

*ECKHART TOLLE*  
*A NEW EARTH*

*Awakening to  
Your Life's Purpose*

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## CHAPTER ONE

### *THE FLOWERING OF HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS*

#### EVOCATION

Earth, 114 million years ago, one morning just after sunrise: The first flower ever to appear on the planet opens up to receive the rays of the sun. Prior to this momentous event that heralds an evolutionary transformation in the life of plants, the planet had already been covered in vegetation for millions of years. The first flower probably did not survive for long, and flowers must have remained rare and isolated phenomena, since conditions were most likely not yet favorable for a widespread flowering to occur. One day, however, a critical threshold was reached, and suddenly there would have been an explosion of color and scent all over the planet – if a perceiving consciousness had been there to witness it.

Much later, those delicate and fragrant beings we call flowers would come to play an essential part in the evolution of consciousness of another species. Humans would increasingly be drawn to and fascinated by them. As the consciousness of human beings developed, flowers were most likely the first thing they came to value that had no utilitarian purpose for them, that is to say, was not linked in some way to survival. They provided inspiration to countless artists, poets, and mystics. Jesus tells us to contemplate the flowers and learn from them how to live. The Buddha is said to have given a “silent sermon” once during which he held up a flower and gazed at it. After a while, one of those present, a monk called Mahakasyapa, began to smile. He is said to have been the only one who had understood the sermon. According to legend, that smile (that is to say, realization) was handed down by twenty-eight successive masters and much later became the origin of Zen.

Seeing beauty in a flower could awaken humans, however briefly, to the beauty that is an essential part of their own innermost being, their true nature. The first recognition of beauty was one of the most significant events in the evolution of human consciousness. The feelings of joy and love are intrinsically connected to that recognition. Without our fully realizing it, flowers would become for us an expression in form of that which is most high, most sacred, and ultimately formless within ourselves. Flowers, more fleeting, more ethereal and more delicate than the plants out of which they emerged, would become like messengers from another realm, like a bridge

between the world of physical forms and the formless. They not only had a scent that was delicate and pleasing to humans, but also brought a fragrance from the realm of spirit. Using the word “enlightenment” in a wider sense than the conventionally accepted one, we could look upon flowers as the enlightenment of plants.

Any life-form in any realm – mineral, vegetable, animal, or human – can be said to undergo “enlightenment.” It is, however, an extremely rare occurrence since it is more than an evolutionary progression: It also implies a discontinuity in its development, a leap to an entirely different level of Being and, most important, a lessening of materiality.

What could be heavier and more impenetrable than a rock, the densest of all forms? And yet some rocks undergo a change in their molecular structure, turn into crystals, and so become transparent to the light. Some carbons, under inconceivable heat and pressure, turn into diamonds, and some heavy minerals into other precious stones.

Most crawling reptilians, the most earthbound of all creatures, have remained unchanged for millions of years. Some, however, grew feathers and wings and turned into birds, thus defying the force of gravity that had held them for so long. They didn’t become better at crawling or walking, but transcended crawling and walking entirely.

Since time immemorial, flowers, crystals, precious stones, and birds have held special significance for the human spirit. Like all life-forms, they are, of course, temporary manifestations of the underlying one Life, one Consciousness. Their special significance and the reason why humans feel such fascination for and affinity with them can be attributed to their ethereal quality.

Once there is a certain degree of presence, of still and alert attention in human beings’ perceptions, they can sense the divine life essence, the one indwelling consciousness or spirit in every creature, every life-form, recognize it as one with their own essence and so love it as themselves. Until this happens, however, most humans see only the outer forms, unaware of the inner essence, just as they are unaware of their own essence and identify only with their own physical and psychological form.

In the case of a flower, a crystal, precious stone, or bird, however, even someone with little or no Presence can occasionally sense that there is more than the mere physical existence of that form, without knowing that this is the reason why he or she is drawn toward it, feels an affinity with it. Because of its ethereal nature, its form obscures the indwelling spirit to a lesser

degree than is the case with other life-forms. The exception to this are all newborn life-forms – babies, puppies, kittens, lambs, and so on. They are fragile, delicate, not yet firmly established in materiality. An innocence, a sweetness and beauty that are not of this world still shine through them. They delight even relatively insensitive humans.

So when you are alert and contemplate a flower, crystal, or bird without naming it mentally, it becomes a window for you into the formless. There is an inner opening, however slight, into the realm of spirit. This is why these three “en-lightened” life-forms have played such an important part in the evolution of human consciousness since ancient times; why, for example, the jewel in the lotus flower is a central symbol of Buddhism and a white bird, the dove, signifies the Holy Spirit in Christianity. They have been preparing the ground for a more profound shift in planetary consciousness that is destined to take place in the human species. This is the spiritual awakening that we are beginning to witness now.

## THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK

Is humanity ready for a transformation of consciousness, an inner flowering so radical and profound that compared to it the flowering of plants, no matter how beautiful, is only a pale reflection? Can human beings lose the density of their conditioned mind structures and become like crystals or precious stones, so to speak, transparent to the light of consciousness? Can they defy the gravitational pull of materialism and materiality and rise above identification with form that keeps the ego in place and condemns them to imprisonment within their own personality?

The possibility of such a transformation has been the central message of the great wisdom teachings of humankind. The messengers – Buddha, Jesus, and others, not all of them known – were humanity’s early flowers. They were precursors, rare and precious beings. A widespread flowering was not yet possible at that time, and their message became largely misunderstood and often greatly distorted. It certainly did not transform human behavior, except in a small minority of people.

Is humanity more ready now than at the time of those early teachers? Why should this be so? What can you do, if anything, to bring about or accelerate this inner shift? What is it that characterizes the old egoic state of consciousness, and by what signs is the new emerging consciousness recognized? These and other essential questions will be addressed in this book. More important, this book itself is a transformational device that has

come out of the arising new consciousness. The ideas and concepts presented here may be important, but they are secondary. They are no more than signposts pointing toward awakening. As you read, a shift takes place within you.

This book's main purpose is not to add new information or beliefs to your mind or to try to convince you of anything, but to bring about a shift in consciousness; that is to say, to awaken. In that sense, this book is not "interesting". Interesting means you can keep your distance, play around with ideas and concepts in your mind, agree or disagree. This book is about you. It will change your state of consciousness or it will be meaningless. It can only awaken those who are ready. Not everyone is ready yet, but many are, and with each person who awakens, the momentum in the collective consciousness grows, and it becomes easier for others. If you don't know what awakening means, read on. Only by awakening can you know the true meaning of that word. A glimpse is enough to initiate the awakening process, which is irreversible. For some, that glimpse will come while reading this book. For many others who may not even have realized it, the process has already begun. This book will help them recognize it. For some, it may have begun through loss or suffering; for others, through coming into contact with a spiritual teacher or teaching, through reading *The Power of Now* or some other spiritually alive and therefore transformational book – or any combination of the above. If the awakening process has begun in you, the reading of this book will accelerate and intensify it.

An essential part of the awakening is the recognition of the unawakened you, the ego as it thinks, speaks and acts, as well as the recognition of the collectively conditioned mental processes that perpetuate the unawakened state. That is why this book shows the main aspects of the ego and how they operate in the individual as well as in the collective. This is important for two related reasons: The first is that unless you know the basic mechanics behind the workings of the ego, you won't recognize it, and it will trick you into identifying with it again and again. This means it takes you over, an impostor pretending to be you. The second reason is that the act of recognition itself is one of the ways in which awakening happens. When you recognize the unconsciousness in you, that which makes the recognition possible *is* the arising consciousness, *is* awakening. You cannot fight against the ego and win, just as you cannot fight against darkness. The light of consciousness is all that is necessary. You are that light.

## OUR INHERITED DYSFUNCTION

If we look more deeply into humanity's ancient religions and spiritual traditions, we will find that underneath the many surface differences there are two core insights that most of them agree on. The words they use to describe those insights differ, yet they all point to a twofold fundamental truth. The first part of this truth is the realization that the "normal" state of mind of most human beings contains a strong element of what we might call dysfunction or even madness. Certain teachings at the heart of Hinduism perhaps come closest to seeing this dysfunction as a form of collective mental illness. They call it *maya*, the veil of delusion. Ramana Maharshi, one of the greatest Indian sages, bluntly states: "The mind is maya."

Buddhism uses different terms. According to the Buddha, the human mind in its normal state generates *dukkha*, which can be translated as suffering, unsatisfactoriness, or just plain misery. He sees it as a characteristic of the human condition. Wherever you go, whatever you do, says the Buddha, you will encounter *dukkha*, and it will manifest in every situation sooner or later.

According to Christian teachings, the normal collective state of humanity is one of "original sin." *Sin* is a word that has been greatly misunderstood and misinterpreted. Literally translated from the ancient Greek in which the New Testament was written, to sin means to miss the mark, as an archer who misses the target, so to sin means to *miss the point* of human existence. It means to live unskillfully, blindly, and thus to suffer and cause suffering. Again, the term, stripped of its cultural baggage and misinterpretations, points to the dysfunction inherent in the human condition.

The achievements of humanity are impressive and undeniable. We have created sublime works of music, literature, painting, architecture, and sculpture. More recently, science and technology have brought about radical changes in the way we live and have enabled us to do and create things that would have been considered miraculous even two hundred years ago. No doubt: The human mind is highly intelligent. Yet its very intelligence is tainted by madness. Science and technology have magnified the destructive impact that the dysfunction of the human mind has upon the planet, other life-forms, and upon humans themselves. That is why the history of the twentieth century is where that dysfunction, that collective insanity, can be most clearly recognized. A further factor is that this dysfunction is actually intensifying and accelerating.

The First World War broke out in 1914. Destructive and cruel wars, motivated by fear, greed, and the desire for power, had been common occurrences throughout human history, as had slavery, torture, and widespread violence inflicted for religious and ideological reasons. Humans suffered more at the hands of each other than through natural disasters. By the year 1914, however, the highly intelligent human mind had invented not only the internal combustion engine, but also bombs, machine guns, submarines, flame throwers, and poison gas. Intelligence in the service of madness! In static trench warfare in France and Belgium, millions of men perished to gain a few miles of mud. When the war was over in 1918, the survivors look in horror and incomprehension upon the devastation left behind: ten million human beings killed and many more maimed or disfigured. Never before had human madness been so destructive in its effect, so clearly visible. Little did they know that this was only the beginning.

By the end of the century, the number of people who died a violent death at the hand of their fellow humans would rise to more than one hundred million. They died not only through wars between nations, but also through mass exterminations and genocide, such as the murder of twenty million “class enemies, spies, and traitors” in the Soviet Union under Stalin or the unspeakable horrors of the Holocaust in Nazi Germany. They also died in countless smaller internal conflicts, such as the Spanish civil war or during the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia when a quarter of that country’s population was murdered.

We only need to watch the daily news on television to realize that the madness has not abated, that is continuing into the twenty-first century. Another aspect of the collective dysfunction of the human mind is the unprecedented violence that humans are inflicting on other life-forms and the planet itself – the destruction of oxygen-producing forests and other plant and animal life; ill-treatment of animals in factory farms; and poisoning of rivers, oceans, and air. Driven by greed, ignorant of their connectedness to the whole, humans persist in behavior that, if continued unchecked, can only result in their own destruction.

The collective manifestations of the insanity that lies at the heart of the human condition constitute the greater part of human history. It is to a large extent a history of madness. If the history of humanity were the clinical case history of a single human being, the diagnosis would have to be: chronic paranoid delusions, a pathological propensity to commit murder and

acts of extreme violence and cruelty against his perceived “enemies” – his own unconsciousness projected outward. Criminally insane, with a few brief lucid intervals.

Fear, greed, and the desire for power are the psychological motivating forces not only behind warfare and violence between nations, tribes, religions, and ideologies, but also the cause of incessant conflict in personal relationships. They bring about a distortion in your perception of other people and yourself. Through them, you misinterpret every situation, leading to misguided action designed to rid you of fear and satisfy your need for *more*, a bottomless hole that can never be filled.

It is important to realize, however, that fear, greed, and the desire for power are not the dysfunction that we are speaking of but are themselves created by the dysfunction which is a deep-seated collective delusion that lies within the mind of each human being. A number of spiritual teachings tell us to let go of fear and desire. But those spiritual practices are usually unsuccessful. They haven’t gone to the root of the dysfunction. Fear, greed, and desire for power are not the ultimate causal factors. Trying to become a good or better human being sounds like a commendable and high-minded thing to do, yet it is an endeavor you cannot ultimately succeed in unless there is a shift in consciousness. This is because it is still part of the same dysfunction, a more subtle and rarefied form of self-enhancement, of desire for more and a strengthening of one’s conceptual identity, one’s self-image. You do not become good by trying to be good, but by finding the goodness that is already within you, and allowing that goodness to emerge. But it can only emerge if something fundamental changes in your state of consciousness.

The history of Communism, originally inspired by noble ideals, clearly illustrates what happens when people attempt to change external reality – create a new earth – without any prior change in their inner reality, their state of consciousness. They make plans without taking into account the blueprint for dysfunction that every human being carries within: the ego.

## THE ARISING NEW CONSCIOUSNESS

Most ancient religions and spiritual traditions share the common insight – that our “normal” state of mind is marred by a fundamental defect. However, out of this insight into the nature of the human condition – we may call it the bad news – arises a second insight: the good news of the possibility of a radical transformation of human consciousness. In Hindu

teachings (and sometimes in Buddhism also), this transformation is called *enlightenment*. In the teachings of Jesus, it is *salvation*, and in Buddhism, it is *the end of suffering*. *Liberation* and *awakening* are other terms used to describe this transformation.

The greatest achievement of humanity is not its works of art, science, or technology, but the recognition of its own dysfunction, its own madness. In the distant past, this recognition already came to a few individuals. A man called Gautama Siddhartha, who lived 2,600 years ago in India, was perhaps the first who saw it with absolute clarity. Later the title Buddha was conferred upon him. *Buddha* means “the awakened one.” At about the same time, another of humanity’s early awakened teachers emerged in China. His name was Lao Tzu. He left a record of his teaching in the form of one of the most profound spiritual books ever written, the *Tao Te Ching*.

To recognize one’s own insanity, is of course, the arising of sanity, the beginning of healing and transcendence. A new dimension of consciousness had begun to emerge on the planet, a first tentative flowering. Those rare individuals then spoke to their contemporaries. They spoke of sin, of suffering, of delusion. They said, “Look how you live. See what you are doing, the suffering you create.” They then pointed to the possibility of awakening from the collective nightmare of “normal” human existence. They showed the way.

The world was not yet ready for them, and yet they were a vital and necessary part of human awakening. Inevitably, they were mostly misunderstood by their contemporaries, as well as by subsequent generations. Their teachings, although both simple and powerful, became distorted and misinterpreted, in some cases even as they were recorded in writing by their disciples. Over the centuries, many things were added that had nothing to do with the original teachings, but were reflections of a fundamental misunderstanding. Some of the teachers were ridiculed, reviled, or killed; others came to be worshipped as gods. Teachings that pointed the way beyond the dysfunction of the human mind, the way out of the collective insanity, were distorted and became themselves part of the insanity.

And so religions, to a large extent, became divisive rather than unifying forces. Instead of bringing about an ending of violence and hatred through a realization of the fundamental oneness of all life, they brought more violence and hatred, more divisions between people as well as between different religions and even within the same religion. They became ideologies, belief systems people could identify with and so use them to

enhance their false sense of self. Through them, they could make themselves “right” and others “wrong” and thus define their identity through their enemies, the “others,” the “nonbelievers” or “wrong believers” who not infrequently they saw themselves justified in killing. Man made “God” in his own image. The eternal, the infinite, and unnameable was reduced to a mental idol that you had to believe in and worship as “my god” or “our god.”

And yet... and yet... in spite of all the insane deeds perpetrated in the name of religion, the Truth to which they point still shines at their core. It still shines, however dimly, through layers upon layers of distortion and misinterpretation. It is unlikely, however, that you will be able to perceive it there unless you have at least already had glimpse of that Truth within yourself. Throughout history, there have always been rare individuals who experienced a shift in consciousness and so realized within themselves that toward which all religions point. To describe that non-conceptual Truth, they then used the conceptual framework of their own religions.

Through some of those men and women, “schools” or movements developed within all major religions that represented not only a rediscovery, but in some cases an intensification of the light of the original teaching. This is how Gnosticism and mysticism came into existence in early and medieval Christianity, Sufism in the Islamic religion, Hasidism and Kabbala in Judaism, Advaita Vedanta in Hinduism, Zen and Dzogchen in Buddhism. Most of these schools were iconoclastic. They did away with layers upon layers of deadening conceptualization and mental belief structures, and for this reason most of them were viewed with suspicion and often hostility by the established religious hierarchies. Unlike mainstream religion, their teachings emphasized realization and inner transformation. It is through those esoteric schools or movements that the major religions regained the transformative power of the original teachings, although in most cases, only a small minority of people had access to them. Their numbers were never large enough to have any significant impact on the deep collective unconsciousness of the majority. Over time, some of those schools themselves became too rigidly formalized or conceptualized to remain effective.

## SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGION

What is the role of the established religions in the arising of the new consciousness? Many people are already aware of the difference between spirituality and religion. They realize that having a belief system- a set of

thoughts that you regard as the absolute truth – does not make you spiritual no matter what the nature of those beliefs is. In fact, the more you make your thoughts (beliefs) into your identity, the more cut off you are from the spiritual dimension within yourself. Many “religious” people are stuck at that level. They equate truth with thought, and as they are completely identified with thought (their mind), they claim to be in sole possession of the truth in an unconscious attempt to protect their identity. They don’t realize the limitations of thought. Unless you believe (think) exactly as they do, you are wrong in their eyes, and in the not-too-distant past, they would have felt justified in killing you for that. And some still do, even now.

The new spirituality, the transformation of consciousness, is arising to a large extent outside of the structures of the existing institutionalized religions. There were always pockets of spirituality even in mind-dominated religions, although the institutionalized hierarchies felt threatened by them and often tried to suppress them. A large-scale opening of spirituality outside of the religious structures is an entirely new development. In the past, this would have been inconceivable, especially in the West, the most mind-dominated of all cultures, where the Christian church had a virtual franchise on spirituality. You couldn’t just stand up and give a spiritual talk or publish a spiritual book unless you were sanctioned by the church, and if you were not, they would quickly silence you. But now, even within certain churches and religions, there are signs of change. It is heartwarming, and one is grateful for even the slightest signs of openness, such as Pope John Paul II visiting a mosque as well as a synagogue.

Partly as a result of the spiritual teachings that have arisen outside the established religions, but also due to an influx of the ancient Eastern wisdom teachings, a growing number of followers of traditional religions are able to let go of identification with form, dogma, and rigid belief systems and discover the original depth that is hidden within their own spiritual tradition at the same time as they discover the depth within themselves. They realize that how “spiritual” you are has nothing to do with what you believe but everything to do with your state of consciousness. This, in turn, determines how you act in the world and interact with others.

Those unable to look beyond form become even more deeply entrenched in their beliefs, that is to say, in their mind. We are witnessing not only an unprecedented influx of consciousness at this time but also an entrenchment and intensification of the ego. Some religious institutions will be open to the new consciousness; others will harden their doctrinal

positions and become part of all those other man-made structures through which the collective ego will defend itself and “fight back.” Some churches, sects, cults, or religious movements are basically collective egoic entities, as rigidly identified with their mental positions as the followers of any political ideology that is closed to any alternative interpretation of reality.

But the ego is destined to dissolve, and all its ossified structures, whether they be religious or other institutions, corporations, or governments, will disintegrate from within, no matter how deeply entrenched they appear to be. The most rigid structures, the most impervious to change, will collapse first. This has already happened in the case of Soviet Communism. How deeply entrenched, how solid and monolithic it appeared, and yet within a few years, it disintegrated from within. No one foresaw this. All were taken by surprise. There are many more such surprises in store for us.

