

Awakening To The True Self

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*The Self
Smaller than the smallest,
Greater than the greatest,
This Self forever dwells
In the hearts of all.
A person freed from desire,
With mind and senses purified,
Beholds the glory of the Self
and is without sorrow.
—Katha Upanishad*

Introduction

Awakening to the true Self is the path home for each of us. It is the path of leaving behind illusions of separation and identification with the mind, body, and emotions for true knowledge of our oneness with the Divine. To awaken to the true Self is to know the divine truth of God. It is to be self-realized and enlightened. There are many words and paths describing this same state of being, which is the one state of being that exists in everything, everywhere, and in all times. We are this! We are infinite, boundless, pure consciousness. Yet, even these words do not fully express the truth of the Divine, which is beyond definitions. “Most of us live in the world thinking and acting as if we are the child of a barren woman—as if we were born. At some point in our evolution, we wake up and realize we are not the illusion of the body-mind complex, but THAT which exists as prior to consciousness, time, space, and Being—we were never born and will never die,” (xv) states Gabriel Cousens in *Spiritual Nutrition: Six Foundations For Spiritual Life And The Awakening Of Kundalini* (2005).

How do we make the journey from separation consciousness to that of being awakened to the true Self? In the words of Paramahansa Yogananda from Gabriel Cousens’ book *Spiritual Nutrition: Six Foundations For Spiritual Life And The Awakening Of Kundalini* (2005), “Self-realization is the knowing- in the body, mind, and soul—that we are one with the omnipresence of God; that we do not have to pray that it comes to us, that we are not merely near it at all times, but that God’s omnipresence is our omnipresence; that we are just as much a part of Him now as we will ever be. All we have to do is improve our knowing.” (x) There are many paths of self-realization that teach us how to awaken. Today’s vast amount of knowledge about self-realization is a result of many people taking the quest inward to know the true Self throughout the ages. Those who have succeeded in awakening to the Divine have offered answers to the questions surrounding the nature of our true Self. Within these answers lays a central message: there is a true Self that is the same for all of life; it is eternal, perfect, and certainly can be known.

Although spiritual teachers offer answers to the question of who we really are and paths of how to come to know our true nature, people need to take the journey inward and experience the nature of the Divine themselves. In this way, each person is her/his own liberator and spiritual teacher. Devotion to the path of awakening to the true Self, openness to the grace of becoming self-realized, and cultivation of spiritual energy are states of being which help us to experience the nature of the true Self. The paradox of the situation is that even though we are the true Self right now and thus do not need to go outside of ourselves to find it, we can not know it with a mind that is constantly racing between thoughts of the past and future. This is why spiritual teachers offer us practices as a foundation for realizing the true Self. Such practices prepare the body and mind to perceive the true Self. The body and mind can be likened to antennas, which are slightly altered here and there in order to be better conductors for tuning into the frequency of the Divine. As Ellen Grace O’Brien notes in *Living The Eternal Way: Spiritual Meaning And Practice For Daily Life* (1998), spiritual practices are “nutrients for the seed of realization which already exists within us to bloom.” (10) To become self-realized is a natural process of our true Self unfolding, the same process that a flower undergoes in blooming. O’Brien states, “One has simply journeyed home to the exquisite flowering of the Divine in and as one’s own Self.” (10)

In this course, we will intellectually take the journey of self-realization together by first looking at the state of consciousness that people are in when they identify with the body, mind, and emotions as self. After gaining clarity on this state of understanding, we will then move to a compilation of wisdom from various spiritual paths of how to connect to the true Self. This is a wonderful way to see how spiritual practices from different traditions can be woven together to give a broad range of knowledge of the path of awakening. Such knowledge is highly useful when choosing practices to help with one's spiritual growth and awakening.

This course can be used as a starting point for anyone new to the exploration of the true Self or as a spark of inspiration for those already on the path of awakening. The level to which you take this course depends on your own intentions in life. This course can be kept at the intellectual level and as such, can be wonderful for further thought. It can also be taken to the experiential level through the exercises given and encouragement offered to pursue any other practices that help you to realize the true Self. If you choose to apply this course to working with other people, viewing them as more than their bodies, thoughts, and personalities can be healing for all those involved. It can bring a deeper level of healing and understanding to any situation. Additionally, having personal experiences of deeply questioning what your true nature is can help you to relate and support others in their processes of awakening to the true Self.

The focus of this course is not something that is beyond you or those around you. It is the journey of awakening to who you truly are and learning to let your true Self flow unhindered through your life. As many spiritual teachers say, awakening to the true Self really can be done in this lifetime. May this course be a mirror to reflect the perfection of who you have been, are, and will always be.

Review Of Literature

(Exams questions are not drawn from the Review Of Literature section)

Many of the books that have been used in writing this course are written with great spiritual potency and as such, can transmit energy to the reader. If you or someone else you know would like to read books on the subject of the true Self, this section of the course can help you to better select any books from those that have been used in writing this course.

One book that provided information for this course is called *Start Where You Are: A Guide To Compassionate Living* (1994). The author, Pema Chodron, is an American Buddhist nun and a meditation master. This book is intended to help people awaken a compassionate heart and develop fearlessness. Pema Chodron encourages readers to embrace the painful parts of their lives instead of denying them. She presents several Buddhist meditation techniques with great clarity and compassion for those beginning a meditation practice. Pema Chodron furthermore uses fifty-nine traditional Tibetan Buddhist slogans as a framework for her wisdom on how to awaken a compassionate heart.

