

Spiritual Awakening: **What the Heck Is That?**

By Nathan Whiteside

Spiritual Awakening! What a beautiful term, charged with images of great sages sitting peacefully in meditation, as well as lifelong seekers desperate to be free of their suffering. It is an often misunderstood term, regularly confused with expanded ego states, eternal happiness, a problem-free life, ascension, wisdom, intelligence, and in some cases a really bright smile.

Awakening is none of these things. It is both more and less than the highest ideal that you can imagine. It brings both laughter and disappointment. It is the ultimate paradox, and even those who have experienced it often feel lost in trying to explain it. Yet we talk about it, seek it, run from it, get frustrated by it, and somehow in this process it does seem to happen. It can happen to you. Eventually – if the philosophy of reincarnation is to be believed – it happens to everybody.

So what is it, and how can you get a piece of the action? These are the questions that this essay will attempt to answer. But first I'm sure you're wondering – who am I, and what is my experience in these matters?

To begin, I'll tell you a bit about my history: I plopped into this human existence on September 25, 1975. A born seeker, I craved knowledge and understanding, first of the physical world, then of the spiritual realm. I went to college, and although I had been in love with technology my entire life, I was surprised to find myself bored by electrical engineering, so I left the program and finished my degree in philosophy, with an unofficial emphasis in religious studies. After I graduated I did a two-year stint in the Peace Corps as a math teacher, which was a great way to help people while studiously avoiding the pressing question of what I was going to do with the rest of my life. Upon re-entry into the U.S., I worked a number of small-time jobs and entrepreneurial ventures, and continued to feed my hunger for esoteric knowledge of the universe's inner workings. Today, I am fulfilling my vocation as a healer and spiritual counselor.

I started this path by taking classes in tai chi and chi gung. Having grown up as an atheist, it was Taoism – with its emphasis on observing nature and using those

observations to alleviate human suffering – that proved to me that spirituality can actually make sense, and I wanted to learn what these two Taoist practices had to teach me. Unfortunately, my teacher was much better at developing his chi than he was at letting go of his ego, so while I learned a lot about how subtle energies work in the human body, spiritually speaking my teacher could only demonstrate what *not* to do.

For my spiritual development, I was on my own – which was actually how I preferred it. I grew up without religion, so my spirituality emerged as a very personal endeavor and I never looked to a preacher or a spiritual community for guidance. I was content to read lots of books and to work on my issues in my own time. Starting at age 16, I typically spent a minimum of two to four hours each day in this process of self-inquiry, determined to release the roots of my suffering. All things considered, I'd say that I had a respectable degree of success, but it was a long, torturous process.

After three years under the tutelage of my tai chi teacher, I felt I had learned as much as I could from him, so I moved on. Soon thereafter, I came across a modality of energy healing called VortexHealing® Divine Energy Therapy. (“Energy healing” is any form of healing that uses some form of subtle healing energy, which is usually channeled through a practitioner – as opposed to physical healing such as surgery, herbs, massage, pharmaceuticals, etc.) Although initially skeptical of something that sounded so “New Age,” once I experienced it I was impressed by how thoroughly it changed my inner dialog, and this healing modality soon became the basis of my spiritual practice. I got in at a good time, too, because the founder, Ric Weinman, had experienced what he called “Basic Awakening” not long before I started taking his classes, and as time went on he developed a real talent for facilitating others’ Awakening.

I met Ric late in 2003, and I was impressed by his intuition, insight, clarity, inner strength, and most of all his integrity. When I asked him about it, he said – without pomp or arrogance – that he had Awakened, and although I was usually skeptical of this sort of thing, I felt comfortable in believing him. A month later, one of my fellow students Awakened in a class I was attending, and right then I knew that I had found my path to liberation. I was very excited about it! From what I had experienced so far, it seemed that to Awaken in relatively short order, all I needed was an intelligent application of the Vortex practices and a strong desire to break through the illusion; however, this turned

out not to be the case. I was missing a key ingredient – surrender – which took me years to learn and truly embody. As a result of this drama, I suffered for quite some time in aching desperation for the one thing that continued to elude me.

All of that came to a head in September of 2006. I was in another class with Ric, and he had everyone do an exercise in which we imagined that we were looking at ourselves in a mirror, and, looking deeply into our own eyes, we were to ask ourselves, “Who is this person?” As usual, I struggled and strained to “get it right,” because I was as determined as ever to Awaken *now*, damn it! At the end of the exercise, myself still as unAwake as ever, Ric looked at me and said (with great emphasis at the end), “Nathan, you were in so much drama during this exercise, I just wanted to come up to you and say, ‘BOO!’”

