

At first John felt that his wife was angry at him for making some of the radical shifts that he did. This would be the spark that started many fights. He explains:

But [my wife], to me, I always thought that she always...because I guess it was a radical shift in the way I see things and who I was in some ways...that I thought that she sort of held that against me. So we had a lot of fights sometimes about the change and I never really told her about how I really felt, that she had...I thought that she had purposely done that. So I kind of resented her for actually thinking that this was all about me. And in some ways, she said, well, we changed our life, we went to school because you wanted to, we never really talked about it. And looking back on it, before I went to college, we talked a little bit about it, but for me, it was like she always threw it in my face, it was just basically about me. So then I started to have to look at maybe how selfish I was. And I had to start realising that yeah...basically we did give up a lot for me to go to school. And how life had changed, and basically it was a lot about me, it wasn't a lot about our relationship and about her. So at that time, we were struggling quite a bit in some ways. There was a lot of distance between us.

John began to think that an easy way to connect and a way that his wife could find her own way out of suffering was for her to find a path. He explains:

...and [I] wanted to get her to understand to see all this and I tried to force her into it, but I didn't realise that I created a lot of distance between us. And so I had to start to look at that kind of stuff, a little bit more seriously.

It was in this place that John began to see that there was a need to let the idea of path go and in turn create more peace for himself. He began to see that the more involved he was

in trying to change his wife and get her to understand, the more self came back creating a need to reflect even deeper on his own process. He explains:

...my life at that time was really establishing more a sense of peace, becoming more – I guess probably more honest with myself about things, letting go, trying to get my wife to see where I was at or what I was experiencing and that helped lots too. Because that really allowed me to not be preoccupied with trying to change her – because I realized that just wasn't going to happen. Oh we would get in arguments once in a while or else I get into a tirade once in a while and I realized most of this was just sort of bullshit. But it's difficult. You want to share something you think you've understood but you don't really realize that that is more *you* being involved again. So the relationship piece – we definitely improved our relationship in that way.

John's wife had something very interesting to say to him when this all began for him, in a symbolic comment that was to later manifest in his life. He explains:

I think at the same time, things between [my wife] and I, things started to change because I dropped trying to push this journey on her. I started to see – and it was interesting because I remember her telling me...when things were really messed up for me, she goes to me, 'you know you're going to come to a point where you are going to come back to the same place you started.'...this whole journey is a curse in some ways because ultimately I think that's what it really is. But I think for people who, like us, this is our turning of the wheel and we're in a different place, we're cursed because we can't do anything about it.

In this curse, the questioning individuals who are seekers struggle to know more and move further along in the process. The seeker is cursed as he/she does not seem to be able to go any other way in life, the drive to *know* more seems to be too strong and thus are destined, in some ways, to continue trudging the path. As for someone like John's wife, life seems to be simple and she seems to be able to find joy in the little things without having to question and undertake a path, in John's mind. Just living for what is in front of her and not really seeing a need to question things around her.

My own experience has been similar to John's in which I have pushed the journey or path on my significant other as well. Not able to understand how she would not want to look into these matters, much like John. But, like all other attachments, these ideals have to be continually let go in our lives, as it can only cause harm and ultimately comes back to ego trying to save someone or thinking that it knows more.

Although there may be a debate here as to whether these individuals have developed their capacity for conscious awareness or not, this attitude just accentuates the problem of spiritual materialism/bypass and distances the individual on the path from the rest of the world. The practitioner's life is one that can be full of ups and downs, constantly looking for an intensive insight into reality and a way to come to know the Self at a deeper level. The path opens up and becomes life, and therefore breaks from the path become scarce and unwanted by the practitioner who is driven to find more.

John began to see how he was a big problem in the relationship and began to take responsibility for this:

So I think, back then...our relationship changed where we could – I could start to see how I was really messing things up – how I was not really allowing her to be

who she was. Coming back to that place. Then there was less fighting with the ego and I still – and then things would just come up where you would be hit with things and you go, oh yeah, that's me falling back into my old self again, and trying to be superhero again.

As he began to see what it was doing to the marriage and his relationship with his children, he looked at the amount of ego and selfishness that was unfolding for him. This began to enable him to come to a new understanding. John explains:

We really actually connected a lot more on a different level. The seeking falls away and it's not really...I don't think a person really gets the gifts from the path until they actually see how selfish they are. So the spiritual maturation thing comes up on a regular basis back then.

Spiritual maturation became a big theme for John as he began to unpack more of his selfishness, to open to the path, and to see things for what they are.

Scott, on the other hand, seemed to struggle with the idea of “not being spiritual” on a deep level. For him it was after his own awakening that he began to question his relationship. He started to become aware that the woman that he was with was not into the spiritual life. Scott's spiritual quest became everything in his life following his awakening:

...once there was a transformation, everything else has to change around, or it just naturally falls away. So, my relationship had to change. It was a new level of honesty; an openness; sensitivity; new respect for the other person – not as an object. Like there is less objectiveness happening now. It's harder to take advantage of someone if they are your equal. And that eventually led to the end of

that relationship because spirituality is so important to me, by then, that her level of recognition or where she was at, at the time, we just couldn't connect. Or I had a hard time connecting at that level with her. She didn't really understand what was happening with me. I was changing rapidly and I was changing career, ideas and all sorts of stuff. She really didn't know how to adjust. So that kind of led to needing to part ways, really... That's why with my fiancé now, it's basically on our first date we were talking about spirituality and religions because I wasn't going to go to step two without that being totally clear.

In contrast to John's realization of letting go of his relationship needing to also be based in spirituality, this text seems to point in the opposite direction. There seems to be a fear of having a relationship with someone who does not meet or exceed the expectations of what a 'spiritual person' is, contained in the above text. It seems to be a rationalization, of sorts, 'it is just a natural process of how one's life is overtaken with spirituality.' And yet how is one to relate to all who are not on a path, or engage in every aspect of life if there is a separation created? Where does the separation of 'spiritual' begin and end? As many point to, "We must meet every being where they are at, on all levels of existence" (Almaas, 2001, 2004; Kneen, 2002; Trungpa, 1973; Welwood, 2002). This can turn into spiritual materialism (Trungpa, 1973), the process of beginning to collect experience and knowledge as a miser hoards money; no longer able to connect with others while having an inflated sense of self. The important piece to spiritual materialism is that the individual who falls prey to the cunning psyche and ignores the truth of inseparability, can begin to harm others and make decisions based from a false sense of security (Trungpa, 1973).

The following theme outlines the realities of the lived-experience of spiritual materialism and its affect on the co-researchers' process.

Spiritual Materialism: The All Pervading Answer to Everything

Knowledge must be burned, hammered, and beaten like pure gold. Then one can wear it as an ornament. (Trungpa, 1973, p. 17)

Our life is not about sitting on some mountain top contemplating our navel. It takes place in the world, interacting with others. The question becomes how to proceed when we are on top of the mountain. (Loori, 2002, p. 17)

There is no path – apart from some of the cults that have surfaced throughout the years – that says we must give up all relationships that are not rooted in spirituality as we are no longer going to be able to connect with others who are not on that *level* (Kornfield, 1993). Reflecting on Scott's statement, concerning his realization on the effect that it had on his relationship, he seems to distinguish himself from others who are not on “a spiritual path,” although I, and many others, would argue that we are all on some type of path, no matter what an individual's beliefs are (Kornfield, 1993). If one is going to begin to be ‘spiritual,’ is that not part of connecting with all, loving all? This is the message that comes through crystal clear, from the Buddha, Jesus, Lau Tzu and many others who have written or commented on the ‘spiritual life.’ There is no beginning and no end to one's life, and in that truth there can be no separation between ‘spiritual life’ and the rest of life. It is all the path.

I know much of this firsthand as, I too, have lived this seemingly subtle realization, creating a separation between “us” (people on the path) and “them” (those not on the path). It became obvious to me that this was only another way for the ego to come

into existence and not acknowledge the interconnectedness of all, at a deeper level. If “I” could be the answer then what problems could “I” have if “I” already know it? None. And thus, this can create another way to use spiritual life as an escape and an excuse in order to avert one’s attention from the truth. As Trungpa (1973) points out:

The problem is that ego can convert anything to its own use, even spirituality. Ego is constantly attempting to acquire and apply the teachings of spirituality for its own benefit. The teachings are treated as an external thing, external to ‘me,’ a philosophy which we try to imitate...we become skilful actors, a while playing deaf and dumb to the real meaning of the teachings, we find some comfort in pretending to follow the path. (p. 13)

In this ego feeding, and inflation, it can be very difficult to sort out what is being/essence and what is entrenched in ego and a new re-construction. One can easily falling into the trap of this egoic façade, walking down a path in order to re-formulate a new version of egoic-self, a new and improved ‘spiritual’ self. A self that only creates a mirage of embracing the path, and is only an illusion pulling further away from essence. Trungpa (1973) goes on:

It is important to see that the main point of any spiritual practice is to step out of the bureaucracy of ego. This means stepping out of ego’s constant desire for a higher more spiritual, more transcendental version of knowledge, religion, virtue, judgement, comfort, or whatever it is that the particular ego is seeking...we display them [our knowledge and wisdom] to the world and, in doing so, reassure ourselves that we exist, safe and secure, as ‘spiritual’ people. (p. 15)

This knowledge and all the experiences that one lives on the path, need to be let go of. Knowledge, like experience, is only that, knowledge. It can be another way to hide from the mystery of being.