## THE URGENCY OF TRANSFORMATION

When faced with a radical crisis, when the old way of being in the world, of interacting with each other and with the realm of nature doesn't work anymore, when survival is threatened by seemingly insurmountable problems, an individual life-form – or a species – will either die or become extinct or rise above the limitations of its condition through an evolutionary leap.

It is believed that the life-forms on this planet first evolved in the sea. When there were no animals yet to be found on land, the sea was already teeming with life. Then at some point, one of the sea creatures must have started to venture onto dry land. It would perhaps crawl a few inches at first, then exhausted by the enormous gravitational pull of the planet, it would return to the water, where gravity is almost nonexistent and where it could live with much greater ease. And then it tried again and again and again, and much later would adapt to life on land, grow feet instead of fins, develop lungs instead of gills. It seems unlikely that a species would venture into such an alien environment and undergo an evolutionary transformation unless it was compelled to do so by some crisis situation. There may have been a large sea area that got cut off from the main ocean where the water gradually receded over thousands of years, forcing fish to leave their habitat and evolve.

Responding to a radical crisis that threatens our very survival – this is humanity's challenge now. The dysfunction of the egoic human mind,

recognized already more than 2,500 years ago by the ancient wisdom teachers and now magnified through science and technology, is for the first time threatening the survival of the planet. Until very recently, the transformation of human consciousness – also pointed to by the ancient teachers – was no more than a possibility, realized by a few rare individuals here and there, irrespective of cultural or religious background. A widespread flowering of human consciousness did not happen because it was not yet imperative.

A significant portion of the earth's population will soon recognize, if they haven't already done so, that humanity is now faced with a stark choice: Evolve or die. A still relatively small but rapidly growing percentage of humanity is already experiencing within themselves the breakup of the old egoic mind patterns and the emergence of a new dimension of consciousness.

What is arising now is not a new belief system, a new religion, spiritual ideology, or mythology. We are coming to the end not only of mythologies but also of ideologies and belief systems. The change goes deeper than the content of your mind, deeper than your thoughts. In fact, at the heart of the new consciousness is the transcendence of thought, the newfound ability of rising above thought, of realizing a dimension within yourself that is infinitely more vast than thought. You then no longer derive your identity, your sense of who you are, from the incessant stream of thinking that in the old consciousness you take to be yourself. What a liberation to realize that the "voice in my head" is not who I am. Who am I then? The one who sees that. The awareness that is prior to thought, the space in which the thought – or the emotion or sense perception – happens.

Ego is no more than this: identification with form, which primarily means thought forms. If evil has any reality – and it has a relative, not an absolute, reality – this is also its definition: complete identification with form – physical forms, thought forms, emotional forms. This results in a total unawareness of my connectedness with the whole, my intrinsic oneness with every "other" as well as with the Source. This forgetfulness is original sin, suffering, delusion. When this delusion of utter separateness underlies and governs whatever I think, say, and do, what kind of world do I create? To find the answer to this, observe how humans relate to each other, read a history book, or watch the news on television tonight.

If the structures of the human mind remain unchanged, we will always end up re-creating fundamentally the same world, the same evils, the same dysfunction.

## A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH

The inspiration for the title of this book came from a Bible prophecy that seems more applicable now than at any other time in human history. It occurs in both the Old and the New Testament and speaks of the collapse of the existing world order and the arising of “a new heaven and a new earth.”<sup>1</sup> We need to understand here that heaven is not a location but refers to the inner realm of consciousness. This is the esoteric meaning of the word, and this is also its meaning in the teachings of Jesus. Earth, on the other hand, is the outer manifestation in form, which is always a reflection of the inner. Collective human consciousness and life on our planet are intrinsically connected. *“A new heaven” is the emergence of a transformed state of human consciousness, and “a new earth” is its reflection in the physical realm.* Since human life and human consciousness are intrinsically one with the life of the planet, as the old consciousness dissolves, there are bound to be synchronistic geographic and climatic natural upheavals in many parts of the planet, some of which we are already witnessing now.

## CHAPTER TWO

### *EGO: THE CURRENT STATE OF HUMANITY*

Words, no matter whether they are vocalized and made into sounds or remain unspoken as thoughts, can cast an almost hypnotic spell upon you. You easily lose yourself in them, become hypnotized into implicitly believing that when you have attached a word to something, you know what it is. The fact is: You don't know what it is. You have only covered up the mystery with a label. Everything, a bird, a tree, even a simple stone, and certainly a human being, is ultimately unknowable. This is because it has unfathomable depth. All we can perceive, experience, think about, is the surface layer of reality, less than the tip of an iceberg.

Underneath the surface appearance, everything is not only connected with everything else, but also with the Source of all life out of which it came. Even a stone, and more easily a flower or a bird, could show you the way back to God, to the Source, to yourself. When you look at it or hold it and *let it be* without imposing a word or mental label on it, a sense of awe, of wonder, arises within you. Its essence silently communicates itself to you and reflects your own essence back to you. This is what great artists sense and succeed in conveying in their art. Van Gogh didn't say: "That's just an old chair." He looked, and looked, and looked. He sensed the Beingness of the chair. Then he sat in front of the canvas and took up the brush. The chair itself would have sold for the equivalent of a few dollars. The painting of that same chair today would fetch in excess of \$25 million.

When you don't cover up the world with words and labels, a sense of the miraculous returns to your life that was lost a long time ago when humanity, instead of using thought, became possessed by thought. A depth returns to your life. Things regain their newness, their freshness. And the greatest miracle is the experiencing of your essential self as prior to any words, thoughts, mental labels, and images. For this to happen, you need to disentangle your sense of I, of Beingness, from all the things it has become mixed up with, that is to say, identified with. That disentanglement is what this book is about.

The quicker you are in attaching verbal or mental labels to things, people, or situations, the more shallow and lifeless your reality becomes, and the more deadened you become to reality, the miracle of life that

continuously unfolds within and around you. In this way, cleverness may be gained, but wisdom is lost, and so are joy, love, creativity, and aliveness. They are concealed in the still gap between the perception and the interpretation. Of course we have to use words and thoughts. They have their own beauty – but do we need to become imprisoned in them?

Words reduce reality to something the human mind can grasp, which isn't very much. Language consists of five basic sounds produced by the vocal cords. They are the vowels *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, *u*. The other sounds are consonants produced by air pressure: *s*, *f*, *g*, and so forth. Do you believe some combination of such basic sounds could ever explain who you are, or the ultimate purpose of the universe, or even what a tree or stone is in its depth?

### THE ILLUSORY SELF

The word “I” embodies the greatest error and the deepest truth, depending on how it is used. In conventional usage, it is not only one of the most frequently used words in the language (together with the related words: “me,” “my,” “mine,” and “myself”) but also one of the most misleading. In normal everyday usage, “I” embodies the primordial error, a misperception of who you are, an illusory sense of identity. This is the ego. This illusory sense of self is what Albert Einstein, who had deep insights not only in to the reality of space and time but also into human nature, referred to as “an optical illusion of consciousness.” That illusory self then becomes the basis for all further interpretations, or rather misinterpretations of reality, all thought processes, interactions, and relationships. Your reality becomes a reflection of the original illusion.

The good news is: If you can recognize illusion as illusion, it dissolves. The recognition of illusion is also its ending. Its survival depends on your mistaking it for reality. In the seeing of who you are not, the reality of who you are emerges by itself. This is what happens as you slowly and carefully read this and the next chapter, which are about the mechanics of the false self we call the ego. So what is the nature of this illusory self?

What you usually refer to when you say “I” is not who you are. By a monstrous act of reductionism, the infinite depth of who you are is confused with a sound produced by the vocal cords or the thought of “I” in your mind and whatever the “I” has identified with. So what do the usual “I” and the related “me,” “my,” or “mine” refer to?

When a young child learns that a sequence of sounds produced by the parents' vocal cords is his or her name, the child begins to equate a word, which in the mind becomes a thought, with who he or she is. At that stage, some children refer to themselves in the third person. "Johnny is hungry." Soon after, they learn the magic word "I" and equate it with their name, which they have already equated with who they are. Then other thoughts come and merge with the original I-thought. The next step are thoughts of me and mine to designate things that are somehow part of "I." This is identification with objects, which means investing *things*, but ultimately thoughts that represent things, with a sense of self, thereby deriving an identity from them. When "my" toy breaks or is taken away, intense suffering arises. Not because of any intrinsic value that the toy has – the child will soon lose interest in it, and it will be replaced by other toys, other objects – but because of the thought of "mine". The toy became part of the child's developing sense of self, of "I."

And so as the child grows up, the original I-thought attracts other thoughts to itself: It becomes identified with a gender, possessions, the sense-perceived body, a nationality, race, religion, profession. Other things the "I" identifies with are roles – mother, father, husband, wife, and so on – accumulated knowledge or opinions, likes and dislikes, and also things that happened to "me" in the past, the memory of which are thoughts that further define my sense of self as "me and my story." These are only some of the things people derive their sense of identity from. They are ultimately no more than thoughts held together precariously by the fact that they are all invested with a sense of self. This mental construct is what you normally refer to when you say "I." To be more precise: Most of the time it is not you who speaks when you say or think "I" but some aspect of that mental construct, the egoic self. Once you awaken, you still use the word "I," but it will come from a much deeper place within yourself.

Most people are still completely identified with the incessant stream of mind, of compulsive thinking, most of it repetitive and pointless. There is no "I" apart from their thought processes and the emotions that go with them. This is the meaning of being spiritually unconscious. When told that there is a voice in their head that never stops speaking, they say, "What voice?" or angrily deny it, which of course *is* the voice, is the thinker, is the unobserved mind. It could almost be looked upon as an entity that has taken possession of them.

Some people never forget the first tie they disidentified from their thoughts and thus briefly experienced the shift in identity from being the content of their mind to being the awareness in the background. For others it happens in such a subtle way they hardly notice it, or they just notice an influx of joy or inner peace without knowing the reason.

## THE VOICE IN THE HEAD

That first glimpse of awareness came to me when I was a first-year student at the University of London. I would take the tube (subway) twice a week to go to the university library, usually around nine o'clock in the morning, toward the end of the rush hour. One time a woman in her early thirties sat opposite me. I had seen her before a few times on that train. One could not help but notice her. Although the train was full, the seats on either side of her were unoccupied, the reason being, no doubt, that she appeared to be quite insane. She looked extremely tense and talked to herself incessantly in a loud and angry voice. She was so absorbed in her thoughts that she was totally unaware, in seemed, of other people or her surroundings. Her head was facing downward and slightly to the left, as if she were addressing someone sitting in the empty seat next to her. Although I don't remember the precise content, her monologue went something like this: "And then she said to me... so I said to her you are a liar how dare you accuse me of... when you are the one who has always taken advantage of me I trusted you and you betrayed my trust..." There was the angry tone in her voice of someone who has been wronged, who needs to defend her position lest she become annihilated.

As the train approached Tottenham Court Road Station, she stood up and walked toward the door with still no break in the stream of words coming out of her mouth. That was my stop too, so I got off behind her. At street level, she began to walk toward Bedford Square, still engaged in her imaginary dialogue, still angrily accusing and asserting her position. My curiosity aroused, I decided to follow her as long as she was walking in the same general direction I had to go in. Although engrossed in her imaginary dialogue, she seemed to know where she was going. Soon we were within sight of the imposing structure of Senate House, a 1930's high-rise, the university's central administrative building and library. I was shocked. Was it possible that we were going to the same place? Yes, that's where she was heading. Was she a teacher, student, an office worker, a librarian? Maybe she

was some psychologist's research project. I never knew the answer. I walked twenty steps behind her, and by the time I entered the building (which ironically was the location of the headquarters of the "Mind Police" in the film version of George Orwell's novel, *1984*), she had already been swallowed up by one of the elevators.

I was somewhat taken aback by what I had just witnessed. A mature first-year student at twenty-five, I saw myself as an intellectual in the making, and I was convinced that all the answers to the dilemmas of human existence could be found through the intellect, that is to say, by thinking. I didn't realize yet that thinking without awareness *is* the main dilemma of human existence. I looked upon the professors as sages who had all the answers and upon the university as the temple of knowledge. How could an insane person like her be part of this?

I was still thinking about her when I was in the men's room prior to entering the library. As I was washing my hands, I thought: I hope I don't end up like her. The man next to me looked briefly in my direction, and I suddenly was shocked when I realized that I hadn't just thought those words, but mumbled them aloud. "Oh my God, I'm already like her," I thought. Wasn't my mind as incessantly active as hers? There were only minor differences between us. The predominant underlying emotion behind her thinking seemed to be anger. In my case, it was mostly anxiety. She thought out loud. I thought – mostly – in my head. If she was mad, then everyone was mad, including myself. There were differences in degree only.

For a moment, I was able to stand back from my own mind and see it from a deeper perspective, as it were. There was a brief shift from thinking to awareness. I was still in the men's room, but alone now, looking at my face in the mirror. At that moment of detachment from my mind, I laughed out loud. It may have sounded insane, but it was the laughter of sanity, the laughter of the big-bellied Buddha. "Life isn't as serious as my mind makes it out to be." That's what the laughter seemed to be saying. But it was only a glimpse, very quickly to be forgotten. I would spend the next three years in anxiety and depression, completely identified with my mind. I had to get close to suicide before awareness returned, and then it was much more than a glimpse. I became free of compulsive thinking and of the false, mind-made "I."

The above incident not only gave me a first glimpse of awareness, it also planted the first doubt as to the absolute validity of the human intellect. A few months later, something tragic happened that made my doubt row. On a Monday morning, we arrived for a lecture to be given by a professor whose mind I admired greatly, only to be told that sadly he had committed suicide sometime during the weekend by shooting himself. I was stunned. He was a highly respected teacher and seemed to have all the answers. However, I could as yet see no alternative to the cultivation of thought. I didn't realize yet that thinking is only a tiny aspect of the consciousness that we are, nor did I know anything about the ego, let alone being able to detect it within myself.

## CONTENT AND STRUCTURE OF THE EGO

The egoic mind is completely conditioned by the past. Its conditioning is twofold: It consists of content and structure.

In the case of a child who cries in deep suffering because his toy has been taken away, the toy represents content. It is interchangeable with any other content, any other toy or object. The content you identify with is conditioned by your environment, your upbringing, and surrounding culture. Whether the child is rich or poor, whether the toy is a piece of wood shaped like an animal or a sophisticated electronic gadget makes no difference as far as the suffering caused by its loss is concerned. The reason why such acute suffering occurs is concealed in the word "my," and it is structural. The unconscious compulsion to enhance one's identity through association with an object is built into the very structure of the egoic mind.

One of the most basic mind structures through which the ego comes into existence is identification. The word "identification" is derived from the Latin word *idem*, meaning "same" and *facere*, which means "to make." So when I identify with something, I "make it the same." The same as what? The same as I. I endow it with a sense of self, and so it becomes part of my "identity." One of the most basic levels of identification is with things: My toy later becomes my car, my house, my clothes, and so on. I try to find myself in things but never quite make it and end up losing myself in them. That is the fate of the ego.

## IDENTIFICATION WITH THINGS

The people in the advertising industry know very well that in order to sell things that people don't really need, they must convince them that those things will add something to how they see themselves or are seen by others; in other words, add something to their sense of self. They do this, for example, by telling you that you will stand out from the crowd by using this product and so by implication be more fully yourself. Or they may create an association in your mind between the product and a famous person, or a youthful, attractive, or happy-looking person. Even pictures of old or deceased celebrities in their prime work well for that purpose. The unspoken assumption is that by buying this product, through some magical act of appropriation, you become like them, or rather the surface image of them. And so in many cases you are not buying a product but an "identity enhancer." Designer labels are primarily collective identities that you buy into. They are expensive and therefore "exclusive." If everybody could buy them, they would lose their psychological value and all you would be left with would be their material value, which likely amounts to a fraction of what you paid.

What kind of things you identify with will vary from person to person according to age, gender, income, social class, fashion, the surrounding culture, and so on. *What* you identify with is all to do with content; whereas, the unconscious compulsion to identify is structural. It is one of the most basic ways in which the egoic mind operates.

Paradoxically, what keeps the so-called consumer society going is the fact that trying to find yourself through things doesn't work: The ego satisfaction is short-lived and so you keep looking for more, keep buying, keep consuming.

Of course, in this physical dimension that our surface selves inhabit, things are a necessary and inescapable part of our lives. We need housing, clothes, furniture, tools, transportation. There may also be things in our lives that we value because of their beauty or inherent quality. We need to honor the world of things, not despise it. Each thing has Beingness, is a temporary form that has its origin within the formless one Life, the source of all things, all bodies, all forms. In most ancient cultures, people believed that everything, even so-called inanimate objects, had an indwelling spirit, and in

this respect they were closer to the truth than we are today. When you live in a world deadened by mental abstraction, you don't sense the aliveness of the universe anymore. Most people don't inhabit a living reality, but a conceptualized one.

But we cannot really honor things if we use them as a means to self-enhancement, that is to say, if we try to find ourselves through them. This is exactly what the ego does. Ego-identification with things creates attachment to things, obsession with things, which in turn creates our consumer society and economic structures where the only measure of progress is always *more*. The unchecked striving for more, for endless growth, is a dysfunction and a disease. It is the same dysfunction the cancerous cell manifests, whose only goal is to multiply itself, unaware that it is bringing about its own destruction by destroying the organism of which it is a part. Some economists are so attached to the notion of growth that they can't let go of that word, so they refer to recession as a time of "negative growth."

A large part of many people's lives is consumed by an obsessive preoccupation with things. This is why one of the ills of our times is object proliferation. When you can no feel the life that you are, you are likely to fill up your life with things. As a spiritual practice, I suggest that you investigate your relationship with the world of things through self-observation, and in particular, things that are designated with the word "my." You need to be alert and honest to find out, for example, whether your sense of self-worth is bound up with things you possess. Do certain things induce a subtle feeling of importance or superiority? Does the lack of them make you feel inferior to others who have more than you? Do you casually mention things you own or show them off to increase your sense of worth in someone else's eyes and through them in your own? Do you feel resentful or angry and somehow diminished in your sense of self when someone else has more than you or when you lose a prized possession?

## THE LOST RING

When I was seeing people as a counselor and spiritual teacher, I would visit a woman twice a week whose body was riddled with cancer. She was a schoolteacher in her mid-forties and had been given no more than a few

months to live by her doctors. Sometimes a few words were spoken during those visits, but mostly we would sit together in silence, and as we did, she had her first glimpses of the stillness within herself that she never knew existed during her busy life as a schoolteacher.

One day, however, I arrived to find her in a state of great distress and anger. “What happened?” I asked. Her diamond ring, of great monetary as well as sentimental value, had disappeared, and she said she was sure it had been stolen by the woman who came to look after her for a few hours every day. She said she didn’t understand how anybody could be so callous and heartless as to do this to her. She asked me whether she should confront the woman or whether it would be better to call the police immediately. I said I couldn’t tell her what to do, but asked her to find out how important a ring or anything else was at this point in her life. “You don’t understand,” she said. “This was my grandmother’s ring. I used to wear it every day until I got ill and my hands became too swollen. It’s more than just a ring to me. How can I not be upset?”

The quickness of her response and the anger and defensiveness in her voice were indications that she had not yet become present enough to look within and to disentangle her reaction from the event and observe them both. Her anger and defensiveness were signs that the ego was still speaking through her. I said, “I am going to ask you a few questions, but instead of answering them now, see if you can find the answers within you. I will pause briefly after each question. When an answer comes, it may not necessarily come in the form of words.” She said she was ready to listen. I asked: “Do you realize that you will have to let go of the ring at some point, perhaps quite soon? How much more time do you need before you will be ready to let go of it? Will you become less when you let go of it? Has *who you are* become diminished by the loss?” There were a few minutes of silence after the last question.

When she started speaking again, there was a smile on her face, and she seemed at peace. “The last question made me realize something important. First I went to my mind for an answer and my mind said, ‘Yes, of course you have been diminished.’ Then I asked myself the question again, ‘Has *who I am* become diminished?’ This time I tried to feel rather than think the answer. And suddenly I could feel my I Am-ness. I have never felt

that before. If I can feel the I Am so strongly, then who I am hasn't been diminished at all. I can still feel it now, something peaceful but very alive."

