

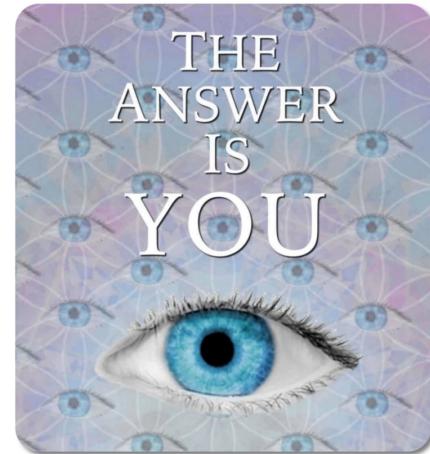
The Answer Is YOU

A guide to mental, emotional and spiritual freedom (a summary by Pat Evert)

Introduction

Clearly we cannot continue to operate at our current level of consciousness, and so, this is a wonderful opportunity for us as a species to evolve past our ignorant and self-destructive beliefs and create a better society, **one that** understands our connection to each other and the **planet**, and one that is focused on love and unity, rather than fear and separation. Just as you cannot accurately convey the taste of an orange to someone who has never had one, words cannot accurately convey the Truth. You can only realize the Truth within yourself, through your own direct experience. “A human being is a part of the whole called by us universe, a part limited in time and space.

He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.” ~ Albert Einstein



Truth

Much of what we consider to be the absolute Truth—light, dark, hot, cold, big, small, good, bad, etc.—are only relative truths. The absolute Truth is not so easy to discover, and it is the absolute Truth of existence that we are concerned with knowing here. When we want to know the absolute Truth of something, we do not want to be fooled by our perceptions or by changing circumstances.

The Parable of the Empty Cup

This old parable points out that if we want to discover something new, **we must first empty our minds of the notion that we already understand what it is we are seeking.** This seems obvious enough, but many of us cling to what we think we know, and we allow our preconceived notions to interfere and prevent us from gaining any new knowledge. This requires a state of openness, curiosity, and sincerity, a state of pure awareness, a state of observing reality without jumping to conclusions about what reality is. This state of direct experience is known in Zen as “**beginner’s mind**,” and it is

essential to embody this state when we want to understand our experience. According to the Zen tradition, they believe that every moment we should embody this state of beginner's mind, for every moment is new.

Perception

When trying to find the Truth about ourselves and our experience, the experience itself is simply unable to provide it. Would the answer then lie in the "you" that is experiencing?

YOU

It is only once you admit that you do not know who you are that you are then capable of seeing through all that you are not and discovering your True Self. We shed away the layers of what we are not, being left only with our True Selves in the end. It is similar to the process in which a sculptor chisels away at a block of stone to reveal the object hidden within it. If you suffer from something that happened in the past it is because you have yet to forgive the situation and move on. We all have a unique personality because we each experience reality in a way that is unique to us, but the personality is not who we are at our core.

The True YOU

You simply are, always, witnessing. No label can define the immensity of your True nature. But consciousness is something that exists outside of space, outside of time, and thus is without form. This is the reason why your observing consciousness often goes unnoticed, even though it is always there, and you are always it. It is no thing—no object with form, but just simply, undeniably, you. We only suffer when we falsely identify with the objects that arise in our awareness, rather than with the awareness itself. When you reconnect to your source—the essence of your being, the pure and impartial witness—you become free from all of the troubles of the material world. Since all forms are undergoing constant change, **shouldn't it be obvious that the absolute and unchanging Truth of who you are must be without form?**

The Cosmic YOU

We see that nature is one seamless web, and the notion that things have an existence of their own is merely an illusion. You are just as connected to the Universe as a finger is to a hand, or as a branch is to a tree. The entire cosmos is expressing itself through your being. We mistreat and harm each other, thinking that these destructive actions will not have a direct effect on us. All of this suffering arises from failing to see the interconnectedness of all forms, as well as failing to see the formless dimension of consciousness that we all share. And since every being has such an absolutely identical Consciousness within them, does this not mean that the Universe has only one Consciousness, looking through many eyes, hearing through numerous ears, and tasting through countless tongues? We may appear to be separate and individual because of the various forms our Consciousness inhabits, but below the surface the substance of our being is one and the same. **If you practice looking beyond the surface of appearances, you will begin to see the true Being that lies within each**

form. Stop seeing them only as bodies, and what we can get from them as bodies, rather than acknowledging the Being that lies within the body. “It is like two mirrors facing each other. You see yourself looking at yourself looking at yourself. There is only one of us.” It is the recognition of this oneness and connection with another that gives rise to what we call Love. All that we know to truly exist as being fixed, unchanging, and eternal, is YOU, the Universal Consciousness that is present in each and every thing. YOU are the Truth of existence. YOU are the Consciousness that creates form and brings it to life. Without YOU there is no Universe.