It is not the path if it is not an embodied aspect of daily-life, something that one is able to be open and embrace all. One must be able to surrender to life on all plains of reality and at all levels; otherwise there may be a distance created between the ground of being – that is home – and material reality, accumulating more illusion of egoic fixations and triumphs.

This is where the path gets deeper and deeper. I have met many spiritual people but have not met many who have been able to embody their realization. This is the true challenge; to embody the teaching, knowledge, and experience that one has lived.

John began to experience materialism in many ways; although, it seemed to come together for him when he went to defend his Masters thesis. It was during this process that he had a disagreement with one of his committee members and had a falling out with him. He explains further:

Because that really wounded me...I was really shamed by that...and so that part was I really had to start to look at that real piece; what was really going on there? Work on the mind piece and let it go...I was quite angry about that and had all kinds of dreams about killing him and this and that...so I really got outside myself. But in a lot of ways it was really necessary for it to happen...But I, you know, I come back to the idea of why was I wounded? There was a lot of self-involved in being wounded there because I mean, who cares? It's life and move on...I can be passionate about it and stuff but I was taking way too much

ownership of it. So that was hard to look at...And why was I overreacting so much? It took me months to work that through – to really be okay with that.

An inventory of one's actions needs to be taken from an open and vulnerable place in which can provide the ability to see the whole picture from an unbiased place, creating more perspective on the reality of the situation. Through this account it can be seen how difficult it can be to surrender to what is, and to process disputes. As in daily life it can be amplified and begin to point to a core driver/issue within one's psyche; something that is core to the individual and is seen in all aspects of that individual's egoic structure.

For example, a core issue of mine is the need to be seen and heard. A need to show others what I can do, in order to make up for a piece of my psyche that does not feel whole. A piece of me became entrenched in the addictive pathway and tried to solidify itself through any means necessary during that time. Although I felt many times that I had found the answer and worked this through, it seems to get deeper and deeper and continue to rear its head every once in a while, just to remind me that the path is a continual process. It is in this 'know it all' state that I can get very nihilistic, which can be a very harmful place to be. After having many openings into various parts of being, the ego seems to attach itself to the experiences and justify why it has everything worked out. This is similar to Trungpa's (1973) warning that ego will use anything to solidify itself further.

Logically it makes sense that human beings cannot know really anything in the whole scheme of things, and yet if one is not careful the ego begins to own the insights that have come for itself, pushing further away from the awakened state of being. This inflation of ego is a dangerous place to be in as it is very deceiving and can feel very

good. The experiences that unfold can create the illusion of being awake, or heightened. It can manifest as a feeling that one is so far beyond the material realm that they are wishing to have his/her body annihilated, sometimes manifesting as intense nihilism; i.e., what is the point? I don't see why I should bother if "I" don't really exist.

Jaclyn, too, identified with the issue of inflation and feeling as if she was beyond it all. She seems to attach herself on to others energy and 'ride that out' as long as she can, giving her this feeling of being intoxicated with that energy. She explains:

I can get into that white lightning energy but I got to watch that because I quite enjoy that energy and I can really – you know it's like – I can really tear someone apart in that time. And I, I know that it would hurt someone but I wouldn't care...that's not that loving energy... I don't know quite what happens all the time. I know now. I used to not know, but now I know and as soon as I start recognising it, I start doing those things...like it's really evil almost. It's really hurtful.

In this place the individual can enjoy his/her own energy and disregard all others. It can become intoxicating to that individual, no longer able to stay in one's conscious awareness. Jaclyn expands:

...it becomes consuming but now I have a lot of awareness around, I have awareness around that energy and I don't want it to get too far. So I don't let it consume me. There used to be times when it was consuming but now it's like, it's that witnessing state where you know what's going on...its like – it's such a damaging energy, like it's so nasty. Just madness, it's madness...you're manic. I definitely could say I was manic. And so, I have to watch it where certain people

are in that state, too...I find, I can easily grab onto it...it's really intoxicating and part of me would be like, mmm, let's taste some of that. And another part of me would say, no way. But no way because you just know – now that experience of one-ness is more homely to me than that other energy is – you just split off. [it used to be for] a big chunk of my life, that energy was more home to me than one-ness was.

This madness or mania, whatever one chooses to call it, can begin to take over an individual's lived experience of the world. And in many ways it can be easier to live in this inflated sense of self than face the realities that are apparent on the path. There can be less pain in this place and more power from this place which can seem as if it is a lot easier for the practitioner.

Jaclyn was able to work out some of these struggles and transcend this structure, opening into a more awakened state. And yet, it may have taken her many years to come to this, as it can be a massive challenge to take on all responsibility for each and every piece of one's life. This can be manifest in many ways, but the path will open up, providing many opportunities to acknowledge and embrace it.

For Scott, these issues of inflation and separation are things in which he seems to have not yet realized. For example, he speaks about his difficulties at work:

It's hard not to be authentic with self and be playing out a role, like with co-workers I know that I am not being authentic and that's hard to do. It's an inconsistency, an in-congruency, and that is another part of what makes it so hard to be in that role.

This statement in itself is very contradictory. If one is finding it difficult to be authentic, how does that have anything to do with anyone else? It is in one's own hands how to "play out a role" and he/she has the ultimate decision to respond to this role how they may see fit. Thus, one must begin to take sole responsibility for his/her actions on the path, and not *own* his/her wisdom. As Kornfield (1993) points out:

As with near-death experiences or a car accident, some people will change a great deal and others will return to old constricted habits shortly thereafter. Spiritual experiences themselves do not count for much. What matters is that we integrate and learn from the process. (p. 129)

In the integration process, one begins to face his or her own unresolved issues, attachments, and struggles. This will be charted in the next theme.

True Awakening: Facing Our Demons & Unresolved Issues

There are many minor satoris before a major satori, and many major satoris on the path of genuine awakening. (Master Hsu Yun, cited in Kornfield, 2000, p. 109)

It is through this continual need to be open and surrender to what is that one can begin to find the present moment and the issues that need to be addressed to further growth and development on the path. This also consists of seeing the responsibility in all that occurs within everyday lived-experience. As Looi (2002) points out, individuals are more open and awake, "when we realize that what we do and what happens to us are the same thing, that cause and effect are one" (p. 22). Kornfield (1993) expands on this: "in truth, the need to deal with our personal emotional problems is more the rule in spiritual practice than the exception" (p. 246). This is where the path can begin to open offering an

opportunity to embody one's insightful realizations and work through egoic hang-ups and fixations. Loori (2002) states this in simple but moving terms:

We go straight ahead, and straight ahead takes us right back down the other side, into the valley, into the market place. It is there that our realization functions and manifests itself in everything we do; in the way we drive a car, raise a child, maintain a relationship, grow a garden, live a life. If our practice doesn't function there, what good is it? Why are we doing it? (p. 21)

It makes no sense to have all these experiences and then have a life that is barely holding together. This is how the truth of realizations can begin to open doors and provide opportunities to help others, while deepening an individual's developmental process as well.

All of the co-researchers identified various attachments, and childhood work that they faced. For Jaclyn, her unresolved issues seem to be within her family. She explains:

I still have hard times with my family. I think because they live so far away, I haven't had to do much with them or anything like that. But I see my family for what they are now but I have hard times still – especially with my mother. I can't seem to kind of, I don't know, let that one go. I don't know. There's still something there with her. With my sisters it's more effortless and stuff like that. I can get quite split off when it comes to them for some reason...there's still something that needs to be worked out there.

This highlights the unresolved struggles that continually surface for people, whether on the path or not; no one is in the clear (Kornfield, 1993, 2000; Welwood, 2002). The difference becomes that, hopefully, people who are on the path are more willing to

unravel what it is that needs to be acknowledged and viewed, otherwise it can be questionable whether that individual has realized anything or not. As Dogen (cited in Kornfield, 1993) points out, “ a Zen master’s life is one continuous mistake” (p. 255). This is pointing to the fact that no one is perfect and, yet, if there exists the ability to continue on and be open to the mistakes, a willingness to surrender and be vulnerable will follow. The point here is that one must visit and/or re-visit these attachments and struggles on a regular basis, dealing with the egotism and walls that hold back the vulnerable beauty that is essence or being.