In that moment, I felt a bit weird. Not unpleasantly so, just different in a way that I could barely describe as different. I felt confused. I was looking into Ric’s eyes, feeling confused, and suddenly for no reason I started laughing. Everyone else in the class, observing this exchange, laughed as well. I knew they were laughing because they thought I had Awakened, but I didn’t *feel* Awake (which is to say that I didn’t feel how I had always *imagined* Awakening would feel), so I just kept laughing. Eventually, I said something, and the whole class gasped – my voice sounded completely different! They heard what I sensed, which was that my voice was no longer “contained” somehow – not that I’d ever thought of my voice as being contained before! Yet the difference was more than obvious. Without knowing it, my entire life I’d always had the experience of my voice echoing back to me somehow, like I was walking around in a box that followed me wherever I went, and now that box was gone. Now, when my voice rang out, it just kept going out into emptiness. Something had shifted, and with that shift some sort of “container” on my physical voice had disappeared.

Of course, a change in one’s voice – no matter how odd or dramatic – isn’t really an indicator of Awakening. What I soon noticed that did seem to indicate an Awakening is that when I looked within to find myself, there was no one there anymore. For years, as a spiritual practice I looked for and observed my sense of “I,” which seemed to have a locus in the center of my chest. However, after my teacher said, “Boo!” whenever I looked I would only find emptiness – and laughter! Whereas for years it had seemed

quite natural, now the very notion of looking for myself was entirely comical. Who would be looking, and how would that looking lead to “finding” one’s own self? As a result, rather than looking for myself, I learned simply to rest in Being, and to allow an inner knowing to replace all that seeking.

So that was my experience of Awakening. Far from being a big “Ah-ha!” or a new understanding that my mind could take credit for, it was more like being the victim of an invisible pick-pocket who stole my most prized (yet also hated) possession – all with my being completely unaware until it was too late to do anything about it (thank God!). It is for this reason that I know better than to take any credit for what happened. Whatever is Awake within me isn’t *me* – at least not the me that takes credit for things it had nothing to do with. Also, not only was I clearly not the agent of my own Awakening, but I can now see that “I” was actually the only thing that got in the way of its happening. As best I can understand it right now, that “invisible pick-pocket” was Grace and Grace alone, which used me and my teacher to create this movement because it was time for it to happen. Anything beyond that would be pure speculation.

So that’s my story. I hope you like it because it’s the only one I have. Does this experience qualify me to write about Awakening? Probably not, but I’m going to anyway. I hope that what I write is helpful to you, but again, that is up to Grace. All I can do is express myself and hope for the best. I appreciate your coming along for the ride.

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Now, on to Big Question Number One: What is Awakening?

At its foundation, Awakening is the death of one’s false sense of self. It is a movement of consciousness out of false identity, which naturally leads us back to the truth of who we are. Prior to Awakening, this false identity is whatever you are referring to when you say the word “I.” When people say “I,” they are usually referring to themselves as a particular person with a particular, unique set of experiences. This person defines who they think they are, and I call that sense of “I” the ego.

Before Awakening, we think that we are this ego, which experiences itself as essentially separate from everything and everyone else. The truth, however, is that we are all expressions of One Consciousness, unseparated and undivided. Arising within this One Consciousness is a countless multitude of simultaneous experiences, and a common

feature of these experiences is a sense of identity, a sense of “I.” So long as a person feels identified with their sense of “I,” they are caught in a dream-like state, a trance that obscures their knowledge of their true essence, and which inevitably causes them to suffer. One who is “Awake” is someone who’s fundamental sense of “I” has broken down (although there will usually be remnants of ego or “shadow-I’s” floating around, to be dealt with over time).

