

The Nature of Awakening Part 2

Part 2: Exercises to Ripen Towards Awakening

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In *The Nature of Awakening Part I*, in the last issue of *Paradigm Shift*, I wrote, “Awakening, by definition, only happens as some core sense of the ego actually *disappears*.” The question for this article is, how can you facilitate that?

Since the ego is the personal, separate sense of ‘I’ and ‘me’ it might be helpful to start by looking at why you want that to disappear.

1) Why do you want to wake up? The most common answer to this is that in some way you want to have an end to your suffering. This is an answer that comes from the ego, with that ego wanting to get rid of its own pain. It doesn’t want to get rid of itself; it wants to be there to enjoy the loss of pain that it expects with awakening. Most people first get interested in awakening in the hope that they will be able to get out of their pain and then still be around to enjoy the show. And some of these people awaken in spite of this orientation, but to get a head start on the process, it’s best to see this for what it is. The Truth will set you free. Recognize, if this is where you are coming from, that this kind of desire for awakening is an ego-desire; it is something the ego wants for itself. And the ego wanting and getting things for itself has absolutely nothing to do with awakening. Although the inner movement that is taking you towards awakening may use this kind of ego-desire to keep the ego interested and involved in the process (until that kind of desire is no longer needed), awakening will happen in spite of this desire, not because of it. So, don’t clutter your clarity with this kind of desire to awaken. Let’s be more clear than that. If you do feel a pull towards awakening, then you are in fact being pulled towards awakening. But since the desire to end your suffering cannot really take you closer to awakening (although the awakening process may use that desire), recognize that whatever is pulling towards awakening **MUST** be coming from some place else. So, meditate on what that place is that is actually pulling you towards awakening. If you have felt that it was the desire to end your suffering (or have peace, or transcend, or be in bliss—all just different ways to avoid suffering) then see that as simply a struggle within the ego, and then sense underneath that. Where is the pull to awaken really coming from? Notice that while the desire to end your suffering takes you out of yourself, the true pull to awakening takes you deeper into your heart. In fact, notice that this pull is actually arising from your heart, not from your suffering. It is the Self calling Itself home. It has nothing to do with the ego; the ego is simply the obstacle; it is not part of the goal. Since the movement to awaken actually originates in Self, in that which is always already Awake, one technique to facilitate your awakening is to simply follow that movement inside, follow it until it takes you to its origin.

2) Spend time in the company of beings who have awakened. This is the easiest method. We tend to align our consciousness with others around us. If we meet someone who is very angry, we start to align with that and start to feel defensive and angry ourselves. So, if you want to wake up, align yourself with someone who already has. By that, I don't mean to align with their personality or their emotions. But try to sense what is different about them in the core and align with that. Notice what is in the way, within yourself, from aligning with that. See if you can relax that. This is different from co-dependently merging with the awake person. Co-dependent merging is just another way that the ego avoids its own pain, and it will not help you to wake up. You are not co-dependently merging, but rather *aligning* your consciousness with consciousness that has become awake. Sense for the place in their heart where 'I' has disappeared. That is what you want to align with. As I wrote in Part 1, some awake teachers are better at helping you with this by bridging their own awakeness into your consciousness. This doesn't alleviate you of the responsibility to stay present and align with the teacher, but it makes the process much easier and much faster.

Be aware of a danger here: as you get closer to awakening, you may start to feel uncomfortable. The discomfort is because the movement towards awakening is pulling on you to let go of the core of your sense of personal, separate self. Your ego will not be happy about this, and if the pull to awaken were really based on your desire to end suffering and then enjoy that space, you would always leave at this point. And many do. And many of these then go to another teacher and go through the process over again and then leave just when the fire gets a little hotter. But many stay through the discomfort, because what is holding them there is deeper than the ego's desire to seek pleasure and to avoid pain. Your job here is to be clear and follow the Truth, which has forever promised to set you free. The Truth may be that the teacher, whether awake or not, has his or her own agenda, and that you need to find a 'cleaner' teacher. And the Truth may be that all your buttons are being pushed but you need to stay. Only you can know the Truth for yourself here. Just be willing to not hide from it and it will find you.

3) A picture is worth a thousand words. To spend time with an awake teacher, it is not necessary to be in their physical presence. You can hang out with a photo. The awake consciousness will be present in the photo and you can practice aligning with that. And many teachers will bridge back, even through the photo, making your process easier and faster. Again, sense for the place in their heart where 'I' has disappeared.

4) Devotion without the devotee. This kind of practice usually requires a teacher, although the teacher does not need to be alive. This is the traditional devotional practice, which deeply evolves and ripens the heart, moving it towards awakening. Where people get stuck in devotional practice, though, is that they become identified with the emotional position of devotion. They become 'a devotee'. Being a devotee is no better than basing your identity on being a baker or a teacher or

anything else. It is just another something that the ego has identified with. You don't want to become a devotee; you want to be the devotion itself. The practice is to surrender into the devotion so that it just unfolds naturally, by itself. Devotion really doesn't need you directing it. If you are directing or controlling the devotion then it is something you are doing, which is just another ego activity. Devotion is a process of surrendering your heart and the sense of 'I' that keeps it tight. You don't want devotion to become another ego game. You want to practice devotion without the devotee. You need to let your heart be moved by that deeper presence which already resides in your heart, reflected in the heart of the awake teacher. Just let your heart move and surrender into the movement. You cannot force or control this kind of surrender. Either it is arising through you or it is not. And if it isn't, no bother, just pick another path.