The Mysterious World of Quantum Physics

Quantum physics is concerned with the scale of reality that is the most microscopic—the atomic and subatomic scale. Quantum physicists study the very fabric of the Universe, with the notion that by understanding the way reality functions at its core, we can have a greater understanding of how the Universe functions at larger scales, and even how it functions as a whole. Atoms, what we consider to be the building blocks of all matter, are actually made up of more than 99.999999999999% empty space. This “empty space” is not really empty at all, but is abundant with energy. All matter is essentially just vibrational energy, oscillating at different frequencies. There is nothing in nature that is truly solid; everything is just energy in a state of constant vibration, and the lower its rate of vibration, the denser the matter appears to be. An electron—the core element of what we call our physical reality—is only a solid particle—is only matter—when someone is looking at it. Otherwise, it is a wave, and is not solid at all. An atom, just like electrons, pops in and out of existence depending on whether or not someone is looking at it. All matter—everything that we perceive to be solid and real—exists as waves, and the waves only manifest as particles in space and time when we observe them, showing clearly that **there is no reality independent of the observer, no reality independent of Consciousness**. When we perceive the stars, the stars are the object of our perception—they exist within us. When we perceive the ocean, the ocean is also within us. The idea that things exist outside of our Consciousness is an illusion.

Everything that we perceive to be “out there” is being experienced “in here.” Mind is the perceiver and objects of mind are the perceived. But perceiver and perceived can never be separated; they make one whole. “The Field” is a field of infinite possibilities out of which everything is created. The problem is that since The Field exists outside of space and time, its existence cannot be proven by our standard scientific methods. It cannot be observed, it cannot be measured, for the very act of observing or measuring causes the field to pop out of its wave state and manifest as particles in space and time. Akasha—is described as a field beyond space and time from which everything emerges. Akasha is the Quantum Field that exists prior to space and time; it is the fundamental matrix in which all things arise, through which all things exist, and into which all things return.

The Holographic Universe

Once the record is made, the record of that thing existing a certain way means it must exist that way for as long as the record is available in the universe. This allows for a consistent reality to be manifested each time it is observed. What we perceive to be objective reality is merely a projection of subjective consciousness. There is no reality “out there” independent of the observer, but rather the observer is responsible for the reality that is produced. The records within our own minds determine the probability of the reality that we manifest. If we change the records within our minds—change our subconscious beliefs—we change what we believe to be possible, thus changing the potential realities that we may experience. The process of creating a virtual image is relatively easy to understand, but the idea that reality itself may be virtual—may be a type of hologram—is not so easy to accept. As strange as this may seem, this is what many highly respected quantum physicists are telling us. They claim that based on the latest research, we are living in a type of hologram—that our reality is a virtual image, an illusion that isn’t real. It only appears real to us within the hologram. “Despite its apparent solidity, the universe is at heart a phantasm—a gigantic and splendidly detailed hologram.” —David Bohm, Theoretical Physicist.

Consciousness cannot be modeled because it is the computer running the model—the computer running the virtual reality that we call the physical Universe. It cannot be perceived because it is the one perceiving. We are not our physical bodies, but rather we are units of Consciousness, a part of the one Universal Consciousness. Our bodies are merely avatars that Consciousness can use to maneuver through the virtual reality of our universe. As Alan Watts eloquently puts it: “Through our eyes, the universe is perceiving itself. Through our ears, the universe is listening to its harmonies. We are the witnesses through which the universe becomes conscious of its glory, of its magnificence.”

Chess, a more complex game than checkers, has over 1,043 possible legal positions, which means there are around 10,120 possible moves that players can make. Just think of the game of life, which is much more complex, the possible choices we can make within the rule-set of this reality are seemingly infinite. Our virtual reality, with its established rule-sets (most of which are still a complete mystery), **gives Consciousness a world in which it can freely move and explore.** Without the rule-set of the game, there would be no foundation on which the game of life could be played. And while the game of life appears to have many different players in it, we are all contained within the “MIND OF THE ALL,” within the computer of Consciousness. In Truth, there is really only one player—Consciousness—interacting with and experiencing itself.