The book *Spiritual Nutrition: Six Foundations For Spiritual Life And The Awakening Of Kundalini* (2005) is written by Gabriel Cousens, M.D. The content of this book includes the scientific, spiritual, and metaphysical aspects of awakening to the true Self, nutrition, and Kundalini. It gives us knowledge of how to awaken the spiritual energy in our bodies through the foods that we eat. Gabriel Cousens also gives us a clear understanding of the continuum of ways that energies manifest. In the words of Viktoras Kulvinskas, who wrote the preface to Cousens' book, "Reading *Spiritual Nutrition* feels like having a conversation with God over a glass of wheatgrass juice." (xii)

An Easy Guide To Ayurveda: The Natural Way To Wholeness (1996) had sections that were used for this course. Written by Roy Eugene Davis, this is a highly spiritual book on the ancient healing methods of ayurveda. It also offers much practical wisdom, inspiration, and exercises for awakening to the true Self. Roy Eugene Davis is a spiritual teacher in the Kriya Yoga tradition and a direct disciple of Paramahansa Yogananda.

Roy Eugene Davis's book *The Eternal Way: The Inner Meaning Of The Bhagavad Gita* (1996) offers a commentary on the Bhagavad Gita, a yoga scripture written centuries ago in India. In Roy Eugene Davis' own words, "the *Bhagavad Gita* is a guidebook to understanding the reality of God, the processes of universal manifestation, and how every aspiring soul can have awareness restored to higher knowledge and spiritual wholeness." Davis' commentary on the Bhagavad Gita offers clarity to this ancient yoga scripture.

Another book by Roy Eugene Davis that was used in writing this course is *Seven Lessons In Conscious Living* (2000). In this book, Roy Eugene Davis explains several meditation practices for discovering your true Self. Davis also discusses yoga philosophy and gives lifestyle guidelines for creating a balanced spiritual path. *Seven*

Lessons In Conscious Living is a workbook, making it an interactive journey. A personal application section for each lesson is given, which includes questions to ask yourself and affirmations you can use.

You Are That! Satsang With Gangaji, Volume II (1996) is a compilation of excerpts from various satsangs, which are public gatherings in which everyone is welcome to ask Gangaji questions. This is a wonderful compilation of Gangaji's teachings. They center around the message that what people are really looking for is the true Self. The format of this book allows readers get to see the process that Gangaji uses with people to help them move into understanding what is at the core of their life stories and who they truly are. This unique view of the processes that others go through as they apply Gangaji's message can be very helpful for readers when bringing Gangaji's message to their own lives.

In *Freedom From The Known* (1969), Krishnamurti encourages us to step away from other peoples' paths and really come into knowing ourselves. Krishnamurti points to the benefits of watching our minds without judgment. It is between the noise of thoughts that Krishnamurti says we can experience Freedom From The Known and thus experience our true Self.

Coming Back To Life: Practices To Reconnect Our Lives, Our World (1998) looks at the roots of suffering and how to move from this state into wholeness. This book is written by Joanna Macy and Molly Young Brown, who offer information on healing at the individual and world levels. This book contains many exercises that are helpful for gaining meaning in one's life. In the words of Joanna Macy, this book "maps ways into the vitality and determination we each possess to take part in the healing of our world." (5)

The book *A Single Blade Of Grass: Finding The Sacred In Everyday Life* (2002) is a beautiful book of spiritual wisdom written by Ellen Grace O'Brian. This book begins with an inspiring discussion of the elements of a spiritual path and reasons why cultivating such a path can be desirable. The rest of the book contains short and meaningful pieces of wisdom about attention, inner guidance, true Self, nonattachment, purity, abundance, devotion, grace, surrender, and other spiritual topics as well. This part of the book can be used daily by reading one page of wisdom and using it as a focus of contemplation for the day. Reverend Ellen Grace O'Brian is a spiritual teacher in the Kriya Yoga tradition and is a disciple of Roy Eugene Davis. She is the Spiritual Director of the Center for Spiritual Enlightenment and inter-faith ministry in San Jose, CA. The focus of her ministry is on the essential truth at the heart of the world's religions.

Another book by Ellen Grace O'Brian that was used for this course is *Living The Eternal Way: Spiritual Meaning And Practice For Daily Life* (1998). The Eternal Way refers to teachings from the Vedas, which is the sacred literature of India that describes the revelations of illumined seers from thousands of years ago. The Eternal Way is the inner journey of Self realization. Ellen Grace O'Brian's book is intended for those interested in this journey. She dedicated this book "to the holy fire of the divine Self burning in every heart..." *Living The Eternal Way: Spiritual Meaning And Practice For Daily Life* describes the paths of awakening within the yogic tradition and the ways that we live them, including contemplation, meditation, cultivating virtues, surrender, and service.

Loving-Kindness: The Revolutionary Art Of Happiness (1995) was written by Sharon Salzberg and offers us wisdom from the Buddhist tradition. Sharon Salzberg is a meditation teacher and founder of the Insight Meditation Society in Massachusetts. There are several meditation practices that are shared in this book, including meta. Meta, meaning loving-kindness, involves repeating certain phrases to yourself when you are in a meditative place. These phrases include, "May I be free of danger" and "may I have ease of well-being."

