

Detachment Question & Answer Session

Alan Zundel at the HeartAwake Center, July 25th 2007

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AZ: Okay.

Q1: I have a colleague who says that ‘we are our neuroses.’ It’s what defines us, what makes us something different, me different from you. I don’t know, somehow I don’t find sinking into unonymity, inonymity, whatever—

AZ: Anonymity?

Q1: Anonymity; there, that’s it—is exactly freeing either. I mean, I guess it’s freeing, but it’s giving away the ship—throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

AZ: Well, it’s not a baby. It’s really clods of dirt that you’re mistaking for a baby.

Q1: I see. [*laughter*] Well, anyway, the thing that caught me was the, you giving up the chocolate. I can see looking at myself and saying, ‘I don’t have to have that craving.’ But in saying, ‘I’ve got that craving,’ that’s *me*. It seems all right. Is meditation simply to live in the third reflection? Is that what you’re saying?

AZ: The third reflection?

Q1: I’m the me that loves chocolate, and I’m looking at the me that loves chocolate—the third reflection.

AZ: It’s a step on the way.

Q1: Where am I headed?

AZ: You’re heading to, ‘I’m one with it all.’ One of the things you said earlier, is these neuroses that define us is what makes you different from me. So it separates us, right? To be different is to be separate.

Q1: Oh, I’m sorry, it’s a paradox.

AZ: It’s a paradox! [*general laughter*]

Q1: I am both separated and whole.

AZ: You don’t have to define yourself by things that are transient. You may—

Q1: Everything is transient!

AZ: Exactly! And when you define yourself by any one of those things, you're limiting yourself to a part of reality.

Q1: I *like* the me that likes chocolate.

AZ: [*laughs*]

Q2: I think what Alan was talking about, is that chocolate is—when you are aware of cravings, chocolate doesn't need to drive your life and drive your motivation.

Q1: Absolutely.

Q2: And being free from the drive and intense so-called necessity, you can in a relaxed way say yes sometimes, and no others—you can enjoy chocolate perhaps even more than if you had craved it.

AZ: Yes.

Q1: That I agree with.

AZ: You can enjoy it even more. Part of it is you have this sense that, this inner sweetness that I'm now experiencing, not a sweetness of personality but a sweetness of *life*—my personality I don't think is especially sweet—but this inner sweetness is so strong that chocolate pales in front of it. So you can say, 'Well, now, chocolate, I still enjoy it, and if I'd like it, I can have it; but this inner sweetness is now so strong that it's not as powerful—

Q1: So I'm supposed to experience inter-sweetness?

AZ: Inner sweetness.

Q1: Inner sweetness is what it's all about?

AZ: Well— [*laughs*], it's a way of describing it.

Q1: I know, but I'm trying to capture it. I mean, it's—it's just *nothing*, this inner sweetness. I just haven't gotten my head around it, what it is.

AZ: Well, you can't get your head around it; the idea is to break your head open so you can experience it directly.

Q2: Direct experience.

AZ: As long as your head is trying to encapsulate it, you're trying to capture it in *words*. Words are another attachment.

Q3: How are you going to get it, then?

AZ: How are you going to get it? You get it by coming to a larger experience that can encompass both the desires, and the words, and the emotions, and yet there's *more*. There's more. There's more to *you*.

Q2: Well, don't you think for the Christian that ideal would be to be one with God—Christ in you, you in Christ—and so these little preferences and things pale in significance to being united with the All?

AZ: That's exactly what I would say, yeah. That is another way of saying it, to be one with God.

Q1: How about the Buddhist? We don't know, is that the only thing you could say?

AZ: I think they just use different words for it.

Q1: I think so.

AZ: When they say 'emptiness' they don't mean emptiness in the sense—it partially means in the sense of nothing else, but really the more strong sense of it is, it's not anything you can conceive of or experience. It's something other than all of that. It's like when we say God can't be described, or can't be described adequately, because any words we use are not enough to encompass what God is. So in both cases there's the sense that when everything else is let go of, there's something that remains that we become one with, that is more than the sum of the rest.

Q3: So you think becoming one with God takes away the desires?