Maya

In this dream we do not wake up to realize we are still in the world, we awake from the world to realize that we are God. This is a world of matter, for as we have seen, material things are a product of our mental measuring and dividing which, if mistaken for the ultimate reality, are indeed nothing but illusions. This apparent reality that is projected by

our minds, is maya (illusion), and to believe that maya is the ultimate reality is a result of ignorance. Once we are no longer ignorant and instead have true knowledge of reality, there is no need to be afraid, and we are free to continue on our way. Like the man in the story afraid of what he had mistaken for a snake, the world of human beings is trembling under a misconception of what they have mistaken for reality. The world of appearances may exist, but it is an illusion. Just as the true nature of the snake in the story was really a rope, the true nature of illusion in our story is really the pure and absolute Consciousness. All things are superimposed on this eternal, unchanging, free, transcendent, timeless, and spaceless Awareness which is your true nature. **You are and have always been this one universal awareness, even if you have forgotten your true Self in the world of maya—in the illusion of being “me,” “my body,” “my personality,” “my experience,” and “my story”—all of which are merely illusions of the mind.**

The Play of God

Lila, another Hindu concept, is the play of God, a theatre, or game, in which God can create, live, and express Itself **for the purpose of enjoyment**—to have something to witness. Only through the interaction with universal energy can universal consciousness know that it exists. For universal Consciousness, creation is like a mirror, the only image it can get of itself—even if the image is not a totally complete reflection. Life is an interactive theatre in which everyone is both the actor and the spectator, energy and consciousness. **Enlightenment is simply the final level of the game of life—the final act of the play in which Consciousness, after losing itself in the world, once again discovers itself as the Infinite Creator of the play.** According to the philosophy of Lila, God creates the world by an act of self-dismemberment, or self-forgetting, whereby the one becomes many, and the single actor plays innumerable parts. By this act of self-dismemberment, God becomes all beings, yet at the same time never ceases to be God. And in the end, God comes back to find himself—the one dying into the many, and the many dying into the one.

In his book “The Book On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are,” Alan Watts describes the play of Lila as a game of hide and seek: “God also likes to play hide-and-seek, but because there is nothing outside of God, he has no one but himself to play with. But he gets over this difficulty by pretending that he is not himself. This is his way of hiding from himself. **He pretends that he is you and I and all the people in the world, all the animals, all the plants, all the rocks, and all the stars.** In this way he has strange and wonderful adventures, some of which are terrible and frightening. But these are just like bad dreams, for when he wakes up they will disappear. Now when God plays hide and pretends that he is you and I, he does it so well that it takes him a long time to remember where and how he hid himself. But that’s the whole fun of it—just what he wanted to do. He doesn’t want to find himself too quickly, for that would spoil the game. That is why **it is so difficult for you and me to find out that we are God in disguise, pretending not to be himself.** But when the game has gone on long enough, all of us will wake up, stop pretending, and remember that we are all one single Self—the God who is all that there is and who lives for ever and ever.”

For one who realizes their true nature as God, as Consciousness, life becomes a joy without end. Then love flows like a powerful wave toward all of the fellow actors within the play, simply because all of the other actors are YOU, playing a different part in this cosmic play. How can there be anything but love felt for another who is but a reflection of oneself? How can one feel sadness for what is lost, only for it to return in some form or another? How can one have fear of losing anything when they realize that they are everything? When all of those fears and undesirable emotions dissolve in the ocean of your loving awareness, then Love becomes your very Being. **The real you can never really suffer, can never really be sad, miserable, or afraid**—because the real you is eternally blissful, ever at rest, ever at peace. **Why not embrace life**, embrace the world of form, embrace this cosmic play, experience the many joys that life has to offer, all while remembering that YOU, as the one formless Consciousness, are always the free and peaceful witness of this divine creation.

Shiva & Shakti

Vulnerability is often seen as a sign of weakness, but it takes true strength to allow oneself to be open; much more strength than it takes to close oneself off. Life is a continuous flow, and by clinging to life we restrict this flow, and cause ourselves to suffer. The being who fully realizes their formless nature is no longer fooled by the ever-changing forms of the material world. Thus, the Love for the beloved becomes pure, without any conflict or duality, without any attachment, without desire or expectation.

Conditioning

As children the seed of individuality and separation was planted in the fertile soil of our minds, and as we grew, this seed was watered with repetition, blossoming into the way that we perceive reality. So then they begin seeing things from the view of the social program that everyone wants them to see, so that they will no longer have to experience the pain of being punished. When a child receives this judgment from one of their peers, they begin to judge themselves, and they change who they are in order to fit in with others, to avoid the pain and trauma of being judged, made fun of, or abused. People do not do what they love to do, and are not being who they want to be, because they are afraid that they will be judged by the people around them. They experienced something so personally traumatizing that **they would rather be someone who they are not, than be judged, made fun of, or abused for being who they are**. These experiences, no matter how subtle or severe they may be, slowly harden our spirit, and prevent us from being our natural selves. Little by little we are taught to conform to a way of being that is the least offensive, the least different, the least extraordinary, and the least subject to judgment or ridicule. This has caused us to develop a false understanding of the world, and consequently a false understanding of who we are. We do not realize our true nature as Consciousness, but rather, we have confused our identity with an idea of ourselves—a mental image projected by Consciousness. This illusory identity is what many refer to as, “the ego.” The ego is not who we are, it is who we think we are.