Swami Muktananda's book *Where Are You Going? A Guide To The Spiritual Journey* (1981) was also used for this course. Swami Muktananda was born in India, where, at the age of fifteen, he left his home in search of experiencing God. Swami Muktananda journeyed across India three times and learned from more than sixty spiritual teachers. It was during his time learning from Bhagawan Nityananda, the Siddha Master, that Swami Muktananda attained enlightenment. This book is written in a very clear way and is a great aide to one's spiritual journey.

One of The Dalai Lama's books entitled *An Open Heart: Practicing Compassion In Everyday Life* (2001) is a great resource for practices that can help us to connect with our true Self. The Dalai Lama writes in a very sincere and clear way, and in this book, he touches upon many of the challenges that people face in creating happiness in their lives. The spiritual practices that The Dalai Lama offers are intended to help people gain awareness of their minds. These practices serve to help us cultivate wanted mental states and tame those that are unwanted.

The book *The Power Of Now: A Guide To Spiritual Enlightenment* (1999) is another helpful resource in the journey to awakening to the true Self. Eckhart Tolle explains why the mind has control over people and how to

gain awareness of not being the mind. Eckhart Tolle focuses on why it is important to surrender to the present moment. In doing so, one can access the doorways to enlightenment which exist in everyone's lives. Such doorways, according to Tolle, include our relationships and bodies.

No Boundary: Eastern And Western Approaches To Personal Growth (1979) is a wonderful book about the wide variety of psychologies and therapies from the East and West. The author, Ken Wilber, provides a map of consciousness that is defined by what types of boundaries people use when they define the self. Ken Wilber suggests that the variety of psychologies and therapies do not contradict each other, but instead compliment each other by being effective for different levels of human consciousness. This is a wonderful book for anyone interested in Eastern and Western approaches to consciousness.

The Body, Mind, & Emotions As Identities

Throughout our lives, we are continually forming answers to the question of who we are. Yet these answers often do not come through really looking to the core of our being, but instead from how we want others to perceive us. They are answers from the ego, and they come in numerous forms. Regardless of how we identify ourselves, the process of saying we are any "thing" requires that we draw a line between what we are and what we are not. According to Ken Wilber in the book *No Boundary: Eastern And Western Approaches To Personal Growth* (1979), "What you are actually doing, whether you know it or not, is drawing a mental line or boundary across the whole field of your experience, and everything on the *inside* of that boundary you are feeling or calling your 'self,' while everything *outside* that boundary you feel to be 'not-self.'" (4)

The body is one of the boundary lines that people use in defining who they are. For some people, their sense of self includes their bodies, while for others, their bodies are simply vehicles for their minds. Another such boundary line is to accept the whole mind as self or to only accept certain parts of the mind (called the persona) as being the self. This can be seen when someone denies her/his deep anger and instead puts it off on other people and situations. The boundaries of self that people draw vary between individuals and between times in each individual's life. At one point we may feel our identities linked to a certain body type or emotion, yet within a matter of several years, our bodies and emotions often change. This continual changing in how we identify ourselves shows that identities within such boundaries are not the same as the unchanging true Self. Ellen Grace O'Brian states in *A Single Blade Of Grass: Finding The Sacred In Everyday Life* (2002), "If we analyze our life, we see that most of what we think is 'us' cannot be us. Is the body us? No. Because the body we have now is different from the one we had ten or even five years ago. Is the mind us? No. Because our thoughts are also changing, even more than the body is changing." (46) Another way to realize the illusion of these boundaries of self is offered by Gangaji, who encourages us to look deeply to the core of any sense of separation. "When you inquire into that separation, simply, obviously, immediately, you find that it is just not there." (<http://www.gangaji.org>)

As we learn to dissolve these boundaries our sense of self encompasses more and more, and we move toward the true Self, which is boundless. Ken Wilber suggests that the true Self is like the ocean water, while all the ideas of self that we have within our boundary lines are like the various waves on the ocean. Each wave is made of the water, yet if we only focus on the wave, we may not realize it is made of water. We have learned to look at life with our minds, and thus we apply our minds to trying to know the true Self. Yet it is the mind that holds one's sense of self within the boundaries of thoughts.

Many spiritual teachers and traditions focus on quieting the mind, for the true Self can not be realized when the mind is full of thoughts. According to Eckhart Tolle in *The Power Of Now: A Guide To Spiritual Enlightenment* (1999), it is the mind which is the largest obstacle to self-realization. Many peoples' minds are out of balance, constantly racing between thoughts. Although it may seem that we are in control of our minds because we can use them to solve a problem or focus on a project, Tolle states that if we cannot turn off our minds, we are being used by them. As such, the mind is destructive. Tolle states, "You believe that you are your mind. This is the delusion. The instrument has taken you over." (13)

What happens when we identify with the mind, body, and/or emotions is that we seek happiness through gratifying these senses of self. We may focus our lives on stimulating our minds, pleasing our bodily senses, working through our emotions, and trying to keep our bodies from aging. Yet what seems to happen is that the moment we are not stimulated, we find ourselves unsure of who we are and our place in the world. We thus try to fill our lives with tasks and preoccupations in order to not experience an underlying sense of disappointment, longing, and searching for something more.