AZ: It makes them less—it makes them—ah, how to say this? It's not that they lessen in intensity, but the intensity of the experience of God of whatever you want to call it, is so much greater that they seem lesser. It's as though you have a transistor radio playing a violin concerto, and you've turned it up to the full volume and you're enjoying it, but now in walks the maestro himself and he's playing loudly on his violin next to you and you say 'that is so beautiful, I could still if I concentrate hear the radio and enjoy what's on the radio, but this is good, this is good too.' And it makes that radio seem less. And the radio hasn't diminished in volume, just like your desires for things don't diminish in volume. They just become outweighed when you let this something *other* enter in more fully. It's like making room for that.

Q3: I think when you sense the fullness of life, you don't have desires so much so. You don't have—

Q1: It seems like you—I agree with Alan that they may be there, but they're not the focal point. You can live with a piece of chocolate out there without grabbing it, because you're centered on something more important. But I agree I don't think it goes away.

AZ: Things don't cease entirely. I mean, when you have an experience—probably all of you had this at least transitory experience of 'Oh, life just seems so full in the moment, that I can't imagine anything else adding to it.' But then after a moment something will come up, like 'Oh, I feel like going to get a glass of water,' or whatever. Now, you don't—that glass of water is not *necessary* for enjoyment of this fullness, but if you choose to drink the water you're going to say, 'Wow, that water tastes better than I remember.' It just, like, things become more—what?

Q2: Heightened?

AZ: Heightened, yeah. I hate to say it, but it's kind of like a drug experience. I guess if I really hated to say it, I wouldn't say it.

Q2: A high.

AZ: Yeah. Like, you see these characters smoking pot in a movie and they're always saying, 'Wow, this *really* tastes good.' It's like these experiences are more full for you because you're more awake to them. At the same time, they don't have the hold on you that they would have because you're awake to everything. You're awake to just being *alive*, and to the presence of life all around you and through you and other people and plants and animals and *beyond* that. I mean, that to me is what God is—this life that pervades everything and inspires it and brings it into being.

Q3: I think a lot of people without the fullness of life are searching for it, and therefore this longing—

AZ: Yes.

Q3: —something to satisfy. They end up shopping for new clothes, or they have to have a beautiful car, or—always something.

Q1: They're looking for something to be attached to.

AZ: Yes.

Q1: And picking the wrong—your God is too small.

AZ: Yes.

Q2: They're trying to fill the void with things, or idols.

AZ: And the attachments never satisfy, or they may feel like they satisfy temporarily. You have a desire, you fulfill it, or even moments later, I mean—think of, you go on a shopping spree and you come home and sometimes soon as you buy something—for me, it's like going into a book store and you say, 'Oh, man, there's so many books I want to buy.' You buy a book and you get it home and you say, 'Well, what was so fascinating about this book?' [*laughs*] 'What did I expect from this experience—that it was going to, like, fulfill my life?' So it's

that constantly craving for things, but it goes beyond cravings for material things to cravings for philosophical or theological systems, for answers that we can hold in our heads. Because we have this experience intellectually of solving puzzles, intellectual puzzles, and know the satisfaction of that—very similar to having a craving for food and satisfying that, right? Our mind, our intellect, can recognize a puzzle and then find an answer and feel a sense of satisfaction. And we start—when people get very intellectual, like I’ve been in my life, when people are very much in their intellect they become attached to *that*. To that sense that if I go into these thought processes, set puzzles and answer them, I’m going to have that sense of fulfillment. ‘If only I could find that right philosophical system, or theological system, or way of understanding things—if I could bring it all together, answer all the questions that I’m posing, that keep coming up—once you get all those answers in place *then* I’ll be fulfilled.’ But there’s no end to it. There’s no end to it.

Q2: Also you’re not experiencing, you’re cognitively developing constructs and models.

AZ: Yeah, you’re caught up in the mind.

Q3: So would it be good for us to try to figure out something we’re attached to?

AZ: If you become aware of attachments, becoming more aware of how that makes you feel and what that sense of it is when it arises, will make you—what? Not simply have the desire to let go of it, but you finally will when it becomes uncomfortable enough.

Q3: I’m attached to my garden. And I don’t want to give up the garden, and meditation—?

Q4: I think it’s more like, things like, for me, I’m attached to an image of myself performing a certain way at work. And it’s causing some pain because I can’t always do that [*inaudible*].