When people hear this for the first time, they often think that surely anyone who has lost his sense of “I” must either die, go insane, or become a bland, shallow husk of a person. This is not the case. To illustrate this point, imagine that from the day you were born, you believed that you were a unicorn. As such, throughout your entire life, you’ve acted like a unicorn, to the best of your ability. When you were hungry you ate grass off the lawn; rather than talking you would shake your imaginary mane and make low, snorting sounds; if someone angered you, you would try to pierce them with the horn supposedly protruding from your forehead. By the time you were in your thirties, you would be an adult who has only ever known himself as a unicorn. If by some chance it occurred to you that you might not actually be a unicorn at all, the concept would seem very threatening to you – trying to imagine what it would be like not to be a unicorn would seem nearly impossible after so many years of living as a unicorn. Yet despite all that fear, clearly it would be in your best interest to let go of your identity as a unicorn and to live as what you truly are. If you were to finally see yourself as a human being, at first you might not know how you were supposed to act – you’d never acted like a human before, and all your unicorn mannerisms would be a very deeply ingrained part of your behavior. Coming into the fullness of your humanity might take some time, and meanwhile you would probably still act very much like a unicorn, but essentially the illusion has been broken. You know that you are a human, and it’s only a matter of time before you act more like a human than like a unicorn. It might be a painful process, but clearly it’s a process that needs to happen for your own mental and emotional well-being – no matter how happy you thought you were as a unicorn.

A similar story can be told of one who has Awakened out of her false identity as an ego and into the fullness of her egoless nature. All of her thoughts, feelings, emotions, and personality traits will continue to exist, just without a fundamental sense of identity

with them. For instance, your thoughts are still there, it's just that you don't identify with those thoughts. They are just thoughts that you've become aware of, in the same way that you can become aware of the wind and know that you are not the wind. You have a personality but you see that you are not your personality. At most, you are aware of a consistent experience of a particular personality, but a consistent experience is not the same as an identity. You have a body but you are not your body. You have a position within society but that position doesn't define who you are. You may feel sad or even angry, but these are just feelings arising in the moment, and don't define you – because there is no “you” to be defined, anymore! There is only Free Consciousness, and experiences that are happening within that Consciousness.

It is important to note that what happens with Awakening isn't a transformation, a metamorphosis, or some kind of spiritual ascension. That would imply that what you are has changed from one kind of person into another, supposedly “better” kind of person. But whatever you change into, if you think you *are* that new, better person, you haven't Awakened. You've simply traded one false identity for another. People do that all the time, either by getting a makeover, finding a new career, going to the latest motivational seminar, getting married, having children – you name it, and I guarantee that someone has done it, thinking that it would change them from an unhappy person into a happy person.

With Awakening, *nothing* about you changes. If you were unhappy before, you will probably be unhappy afterwards, as well. The difference is that there is simply nobody there anymore to identify with that unhappiness, so it doesn't mean as much as it used to; it's not as real, in a way. Rather than being a transformation from one kind of person into another, Awakening releases your basic identity with whoever it is that would undergo such a transformation.

So why does Awakening matter? On the one hand, it doesn't matter in the least. If Awakening isn't your path or your desire, then there's no reason why you should pursue it. In addition, there's nothing in it for the ego – for the “you” that you think you are – so why would “you” ever want to be Awake? Although there will be an experience of greater Freedom, “you” won't be there anymore to enjoy it, so from that perspective it

can only be a colossal disappointment. On the other hand, *Awakening is the only permanent cure for suffering.*

This is a bold statement, I know, but I make it for two reasons. The first is that any “permanent cure” for suffering cannot simply be a change in one’s circumstances, no matter how good a change that might be. Life is constantly changing, and any experience that we can create for ourselves will eventually change into a different experience – even our innermost emotional experiences. What’s more, even if we could force something to change for the better and then stay that way, we would then have to live in a state of hyper-vigilance to keep things the same, not to mention the constant fear of losing what we had worked so hard to obtain. There is suffering within that fear and hyper-vigilance (a kind of stress), so even getting everything you want bears its own sort of burden.

Since Awakening is not about changing one’s life experiences, it is the one thing that isn’t subject to the law of change. Awakening is a form of death, for it is the death of the ego, and although life and death are part of the same cycle, the one who dies never comes back. This is why the great sages have always said that a true Awakening is permanent, not a state that can change and then change back.

But let’s say for the sake of argument that, despite all the countless failed efforts on the parts of visionaries throughout history to create a sustainable Utopia, it actually is possible to create a perfect life. With the right combination of intelligence, wisdom, altruism, and will perhaps someone could create a perfect life or even a perfect community. Would suffering be cured permanently, or at least for a respectably long period of time?

I would suggest that the answer is no – even if you could create a perfect life, your suffering would not be cured. This is due to the fact that *our life experiences do not cause our suffering.* This is the second reason for my assertion that Awakening is the only permanent cure for suffering. What causes suffering is the mistaken perception of being something that we are not – the perception of one’s identity as an isolated individual, essentially separate from the rest of creation. This sense of separation makes us feel cut off from the very source of life, love, joy, and abundance, and in their place we can only feel things like fear, anger, grief, lack, and despair – among many other unpleasant emotions.