Gateways To Awakening

After identifying ourselves with the body, mind, and emotions, there is a point for many of us when we find ourselves facing our underlying feelings of being unsatisfied with life and longing for something more. Facing these feelings requires that we stop from constantly acting on our thoughts. According to The Dalai Lama, "Once we finally recognize the suffering state we are in, the all-pervasive suffering that the afflictive emotions such as attachment and anger inflict upon us, we develop a sense of frustration and disgust with our present predicament. This, in turn, nurtures the desire to free ourselves from our present state of mind, the endless cycles of misery and disappointment." (38)

When we begin to see the impermanence of our emotional states and the suffering involved in clinging to ideas of outward happiness, we can be impelled to seek something else in our lives, some further meaning to who we are. To come to this point of facing our inner suffering is an opportunity, or gateway, to awakening to the true Self. We may, however, misinterpret the call toward self-realization as a need to change the ego or outside world in some way. On the other hand, we may be at the point in our journeys when we come to know that seeking happiness in the outer world and ego does not produce lasting results and that instead, we must look deeply within for the true Self.

In this way, we can use the inner suffering that we feel as a gateway to the path of self-realization. Deeply questioning the meaning of life can also be a gateway to awakening. Yet another gateway lies in loving life and the Divine. Deep love can then spark devotion and lead to spiritual awakening. This is expressed in the following poem by Gangaji (<http://www.gangaji.org>):

*The light of love
pierces this dream
to wake us up
And to reveal
that it is itself
the awakening.*

Anyone on the path of self-realization has had some catalyst experience, which moves them toward a gateway of awakening. Ellen Grace O'Brian likens this experience to an alarm clock waking us up from sleep in *A Single Blade Of Grass: Finding The Sacred In Everyday Life* (2002). O'Brian states, "This alarm is a manifestation of God's grace, that aspect of Divine Consciousness that is consciously striving to bring all souls back to Itself." (xvii) There are numerous ways that peoples' alarm clocks of awakening begin to ring. Once this happens, we begin to tune into a longing for self-realization. O'Brian states, "Just as the ocean pulls all waves back to its bosom, God is actively drawing all souls back to their divine home." (85)

Knowing The True Self

Many of us have had moments of experiencing the nature of the true Self, even if we are not yet fully awakened. Ellen Grace O'Brian states in *A Single Blade Of Grass: Finding The Sacred In Everyday Life* (2002) that "because spiritual awareness is a natural state of consciousness, most people have experienced it at some time." (3) O'Brian says that the feelings of oneness with all, peace, and pure clarity mark such a moment. For some people, this comes through watching the birth of a baby or through being in nature. These moments of spiritual awareness, or awakening to the true Self, are often remembered as peak moments in our lives. Many people devote themselves to a path of spirituality as a way of connecting to the true Self more often than such fleeting experiences here and there. Those fleeting experiences of true Self awareness keep us on the spiritual path like nothing else can.

Ellen Grace O'Brian defines the spiritual life as putting God first. In this way it is very simple, and at the same time extremely difficult because we are not used to doing so. In this very moment, doesn't it seem reasonable to allow our focus to fall upon our true Self? If we look at our lives as a string of such moments, we can see that each moment is full with the question of whether we want to focus our minds on awakening or not. What is truly most important to us? When our minds center on self-realization, our actions then come as an expression of our desire for awakening and our spiritual growth quickens. Roy Eugene Davis states in *The Eternal Way: The Inner Meaning Of The Bhagavad Gita* (1996), "Responding joyously to the soul's innate urge to have awareness restored to conscious wholeness or oneness assures rapid, authentic spiritual growth." (53)

In addition to focusing our minds on knowing the true Self, we can cultivate the spiritual energy that resides in our bodies. Such energy is called prana and kundalini in the yogic system of spirituality and wellness; it is called chi in the Chinese system of wellness. T'ai chi and chi qong are physical practices from the Chinese system of health that are used to increase one's chi. The path of yoga (meaning union with the Divine) includes meditation, breathing exercises, and physical poses. These practices are designed to awaken the energy centers (called nadis and chakras) of the body. When people become self-realized, their kundalini rises from where it resides at the base of the spine to the crown chakra at the top of the head. They then become fully awakened to the true Self, or Divine. In order for a kundalini awakening to occur, one's channel through the chakras needs to be clear and a great deal of spiritual energy needs to be cultivated.

Many spiritual traditions and teachers encourage those who want to know the true Self to meditate. According to Swami Muktananda in *Where Are You Going? A Guide To The Spiritual Journey* (1981), the Self cannot be seen, heard, tasted, or spoken of. It cannot be understood by the mind or the senses. "Yet when the inner psychic instruments are purified through meditation, it reveals itself on its own." (28) Meditation is a way to step back from the turbulent currents of our everyday thoughts. "Meditation means learning how to get out of this current, sit by its bank and listen to it, learn from it, and then use its energies to guide us rather than to tyrannize us." (9) states Jon Kabat-Zinn in *Wherever You Go There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation In Everyday Life* (1994). Meditation helps the mind to become still, and in such stillness, we can come to experience the subtle nature of the Divine.