Ego

Why is it that we feel so separate from our environment? Why do we have the strong sensation that the being inside of our skin is somehow separate from the world outside of our skin? But as Alan Watts says, “we did not come into this world, we came out of it, in the same way as a flower comes out of a plant, or a fruit comes out of a tree. There is no force in nature more destructive than a society of human beings who have forgotten their connection to the natural world. But the world does not come at us in lines; it is a multidimensional continuum in which everything everywhere is happening all together at once. We have confused the world as it is with the world as it is measured, described, and conceptualized. The ego is essentially a large collection of thoughts, all connected to one singular thought at the center that we call “I” or “me.” We feel that we have to constantly protect, defend, and advocate for this illusory identity. If any of the aspects that we identify with are threatened, on some level we perceive that as a threat to our survival, an attack on who we are. Whatever we attach to—be it our thoughts, our feelings, our body, our name, our profession, our personality, our beliefs, our memories, our accomplishments, our social roles, etc.—are forms that we cling to for a sense of identity, when our true identity is formless, and consists of all things, not any one or few things in particular. It is because we identify with the ego that we desire the recognition and approval of others. And **it is because we identify with the ego that we live in a state of constant fear** and worry as a result of feeling the need to protect our identity. They perceive themselves as victims of their circumstances, when really they are victims of their minds and their way of thinking. To the person identified with the ego, everything and everyone are seen only in the light of how they can benefit “me.” Greed, lust, violence, attachment, judgment, criticism, blame—all are qualities of the ego. You can very easily recognize the ego within yourself. You can feel when you have an urge to protect your image or reputation, or enforce your beliefs onto another and prove that you are right. Our culture, being one profoundly obsessed with the symbolic and conceptual representations of reality, is also a culture profoundly consumed by ego, and almost everyone in our society has their true identity confused with this illusory identity of “I.”

The two most apparent qualities of the ego are craving and aversion. There is nothing wrong with wanting something, but if you want it so badly that you become miserable, irritated, anxious, impatient, and stressed, then the desire is unhealthy and will only cause you to suffer. **A comfort zone is an illusionary boundary that prevents us from living life.** Instead, we live in fear of the unknown and avoid anything that threatens the habits, beliefs, or concepts that make us feel safe. Life is uncertain, nothing can really be known, and by avoiding the unknown we only avoid life. Thus, one who is identified with ego, feels much safer living in the world of their thoughts, beliefs, and concepts, and feels very frightened of the unknown. But the essence of reality is unknowable, and so the ego fears its source, which is why when we are confused with being the ego, we are afraid to look into our illusions, and afraid to discover our true selves, which cannot be understood by the same means of conceptualization. We are thinking endlessly, jumping from one fantasy to the next, afraid of just relaxing into the peace of being without thinking, always resisting the silence of the unknown. Most

people have invested so much time and energy into their illusions that the idea that they are not who they think they are is too frightening to even entertain. Illusions can never give us an understanding of the Truth of life, and **if we want to realize our true identity and be free of ego, we have to be willing to let go of our illusions.**

Freedom

It is the freedom that comes from realizing our original identity as Consciousness, the substance and source of all that is. This liberated state of consciousness is not something that can be an object of knowledge, rather it is a state of pure being that is beyond knowing, beyond duality, and beyond measurement of any kind. **The practical way to liberation is a disentanglement of one's consciousness from every form of identification.** This is where the process of self-inquiry, of neti, neti (not this, not this) comes in. This process leads one to the realization that I am not this body, not these sensations, not these feelings, not these thoughts, not these roles, not this personality, not the ego, not the idea of God or the Self. It is liberation from maya, liberation from the world of measurement. But to the mind that lets go of this desire to grasp, and comfortably flows with change, the sense of impermanence and emptiness becomes a source of profound freedom and joy. One's true nature is beyond conceptualization. It was this realization of being unable to grasp or define oneself that led the Buddha to a state of perfect clarity and understanding, or unexcelled, complete awakening. Our true nature cannot be grasped, cannot be measured, cannot be confined or defined by a set of words, labels, concepts, or scriptures. **To attain freedom, one must let go of the mind's desire to fit reality into mental labels and boxes.** He called this ultimate reality Nirvana. Nirvana is the absence of all notions, the absence of all concepts. But when we touch our true nature, the nature of Nirvana, we transcend all of these notions and become free. **These notions and concepts that our minds create are the source of all our fears**, and consequently are the source of everything that prevents us from feeling love, freedom, and happiness.

