

## Relax Into Reality

Alan Zundel at the Tamarack Wellness Center, Jan. 20, 2010

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Two weeks ago, when we were last here—at least some of us were here, a few of us were here—I talked about the seeking mind, which I also called the craving mind. And I'm going to briefly recap some of what I talked about because I want to build on that somewhat and follow on what I had said at that time.

Our minds are really good at forming a picture of something that we desire for one reason or another and holding that and determining practical steps to satisfy that desire. Right? You're hungry, you can picture what kind of meal you want, and you can take steps to obtain it. A lot of other things like that. So we use that craving mind a lot; that's what I mean by craving mind, it takes some kind of craving, some kind of desire, sets up a picture, "this is what I want," holds this image in mind, and then thinks of how to orient your behaviors toward achieving or satisfying that desire. And it works real well for a lot of practical things in life. Like satisfying your hunger, or fixing an overflowing toilet, or buying car insurance—there's a lot of things that you can have some sense of what you're after, and it'll tell you how to get there.

Bigger things in life, it's not quite as good at, I don't think. Like major decisions. What do I want to major in in school? Major decision about majoring [*laughs*]—I'm sorry. Or what kind of career do I want? Or do I want to marry this person? You can have some idea of what you're trying to achieve through those things, but there's just too much information you need in order to know the real steps to get there, or even if once you get there that's going to be what you thought you wanted. So the bigger the question, the more that process seems not as well suited to satisfying the aim or the desire.

And for the biggest questions, like enlightenment or finding God or whatever your term is for the infinite, achieving some kind of desired outcome in your spiritual journey is a problem that you can't even form a picture exactly of what you're looking for, and the steps to get there are really hazy and you're not always sure if they're taking you closer or not. So the craving mind there doesn't seem to be well suited at all, and in fact the more you try to use that craving or seeking mind to get there, the more dissatisfied you are.

The attraction is that this promises to be—this sense of gaining the ultimate or the divine or union with God or enlightenment or awakening, however you want to term it—promises to be the ultimate satisfaction, right? The satisfaction from which no further craving arises; I'm totally fulfilled once I get there, that's the picture, that's the hope. And it's above and beyond the satisfaction of all my other desires. So it seems like the big payoff, but the more you seek it sometimes the more acute that sense is of lacking it. And the very process of setting something out as a future goal and trying to figure out how to get there can take away from your sense of being there. Awakening, God, whatever you

want to call it, should be accessible right now in the present rather than in the future sometime. So why does it often seem like the seeking for it always is postponing it into the future and you can never quite get there?

And what I was explaining is why this seeking mind or the craving mind is itself the obstacle to getting there, because it's ill-suited to what you're trying to achieve, and in fact that sense of craving that comes along with the mind working the gears takes you out of the ability to open yourself to the experience of the present. You become very focused on a goal and steps to get there rather than opening up to what is here now, and it takes you away rather than bringing you closer.

Okay so far? So I wanted to talk about what do you do then, when you find yourself in the position of seeking or craving something—you know you're moving toward some kind of a spiritual something, "thing" isn't even a good word, but there's some kind of orientation toward some kind of development. And if you're not going to use that usual part of your mind that sets up goals and determines the practical steps towards getting there, how do you going about doing it? Where does that leave you if you don't have that to rely on? So that's what I'd like to talk about tonight, is what do you do—or what do you *not* do—to have that *now* rather than having it as a goal, having it now.

So if you would I'd like you to listen very carefully right now, so I'm going to give you the very steps [*laughter*] to get there. Do I have your full attention? [*laughs*] Maybe not so much. [*laughter*] First step is to take stock of what you're experiencing right now, because my hope was to invoke that craving mind to some degree. So take stock of what that feels like to have at least a glimmer of a sense that, "oh, there's something I can do to get there, and maybe there's going to be some answer here." How that moves inside you, how that feels, to be in that anticipatory state, right? Take stock of it.

And if you can sense that at all, I think what you will feel is a movement of energy up into your head. And it's partially a listening, partially an attentiveness, but it's also partially that part of yourself that wants to know steps, that wants to have direction, that wants to have something to do. So being aware of what that feels like and recognizing it when it arises really is the prerequisite to moving away from it. Because if you don't know you're doing it and you don't know that it's a problem, it'll remain a problem. If it comes up and you see it as, "oh, this is not where I want to be," then you have the opportunity of moving away from it.

The tendency is to put the energy into it. "How do I figure out how to get out of where I am? I feel stuck, I want to figure it out." The movement is up into figuring it out. "What do I have to do? What can I read, who can I listen to, what steps can I take?" And it's feeding that sense of "I can figure this out, I can determine the steps." So being aware of how that feels, and noticing when that's taking place inside of you, is the essential first step. Knowing that that's happening, right?