The benefits of meditation ripple out to touch all moments in our lives, helping us to gain awareness and inner stillness in our daily lives. However, when we bring stillness to whatever thoughts and emotions arise throughout the day, there is a habitual pull within our minds to go into these thoughts and emotions. In the book *You Are That! Satsang With Gangaji, Volume II* (1996) Gangaji states, "When the conditioned tendencies to move away from a state or toward a state arise, relax your mind. Surrender the activity of mind to what is before and after all activity of mind." (71) Watching our thoughts allows us to take a step back from the thinking identity and realize that we are something else. In *The Power Of Now: A Guide To Spiritual Enlightenment* (1999) Eckhart Tolle states, "You then begin to realize that there is a vast realm of intelligence beyond thought, that thought is only a tiny aspect of that intelligence. You also realize that all the things that truly matter—beauty, love, creativity, joy, inner peace—arise from beyond the mind. You begin to awaken." (14)

Through stillness we can learn to more fully experience each moment of life. Ellen Grace O'Brian states in *A Single Blade Of Grass: Finding The Sacred In Everyday Life* (2002), "We discover the spiritual law of our life by being completely present where we are—with our family, work, and spiritual practice. Sometimes there is an expectation that our spiritual purpose or duty will be more significant or glamorous than our life is now. But God is no more present in one place than another." (12) As we surrender and open to the present moment, we let go of old ideas and feelings that we have held onto as parts of our identities. Ellen Grace O'Brian speaks of the process of letting go false identities in order to open ourselves to the true Self in *A Single Blade Of Grass: Finding The Sacred In Everyday Life* (2002). "God is an open door, welcoming all. Anyone may enter, regardless of the name they call out at the doorway. The only requirement is willingness to leave behind the baggage of self-will and self-importance. Only those emptied of self may cross the threshold." (80) When we empty ourselves of our ideas of ourselves and God, we are ready to be filled with the truth of our being. Ellen Grace O'Brian states, "When we slough off all the things we are not, it is spirituality that remains." (78) And what are we not? We are not the identities of self that we try to contain within any boundaries that our minds construct. We are much more than these limited perspectives that are continuously changing. In *Seven Lessons In Conscious Living* (2000) Roy Davis offers us the following quote by Paramahansa Yogananda:

God is the ocean of Spirit; we are like waves that rise and fall on the ocean's surface.

*To one involved in the drama of relative life who is attached to success and fearful of failure, attached to good health and fearful of illness,
attached to physical existence and fearful of death,
human experiences appear to be the only reality.
To one who is established in nonattachment,
everything is perceived as God. (65)*

The Nature Of The True Self

The true Self is an inner jewel within each being. It is perfect, omnipresent, and eternal. Roy Eugene Davis states in *The Eternal Way: The Inner Meaning Of The Bhagavad Gita* (1996), "As rays of God's light we are expressed, not created." (53) Each of us is an expression of the Divine, and if we tune into our own inner light, we can see that it is one with the light of the Divine.

Let us take in these words from the Ashavakra Gita, which Ellen Grace O'Brian offers us in her book *Living The Eternal Way: Spiritual Meaning And Practice For Daily Life* (1998):

*I am the boundless ocean.
This way and that,
The wind, blowing where it will,
Drives the ship of the world.
But I am not shaken.
I am the unbounded deep
In whom the waves of all the worlds
Naturally rise and fall.*

*But I do not rise or fall.
I am the infinite deep
In whom all the worlds
Appear to rise.
Beyond all form,
Forever still.
Even so am I. (50)*

A Jewel Lies Within

In the book *The Power Of Now: A Guide To Spiritual Enlightenment* (1999), Eckhart Tolle illustrates the situation that many people are in with the following story about a beggar. One day a man walked by a beggar, who was sitting in the street. Out of habit, the beggar asked, "Spare any change?" The man replied that he could not, but asked about the box that the beggar was sitting on. "Oh, this thing? It's just an old box I've been sitting on for a long, long time." The man asked if the beggar had ever taken a look inside and found that the beggar had not, assuming there was nothing. The beggar decided to have a look, though, since this man was so curious. Upon opening the box, the beggar found that it was filled with gold!

Most of us are in the same situation as this beggar. Our true wealth is right here, yet we do not know this because we assume we are not perfect and vast enough to hold such wealth. Eckhart Tolle states, "Those who have not found their true wealth, which is the radiant joy of Being and the deep, unshakable peace that comes with it, are beggars, even if they have great material wealth. They are looking outside for scraps of pleasure of fulfillment, for validation, security, or love, while they have a treasure within that not only includes all those things but is infinitely greater than anything the world can offer." (9)

The Eternal Perfection Of The True Self

In *Start Where You Are: A Guide To Compassionate Living* (1994), Pema Chodron reminds us that the true Self is always perfect, and at the deepest level, there is nothing that we need to change about ourselves in order to awaken. The true Self is always awake. Chodron uses the metaphor of the true Self being the sun and all our addictions, fears, and identities being the clouds that pass by. Some clouds may be light and fluffy while others are darker and heavier. The sun may be blocked temporarily by these clouds so that we do not recognize the true Self, but the true Self is all the while unchanged. In the words of Pema Chodron, "...all the time our warmth and brilliance are right here. This is who we really are. We are one blink of an eye away from being fully awake." (3)

There is a reassurance in contemplating the perfection of the true Self. Even if we do not view our egos, bodies, or the world in which we live as being perfect in our minds, there is an eternal perfection that is being expressed through each part of life. Swami Muktananda states, "The only one dwelling in this entire world is God" (<http://cosmicharmony.com/Sp/Muktanan/Muktanan.htm>). Once one becomes tuned into the perfection of the Divine, there is a grounded peace that emerges. It has sometimes been likened to finally letting go after trying so desperately to cling to rocks in a river. Once we let go of our old perceptions of the way we think life to be and come into oneness with the Divine, we are amazed at the river we are a part of. We realize it was only an illusion that we were separate from this river of Life and that we had to protect ourselves from being swept away; for in being swept "away," we are only swept into the Divine, our true Self.