Q1: It’s not always appreciated, but—

Q4: Yeah, but it also is not allowing me to be open enough—I mean, I’m trying to be open to different things that could happen, spur of the moment or in the future, but still I’m pretty attached to this view of myself, of how I perform. And it’s also causing pain because sometimes I look at other people, and if they’re just sitting there, my view of myself at work, being there for the patients, giving them resources, meeting with them—the pain is now really becoming great when I see the other nurses are sitting down, talking to each other and not to patients, it becomes extremely painful. So this attachment is not, is *not* good. It was painful before, but it’s really getting to be a problem. So it’s this idea of being attached to a view of myself. Is that sort of like it?

AZ: Yeah, attachment to roles, and views of yourself, is—can be a strong attachment for most of us. Yeah, sure.

Q2: But I appreciate that work ethic. And you have heart, you have heart in your work, you really *care*. I don’t think—I don’t call that quite attachment, unless there’s a certain performance that has to do with others’ expectations or your own that’s a little bit

unreasonable, that'll absorb you and you just dwell on things. It just flows out of you; I think it's wonderful.

Q4: Well, the interaction flows with our patients—

Q2: But if you fuss and fret about it, then—

Q1: There's some things you should be attached to, and some things you shouldn't be attached to; that's what you're saying?

Q2: Well, I—

Q3: She's saying that isn't an attachment, it just is.

Q2: Yeah, being who she is and letting the goodness flow from her.

Q1: But we're one with everything, we have no—we're not any—I mean, I have lots of roles to play but I can't be attached to any of them; sorry about that.

Q2: But can't you be kind of—can't you be in a mode of losing your self and letting those natural talents and spiritual gifts just flow from you?

Q1: Well, like you say, it's a mystery. I really can't describe it in words, but I mean I think that what Alan is saying is that there's nothing in this world that is worth being attached to.

AZ: You can enjoy things, you can experience things, without being attached to them. You can enjoy doing a good job at work without being attached to the role of doing that, so that if you have a day when you don't live up to snuff, or something stands in the way of you performing up to the standard you'd like to, it doesn't become a cause of suffering. You can roll with the punches, so to speak—you can accept what life brings in. I would say the same thing about enjoying your garden. You can enjoy your garden, but when you're attached means if you were not able to garden, would you suffer? Or would you be able to enjoy what it is you are doing? Suppose you—

Q1: We just got a letter, like we did today, and it says those people that have two gardens—two plots—have to give one up.

AZ: Uh huh.

Q1: I mean, I'd have to suffer, but I—

AZ: You wouldn't *have* to suffer, but you could.

Q1: But I probably would.

AZ: You could still enjoy the other plot. Or you could find other things to enjoy.

Q4: That's a challenge.

AZ: I think a big challenge is just to grasp the idea that this is a positive thing. Because detachment seems to have so many negative connotations for people, even to describe it, and try to do it in a positive sense, there's this feeling like, 'I don't want to let go of that!' I think part of it is that at some level you're aware that to be totally detached means to be open to the unknown. Because you don't have to be defined by, 'In the future I want to get this, I want to do this, I want to be this,' right? To let go of attachments means whatever comes up, that's what I'm going to experience. I'm going to be open to that; I'm not going to try to limit the future to the things, experiences, desires, roles, that I'm attached to. And that at the same time you have a sense of freedom, you can have a sense of fear, because that's such an unknown. It means to give up *control*.

Q2: It's a mystery, like Len was saying.

AZ: Yeah, *that's* a paradox—you get greater freedom by giving up control.

Q1: Well, in the end we give everything up anyway, so—

AZ: Well, yeah, that is the truth. That is the truth, you're going to have to give it all up eventually. All but that eternal life. What I was going to say—what was it that St. Paul said, 'I can be content whether in good or bad, distress or—'

Q3: Wealth or poverty.

AZ: Wealth or poverty. Starting to sound like a marriage vow, but—

Q4: Yeah, he got it, didn't he?

AZ: And he still said, *joy*. This is what he's experiencing: joy. Joy in 'the stripes of Christ'—being whipped for Christ. Because the sense of freedom, the sense of fulfillment, the sense of this eternal life, meant so much more than giving up physical comfort, convenience, even bodily integrity. So, shall we wind it up?

Q3: [*Laughs*] I don't know, are you ready?

Q1: Ready.

AZ: Thank you all; thank you very much.

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