From there—and this is the title of this week's topic—is you *relax* [*laughs*], instead of feeding that sense of craving and wanting and desiring and figuring out how to get there

and what I lack, you relax. You move that energy, if you can sense the energy flow—the way I feel it is a movement into the head—is allowing it, or trying to draw it down, or at least imagining the energy coming from the head, moving down into a more deep place in your psyche. Just come down from that, step down from that ladder. Step back. Step back. That’s a metaphor, and you really have to have a taste of it in your own experience to know how to do that. So it’s a matter of watching what’s happening inside yourself. When you see that kind of craving arising and being applied—or misapplied—to your spiritual search, step down from it. Move it down. Move it down; move back from the desire to figure it out, to determine the steps, to solve a problem.

Now there’s a middle path in relaxing between two extremes, so explaining the two extremes might make the middle path a little clearer. And the first extreme is to try too hard to relax. [*laughs*] Because when you start over-monitoring yourself and are always thinking, “am I relaxing, how can I get more relaxed?”, then it’s invoking that same kind of process, right? “What’s happening? I’m here, I ought to be *there*”—that’s the goal, to be more relaxed—“how can I get from here to there”, and you’re feeding that when you’re trying to figure it out and monitor and do that. You gotta step down from that.

Years ago, when I was in my twenties, my first spiritual mentor—first time I went to see him some friends took me to see this guy, and I’d heard a lot about him ahead of time—he wasn’t real well known, he was just known to people that I knew. And so I was going to meet him for the first time and I was real eager to meet this guy, and when I walked in I was like hyper alert and attentive because I wanted to hear what he had to say and see how he would respond to me and what he would say to me. I was just feeling like some kind of bolt of lightning was going to hit me. And so I came in and I sat down and he joked a lot and told obscure stories [*laughs*] and things like that. And he looked at me on the couch and he said, “why don’t you put your feet up?” You know, like turn sideways and just put your feet up and lay back.

And now, many years later, I realize what he was saying to me, which was *relax*. [*laughs*] And at the time I really took it in a totally opposite direction, I thought he was saying to me in some way, you know, “you’re being lazy, you need to try harder.” [*laughs*] And it was kind of, you know, paradoxical teaching he was saying, “okay, put your feet up and relax because you’re a lazy bum, and you need to work harder on your spiritual life.” But he was just saying something real plain, you know, “look at you, you’re all tense about this whole thing, and you gotta just let go, take it easy. You’re making *me* nervous!” [*laughs*]

So that’s one extreme, when you find yourself trying too hard and turning this into some kind of a discipline. Relaxing is not a discipline in that sense, it’s like a moving into a state of just—what? Accepting what is. All those hackneyed phrases that are hard to explain, but it’s a state of being okay with where you’re at, as opposed to trying to figure out how to reach a goal. Being okay with what’s here now.

The other extreme is to take relaxing or being okay with what’s here now as meaning stop functioning, don’t do anything at all. Like to do something is to move away

from being just at peace with the moment. So let's not work, or look for a job, or let's not [*laughs*—you know, just go with the flow all the time, don't worry about trying to take care of normal functions in life. I mean that would be an extreme, where it would be a little less ridiculous is in taking your spiritual life to mean I shouldn't be doing anything at all, like meditating or going to meetings or listening to someone or reading sacred literature or anything like that. It doesn't mean stop doing things, it means do it with the right attitude, the right state of mind, and it's, again, not feeding that craving mind but being more relaxed about it.

And a problem people often have with coming to that point of talking about it is, if I'm not supposed to stop doing things, okay—I'm supposed to keep doing things but in a more relaxed, open way—and I'm not going to figure out how to get there and have ways to get there, then how do I know what it is I'm going to do? If not for the mindset of goal, steps to a goal, then what is my next step? What do I do with myself? Do I meditate, do I not meditate? Do I read this book, do I read that book, do I not read any book? What do I do with myself, if you're telling me not to worry about doing, but not to stop doing, what's left? What's in between?

In getting out of the craving mind, what it does is it begins to open up access, or open up, um—to access means like you're out there going in to get something, where it really it opens up from within you a different source of movement. A different source of guidance and decision making that's not premised on that kind of practical, goal, steps to the goal, means/ends kind of mentality. It's just an inner sense of movement. You might say it's like when you have an intuition. "I can't figure it out, but this just *seems* right for me to move in this direction, to do this." Very vague sounding, but I think everybody has experienced it to some degree. You just feel your, even your body, you know, physically there's like a draw toward a particular type of activity, a particular group, a particular teacher—whatever it is, you can sense it, it's almost like there's a magnetic pull.

And going into that craving mind obscures that to some degree. It's like muddying the waters, and the more you can pull yourself out and just be in this more state of openness, the more this other force has room to move, has room to come in and give you the guidance that way, and will draw you towards the experiences, whatever they are, that are best suited for you so that you can come deeper into this state of awakening. Just opening yourself up is a form of awakening. The experiences of life that come in will bring you there. It's not something you have to do entirely on your own, it's just things are conspiring to move you there and you have to make room for that movement to make itself known, to give it room to just function.

Okay, I think I've said enough for tonight. So I welcome comments, or questions, or objections?

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