A Mysterious Nature

Even for those who know the true Self, they cannot define it as being any "thing." Gangaji states that no concept touches the true Self, although concepts point to it. In her own words, "When you identify yourself as a

thing—mental, physical, emotional, or circumstantial—and you believe this identification to be real, you overlook the reality of the vastness of Being.” (5) “Spiritual investigation reveals Self as limitless Being, in truth unbound by any and all perceptions of bondage.” (69)

This is expressed in the Upanishads, an ancient spiritual text from India, with the Sanskrit phrase *Neti-neti* (<http://www.rainbowbody.net/HeartMind/netineti.htm>). *Neti-neti* is often translated as “neither this, nor that.” The true Self is neither this concept, nor another. *Neti-neti* also means that we are not separate from the true Self, and the true Self is not separate from the Divine. Everything is one. In this way, when we tune into our true nature, we are all tuning into the same Self, the one true Self that exists. In *Where Are You Going? A Guide To The Spiritual Journey* (1981) Swami Muktananda states, “The Self is the seed that contains the whole universe. Everything is within the Self, and therefore when we know the Self, we know everything that can be known.” (25)

Swami Muktanada also describes the Self in *Where Are You Going? A Guide To The Spiritual Journey* (1981) as “the most subtle of all subtle things. It is highly secret and mysterious, and it has no name, no color, and no form. Even though it is without attributes, the sages have described its nature as *Sat Chit Ananda*—existence, consciousness, and bliss absolute (26). Looking at this more deeply, *sat* means that the Self exists in all times, things, and places. The true Self has no beginning and no end. It exists everywhere and in everything. Nothing is separate from the true Self. “*Chit* is Consciousness, which illuminates everything.” (26) This means that when we feel any type of emotion, it is Consciousness that allows us to realize we are feeling it. It is Consciousness as well that illuminates the True Self. Swami Muktananda states that while *Sat* and *Chit* can be understood by the mind, *Ananda* can only be understood by experiencing it in meditation. In Muktananda’s words, “...the bliss of the Self does not depend on any external factor. It is completely independent; it arises, unconditioned, from within.” (27)

A Blissful State

Awakening to the true Self often involves experiences of bliss, peace, love, freedom, and awe. These ecstatic states of awakening to the Divine are said by many spiritual leaders to be incomparable to any state that we experience before becoming self-realized. Gabriel Cousens, who awakened to the true Self in 1975, wrote of the bliss he experienced during his awakening in the following journal entries from *Spiritual Nutrition: Six Foundations For Spiritual Life And Awakening Of Kundalini* (2005):

*“Ah— the bliss of my life, of the world, of my children, of my wife.
If I die of a broken heart, it will not be out of sorrow,
but because it is so full of Love, that I could not say no to more...
and it just burst out of Love.”*

*“The bliss of the Self, the pulsating oneness, the inner joy
has simply grown greater than the contraction of my ego.*

The critical point has past...

The power of the Bliss of God is greater than the safe contraction of the ego.

It dies as my Liberation grows.” (33)

This bliss is further expressed in the following letter from a devotee to Gangaji (<http://www.gangaji.org>): “I am happy and humored behind all experience. There is nothing to be lost—there is only now, and the opportunity for more... I am rest and in love. I have everything. I am free and complete. Imperfection has vanished as the dream it was. There is only what was and what will be. There is only the one Heart. There is only Love. And I am not afraid, even when I am afraid. I have never been so alive, and yet I have never been born. I have never loved this one individual life so much, and yet even with death I will not die. I am transcendent of my body, and yet my body is all that I am. All that I speak of adds exactly nothing to what has always already been. I am exactly this...”

When someone asked the spiritual teacher Amma to describe the experience of the Divine, Amma replied, “It is not possible to adequately put into words the taste of sugar to one who does not know the meaning of the word ‘sweet.’ One has to taste sugar to understand sweetness. Similarly, God is pure experience, beyond the mind and words.” (<http://www.ammachi.org>)

Let us conclude this section with one more beautiful expression of the state of self-realization. In the form of a poem, this comes from Gabriel Cousens in *Spiritual Nutrition: Six Foundations for Spiritual Life and Awakening of Kundalini* (2005):

Twenty Years After

*Twenty Years After
And bliss bursts through every cell.
Sometimes the non-causal joy is so much
This body-mind-I AM complex
Explodes in natural
Love
Ecstasy
Supreme non-causal contentment.
It can't be contained any longer.*

*No amount of work or external difficulties
Can keep it quiet
The endless Light of Yah (God)
Reflected
Through this funny body-mind-I AM complex
As the infinite smile
Yes
Enlightenment is an infinite smile. (56)*

Exercises

Who Am I?

In the book *Coming Back To Life: Practices To Reconnect Our Lives, Our World* (1998), Joanna Macy and Molly Young Brown offer an exercise called "Who Are You." (127) This exercise can be a powerful way to tune into your current ideas of self and bring these closer to the true nature of who you are. The authors suggest doing this practice in pairs; however, it can also be modified to be done by yourself. If you do this exercise by yourself, you could write down whatever ideas come to mind, or tape record yourself responding to the questions. The idea is to not edit what your initial ideas are in response to the questions. The instructions to this exercise will be given for two people; if done alone, take both roles of questioning and answering yourself. Joanna Macy and Molly Young Brown suggest that for two people, they sit comfortably facing each other. The first person then asks the second "Who are you?" The second person responds with whatever comes to mind and tries not to edit his/her thoughts. Then the first person asks the same question again, and the second person responds. This then happens once more. This process of questioning and listening three times happens with the following questions: "Who are you?" "What do you do?" and then "Who are you?" again. After taking a small break, the roles of the two people can be reversed and the exercise can be repeated. Joanna Macy and Molly Young Brown say that peoples' responses to these questions will be different each time they are asked. This can be a challenging exercise, but at the same time very rewarding in the insights that it brings. It was originated by the famous spiritual teacher Ramana.

