



Stefan Ahmann

Opening to Truth

Essential Non-Dual
Teachings and Tools



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*Without going outside, you may know the whole
world.*

*Without looking through the window, you may see the
ways of heaven.*

*The farther you go, the less you know.
Thus the sage knows without travelling;
He sees without looking;
He works without doing.*

Dao De Ching

*Form is no other than emptiness,
Emptiness no other than form.
Form is only emptiness,
Emptiness only form.
Feeling, thought, and choice,
Consciousness itself,
Are the same as this.*

The Heart Sutra

*If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring
forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is
within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy
you. (...)*

The Gnostic Gospel of Thomas

*Only Lovers can escape
From these two worlds.
This was written in creation.
Only from the Heart
Can you reach the sky.
The rose of Glory
Can only be raised in the Heart.*

Rumi

*I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My
judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own
will but the will of the Father who sent Me.*

John, 5:30

What I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.

Mark, 13:37

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

Matthew, 5:8

Introduction

Sometimes one will find a place where people are not trying to run away from themselves, distracting themselves, mistrusting each other etc. but where they live in a more natural, open and aware state. One such place is Taizé in Burgundy, France, where, during one week in May 2024, a substantial part of this book was written. Actually, I spent most of my time singing at the Church of Reconciliation, hiking, meditating, watching Adyashanti videos and even doing a little sightseeing. The ideas written down here just came in between. They were mostly little pointers and reflections that I wrote for myself and later, at home, polished and completed. Maybe you will find them helpful, too.

One thing which Taizé has taught me is how fundamental silence is, generally, but also how important it is to be silent together. Sometimes in the silence something can come forward that is bigger than you, that is there in you and me. It is a space where we can meet in a way that we cannot meet when we are talking. Chatting has its place, personal problems have their place, but these are

not everything. They need to be complemented by something that is beyond the person and beyond words. This is also something I loved in Taizé: the middle ground between words and silence that the repetitive singing opens up. There is, in the practice at Taizé, always a pointing beyond words; the words in the songs are often beautiful pointers, they influence you on a very deep level, there is a holiness to them, like to meditative prayer or certain mantras. "Atme in uns, Heiliger Geist" ("Breathe in us, Holy Spirit") for instance, has a simplicity and depth to it that can only be compared to something like the orthodox "Prayer of the Heart". These songs open people to God's Love by relieving them of their constant self-obsessing. You become empty, open and still. No thinking is required. You merely participate in the regular discipline of singing and worshipping three times a day.

This simplicity proved to be enormously helpful. The thoughts I had in between the singing and sitting in stillness were clearer and more to the point than most of the material I had written previously. I am very grateful for the inspiration I received at Taizé, which made it possible for me to write the book I had wished to write: something brief and (hopefully) not overly intellectual. A use-

ful handbook for people on the path, pilgrims to the heart of truth, which is always there, in everybody.

In this book, I am also providing some information on somatic therapy, emotional work or shadow work. Before or after awakening, this kind of work is *always* relevant. The body stores any trauma, not only the kind of big obvious trauma that is usually regarded as requiring therapy. Everybody has some kind of trauma in the sense of unprocessed or suppressed emotion. This needs to be accessed, faced, felt and processed, which is very hard to do without any specific technique. On the spiritual path, we need to honor the body because it is our most important tool. We have incarnated because we want to learn with a body. So we should not skip that class. If we do not listen to the body and its feelings, we will always be bypassing what we need to learn. In a sense, this is the most meaningful work there is because, as there is no separation, no inside or outside, all beings are affected by the liberation of one. Ultimately, this is beyond "you".

CONDITIONING AND RELATIONSHIPS

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Conditioning and Relationships

It is interesting that just about every form of entertainment is socially accepted and even encouraged but asking questions like “What is existence?”, “Who am I?” and the like is not in our conditioning, although actually it could be and should be. Our conditioning is rather *not* to ask these questions. Outside of Buddhism and non-duality they are almost taboo. This makes perfect sense because the social structure is ultimately just conditioning and the concern that is never voiced but that is certainly there is that if people outgrow their conditioning, then society might very well collapse. What is really going to collapse is everything in our social interaction and social system that depends on reckless competitiveness. But the foundation, which is that we actually *are* social beings, is not going to disappear. It is just going to be more functional.