Scott began to look into some of his deeper struggles after he made the decision to leave the engineering field for a brief time. It had become too difficult for him to deal with being too far out of his element with no support. He explains:

And I go up to Grand Prairie, which is quite blue collar and not a lot of that going on and then just sunk into this field lifestyle – which is very intense. A lot of time, constantly working, sleep deprived, stressed out, hanging around people that you would judge or classify as very low vibration people. And it just all, it was just very intense; it was very much imposing on me. And so, being sensitive, it was really getting to me a lot. And I didn’t have my support network. And I wasn’t established enough in presence to really have it in those challenging of environments. So basically it came to a point where I had had enough. And I couldn’t handle it anymore, did not want to handle it. And just the emergence of spirituality as a priority, basically, did a leap of faith and just left the job, came back here...so I went into this real openness phase. I just jumped into that freefall not knowing what it was going to turn out to be.

Although Scott seems to have had a preconceived idea of what it would all look like – to look into his spiritual life on a deeper level – it seems that he had enough perspective on the situation to leave an environment in which he was not equipped to handle. Although one may say that he was running away from reality, there is a semblance of humility to surrender to what is and leave the situation. Listening to Scott speak about this during the interview, I felt humility from this place as he was able to recall admitting defeat when coming back to his home town. He goes on to explain what began to unfold for him:

And then mind activity started coming in again, ego, fear, I was collecting E.I...
So I started to look for another engineering job. And it, it really became a time of seeking for me and I call it the winter of my Life. I went through a lot of dying.
And I started to get into personal development workshops and stuff like that;
anger and general personal development stuff...It was profoundly useful and very useful for me in shedding a lot of the ego trash and subconscious garbage and all that. And learning how to deal with – how to get in touch with my emotions and all this stuff...I was just going through this – confusion, anger with God, a lot of anger, doing this leap of faith and feeling kind of hung out to dry. And I was trying to live up to this image of – okay, well if I'm all spiritual now I should use my engineering degree to do good things. Like I wanted to get into wind power; helping the environment....So I'm seeking that, seeking, seeking, seeking, seeking, and nothing is happening and getting very frustrated and I eventually had to die off of these images of one thing being good and one thing being bad.

Here Scott seems to have seen the reality in which he has to 'call off the search' and begin to embrace what is. However, he still seems to attach himself to a place in which

the 'spiritual life' is a lot more noble than that of someone who is just living in a worldly way. This can become a new identity/role for some individuals, just as being a mother or father, a new role to play, a new egoic structure to battle and wear down over time. After all his struggles with the oil and gas industry Scott was to eventually go back to that industry, finding a whole new set of problems to deal with.

When John began to do some deep work on some of his family of origin issues and work through his object-relations, he was still trying to become free of this 'out there' state that he was embodying; searching for an answer and grasping at his own intellect in order to save him. Reflecting back, he began to see how his ego would become more stable, and some of his symptoms (i.e., disconnection from body and ground) would fall away. Receiving a good mark in school, his symptoms would begin to fall away for "an hour or half a day." John began to see some of his symptoms as karma, brought on by what he was doing in his everyday life:

...Even though I've had some pretty intense experiences and I started to realize what's going on – part of me still thought I was special because of it. And I worked a big piece of that through; it wasn't a big enough piece. Because with my tantrums I challenged people pretty harshly and was wounded about – ultimately I wasn't really thinking clearly. So I sat back and thought clearly about the situation outside that that has nothing to do with me. Other people's issues I could see clearly what was going on but this issue; fixated upon me being wounded about me not being brilliant – can't you see? [Laughter]...It pissed me off a little bit and I think also on the path it was necessary to help me see that... until I experience something for myself I can have a teacher or a helper but it doesn't

matter that much. So I necessarily had to set my own trap and having to fall into it and basically live it.

The trap of having all the answers, not being able to take advice or learn lessons through someone else's mistakes is a difficult for some, especially when Western culture has put such an emphasis on individuality and questioning things on an individual basis. It seems, for John, this was an ingrained structure within his life and a major hurdle to leap over in terms of working with his mind.

At this time, John also began to piece together some of his family of origin issues and look deeper into his addiction. Being almost required to learn how to work at a young age to survive in his family, John began to forgive and was able to let go of some of his resentment, viewing his father in a new light:

I couldn't really understand that this was his passion. I couldn't understand the peace he found cutting trees down or whatever he did...until later I understood, I pieced together a lot of his life just through my own life. And could see so many similarities between him and I and him never having the ability or capacity to understand why he did what he did and appreciate that it wasn't so much him doing it in a lot of ways.

As John began making more connections and looking at his own need to be special, the seeking and needing to find an answer began to fade away for him. This only began to deepen his relationships and helped him come to a deeper understanding of what it was to be on the path:

...what really made sense to me was that when I really started to realize that the Dharma was life. And that really I'm just life. And that is all it is. And that was a

pretty huge moment because then I started to realize, okay, well here the whole time it's been me, and me against life....it's all about me against life and not really realizing that I'm just a part of this as well. And even the creative mind and the ego and that's just the way it is, or else you would be a vegetable.

This only accentuates the reality that every moment in life gives us opportunity to wake up and expand the process. This is the practice of surrender, the process of letting go and accepting what is, letting things unfold how they are going to.

For Jaclyn the surrender comes in many different forms. She began long distance running as another way to connect with her body and to clear stale energy that can sit in our bodies (Judith, 2004). She explains:

...the running that I do, it keeps me in the flow of that witnessing energy.

Sometimes I'll just be running along and I don't know how my body will continue kind of to put one leg in front of the other – or jump a stick, or not trip over itself, and I get in that witnessing energy and I literally will go – again, that blackness will come up – and kind of go blank and I'm watching – like my eyes are watching the road –because I can still see things – but the blackness is there. And I know it's that blackness that's moving me. And that's just causing all the motions. And it's like – okay. And it's just so effortless.

Jaclyn seems to explain the blackness as the consciousness that is beyond egoic awareness. The process of connecting with this consciousness also comes into her day-to-day life in beginning to surrender to what is. She describes the process of opening into the moment and what that looks like for her, “a constant blooming....It's a constant unfolding. Things just kind of...happen....In each moment, there's a giving and receiving

and the – seeing our humanness and realising the transcendence of it...seeing the limitations of our humanness and realising the hugeness of it.”

These texts reveal the process of unfolding into the moment, as well as the difficulty of continually taking day-to-day actions and functioning in the material realm, given all the different experiences the seekers had and the understandings they gained from them. The next section will outline some of these struggles as understood by the co-researchers.

Day-to-day Life: Practicing the Moment

Enlightenment must be lived here and now through this very body or else it is not genuine. In this body and mind we find the cause and end of suffering. For awakening to be an opening into freedom in this very life, the body must be its ground.

(Kornfield, 2000, p. 178)

As transcendentally blissful and peaceful as the state of samadhi may be, however, awakening beyond life can never be the final goal of spiritual practice. It has to be followed by awakening in life. This means seeing life through the eyes of God – the universe – casting the light of your realization upon the intractable problems and emotional sufferings of a human being on planet earth. (Khan, 1999, p. 116)

On the path of awakening, there are many realizations that must occur in order to expand the developmental process and open into the consciousness that underlies all things in the material realm. Yet, none most important is that one embodies one's realization. It is in day-to-day mundane human life that awakening opens into a way out of suffering and a way to make a difference in the world by living the example. As one Sufi master (cited in Kornfield, 2000) points out, “even though we know the truth, we

have to work through the holding and beliefs that keep us limited. For a long time you have to keep this opening process going by paying attention” (p. 99). And thus, it is through a constant surrender and awareness of what is, that one becomes an embodiment of awakening. It is through one’s continual awareness of the need to face ‘good’ and ‘bad’ emotions that one begins to open into an understanding that ‘good’ and ‘bad’ are only concepts which do not even exist in reality. They are constructions based on the egoic filter of reality. It becomes clear that one must treat suffering and ‘negative’ emotion with the same respect that is given to ‘positive’ emotion. Ingram (2003) elucidates this well:

In awakened awareness there is no reassuring story that allows distancing from this suffering. The intelligence is clear and vast enough to contain it, yet specific and tender enough to be with the nuances of sorrow. It does not look away, nor does it rely on beliefs for an escape from feeling. (p. 67)

It is through accepting this paradox of “vast” yet “specific” or “dealing with the other” yet “there being no other” that one’s awareness begins to flower into an all encompassing embodiment of the animal form and the gift of consciousness. As Welwood (2003) points out:

Even in the best of times, being human is challenging and confusing, for it involves living on different planes of reality at the same time. To be fully human, then, requires cultivating a taste for paradox – an appreciation of how very different truths can be true at the same time. (p. 1)

As these paradoxes become clearer and clearer, they begin to make intuitive sense; one can begin to see some of the difficulties inherent in beginning to embody these truths in

daily life. There is real difficulty when one tries to live in the transcendent reality and then participate in the material reality. As Jaclyn explains:

I have times when everything falls away and there's – I'm not really in my body and I'm just...I've got to...you know, make supper or day-to-day stuff. So how is it – like obviously you do it by doing it, but I guess – you know, and this is why this is interesting in a sense because it's...hard to explain and it's...never really been mapped.