Daily Remembrance

In the book *An Easy Guide to Ayurveda: The Natural Guide To Wholeness* (1996), Roy Eugene Davis offers us an affirmation for awakening to the true Self. This can be recited out loud or silently, first thing in the morning upon awakening, or at any time throughout the day as a way to focus yourself and set an intention for your life. If this dedication does not feel right to you, the idea of it can be applied to creating your own words of intent or using some other passage that feels better to you.

An Affirmation Of Realization

*At the innermost level of my being I am serenely peaceful.
I am completely fulfilled because soul-satisfied.
No longer blinded by delusions, I know what is true.
No loner confused by illusions, I see what is real.
Established in the Infinite, I live effectively
with flawless skill and easy grace.
I knowledgeably cooperate with the supportive laws
of nature and spontaneously demonstrate total wellness. (72)*

The Shamatha-Vipashyana Meditation

Many spiritual traditions strongly recommend practicing meditation as a way of connecting to the true Self. There are many types of meditation that are described by various spiritual teachers, and you have practiced several different types in your studies thus far. This section is dedicated to one form of meditation called shamatha-vipashyana, which is from the Buddhist tradition. This meditation comes from Pema Chodron's book

Start Where You Are: A Guide To Compassionate Living (1994). Shamatha-vipashyana offers us a way to begin to recognize our thoughts and to realize that we are something other than our minds.

Pema Chodron suggests that in practicing this meditation, one sits upright with legs crossed and eyes open. The first part of this meditation involves becoming present to the moment by bringing awareness to the out breath. The breath is soft and relaxed. Be with the breath as it leaves the body. Pema Chodron states, "The touch on the breath is light: only about 25 percent of the awareness is on the breath. You're not grasping or fixating on it. You're opening, letting the breath mix with the space of the room, letting your breath just go out into space. Then there's something like a pause, a gap until the next breath goes out again. While you're breathing in, there could be some sense of just opening and waiting." (5)

The second part of this meditation addresses the thoughts that inevitably arise as we try to be present with the breath. The object is not to stop these thoughts, but instead to recognize when we are thinking. Whenever we realize we're thinking, we say "thinking" silently to ourselves. There need not be any additional judgement. All thoughts are thoughts; whether they are violent or happy they are all okay. As we see the numerous ways in which our minds wander from the breath, we begin to know all the ways in which we hide from our true Self. Pema Chodron states, "By knowing yourself, you're coming to know humanness altogether." (6)

Tuning In Throughout The Day

In addition to setting an intention to awaken to the true Self and practicing meditation, it can be highly beneficial to find ways to remind yourself to tune into your state of consciousness throughout each day. We can lose our perspective of awakening when we interact with other people or have many activities we are participating in. It can be helpful to refocus ourselves by asking, "Who am I? Am I what I am doing, these thoughts, these emotions, or my body?" We can also say an affirmation such as "I am pure consciousness being expressed through this mind and body." Maybe taking a few deep breaths and centering can work for you. Such practices of tuning into the true Self throughout each day helps us to create purposeful lives of continual awakening. What are you waiting for? Everything exists right at this moment that you need to awaken, and upon awakening, you can perceive the perfection of it all. You can affirm that you will awaken to your true Self at some moment and question when this will be. Will it be right now? Tomorrow? Two years from now? We can be at ease in this affirmation and feel a sense of wonderment at the unfolding of our divine seed of consciousness within.

Discussion

In looking at the challenge of practicing exercises to help with awakening, I have found that the process of beginning and continuing spiritual practices come naturally when the rest of my life is supportive for such development. Even if you or someone you know doesn't feel that their lives are supportive for spiritual growth, you can create such a reality. The process of doing so includes looking at the energy of each aspect of our lives, setting goals for improvement, and creating change through action, whether it be physical or intentional. It is highly beneficial to first look at the energy of each aspect of our lives and see how harmonious each is to cultivating a spiritual life of awakening. What are you taking into your body through conversations, television, books, internet, food, and activities? Are these life-enhancing for you? All aspects of our lives have effects on whether we feel like practicing meditation, yoga, devotional chanting, or any other type of practice to connect to Source. What is your environment like? Is it noisy, cluttered or otherwise negative? Do you have time set aside each day that could be your personal time for something you want to do?

I have found that food plays a tremendous role in my spiritual motivation and general outlook on life. Food can be a touchy subject for many of us because we often have deeply rooted addictions to certain foods as ways to cope with emotional and mental patterns. The vibrations of anger, sadness, and fear that we've felt while eating in the past become stuck in our bodies. This is where the benefits of some sort of cleansing can be profound. We can release the stuck vibrations in our bodies and then be open to filling ourselves with new vibrations of energy. A great place to start with all of this is to begin to look at the energy of the foods we are putting into our bodies, even if it is just once in a while. We can assess the energy of food by thinking about where our food has come from. Is that energy conducive to spiritual growth? Also, taking notice of how we feel after a meal is a wonderful way to tune into how foods affect us. For example, heavy, cooked foods make me feel

uninspired and tired. On the other hand, fruits and vegetables help me feel energized, clear, and engaged with life.