Presence

Thoughts of both past and future only take us away from life as it exists now. This addiction to impatiently rushing onward causes us to never really feel the joy of living, which is why so many people are full of regret on their deathbed, realizing that they rushed through their entire life, never taking the time to relax and smell the roses. Many people who experience the feeling that they missed out on their lives still do not realize that they have the opportunity to find peace and freedom in this present moment. Our society is so goal-oriented, so focused on accomplishing everything that we forget to **just live and enjoy our experience of being alive**. Why can we not just enjoy the beauty and magic of existence, of being alive in this unknowable and mysterious moment? There is no need for us to struggle and suffer the way that we do. **We do not have to take life so seriously. It is all just a play.** We knew this when we were children, and we can realize it again now. what matters is that you give yourself permission to be your natural self, and to express yourself freely in the present moment. We think that we know, but when we label or define anything, we only block ourselves off from discovering everything that it really is; we prevent ourselves from discovering

the mysterious universe that exists just outside of our concepts and social conventions. Presence, the state of pure Being, is a state that is free of all objects of knowledge, free of all concepts and grasping, and consequently, is also free of ego. Surrender, used in this sense, does not refer to the act of giving up; it refers to the act of no longer resisting the present moment, but instead accepting it unconditionally. **To surrender is to let go of how we think reality should be, and to embrace the way that reality is.** Our suffering arises from resisting reality, from resisting the moment and the course of nature because we desire for it to unfold in a particular way.

Love

Being in a state of Presence allows us to be free of our egos, and when we are free of ego, we feel our connection to the Universe, our connection to each other, and our oneness with the whole of nature. This feeling of connection is the indescribable sensation that many people refer to as Love. Love is not fearful, clinging, or controlling. It does not criticize, judge, or condemn. Love embraces all unconditionally. Love sees all as one. Love respects all as being a part of the one, and appreciates every part of the one by recognizing its impermanence and acknowledging its beauty as it exists now in this moment. Relationships are where most people look for Love, but relationships cannot give us love, they can only help us connect to the Love that is already within us. **Love is not something we can get; it is something that we are**, something that exists within us, and **all we need do is surrender to it**, tap into it, and let it consume us wholly. If we confuse love with attachment, with the need to feel safe, and the need to have someone we can depend on and fulfill our desires and expectations, we will only suffer, as we are not really acting in love, but in fear. **Fear is controlling**, dependent, and insecure, and stems from a lack of love, from a lack of realizing our true nature. Fear is not a quality of Love, it is a quality of ego. But by being here now, by being in a state of Presence, we can embrace the unknown with Love. Whatever arises in our experience can be welcomed with Love, rather than being pushed away by fear. Everything we interact with can benefit from our loving Presence. By healing the psychological and emotional wounds within our own being, we are able to allow Love into our lives, and are able to share that Love with others, contributing to their own healing. You realize your connection to them, and you see them with the eyes of Love. **When we are present with another person, it means that we are attentive to them and that we respect them in their essence.** When they speak, we listen, and try to feel what it is they are communicating—we are not just waiting to reply so that we can state our opinion and enforce our views on them. To be in a state of loving Presence is to be in a state of awareness that is calm, relaxed, open, attentive, alert, genuine, caring, sincere, curious, and nurturing. It is a state in which we are so immersed in the dimension of here and now that we have no consciousness of self, no sense of separation from our environment, no fears or worries about the future, no regrets or grievances about the past. It is a state in which everything is perceived as new, as though we are experiencing it for the very first time.

Resistance

Because of our identification with the ego, our lack of understanding our true nature, our social conditioning, and all of the traumatic experiences we have undergone in our past, we have built up many barriers that prevent us from allowing the flow of Love to enter our lives. Unless we look within ourselves, find these barriers, and heal them, we will not truly be able to open ourselves to the flow of Love that is ever present around and within us. We look for Love in other people, and depend on them for our feelings of Love, and when they are no longer able to provide us with these feelings, we become hurt and blame them for our suffering, **when really we are at fault for giving so much of our power away to them in the first place**. Love is something that exists within you, and you can only find Love within you. If we look for Love in others, without having found Love within ourselves, we only cling to the object of our Love, depend on them, and constantly fear losing them. It is something within yourself that you need to allow, something you need to trust, and something you need to open yourself up to. The level of Love we do or do not feel is equal to **the level of resistance we have within ourselves**. We have to learn to trust in the present moment, to welcome change, to **allow life to flow in whatever direction that it wants**. If we can be honest with ourselves, we will realize that the only time we suffer is when we resist the present moment—when we resist life as it exists right here and now. It is never our situation that is the cause of our suffering, but our thoughts about our situation. Now that we have gotten this far on our journey, we can forgive the past and start anew. We can stop resisting the moment, we can stop clinging to our barriers for security. When we **learn to embrace life and all of its uncertainties** with the openness and receptivity of our loving awareness, life becomes truly joyful, truly magical, and we become truly free.

Mindfulness

Getting out of our heads and into the present moment is not always as easy as we would like it to be, this is the practice of mindfulness. Basically, mindfulness is the simple reminder to come back to the present moment whenever our attention becomes consumed by our thinking mind and our unnecessary mental self-talk. It is important to keep in mind that thoughts are not something that we suppress, condemn, or try to get rid of by force. **Rather than resisting thought, understand deeply that thoughts are only symbols for reality**, and are incapable of describing reality in its suchness.