It turns out that the veiling of the spiritual truth of who we are is a collective effort. We are not aware of it, but it is happening, through our conditioned obsession with material or social success, with our physical appearance, with the idea that

you need to be special, with entertainment, with our own cleverness, with ideologies etc. This is why, as Ken Wilber has pointed out, we need more focus on *waking up* to complement the increasingly complex process of *growing up*, into which our collective effort right now goes almost exclusively. The “growing up” part basically consists of learning everyday survival skills and acquiring general knowledge and the conditioning that is needed to be a functional member of society. So it is really just about skills, social or otherwise, and affective and cognitive development. Teaching people in a cognitive and affective way is great, but it will, by itself, not change the world, it will not stop hate. We all need to turn inside for that and individually accept our responsibility for peace and truth. A society that tells us that we can just avoid and ignore existential questions is being untruthful about the human condition. Such a society lacks a sound ethical basis, its values are likely to be shallow or even arbitrary.

At school we are introduced to lots of models of reality: mostly through science (mathematics, biology, chemistry, physics), but also through fictional literature and maybe philosophy and religion. But this is never put into context by reminding us that models are just that: models, inherently inadequate

representations of whatever reality may be. We are basically conditioned to live in models, in representations, without ever reflecting on their nature. This is because models are useful in a practical way; but no model can ever really provide meaning in any deeper sense. They all have the potential of alienating us from our true nature, which is ineffable and indescribable. Then there is also the socially conditioned model of you, the idea of yourself, that you learned and that is reflected back to you in your social interactions, in your different social roles. But once you recognize that *that* is also just a model, things get a little slippery. However, in seeing through it, you will lose your emotional investment in it but you can still keep your social skills and function just as well or even better. Eventually, it is true, we must all reach the point where we are just done with models, where we have no personal investment in *any* model anymore.

By remaining caught up in the socially conditioned, repetitive and rather superficial mental activity games one loses sight of what is possible, which means that one cultivates the more or less unconscious belief that what is going on with you right now emotionally is how it is always going to be, that your emotional state as it is now is “nor-

mal" and it could not really be any different (e.g. more fluid and free). Ultimately, through our conditioning, something dysfunctional is presented to us as normal. In our society being stressed out and unhappy is just normal. The message we are being fed is that you (somewhat stressed and somewhat unhappy) can actually count yourself lucky because other people are much worse off, they are poor, they are sick or they have a "mental health condition" (e.g. depression) that requires "treatment" (and if you have that, there is something wrong with *you*, obviously, surely not with our culture, our very advanced civilization). Then, of course, there are always things to be afraid of, like losing your job, ending up in the street and feeling still more pain than you are feeling now. So psychologically, from this position of *fear of losing* "the beggar's fare" (just being less unhappy than others), the fear of losing what little comfort you think you have, you quickly find yourself in a circle of stress, in constant fight-or-flight mode, also because you have to be very active to achieve the standard of living that is deemed necessary for "happiness" and social recognition. *This mindset makes us beggars.* But we are not beggars unless we make ourselves into beggars.

In this way we often spend far too much time and energy “giving Caesar what is Caesar’s”. But when and how do we “give God what is God’s”? When and how do we become aware of our True Nature, when do we let go and trust, deeply? When and how can we rest in Being? Or feel alive and creative? Truly joyful?

All conditioning, which makes up our social identity, cannot be the ground of our existence because it is just *content* or rather *patterns*. What we really are must be *unconditioned*, but what is the “Unconditioned”? It is hard or rather impossible to imagine with the mind what that even might be, but still it has to be here, it has to be right under our noses, it has to be the very ground we are walking on. So why can we not see it? The usual answer is: Because it is so close or because the eye cannot look at itself. So: Can I turn around and become aware of what is looking?

Through conditioning I have learned how to survive in this world and how to function in this world, but I have forgotten who I am. Can I go back to my original sense of being, which pre-

cedes, which *must have* preceded my conditioning?
Can I feel it now?

What can a relationship actually be? What do you want out of a relationship? To some extent you probably demand of the other person to be an accomplice in maintaining your conditioning. If your conditioning is very similar, it will be easy to confirm each other's conditioning as "right" and to contrast it with the conditioning of other, different people, which are then labeled "wrong" (which generally happens when you gossip about others). If, however, your conditioning is fairly dissimilar, then some would say that you are "incompatible". But the opportunity that comes with this "incompatibility" in conditioning is that you realize that what is actually jarring in your relationship is just your conditioning. So the lack of harmony is a kind of invitation to *go beyond the conditioning*. When there is a mutual intention of going beyond the conditioning, when the aim of the relationship is the looking for truth, that may be said to "sanctify" the relationship and turn it into a "spiritual" marriage. I am afraid, however, that the majority of relations is based on the opposite, which is "I love you as long as you help me to maintain my conditioning, I love you as long as you confirm my conditioning and reinforce it". Isn't this what we are