For example, if someone is uncommonly disrespectful to you, it isn't their disrespect that would make you suffer, it is the feelings of powerlessness and inadequacy that are triggered by their disrespect that would cause you to suffer. However, those feelings didn't get invented right on the spot – they've been with you your whole life, and this incident is just bringing them to the surface. What's more, you're not just feeling these emotions, you are identified with them – as they arise, you automatically assume that you *are* powerless and that you *are* inadequate, and that these emotions somehow describe you in a fundamentally important way. That focus of identification actually intensifies the suffering held within these emotions and causes you to resist them – and the experience that is triggering them – because you don't want to think of yourself as powerless and inadequate. But how much of a knot would you tie yourself into if you knew that these emotions had nothing to do with you? If you naturally recognized that there is no “you” who could be powerless or inadequate, wouldn't that take the steam out of your suffering?

Since most people are not Awake in this way, unpleasant experiences will trigger their sense of separation and suffering, which would otherwise remain buried under the surface. As a result, most people believe that the way to avoid suffering is to make certain that unpleasant experiences don't happen anymore, but of course that's impossible. What happens instead is that the outer situation might change, but then they enter the new situation without having dealt with these painful feelings – or their identity with them – and eventually these issues will bubble to the surface and create problems all over again.

So, with the understanding that the cause of suffering isn't one's outer experience, it stands to reason that the solution wouldn't be a matter of changing that experience. Since it is separation consciousness that creates suffering, that is what must be addressed in order to find a permanent cure for suffering.

And, while the ego can't get anything out of Awakening (because Awakening is what happens in the absence of ego), those who want their suffering to end permanently must be willing to accept a solution that addresses their inner sense of separateness rather than their outer circumstances. They must be willing to let their separateness die and to embrace life as it is. They must be willing to Awaken.

This brings us back to Big Question Number One: What is Awakening? As I stated before, Awakening is simply the death of one's sense of "I" – the end, fundamentally, of a false perception of individual separateness. This doesn't mean that you become assimilated into some collective. Instead, you find that there is a space in your heart where you feel whole, undivided, and at peace. When you look at others, rather than seeing people who are essentially separate from you, you see that the consciousness looking through their eyes is the same consciousness that looks out of your own eyes. There are obvious differences in physical form, personal beliefs, ideas, agendas, and personality, but it is Consciousness that is aware of these differences, not the separate self.

Immediately after Awakening, because you've only ever known life through the filter of your ego, you will probably think, feel, and act almost exactly the same as you always did, just from a place of greater Freedom. Now, the Freedom that I'm talking about isn't freedom from some part of life that you don't like. Awakening won't put a million dollars in your bank account, or help you to find your soulmate, or give you whiter teeth. It doesn't mean that you don't have to pay taxes anymore, or that your health problems will go away. True Freedom isn't freedom *from* anything; it is just Freedom. It is to be Free within yourself, *regardless* of any experience you might have.

Everyone who Awakens will have a somewhat different experience of it and a different way to describe what it is like. It might be completely obvious, but it's equally possible that you'll hardly notice it, or you might notice that something has happened but you don't have a word for it. For some it will be liberating, but for others it may be quite painful. This is because the space it creates in your consciousness is quite peaceful by itself, but this space can also become a place where your issues arise more freely. There's no longer an ego resisting various feelings or experiences, so they tend to come up more easily. Fortunately, at the same time there is the Freedom to experience these feelings with less suffering, and as time goes on and you integrate the initial Awakening more fully, your suffering will continue to diminish.

I could go on, but I think you get the picture. However, there is a second answer to the question of "What is Awakening?" What I've described so far is the essence of Awakening and some of the experiences that may arise as a result of Awakening.

However, none of what I've written describes the *mechanics* of Awakening. How does it happen? What are its prerequisites? What marks the difference between someone who is Awake and someone who is not?

From this point forward I will be addressing these questions from a fairly esoteric point of view. For me, the need for esoterica comes from the fact that Awakening has very little to do with physical biochemistry, or other, similar phenomena; if it did, by now someone would have invented a pill that you could take to Awaken. So far that is not the case, and most Awakened teachers agree that such a pill could never be invented, because changing your biochemistry would only change your experience, not permanently shift your consciousness. Therefore, we have to look at how consciousness structures itself independently of the body. If discussions of energy, consciousness, chakras, or other esoteric topics make you feel queasy, please stop reading now.