Thought is a product of conditioning and memory, and it carries with it a huge momentum of mental energy. Our thoughts will not immediately cease, but will gradually become less dominant and less apparent as this mental energy continues to lose its momentum. **Practice developing a detachment from thought and understand that your thoughts are not who you are**. Rather than trying to make our mind empty and dull, we should try to make our mind like space. Space contains all forms within it, but it is not bound to or affected by any of these forms. Space allows forms to appear, to be, and to disappear freely, remaining untouched as the essential background of everything. **When we are in a state of Presence and pure awareness, we welcome all experiences, allowing them to come and go freely**. We do not push them away or try to grasp them, as this only creates a resistance within us, and prevents Love from flowing freely through us. One of the simplest and most effective ways to come back to

the present moment is to **focus on your breath**. By relaxing and consciously breathing, we unite mind and body, and our attention becomes focused on the here and now. The body is always operating in the present moment—only the mind can get lost in thoughts of the past and future. However, when we fear thoughts of the future or think negatively of the past, this releases certain chemicals in our body that influence our health and well-being. Another way to accomplish this is by **feeling into your body**. We can also tune into the present moment by **practicing gratitude**, and we realize that there is absolutely nothing that is lacking in this moment. The best practice for cultivating Presence is the practice of meditation.

Meditation

Essentially it is a practice to help one be free of the mind and to cultivate a state of pure awareness. Meditation is not something that is done to attain Nirvana, to attain enlightenment, or to attain anything for that matter. Therefore, meditation is not a practice in which we do anything. **It is a practice in which we stop doing**, in which we stop completely, both inwardly and outwardly, in order to reconnect with our source and realize the fundamental ground of our Being. Meditation is the art of resting our minds and becoming aware. The more we try to transcend ego, the stronger it becomes.

Therefore, we should just let go of our effort to conquer and get rid of the illusion and just relax. **When we relax into a state of Presence, the ego naturally dissolves in our loving awareness, without us having to do anything**. It really is that simple.

Meditation is about resting completely—not just physically resting, but resting psychologically, letting go of all forms of mental effort. When you pause completely, the world of illusion ceases, and the true nature of reality is instantly realized. Focus on the sensation of the breath as it enters and exits your nostrils. Do not force yourself to breathe in a certain way, just allow your breath to flow naturally. A simple mantra for meditation is “relax and open,” just focus on becoming aware—of thoughts, sensations, emotions, and whatever it may be that you experience. It is extremely important not to feel rushed. There is really nothing that has the power to take us out of this state of relaxation unless we give it that power. Whatever sensation you are feeling, pleasant or unpleasant, can you allow yourself to relax with it, and find peace and stability in the formless space of your awareness? It is in this state that we come to realize our true nature. **We realize that we are already enlightened**. We are pure consciousness—perfect just as we are. When we realize this, we are perfect. When we don’t realize this, we are also perfect. When we awaken to our true nature, there is no longer any desire to become something other than who we are. Every notion of who we are vanishes and along with it vanishes the fear, the suffering, the pain, the guilt, and the pride that is associated with our ego and self-image. It is simply dependent upon whether or not one is open to it—whether one is willing to let go of their identification with form, and realize the formless nature of reality. We begin to see everything clearly. We see that the self has no basis or solidity—it is a complete mental fabrication. We also realize that everything we believe to be true about life is nothing but stories, fabricated around false identifications. **True realization is realizing that everything is an illusion**, everything is impermanent, ever-changing, ungraspable, and transitory. Without this realization there can be no freedom. Therefore, the goal of the spiritual path is to bring about this

realization, not just to glimpse it once, or a few times, but to live in this realization in every moment. Once our original being is fully realized we have true freedom, the freedom just to be alive without conflict, and to move with the present moment in whatever way that it flows.