"That is the joy of Being," I said. "You can only feel it when you get out of your head. Being must be felt. It can't be thought. The ego doesn't know about it because thought is what it consists of. The ring was really in your head as a thought that you confused with the sense of I Am. You thought the I Am or a part of it was in the ring."

"Whatever the ego seeks and gets attached to are substitutes for the Being that it cannot feel. You can value and care for things, but whenever you get attached to them, you will know it's the ego. And you are never really attached to a thing but to a thought that has 'I,' 'me,' or 'mine' in it. Whenever you completely accept a loss, you go beyond ego, and who you are, the I Am which is consciousness itself, emerges."

She said, "Now I understand something Jesus said that never made much sense to me before: 'If someone takes your shirt, let him have your coat as well.'"

"That's right," I said. "It doesn't mean you should never lock your door. All it means is that sometimes letting things go is an act of far greater power than defending or hanging on."

In the last few weeks of her life as her body became weaker, she became more and more radiant, as if light were shining through her. She gave many of her possessions away, some to the woman she thought had stolen the ring, and with each thing she gave away, her joy deepened. When her mother called me to let me know she had passed away, she also mentioned that after her death they found her ring in the medicine cabinet in the bathroom. Did the woman return the ring, or had it been there all the time? Nobody will ever know. One thing we do know: Life will give you whatever experience is most helpful for the evolution of your consciousness. How do you now this is the experience you need? Because this is the experience you are having at this moment.

Is it wrong then to be proud of one's possessions or to feel resentful toward people to have more than you? Not at all. That sense of pride, of needing to stand out, the apparent enhancement of one's self through "more than" and diminishment through "less than" is neither right nor wrong – it is

the ego. The ego isn't wrong; it's just unconscious. When you observe the ego in yourself, you are beginning to go beyond it. Don't take the ego too seriously. When you detect egoic behavior in yourself, smile. At times you may even laugh. How could humanity have been taken in by this for so long? Above all, know that the ego isn't personal. It isn't who you are. If you consider the ego to be your personal problem, that's just more ego.

## THE ILLUSION OF OWNERSHIP

To "own" something – what does it really mean? What does it mean to make something "mine"? If you stand on a street in New York, point to a huge skyscraper and say, "That building is mine. I own it," you are either very wealthy or you are delusional or a liar. In any case, you are telling a story in which the thought form "I" and the thought form "building" merge into one. That's how the mental concept of ownership works. If everybody agrees with your story, there will be signed pieces of paper to certify their agreement with it. You are wealthy. If nobody agrees with the story, they will send you to a psychiatrist. You are delusional, or a compulsive liar.

It is important to recognize here that the story and the thought forms that make up the story, whether people agree with it or not, have absolutely nothing to do with who you are. Even if people agree with it, it is ultimately a fiction. Many people don't realize until they are on their deathbed and everything external falls away that *no thing* ever had anything to do with who they are. In the proximity of death, the whole concept of ownership stands revealed as ultimately meaningless. In the last moments of their life, they then also realize that while they were looking throughout their lives for a more complete sense of self, what they were really looking for, their Being, had actually always already been there, but had been largely obscured by their identification with things, which ultimately means identification with their mind.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit," Jesus said, "for theirs will be the kingdom of heaven."<sup>1</sup> What does "poor in spirit" mean? No inner baggage, no identifications. Not with things, nor with any mental concepts that have a sense of self in them. And what is the "kingdom of heaven" The simple but profound joy of Being that is there when you let go of identifications and so become "poor in spirit."

This is why renouncing all possessions has been an ancient spiritual practice in both East and West. Renunciation of possessions, however, will not automatically free you of the ego. It will attempt to ensure its survival by finding something else to identify with, for example, a mental image of yourself as someone who has transcended all interest in material possessions and is therefore superior, is *more* spiritual than others. There are people who have renounced all possessions but have a bigger ego than some millionaires. If you take away one kind of identification, the ego will quickly find another. It ultimately doesn't mind what it identifies with as long as it has an identity. Anti-consumerism or anti-private ownership would be another thought form, another mental position, that can replace identification with possessions. Through it you could make yourself right and others wrong. As we shall see later, making yourself right and others wrong is one of the principal egoic mind patterns, one of the main forms of unconsciousness. In other words, the content of the ego may change; the mind structure that keeps it alive does not.

One of the unconscious assumptions is that by identifying with an object through the fiction of ownership, the apparent solidity and permanency of that material object will endow your sense of self with greater solidity and permanency. This applies particularly to buildings and even more so to land since it is the only thing you think you can own that cannot be destroyed. The absurdity of owning something becomes even more apparent in the case of land. In the days of the white settlement, the natives of North America found ownership of land an incomprehensible concept. And so they lost it when the Europeans made them signs pieces of paper that were equally incomprehensible to them. They felt they belonged to the land, but the land did not belong to them.

The ego tends to equate having with Being: I have, therefore I am. And the more I have, the more I am. The ego lives through comparison. How you are seen by others turns into how you see yourself. If everyone lived in a mansion or everyone was wealthy, your mansion or your wealth would no longer serve to enhance your sense of self. You could then move to a simple cabin, give up our wealth, and regain an identity by seeing yourself and being seen as more spiritual than others. How you are seen by others becomes the mirror that tells you what you are like and who you are. The ego's sense of self-worth is in most cases bound up with the worth you have

in the eyes of others. You need others to give you a sense of self, and if you live in a culture that to a large extent equates self-worth with how much and what you have, if you cannot look through this collective delusion, you will be condemned to chasing after things for the rest of your life in the vain hope of finding your worth and completion of your sense of self there.

How do you let go of attachment to things? Don't even try. It's impossible. Attachment to things drops away by itself when you no longer seek to find yourself in them. In the meantime, just be aware of your attachment to things. Sometimes you may not know that you are attached to something, which is to say, until you lose it or there is the threat of loss. If you then become upset, anxious, and so on, it means you are attached. If you are aware that you are identified with a thing, the identification is no longer total. "I am the awareness that is aware that there is attachment." That's the beginning of the transformation of consciousness.

#### WANTING: THE NEED FOR MORE

The ego identifies with having, but its satisfaction in having is a relatively shallow and short-lived one. Concealed within it remains a deep-seated sense of dissatisfaction, of incompleteness, of "not enough." "I don't have enough yet," by which the ego really means, "I *am* not enough yet."

As we have seen, *having* – the concept of ownership – is a fiction created by the ego to give itself solidity and permanency and make itself stand out, make itself special. Since you cannot find yourself through having, however, there is another more powerful drive underneath it that pertains to the structure of the ego: the need for more, which we could also call "wanting." No ego can last for long without the need for more. Therefore, wanting keeps the ego alive much more than having. The ego wants to want more than it wants to have. And so the shallow satisfaction of having is always replaced by more wanting. This is the psychological need for more, that is to say, more things to identify with. It is an addictive need, not an authentic one.

In some cases, the psychological need for more or the feeling of not enough that is so characteristic of the ego becomes transferred to the physical level and so turns into insatiable hunger. The sufferers of bulimia will often make themselves vomit so they can continue eating. Their mind is

hungry, not their body. This eating disorder would become healed if the sufferers, instead of being identified with their mind, could get in touch with their body and so feel the true needs of the body rather than the pseudo-needs of the egoic mind.

Some egos know what they want and pursue their aim with grim and ruthless determination – Genghis Khan, Stalin, Hitler, to give just a few larger-than-life examples. The energy behind their wanting, however, creates an opposing energy of equal intensity that in the end leads to their downfall. In the meantime, they make themselves and many others unhappy, or, in the larger-than-life examples, create hell on earth. Most egos have conflicting wants. They want different things at different times or may not even know what they want except that they don't want what is: the present moment. Unease, restlessness, boredom, anxiety, dissatisfaction, are the result of unfulfilled wanting. Wanting is structural, so no amount of content can provide lasting fulfillment as long as that mental structure remains in place. Intense wanting that has no specific object can often be found in the still-developing ego of teenagers, some of whom are in a permanent state of negativity and dissatisfaction.

The physical needs for food, water, shelter, clothing, and basic comforts could be easily met for all humans on the planet, were it not for the imbalance of resources created by the insane and rapacious need for more, the greed of the ego. It finds collective expression in the economic structures of this world, such as the huge corporations, which are egoic entities that compete with each other for more. Their only blind aim is profit. They pursue that aim with absolute ruthlessness. Nature, animals, people, even their own employees, are no more than digits on a balance sheet, lifeless objects to be used, then discarded.

The thought forms of “me” and “mine,” of “more than,” of “I want,” “I need,” “I must have,” and of “not enough” pertain not to content but to the structure of the ego. The content is interchangeable. As long as you don't recognize those thought forms within yourself, as long as they remain unconscious, you will believe in what they say; you will be condemned to acting out those unconscious thoughts, condemned to seeking and not finding – because when those thought forms operate, no possession, place, person, or condition will ever satisfy you. No content will satisfy you, as long as the egoic structure remains in place. No matter what you have or get,

you won't be happy. You will always be looking for something else that promises greater fulfillment, that promises to make your incomplete sense of self complete and fill that sense of lack you feel within.

## IDENTIFICATION WITH THE BODY

Apart from objects, another basic form of identification is with “my” body. Firstly, the body is male or female, and so the sense of being a man or woman takes up a significant part of most people's sense of self. Gender becomes identity. Identification with gender is encouraged at an early age, and it forces you into a role, into conditioned patterns of behavior that affect all aspects of your life, not just sexuality. It is a role many people become completely trapped in, even more so in some of the traditional societies than in Western culture where identification with gender is beginning to lessen somewhat. In some traditional cultures, the worst fate a woman can have is to be unwed or barren, and for a man to lack sexual potency and not be able to produce children. Life's fulfillment is perceived to be fulfillment of one's gender identity.

In the West, it is the physical appearance of the body that contributes greatly to the sense of who you think you are: its strength or weakness, its perceived beauty or ugliness relative to others. For many people, their sense of self-worth is intimately bound up with their physical strength, good looks, fitness, and external appearance. many feel a diminished sense of self-worth because they perceive their body as ugly or imperfect.

In some cases, the mental image or concept of “my body” is a complete distortion of reality. A young woman may think of herself as overweight and therefore starve herself when in fact she is quite thin. She cannot see her body anymore. All she “sees” is the mental concept of her body, which says “I am fat” or “I will become fat.” At the root of this condition lies identification with the mind. As people have become more and more mind-identified, which is the intensification of egoic dysfunction, there has also been a dramatic increase in the incidence of anorexia in recent decades. If the sufferer could look at her body without the interfering judgments of her mind or even recognize those judgments for what they are instead of believing in them – or better still, if she could feel her body from within – this would initiate her healing.

Those who are identified with their good looks, physical strength, or abilities experience suffering when those attributes begin to fade and disappear, as of course they will. Their very identity that was based on them is then threatened with collapse. In either case, ugly or beautiful, people derive a significant part of their identity, be it negative or positive, from their body. To be more precise, they derive their identity from the I-thought that they erroneously attach to the mental image or concept of their body, which after all is no more than a physical form that shares the destiny of all forms—impermanence and ultimately decay.

Equating the physical sense-perceived body that is destined to grow old, wither, and die with “I” always leads to suffering sooner or later. To refrain from identifying with the body doesn't mean that you neglect, despise, or no longer care for it. If it is strong, beautiful, or vigorous, you can enjoy and appreciate those attributes – while they last. You can also improve the body's condition through right nutrition and exercise. If you don't equate the body with who you are, when beauty fades, vigor diminishes, or the body becomes incapacitated, this will not affect your sense of worth or identity in any way. In fact, as the body begins to weaken, the formless dimension, the light of consciousness, can shine more easily through the fading form.

It is not just people with good or near-perfect bodies who are likely to equate it with who they are. You can just as easily identify with a “problematic” body and make the body's imperfection, illness, or disability in to your identity. You may then think and speak of yourself as a “sufferer” of this or that chronic illness or disability. You receive a great deal of attention from doctors and others who constantly confirm to you your conceptual identity as a sufferer or a patient. You then unconsciously cling to the illness because it has become the most important part of who you perceive yourself to be. It has become another thought form with which the ego can identify. Once the ego has found an identity, it does not want to let go. Amazingly but not infrequently, the ego in search of a stronger identity and can and does create illnesses in order to strengthen itself through them.

## FEELING THE INNER BODY

Although body-identification is one of the most basic forms of ego, the good news is that it is also the one that you can most easily go beyond. This is done not by trying to convince yourself that you are not your body,

but by shifting your attention from the external form of your body and from thoughts about your body – beautiful, ugly, strong, weak, too fat, too thin – to the feeling of aliveness inside it. No matter what your body's appearance is on the outer level, beyond the outer form it is an intensely alive energy field.

If you are not familiar with “inner body” awareness, close your eyes for a moment and find out if there is life inside your hands. Don't ask your mind. It will say, “ I can't feel anything.” Probably it will also say, “Give me something more interesting to think about.” So instead of asking your mind, go to the hands directly. By this I mean become aware of the subtle feeling of aliveness inside them. It is there. You just have to go there with your attention to notice it. you may get a slight tingling sensation at first, then a feeling of energy or aliveness. If you hold your attention in your hands for a while, the sense of aliveness will intensify. Some people won't even have to close their eyes. They will be able to feel their “inner hands” at the same times as they read this. Then go to your feet, keep your attention there for a minute or so, and begin to feel your hands and feet at the same time. Then incorporate other parts of the body – legs, arms, abdomen, chest, and so on – into that feeling until you are aware of the inner body as a global sense of aliveness.

What I call the “inner body” isn't really the body anymore but life energy, the bridge between form and formlessness. Make it a habit to feel the inner body as often as you can. After a while, you won't need to close your eyes anymore to feel it. For example, see if you can feel the inner body whenever you listen to someone. It almost seems like a paradox: When you are in touch with the inner body, you are not identified with your body anymore, nor are you identified with your mind. This is to say, you are no longer identified with form but moving away from form-identification toward formlessness, which we may also call Being. It is your essence identity. Body awareness not only anchors you in the present moment, it is a doorway out of the prison that is the ego. It also strengthens the immune system and the body's ability to heal itself.

## FORGETFULNESS OF BEING

Ego is always identification with form, seeking yourself and thereby losing yourself in some form. Forms are not just material objects and

physical bodies. More fundamental than the external forms – things and bodies – are the thought forms that continuously arise in the field of consciousness. They are energy formations, finer and less dense than physical matter, but they are forms nonetheless. What you may be aware of as a voice in your head that never stops speaking is the stream of incessant and compulsive thinking. When every thought absorbs your attention completely, when you are so identified with the voice in your head and the motions that accompany it that you lose yourself in every thought and every emotion, then you are totally identified with form and therefore in the grip of ego. Ego is a conglomeration of recurring thought forms and conditioned mental-emotional patterns that are invested with a sense of I, a sense of self. Ego arises when your sense of Beingness, of “I Am,” which is formless consciousness, gets mixed up with form. This is the meaning of identification. This is forgetfulness of Being, the primary error, the illusion of absolute separateness that turns reality into a nightmare.

## FROM DESCARTES'S ERROR TO SARTRE'S INSIGHT

The seventeenth-century philosopher Descartes, regarded as the founder of modern philosophy, gave expression to this primary error with his famous dictum (which he saw as primary truth): “I think, therefore I am.” This was the answer he found to the question “Is there anything I can know with absolute certainty?” He realized that the fact that he was always thinking was beyond doubt, and so he equated thinking with Being, that is to say, identity – I am – with thinking. Instead of the ultimate truth, he had found the root of the ego, but he didn't know that.

It took almost three hundred years before another famous philosopher saw something in that statement that Descartes, as well as everybody else, had overlooked. His name was Jean-Paul Sartre. He looked at Descartes's statement “I think, therefore I am” very deeply and suddenly realized, in his own words, “The consciousness that says 'I am' is not the consciousness that thinks.” What did he mean by that? When you are aware that you are thinking, that awareness is not part of thinking. It is a different dimension of consciousness. And it is that awareness that says “I am.” If there were nothing but thought in you, you wouldn't even know you are thinking. You would be like a dreamer who doesn't know he is dreaming. You would be as

identified with every thought as the dreamer is with every image in the dream. Many people still live like that, like sleepwalkers, trapped in old dysfunctional mind-sets that continuously re-create the same nightmarish reality. When you know you are dreaming, you are awake within the dream. Another dimension of consciousness has come in.

The implication of Sartre's insight is profound, but he himself was still too identified with thinking to realize the full significance of what he had discovered: an emerging new dimension of consciousness.

### THE PEACE THAT PASSES ALL UNDERSTANDING

There are many accounts of people who experienced that emerging new dimension of consciousness as a result of tragic loss at some point in their lives. Some lost all of their possessions, others their children or spouse, their social position, reputation, or physical abilities. In some cases, through disaster or war, they lost all of these simultaneously and found themselves with “nothing.” We may call this a limit-situation. Whatever they had identified with, whatever gave them their sense of self, had been taken away. Then suddenly and inexplicably, the anguish or intense fear they initially felt gave way to a scared sense of Presence, a deep peace and serenity and complete freedom from fear. This phenomenon must have been familiar to St. Paul, who used the expression “the peace of God which passeth all understanding.”<sup>2</sup> It is indeed a peace that doesn't seem to make sense, and the people who experienced it asked themselves: In the face of *this*, how can it be that I feel such peace?

The answer is simple, once you realize what the ego is and how it works. When forms that you had identified with, that gave you your sense of self, collapse or are taken away, it can lead to a collapse of the ego, since ego *is* identification with form. When there is nothing to identify with anymore, who are you? When forms around you die or death approaches, your sense of Beingness, of I Am, is freed from its entanglement with form: Spirit is released from its imprisonment in matter. You realize your essential identity as formless, as an all-pervasive Presence, of Being prior to all forms, all identifications. You realize your true identity as consciousness itself, rather than what consciousness had identified with. That's the peace of God. The ultimate truth of who you are is not in I am this or I am that, but I Am.

Not everybody who experiences great loss also experiences this awakening, this disidentification from form. Some immediately create a strong mental image or thought form in which they see themselves as a victim, whether it be of circumstances, other people, an unjust fate, or God. This thought form and the emotions it creates, such as anger, resentment, self-pity, and so on, they strongly identify with, and it immediately takes the place of all the other identifications that have collapsed through the loss. In other words, the ego quickly finds a new form. The fact that this new form is a deeply unhappy one doesn't concern the ego too much, as long as it has an identity, good or bad. In fact, this new ego will be more contracted, more rigid and impenetrable than the old one.

Whenever tragic loss occurs, you either resist or you yield. Some people become bitter or deeply resentful; others become compassionate, wise, and loving. Yielding means inner acceptance of what is. You are open to life. Resistance is an inner contraction, a hardening of the shell of the ego. You are closed. Whatever action you take in a state of inner resistance (which we could also call negativity) will create more outer resistance, and the universe will not be on your side; life will not be helpful. If the shutters are closed, the sunlight cannot come in. When you yield internally, when you surrender, a new dimension of consciousness opens up. If action is possible or necessary, your action will be in alignment with the whole and supported by creative intelligence, the unconditioned consciousness which in a state of inner openness you become one with. Circumstances and people then become helpful, cooperative. Coincidences happen. If no action is possible, you rest in the peace and inner stillness that come with surrender. You rest in God.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE CORE OF EGO

Most people are so completely identified with the voice in the head – the incessant stream of involuntary and compulsive thinking and the emotions that accompany it – that we may describe them as being possessed by their mind. As long as you are completely unaware of this you take the thinker to be who you are. This is the egoic mind. We call it egoic because there is a sense of self, of I (ego), in every thought – every memory, every interpretation, opinion, viewpoint, reaction, emotion. This is unconsciousness, spiritually speaking. Your thinking, the content of your mind, is of course conditioned by the past: your upbringing, culture, family background, and so on. The central core of all your mind activity consists of certain repetitive and persistent thoughts, emotions, and reactive patterns that you identify with most strongly. This entity is the ego itself.