This is where the Zen saying of “before enlightenment, chop wood, carry water, after enlightenment, chop wood, carry water” must have originated. Thus, it is wonderful to have these experiences and great blissful feelings permeate through one's being, but there is still a need to function in the material realm on a daily basis.

I recall for myself, being in a very blissful state – more high and bliss filled than I have ever felt on any drug – not able to go to the bank without leaving my bank card in the ATM. Unable to function really at all, I was filled with love and bliss, but not really able to relate to any other being. As Warner (2007) points out:

...even the Buddha was not free from normal human temptations and folly even after his awakening, that he had to constantly guard and keep the state he'd achieved...meaning enlightenment is not something you can achieve; its something that you do every single moment of every single day until you can't do nuthin' more. (p. 229)

Jaclyn seems to have to revisit her moment-to-moment awareness when she is counselling and/or doing presentations in order to continue down the path of integration.

This text reveals the subtle way in which an egoic self begins to re-surface into being and then creates a duality in lived-experience. She explains:

As soon as I start sinking in counselling, that's when I realise I'm in that kind of manifest, egocentric, conditional mind phase and although my energy will shift; my connection to the client will change; there's a force, like an effort that needs to, that I do with the client. And like I'll actually sit there and go, "think of a question, think of a question" and I'll get all bugged out. And what happens is it becomes more about me, then it becomes about clients because I realise I have split off. And I'm in that like form, manifested state. So I am – I'm cut off. And I'm sitting there and I don't know what – and I get all confused and I don't know what to do. And I become helpless and then that hopelessness comes up and everything like that.

The following outlines some of the dialog that can unfold in that state and how it can affect the connection with beingness/non-dual state. This illustrates how the ego can create the illusion that there is somewhere to go or something that needs to be done.

Jaclyn explains:

...well a part of me will say to myself, 'Okay Jaclyn, you gotta get back to emptiness. And then it's like, you got to get back to emptiness?' And then it's like, I'm still listening to the client at this time. You've got to get back to emptiness. And you're listening and then...and you're responding but then it's all about me. Okay, breathe in, meditate, focus on the groundedness. Okay, and then it just spirals out of control.

Jaclyn stressed her struggle with the integration during the interview process, but feels that it has helped her to come to more of a routine and to deal with life in a routine to which she can stay more in her awareness, no longer creating a duality. She explains:

The irony of all this is that it's become so routine I would say – not routine as in, I get up at 7:00, because it does just kind of flow along and I just see what I have to do and I enjoy every moment...Even moments where I had crap going on two weeks ago at work – I am still just able to enjoy those moments. And I got caught up in some stuff that, you know, this is, this is transformational. Like I realise everything is transformational. Even the worst shittiest stuff is still transformational...It's all transformational.

While recognizing that there is still a long way to go and also remaining open to what is, Jaclyn appears to be embracing the paradox of living within two realms of reality. She explains how she started to view the path after a moment in which she realized that each and every moment offers a new opportunity:

Crap is always going to continue to happen to everyone. It happens to me and stuff but nothing that huge because it was like – I just really felt in touch with that timelessness moment-to-moment process. And it's like, okay, this moment happened, this moment happened and but it's like a timelessness. And just breathing in and breathing out...then I just saw it happen. It's all going to happen. And my mind doesn't have to be there. It's always going to happen whether – and I have no control over it. It's just going to be effortless and choicelessness. And I don't have to make any big decisions. It's awareness that is happening right now, and it's just all going to just be there. Float along.

Although Jaclyn makes it sound quite simple, there must be a continual re-visitation to the moment in order to continue from the state of conscious awareness. This is the real difficulty of coming into the awareness of these two paradoxical truths, the form and formless (Welwood, 2003).

Scott feels that his job has become too much and is looking toward leaving sometime this year (at the time of the interview). Interestingly enough it seems as if there is a resistance to what is going on around him, and contradictions in his view regarding his work situation. He identified his work as one of his biggest difficulties in daily life as he does not feel that it provides him with a grounded sense of 'spiritual living.' He explains:

It's not in alignment with who I am. It's a role that I'm conditioned to play out and it is very safe and secure – basically guaranteed to whatever – the good life as people call it, it's pretty much the...worst case scenario is high paid engineering job – that's the worst case scenario. So a very safe, secure route...So this emergence to do more of a – working with people on spirituality, being more the direction life is moving, and then let fear and security kind of pulling me back to having the day job. It felt like a real tug; a real pulling on me. And I'm resisting it and I'm not accepting what is...and I need to be present and all that crap, but at the end of the day, three years later, it's not different. I need to get out of this...It's just...part of it is the environment. The level of consciousness, it's so low, it's just hard to, it's hard to relate to the people. It's hard to be in meetings. It's hard to make decisions.

While one can understand the difficulties of being at an office job, working as an engineer, while being driven to the path on another end, individuals who have not developed his/her conscious awareness are all around us. Most individuals on this planet are not awake; thus, wherever we go, there we are, and so is everyone else. There is no safe haven from people who are not awake. One is still needed as a part of the world, not to run from the realities of it into a spiritual safe guard. Scott goes on:

So this is part of waking up in the West being in these roles and how am I going to function? Am I going to choose to stay there, or not? Or is there even a choice? I really feel there is not a choice. The suffering gets to be so much that I got to go. My physical health has deteriorated in the last three years. I now see a herbalist on a regular basis and take herbs all the time, basically to help deal with the things – depression – the energy that has come up that caused the depression, caused some skin problems or however they manifest. They are not curing anything. It's just kind of, okay put a band-aid on it for now. Like what happens in a life once the tap gets opened on life energy, I'm being held back. The body starts to become ill in these ways. And that's what I see happening here. So basically I have to unclog myself from – I just have to give it up.

This is a difficult place to be and yet, when we are able to embrace the mystery and weave together the two realities – part of the process of integrating awakening into daily life – we can face anything with an open heart (Chodron, 2003a, 2003b; Kneen, 2002; Trungpa, 2005a). Carroll (2004) explains his own struggle to understand the merging of two realities:

Instead of seeking out a monastic life, I was to live in New York and find my spiritual footing in the bowels of capitalism, on Wall Street. Here I would come to learn that what I thought was trivial, the so-called conventional world, was in fact sacred; and what I had considered profound, the ‘spiritual path,’ was simply my own naïve fantasy. (p. 3)

Carroll goes on to say, “...the spiritual path is nothing other than living our very life, fully and confidently, in the immediate moment – and that nothing can be excluded, especially not our work” (p. 4). Carroll reminds the reader that there is a certain perfection to life as it is, a perfection that is viewed throughout all spiritual traditions in which there is nothing that is not perfect, if everything is in fact, only a reflection of one. This is something that the Buddha was very clear on; it is human desire for something else that keeps making people suffer and fuels the desire for more. It is only in this moment that transformation can occur and life be lived. People create their lives in this moment, not through time. Thus, while there may be some wisdom to Scott’s decision to leave his job, there may also be resistance to what is and a grasping for a “spiritually sound fantasy,” the reality that the egoic self wants (Trungpa, 1973; Welwood, 2002).

As John began to recognize the ultimate responsibility for all that unfolded in his life was his own, there was an openness to work with that in his day-to-day life. He identifies that it is still a struggle but something that he continually returns to. He outlines how he creates a distance from peace in his daily life:

And so when you start to practice it more, it becomes peaceful. It’s not about being right or wrong. It’s not about moralistic. It brings more peace to your life. So if you choose to live more peacefully that’s cool. I’m not saying I’m a saint

or...It becomes more obvious. So if I want to dip into delusion, I guess I have to from time to time, and bear the brunt of that.

While there is an understanding of how one creates the struggles that manifest in one's life, there is also a big piece here which implies responsibility solely on the individual. Thus, there is a realization that what is seen and done are not separate. As one begins to reflect on his/her own life experience, they may begin to wonder how others on the path embody this realization, and yet as John points out, "people can put things down in books but not necessarily be that in the world." John began to look toward what his understanding of truth was and how that tied into his life. He explains:

Even though we have self/no-self and ego...there's still – we all do have a life world that was given to us before we even get here. So in some ways you can escape or try to transcend it all your life but in some ways it doesn't so much happen that way. And the idea is you can look at and you can realize, I started to realize well, this is other people's understanding of maybe their understanding of their life world.