Reality Is a Mirror

Perhaps the best way to learn about yourself is to see everything in your experience as a reflection of your state of being. Aside from what we attract into our lives, whatever happens to us in each moment will elicit some sort of reaction within us, and whatever that reaction may be, it can teach us about ourselves. If there is someone who irritates us, this person is triggering something within us to be irritated—they are bringing something within us to the surface that we can reflect on and learn from. If I think negatively about myself, and someone says something to me which I have said a thousand times to myself, and I lash out at them for saying something I have said in my head for years, then that is completely insane. If someone brings out an emotional response in me it is because there is a part of me that agrees with them on some level. If I want to cling to my delusions and defend my ego, then I will perceive that person as an enemy. If, however, I operate from the position of truth, and want to shed the layers of my ego and my conditioning, then **I will realize that they are not my enemy, but my friend, because they assisted me in seeing and uncovering the next layer of illusion within myself.** Seeing things in this light is not always easy to do, and it requires that you take full ownership of yourself and your experience. The ego hates this of course, because it perceives itself as a victim, and perceives everything as some form of personal attack on “me.” If someone judges you, it is because they judge themselves. If someone acts out in anger toward you, it is because they carry this anger within them. **You don't need anyone to accept you, except you.** When someone hurts us, we need to realize that it is because this person is hurting inside. They are only projecting their pain outward. What may appear as anger, abuse, or mistreatment on the surface, is really a deeper cry for help. Recognizing this, we can have true compassion for that person, and can see beyond their projected actions, and can give them our love. The true healer is the person who has healed themselves. The answer to freedom is within you always, as is the answer to Love. The answer is always YOU. The amount of Love that we give and receive is a direct reflection of our present state of awareness. If we do not have Love within ourselves, we will not be able to give true Love to another, and will not be able to receive Love when it is offered to us. Indeed, **we are only able to Love others as deeply as we Love ourselves.** Much of the suffering in the world today arises from our failure to live in a state of Love, and our habit of living in a state of fear. The more that we heal our own conditioning, and break down the barriers that prevent us from living in a state of Love, the more we help others do so, too. Then the energy of Love is able to flow freely through us, without getting stuck on the blocks and barriers that we have built up. The best way to learn about yourself and your life is **to see everyday life as your teacher.** Do not look to books, to movies, to guides, to teachers, or to anyone other than yourself for answers that can only be found within you. Look to this moment, and whatever is arising in this moment. What can this moment teach you?

Forgiveness

The most powerful method of healing our conditioning is to practice forgiveness. Forgiveness is the tool that we can use to heal our traumas, to heal our conditioning, and to heal all of the negative aspects of our experience. By trying to fight the ego, resist it, or push it away, we only strengthen it. But by giving it our Love, we are actually giving ourselves the love that we have always longed to receive. The ego is always looking out for our best interests, even if it does not know what is really best for us. It just wants to ensure our survival. The ego should not be hated, condemned, and destroyed. **Your ego should be loved, thanked, and appreciated.** When you give your ego this energy, it is replaced with Love. When these parts of us do arise, all we need to do to heal them is accept them, forgive them, and give them our love. We do not heal our shadow by judging it, condemning it, or being ashamed of it. Until we make peace with our past, we will not be able to be at peace in the present. Forgive yourself for looking for love in others, and forgetting to give it to yourself. Forgive yourself for creating all of the barriers within yourself that have prevented you from being you. Forgive yourself for losing yourself by trying to fit in to society, and **give yourself the love that you have for so long looked for in others.** Accept the pain that you have experienced in your past, accept the wounds, accept the traumas, accept your conditioning, accept yourself! You have reached a level of freedom that no one can take away from you.

The Path

We are all instruments of divine Love, and our conditioning has made us go out of tune. You already are that which you seek, you just need to remove all of the resistance within yourself that is preventing you from living in this enlightened state. There is no one path that you should follow; **you should follow your intuition**, as it knows how to guide you best through your own direct experience. The Eightfold Path is merely an outline for how one can prevent causing their own suffering.

- Right View

To be in a state of Presence, a state of open-mindedness, a state of sincere awareness, and a state of curious understanding, is to have Right View, and when we have Right View we are able to distinguish what is true from what is illusion, and we are no longer fooled by illusions but are able to live our lives centered in Truth. When we have Right View, **there are no wrong views**, because in truth, all views are wrong views. No view can ever be the truth. It is just from one point; which is why it is called a point of view.

- Right Thinking

We think thoughts that are wholesome and clear, we do not allow our thinking to take us away from the reality of the present moment. **Our thoughts become less controlling**, as we see clearly that they are less necessary than our mind believes them to be. **The mind is always in a rush**, and it always wants to complete things quickly, but when we rush through life we miss out on life. When you notice a negative habit or negative pattern of thinking, **just recognize it, smile to it, and**

replace it with your Love and awareness. Engrain a new pattern in your brain, a pattern that will contribute to your peace, and not your suffering. Alchemy is the art of transmutation, and the most powerful alchemy that we can perform is the transmutation of fear to Love, ignorance to wisdom, and illusion to Truth.

- Right Speech

Not many of us are aware of just how powerful our words are. Words are energy, and the power of speech is able to create worlds, liberate minds, or destroy lives. Whether we want to use our speech for Love, or for violence, is up to us, but regardless, every word that we speak has tremendous power, even **the words that we say to ourselves are powerful.**

But what is more important: being right or being kind? Right Speech is based on our Right Thinking, as speech is our thinking expressed aloud. When we speak to another, we allow them to hear the contents of our mind. To practice Right Speech, we must also develop the skill of deep listening. If we cannot listen mindfully, we cannot practice Right Speech. No matter what we say to another will not be mindful, because we will only be speaking our own ideas, and will not be speaking in response to the other person. If we love someone, **the least we can offer them is a set of open ears for them to express themselves.** Just as important as the ability to speak is the ability to be silent. And often Right Speech consists of remaining silent.