In most cases, when you say “I,” it is the ego speaking, not you, as we have seen. It consists of thought and emotion, of a bundle of memories you identify with as “me and my story,” of habitual roles you play without knowing it, of collective identifications such as nationality, religion, race, social class, or political allegiance. It also contains personal identifications, not only with possessions, but also with opinions, external appearance, long-standing resentments, or concepts of yourself as better than or not as good as others, as a success or failure.

The content of the ego varies from person to person, but in every ego the same structure operates. In other words: Egos only differ on the surface. Deep down they are all the same. In what way are they the same? They live on identification and separation. When you live through the mind-made self comprised of thought and emotion that is the ego, the basis for your identity is precarious because thought and emotion are by their very nature ephemeral, fleeting. So every ego is continuously struggling for survival, trying to protect and enlarge itself. To uphold the I-thought, it needs the opposite thought of “the other.” The conceptual “I” cannot survive without the conceptual “other.” The others are most other when I see them as my enemies. At one end of this scale of this unconscious egoic pattern lies the egoic compulsive habit of faultfinding and complaining about others. Jesus referred to it when he said, “Why do you see the speck that is in your

brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?"<sup>1</sup> At the other end of the scale, there is physical violence between individuals and warfare between nations. In the Bible, Jesus' question remains unanswered, but the answer is, of course: Because when I criticize or condemn another, it makes me feel bigger, superior.

## COMPLAINING AND RESENTMENT

Complaining is one of the ego's favorite strategies for strengthening itself. Every complaint is a little story the mind makes up that you completely believe in. Whether you complain aloud or only in thought makes no difference. Some egos that perhaps don't have much else to identify with easily survive on complaining alone. When you are in the grip of such an ego, complaining, especially about other people, is habitual and, of course, unconscious, which means you don't know what you are doing. Applying negative mental labels to people, either to their face or more commonly when you speak about them to others or even just think about them, is often part of this pattern. Name-calling is the crudest form of such labeling and of the ego's need to be right and triumph over others: "jerk, bastard, bitch" - all definitive pronouncements that you can't argue with. On the next level down on the scale of unconsciousness, you have shouting and screaming, and not much below that, physical violence.

Resentment is the emotion that goes with complaining and the mental labeling of people and adds even more energy to the ego. Resentment means to feel bitter, indignant, aggrieved, or offended. You resent other people's greed, their dishonesty, their lack of integrity, what they are doing what they did in the past, what they said what they failed to do, what they should for shouldn't have done. The ego loves it. Instead of overlooking unconsciousness in others, you make it in to their identity. Who is doing that? The unconsciousness in you, the ego. Sometimes the "fault" that you perceive in another isn't even there. It is a total misinterpretation, a projection by a mind conditioned to see enemies and to make itself right or superior. At other times, the fault may be theirs, but by focusing on it, sometimes to the exclusion of everything else, you amplify it. And what you react to in another, you strengthen in yourself.

Non-reaction to the ego in others is one of the most effective ways not only of going beyond ego in yourself but also of dissolving the collective human ego. But you can only be in a state of nonreaction if you can recognize someone's behavior as coming from the ego, as being an expression of the collective human dysfunction. When you realize it's not personal, there is no longer a compulsion to react as if it were. By not reacting to the ego, you will often be able to bring out the sanity in others, which is the unconditioned consciousness as opposed to the conditioned. At times you may have to take practical steps to protect yourself from deeply unconscious people. This you can do without making them into enemies. Your greatest protection, however, is being conscious. Somebody becomes an enemy if you personalize the unconsciousness that is the ego. Non reaction is not weakness but strength. Another word for nonreaction is forgiveness. To forgive is to overlook, or rather to look through. You look through the ego to the sanity that is in every human being as his or her essence.

The ego loves to complain and feel resentful not only about other people but also about situations. What you can do to a person, you can also do to a situation: make it into an enemy. The implication is always: This should not be happening; I don't want to be here; I don't want to be doing this; I'm being treated unfairly. And the ego's greatest enemy of all is, of course, the present moment, which is to say, life itself.

Complaining is not to be confused with informing someone of a mistake or deficiency so that it can be put right. And to refrain from complaining doesn't necessarily mean putting up with bad quality or behavior. There is no ego in telling the waiter that your soup is cold and needs to be heated up – if you stick to the facts, which are always neutral. “How dare you serve me cold soup...” That's complaining. There is a “me” here that loves to feel personally offended by the cold soup and is going to make the most of it, a “me” that enjoys making someone wrong. The complaining we are talking about is in the service of the ego, not of change. Sometimes it becomes obvious that the ego doesn't really want change so that it can go on complaining.

See if you can catch, that is to say, notice, the voice in the head, perhaps in the very moment it complains about something, and recognize it for what it is: the voice of the ego, no more than a conditioned mind-pattern,

a thought. Whenever you notice that voice, you will also realize that you are not the voice, but the one who is aware of it. In fact, you are the awareness that is aware of the voice. In the background, there is the awareness. In the foreground, there is the voice, the thinker. In this way you are becoming free of the ego, free of the unobserved mind. The moment you become aware of the ego in you, it is strictly speaking no longer the ego, but just an old, conditioned mind-pattern. Ego implies unawareness. Awareness and ego cannot coexist. The old mind-pattern or mental habit may still survive and reoccur for a while because it has the momentum of thousands of years of collective human unconsciousness behind it, but every time it is recognized, it is weakened.

## REACTIVITY AND GRIEVANCES

Whereas resentment is often the emotion that goes with complaining, it may also be accompanied by a stronger emotion such as anger or some other form of upset. In this way, it becomes more highly charged energetically. Complaining then turns into reactivity, another of the ego's ways of strengthening itself. There are many people who are always waiting for the next thing to react against, to feel annoyed or disturbed about – and it never takes long before they find it. “This is an outrage,” they say. “How dare you...” “I resent this.” They are addicted to upset and anger as others are to a drug. Through reacting against this or that they assert and strengthen their feeling of self.

A long-standing resentment is called a grievance. To carry a grievance is to be in a permanent state of “against,” and that is why grievances constitute a significant part of many people's ego. Collective grievances can survive for centuries in the psyche of a nation or tribe and fuel a never-ending cycle of violence.

A grievance is a strong negative emotion connected to an event in the sometimes distant past that is being kept alive by compulsive thinking, by retelling the story in the head or out loud of “what someone did to me” or “what someone did to us.” A grievance will also contaminate other areas of your life. For example, while you think about and feel your grievance, its negative emotional energy can distort your perception of an event that is happening in the present or influence the way in which you speak or behave

to ward someone in the present. One strong grievance is enough to contaminate large areas of your life and keep you in the grip of the ego.

It requires honesty to see whether you still harbor grievances, whether there is someone in your life you have not completely forgiven, an “enemy.” If you do, become aware of the grievance both on the level of thought as well as emotion, that is to say, be ware of the thoughts that keep it alive, and feel the emotion that is the body's response to those thoughts. Don't try to let go of the grievance. *Trying* to let go, to forgive, does not work. Forgiveness happens naturally when you see that it has no purpose other than to strengthen a false sense of self, to keep the ego in place. The seeing is freeing. Jesus' teaching to “Forgive your enemies” is essentially about the undoing of one of the main egoic structures in the human mind.

The past has no power to stop you from being present now. Only your grievance about the past can do that. And what is a grievance? The baggage of old thought and emotion.

## BEING RIGHT, MAKING WRONG

Complaining as well as faultfinding and reactivity strengthen the ego's sense of boundary and separateness on which its survival depends. But they also strengthen the ego in another way by giving it a feeling of superiority on which it thrives. It may not be immediately apparent how complaining, say, about a traffic jam, about politicians, about the “greedy wealthy” or the “lazy unemployed,” or your colleagues or ex-spouse, men or women, can give you a sense of superiority. Here is why. When you complain, by implication you are right and the person or situation you complain about or react against is wrong.

There is nothing that strengthens the ego more than being right. Being right is identification with a mental position – a perspective, an opinion, a judgment, a story. For you to be right, of course, you need someone else to be wrong, and so the ego loves to make wrong in order to be right. In other words: you need to make others wrong in order to get a stronger sense of who you are. Not only a person, but also a situation can be made wrong through complaining and reactivity, which always implies that “this should not be happening.” Being right places you in a position of imagined moral

superiority in relation to the person or situation that is being judged and found wanting. It is that sense of superiority the ego craves and through which it enhances itself.

## IN DEFENCE OF AN ILLUSION

Facts undoubtedly exist. If you say: “Light travels faster than sound,” and someone else says the opposite is the case, you are obviously right, and he is wrong. The simple observation that lightning precedes thunder could confirm this. So not only are you right, but you know you are right. Is there any ego involved in this? Possibly, but not necessarily. If you are simply stating what you know to be true, the ego is not involved at all, because there is no identification. Identification with what? With mind and a mental position. Such identification, however, can easily creep in. If you find yourself saying, “Believe me, I know” or “Why do you never believe me?” then the ego has already crept in. It is hiding in the little word “me.” A simple statement: “Light is faster than sound,” although true, is now in service of illusion, of ego. It has become contaminated with a false sense of “I”; it has become personalized, turned into a mental position. The “I” feels diminished or offended because somebody doesn't believe what “I” said.

Ego takes everything personally. Emotion arises, defensiveness, perhaps even aggression. Are you defending the truth? No, the truth, in any case, needs no defense. The light or sound does not care about what you or anybody else thinks. You are defending yourself, or rather the illusion of yourself, the mind-made substitute. It would be even more accurate to say that the illusion is defending itself. If even the simple and straightforward realm of facts can lend itself to egoic distortion and illusion, how much more so the less tangible realm of opinions, viewpoints, and judgments, all of them thought forms that can easily become infused with a sense of “I.”

Every ego confuses opinions and viewpoints with facts. Furthermore, it cannot tell the differences between an event and its reaction to that event. Every ego is a master of selective perception and distorted interpretation. Only through awareness – not through thinking – can you differentiate between fact and opinion. Only through awareness are you able to see: There is the situation and here is the anger I feel about it, and then realize there are other ways of approaching the situation, other ways of seeing it and dealing

with it. Only through awareness can you see the totality of the situation or person instead of adopting one limited perspective.

## TRUTH: RELATIVE OR ABSOLUTE?

Beyond the realm of simple and verifiable facts, the certainty that “I am right and you are wrong” is a dangerous thing in personal relationships as well as in interactions between nations, tribes, religions, and so on.

But if the belief “I am right; you are wrong” is one of the ways in which the ego strengthens itself, if making yourself right and others wrong is a mental dysfunction that perpetuates separation and conflict between human beings, does that mean there is no such thing as right or wrong behavior, action, or belief? And wouldn't that be the moral relativism that some contemporary Christian teachings see as the great evil of our times?

The history of Christianity is, of course, a prime example of how the belief that you are in sole possession of the truth, that is to say, right, can corrupt your actions and behavior to the point of insanity. For centuries, torturing and burning people alive if their opinion diverged even in the slightest from Church doctrine or narrow interpretations of scripture (the “Truth”) was considered right because the victims were “wrong.” They were so wrong that they needed to be killed. The Truth was considered more important than human life. And what was the Truth? A story you had to believe in; which means, a bundle of thoughts.

The one million people that mad dictator Pol Pot of Cambodia ordered killed included everybody who wore glasses. Why? To him, the Marxist interpretation of history was the absolute truth, and according to his version of it, those who wore glasses belonged to the educated class, the bourgeoisie, the exploiters of the peasants. They needed to be eliminated to make room for a new social order. His truth also was a bundle of thoughts.

The Catholic and other churches are actually correct when they identify relativism, the belief that there is no absolute truth to guide human behavior, as one of the evils of our times; but you won't find absolute truth if you look for it where it cannot be found: in doctrines, ideologies, sets of rules, or stories. What do all of these have in common? They are made up of thought. Thought can at best point to the truth, but it never *is* the truth. That's why Buddhists say “The finger pointing to the moon is not the moon.” All

religions are equally false and equally true, depending on how you use them. You can use them in the service of the ego, or you can use them in the service of the Truth. If you believe only your religion is the Truth, you are using it in the service of the ego. used in such a way, religion becomes ideology and creates an illusory sense of superiority as well as division and conflict between people. In the service of the Truth, religious teachings represent signposts or maps left behind by awakened humans to assist you in spiritual awakening, that is to say, in becoming free of identification with form.

There is only one absolute Truth, and all other truths emanate from it. When you find that Truth, your actions will be in alignment with it. Human action can reflect the Truth, or it can reflect illusion. Can the Truth be put into words? Yes, but the words are, of course, not it. They only point to it.

The Truth is inseparable from who you are. Yes, you *are* the truth. If you look for it elsewhere, you will be deceived every time. The very Being that you are is Truth. Jesus tried to convey that when he said, “I am the way and the truth and the life.”<sup>2</sup> These words uttered by Jesus are one of the most powerful and direct pointers to the Truth, if understood correctly. If misinterpreted, however, they become a great obstacle. Jesus speaks of the innermost I Am, the essence identity of every man and woman, every life-form, in fact. He speaks of the life that you are. Some Christian mystics have called it the Christ within; Buddhists call it your Buddha nature; for Hindus, it is Atman, the indwelling God. When you are in touch with that dimension within yourself – and being in touch with it is your natural state, not some miraculous achievement – all your actions and relationships will reflect the oneness with all life that you sense deep within. This is love. Laws, commandments, rules, and regulations are necessary for those who are cut off from who they are, the Truth within. They prevent the worst excesses of the ego, and often they don't even do that. “Love and do what you will,” said St. Augustine. Words cannot get much closer to the Truth than that.

## THE EGO IS NOT PERSONAL

On a collective level, the mind-set “We are right and they are wrong” is particularly deeply entrenched in those parts of the world where conflict between two nations, races, tribes, religions, or ideologies is long-standing, extreme, and endemic. Both sides of the conflict are equally identified with

their own perspective, their own “story,” that is to say, identified with thought. Both are equally incapable of seeing that another perspective, another story, may exist and also be valid. Israeli writer Y. Halevi speaks of the possibility of “accommodating a competing narrative,”<sup>3</sup> but in many parts of the world, people are not yet able or willing to do that. Both sides believe themselves to be in possession of the truth. Both regard themselves as victims and the “other” as evil, and because they have conceptualized and thereby dehumanized the other as the enemy, they can kill and inflict all kinds of violence on the other, even on children, without feeling their humanity and suffering. They become trapped in an insane spiral of perpetration and retribution, action and reaction.

Here it becomes obvious that the human ego in its collective aspect as “us” against “them” is even more insane than the “me,” the individual ego, although the mechanism is the same. By far the greater part of violence that humans have inflicted on each other is not the work of criminals or the mentally deranged, but of normal, respectable citizens in the service of the collective ego. One can go far as to say that on this planet “normal” equals insane. What is it that lies at the root of this insanity? Complete identification with thought and emotion, that is to say, ego.

Greed, selfishness, exploitation, cruelty, and violence are still all-pervasive on this planet. When you don't recognize them as individual and collective manifestations of an underlying dysfunction or mental illness, you fall into the error of personalizing them. You construct a conceptual identity for an individual or group, and you say: “This is who he is. This is who they are.” When you confuse the ego that you perceive in others with their identity, it is the work of your own ego that uses this misperception to strengthen itself through being right and therefore superior, and through reacting with condemnation, indignation, and often anger against the perceived enemy. All this is enormously satisfying to the ego. It strengthens the sense of separation between yourself and the other, whose “otherness” has become magnified to such an extent that you can no longer feel your common humanity, nor the rootedness in the one Life that you share with each human being, your common divinity.

The particular egoic patterns that you react to most strongly in others and misperceive as their identity tend to be the same patterns that are also in you, but that you are unable or unwilling to detect within yourself. In that

sense, you have much to learn from your enemies. What is it in them that you find most upsetting, most disturbing? Their selfishness? Their greed? Their need for power and control? Their insincerity, dishonesty, propensity to violence, or whatever it may be? Anything that you resent and strongly react to in another is also in you. But it is no more than a form of ego, and as such, it is completely impersonal. It has nothing to do with who that person is, nor has it anything to do with who you are. Only if you mistake it for who you are can observing it within you be threatening to your sense of self.

## WAR IS A MIND-SET

In certain cases, you may need to protect yourself or someone else from being harmed by another, but beware of making it your mission to “eradicate evil,” as you are likely to turn into the very thing you are fighting against. Fighting unconsciousness will draw you into unconsciousness yourself. Unconsciousness, dysfunctional egoic behavior, can never be defeated by attacking it. Even if you defeat your opponent, the unconsciousness will simply have moved into you, or the opponent reappears in a new disguise. Whatever you fight, you strengthen, and what you resist, persists.

These days you frequently hear the expression “the war against” this or that, and whenever I hear it, I know that it is condemned to failure. There is the war against drugs, the war against crime, the war against terrorism, the war against cancer, the war against poverty, and so on. For example, despite the war against crime and drugs, there has been a dramatic increase in crime and drug-related offenses in the past twenty-five years. The prison population of the United States has gone up from just under 300,000 in 1980 to a staggering 2.1 million in 2004.<sup>4</sup> The war against disease has given us, amongst other things, antibiotics. At first, they were spectacularly successful, seemingly enabling us to win the war against infectious diseases. Now many experts agree that the widespread and indiscriminate use of antibiotics has created a time bomb and that antibiotic-resistant strains of bacteria, so-called super bugs, will in all likelihood bring about a reemergence of those diseases and possibly epidemics. According to the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, medical treatment is the third-leading cause of death after heart disease and cancer in the United States. Homeopathy and Chinese medicine are two examples of possible alternative approaches to disease that do not treat the illness as an enemy and therefore do not create new diseases.

War is a mind-set, and all action that comes out of such a mind-set will either strengthen the enemy, the perceived evil, or, if the war is won, will create a new enemy, a new evil equal to and often worse than the one that was defeated. There is a deep interrelatedness between your state of consciousness and external reality. When you are in the grip of a mind-set such as “war,” your perceptions become extremely selective as well as distorted. In other words, you will see only what you want to see and then misinterpret it. You can imagine what kind of action comes out of such a delusional system. Or instead of imagining it, watch the news on TV tonight.

Recognize the ego for what it is: a collective dysfunction, the insanity of the human mind. When you recognize it for what it is, you no longer misperceive it as somebody's identity. Once you see the ego for what it is, it becomes much easier to remain nonreactive toward it. you don't take it personally anymore. there is no complaining, blaming, accusing, or making wrong. Nobody is wrong. It is the ego in someone, that's all. Compassion arises when you recognize that all are suffering from the same sickness of the mind, some more acutely than others. You do not fuel the drama anymore that is part of all egoic relationships. What is its fuel? Reactivity. The ego thrives on it.

## DO YOU WANT PEACE OR DRAMA?

You want peace. There is no one who does not want peace. Yet there is something else in you that wants the drama, wants the conflict. You may not be able to feel it at this moment. You may have to wait for a situation or even just a thought that triggers a reaction in you: someone accusing you of this or that, not acknowledging you, encroaching on your territory, questioning the way you do things, an argument about money.... Can you then feel the enormous surge of force moving through you, the fear, perhaps being masked by anger or hostility? Can you hear your own voice becoming harsh or shrill, or louder and a few octaves lower? Can you be aware of your mind racing to defend its position, justify, attack, blame? In other words, can you awaken at that moment of unconsciousness? Can you feel that there is something in you that is at war, something that feels threatened and wants to survive at all cost, that needs the drama in order to assert its identity as the victorious character within that theatrical production? Can you feel there is something in you that would rather be right than at peace?