5) *Who wants to wake up?* If you are not awake, the only honest answer you can give is, "I do." So find out who this 'I' is that wants to wake up. This process isn't an intellectual one. It's not like filling out a dating service questionnaire. The idea isn't to figure out your personality but to discover the true nature of this 'I' that you experience yourself as. As you investigate, you will sense it as some kind of I-sense in your heart. That is the where 'I' resides. But you can't stop there; you have to keep going deeper into this I-sense in your heart until you come to its very essence, to its root. In this kind of process, you become free of 'I' by discovering what it is, by discovering its true nature. Again, the Truth shall set you free. When you find the Truth of 'I' you will be free of it. And although the ego will fear losing this sense of 'I', because that is the very heart of the ego, what you are functions very nicely without it. It can actually be very funny, after awakening, to realize that you had always believed that you were this 'I', when this 'I' has nothing to do with what you really are. This 'I' was always just a 'thing' in your awareness that you identified with. But you are the awareness, not the thing it is aware of.

6) *Do good deeds & save the world.* This was traditionally called karma yoga. But most people who practice it do so from the wrong understanding and get nowhere with it, in terms of their own awakening. Typically, karma yoga is practiced from the point of view of 'what can I do?' Every action is taken based on 'what can I do?' and so every action reinforces the position that it was generated from, which has 'I' at the center of it. 'What can I do?' is centered on the 'I'. True karma yoga asks, "What needs to be done?" Notice that there is no 'I' here at all. One has already surrendered the 'I' for the sake of the larger need. This kind of karma yoga becomes a practice of 'not-I' and develops the sense of not-I. Done long enough with enough sincerity, the sense of not-I will keep going deeper until it becomes the living reality in the core of that being.

7) *Getting out of quicksand.* We all know there is only one thing to do if one finds oneself in quicksand: stop struggling. For the ego, life is nothing but quicksand,

and the more you struggle with it the deeper into ego you go. The ego actually needs to keep struggling with life to maintain its sense of itself. And more struggle just reinforces its sense of itself as ‘the one who struggles’, pushing it deeper into its own separation, where it starts to drown in its own suffering. The only way out of quicksand is to stop struggling. Big struggles push in deeper in a big way. But even little struggles push you in a little deeper. You have to give up the struggling completely. You have to let go into opening to what life is, just as it is. Attempting to relax into this will most likely generate a crisis within—the ego cannot live without struggle, so it is freaking out—and you will try to find a justification for returning to struggle. But if you can stay with the heat, staying present with it, the ego-sense, the sense of ‘I’, at some point will just stop.

Be aware that it is easy to fool yourself with this one. You can simply ‘space out’ of the struggle, basically suppressing it, and live in a kind of a high, telling yourself that you are at peace. Self-delusion will not help you though. You have to be honest with yourself. Again, it is the Truth that sets you free.

8) *Can I live without this story?* Just as struggle reinforces the ego’s sense of itself, so does the ongoing story you tell yourself about who you are, what you are doing, what is happening to you, how you are feeling, etc. It is ongoing. Start to notice this ongoing story. Notice that it is JUST a story. It seems to be about you, but check it out. Are you really defined by this story? Is this story really you? Ask yourself who you would be without this story. Can you live without this story? Try living without the story. Without your story only you remain.

9) *Who’s watching this show anyway?* Life is a great happening, full of bells and whistles, sights and sounds, emotional dramas, mental struggles, periodic violence, and death and dying, among the special effects. Who’d want to miss the show? And it’s designed for audience participation, so virtually the whole audience is on the stage, lost in the experience of the spectacle and of themselves in it. But who’s watching the show? When you’re so engaged in the action, you’re too busy reacting to see what’s really happening. So disengage a little. Practice observing. But don’t observe from a *position* of observing. Don’t become an observer, which is just another place for the ego to hide. Rather, *be the observing*. This great drama of life is in your awareness. Instead of being the drama, *be the awareness*. Relative to your awareness, the entire drama—including the drama inside your head—is just the coming and going of form, sensation image and thought. What doesn’t change is the awareness. What doesn’t change is what you truly are. Rest in the changeless. Be what you are. Of course, since you are already being that, there is nothing for you to do; and yet for this awareness to emerge, something other than what you are always doing must be done. This certainly isn’t easy for most human beings, since we live in that mind-drama and experience it as self. At best, you may be able to have only momentary glimpses before your mind kicks back in. But even those moments bring Truth into the journey.

10) What does a tree know that you don't? It knows how to exist without thinking it's a something. All plants know this. So spending quality time with them can teach you a bit about this—if you are willing to pay attention and learn this from them. Just being in nature won't do it. You need to become a student of nature. And specifically, you want nature to show you how to live without thinking you are a something (or a someone). Learn to be the quiet presence of aliveness, unfolding itself.

11) Where does laughter come from? Follow laughter to its root. It doesn't come from ego.

12) Where does choice come from? I know it seems like you make choices in your mind. But that's just the surface. What you see in your mind is a reflection of the choice that has already been made. If you're watching yourself choosing carefully enough, you will see that. Even brain studies have shown that you become consciously aware of your choices after the fact. So, find where choice—which is free will—really arises from. Become more familiar with that space.

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Of course, there are many more techniques that can help ripen you. And any of these, if they suit you, can give you a taste of what awakening is. But don't mistake the taste for the actual awakening. Persist until the awakening is permanent.

Nisgardatta Maharaj said that to awaken, all you need is sincerity. If you are sincere, then you will be absolutely honest with yourself. If you are sincere, you will be completely truthful with yourself. And the Truth will set you free.

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