Taking this realization as his own truth, John began to see how various things in his life were already in accordance with the path. And that one cannot compare experiences with others if there is no knowledge of how they may live day-to-day.

It started to become a semblance of deconstructing some of his roles that he was asked to play out in life. For example when he first started to work as an academic he began to open into what the role really was and how there was no sense of being special if he allowed himself to take a step back and see the reality of the situation. He explains:

So basically working there, it was like...it was really easy, 'I can't believe people call this a job.' And then you get used to it after a while and it's just a job. And so I started to work there and I started to do the professional thing, get to see how basically, on a grand scale, how pathetic that was, in some ways, to actually see that – the idea of being an academic was not worthy of a thing. And so two or three months into it, I thought to myself – well, this is sort of – even though it's cool and everything, it's just another job. And I think what that did for me was the idea of another illusion of the ego sort of fell away because I see well, basically, anybody can be doing this. And I wondered at times why I was even – not why I was doing it but whether or not they were going to question what I was doing there. Something that I started to learn was basically what the ego hasn't actually – if you have a desire and you don't tame the desire sometimes it's really hard to actually let go of it until you can actually taste it a little bit. And so I started to see that a little bit.

As John began to “taste” the academic life that he projected would be so intellectual and worthy, he was able to come through it and come out on the other side of it, possessing the ability to look at things from a more balanced perspective.

Another thing John outlined as being influential in helping him on a daily basis is the sense of presence that is pervasive in the morning; he expands:

Before I wake up in the morning, before I become completely conscious of my “I,” there is always this complete vast presence. We always surrender ourselves to that when we're little kids and we move beyond that....So I always think about that and think about, okay well before I wake up I get this sense of beautiful

presence. And then I surrender and it becomes just normal. So before the day comes back to you and all of the sudden you know when it rushes back in, you're very aware of what you need to do that day – if there is anything on your mind that is worrying, anything that you are still attached to, it becomes so very obvious that you cannot...then I started to tap into that. And I started to think, okay, who is it that actually goes to sleep every night? And when I read this stuff without any training or anything and then when you see things that are intuitively – you knew – then I started to realise, well there's got to be more to what is going on. And that sort of provides grounding for me.

John's mind seems to have entered into the picture from time-to-time and convinced him that he may have it all worked out or that he may in fact be crazy, and yet it is this return to intuitive knowing that can bring him back to the grounding in being that resonates deep in each and everyone's core. John expands:

I had to figure out what was constantly true for me. And so if you look at the idea of attachment and impermanence it became more clear for me as I understood things, to realise that...the heart Sutra...that the whole idea of that form of formlessness was no longer conceptual.

In the Heart sutra, the Buddha speaks to one of his main disciples – Shariputra – about the nature of reality. It is a very influential sutra in the Buddhist tradition and is also known in many other traditions (Glassman, 2002). I will not provide the entire sutra, but rather, evidence the main stanza that is often quoted, which has also provided me with many insights into the nature of reality. The Heart Sutra reads (cited in Glassman, 2002):

O Shariputra, form is no other than emptiness,

Emptiness no other than form;

Form is precisely emptiness,

Emptiness is precisely form.

Sensation, perception, reaction, and consciousness are also like this.

O Shariputra, all things are expressions of emptiness:

Not born, not destroyed; not stained, not pure; neither waxing nor waning. (p. 3)

These verses can be as simple or as complicated as one chooses; there have been many commentaries written on the entire sutra, but the general idea here is that there is no separation between the formless and the manifest realm. Both realms encase one's true nature. Thus, this speaks to the paradox of non-duality at an even deeper level. All are encased as one. Jaclyn expands on this, in explaining her view of what truth is:

...truth for me is just that, just that vastness, that spaciousness and timelessness that is always available to me in each moment. And so I go into the world and I do things and I talk to people and I enjoy my connections and I go to work and I get my paycheque and I have to go and get groceries and this body has to operate and function the way that it does. And I do all that – but – there is luminous energy that always is present. That is always there. That is just seeing it all happen. That is just allowing it all to go. So I don't...I don't need to do anything.

We can go beyond our 'normal' realms of consciousness to get a glimpse of it or find it in our everyday sense of the world, but what really changes after we have felt this vastness and experienced it is greatly debated. There are many accounts of awakened beings saying that nothing changed at all after the awakening experience; that there is no

separation between practice and awakening (Dogen, 2004; Warner, 2003). As Warner (2007) states, “real enlightenment is not an experience. Real enlightenment is the ongoing work you do to keep from getting caught up in your experiences” (p. 234). And thus we are only to find awakening in the now. The here and now. There is nowhere else to find it and nowhere else to go. The more that we look for it, the further away from it we become; and still, paradoxically, one must have looked at one point in time in order to find it. The paradox gets deeper and deeper. One must bask in the beautiful presence and being that is contained within the now if we are truly to learn how to live an awakened state of being.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The dream exists inside of my head

I am now awake

But I have not fallen asleep.

(Author, 2006)

In a well that had not been dug,

water ripples from a stream that does not flow.

Someone with no shadow or form

is drawing the water.

(Traditional Zen koan, cited in Murphy, 2006, p. 146)

In reflection on the past chapter, it is apparent that the summary of such a phenomenon is a difficult task to achieve. The co-researchers' narratives, entwined together with literary works, have birthed a map, and a story of awakening. The story being told contains the overall theme, answering the call of the research question; what is the experience of awakening to non-dual living in everyday life?

One has looked toward many traditions in the literature review – Advaita Vedanta, Zen – and various psychological frameworks – Wilber's *Spectrum of Consciousness* (1986, 2000), Almaas's *Diamond Approach* (1988, 2001, 2004), Welwood's *Spiritual Bypass* (2002), and Kornfield's (1989, 1993, 2003) pitfalls along the path that he outlines – in order to begin to summarize the experience of non-duality and developmental process of individuals on the path. Although many themes have arisen in the literature, and in the lived-experience of the co-researchers, there also seems to be a variation in language and how to voice the developmental process for expanding the

initial realization of awakening. Hence as one has also seen, there are some who believe very strongly in the idea of a finality of awakening, and conversely individuals who see finality as another fantasy or illusion that must be realized on the path. Some see human life as a dream or illusion and hold to the fact that the human being is consciousness housed in an animal form. As Murphy (2006) points out:

...this valuable cautionary and salutary sense of 'dream' leaves out and attempts to leave behind much of the complexity and poetry of human experience; and it does not reach far enough into the true nature of that waking up experience. It may also encourage us to think of working hard to attain some pure condition of awakening in which such dark dreams as anger, fear, envy, grief, or regret may no longer have any relationship to us. That pure condition is itself a dream, and beneath its bright mirror, self-deception can lengthen in the shadows, undisturbed. It may seem a lovely dream, but it is a dream nonetheless. (p. 141)

Thus, Murphy (2006) points to the very thing that makes awakening a process, rather than a finished product; the reality of seeing through two sets of eyes, the beauty that is revealed through our experience in the world and also being beyond it, in the same moment-to-moment presence. It is in this place that an appreciation for the paradoxical language of the sages unfolds. The finger that can not be the moon, but only a vague map of how to get there. And although the moon may look similar to all who experience it, there is not, and can not, be an exactly replicated experience that is running through all individuals.

When looking back to the beginning of the journey, one may want to ask the question; when did it actually begin? To answer, it seems that there is no exact beginning

to the journey/path. As human beings we are all on a course or path going somewhere; yet, one can not see that there is essentially “nowhere to go” in order to find true peace. Thus, the major theme of “heeding the call: honouring what is” creates an outlet to explore the pull that individuals feel toward spiritual practice. And yet, one can also see that *the mirror of existence: seeing the Self through others* is an essential component to how this journey unfolds for each individual. There must be this trust in existence as one begins to travel the path to nowhere, or conversely the present moment, expanding the relationship with essence. If there is little or no trust it can be a very difficult process to unravel some of the mystery in which most individuals live, the constructed self, or ‘I.’ And through this trust there appears to be a semblance of foreshadowing for many on the path who undertake this journey.

The gift and the curse: precursors to awakening outlined ways in which reality can be seen from one’s youth; while it may not be understood at the time, it is the reflection of the moon, no less, pointing to a reality that is far greater than the material realm in which human beings live. While one can see that these precursors are only experiences that point to something far greater, they still seem to hold an importance in the journey for many who are able to go back and track his/her developmental process. It is, however, both a gift and a curse, as one seems to be predestined to walk this path and can not seem to drop his/her need and desire to have deep questions answered.