## BEYOND EGO: YOUR TRUE IDENTITY

When the ego is at war, know that it is no more than an illusion that is fighting to survive. That illusion thinks it is you. It is not easy at first to *be* there as the witnessing Presence, especially when the ego is in survival mode or some emotional pattern from the past has become activated, but once you have had a taste of it, you will grow in Presence power, and the ego will lose its grip on you. And so a power comes into your life that is far greater than the ego, greater than the mind. All that is required to become free of the ego is to be aware of it, since awareness and ego are incompatible. Awareness is the power that is concealed within the present moment. This is why we may also call it Presence. The ultimate purpose of human existence, which is to say, your purpose is to bring that power into this world. And this is also why becoming free of the ego cannot be made into a goal to be attained at some point in the future. Only Presence can free you of the ego, and you can only be present Now, not yesterday or tomorrow. Only Presence can undo the past in you and thus transform your state of consciousness.

What is spiritual realization? The belief that you are spirit? No, that's a thought. A little closer to the truth than the thought that believes you are who your birth certificate says you are, but still a thought. Spiritual realization is to see clearly that what I perceive, experience, think, or feel is ultimately not who I am, that I cannot find myself in all those things that continuously pass away. The Buddha was probably the first human being to see this clearly, and so *anata* (no self) became one of the central points of his teaching. And when Jesus said, "Deny thyself," what he meant was : Negate (and thus undo) the illusion of self. If the self – ego – were truly who I am, it would be absurd to "deny" it.

What remains is the light of consciousness in which perceptions, experiences, thoughts, and feelings come and go. That is Being, that is the deeper, true I. When I know myself as that, whatever happens in my life is no longer of absolute but only of relative importance. I honor it, but it loses its absolute seriousness, its heaviness. The only thing that ultimately matters is this: Can I sense my essential Beingness, the I Am, in the background of my life at all times? To be more accurate, can I sense the I Am that I Am at this moment? Can I sense my essential identity as consciousness itself? Or am I losing myself in what happens, losing myself in the mind, in the world?

## ALL STRUCTURES ARE UNSTABLE

Whatever form it takes, the unconscious drive behind ego is to strengthen the image of who I think I am, the phantom self that came into existence when thought – a great blessing as well as a great curse – began to take over and obscured the simple yet profound joy of connectedness with Being, the Source, God. Whatever behavior the ego manifests, the hidden motivating force is always the same: the need to stand out, be special, be in control; the need for power, for attention, for more. And, of course, the need to feel a sense of separation, that is to say, the need for opposition, enemies.

The ego always wants something from other people or situations. There is always a hidden agenda, always a sense of “not enough yet,” of insufficiency and lack that needs to be filled. It uses people and situations to get what it wants, and even when it succeeds, it is never satisfied for long. Often it is thwarted in its aims, and for the most part the gap between “I want” and “what is” becomes a constant source of upset and anguish. The famous and now classic pop song, “(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction,” is the song of the ego. The underlying emotion that governs all the activity of the ego is fear. The fear of being nobody, the fear of nonexistence, the fear of death. All its activities are ultimately designed to eliminate this fear, but the most the ego can ever do is to cover it up temporarily with an intimate relationship, a new possession, or winning at this or that. Illusion will never satisfy you. Only the truth of who you are, if realized, will set you free.

Why fear? Because the ego arises by identification with form, and deep down it knows that no forms are permanent, that they are all fleeting. So there is always a sense of insecurity around the ego even if on the outside it appears confident.

As I was walking with a friend through a beautiful nature reserve near Malibu in California, we came upon the ruins of what had been once a country house, destroyed by a fire several decades ago. As we approached the property, long overgrown with trees and all kinds of magnificent plants, there was a sign by the side of the trail put there by the park authorities. It read: DANGER. ALL STRUCTURES ARE UNSTABLE. I said to my friend, “That's a profound sutra [sacred scripture].” And we stood there in awe. Once you realize and accept that all structures (forms ) are unstable , even the seemingly solid material ones, peace arises within you. This is

because the recognition of the impermanence of all forms awakens you to the dimension of the formless within yourself, that which is beyond death. Jesus called it “eternal life.”

## THE EGO'S NEED TO FEEL SUPERIOR

There are many subtle but easily overlooked forms of ego that you may observe in other people and, more important, in yourself. Remember: The moment you become aware of the ego in yourself, that emerging awareness is who you are beyond ego, the deeper “I.” The recognition of the false is already the arising of the real.

For example, you are about to tell someone the news of what happened. “Guess what? You don't know yet? Let me tell you.” If you are alert enough, present enough, you may be able to detect a momentary sense of satisfaction within yourself just before imparting the news, even if it is bad news. It is due to the fact that for a brief moment there is, in the eyes of the ego, an imbalance in your favor between you and the other person. For that brief moment, you know *more* than the other. The satisfaction that you feel is of the ego, and it is derived from feeling a stronger sense of self relative to the other person. Even if he or she is the president or the pope, you feel superior in that moment because you know *more*. Many people are addicted to gossiping partly for this reason. In addition, gossiping often carries an element of malicious criticism and judgment of others, and so it also strengthens the ego through the implied but imagined moral superiority that is there whenever you apply a negative judgment to anyone.

If someone has more, knows more, or can do more than I, the ego feels threatened because the feeling of “less” diminishes its imagined sense of self relative to the other. It may then try to restore itself by somehow diminishing, criticizing, or belittling the value of the other person's possessions, knowledge, or abilities. Or the ego may shift its strategy, and instead of competing with the other person, it will enhance itself by association with that person, if he or she is important in the eyes of others.

## EGO AND FAME

The well-known phenomenon of “name dropping,” the casual mention of who you know, is part of the ego's strategy of gaining a superior identity in the eyes of others and therefore in its own eyes through association with

someone “important.” The bane of being famous in this world is that who you are becomes totally obscured by a collective mental image. Most people you meet want to enhance their identity – the mental image of who they are – through association with you. They themselves may not know that they are not interested in you at all but only in strengthening their ultimately fictitious sense of self. They believe that through you they can be more. They are looking to complete themselves through you, or rather through the mental image they have of you as a famous person, a larger-than-life collective conceptual identity.

The absurd over-valuation of fame is just one of the many manifestations of egoic madness in our world. Some famous people fall into the same error and identify with the collective fiction, the image people and the media have created of them, and they begin to actually see themselves as superior to ordinary mortals. As a result, they become more and more alienated from themselves and others, more and more unhappy, more and more dependent on their continuing popularity. Surrounded only by people who feed their inflated self-image, they become incapable of genuine relationships.

Albert Einstein, who was admired as almost superhuman and whose fate it was to become one of the most famous people on the planet, never identified with the image the collective mind had created of him. He remained humble, egoless. In fact, he spoke of “a grotesque contradiction between what people consider to be my achievements and abilities and the reality of who I am and what I am capable of.”<sup>5</sup>

This is why it is hard for a famous person to be in a genuine relationship with others. A genuine relationship is one that is not dominated by the ego with its image-making and self-seeking. In a genuine relationship, there is an outward flow of open, alert attention toward the other person in which there is no wanting whatsoever. That alert attention is Presence. It is the prerequisite of any authentic relationship. The ego always either wants something, or if it believes there is nothing to get from the other, it is in a state of utter indifference: It doesn't care about you. And so, the three predominant states of egoic relationship are: wanting, thwarted wanting (anger, resentment, blaming, complaining), and indifference.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### *ROLE-PLAYING: THE MANY FACES OF THE EGO*

An ego that wants something from another – and what ego doesn't – will usually play some kind of role to get its “needs” met, be they material gain, a sense of power, superiority, or specialness, or some kind of gratification, be it physical or psychological. Usually people are completely unaware of the roles they play. They *are* those roles. Some roles are subtle; others are blatantly obvious, except to the person playing it. Some roles are designed simply to get attention from others. The ego thrives on others' attention, which is after all a form of psychic energy. The ego doesn't know that the source of all energy is within you, so it seeks it outside. It is not the formless attention which is Presence that the ego seeks, but attention in some form, such as recognition, praise, admiration, or just to be noticed in some way, to have its existence acknowledged.

A shy person who is afraid of the attention of others is not free of ego, but has an ambivalent ego that both wants and fears attention from others. The fear is that the attention may take the form of disapproval or criticism, that is to say, something that diminishes the sense of self rather than enhances it. So the shy person's fear of attention is greater than his or her need of attention. Shyness often goes with a self-concept that is predominantly negative, the belief of being inadequate. Any conceptual sense of self – seeing myself as this or that - is ego, whether predominantly positive (I am the greatest) or negative (I am no good). Behind every positive self-concept is the hidden fear of not being good enough. Behind every negative self-concept its the hidden desire of being the greatest or better than others. Behind the confident ego's feeling of and continuing need for superiority is the unconscious fear of inferiority. Conversely, the shy, inadequate ego that feels inferior has a strong hidden desire for superiority. Many people fluctuate between feelings of inferiority and superiority, depending on situations or the people they come into contact with. All you

need to know and observe in yourself is this: whenever you feel superior or inferior to anyone, that's the ego in you.

## VILLAIN, VICTIM, LOVER

Some egos, if they cannot get praise or admiration, will settle for other forms of attention and play roles to elicit them. If they cannot get positive attention, they may seek negative attention instead, for example, by provoking a negative reaction in someone else. Some children already do that too. They misbehave to get attention. The playing of negative roles becomes particularly pronounced whenever the ego is magnified by an active pain-body, that is to say, emotional pain from the past that wants to renew itself through experiencing more pain. Some egos perpetrate crimes in their search for fame. They seek attention through notoriety and other people's condemnation. "Please tell me that I exist, that I am not insignificant," they seem to say. Such pathological forms of ego are only more extreme versions of normal egos.

A very common role is the one of victim, and the form of attention it seeks is sympathy or pity or others' interest in *my* problems, "me and my story." Seeing oneself as a victim is an element in many egoic patterns, such as complaining, being offended, outraged, and so on. Of course, once I am identified with a story in which I assigned myself the role of victim, I don't want it to end, and so, as every therapist knows, the ego does not want an end to its "problems" because they are part of its identity. If no one will listen to my sad story, I can tell it to myself in my head, over and over, and feel sorry for myself, and so have an identity as someone who is being treated unfairly by life or other people, fate or God. It gives definition to my self-image, makes me into someone, and that is all that matters to the ego.

In the early stages of many so-called romantic relationships, role-playing is quite common in order to attract and keep whoever is perceived by the ego as the one who is going to "make me happy, make me feel special, and fulfill all my needs." "I'll play who you want me to be, and you'll play who I want you to be." That's the unspoken and unconscious agreement. However, role-playing is hard work, and so those roles cannot be sustained

indefinitely, especially once you start living together. When those roles slip, what do you see? Unfortunately, in most cases, not yet the true essence of that being, but that which overs up the true essence: the raw ego divested of its roles, with its pain-body, and its thwarted wanting which now turns into anger, most likely directed at the spouse or partner for having failed to remove the underlying fear and sense of lack that is an intrinsic part of the egoic sense of self.

What is commonly called “falling in love” is in most cases and intensification of egoic wanting and needing. You become addicted to another person, or rather to your image of that person. It has nothing to do with true love, which contains no wanting whatsoever. The Spanish language is the most honest in regard to conventional notions of love: *Te quiero* means “I want you” as well as “I love you.” The other expression for “I love you,” *te amo*, which does not have this ambiguity, is rarely used – perhaps because true love is just as rare.

## LETTING GO OF SELF-DEFINITIONS

As tribal cultures developed into the ancient civilizations, certain functions began to be allotted to certain people: ruler, priest or priestess, warrior, farmer, merchant, craftsman, laborer, and so on. A class system developed. Your function, which in most cases you were born into, determined your identity, determined who you were in the eyes of others, as well as in your own eyes. Your function became a role, but it wasn't recognized as a role: It was who you were, or thought you were. Only rare beings at the time, such as the Buddha or Jesus, saw the ultimate irrelevance of caste or social class, recognized it as identification with form and saw that such identification with the conditioned and the temporal obscured the light of the unconditioned and eternal that shines in each human being.

In our contemporary world, the social structures are less rigid, less clearly defined than they used to be. Although most people are, of course, still conditioned by their environment, they are no longer automatically assigned a function and with it an identity. In fact, in the modern world, more and more people are confused as to where they fit in, what their purpose is, and even who they are.

I usually congratulate people when they tell me, “I don't know who I am anymore.” Then they look perplexed and ask, “Are you saying it is a good thing to be confused?” I ask them to investigate. What does it mean to be confused? “I don't know “ is not confusion. Confusion is: “I don't know, but I should know” or “I don't know, but I need to know.” is it possible to let go of the belief that you should or need to know who you are? In other words, can you cease looking to conceptual definitions to give you a sense of self? Can you cease looking to *thought* for an identity? When you let go of the belief that you should or need to know who you are, what happens to confusion? Suddenly it is gone. When you fully accept that you don't know, you actually enter a state of peace and clarity that is closer to who you truly are than thought could ever be. Defining yourself through thought is limiting yourself.

## PRE-ESTABLISHED ROLES

Of course different people fulfill different functions in this world. It cannot be otherwise. As far as intellectual or physical abilities are concerned – knowledge, skills, talents, and energy levels – human beings differ widely. What really matters is not what function you fulfill in this world, but whether you identify with your function to such an extent that it takes you over and becomes a role that you play. When you play roles, you are unconscious. When you catch yourself playing a role, that recognition creates a space between you and the role. It is the beginning of freedom from the role. When you are completely identified with a role, you confuse a pattern of behavior with who you are, and you take yourself very seriously. You also automatically assign roles to others that corresponding to yours. For example, when you visit doctors who are totally identified with their role, to them you will not be a human being but a patient or a case history.

Although the social structures in the contemporary world are less rigid than in ancient cultures, there are still many pre-established functions or roles that people readily identify with and which thus become part of the ego. This causes human interactions to become inauthentic, dehumanized, alienating. Those pre-established roles may give you a somewhat comforting sense of identity, but ultimately, you lose yourself in them. The functions people have in hierarchical organizations, such as the military, the church, a government institution, or large corporation, easily lend themselves to

becoming role identities. Authentic human interactions become impossible when you lose yourself in a role.

Some pre-established roles we could call social archetypes. To mention just a few: the middle-class housewife (not as prevalent as it used to be, but still widespread); the tough macho male; the female seductress; the “nonconformist” artist or performer; a person of “culture” (a role quite common in Europe) who displays a knowledge of literature, fine art, and music in the same way as others might display an expensive dress or car. And then there the universal role of adult. When you play that role, you take yourself and life very seriously. Spontaneity, lightheartedness, and joy are not part of that role.

The hippie movement that originated on the West Coast of the United States in the 1960's and then spread throughout the Western world came out of many young people's rejection of social archetypes, of roles, of pre-established patterns of behavior as well as egoically based social and economic structures. They refused to play the roles their parents and society wanted to impose on them. Significantly, it coincided with the horrors of the Vietnam War, in which more than 57,000 young Americans and 3 million Vietnamese died and through which the insanity of the system and the underlying mind-set was exposed for all to see. Whereas in the 1950s, most Americans were still extremely conformist in thought and behavior, in the 1960s, millions of people began to withdraw their identification with a collective conceptual identity because the insanity of the collective was so obvious. The hippie movement represented a loosening of the hitherto rigid egoic structures in the psyche of humanity. The movement itself degenerated and came to an end, but it left behind an opening, and not just in those who were part of the movement. This made it possible for ancient Eastern wisdom and spirituality to move west and play an essential part in the awakening of global consciousness.

## TEMPORARY ROLES

If you are awake enough, aware enough, to be able to observe how you interact with other people, you may detect subtle changes in your speech, attitude, and behavior depending on the person you are interacting with. At first, it may be easier to observe this in others, then you may also detect it in yourself. The way in which you speak to the chairman of the company may

be different in subtle ways from how you speak to the janitor. How you speak to a child may be different from how you speak to an adult. Why is that? You are playing roles. You are not yourself, neither with the chairman nor with the janitor or the child. When you walk into a store to buy something, when you go to a restaurant, the bank, the post office, you may find yourself slipping into pre-established social roles. You become a customer and speak and act as such. And you may be treated by the salesperson or waiter, who is also playing a role, as a customer. A range of conditioned patterns of behavior come into effect between two human beings that determine the nature of the interaction. Instead of human beings, conceptual mental images are interacting with each other. The more identified people are with their respective roles, the more inauthentic the relationships become.

You have a mental image not only of who the other person is, but also of who you are, especially in relation to the person you are interacting with. So *you* are not relating with that person at all, but who you think you are is relating to who you think the other person is and vice versa. The conceptual image your mind has made of yourself is relating to its own creation, which is the conceptual image it has made of the other person. The other person's mind has probably done the same, so very egoic interaction between two people is in reality the interaction between two conceptual mind-made entities that are ultimately fictions. It is therefore not surprising there is so much conflict in relationships. There *is* no true relationship.

## THE MONK WITH SWEATY PALMS

Kasan, a Zen teacher and monk, was to officiate at a funeral of a famous nobleman. As he stood there waiting for the governor of the province and other lords and ladies to arrive, he noticed that the palms of his hands were sweaty.

The next day he called his disciples together and confessed he was not yet ready to be a true teacher. He explained to them that he still lacked the sameness of bearing before all human beings, whether beggar or king. He was still unable to look through social roles and conceptual identities and see the sameness of being in every human. He then left and became the pupil of another master. He returned to his former disciples eight years later, enlightened.

## HAPPINESS AS A ROLE VS. TRUE HAPPINESS

“How are you?” “Just great. Couldn't be better.” True or false?

In many cases, happiness is a role people play, and behind the smiling facade, there is a great deal of pain. Depression, breakdowns, and overreactions are common when unhappiness is covered up behind a smiling exterior and brilliant white teeth, when there is denial, sometimes even to one's self, that there is much unhappiness.

“Just fine” is a role the ego plays more commonly in America than in certain other countries where being and looking miserable is almost the norm and therefore more socially acceptable. It is probably an exaggeration, but I am told that in the capital of one Nordic country you run the risk of being arrested for drunken behavior if you smile at strangers in the street.

If there is unhappiness in you, first you need to acknowledge that it is there. But don't say, “I'm unhappy.” Unhappiness has nothing to do with who you are. Say: “There is unhappiness in me.” Then investigate it. A situation you find yourself in may have something to do with it. Action may be required to change the situation or remove yourself from it. If there is nothing you can do, face what is and say, “Well, right now, this is how it is. I can either accept it, or make myself miserable.” The primary cause of unhappiness is never the situation but your thoughts about it. Be aware of the thoughts you are thinking. Separate them from the situation, which is always neutral, which always is as it is. There is the situation or the fact, and here are my thoughts about it. Instead of making up stories, stay with the facts. For example, “I am ruined” is a story. It limits you and prevents you from taking effective action. “I have fifty cents left in my bank account” is a fact. Facing facts is always empowering. Be aware that what you think, to a large extent, creates the emotions that you feel. See the link between your thinking and your emotions. Rather than being your thoughts and emotions, be the awareness behind them.

Don't seek happiness. If you seek it, you won't find it, because seeking is the antithesis of happiness. Happiness is ever elusive, but freedom from unhappiness is attainable now, by facing what is rather than making up stories about it. Unhappiness covers up your natural state of well-being and inner peace, the source of true happiness.

## PARENTHOOD: ROLE OR FUNCTION?

Many adults play roles when they speak to young children. They use silly words and sounds. They talk down to the child. They don't treat the child as an equal. The fact that you temporarily know more or that you are bigger does not mean the child is not your equal. The majority of adults, at some point in their lives, find themselves being a parent, one of the most universal roles. The all-important question is: Are you able to fulfill the function of being a parent, and fulfill it well, without identifying with that function, that is, without it becoming a role? Part of the necessary function of being a parent is looking after the needs of the child, preventing the child from getting into danger, and at times telling the child what to do and not to do. When being a parent becomes an identity, however, when your sense of self is entirely or largely derived from it, the function easily becomes overemphasized, exaggerated, and takes you over. Giving children what they need becomes excessive and turns into spoiling; preventing them from getting into danger becomes overprotectiveness and interferes with their need to explore the world and try things out for themselves. Telling children what to do or not to do becomes controlling, overbearing.

