

## Balloons Question and Answer Session

Alan Zundel at the HeartAwake Center, May 9th 2007

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Q1: There is a theory that part of the problem is our language; that if we would do away with the verb “to be” we’d be in a lot better shape. In other words, “I am,” “you are,” are boxes that we give each other or ourselves, is part of this problem that you’re talking about.

AZ: I think there’s a lot of truth in that. Ways of representing reality that are useful to us for different reasons, like language, or our imagination as a way of picturing reality, or drawing back memories of things as a way of representing reality to ourself, past reality, things like that—so a lot of that stuff in your mind is representations of reality rather than reality, and I think we get pulled in to treating it as though it *is* reality, when it’s a useful representation. With emotions it’s a little bit different. My sense of that is, often emotions are like physical responses, they’re real physical, and they become emotional stuff in our head when we start to interpret. You have a feeling and then, “oh, I’m angry,” and start to interpret it as anger, with reactions that come natural to you when you’re in an angry state. But I think they start out as just a physical sense and then we’re explaining to ourselves, in a sense, what this emotion means, and that’s where it starts to become even more seductive.

Q2: I was talking to someone the other day who, a lot like you described somebody, perhaps [*inaudible*], “you’re not good enough” or “you can’t do it,” and he describes the balloons like tapes that run in his head: “oh, you can’t do that” or “you messed up again.” And you were saying, “let it go; just let that go.” How do you do that? How do you let the tapes go?

AZ: When it’s something that’s really deeply ingrained, it’s hard; I don’t want to make it sound like there’s a simple technique to do that. The practice would be—the first step is always to be *aware* that that is what he’s calling a tape, or what I’m calling balloons—tape, in some sense, makes more sense [*laughs*] –but to maintain that awareness instead of being pulled into that and living it out with no sense of separation. So the first step is to become *aware* that it’s that and remind yourself of that. I was saying last week it’s a good thing periodically to ask yourself the question, “Am I awake?” That’s a way of kind of saying, “What am I doing? Where am I at?”

Q2: “What am I listening to?”

AZ: Yeah, “What am I listening to? Am I living life or am I living a tape from the past?” That periodically you just do a check on yourself. Of course, meditation, self-examination, is a way of trying to locate those things and become familiar with them so when they arise you see them as that. You know, when you sit here and meditate things come up and you see them and eventually you say, “Wow, that’s getting really familiar, my head keeps going in that circle,” and when you’re in your day to day life and it gets provoked you’re more apt to be able to recognize it. So that first step is letting go of that string so that balloon can move off

and you can start to see through it a little bit, right? That's what you're doing. "Letting go" means not pulling it in close and wrestling with it, not either living it out or trying to push it away. Just letting it be. Saying, "Okay, this is what's happening; this thing is going through my mind and I'm going to last it out, I'm going to watch it run through my mind and try not to get all sucked into it and reinforce it by my behavior," or reinforcing it in some way. I think for some of those things that are really tied deeply, what it actually takes—and it will come up, if you're opening yourself up to being *led*, as your sense of an inner guide develops, you know, you're being led in your life—situations will come up that are often challenging. And it takes a situation of suffering to finally snap that string. You know, where there's a [*slaps hands together*] confrontation, and your sense of self becomes thrown off kilter because of this interaction, usually with another person. It's unpleasant. Or other types of suffering where you're just put through the wringer by something in your life; a lot of times that's what it takes for that, to break that, to break it free. So, in some ways, welcoming challenges in your life can be a means of doing that. Not to seek them out [*laughs*]—God knows we got enough, without seeking them out—but when they come your way, sometimes recognizing it, particularly if it's provoking something in you. If you find yourself going into an anger state or memories or habitual patterns of behavior and you start to see that, welcoming that as a way to work this out—to live through it and survive to tell the tale, so to speak.

Q3: You know, I find it interesting that you brought up this up. During my meditation, I was having a reoccurring thought of some deep desires that I've been holding on to, and wondering why they haven't occurred. And my thought that had come to me was that "you needed to let them go." That's truly what happened and then you began to talk about releasing the balloons. And it said that if you allow them to go, they will appear in time. And you get so anxious about time, when things will come to us.