Ah, you're still here! How wonderful. Okay, so let's get down to business – What are the mechanics of Awakening? How does it happen?

If Awakening is the death of one's sense of "I," we must first understand where that sense of "I" actually comes from. The "I" is an experience within awareness, and therefore it must have a form of some sort. For example, the experience of a car requires the form of a car; in the same way, the experience of an emotion also requires some sort of form within manifestation, be it neurotransmitters or emotional "energy." The experience of "I"/ego is no different. The form that the ego takes is that of a veil, which creates a sense of separation within consciousness. There may be many veils out there, so we will call the veil that creates the core sense of "I" the Core Veil (a term coined by Ric Weinman).

The Core Veil is a play within consciousness. There is only One Consciousness, but the Core Veil creates a sense of separation within that One Consciousness – a sense of me-here and you-there. It divides consciousness, just as a partition might divide the space of a single room, creating a sense of two separate spaces. However, in actual fact it is all just one room, one space, and once the partition is gone, it is clear for anyone to see that it was always just one room – even though the partition had created an experience of "two" rooms.

The same is true of the Core Veil and the sense of “I.” Although the Core Veil creates a very convincing sense of separation and individuality, once it is gone it is easy to see that this division was always just an illusion. When this happens, a being that had formerly been mired in the illusion of separation has had a fundamental shift in consciousness, and is now Awake – although, much like the unicorn who discovered that he is actually a man, it may take some time before the person fully integrates that Awakening. So we can think of Awakening as synonymous with the complete breakdown of the Core Veil – no Core Veil means there is no core sense of “I,” and therefore Awakening has occurred.

But there is more to the story than just the Core Veil. While the Core Veil is responsible for one’s fundamental sense of “I,” our deepest sense of separation and suffering comes from another structure within consciousness, called “karma knots.” A karma knot is a point of consciousness that sits along the center of the spine, and which is stuck in pure separation. It’s like a hole in consciousness that creates horrifying, nightmarish feelings of pain and suffering. Each one is the root cause of a particular karmic issue (such as survival fear, lack, low self-worth, fear of emotions, etc.), and a person could have anywhere from no karma knots to several thousand karma knots.

The feeling of separation created by these karma knots supports and deepens the sense of “I” from the Core Veil. In addition, because the suffering that these knots create is so intense, we tend to develop all sorts of conditioning and patterned behavior as a means of avoiding that suffering, such as substance abuse or being a “know-it-all.” Over time, our “I” becomes identified with that conditioning, and so the person that we believe we are is defined by these feelings and habituated actions. We become our conditioning. Who would you be if you no longer did the things you always do? Would you be the “you” that you’ve always known?

The conditioning created by these karma knots reaches into our entire body and consciousness, creating kinks and contractions in the physical body, chakras, energy bodies, meridians and other energy pathways, and even in our DNA. Although it is easier to Awaken with less of that conditioning, there will always be some conditioning, and the point of Awakening is not to have no conditioning at all but to see that despite your conditioning, *you are not your conditioning*. This means that Awake people still have

issues and patterns that they are working out, they just aren't identified with those issues and patterns. As I've said before, Awakening changes very little, even as it fundamentally changes everything.

However, while conditioning can remain, you cannot Awaken so long as you have karma knots. It is possible to have karma knots and a Core Veil in one moment, and then be Awake in the next, but this rarely happens. More often, a person will work through all of his karma knots and then some time later drop the Core Veil.

But again, it's not quite that simple. Releasing all your karma knots is only the first step in a longer process that eventually leads to Awakening. Your consciousness must go through a series of shifts (or "initiations") before you can drop the Core Veil. Losing your last karma knot is one such initiation, and for some, it will be one of the most dramatic shifts they'll ever experience. When my last karma knot released, I remember lying in my bed, thinking the words, "It's gone, it's gone, it's gone..." over and over again. I didn't even know what it was that was gone, but in those moments, for the first time in my life, I felt like I really knew what it meant to be Free. Becoming "karma knot free" felt like what I would now call a "pre-Awakening."

After you lose your last karma knot, you may undergo a series of further initiations that are a bit too technical to describe here, and their description would only over-intellectualize a process that isn't at all intellectual. However, as a general description I will say that they have to do with divine consciousness emerging in various parts of your system, and your ego becoming less fixed and more fluid. For instance, the initiation following the last karma knot has to do with a new level of divine consciousness entering your heart chakra (located in the lower part of your sternum). Although for myself I could never pinpoint the exact moment that this happened, eventually I did notice a constant, pleasant sensation in my chest, which I could only describe as "smiling wholeness."