While our seeking is all part of the journey, the *lines of questioning: the tried and true method* becomes a very important part of how one begins to understand and expand consciousness. It is through this questioning that facilitates a peeling back of the layers of

egoic self, and a one pointed reality in which, a stark focus on science, has convinced people that there exists only what can be seen with the human eye, manifest reality.

Once peeled back, the layers and questions only get deeper and the major theme of, “the unfolding process: pulling back the veil” begins to show how, *consciousness reveals itself*. As the Self begins to reveal *itSelf* to the individual, still seeing with only one set of eyes, there can be many intense experiences unfold. Although, again, it is important to remember that the experience is only an experience and not the end goal. The path itself is the goal and there becomes a deeper embrace of the ‘what is’ contained within all of life. There may be a, *spontaneous combustion, baptism by fire*, in the sense of losing one’s construction of the self in an instant, disorientated and terrified of not only what may come next, but of the present moment in which the “I” no longer exists. This is further elucidated in, *welcome to hell: the terror of no-self*. Pointing to the traumatic and painful experience that it can be to lose one’s self construction, that is a core attachment of the psyche. The major theme of “the wonderful land of Oz: pointing to the answer within” begins to personify how a teacher, of sorts, is needed in order to practice and embody some of the insights that come with psycho-spiritual practice. Moving along one can also identify the importance of beginning to see the role and impact on the path of *textual masters: transformational interpretations* and being *intoxicated with the guru*. Within these themes, there can be many different communities to assist individuals in furthering his/her understanding of awakening, while also continuing to develop these two paradoxical realities colliding in each and every moment.

While teachers along the path are very important there is also a pivotal piece of seeing how one must initiate, *burning through idealized transference* and come through

to the other side, gaining a greater perspective for another human being who is also on the path, with no separation that exists. This expands the understanding of the practitioner and allows for more beingness/essence to come through and generates less attachment to the egoic self.

Following this the final major theme of “finding a lotus in the muddy waters of life” begins to take form and points to the need to awaken in all aspects of one’s lived-experience. This is illuminated by *living as one with another: the difficulty of relationship*, and in *spiritual materialism: the all pervading answer to everything*. While these two themes show the importance of facing one’s psyche in the reality of the material world, there must also exist an acknowledgment of the impact of *true awakening: facing our demons and unresolved issues*. This enables the practitioner to move into *day-to-day life: practicing the moment* and expand the process by acknowledging the core issues that need to be faced. There may have to be a continual return to repeat the process by, facing what can surface in any given moment with fearlessness; opening to what is, not fighting with the reality that is being mirrored back. Facing every moment as if it were the last, becoming awakened to the role that is played in our individual lives.

Implications of Non-dual Living

There have been various suggestions throughout this thesis that have pointed to a greater reality of living in a non-dual way. Many of these realities and suggestions are paradoxical in nature and require a re-visitation to the psyche’s core in order to walk into some of the deeply embedded attachments and struggles that are held captive in our individual egoic structure. This is very difficult work, as it requires both a willingness to

trudge through attachment and emotional pain with no judgement, and no preference as to what that may look like; and it asks the practitioner to be contemplative and move further into inquiry over time. For example, in my own life I have always struggled with authority (as it seems many people do to one extent or another) and through my own exploration of this issue it has become clear that my first inclination to understand why was not necessarily the case. It took me a long time to even understand why authority would be such a problem in the first place and why I grew up feeling the ‘me against the world’ syndrome. The difficulty for me was to see that I was in fact – by my own attitude and energy that I put out – actually inviting in this frame of mind unconsciously. It would, in fact, take me years to really see this for what it was, and being such a deep core structure embedded in my own psyche, the layers seem to continue to reveal themselves to me as I open more into a vulnerable understanding. One may be able to see this as something that is similar in effect to the movie *Groundhog Day* (Albert & Ramis, 1993) in which the character played by Bill Murray is forced to continually face the same day until he is able to ‘get it right.’ Just when one begins to think that he or she has it all worked out, things begin to surface in order to show him/her that the need to return does not ever end.

It is within these nuances that one begins to realize that to truly live in a non-dual way it must be brought down to a moment-to-moment process and a willingness to enter the darkness/light when necessary. Each and every moment can be a teacher on the path, and if there is little awareness, the individual will not reap the benefits of the lesson being brought to the forefront of his/her life. Interestingly enough it seems that for some, including myself, the more that we are shown or told by others what it really is that we

need to see, the more we reel from it and need life to step in to provide a mirror of reality, not just a speculation. And it is in this mirror that life can act as the greatest teacher and provide us what needs to be seen in order to deepen the process.

The real work in all this comes with an individual's ability to see what is presented and to delve deeper into the attachment or core-issue, letting it sit in the psyche and *burn through*, not judging it or providing ways to run from reality. This is hard work to do and can be very painful as there is a letting go of pieces of self that are core to the structure of what we used to call "I." This can muster up intensive feelings of sadness and can even facilitate a grieving process for that piece of self that is/has falling/fallen away. The paradox here is that as there is a letting go of more egoic self, there is more freedom and peace to be received. And yet, there is a feeling of intense sadness on one level and seeing the perfection and beauty of what is, on another. It is this place in where there is a return to our true form of formlessness and encounter *sunyata* (full emptiness). As Sosan (2002) states:

Empty and infinite
existing as one,
opening before your eyes,
a vast presence.

One thing is all things, and all things are one.

What is and what is not are equals.

Once this is realized

there is no need to worry about anything.

To live and trust in the non-dual mind
is to move with true freedom,
to live without anxiety,
upon the Great Way. (pp. 75-76)

To arrive at this place we must be able to embrace all aspects of life, not just look towards the transcendental states of consciousness for peace and freedom. Thus, one must always be willing to look within, as it is when individuals no longer are open and able to reflect within that they become materialistic without even knowing it.

Implications for Counselling

Below I briefly outline some of the implications for the counselling/psychotherapy field and discuss the impact of these experiences on developmental process. In reality not all “mental health issues” are in fact mental health problems. An individual may have opened into awakening and he or she may have need to integrate the experience and/or or normalize it, and may require to do so. Some individuals are on a path, in the case of John he had a spontaneous falling away of self which, when described to a counsellor/psychotherapist, may have looked similar to schizophrenia or a psychotic episode. I urge that the educational system in which we are training counsellors/psychologists/psychiatrists take a more developmental, theoretical approach to psychology and counselling. It is within this developmental framework that one can begin to see the importance of understanding what some of these issues of opening into consciousness look like as opposed to just tacking a label onto it and prescribing psychotropic drugs. There are some that even see madness as a necessary step

in the process of spirituality of spiritual growth (Laing, 1990). It is within this conceptualization that I urge counsellor training programs to take a more holistic view in terms of what is being taught as ‘unquestionable truth.’

It becomes difficult in psychology and psychiatry to begin to call one thing or another *truth* as human behaviour and experience is not a science. And yet this seems to be how most programs and educational systems teach and train, as an exact science. We can not muster up the idea of scientific thought when we are looking at lived-experience for an individual human being (Wilber, 2001). As Roger’s (1961), the grandfather of the humanistic movement, states:

If the therapy were optimal, intensive as well as extensive, then it would mean that the therapist has been able to enter into an intensely personal and subjective relationship with the client – relating not as a scientist to an objective study, not as a physician expecting to diagnose and cure, but as a person to a person. (pp. 184-185)

Hahn (2002) also weighs in on the harm of one truth:

The Buddha said that if you get caught in one idea and consider it to be ‘the truth,’ then you miss the chance to know the truth. Even if the truth comes in person and knocks at your door you will refuse to open your mind. (pp. 10 -11).

When anything beyond the material realm is denied, there is, ethnocentrically and egotistically, a driving away of myriad forms of knowledge from cultures all over the world with the desire to *own* knowledge that can never be considered total truth (Wilber, 2001).

While I am not denying the seriousness of mental illness and the diagnosis standards contained in the DSM-IV-TR (American Psychiatric Association, 2000), it is still a very difficult subject matter to assess as *truth*. In many cultures, some of the symptoms and diagnoses contained within the DSM-IV-TR are considered to be given to an individual by a god and providing him/her with shamanic powers that can heal and assist others (Grof & Grof, 1989), thus, view taken by the manual is ethnocentric (Grof & Grof, 1989; Sadler, 2005). It has been our denial of spiritual issues in the West that seems to be driving the cultural need for more technology to keep our minds occupied. As it seems to be when Westerners *slow down* and reflect that there is a bubbling up of neurosis and attachment that has accumulated over the years of denying it exists (Warner, 2003). It is time to reclaim our true home as conscious beings and enter the ground of essence in order to connect with other beings and enter into a path of healing the species in a whole new way. While this may be idealistic, it is still a possibility and can be a reality if there is an effort to stress a different way of working with people and giving each and every individual the opportunity to feel that they have the power for transformation and can claim *being* in order to heal, not temporarily fix the problem that they are facing. As Walsh and Vaughan (1993) state, “the ideal goal is a sensitive integration of ancient and contemplative wisdom with modern clinical and scientific skills. This is a major clinical challenge and opportunity for transpersonal psychology” (p. 132).