As mentioned above, another area of life to look at is the content of what we fill our minds with. What types of books, movies, television shows, and conversations do you regularly engage in? How do these leave you feeling? To change such habits in our lives can be very challenging. It can take time. We can always begin with noticing our own thoughts and feelings around each aspect of our lives and then figuring out what we can do to make positive changes. This is a very self-empowering, life-affirming process. We are taking responsibility for our own spiritual growth instead of waiting for something outside of us to point us in that direction. How great this can feel! Even small steps toward creating a life filled with harmonious energies for spiritual awakening can lead to transformation and growth. Our motivation and openness toward spiritual growth can be a great catalyst within itself.

Reminding ourselves of our ability to know the true Self during this lifetime, regardless of our age right now, is a wonderful way to have this seed planted in our minds. It can be helpful to fill ourselves with inspiration from outside sources as well. Spiritual literature, groups, and any other forms of inspiration can serve as reminders that the quest of awakening can indeed be fulfilled and that it is the only quest that will give us lasting peace, joy, and clarity.

There may be many paths to awakening, yet there seems to be one Self to which we awaken. As more of us “step” into the path of awakening, the energy will continue to spread throughout the earth. Many teachers say that a time of great opportunity for spiritual awakening will be here soon for the masses and that what all of us choose in our lives is highly important to whether this opportunity will be taken or not. May the desire to know the true Self blossom in each of our hearts, and may the teachings of how to kindle this desire continue to spread to all those who are attracted to its path. Blessings to you on your journey.

*Once the journey of soul recovery
is begun in earnest, Life itself
conspires to support us. It is up to
us to learn to cooperate with it.
For one who is surrendered to
God, a change in consciousness is
inevitable. It comes like the
approaching dawn. There is a long*

*time in the dark, then slowly,
barely perceptible changes occur
until finally the entire landscape of
our life is illumined. (178)
— Ellen Grace O’Brian
A Single Blade Of Grass: Finding The Sacred In
Everyday Life (2002)*

Conclusion

However we are led to the path of awakening to the true Self, we then begin the process of looking for the changeless Self amongst the continuously varying states of our minds, bodies, and emotions. We let go of old ways of being in favor of ones that support our awakening. We learn to quiet our minds and open our hearts in order to tune into the subtleness of the true Self. With dedication, this awakening occurs, and we are aware of our eternal, boundless, and perfect nature. Although we previously experienced feelings of being isolated in the idea of “I,” we realize that all the while we were the Divine. We were never really separate. The true Self has always been here! Let us end this course by allowing ourselves to deeply feel these beautiful words from Gangaji on the true Self (www.gangaji.org):

*There is a great secret that beings throughout time have announced,
the secret of an extraordinary treasure, the treasure of the nectar of eternal life.
It is the nectar of pure beingness,
recognizing itself as consciousness and overflowing in the love of that recognition.
If you imagine yourself to be located in a body, then you will move that body from place to place,
searching for this treasure of nectar.
But, if you will stop all searching right now and tell the truth to yourself,
you will know what is known in the core of your bones.
You will know what these great beings knew and attempted to describe.
You will know it with no image of it, no concept of it, no thought of it.
You will know it as that which has eternally been here.
And you will know it as yourself.*

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Awakening To The True Self Exam Questions

Name _____ Phone # _____

Address _____

(Please supply name, phone #, and address as identifying factors for giving credit properly)

1. What are the three boundaries that people commonly draw when defining who they are?
A. The atom, cell, and body
B. The shadow self, light body, and soul
C. The body, mind, and persona
D. The waking, dreaming, and sleeping selves
2. We can see that we are not the mind, body, or emotions because...
A. They are always the same
B. We are the persona
C. They are always changing
D. Matter is not solid
3. The mind is considered to be destructive by Eckhart Tolle...
A. If we cannot turn the mind off
B. Because the negative dreams of the mind create unhealthy vibrations throughout the body
C. Because it exists
D. Because thoughts affect the chemicals released in our bodies
4. If we feel suffering, it is best to distract ourselves in order to not re-experience past trauma. **T** **F**
5. In order to find lasting happiness, teachers in this course recommend that we...
A. Make a list of all our desires in life and say affirmations on fulfilling them daily
B. Define what our true Self is and live based on this definition
C. Look within to awaken to the true Self
D. Visualize fulfilling our desires
6. It is recommended to practice meditation as a way of knowing the true Self because meditation quiets the mind and purifies the inner psychic instruments. **T** **F**
7. The story of the beggar illustrates:
A. The sadness that lies at the core of each of us
B. That we all need to refine what we ask for
C. A beggar often knows what is truly important
D. Our true wealth lies closer than we may think
8. Those who know the true Self are able to provide us with exact definitions of the true Self. **T** **F**
9. Once we dedicate ourselves to awakening, _____.
A. Answers C and D
B. We need to cocoon ourselves from the world for transformation
C. We begin the process of letting go of old ideas of self for those that are closer to the true Self
D. Life itself conspires to help us remember who we are
10. Common feelings that people experience when awakening to the true Self include:
A. bliss B. love C. freedom D. All, A B and C
11. Do you aspire to awaken to the true Self? Who are you? Briefly describe your thoughts and feelings. *(use a separate sheet of paper or the back of this exam if necessary.)*

Audio Meditation Reports on the next page.

Audio Meditation Reports

Please briefly describe your experiences with the meditations below.

Meditation 1: Exploring Awareness:

Meditation 2: Who Are You?