From here, things continue to evolve. If you're anything like me, you will feel some initiations quite dramatically, and others you will never even notice. It will be different for different people, however, and it's entirely possible to go through all the initiations without noticing any of them. However, the real key is the initiation in which a hole appears in the Core Veil. Consciousness, looking out at the world, now has a place

where it can see without the distortion of the false “I.” As such, it is a bit like a “mini-Awakening.”

For me, this was the most interesting initiation to go through. I was sitting in a bookstore, reading a sci-fi novel for several hours. I was entirely engrossed in the story, so it was some time before I even raised my eyes from the black and white pages. When I did, it was like I was watching television and someone had turned up the color without telling me – colors were brighter, crisper, and more vibrant. What was most remarkable, however, was how incredibly *ordinary* everything felt! I had never in my life felt a sense of “ordinariness” as such a tangible sensation, and yet here it was. As a result, there was a deep sense of calm and centeredness – since everything is so ordinary, what would be the point in my normal racing about? I would only be racing from one ordinary experience to another.

Upon entering this initiation, you will be more or less “ripe” for Awakening. There are no further, specific shifts needed for the Core Veil to break down – but that doesn’t mean that it will happen right away. This is the place that I was stuck in for three years before my Core Veil dropped, and despite all the frustration at the time, I would now say that three years was actually quite a short period of time to have to wait. At some point, once there is a hole in the center of the Core Veil, Grace will break down the rest of it when the time is right. Ultimately it is a matter of surrender; however, there are some practices that may accelerate this process – if such acceleration is part of the plan that Grace has for you.

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This leads us to Big Question Number Two: What can you do to Awaken?

On this topic there is some good news and there is some bad news. First, we’ll start with the bad news: In truth there is absolutely nothing that you can do to Awaken yourself. The “you” that you think you are cannot be the agent of its own Awakening, because that “you” is the one and only thing that prevents Awakening from occurring! As long as “you” are doing anything, even if it’s to Awaken, there is still a “you” there doing it, so there can be no Awakening! Also, it is the nature of the ego (i.e. “you”) to resist death at all costs, and Awakening requires the complete surrender of this false self. The ego is incapable of this kind – or any kind – of surrender. The best it can do is pretend to

surrender, and that just won't cut it. You can't play games of pretend in an authentic effort to rediscover the truth of who you are.

I should point out that surrender – true surrender – is quite different from what many people think of as surrender. Surrender is not the same as defeat, resignation, or passivity. These are ego states, games that the ego plays in its desperate desire for survival. These three states are actually subtle forms of resistance; they are a means of “passive aggression.” As such, they aren't even a form of surrender, any more than the French Resistance was a form of surrender to the German occupation.

True surrender requires a complete absence of resistance to everything, even the most unpleasant of experiences. At the same time, while you are not resisting anything you must also be fully present and engaged with whatever you're experiencing. Far from being passive, you are actively engaged in life, without resisting what you are engaged with.

Another key to surrender is letting go of any agenda you might have. If you are “surrendering” in order to bring about a certain outcome, then you aren't surrendering at all; instead, what you are actually doing is being manipulative – e.g. “If I do X (surrender), then I will get Y (Awakening).” You can't surrender in order to get something out of it – especially Awakening.

Yep, that's right – the one thing that opens the doorway to Awakening is the same thing that strips away all of your agendas, strategies, guile, and goals. In true surrender, any and all outcomes are accepted, even that of perpetual ego and the unenlightened dream state. That's the paradox that your consciousness will have to become comfortable with – that the thing you want most (Awakening) can only come when you have unconditionally surrendered any hope of its happening, and even then there's no guarantee that it will happen.

Now here's the real kicker – you can't even decide to surrender unconditionally! This decision can only come from that which is Free, and Free Consciousness, by definition, is not bound by the whims and desires of your ego, so no matter how much you kick and scream, or sit and “om,” the surrender needed for Awakening will only come when it is time for it to come. It is completely a matter of Grace, and there is no force in the universe that can change that.

So that's the bad news. The good news is this: If you have an authentic desire to Awaken, Grace already has you in its cross hairs. Even the desire for Awakening is a matter of Grace, so if you feel deeply in your soul the desire to Awaken, then the ball has already been set in motion. You can't make yourself want something that you don't really want, so if it's just a passing fancy, don't waste your time. Find something else to busy yourself with, because the pursuit of Awakening will only be an exercise in frustration. However, if the desire is already there, or if at least the seed for this desire is there, then it is coming.