As seen in the literature review, there is a *spectrum of consciousness* for which therapists and counsellors can work (Wilber, 1986). It is through this framework that anyone in the helping profession can begin to embrace and look towards using

interventions that will meet the client where he/she may be at, by assessing the stage of developmental consciousness that is embodied by the client. In using this assessment tool, the therapist can meet the needs of any client and ensure that they are taking care to use interventions that are appropriate for each individual. For example, a client may present with psychotic-like symptoms, and if the therapist is to inquire as to what the context of these symptoms are (i.e., is the client an avid meditator? Is the client on a spiritual path?), there can be much learned for both the therapist and the client in working towards a greater state of wholeness. Thus, by embracing this framework, the helping professions could create more insight into the ground of being and assist others in crafting a more holistic view of the world (Walsh & Vaughan, 1993; Wilber, 1986, 2000).

Implicated Researcher

While this study does not provide a reference to generalize to the population – which may be seen as a limitation to the study – it does provide an in-depth analysis of the three co-researchers who were interviewed and it offers a window into the lived-experience of these individuals and their trials and tribulations as they awaken to daily life. My intent is not to overgeneralize, but to show that these experiences can be pivotal and provide freedom and peace for those who choose to undertake such a process; while also hopefully giving others – in the fields of psychotherapy and counselling – an idea that there are many ways in which individuals can heal and find meaning. The point here is that there can be no *final truth* in the ways which we work with others as therapists, that there must always remain this openness to experience and let the clients that we meet guide their own path/therapy. Another limitation to this study is that it does not take

culture into account when viewing the lived experience of the co-researchers; as the three co-researchers are all from a Western cultural perspective, born and presently living in the West.

In writing this thesis, again, I must come forth with my own biases and state that it is impossible to remove such biases from a topic so close to my own heart; it was the driving force behind undertaking such an endeavour in the first place. The process of writing this thesis has been a lesson in the area of this writing (non-dual reality), and assisted me in creating a greater opportunity to integrate my own experiences of non-duality into daily life. While this thesis was not about *me* or my struggles directly, it has taught me many lessons in my own developmental process, and given me the opportunity to face some of my own glaring demons, and to emerge with a deeper understanding of what awakening is.

During the dialogs with the co-researchers I was also able to piece together more of my specific process and understand, more intimately, the struggles of living in a non-dual fashion in today's world. Through the preparation of my colloquium to the final revisions of the document, this has been more a life-process for me, than a far removed topic that I have written on out of mere interest. I related very intimately with all the themes that surfaced in the interviews and was able to come to a place of greater clarity on some of the work that I will have to face in the coming years.

It has shown me that there is no answer, and no truth, other than what is available in the moment to each and every one of us. While I can rest in my non-dual home of being, I must also be open to the material realm and continue down the 'warrior path' of assisting others by continuing on the path, and deepening the process. By bringing some

of this process into the work that I do with other individuals in a therapeutic context, I can also enable others to come to some of the same conclusions. Allowing individuals to have the opportunity to take more responsibility for their own development.

Recommendations for Further Research

While there are obviously many issues in researching such a phenomenon as non-duality and awakening, this is also an area in which there has not been very much research conducted. While I feel that it would be a very difficult task to begin to take these experiences and generalize any of them, I do feel it would be of benefit to look more into the experiences of awakening in order to delineate a clearer approach for therapists to use in order to facilitate a non-dual therapy. Within this context, we can also see how it would be very difficult for a counsellor or therapist to facilitate such a process without his/her own prior lived-experience with such a process. Similar to the existential ideas of walking a path with your clients as a guide/mentor (Corey, 2001), this process must be undertaken by the therapist as well. There are some therapists who have already, in their own process of awakening, begun to do this work and that work seems to be more widely accepted in the counselling/psychology field (Almaas, 2001, 2004; Kornfield, 1993, 2000; Welwood, 2002).

There are always going to be sceptics to what this experience *actually* is, there is still a need to bring more awareness to what some of these states are and what issues that arise on the path look like. We live in a world in which any lay person can learn an age-old esoteric meditative practice on the internet and begin his/her own unfolding process. For many people, it seems that they do not know what they are going to be faced with during the shift from local reality (ego) to non-local reality (beyond ego), considering the

paucity of literature that outlines these states. As already mentioned, there exist maps in which we can understand some of the experiences through a specific lens, but that does not always encompass everyone's individual experience. Each participant, although possessing his/her unique way to embody *being* and awaken to non-dual reality, identified with the present moment as being key. It is in the present moment that absolutely, every last thing, feeling, insight, or reality, is found.

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Appendix A



PARTICIPANT (ADULT) CONSENT FORM

The Transformational Quest to Awaken to Daily Life

You are being invited to participate in a study entitled “The Transformational Quest to Awaken to Daily Life” that is being conducted by Kyler Evans. Kyler Evans is a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Lethbridge and you may contact him if you have further questions by phone number at (403) 388-4549 or via email kyler.evans@uleth.ca. As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree in counselling psychology. It is being conducted under the co-supervision of Gary Nixon & Cynthia Chambers. You may contact my supervisors at, (Gary Nixon) (403) 329-2644 or via email gary.nixon@uleth.ca, or (Cynthia Chambers) (403) 329-2392 or via email Chambers@uleth.ca.

The purpose of this research project is to assist in answering the question: what is the lived experience of the individual seeking for spiritual wholeness and coming to awakening. The objectives of the study will be; 1) to understand the possible psychological issues (ex. depression) that may be involved in this process, 2) to illuminate the lived experience of the phenomenon of awakening. Research of this type is important because I will be opening a new area of study that can contribute to health practitioners understanding of various difficulties and states of consciousness that can exist in spiritual seekers. This can add to the literature and provide an understanding of what some of these states and difficulties may look like, and how these states can sometimes be mistaken for pathologies and/or psychological disorders and not as an opening of consciousness.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you have experienced the phenomenon of awakening and will be able to articulate your experience, and are of 18 years of age or older. If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include an interview lasting between 90-120 minutes. There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include offering a potentially new understanding of the phenomenon of awakening which may also provide a guide for practitioners to follow in terms of invalidly diagnosing symptoms that can look similar to chronic mental illnesses. This may also benefit spiritual seekers who have gone through similar things and who may be struggling in his/her spiritual practice and wrestling with reality, as it is. Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without reason. However, once your interview is compiled and examined, it will no longer be possible to eliminate it from the thesis writing process. Subsequently, if you do withdraw from the study prior to compilation and examination your interview will be destroyed by the researcher. In terms of protecting your anonymity participants will be completely protected. Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the interview will further be ensured by having your taped interview placed into a sealed envelop and transferred

into a locked filing cabinet which will only be accessible to the principle investigator. The taped interviews will be kept for five years and be destroyed after that time, in October 2011. If you would like a copy of the final results of the thesis this will be provided to you by the researcher when compiled and all final changes have been made.

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways 1) compiled into a thesis; 2) published in a scholarly journal; 3) presented at a scholarly meeting; 4) published in a book. In addition to being able to contact the researcher and the thesis supervisors at the above phone numbers, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Chair of the Faculty of Education Human Subjects Research Committee (Dr. Rick Mrazek) at the University of Lethbridge (403-329-2425). Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

Appendix B

'The reality of existence'

2005



(Acrylic on canvas)

Appendix C

Untitled

2006



(Charcoal, graphite pencil, acrylic, and pastel on canvas board)

Endnotes

¹ I have italicized path here, as the concept of path is something that is grounded and leads somewhere. This idea is a little different as it is a “path” that can allow the individual to begin to awaken to what is already present in reality and only hidden from awareness.

² Transformation, as it is used throughout this thesis, is to mean the process of inner realization and change that occurs within individuals who are willing to undergo spiritual, emotional, and/or psychological growth in their life.

³ “The counterfeit quest for wholeness” is a term that is sometimes used in Neo-Jungian archetypal psychology (Hillman, 1983) and is meant to describe the hero’s journey and the quest for wholeness (see Campbell, 1970). Jung himself called the addict’s craving a “thirst for wholeness” (cited in Grof, 1993) which can be understood as a need for something more, although looking towards an addictive means to do so is by no means a legitimate quest for wholeness.