What is more, the role-playing identity remains in place long after the need for those particular functions has passed. Parents then cannot let go of being a parent even when the child grows into an adult. They can't let go of the need to be needed by their child. Even when the adult child is forty years old, parents can't let go of the notion "I know what's best for you." The role of parent is still being played compulsively, and so there is no authentic relationship. Parents define themselves by that role and are unconsciously afraid of loss of identity when they cease being parents. If their desire to control or influence the actions of their adult child is thwarted – as it usually is – they will start to criticize or show their disapproval, or try to make the child feel guilty, all in an unconscious attempt to preserve their role, their identity. On the surface it looks as if they were concerned about their child, and they themselves believe it, but they are only really concerned about preserving their role-identity. All egoic motivations are self-enhancement and self-interest, sometimes cleverly disguised, even from the person in whom the ego operates.

A mother or father who identifies with the parental role may also try to become more complete through their children. The ego's need to

manipulate others into filling the sense of lack it continuously feels is then directed toward them. If the mostly unconscious assumptions and motivations behind the parent's compulsion to manipulate their children were made conscious and voiced, they would probably include some or all of the following: "I want you to achieve what I never achieved; I want you to be somebody in the eyes of the world, so that I too can be somebody through you. Don't disappoint me. I sacrificed so much for you. My disapproval of you is intended to make you feel so guilty and uncomfortable that you finally conform to my wishes. And it goes without saying that I know what's best for you. I love you and I will continue to love you if you do what I now is right for you."

When you make such unconscious motivations conscious, you immediately see how absurd they are. The ego that lies behind them becomes visible, as does its dysfunction. Some parents that I spoke to suddenly realized, "My God, is this what I have been doing?" Once you see what you are doing or have been doing, you also see its futility, and that unconscious pattern then comes to an end by itself. Awareness is the greatest agent for change.

If your parents are doing this to you, do not tell them they are unconscious and in the grip of the ego. That will likely make them even more unconscious, because the ego will take up a defensive position. It is enough for you to recognize that it is the ego in them, that it is not who they are. Egoic patterns, even long-standing ones, sometimes dissolve almost miraculously when you don't oppose them internally. Opposition only gives them renewed strength. But even if they don't, you can then accept your parents' behavior with compassion, without needing to react to it, that is to say, without personalizing it.

Be aware also of your own unconscious assumptions or expectations that lie behind your old, habitual reactions to them. "My parents should approve of what I do. They should understand me and accept me for who I am." Really? Why should they? The fact is they don't because they can't. Their evolving consciousness hasn't made the quantum leap to the level of awareness yet. They are not yet able to disidentify from their role. "Yes, but I can't feel happy and comfortable with who I am unless I have their approval and understanding." Really? What difference does their approval or

disapproval truly make to who you are? All such unexamined assumptions cause a great deal of negative emotion, much unnecessary unhappiness.

Be alert. Are some of the thoughts that go through your mind the internalized voice of your father or mother, saying perhaps something like, “You are not good enough. You will never amount to anything,” or some other judgment or mental position? If there is awareness in you, you will be able to recognize that voice in your head for what it is: an old thought, conditioned by the past. If there is awareness in you, you no longer need to believe in every thought you think. It's an old thought, no more. Awareness means Presence, and only Presence can dissolve the unconscious past in you.”

“If you think you are so enlightened,” Ram Dass said, “go and spend a week with your parents.” That is good advice. The relationship with your parents is not only the primordial relationship that sets the tone for all subsequent relationships, it is also a good test for your degree of Presence. The more shared past there is in a relationship, the more present you need to be; otherwise, you will be forced to relive the past again and again.

## CONSCIOUS SUFFERING

If you have young children, give them help, guidance, and protection to the best of your ability, but even more important, give them space – space to be. They come into this world through you, but they are not “yours.” The belief “I know what's best for you” may be true when they are very young, but the older they get, the less true it becomes. The more expectations you have of how their life should unfold, the more you are in your mind instead of being present for them. Eventually, they will make mistakes, and they will experience some form of suffering, as all humans do. In fact, they may be mistakes only from your perspective. What to you is a mistake may be exactly what your children need to do or experience. Give them as much help and guidance as you can, but realize that you may also at times have to allow them to make mistakes, especially as they begin to reach adulthood. At times, you may also have to allow them to suffer. Suffering may come to them out of the blue or it may come as the consequence of their own mistakes.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if you could spare them from all suffering? No, it wouldn't. They would not evolve as human beings and would remain shallow, identified with the external form of things. Suffering drives you deeper. The paradox is that suffering is caused by identification with form and erodes identification with form. A lot of it is caused by the ego, although eventually suffering destroys the ego – but not until you suffer consciously.

Humanity is destined to go beyond suffering, but not in the way the ego thinks. One of the ego's many erroneous assumptions, one of its many deluded thoughts is “I should not have to suffer.” Sometimes the thought gets transferred to someone close to you: “My child should not have to suffer.” That thought itself lies at the root of suffering. Suffering has a noble purpose: the evolution of consciousness and the burning up of the ego. The man on the Cross is an archetypal image. He is every man and every woman. As long as you resist suffering, it is a slow process because the resistance creates more ego to burn up. When you accept suffering, however, there is an acceleration of that process which is brought about by the fact that you suffer consciously. You can accept suffering for yourself, or you can accept it for someone else, such as your child or parent. In the midst of conscious suffering, there is already the transmutation. The fire of suffering becomes the light of consciousness.

The ego says, “I shouldn't have to suffer,” and that thought makes you suffer so much more. It is a distortion of the truth, which is always paradoxical. The truth is that you need to say yes to suffering before you can transcend it.

## CONSCIOUS PARENTING

Many children harbor hidden anger and resentment toward their parents and often the cause is inauthenticity in the relationship. The child has a deep longing for the parent to be there as a human being, not as a role, no matter how conscientiously that role is being played. You may be doing all the right things and the best you can for your child, but even doing the best you can is not enough. *In fact, doing is never enough if you neglect Being.* The ego knows nothing of being but believes you will eventually be saved by doing. If you are in the grip of the ego, you believe that by doing more and more you will eventually accumulate enough “doings” to make yourself feel complete at some point in the future. You won't. You will only

lose yourself in doing. The entire civilization is losing itself in doing that is not rooted in Being and thus becomes futile.

How do you bring Being into the life of a busy family, into the relationship with your child? The key is to give your child attention. There are two kinds of attention. One we might call form-based attention. The other is formless attention. Form-based attention is always connected in some way with doing or evaluation. “Have you done your homework? Eat your dinner. Tidy up your room. Brush your teeth. Do this. Stop doing that. Hurry up, get ready.”

What's the next thing we have to do? This question pretty much summarizes what family life is like in many homes. Form-based attention is of course necessary and has its place, but if that's all there is in the relationship with your child, then the most vital dimension is missing and Being becomes completely obscured by doing, by “the cares of the world,” as Jesus puts it. Formless attention is inseparable from the dimension of Being. How does it work?

As you look at, listen to, touch, or help your child with this or that, you are alert, still, completely present, not wanting anything other than that moment as it is. In this way, you make room for Being. In that moment, if you are present, you are not a father or mother. You are the alertness, the stillness, the Presence that is listening, looking, touching, even speaking. You are the Being behind the doing.

## RECOGNIZING YOUR CHILD

You are a human being. What does that mean? Mastery of life is not a question of control, but of finding a balance between human and Being. Mother, father, husband, wife, young, old, the roles you play, the functions you fulfill, whatever you do – all that belongs to the human dimension. It has its place and needs to be honored, but in itself it is not enough for a fulfilled, truly meaningful relationship or life. Human alone is never enough, no matter how hard you try or what you achieve. Then there is Being. It is found in the still, alert presence of Consciousness itself, the Consciousness that you are. Human is form. Being is formless. Human and Being are not separate but interwoven.

In the human dimension, you are unquestionably superior to your child. You are bigger, stronger, know more, can do more. If that dimension is all you know, you will feel superior to your child, if only unconsciously. And you will make your child feel inferior, if only unconsciously. There is no equality between you and your child because there is only form in your relationship, and in form, you are of course not equal. You may love your child, but your love will be human only, that is to say, conditional, possessive, intermittent. Only beyond form, in Being, are you equal, and only when you find the formless dimension in yourself can there be true love in that relationship. The Presence that you are, the timeless I Am, recognizes itself in another, and the other, the child in this case, feels loved, that is to say, recognized.

To love is to recognize yourself in another. The other's "otherness" then stands revealed as an illusion pertaining to the purely human realm, the realm of form. The longing for love that is in every child is the longing to be recognized, not on the level of form, but on the level of Being. If parents honor only the human dimension of the child but neglect Being, the child will sense that the relationship is unfulfilled, that something absolutely vital is missing, and there will be a buildup of pain in the child and sometimes unconscious resentment toward the parents. "Why don't you recognize me?" This is what the pain or resentment seems to be saying.

When another recognizes you, that recognition draws the dimension of Being more fully into this world through both of you. That is the love that redeems the world. I have been speaking of this with specific reference to the relationship with your child, but it equally applies, of course, to all relationships.

It has been said "God is love" but that is not absolutely correct. God is the One Life in and beyond the countless forms of life. Love implies duality: lover and beloved, subject and object. So love is the recognition of oneness in the world of duality. This is the birth of God into the world of form. Love makes the world less worldly, less dense, more transparent to the divine dimension, the light of consciousness itself.

## GIVING UP ROLE-PLAYING

To do whatever is required of you in any situation without it becoming a role that you identify with is an essential lesson in the art of living that each one of us is here to learn. You become most powerful in whatever you do if the action is performed for its own sake rather than as a means to protect, enhance, or conform to your role identity. Every role is a fictitious sense of self, and through it everything becomes personalized and thus corrupted and distorted by the mind-made “little me” and whatever role it happens to be playing. Most of the people who are in positions of power in this world, such as politicians, TV personalities, business as well as religious leaders, are completely identified with their role, with a few notable exceptions. They may be considered VIPs, but they are no more than unconscious players in the egoic game, a game that looks so important yet is ultimately devoid of true purpose. It is, in the words of Shakespeare, “a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.”<sup>1</sup> Amazingly, Shakespeare arrived at this conclusion without having the benefit of television. If the egoic earth drama has any purpose at all, it is an indirect one: It creates more and more suffering on the planet, and suffering, although largely ego-created, is in the end also ego-destructive. It is the fire in which the ego burns itself up.

In a world of role playing personalities, those few people who don't project a mind made image – and other are some even on TV, in the media, and the business world – but function from the deeper core of their Being, those who do not attempt to appear more than they are but are simply themselves, stand out as remarkable and are the only ones who truly make a difference in this world. They are the bringers of the new consciousness. Whatever they do becomes empowered because it is in alignment with the purpose of the whole. Their influence, however, goes far beyond what they do, far beyond their function. Their mere presence – simple, natural, unassuming – has a transformational effect on whoever they come into contact with.

When you don't play roles, it means there is no self (ego) in what you do. There is no secondary agenda: protection or strengthening of yourself. As a result, your actions have far greater power. You are totally focused on the situation. You become one with it. You don't try to be anybody in particular. You are most powerful, most effective, when you are completely

yourself. But don't try to be yourself That's another role. It's called "natural, spontaneous me." As soon as you are trying to be this or that, you are playing a role. "Just be yourself" is good advice, but it can also be misleading. The mind will come in and say, "Let's see. How can I be myself?" Then, the mind will develop some kind of strategy: "How to be myself." Another role. "How can I be myself?" is, in fact, the wrong yourself. It implies you have to do something to be yourself. But how doesn't apply here because you are yourself already. Just stop adding unnecessary baggage to who you already are. "But I don't know who I am. I don't know what it means to be myself." If you can be absolutely comfortable with not knowing who you are, then what's left is who you are – the Being behind the human, a field of pure potentiality other than something that is already defined.

Give up defining yourself – to yourself or to others. You won't die. You will come to life. And don't be concerned with how others define you. When they define you, they are limiting themselves, so it's their problem. Whenever you interact with people, don't be there primarily as a function or a role, but as a field of conscious Presence.

Why does the ego play roles? Because of one unexamined assumption, one fundamental error, one unconscious thought. That thought is: I am not enough. Other unconscious thoughts follow: I need to play a role in order to get what I need to be fully myself; I need to get more so that I can be more. But you cannot be more than you are because underneath your physical and psychological form, you are one with Life itself, one with Being. In form, you are and will always be inferior to some, superior to others. In essence, you are neither inferior nor superior to anyone. True self-esteem and true humility arise out of that realization. In the eyes of the ego, self-esteem and humility are contradictory. In truth, they are one and the same.

## THE PATHOLOGICAL EGO

In a wider sense of the word, the ego itself is pathological, no matter what form it takes. When we look at the ancient Greek root of the word *pathological*, we discover just how appropriate that term is when applied to the ego. Although the word is normally used to describe a condition of disease, it is derived from *pathos*, which means suffering. This is, of course, exactly what the Buddha already discovered 2,600 years ago as a characteristic of the human condition.

A person in the grip of ego, however, does not recognize suffering as suffering, but will look upon it as the only appropriate response in any given situation. The ego in its blindness is incapable of seeing the suffering it inflicts on itself and on others. Unhappiness is an ego-created mental-emotional disease that has reached epidemic proportions. It is the inner equivalent of the environmental pollution of our planet. Negative states, such as anger, anxiety, hatred, resentment, discontent, envy, jealousy, and so on, are not recognized as negative but as totally justified and are further misperceived not as self-created but as caused by someone else or some external factor. "I am holding you responsible for my pain." This is what by implication the ego is saying.

The ego cannot distinguish between a situation and its interpretation of and reaction to that situation. You might say, "What a dreadful day," without realizing that the cold, the wind, and the rain or whatever condition you react to are not dreadful. They are as they are. What is dreadful is your reaction, your inner resistance to it, and the emotion that is created by that resistance. In Shakespeare's words, "There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so."<sup>2</sup> What is more, suffering or negativity is often misperceived by the ego as pleasure because up to the point the ego strengthens itself through it.

For example, anger or resentment strengthen the ego enormously by increasing the sense of separateness, emphasizing the otherness of others and creating a seemingly unassailable fortress-like mental position of "rightness." If you were able to observe the physiological changes that take place inside your body when possessed by such negative states, how they adversely affect the functioning of the heart, the digestive and immune systems, and countless other bodily functions, it would become abundantly clear that such states are indeed pathological, are forms of suffering and not pleasure.

Whenever you are in a negative state, there is something in you that wants the negativity, that perceives it as pleasurable, or that believes it will get you what you want. Otherwise, who would want to hang on to negativity, make themselves and others miserable, and create disease in the body? So, whenever there is negativity in you, if you can be aware at that moment that there is something in you that takes pleasure in it or believes it has a useful purpose you are becoming aware of the ego directly. The moment this

happens, your identity has shifted from ego to awareness. This means the ego is shrinking and awareness is growing.

If in the midst of negativity you are able to realize “At this moment I am creating suffering form myself” it will be enough to raise you above the limitations of conditioned egoic states and reactions. It will open up infinite possibilities which come to you when there is awareness - other vastly more intelligent ways of dealing with any situation. You will be free to let go of your unhappiness the moment you recognize it as unintelligent. Negativity is not intelligent. It is always of the ego. The ego may be clever, but it is not intelligent. Cleverness pursues its own little aims. Intelligence sees the larger whole in which all things are connected. Cleverness is motivated y self-interest, and it is extremely short-sighted. Most politicians and businesspeople are clever. Very few are intelligent. Whatever is attained through cleverness is short-lived and always turns out to be eventually self-defeating. Cleverness divides; intelligence unites.

## THE BACKGROUND UNHAPPINESS

The ego creates separation, and separation creates suffering. The ego is therefore clearly pathological. Apart from the obvious ones such as anger, hatred, and so on, there are other more subtle forms of negativity that are so common they are usually not recognized as sch, for example, impatience, irritation, nervousness, and being “fed up.” They constitute the background unhappiness that is many people's predominant inner state. You need to be extremely alert and absolutely present to be able to detect them. Whenever you do, it is a moment of awakening, of disidentification from the mind.

Here is one of the most common negative states that is easily overlooked, precisely because it is so common, so normal. You may be familiar with it. Do you often experience a feeling of discontent that could best be described as a kind of background resentment? It may be either specific or nonspecific. Many people spend a large part of their lives in that state. They are so identified with it that they cannot stand back and see it. Underlying that feeling are certain unconsciously held beliefs, that is to say, thoughts. You think these thoughts in the same way that you dream your dreams when you are asleep. In other words, you don't know you are thinking those thoughts, just as the dreamer doesn't know he is dreaming.

Here are some of the most common unconscious thoughts that feed the feeling of discontent or background resentment. I have stripped away the content from those thoughts so that the bare structure remains. They become more clearly visible that way. Whenever there is unhappiness in the background of your life (or even in the foreground), you can see which of these thoughts applies and fill in your own content according to your personal situation:

*“There is something that needs to happen in my life before I can be at peace (happy, fulfilled, etc.). And I resent that it hasn't happened yet. Maybe my resentment will finally make it happen.”*

*“Something happened in the past that should not have happened, and I resent that. If that hadn't happened, I would be at peace now.”*

*“Something is happening now that should not be happening, and it is preventing me from being at peace now.”*

Often the unconscious beliefs are directed toward a person and so “happening” becomes “doing”:

*“You should do this or that so that I can be at peace. And I resent that you haven't done it yet. Maybe my resentment will make you do it.”*

*“Something you (or I) did, said, or failed to do in the past is preventing me from being at peace now.”*

*“What you are doing or failing to do now is preventing me from being at peace.”*

## THE SECRET OF HAPPINESS

All of the above are assumptions, unexamined thoughts that are confused with reality. They are stories the ego craves to convince you that you cannot be at peace now or cannot be fully yourself now. Being at peace and being who you are, that is, being yourself, are one. The ego says: Maybe at some point in the future, I can be at peace – and if this, that, or the other happens, or I obtain this or become that. Or it says: I can never be at peace because of something that happened in the past. Listen to people's stories

and they could all be entitled “Why I Cannot Be At Peace Now.” The ego doesn't know that your only opportunity for being at peace *is* now. Or maybe it does know, and it is afraid that you may find this out. Peace, after all, is the end of the ego.

How to be at peace now? By making peace with the present moment. The present moment is the field on which the game of life happens. It cannot happen anywhere else. Once you have made peace with the present moment, see what happens, what you can do or choose to do, or rather what life does through you. There are three words that convey the secret of the art of living, the secret of all success and happiness: One With Life. Being one with life is being one with Now. You then realize that you don't live your life, but life lives you. Life is the dancer, and you are the dance.

The ego loves its resentment of reality. What is reality? Whatever is. Buddha called it *tatata* – the suchness of life, which is no more than the suchness of this moment. Opposition toward that suchness is one of the main features of the ego. It creates the negativity that the ego thrives on, the unhappiness that it loves. In this way, you make yourself and others suffer and don't even know that you are doing it, don't know that you are creating hell on earth. To create suffering without recognizing it – this is the essence of unconscious living; this is being totally in the grip of the ego. The extent of the ego's inability to recognize itself and see what it is doing is staggering and unbelievable. It will do exactly what it condemns others for and not see it. When it is pointed out, it will use angry denial, clever arguments, and self-justifications to distort the facts. People do it, corporations do it, governments do it. When all else fails, the ego will resort to shouting or even to physical violence. Send in the marines. We can now understand the deep wisdom in Jesus' words on the cross: “Forgive them for they know not what they do.”