The second piece of good news is that Awakening – even as an unpredictable manifestation of Grace – tends to happen more often for those who are ripe for it, and there are things you can do to facilitate this ripening. As I stated before, it is possible for a person to be filled with thousands of karma knots in one moment, and then be Awake in the next, because Grace is running the show. However, this sort of thing is quite rare, and in most cases it would even be physically and psychologically harmful. More often, a person will spend many years working towards greater surrender and greater Freedom, and at some point when she is least expecting it – Whoosh! Like a whisper in the night, it happens.

So the more ripe you are, the more likely it is that you will Awaken. That being the case, how does one become ripe? Releasing karma knots and developing a hole in your Core Veil are essential components in this ripening process. So how do you do that?

The key to all of this is to bring divine, whole, non-dual, unresisting awareness into the places within you that are stuck in separation, starting with your karma knots. There are many ways to do this including, but not limited to, the following:

1. Chanting mantras
2. Doing japa (i.e. repeating divine names)
3. Channeling divine consciousness
4. Bringing your own, divine awareness into the center of your suffering

Let's go through these one by one: The first method is to chant a mantra. A mantra isn't just a word that you say a lot. If that were the case, the word "Bob" could be a mantra. A real mantra is a word or sound that has been *empowered* in some way, so that the vibration of the word carries an aspect of divine consciousness within it. The word "om" has been empowered by thousands of years of use on the part of Hindus and

Buddhists for the purpose of connecting to the Source of creation. As such, it has a very powerful meditative quality that helps later generations of spiritual aspirants connect to Source. A word could also be empowered by a spiritual master, such as a saint or guru. Gurus sometimes give mantras to their followers, and each mantra is tailor-made for the disciple. Repeating this word over and over again brings divine awareness into the student's consciousness, and this will eventually lead to the release of karma knots. In addition, at least with certain mantras you could even intend that the mantra resonate within a particular karma knot, which would accelerate its release. The trick here, of course, is to become sensitive enough to be able to find each knot and chant the mantra within it.

The second method is doing japa. This is very similar to repeating a mantra, but instead of repeating an otherwise meaningless word or sound, you repeat the name of a divine being. This is a form of surrender that invites that being's consciousness – which is divine in nature – into your own awareness. When you allow this being into your deepest suffering, divinity can transmute that suffering back into wholeness. You can even ask the being to come into and release a particular karma knot, or ask that the knot most appropriate for your highest good be released. Of course, the trick here is to find a (non-imaginary) divine being with whom you feel connected. Some examples might be Krishna, Vishnu, Kali, Quan-Yin, and Christ. If none of these resonate with you, read up on various gods, goddesses, and avatars to see who does resonate for you.

The third method involves channeling divine consciousness. This is a bit more rare than you might think. For instance, mediumship doesn't count – just because someone is speaking for the dead, or even for a divine being, that doesn't mean that he can actually channel divine awareness directly into a karma knot. Also, healing modalities such as Reiki, pranic healing, and chi gung channel manifested energy, which is subject to the world of duality – as opposed to divine energy or divine consciousness, which has no duality to it – so while they can do a lot to improve your physical and emotional well-being, by themselves they wouldn't be able to release anyone's karma knots. I admit that my experience in these matters is far from exhaustive, but the only form of channeled energy healing I've found that can release karma knots is VortexHealing, which channels both divine energy and divine consciousness. Depending

on the practitioner's level of training, a karma knot can be released – assuming that it is appropriate to do so – in anywhere from 12 minutes to less than 10 seconds! An added bonus is that practitioners can do this for themselves as well as others, so while I do recommend working with a VortexHealing practitioner, even more I would recommend becoming one yourself.

The fourth way to release karma knots utilizes your own divine nature. Separation is a complete illusion, so while you may feel completely cut off, you are not. All it takes is waking up to this reality. Despite all the pain, suffering, and drama in your life, there is a part of you that is silently observing everything. There is a part of you that is aware of all these experiences, yet is never affected by them. It is simply aware, and nothing more. By bringing this awareness – without resistance, judgment, or drama – into the very center of each karma knot, you can Awaken that which is dreaming the dream of separation.

Of course, this is much easier said than done. If you do this intentionally, it will involve a relatively lengthy process of self-inquiry, in which you track your suffering through a maze of subconscious thoughts, beliefs, and emotions to the root cause of the entire issue, which will be one or more karma knots. Once there, you have to *feel* the sense of separation – and the suffering that it causes – fully and without reservation. Once you do, the karma knot will literally “burn up” under the searing light of your own divinity, and in a flash it will be gone.