Within the context of this thesis, I am using the term to mean an individual’s journey towards wholeness, which is sometimes deemed as counterfeit when substances are used to achieve that feeling of wholeness, or “being complete.” It can be understood as a shortcut in which to achieve a “whole state of being” which is ultimately seen as counterfeit or illusionary as the substances only work to achieve this state for so long. Solowoniuk (2005) describes this process in more detail with regards to gambling and Grof (1993) and Leonard (1989) both provide a good description of the addict’s journey.

⁴ This idea comes up repeatedly in the Zen literature and can also be understood as Level 9 on Wilber’s spectrum of consciousness (Cleary, 2001b; Glassman, 2002; Wilber, 1986, 2000).

⁵ At the time of this experience I was quite drawn to Hinduism in which *Atman* is understood as a similar concept to the idea of soul in the West, an energy body that contains the chakras in the Hindu philosophy (Oxtoby, 1996).

⁶ *Brahman* is the Supreme Being and is sometimes considered inseparable from *Atman* in different schools throughout Hinduism. As Oxtoby (1996) points out, “to know Brahman is to enter a new state of consciousness; to know Brahman is to reach the supreme” (p. 32).

⁷ Sigmund Freud’s (1856-1939) concept of the id-ego-superego is one that has become a part of the common Western references. The id, ego, and superego are seen as part of the personality structure and are all *ruled* by different aspects of the personality. The id is seen as being the *original* structure and is governed according to the pleasure drives in one’s psyche. The ego is said to be the governing factor in the psyche and is based in logic and in realism. The superego acts more like the judge of the other two and can be the influencing balance in one’s life (Corey, 2001; Wollheim, 1985).

⁸ These can manifest in many different ways, such as: integration into society/family, problems ‘fitting in’ to family/peer group, inter-family problems, irrational fears of not fitting in, rigidly following rules, or always breaking them (Wilber, 1986).

⁹ The ego, as characterized by object-relations theory and various other schools of psychology, is a construct and therefore not ‘real’ in any literal sense. Thus, individuals who are seeking validation are doing so to ‘keep his/her ego alive and well,’ which in turn keeps the ego strong and dependent on the external validation which will “keep the ego happy” (Almaas, 1988, 1998a, 2001; Welwood, 2002).

¹⁰ I am using the capitalized word Self in order to convey the truth of one’s essence as is used in the Advaita Vedanta tradition. Please refer to this section in the literature review.

¹¹ This translates literally as, “just-sitting” or “only sitting” (Maezumi, 2002). Maezumi (2002) describes this as, “practice of zazen itself without supportive devices such as breath counting or koans. Characterized by intense non-discursive awareness; shikantaza is ‘zazen doing zazen for the sake of zazen’” (p. 140).

¹² Samadhi is defined as “a non-dualistic state of consciousness in which the consciousness of the experiencing ‘subject’ becomes one with the experienced ‘object’ – thus is only experiential content” (Schumacher & Woerner, 1994, p. 296).

¹³ *Kensho* is often used synonymously with *satori*, which means awakening or self-realization. In this case *Kensho* refers to a student’s initial realization that must be refined through more practice and experience (Loori, 2002; Schumacher & Woerner, 1994).

¹⁴ Sometimes translated or understood as a “full-emptiness;” *sunyata* is seeing into the reality of existence (Schumacher & Woerner, 1994). Kapleau (2000) eloquently explains this Buddhist concept; “Voidness, the

dynamic substratum of all existence. All phenomenon are essentially empty, or devoid of self-substance, in the sense that they are but fleeting manifestations in a stream of endless transformation. Though sunyata, it informs everything; to see into this no-thingness of things is awakening” (p. 283)

¹⁵ Wu-wei is generally translated as “actionless action” or “non-doing” (Schumacher & Woerner, 1994). This concept comes from the *Tao Te Ching* and is a Taoist concept; personifying the ideal Taoist sage (Ames & Hall, 2003). Contained in the 48th verse Lao Tzu (cited in Mitchell, 1988, Ch. 48) Writes:

In the pursuit of knowledge,
every day something is added.
In the practice of Tao,
every day something is dropped.
Less and less do you need to force things,
until finally you arrive at non-action [Wu-wei].
When nothing is done,
nothing is left undone.

¹⁶ Shantideva laid out the path for the bodhisattva and the development of one who undergoes such training from the very thought of awakening. His two predominant texts – *Shikshamuchaya* [collection of rules] & *Bodhicharyavatara* [entering the path of enlightenment] – are still used widely in the Tibetan tradition (Schumacher & Woerner, 1994).

¹⁷ An individual who takes on the path of enlightenment, also vowing to return to the world to free all sentient beings before taking his/her own final step to awakening (Schumacher & Woerner, 1994).

¹⁸ Satsang is a gathering of seekers on the path, who are in the presence of a holy or awakened individual who speaks to the community (Schumacher & Woerner, 1994). For example, the most prominent account of Nisargadatta’s (Maharaj, 1996) teachings is mostly in question and answer format.

¹⁹ In Hindu mythology Hanuman or Hanumat – also known as “the one with the big jaws” or Mahavira (“great hero”) – is a well known character in the Ramayana in which he and his monkey supporters assisted Rama in his war against Ravana (Schumacher & Woerner, 1994).

²⁰ The Ramayana is one of the great Hindu epics which has also had huge impact on Indian culture and is one of the major books in the Hindu canon. There are many different stories but also great knowledge passed down from Hindu sages contained in the book. Although it is very difficult to date, it is usually put between 200 B.C.E – 200 C. E. (O’ Flaherty, 1975; Schumacher & Woerner, 1994).

²¹ It is said that the forest tradition of Thailand pre-dates even the Buddha’s teachings; as many, prior to the Buddha’s philosophy, mainly in India and the Himalayan regions sought spiritual liberation to leave all worldly possessions in order to embrace the wild and primal ways of the forest (Amaro, 2002). As Ajahn Amaro states, “. . .it was a sphere outside the influence of materialistic cultural norms and thus ideal for the cultivation of the aspects of the spirit that transcended them.” (Amaro, 2002, p. 13) Many Western practitioners have gone over seas to Asian and Indian cultures in an attempt to embrace this primitive way of living (Das, 1989; Kornfield, 1993).

²² Ajahn Chah (1918 – 1992) was a Thai Buddhist monk, perhaps one of the most influential Thai monks of the 20th century (Chah, 2002; Kornfield, 1993). Ajahn Chah established two major monasteries; Wat Nong Pah Pong and Wat Pah Nanachat in Northeast Thailand. He entered monastic life, of his own accord, when he was nine years of age. Devoting his entire life to discovering truth he was celibate his entire life and taught American Buddhist masters such as Jack Kornfield (Chah, 2002; Kornfield, 1993).

²³ Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (1917 - Present) is the founder of the TM or transcendental meditation technique which was popularized in the 1960’s by world famous rock band The Beatles; based in Hindu philosophy (Segal, 1996). It has been, since 2001, offered to over five million people and there are over 40,000 teachers world wide (Maharishi, 2001).

²⁴ In 1988, it was found that a Regent (Osel Tendzin) appointed by Chogyam Trungpa – who died in 1987 due to related liver failure from his excessive drinking – had Aids and was inadvertently telling his students that he had a magic power in which could prevent the contraction of the virus to others when he would have sexual relations with them. The Buddhist community publicised this information in order to try and protect the students that had slept with the Regent (Fields, 1992). Jack Kornfield had also published an article in *Yoga Journal* which outlined that out of 51 people he had interviewed, who had slept with their

teacher (in Hindu, Jain, Buddhist communities), 36 felt that these sexual relations had made them feel used and hurt their self-worth (Fields, 1992).

²⁵ There is a lot of literature on transference and many different thoughts on it. Some therapists feel that it is a projection of 'left over' emotions from parental relationships being put on to a therapist, while others see it and cannot exactly describe it, but say it is archetypal in nature (Mattoon, 1985). Counter-transference can be defined as issues that are mirrored to a therapist, from the client which have not yet been dealt with by the therapist. The issue here is that the therapist can get caught in their own issues when working with a client, as opposed to assisting the client in developing and dealing with his/her issues (Corey, 2001). Either way most gurus are not trained in this area and may also experience counter-transference and feel very good when they are perceived as having all the answers (Kornfield, 1993), which can begin to solidify ego and bring about issues of abuse and other things (i.e., the debate over the crazy wisdom traditions) (Falk, 2005).

²⁶ "The awakened heart of loving-kindness and compassion. Absolute bodhichitta is our natural state, experience as the basic goodness that links us to every other living being. It has been defined as openness, ultimate truth, our true nature, soft spot, tender heart, or simply what *is*" (Chodron, 2002, p. 213).

²⁷ The Buddhist community.