To end the misery that has afflicted the human condition for thousands of years, you have to start with yourself and take responsibility for your inner state at any given moment. That means now. Ask yourself, “Is there negativity in me at this moment?” Then, become alert, attentive to your thoughts as well as your emotions. Watch out for the low-level unhappiness in whatever form that I mentioned earlier, such as discontent, nervousness, being “fed up,” and so on. Watch out for thoughts that appear to justify or explain this unhappiness but in reality cause it. The moment you

become aware of a negative state within yourself, it does not mean you have failed. It means that you have succeeded. until that awareness happens, there is identification with inner states, and such identification is ego. With awareness comes disidentification from thoughts, emotions, and reactions. This is not to be confused with denial. The thoughts, emotions, or reactions are recognized, and in the moment of recognizing, disidentification happens automatically. Your sense of self, of who you are, then undergoes a shift: Before you were the thoughts, emotions and reactions; now you are the awareness, the conscious Presence that witnesses those states.

“One day I will be free of the ego.” Who is talking? The ego. To become free of the ego is not really a big job but a very small one. All you need to do is be aware of your thoughts and emotions – as they happen. This is not really a “doing,” but an alert “seeing.” In that sense, it is true that there is nothing you can do to become free of the ego. When that shift happens, which is the shift from thinking to awareness, an intelligence far greater than the ego's cleverness begins to operate in your life. Emotions and even thoughts become depersonalized through awareness. Their impersonal nature is recognized. there is no longer a self in them. They are just human emotions, human thoughts. Your entire personal history, which is ultimately no more than a story, a bundle of thoughts and emotions, becomes of secondary importance and no longer occupies the forefront of your consciousness. It no longer forms the basis for your sense of identity. you are the light of Presence, the awareness that is prior to and deeper than any thoughts and emotions.

## PATHOLOGICAL FORMS OF EGO

As we have seen, the ego is in its essential nature pathological, if we use the word in its wider sense to denote dysfunction and suffering. Many mental disorders consist of the same egoic traits that operate in a normal person, except that they have become so pronounced that their pathological nature is now obvious to anyone, except the sufferer.

For example, many normal people tell certain kinds of lies from time to time in order to appear more important, more special, and to enhance this image in the mind of others: who they know, what their achievements, abilities, and possessions are, and whatever else the ego uses to identify with. Some people, however, driven by the ego's feeling of insufficiency and

its need to have or be “more,” lie habitually and compulsively. Most of what they tell you about themselves, their story, is a complete fantasy, a fictitious edifice the ego has designed for itself to feel bigger, more special. Their grandiose and inflated self-image can sometimes fool others, but usually not for long. It is then quickly recognized by most people as a complete fiction.

The mental illness that is called paranoid schizophrenia, or paranoia for short, is essentially an exaggerated form of ego. It usually consists of a fictitious story the mind has invented to make sense of a persistent underlying feeling of fear. The main element of the story is the belief that certain people (sometimes large numbers or almost everyone) are plotting against me, or are conspiring to control or kill me. The story often has an inner consistency and logic so that it sometimes fools others into believing it too. Sometimes organizations or entire nations have paranoid belief systems at their very basis. The ego's fear and distrust of other people, its tendency to emphasize the “otherness” of others by focusing on their perceived faults and make those faults into their identity, is taken a little further and makes others into inhuman monsters. The ego needs others, but its dilemma is that deep down it hates and fears them. Jean-Paul Sartre's statement “Hell is other people” is the voice of the ego. The person suffering from paranoia experiences that hell most acutely, but everyone in whom the egoic patterns still operate will feel it to some degree. The stronger the ego in you, the more likely it is that in your perception other people are the main source of problems in your life. It is also more than likely that you will make life difficult for others. But, of course, you won't be able to see that. It is always others who seem to be doing it to you.

The mental illness we call paranoia also manifests another symptom that is an element of every ego, although in paranoia it takes on a more extreme form. The more the sufferer sees himself persecuted, spied on, or threatened by others, the more pronounced becomes his sense of being the center of the universe around whom everything revolves, and the more special and important he feels as the imagined focal point of so many people's attention. His sense of being a victim, of being wronged by so many people, makes him feel very special. In the story that forms the basis of his delusional system, he often assigns to himself the role of both victim and potential hero who is going to save the world or defeat the forces of evil.

The collective ego of tribes, nations, and religious organizations also frequently contains a strong element of paranoia: us against the evil others. It is the cause of much human suffering. The Spanish Inquisition, the persecution and burning of heretics and “witches,” the relations between nations leading up to the First and Second World wars, Communism throughout its history, the “Cold War,” McCarthyism in America in the 1950's, prolonged violent conflict in the Middle East are all painful episodes in human history dominated by extreme collective paranoia.

The more unconscious individuals, groups, or nations are, the more likely it is that egoic pathology will assume the form of physical violence. Violence is a primitive but still very widespread way in which the ego attempts to assert itself, to prove itself right and another wrong. With very unconscious people, arguments can easily lead to physical violence. What is an argument? Two or more people express their opinions and those opinions differ. Each person is so identified with the thoughts that make up their opinion, that those thoughts harden into mental positions which are invested with a sense of self. In other words: Identity and thought merge. Once this has happened, when I defend my opinions (thoughts), I feel and act as if I were defending my very self. Unconsciously, I feel and act as if I were fighting for survival and so my emotions will reflect this unconscious belief. They become turbulent. I am upset, angry, defensive, or aggressive. I need to win at all costs lest I become annihilated. That's the illusion. The ego doesn't know that mind and mental positions have nothing to do with who you are because the ego is the unobserved mind itself.

In Zen they say: “Don't seek the truth. Just cease to cherish opinions.” What does that mean? Let go of identification with your mind. Who you are beyond the mind then emerges by itself.

## WORK – WITH AND WITHOUT EGO

Most people have moments when they are free of ego. Those who are exceptionally good at what they do may be completely or largely free of ego while performing their work. They may not know it, but their work has become a spiritual practice. Most of them are present while they do their work and fall back into relative unconsciousness in their private life. This means their state of Presence is for the time being confined to one area of their life. I have met teachers, artists, nurses, doctors, scientists, social

workers, waiters, hairdressers, business owners, and salespeople who perform their work admirably without any self-seeking, fully responding to whatever the moment requires of them. They are one with what they do, one with the Now, one with the people or the task they serve. The influence such people have upon others goes far beyond the function they perform. They bring about a lessening of the ego in everyone who comes into contact with them. Even people with heavy egos sometimes begin to relax, let down their guard, and stop playing their roles when they interact with them. It comes as no surprise that those people who work without ego are extraordinarily successful at what they do. Anybody who is one with what he or she does is building the new earth.

I have also met many others who may be technically good at what they do but whose ego constantly sabotages their work. Only part of their attention is on the work they perform; the other part is on themselves. Their ego demands personal recognition and wastes energy in resentment if it doesn't get enough – and it's never enough. “Is someone else getting more recognition than me?” Or their main focus of attention is profit or power, and their work is no more than a means to that end. When work is no more than a means to an end, it cannot be of high quality. When obstacles or difficulties arise in their work, when things don't go according to expectation, when other people or circumstances are not helpful or cooperative, instead of immediately becoming one with the new situation and responding to the requirements of the present moment, they react against the situation and so separate themselves from it. There is a “me” that feels personally offended or resentful, and a huge amount of energy is burned up in useless protest or anger, energy that could be used for solving the situation if it were not being misused by the ego. What is more, this “anti”-energy creates new obstacles, new opposition. Many people are truly their own worst enemy.

People unknowingly sabotage their own work when they withhold help or information from others or try to undermine them lest they become more successful or get more credit than “me.” Cooperation is alien to the ego, except when there is a secondary motive. The ego doesn't know that the more you include others, the more smoothly things flow and the more easily things come to you. When you give little or no help to others or put obstacles in their path, the universe – in the form of people and circumstances – gives little or no help to you because you have cut yourself off from the whole.

The ego's unconscious core feeling of “not enough” causes it to react to someone else's success as if that success had taken something away from “me.” It doesn't know that your resentment of another person's success curtails your own chances of success. In order to attract success, you need to welcome it wherever you see it.

## THE EGO IN ILLNESS

An illness can either strengthen or weaken the ego. If you complain, feel self-pity, or resent being ill, your ego becomes stronger. It also becomes stronger if you make the illness art of your conceptual identity: “I am a sufferer of such and such a disease.” Ah, so now we know who you are. Some people, on the other hand, who in normal life have a big ego, suddenly become gentle and kind and much nicer people when they are ill. They may gain insights they may never have had in their normal life. They may access their inner knowing and contentment and speak words of wisdom. Then, when they get better, energy returns and so does the ego.

When you are ill, your energy level is quite low, and the intelligence of the organism may take over and use the remaining energy for the healing of the body, and so there is not enough left for the mind, that is to say, egoic thinking and emotion. The ego burns up considerable amounts of energy. In some cases, however, the ego retains the little energy that remains and uses it for its own purposes. Needless to say, those people who experience a strengthening of the ego in illness take much longer to recover. Some never do, and so the illness becomes chronic and a permanent part of their false sense of self.

## THE COLLECTIVE EGO

How hard it is to live with yourself! One of the ways in which the ego attempts to escape the unsatisfactoriness of personal self-hood is to enlarge and strengthen its sense of self by identifying with a group – a nation, a political party, corporation, institution, sect, club, gang, football team.

In some cases the personal ego seems to dissolve completely as someone dedicates his or her life to working selflessly for the greater good of the collective without demanding personal rewards, recognition, or aggrandizement. What a relief to be freed of the dreadful burden of personal self. The members of the collective feel happy and fulfilled, no matter how

hard they work, how many sacrifices they make. They appear to have gone beyond ego. The question is: Have they truly become free, or has the ego simply shifted from the personal to the collective?

A collective ego manifests the same characteristics as the personal ego, such as the need for conflict and enemies, the need for more, the need to be right against others who are wrong, and so on. Sooner or later, the collective will come into conflict with other collectives, because it unconsciously seeks conflict and it needs opposition to define its boundary and thus its identity. Its members will then experience the suffering that inevitably comes in the wake of any ego-motivated action. At that point, they may wake up and realize that their collective has a strong element of insanity.

It can be painful at first to suddenly wake up and realize that the collective you had identified with and worked for is actually insane. Some people at that point become cynical or bitter and henceforth deny all values, all worth. This means that they quickly adopted another belief system when the previous one was recognized as illusory and therefore collapsed. They didn't face the death of their ego but ran away and reincarnated into a new one.

A collective ego is usually more unconscious than the individuals that make up that ego. For example crowds (which are temporary collective egoic entities) are capable of committing atrocities that the individual away from the crowd would not be. Nations not infrequently engage in behavior that would be immediately recognizable as psychopathic in an individual.

As the new consciousness emerges, some people will feel called upon to form groups that reflect the enlightened consciousness. These groups will not be collective egos. The individuals who make up these groups will have no need to define their identity through them. They no longer look to any form to define who they are. Even if the members that make up those groups are not totally free of ego yet, there will be enough awareness in them to recognize the ego in themselves or in others as soon as it appears. However, constant alertness is required since the ego *will* try to take over and reassert itself in any way it can. Dissolving the human ego by bringing it into the light of awareness – this will be one of the main purposes of these groups, whether they be enlightened businesses, charitable organizations, schools, or

communities of people living together. Enlightened collectives will fulfill an important function in the arising of the new consciousness. Just as egoic collectives pull you into unconsciousness and suffering, the enlightened collective can be a vortex for consciousness that will accelerate the planetary shift.

## INCONTROVERTIBLE PROOF OF IMMORTALITY

Ego comes about through a split in the human psyche in which identity separates into two parts that we could call “I” and “me” or “me” and “myself.” Every ego is therefore schizophrenic, to use the world in its popular meaning of split personality. You live with a mental image of yourself, a conceptual self that you have a relationship with. Life itself becomes conceptualized and separated from who you are when you speak of “my life.” The moment you say or think “my life” and believe in what you are saying (rather than it just being a linguistic convention), you have entered the realm of delusion. If there is such a thing as “my life,” it follows that I and life are two separate things, and so I can also lose my life, my imaginary treasured possession. Death becomes a seeming reality and a threat. Words and concepts split life into separate segments that have no reality in themselves. We could even say that the notion “my life” is the original delusion of separateness, the source of ego. If I and life are two, if I am separate from life, then I am separate from all things, all beings, all people. But how could I be separate from life? What “I” could be there apart from life, apart from Being? It is utterly impossible. So there is no such thing as “my life,” and I don't *have* a life. I *am* life. I and life are one. It cannot be otherwise. So how could I lose my life? How can I lose something that I don't have in the first place? How can I lose something that I Am? It is impossible.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### *THE PAIN-BODY*

The greater part of most people's thinking is involuntary, automatic, and repetitive. It is no more than a kind of mental static and fulfills no real purpose. Strictly speaking, you don't think; Thinking happens to you. The statement "I think" implies volition. It implies that you have a say in the matter, that there is choice involved on your part. For most people, this is not yet the case. "I think" is just as false a statement as "I digest" or "I circulate my blood." Digestion happens, circulation happens, thinking happens.

The voice in the head has a life of its own. Most people are at the mercy of that voice; they are possessed by thought, by the mind. And since the mind is conditioned by the past, you are then forced to reenact the past again and again. The Eastern term for this is karma. When you are identified with that voice, you don't know this, of course. If you knew it, you would no longer be possessed because you are only truly possessed when you mistake the possessing entity for who you are, that is to say, when you become it.

For thousands of years, humanity has been increasingly mind-possessed, failing to recognize the possessing entity as "not self." Through complete identification with the mind, a false sense of self – the ego – came into existence. The density of the ego depends on the degree to which you the consciousness – are identified with your mind, with thinking. Thinking is no more than a tiny aspect of the totality of consciousness, the totality of who you are.

The degree of identification with the mind differs from person to person. Some people enjoy periods of freedom from it, however brief, and the peace, joy, and aliveness they experience in those moments make life worth living. These are also the moments when creativity, love, and compassion arise. Others are constantly trapped in the egoic state. They are alienated from themselves, as well as from others and the world around them. When you look at them, you may see the tension in their face, perhaps the furrowed brow, or the absent or staring expression in their eyes. Most of their attention is absorbed by thinking, and so they don't really see you, and

they are not really listening to you. They are not present in any situation, their attention being either in the past or future which, of course, exist only in them ind as thought forms. Or they relate to you through some kind of role they play and so are not themselves. Most people are alienated from who they are, and some are alienated to such a degree that the way they behave and interact is recognized as “phony” by almost everyone, except those who are equally phony, equally alienated from who they are.

Alienation means you don't feel at ease in any situation, any place, or with any person, not even with yourself. You are always trying to get “home” but never feel at home. Some of the greatest writers of the twentieth century, such as Franz Kafka, Albert Camus, T.S.Eliot, and James Joyce, recognized alienation as the universal dilemma of human existence, probably felt it deeply within themselves and so were able to express it brilliantly in their works. They don't offer a solution. Their contribution is to show us a reflection of the human predicament so that we can see it more clearly. To see one's predicament clearly is a first step toward going beyond it.

## THE BIRTH OF EMOTION

In addition to the movement of thought, although not entirely separate from it, there is another dimension to the ego: emotion. This is not to say that all thinking and all emotion are of the ego. The turn into ego only when you identify with them and they take you over completely, that is to say, when they become “I.”

The physical organism, your body, has its own intelligence, as does the organism of every other life-form. And that intelligence reacts to what your mind is saying, reacts to your thoughts. So emotion is the body's reaction to your mind. The body's intelligence is, of course, an inseparable part of universal intelligence, one of its countless manifestations. It gives temporary cohesion to the atoms and molecules that make up your physical organism. It is the organizing principle behind the workings of all the organs of the body, the conversion of oxygen and food into energy, the heartbeat and circulation of the blood, the immune system that protects the body from invaders, the translation of sensory input into nerve impulses that are sent to the brain, decoded there, and reassembled into a coherent inner picture of outer reality. All these, as well as thousands of others simultaneously occurring functions, are coordinated perfectly by that intelligence. You don't run your body. The

intelligence does. It also is in charge of the organism's responses to its environment.

This is true for any life-form. It is the same intelligence that brought the plant into physical form and then manifests as the flower that comes out of the plant, the flower that opens its petals in the morning to receive the rays of the sun and closes them at nighttime. It is the same intelligence that manifests as Gaia, the complex living being that is planet earth.

This intelligence gives rise to instinctive reactions of the organism to any threat or challenge. It produces responses in animals that appear to be akin to human emotions: anger, fear, pleasure. These instinctive responses could be considered primordial forms of emotion. In certain situations, human beings experience instinctive responses in the same way that animals do. In the face of danger, when the survival of the organism is threatened, the heart beats faster, the muscles contract, breathing becomes rapid in preparation for fight or flight. Primordial fear. When being cornered, a sudden flare-up of intense energy gives strength to the body that it didn't have before. Primordial anger. These instinctive responses appear akin to emotions, but are not emotions in the true sense of the word. The fundamental difference between an instinctive response and an emotion is this: An instinctive response is the body's direct response to some external situation. An emotion, on the other hand, is the body's response to a thought.

Indirectly, an emotion can also be a response to an actual situation or event, but it will be a response to the event seen through the filter of a mental interpretation, the filter of thought, that is to say, through the mental concepts of good and bad, like and dislike, me and mine. For example, it is likely you won't feel any emotion when you are told that someone's car has been stolen, but when it is *your* car, you will probably feel upset. It is amazing how much emotion a little mental concept like "my" can generate.

Although the body is very intelligent, it cannot tell the difference between an actual situation and a thought. It reacts to every thought as if it were a reality. It doesn't know it is just a thought. To the body, a worrisome, fearful thought means "I am in danger," and it responds accordingly, even though you may be lying in a warm and comfortable bed at night. The heart beats faster, muscles contract, breathing becomes rapid. There is a buildup of

energy, but since the danger is only a mental fiction, the energy has no outlet. Part of it is fed back to the mind and generates even more anxious thought. The rest of the energy turns toxic and interferes with the harmonious functioning of the body.

## EMOTIONS AND THE EGO

The ego is not only the unobserved mind, the voice in the head which pretends to be you, but also the unobserved emotions that are the body's reaction to what the voice in the head is saying.

We have already seen what kind of thinking the egoic voice engages in most of the time and the dysfunction inherent in the structure of its thought processes, regardless of content. This dysfunctional thinking is what the body reacts to with negative emotion.

The voice in the head tells a story that the body believes in and reacts to. Those reactions are the emotions. The emotions, in turn, feed energy back to the thoughts that created the emotion in the first place. This is the vicious circle between unexamined thoughts and emotions, giving rise to emotional thinking and emotional story-making.

The emotional component of ego differs from person to person. In some egos, it is greater than in others. Thoughts that trigger emotional responses in the body may sometimes come so fast that before the mind has had time to voice them, the body has already responded with an emotion, and the emotion has turned into a reaction. Those thoughts exist at a pre-verbal stage and could be called unspoken, unconscious assumptions. They have their origin in a person's past conditioning, usually from early childhood. "People cannot be trusted" would be an example of such an unconscious assumption in a person whose primordial relationships, that is to say, with parents or siblings, were not supportive and did not inspire trust. Here are a few more common unconscious assumptions: "Nobody respects and appreciates me. I need to fight to survive. There is never enough money. Life always lets you down. I don't deserve abundance. I don't deserve love." Unconscious assumptions create emotions in the body which in turn generate mind activity and/or instant reactions. In this way, they create your personal reality.

The voice of the ego continuously disrupts the body's natural state of well-being. Almost every human body is under a great deal of strain and stress, not because it is threatened by some external factor but from within the mind. The body has an ego attached to it, and it cannot but respond to all the dysfunctional thought patterns that make up the ego. Thus, a stream of negative emotion accompanies the stream of incessant and compulsive thinking.

What is a negative emotion? An emotion that is toxic to the body and interferes with its balance and harmonious functioning. Fear, anxiety, anger, bearing a grudge, sadness, hatred or intense dislike, jealousy, envy – all disrupt the energy flow through the body, affect the heart, the immune system, digestion, production of hormones, and so on. Even mainstream medicine, although it knows very little about how the ego operates yet is beginning to recognize the connection between negative emotional states and physical disease. An emotion that does harm to the body also infects the people you come into contact with and indirectly, through a process of chain reaction, countless others you never meet. There is a generic term for all negative emotions: unhappiness.