AZ: That's a lesson we all learn slowly, is it takes time—it takes time to learn the lesson that it's taking time! [*laughs*]

Q4: I have something. Whenever I meet somebody at work, if somehow the subject of my family comes up and my daughter, often I'll say something, that our daughter has been very ill and now she's better and not going to anything, but that's why she's living with us right now. And something brand new came up this week—like there's less and less fascination with this story about her illness and the whole story about that. And I've been seeing that, "let go, let go;" it's just been letting go for the past year or two. But now it's like this new thought came up, "oh, why are you choosing to describe this, it's like, instead you're not able to present the picture correctly, or where it is right now." It's still with the past, or with that thought process. If I were to say something now, I guess the only thing I would say would be, "oh, I happen to live with my daughter who in some ways is like a little wise person, a little buddha." And not go around those other circles, you know. It was a very different sense for me, and it's very freeing. It's sort of like that old balloon, I keep pulling it back and looking at it, "oh this is interesting; all this happened and that happened and that fear," and it's clouding the view of what is present, is possible. It was really nice to have that experience.

AZ: Sometimes that's the way things happen too, is you just get sick of it. You just get so sick to death of that feeling or thought that you just don't want it any more, you just don't want to hold on to it.

Q5: Alan, should we have *no* balloons that we bring close? Or do we bring them close to briefly examine, and then put out—

AZ: Put out our own balloons?

Q5: No, no.

AZ: Oh, you mean to let go?

Q5: To put them away from direct in front.

AZ: Yeah. When you said “put out” I thought, well, sometimes we're creating balloons for other people by the things that we say. [*laughs*] But this is getting a little too involved—say that again; I'm sorry.

Q5: Are there any balloons that are worth keeping—

AZ: Worth keeping—

Q5: —close, and should we bring them in to examine them, perhaps so that we *can* let them float away?

AZ: Well, something that comes to mind here is, you've got a balloon that really distorts the view and blocks it and you say “I'm tired of that,” and then you say, “I want a balloon that has a picture of that view on it, to remind me of what I'm looking for.” Now this is, in a way, you're doing some inspirational readings or something and favorite things like that, that can remind you of things that you want to incorporate into your viewpoint, like peace and love and compassion towards people and that kind of thing. And it's like, you know, getting your customized balloon and it's got writing on it and says—you know, it's got a drawing of the trees and the sky and everything and you pull this in and you say, “Okay, if I can't totally see it and I have to hold on to a balloon right now for security, I want to at least have a balloon that reminds me of what I'm looking for. So, get rid of the old balloons and bring in some new balloons until I'm ready to do without.” But there's always something going through the mind, at least as far as I know.

Q1: It seems to me that you can turn bad balloons into good balloons, and good balloons into bad balloons. It's sort of like, my gifts are my problems and my problems are my gifts.

AZ: Uh, huh. Or like the clown that twists it into animal shapes. [*laughs*] Now it's a *fun* thing!

Q1: Right.

Q5: Is the lesson not to forget that there's a wide, beautiful landscape out there, that's worth centering on?

Q1: What is that wide landscape? I mean, it's an analogy for something. It's not a landscape; what is it?

Q2: It's the beautiful view.

AZ: Yeah. I don't know how to describe it to you if it doesn't have an immediate resonance in your experience. I'd say the lesson is, though, that if you're feeling like these balloons are crowding you, or like there's something better out there—some kind of experience that's a little more free, a little more fulfilling—part of the lesson is, yeah, remember that view, or at least say, “Well, Alan was talking about that view and it sounds like it's worth a try; I'm going to see if I can get a better glimpse of that”—or whoever might be explaining something like this. That's part of the lesson, remember the view, or to orient yourself. A bigger part, though, I think, is this recognition of these balloons and what their nature is, and letting go of them and how to handle them. Because the view takes care of itself; what you want to do is clear up the stuff that's blocking the view. It's not like you have to achieve the vision, it's just that you have to enjoy it, allow it.

Q1: Brother David Stienl-Rast, he wants us to look at everything with surprise. Look at everything that you see as, you know, something new.

AZ: Yeah, I would say that's a big part of the view, is when you come to your experience of life without holding on to these preconceptions about it, everything *is* new. Because you're not locked into your mental habits, you realize that every moment of every day—I mean, the trite clichés: cherish every moment of every day, they all have a gift for you.

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