- Right Action

Right Action is to practice nonviolence toward oneself and others. If we support industries that harm our planet, essentially we are the ones harming the planet. The animal agriculture industry, for example, is the biggest threat to the environment, as there are nearly 80,000,000,000 (eighty billion) animals killed each year for food. We are all interconnected to one another, and even the smallest actions affect the Universe as a whole. **The importance of living a life that does not condone violence is immense.** Right Action means most of all that our actions are rooted in love for all and not in gratification for ourselves alone.

- Right Livelihood

To practice Right Livelihood, you must earn a living without going against your ideals of love and compassion. If our intention is to live for the good of all, the work that we do should be an expression of our true nature, not an expression of ignorance, violence, or ego.

“When diet is wrong, medicine is of no use. When diet is correct, medicine is of no need.” –Ayurvedic proverb

We might not realize it in our daily lives, but **our diet impacts the whole of the earth.** We have the power to create positive global change simply by consciously choosing to eat products that are good for our health, and avoiding products that hinder our health.

- Right Diligence

We can become acutely aware of our intention and whether it is wholesome or unwholesome by practicing mindfulness of our thoughts, and what motivates us to do what we do.

- Right Mindfulness

Right Mindfulness is to be conscious of the present moment, in the present moment. It is to have our attention here and now, and to give our heart, mind, and body, to our experience of the here and now. The Sanskrit word for mindfulness is smriti, which means “remember.” **Mindfulness is remembering to come back to the present moment** whenever our attention is lost in our thoughts.

- Right Concentration

To live in this abode of true mind is to maintain equanimity, to maintain calmness. “The perfect man employs his mind as a mirror; it grasps nothing; it refuses nothing; it receives, but does not keep.” –Chung-Tzu

Detachment means that you do not allow yourself to be upset by the course that nature takes. They move with life, and are in accord with the symphony of life as it plays its music. This is the nature of Presence, of Freedom, of Enlightenment.

Be YOU

There are no practices that can make you enlightened or can turn you into a Buddha, because you already are. This is the essence of Zen Buddhism—**that there is nothing to do, nothing to accomplish, just to be** and to live naturally in your own being is enough. The premise of Zen is that all beings are in Nirvana from the beginning, and that all dualism is only falsely imagined. But we are afraid of surrender. The ego fears that it is going to lose everything, clinging to thought with all that it has. But there is nothing to lose except our illusions and the suffering they produce, and when we lose these there is no longer anything preventing us from being ourselves. The whole spirit of Zen is to surrender our attachment to conceptual grasping, and to trust in our own nature, allowing ourselves to act spontaneously, without resistance. When we do this, our mind is free to express itself, free to act clearly in response to the moment, and free to behave without clinging, doubt, or mistrust in oneself. The aim of Zen is to experience reality as it is, without the intellect interfering. This seems simple enough, but in our mind-dominant society, most are incapable of the simple act of observation without evaluation. We allow our thoughts to interfere with our experience, and rather than experiencing life, we experience a mental image of life—a perception filtered by thoughts, judgments, discriminations, and comparison. **Let go of the pressure of trying to become someone**, of trying to escape yourself, or of trying to reach some level of success—**you are already perfect as you are**, you are already in Nirvana, you are already free—you only need to realize it. “Everything that exists has Being, has God-essence, has some degree of consciousness.” To live in alignment with Spirit, we must learn to get out of our heads and into our hearts. We must learn to trust in our own nature. To do this might require that you meet yourself for the very first time. Once we reach this level of contentment and self-acceptance, we no longer compare ourselves to others, and we no longer fear what others will think of us. We drop all of our fears, and understand that what others perceive in us is a reflection of themselves, and we are not going to let their projections interfere with our happiness. To realize this fully is perhaps one of the most liberating feelings one can experience. When you no longer care what people think of you, you develop a level of freedom that no one can take away from you,

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the freedom to be yourself and to Love yourself unconditionally. If your happiness is not dependent on the opinions of others, it won't matter to you what people think of you, because you will be happy regardless. When you stop looking outward for answers, you look within, and tune into your heart. By trying to be something other than yourself, you take away the uniqueness that is YOU. No one can be you better than you can, and that is your power. Be in tune with YOU and the peace that comes from relaxing into your being in the present moment. If you are following someone else in search of Truth you will never find it. **You don't need to attain freedom; you are already free.** If you feel imprisoned it is only because you do not realize your freedom, and are caught in the web of your thinking mind. The answer to ending your suffering, the answer to finding peace, to finding love, to finding freedom, is within you always. The answer is YOU.