This fourth method is what most people actually do. However, while practice and training can facilitate this process, none is actually needed. Proper meditation can lead to this kind of release, but so can simply living life! Sometimes, when people experience painful traumas, or when they've become just too exhausted to fight anymore, something in them lets go, and they spontaneously release one or more karma knots.

What most people don't realize is that this process doesn't have to be so messy and painful. You don't have to wait until everything falls apart before you can heal from these ancient wounds. The path of Awakening is rarely a smooth or easy process, but many of the worst episodes of human drama can be avoided by dealing with these issues internally, through one or more of the methods outlined above.

Okay, so now we've covered the means by which you can release all of your karma knots. The next step is to move through a number of initiations, culminating in a hole appearing in your Core Veil. These initiations will happen on their own simply by continuing to surrender into what IS as much as you possibly can. Keep using whichever method you found most helpful in moving through your karma knots to let go of your resistance to life, in whatever form that takes for you. As you do so, your consciousness will naturally become more fluid, which will create the space needed for each initiation to come through.

Once that hole has appeared in your Core Veil, Awakening becomes even more a matter of Grace. Of course, that doesn't mean that you should now become a spiritual couch potato. You still need to be *engaged* in your process. You still have to consciously choose to surrender when your subconscious tries to lull you back into your familiar habits of resistance.

Yet along with that surrender, there are practices that may help you in your journey. Throughout all of this spiritual inquiry, there have surely been certain ideas and activities that have felt more attractive to you than others. For instance, you may or may not have been interested in Zen sitting meditation, or Buddhist sanghas (spiritual community), or an Indian guru, or Christian services. Some spiritual activities have probably resonated for you more than others, and you should follow that sense of resonance. This is Grace working through you, and Grace will use these activities to help you Awaken.

In addition to the themes and practices that you might have already encountered, the following suggestions may also be helpful in your journey:

1. Find an Awakened teacher with whom you feel some kind of affinity, and spend as much time as possible with that person. Sitting in the presence of one who is already Awake will help you to connect with that Awakeness directly, which over time will help you to rediscover it within yourself, as well. There are many out there, and I would personally recommend Adyashanti, Eckhart Tolle, Gangaji, and Tony Parsons.
2. Once you have a hole in your Core Veil, simply put your awareness there, and be curious about what you experience. In that place, your consciousness is already Awake, and the more you can integrate that Awakeness into the rest of your being, the more your Core Veil will break down. Remember, this requires *surrender*, not strategy.

3. Devote yourself to an authentic Indian guru. Some beings are born without any karmic journey to contend with, and they are some of the most powerful Awakened beings on the planet. Their intuition is generally spot-on, so they are particularly adept at guiding their disciples in this process. For this, I recommend Ammachi, Mother Meera, and Sri Karunamayi.
4. Practice self-inquiry. Ask yourself, “Who am I?” and every time you get an answer, ask again. Don’t just ask mechanically – be curious! Truly inquire into your own nature, and keep on asking until you’ve seen through the illusion of ego.
5. Become a student of VortexHealing. This was and continues to be my own path, and if you are interested in an esoteric/energetic path to Awakening, I can’t recommend it enough. The classes will help you move all your karma knots, go through all the initiations, and ultimately break down what remains of your Core Veil.
6. Above all else, learn to be searingly honest with yourself. Even the most powerful spiritual practice can be used by the ego as a means of hiding from the Truth, so be mindful of this tendency and look within for the strength to choose Truth over feelings of security and familiarity.

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Final Notes

In this essay, I’ve tried to strike a balance between certain concepts around Awakening, and the direct experience of Awakening. Concepts are helpful, but they can only point to the Truth; they are not the Truth in and of themselves. Words like “karma knots,” “initiations,” “surrender,” and “Core Veil” can help us draw a map of the journey to Awakening, and that map can help shorten the journey by minimizing distractions and wrong turns, but no words can convey the actual experience of walking that path. For that, you must walk the path yourself.

Also, ultimately it doesn’t matter how many karma knots you have, what initiation you’re in, or whether or not you have a Core Veil. What you are is beyond all that. What you are is what I am, regardless of any differences in form. We are One, and for that simple truth I am eternally grateful. What matters is how we treat each other, and how we treat ourselves. Be good to yourself, and share your love with others. That is what is important. That is what changes lives.

With Deepest Love,

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