Do positive emotions then have the opposite effect on the physical body? Do they strengthen the immune system, invigorate and heal the body? They do, indeed, but we need to differentiate between positive emotions that are ego-generated and deeper emotions that emanate from your natural state of connectedness with Being.

Positive emotions generated by the ego already contain within themselves their opposite into which they can quickly turn. Here are some examples. What the ego calls love is possessiveness and addictive clinging that can turn into hate within a second. Anticipation about an upcoming event, which is the ego's overvaluation of future, easily turns into its opposite – letdown or disappointment – when the event is over or doesn't fulfill the ego's expectations. Praise and recognition make you feel alive and happy one day; being criticized or ignored make you dejected and unhappy the next. The pleasure of a wild party turns into bleakness and a hangover the next morning. There is no good without bad, no high without low.

Ego-generated emotions are derived from the mind's identification with external factors which are of course, all unstable and liable to change at

any moment. The deeper emotions are not really emotions at all but states of Being. Emotions exist within the realm of opposites. States of Being can be obscured, but they have no opposite. They emanate from within you as the love, joy, and peace that are aspects of your true nature.

## THE DUCK WITH A HUMAN MIND

In *The Power of Now*, I mentioned my observation that after two ducks get into a fight, which never lasts long, they will separate and float off in opposite directions. Then each duck will flap its wings vigorously a few times; thus releasing the surplus energy that built up during the fight. After they flap their wings, they float on peacefully, as if nothing had ever happened.

If the duck had a human mind, it would keep the fight alive by thinking, by story-making. This would probably be the duck's story: "I don't believe what he just did. He came to within five inches of me. He thinks he owns this pond. He has no consideration for my private space. I'll never trust him again. Next time he'll try something else just to annoy me. I'm sure he's plotting something already. But I'm not going to stand for this. I'll teach him a lesson he won't forget." And on and on the mind spins its tales, still thinking and talking about it days, months, or years later. As far as the body is concerned, the fight is still continuing, and the energy it generates in response to all those thoughts is emotion, which in turn generates more thinking. This becomes the emotional thinking of the ego. you can see how problematic the duck's life would become if it had a human mind. But this is how most humans live all the time.

No situation or event is ever really finished. The mind and the mind-made "me and my story" keep it going.

We are a species that ahas lost its way. everything natural, every flower or tree, and every animal have important lessons to teach us if we would only stop, look and listen. Our duck's lesson is this: Flap your wings – which translates as "let go of the story" - and return to the only place of power: the present moment.

## CARRYING THE PAST

The inability or rather unwillingness of the human mind to let go of the past is beautifully illustrated in the story of two Zen monks, Tanzan and

Ekido, who were walking along a country road that had become extremely muddy after heavy rains. Near a village, they came upon a young woman who was trying to cross the road, but the mud was so deep it would have ruined the silk kimono she was wearing. Tanzan at once picked her up and carried her to the other side.

The monks walked on in silence. Five hours later, as they were approaching the lodging temple, Ekido couldn't restrain himself any longer. "Why did you carry that girl across the road?" he asked. "We monks are not supposed to do things like that."

"I put the girl down hours ago," said Tanzan. "Are you still carrying her?"

Now imagine what life would be like for someone who lived like Ekido all the time, unable or unwilling to let go internally of situations, accumulating more and more "stuff" inside, and you get a sense of what life is like for the majority of people on our planet. What a heavy burden of past they carry around with them in their minds.

The past lives in you as memories, but memories in themselves are not a problem. In fact, it is through memory that we learn from the past and from past mistakes. It is only when memories, that is to say, thoughts about the past, take you over completely that they turn into a burden, turn problematic, and become part of your sense of self. Your personality, which is conditioned by the past, then becomes your prison. Your memories are invested with a sense of self, and your story becomes who you perceive yourself to be. This "little me" is an illusion that obscures your true identity as timeless and formless Presence.

Your story, however, consists not only of mental but also of emotional memory – old emotion that is being revived continuously. As in the case of the monk who carried the burden of his resentment for five hours by feeding it with his thoughts, most people carry a large amount of unnecessary baggage, both mental and emotional, throughout their lives. They limit themselves through grievances, regret, hostility, guilt. Their emotional thinking has become their self, and so they hang on to the old emotion because it strengthens their identity.

Because of the human tendency to perpetuate old emotion, almost everyone carries in his or her energy field an accumulation of old emotional pain, which I call “the pain-body.”

We can, however, stop adding to the pain-body that we already have. We can learn to break the habit of accumulating and perpetuating old emotion by flapping our wings, metaphorically speaking, and refrain from mentally dwelling on the past, regardless of whether something happened yesterday or thirty years ago. We can learn not to keep situations or events alive in our minds, but to return our attention continuously to the pristine, timeless present moment rather than be caught up in mental movie-making. Our very Presence then becomes our identity, rather than our thoughts and emotions.

Nothing ever happened in the past that can prevent you from being present now; and if the past cannot prevent you from being present now, what power does it have?

## INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE

Any negative emotion that is not fully faced and seen for what it is in the moment it arises does not completely dissolve. It leaves behind a remnant of pain.

Children in particular find strong negative emotions too overwhelming to cope with and tend to try not to feel them. In the absence of a fully conscious adult who guides them with love and compassionate understanding into facing the emotion directly, choosing not to feel it is indeed the only option for the child at that time. Unfortunately, that early defense mechanism usually remains in place when the child becomes an adult. The emotion still lives in him or her unrecognized and manifests indirectly, for example, as anxiety, anger, outbursts of violence, a mood, or even as a physical illness. In some cases, it interferes with or sabotages every intimate relationship. Most psychotherapists have met patients who claimed initially to have had a totally happy childhood, and later the opposite turned out to be the case. Those may be the more extreme cases, but nobody can go through childhood without suffering emotional pain. Even if both of your parents were enlightened, you would still find yourself growing up in a largely unconscious world.

The remnants of pain left behind by every strong negative emotion that is not fully faced, accepted, and then let go of join together to form an energy field that lives in the very cells of your body. It consists not just of childhood pain, but also painful emotions that were added to it later in adolescence and during your adult life, much of it created by the voice of the ego. It is the emotional pain that is your unavoidable companion when a false sense of self is the basis of your life.

This energy field of old but still very-much-alive emotion that lives in almost every human being is the pain-body.

The pain-body, however, is not just individual in nature. It also partakes of the pain suffered by countless humans throughout the history of humanity, which is a history of continuous tribal warfare, of enslavement, pillage, rape, torture, and other forms of violence. This pain still lives in the collective psyche of humanity and is being added to on a daily basis, as you can verify when you watch the news tonight or look at the drama in people's relationships. The collective pain-body is probably encoded within every human's DNA, although we haven't discovered it there yet.

Every newborn who comes into this world already carries an emotional pain-body. In some it is heavier, more dense than in others. Some babies are quite happy most of the time. Others seem to carry an enormous amount of unhappiness within them. It is true that some babies cry a great deal because they are not given enough love and attention, but others cry for no apparent reason, almost as if they were trying to make everyone around them as unhappy as they are – and often they succeed. They have come into this world with a heavy share of human pain. Other babies may cry frequently because they can sense the emanation of their mother's and father's negative emotion, and it causes them pain and also causes their pain-body to grow already by absorbing energy from the parents' pain-bodies. Whatever the case may be, as the baby's physical body grows, so does the pain-body.

An infant with only a light pain-body is not necessarily going to be a spiritually “more advanced” man or woman than somebody with a dense one. In fact, the opposite is often the case. People with heavy pain-bodies usually have a better chance to awaken spiritually than those with a relatively light one. Whereas some of them do remain trapped in their heavy pain-

bodies, many others reach a point where they cannot live with their unhappiness any longer, and so their motivation to awaken becomes strong.

Why is the suffering body of Christ, his face distorted in agony and his body bleeding from countless wounds, such a significant image in the collective consciousness of humanity? Millions of people, particularly in medieval times, would not have related to it as deeply as they did if something within themselves had not resonated with it, if they had not unconsciously recognized it as an outer representation of their own inner reality – the pain-body. They were not yet conscious enough to recognize it directly within themselves, but it was the beginning of their becoming aware of it. Christ can be seen as the archetypal human, embodying both the pain and the possibility of transcendence.

## HOW THE PAIN-BODY RENEWS ITSELF

The pain-body is a semi-autonomous energy form that lives within most human beings, an entity made up of emotion. It has its own primitive intelligence, not unlike a cunning animal, and its intelligence is directed primarily at survival. Like all life-forms, it periodically needs to feed – to take in new energy – and the food it requires to replenish itself consists of energy that is compatible with its own, which is to say, energy that vibrates at a similar frequency. Any emotionally painful experience can be used as food by the pain-body. That's why it thrives on negative thinking as well as drama in relationships. The pain-body is an addiction to unhappiness.

It may be shocking when you realize for the first time that there is something within you that periodically seeks emotional negativity, seeks unhappiness. You need even more awareness to see it in yourself than to recognize it in another person. Once the unhappiness has taken you over, not only do you not want an end to it, but you want to make others just as miserable as you are in order to feed on their negative emotional reactions.

In most people, the pain-body has a dormant and an active stage. When it is dormant, you easily forget that you carry a heavy dark cloud or a dormant volcano inside you, depending on the energy field of your particular pain-body. How long it remains dormant varies from person to person: A few weeks is the most common, but it can be a few days or months. In rare cases

the pain-body can lie in hibernation for years before it gets triggered by some event.

## HOW THE PAIN-BODY FEEDS ON YOUR THOUGHTS

The pain-body awakens from its dormancy when it gets hungry, when it is time to replenish itself. Alternatively, it may get triggered by an event at any time. The pain-body that is ready to feed can use the most insignificant event as a trigger, something somebody says or does, or even a thought. If you live alone or there is nobody around at the time, the pain-body will feed on your thoughts. Suddenly, your thinking becomes deeply negative. You were most likely unaware that just prior to the influx of negative thinking a wave of emotion invaded your mind – as a dark and heavy mood, as anxiety or fiery anger. All thought is energy and the pain-body is now feeding on the energy of your thoughts. But it cannot feed on any thought. You don't need to be particularly sensitive to notice that a positive thought has a totally different feeling-tone than a negative one. It is the same energy, but it vibrates at a different frequency. A happy, positive thought is indigestible to the pain-body. It can only feed on negative thoughts because only those thoughts are compatible with its own energy field.

All things are vibrating energy fields in ceaseless motion. The chair you sit on, the book you are holding in your hands appear solid and motionless only because that is how your senses perceive their vibrational frequency, that is to say, the incessant movement of the molecules, atoms, electrons and subatomic particles that together create what you perceive as a chair, a book, a tree, or a body. What we perceive as physical matter is energy vibrating (moving) at a particular range of frequencies. Thoughts consist of the same energy vibrating at a higher frequency than matter, which is why they cannot be seen or touched. Thoughts have their own range of frequencies, which negative thoughts at the lower end of the scale and positive thoughts at the higher. The vibrational frequency of the pain-body resonates with that of negative thoughts, which is why only those thoughts can feed the pain-body.

The usual pattern of thought creating emotion is reversed in the case of the pain-body, at least initially. Emotion from the pain-body quickly gains

control of your thinking, and once your mind has been taken over by the pain-body, your thinking becomes negative. The voice in your head will be telling sad, anxious, or angry stories about yourself or your life, about other people, about past, future, or imaginary events. The voice will be blaming, accusing, complaining, imagining. And you are totally identified with whatever the voice says, believe all its distorted thoughts. At that point, the addiction to unhappiness has set in.

It is not so much that you cannot stop your train of negative thoughts, but that you don't want to. This is because the pain-body at that time is living through you, pretending to be you. And to the pain-body, pain is pleasure. It eagerly devours every negative thought. In fact, the usual voice in your head has now become the voice of the pain-body. It has taken over the internal dialogue. A vicious circle becomes established between the pain-body and your thinking. Every thought feeds the pain-body and in turn the pain-body generates more thoughts. At some point, after a few hours or even a few days, it has replenished itself and returns to its dormant stage, leaving behind a depleted organism and a body that is much more susceptible to illness. If that sounds to you like a psychic parasite, you are right. That's exactly what it is.

## HOW THE PAIN-BODY FEEDS ON DRAMA

If there are other people around, preferably your partner or a close family member, the pain-body will attempt to provoke them – push their buttons, as the expression goes - so it can feed on the ensuing drama. Pain-bodies love intimate relationships and families because that is where they get most of their food. It is hard to resist another person's pain-body that is determined to draw you into a reaction. Instinctively it knows your weakest, most vulnerable points. If it doesn't succeed the first time, it will try again and again. It is raw emotion looking for more emotion. The other person's pain-body wants to awaken yours so that both pain-bodies can mutually energize each other.

Many relationships go through violent and destructive pain-body episodes at regular intervals. It is almost unbearably painful for a young child to have to witness the emotional violence of their parents' pain-bodies, and yet that is the fate of millions of children all over the world, the nightmare of their daily existence. That is also one of the main ways in

which the human pain-body is passed on from generation to generation. After each episode, the partners make up, and there is an interval of relative peace, to the limited extent that the ego allows it.

Excessive consumption of alcohol will often activate the pain-body, particularly in men, but also in some women. When a person becomes drunk, he goes through a complete personality change as the pain-body takes him over. A deeply unconscious person whose pain-body habitually replenishes itself through physical violence often directs it toward his spouse or children. When he becomes sober, he is truly sorry and may say he will never do this again, and he means it. The person who is talking and making promises, however, is not the entity that commits the violence, and so you can be sure that it will happen again and again unless he becomes present, recognizes the pain-body within himself, and thus disidentifies from it. In some cases, counseling can help him do that.

Most pain-bodies want to both inflict and suffer pain, but some are predominantly either perpetrators or victims. In either case, they feed on violence, whether emotional or physical. Some couples who may think they have “fallen in love” are actually feeling drawn to each other because their respective pain-bodies complement each other. Sometimes the roles of perpetrator and victim are already clearly prescribed the time they meet. Some marriages that are thought to be made in heaven are actually made in hell.

If you have ever lived with a cat, you will know that even when the cat seems to be asleep, it still knows what is going on, because at the slightest unusual noise, its ears will move toward it, and its eyes may open slightly. Dormant pain-bodies are the same. On some level, they are still awake, ready to jump into action when an appropriate trigger presents itself.

In intimate relationships, pain-bodies are often clever enough to lie low until you start living together and preferably have signed a contract committing yourself to be with this person for the rest of your life. You don't just marry your wife or husband, you also marry her or his pain-body – and your spouse marries yours. It can be quite a shock when, perhaps not long after moving in together after the honey moon, you find suddenly one day there is a complete personality change in your partner. Her voice becomes harsh or shrill as she accuses you, blames you, or shouts at you, mostly likely

over a relatively trivial matter. Or she becomes totally withdrawn. “What's wrong?” you ask. “Nothing is wrong,” she says. But the intensely hostile energy she emanates is saying, “Everything is wrong.” When you look into her eyes, there is no light in them anymore; it is as if a heavy veil has descended, and the being you know and love which before was able to shine through her ego, is now totally obscured. A complete stranger seems to be looking back at you, and in her eyes there is hatred, hostility, bitterness, or anger. When she speaks to you, it is not your spouse or partner who is speaking but the pain-body speaking through them. Whatever she is saying is the pain-body's version of reality, a reality completely distorted by fear, hostility, anger, and a desire to inflict and receive more pain.

At this point you may wonder whether this is your partner's real face that you had never seen before and whether you made a dreadful mistake in choosing this person. It is, of course, not the real face, just the pain-body that temporarily has taken possession. It would be hard to find a partner who doesn't carry a pain-body; but it would perhaps be wise to choose someone whose pain-body is not excessively dense.

## DENSE PAIN-BODIES

Some people carry dense pain-bodies that are never completely dormant. They may be smiling and making polite conversation, but you do not need to be psychic to sense that seething ball of unhappy emotion in them just underneath the surface, waiting for the next event to react to, the next person to blame or confront, the next thing to be unhappy about.. Their pain-bodies can never get enough, are always hungry. They magnify the ego's need for enemies.

Through their reactivity, relatively insignificant matters are blown up out of all proportion as they try to pull other people into their drama by getting them to react. Some get involved in protracted and ultimately pointless battles or court cases with organizations or individuals. Others are consumed by obsessive hatred toward an ex-spouse or partner. Unaware of the pain they carry inside, by their reaction, they project the pain into events and situations. Due to a complete lack of self-awareness, they cannot tell the difference between an event and their reaction to the event. To them, the unhappiness and even the pain itself is out there in the event or situation.

Being unconscious of their inner state, they don't even know that they are deeply unhappy, that they are suffering.

Sometimes people with such dense pain-bodies become activists fighting for a cause. The cause may indeed be worthy, and they are sometimes successful at first in getting things done; however the negative energy that flows into what they say and do and their unconscious need for enemies and conflict tend to generate increasing opposition to their cause. Usually they also end up creating enemies within their own organization, because wherever they go, they find reasons for feeling bad, and so their pain-body continues to find exactly what it is looking for.

## ENTERTAINMENT, THE MEDIA, AND THE PAIN-BODY

If you were not familiar with our contemporary civilization, if you had come here from another age or another planet, one of the things that would amaze you is that millions of people love and pay money to watch humans kill and inflict pain on each other and call it “entertainment.”

Why do violent films attract such large audiences? There is an entire industry, a large part of which fuels the human addiction to unhappiness. People obviously watch those films because they want to feel bad. What is it in humans that loves to feel bad and calls it good? The pain-body, of course. A large part of the entertainment industry caters to it. So, in addition to reactivity, negative thinking, and personal drama, the pain-body also renews itself vicariously through the cinema and television screen. Pain-bodies write and produce these films, and pain-bodies pay to watch them.

Is it always “wrong” to show and watch violence on television and the cinema screen? Does all such violence cater to the pain-body? At the current evolutionary stage of humanity, violence is still not only all-pervasive but even on the increase, as the old egoic consciousness, amplified by the collective pain-body, intensifies prior to its inevitable demise. If films show violence in its wider context, if they show its origin and its consequences, show what it does to the victim as well as the perpetrator, show the collective unconsciousness that lies behind it and is passed on from generation to generation (the anger and hatred that lives in humans as the pain-body), then those films can fulfill a vital function in the awakening of humanity. They can act as a mirror in which humanity sees its own insanity. That in you

which recognizes madness as madness (even if it is your own) is sanity, is the arising awareness, is the end of insanity.

Such films do exist and they do not fuel the pain-body. Some of the best antiwar films are films that show the reality of war rather than a glamorized version of it. The pain-body can only feed on films in which violence is portrayed as normal or even desirable human behavior, or that glorify violence with the sole purpose of generating negative emotion in the viewer and so become a “fix” for the pain-addicted pain-body.

The popular tabloid press does not primarily sell news but negative emotion – food for the pain-body. “Outrage” screams the three-inch headline, or “Bastards.” The British tabloid press excels at this. They know that negative emotion sells far more papers than news does.

There is a tendency in the news media in general, including television, to thrive on negative news. The worse things get, the more excited the presenters become, and often the negative excitement is generated by the media itself. Pain-bodies just love it.

## THE COLLECTIVE FEMALE PAIN-BODY

The collective dimension of the pain-body has different strands in it. Tribes, nations, races, all have their own collective pain—body, some heavier than others, and most members of that tribe, nation or race have a share in it to a greater or lesser degree.

Almost every woman has her share in the collective female pain-body, which tends to become activated particularly just prior to the time of menstruation. At that time many women become overwhelmed by intense negative emotion.

The suppression of the feminine principle especially over the past two thousand years has enabled the ego to gain absolute supremacy in the collective human psyche. Although women have egos, of course, the ego can take root and grow more easily in the male form than in the female. This is because women are less mind-identified than men. They are more in touch with the inner body and the intelligence of the organism where the intuitive faculties originate. The female form is less rigidly encapsulated than the